



GRINNELL PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD REGULAR
SESSION MEETING
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2025, AT 5:00 PM
IN THE LARGE STUDY ROOM AT THE DRAKE COMMUNITY
LIBRARY

TENTATIVE AGENDA

1. Roll Call:

Lindley__, Eyberg__, Crawford__, Jensen__, Coopriders__, Gant__, Moyer__

2. Approve Agenda:

3. Approval of Minutes:

A. August 18th, 2025

4. Committee Business:

A. Master Parks Plan – priority of projects, fundraising opportunities, grant writing, goals for 2025-2026 fiscal year

- Parks and Cemetery Vegetation - Eyberg
- Bailey Park– Crawford/Jensen
- Arbor Lake/Lake Nyanza- Allsup
- Playgrounds- Lindley

B. Recreation- Report on current and future programming offered by the Recreation Department.

C. Aquatics- Report on Aquatics.

D. Consideration of Adoption of the Updated Master Parks & Recreation Plan

5. Notes:

6. Inquiries:

7. Adjourn:

Any person with a disability who requires a modification or accommodation in order to participate in the meeting, or any person with limited English proficiency (LEP) who requires language assistance to communicate with the City Council during the meeting, should contact the City Clerk, (641) 236-2600 or adevig@grinnelliowa.gov, no fewer than two business days prior to the meeting to enable the City of Grinnell to make reasonable arrangements to assure accessibility or language assistance for the meeting.



GRINNELL PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD REGULAR
SESSION MEETING
MONDAY, AUGUST 18, 2025, AT 5:15 PM
IN THE GRINNELL ATHLETIC AND RECREATION CENTER

MINUTES

1. Roll Call:

Russ Crawford, Whitney Jensen, Ben Coopriders, Matt Moyer, Lisa Lindley, Lauren Gant, Jack Eckstaine and Jordan Allsup
Absent: Ralph Eyberg

2. Approve Agenda:

At 5:18pm Lindley made the motion to approve the agenda, second by Coopriders to approve the agenda. AYES: All. Motion carried.

3. Approval of Minutes:

A. July 28th, 2025- Gant made the motion, second by Moyer, to approve July 28th, 2025, meeting minutes. AYES: All. Motion carried.

4. Committee Business:

- A. Master Parks Plan – priority of projects, fundraising opportunities, grant writing, goals for 2025-2026 fiscal year
- Parks and Cemetery Vegetation – Eyberg- Mowing has been kept up nicely with the amount of rain that was received in July. No action necessary.
 - Bailey Park– Crawford/Jensen- Allsup reported Alliant to hook up power the week of August 25th with hydro-seeding the area to follow. No action necessary.
 - Arbor Lake/Lake Nyanza- Allsup- Allsup reported Houston Engineering, Inc has been selected to do engineering on lake restoration Arbor Lake and Lake Nyanza. Engineering and planning work will be done over the next 12 months. No action necessary.
 - Playgrounds- Lindley- No update. No action necessary.
 - Master Plan- Allsup- No action necessary.
- B. Recreation- Eckstaine reported on current numbers on summer programming. No action necessary.
- C. Aquatics- Eckstaine reported on admissions numbers to the Aquatic Center over the course of the summer and it has outpaced the 2024 Pool season. No action necessary.
- D. All Church Picnic – Linley made the motion to approve the rental of Central Park shelter for an “All Church Community picnic” on Sunday, September 28th. Second by Coopriders. AYES: all. Motion carried.

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- E. Unity Point Fun Run- Coopridder made the motion to approve the rental of Central Park facilities for the "Unity Point Fun Run" on Saturday, October 4th. Second by Moyer. AYES: all. Motion carried.
- F. Consideration of adopting a Resident and Non-resident pricing structure for programs, memberships, and facility rental fees. - Lindley made a motion to approve a Resident pricing structure for programs, memberships, and facility rental fees, recognizing the equity of services funded through city property taxes. Motion seconded by Jensen. AYES: All. Motion carried.
- G. Consideration of Adoption of the Updated Master Parks & Recreation Plan- The board reviewed the updated plan and agreed to table adoption of the plan until the September meeting citing some changes to be made. No action was taken.
- H. Amendment to Grinnell Parks & Recreation Plan- Amend contract with RDG for Master Parks & Recreation Plan to include design of Davis Park.- Gant made a motion to approve the amendment to the Grinnell Master Parks & Recreation Plan with RDG Planning and Design to include Davis Park. Motion seconded by Lindley. AYES: All. Motion carried.

5. Notes:

6. Inquiries:

- 7. Adjourn:** Gant made the motion at 6:16pm to adjourn the meeting, second by Lindley. AYES: All. Motion carried.

Parks and Recreation Director
Jordan Allsup



GROW GRINNELL

A Vision for Parks and Recreation

August 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the members of the Steering Committee, Parks and Recreation Board and City Council for their valuable time, expertise and thoughtful guidance throughout the master planning process. Your leadership, strategic insights and commitment have been instrumental in shaping the direction and success of this project. Your contributions have not only ensured we remain aligned with our core goals and values, but have also fostered a collaborative environment that will benefit all stakeholders involved. We are grateful for your dedication and look forward to continued partnership as we move forward.

STEERING COMMITTEE

Jordan Allsup	Director, City of Grinnell Parks and Recreation
Rachel Arseneault	Ramsey Weeks Real Estate
Lauren Augustin	Grinnell Mutual
Barb Baker	Grinnell Mutual
Russ Behrens	City Manager, City of Grinnell
Brian Conway	Grinnell-Newburg Community School District
Russ Crawford	Parks and Recreation Board
Julie Davis	City Council Member
Carl Eggermont	Public Services Director, City of Grinnell
Tim Ellsworth	Imagine Grinnell
Shane Hart	Grinnell College Golf Course
Avery Lindley	Build a Better Grinnell
Anthony Nieuwsma	Grinnell Friends Church
Sarah Smith	Grinnell College
Rachael Kinnick	Chamber of Commerce

CITY OF GRINNELL PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD

Russ Crawford, Chair	Term expires 6/30/2026
Whitney Jensen, Vice Chair	Term expires 6/30/2026
Ben Cooprider	Term expires 6/30/2028
Ralph Eyberg	Term expires 6/30/2026
Lauren Gant	Term expires 6/30/2027
Lisa Lindley	Term expires 6/30/2028
Matt Moyer	Term expires 6/30/2027
Dan Agnew, Mayor	

CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Julie Davis	First Ward
Jo Wray	Second Ward
Rachel Bly	Third Ward
Shane Hart	Fourth Ward
Jim White	At-Large Member
Byron Hueftle-Worley	At-Large Member



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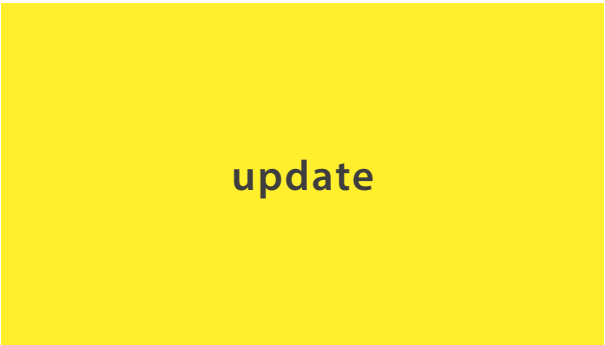
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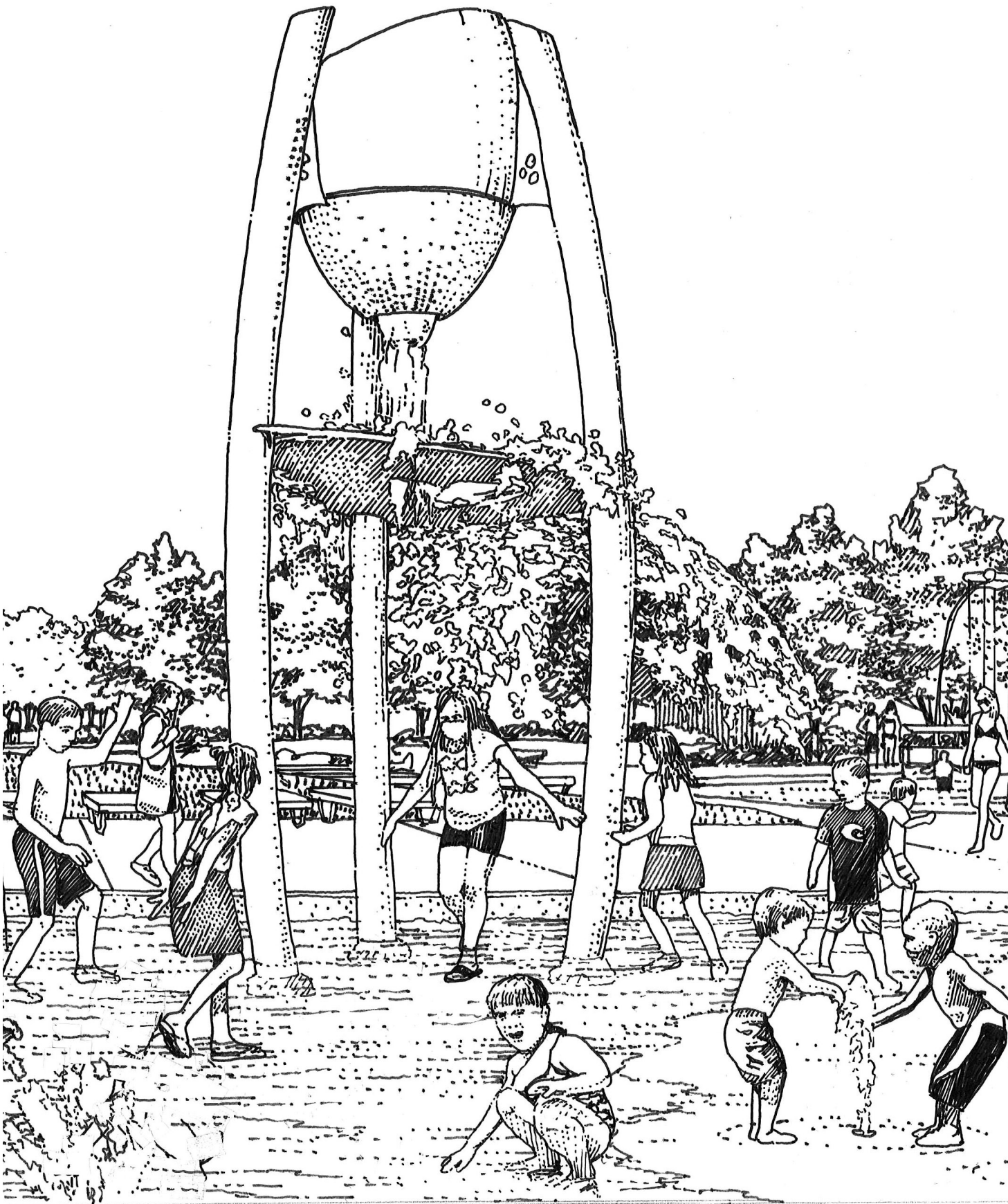


Prologue: Framework of the Grinnell Parks and Recreation Master Plan

The Grinnell Parks and Recreation Master Plan is built upon a structured, forward-looking framework that reflects the city’s identity, values and aspirations. Organized into three major chapters—Discovery, The Plan and Implementation—the document presents a progressive narrative: it begins by evaluating current conditions, transitions into a shared vision for the future and culminates in clear, actionable steps for execution.

- **Chapter One: Discovery** lays the groundwork for the plan, focusing on data collection, public engagement and a comprehensive understanding of Grinnell’s parks and recreation system as it exists today.
- **Chapter Two: The Plan** defines the community’s vision, articulates guiding principles, presents park-by-park master plans, advances the trail system and summarizes the open space recommendations identified in the Grinnell Lakes Restoration Feasibility Study.
- **Chapter Three: Implementation** provides a roadmap for putting the plan into action, outlining funding approaches, partnerships and phased priorities to support long-term success.

Together, these chapters offer more than just a planning document—they form a practical guide for decision-makers, staff and the community to create a vibrant, connected and sustainable parks and recreation system that meets the needs of all Grinnell residents.





CHAPTER ONE: DISCOVERY



SECTION 04

Grow Grinnell: A Vision for Parks and Recreation

Introduction and Plan Framework

Purpose of the Master Plan - *The Why*

Key Objectives of the Master Plan - *The What*

Intended Audience

Planning Process

Expanding on the Foundation of Previous Plans

Common Values

Grow Grinnell - A Vision for Parks & Recreation

Introduction

Grinnell, often called the *Jewel of the Prairie*, is a lively and welcoming community with strong civic pride. Its vibrant downtown, top-ranked Grinnell College, quality healthcare and schools, and rich cultural identity all contribute to a high quality of life. From friendly neighborhoods to energetic local events, Grinnell is a place where people feel connected.

In this setting, parks, trails, and recreation spaces are more than just nice features—they are essential to health, inclusivity and community life. Whether it’s playgrounds, trails, sports fields, or pools, these public spaces help people of all ages stay active and enjoy nature close to home.

As the city grows and changes, especially with evolving needs and shifts in public access at Ahrens Park, it’s the right time to rethink recreation. Grinnell has a chance to shape its parks and programs in ways that better serve everyone’s well-being and strengthen community ties.

Purpose of the Master Plan *The Why*

The purpose of the Grinnell Parks and Recreation Master Plan is to establish a unified, community-driven vision that guides the long-term growth and stewardship of the city’s parks and recreation system. Through strategic investment and strengthened partnerships, the plan provides a clear and actionable roadmap to support an active, connected, and resilient Grinnell for generations to come.



Key Objectives of the Master Plan *The What*

The key objectives of the Grinnell Parks and Recreation Master Plan are found on the following page and define what the plan aims to achieve over the next decade and beyond. These objectives act as anchors for decision-making, helping to prioritize actions and measure progress as the community works toward a shared vision for its parks, trails, and open spaces.



The following seven objectives define what the Grinnell Parks and Recreation Master Plan seeks to accomplish. Together, they serve as guiding anchors for decision-making, resource allocation, and long-term progress.



Key Objectives



Establish a Unified Vision

Define a long-term direction for Grinnell’s parks and recreation system that reflects community values, priorities, and aspirations.



Assess Existing Conditions

Evaluate the current system’s assets, accessibility, distribution, and performance to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.



Engage the Community

Involve residents, stakeholders, and partners through inclusive outreach and participation, ensuring the plan is shaped by diverse voices.



Identify Strategic Priorities

Determine short- and long-term actions that are feasible, impactful, and aligned with community needs and resource capacity.



Guide Smart Investments

Recommend targeted improvements, programming, and policy updates to enhance the quality, equity, and sustainability of parks and recreation offerings.



Strengthen Partnerships and Funding

Build a strong case for future investments by aligning the plan with funding opportunities and cultivating collaborative relationships.



Promote Community Health and Resilience

Support active lifestyles, social connection, and environmental sustainability through thoughtful planning and nature-based design.



Intended Audience

This plan is designed for a wide and diverse audience, each with a unique role in Grinnell’s recreation ecosystem:

- City leadership and elected officials will use the plan to inform capital planning, policy decisions and funding priorities.
- Parks and recreation staff will apply it as an operational guide to direct maintenance, programming and service delivery.
- Community members and stakeholders will see their feedback and priorities reflected, creating trust, transparency and shared ownership.
- Nonprofits, schools and partner organizations will be able to align their efforts with citywide goals.
- Funders and granting agencies will find in this plan the strategic clarity and community buy-in required for successful investment.

By addressing both high-level strategies and site-specific needs, the plan is adaptable, actionable and grounded in the lived experiences of Grinnell’s residents.

Planning Process

The Grinnell Parks and Recreation Master Plan was developed through a transparent, collaborative and phased process. Each step built upon the last to ensure the final plan reflects community values and is grounded in data and feasibility.

1. Project Leadership

A Steering Committee of City staff, stakeholders and community members guided the process, offering strategic input and ensuring alignment with Grinnell’s goals.

2. Data Collection & Analysis

Baseline data was gathered to assess the current system and inform future recommendations.

- Park Inventory & Analysis: On-site assessments and GIS mapping documented conditions, amenities and accessibility across all parks.
- Benchmarking & Trends: Comparisons with national standards and peer communities identified how Grinnell

- performs and highlighted emerging best practices.
- Community Needs Assessment: Demographics, health indicators and recreation trends were analyzed to understand local needs and guide responsive planning.

3. Community Engagement

A broad outreach effort ensured inclusive public input, including digital tools (website, survey, Social Pinpoint), in-person pop-ups and open houses, interviews and youth-focused activities.

4. Mission & Guiding Principles

Workshops with the Steering Committee and community members established shared

values, goals and a mission to guide the plan.

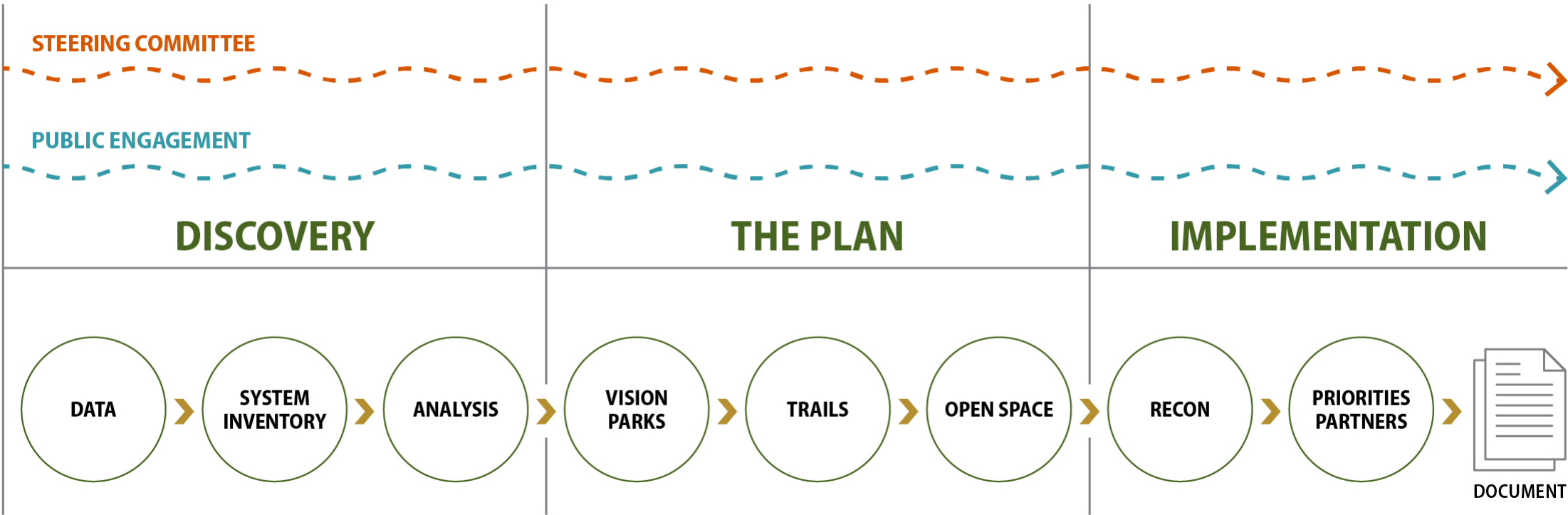
5. Park-by-Park Planning

Each park was evaluated to identify tailored improvements that reflect its role in the system and community needs.

6. Recommendations & Implementation

The plan concludes with phased, actionable strategies—detailing priorities, timelines, responsibilities and funding options to bring the vision to life.

This inclusive process ensured the final plan is not only data-driven, but also community-rooted—reflecting a shared commitment to quality of life, equitable access and environmental responsibility.



Expanding on the Foundation of Previous Plans

This Master Plan builds on the momentum of past and ongoing initiatives, including the PlanGrinnell Comprehensive Plan, Building a Better Grinnell, Imagine Grinnell, Vision Forward, and the work of the Ahrens Park Foundation. It also draws from previous parks-related studies and decades of community investment in recreation infrastructure.

Rather than starting from scratch, the plan honors Grinnell’s rich legacy while positioning the parks and recreation system to meet the challenges and opportunities of the decade ahead. It reaffirms enduring community values—such as stewardship, inclusion, and wellness—while embracing emerging priorities in sustainability, connectivity and resilience.

By weaving together past efforts, current needs, and future aspirations, the Master Plan creates a cohesive framework that aligns with citywide goals and strengthens partnerships, policies, and planning efforts across Grinnell’s broader vision for community well-being.



PlanGrinnell

Grinnell’s parks and recreation system enhances quality of life by providing accessible spaces for play, wellness, and connection. The city manages ten parks, including an aquatic center, with most residents living within a half-mile of a park—meeting national standards. Although quarter-mile access is limited near Grinnell College, the campus green space offers added value. Grinnell exceeds national park acreage targets but falls slightly short in community park classification.

Future efforts focus on equity, amenities, and connectivity. Plans include upgrades to Arbor Lake and Central Park, completing Prairie Park, and developing new parks in growth areas. A citywide trail loop will connect parks, schools, and neighborhoods, while “Blueways,” green buffers, and conservation easements will support sustainability. These strategies advance a comprehensive vision for inclusive, resilient and connected recreation.



Build a Better Grinnell

The Build a Better Grinnell initiative has further refined community values and priorities through extensive engagement. Residents have voiced the need for:

Health-centered infrastructure, such as safe walking/biking options and universally accessible amenities.

Enhanced environmental resilience, with parks contributing to stormwater management, biodiversity, and climate adaptation.

Stronger social cohesion, with parks serving as shared civic spaces that foster inclusivity and intergenerational connection.

These insights reinforce the need to expand and adapt Grinnell’s park system as the city grows—focusing not just on quantity, but on the quality, inclusivity, and versatility of each space.



Imagine Grinnell and the Vision Forward

Founded in 1985 and partnered with the Claude W. & Dolly Ahrens Foundation, Imagine Grinnell is a nonprofit initiative dedicated to building a vibrant, sustainable, and healthy community in Grinnell, Iowa. It has created community gardens like Marvin Garden, launched the “Plate to Plant” curbside compost program, supported Farmer’s Market growth, developed the skate park, and led TreeCorps’ reforestation after the 2020 derecho. Signature events include the Prairie Burn 100 gravel bike ride and the free Grinnell Bike Share. Current efforts focus on revitalizing Arbor Lake and Lake Nyanza, expanding trails, and engaging volunteers to connect people with nature, recreation, and sustainable living.



The Ahrens Park Foundation

Established in 1993, the Claude W. and Dolly Ahrens Foundation has played a vital role in enhancing life in the Greater Grinnell area, with a strong focus on parks, recreation, education, and health. This Master Plan arrives at a pivotal moment, as anticipated changes to public access at Ahrens Park present both challenges and opportunities to reimagine the community’s recreation system. Several key amenities are expected to transition away from public use, including the Grinnell Athletic and Recreation Center (GARC), Ahrens Family Center, soccer complex, driving range, event space, and parking areas.

While the loss of access to these facilities will be significant, Grinnell is prepared to move forward with resilience. Guided by community collaboration and thoughtful investment, the city is committed to expanding recreation opportunities and honoring its legacy of wellness, inclusion, and pride.

Common Values

Across the community’s recent planning efforts—PlanGrinnell, Build a Better Grinnell, Imagine Grinnell and the Ahrens Park Foundation—shared values and themes have consistently emerged. These common threads form a strong foundation for Grinnell’s Parks and Recreation Master Plan and ensure it aligns with broader community aspirations.

The following values, distilled from each initiative, seamlessly connect to and reinforce the goals of this master plan:

- **Health & Wellbeing:** Prioritizing parks, trails and programs that support physical activity, mental health and social connection for all residents.
- **Equity & Inclusion:** Ensuring that all neighborhoods and populations—regardless of income, age, or ability—have fair access to high-quality recreational spaces and services.
- **Sustainability & Resilience:** Integrating environmentally responsible practices and green infrastructure to protect natural systems, adapt to climate change and preserve resources for future generations.

- **Connectivity & Mobility:** Creating safe, convenient and continuous links between parks, neighborhoods, schools and civic destinations through trails, sidewalks and bikeways.
- **Community Identity & Belonging:** Designing and programming parks in ways that celebrate Grinnell’s character, history and diversity while fostering community pride and participation.
- **Collaborative Implementation:** Building cross-sector partnerships and encouraging resident involvement to guide decisions, champion progress and sustain long-term success.







SECTION 2

Community Profile & Demographics

Introduction

Population Trend and Projections

Demographic Implications

Comprehensive Demographic Summary

Implications for Parks and Recreation Planning in
Grinnell

Strategic Planning Takeaways

Introduction

Grinnell, Iowa is a community defined by its educational heritage, small-town character and a population that reflects both stability and evolving needs. As the city looks to the future of its parks and recreation system, understanding the demographic and socioeconomic makeup of Grinnell is essential.

The community’s age distribution, cultural diversity, economic profile and educational strengths all play a critical role in shaping how parks, trails and recreational programs can best serve residents. From an aging population and a vibrant student presence to a workforce grounded in education, healthcare and manufacturing, these characteristics inform the vision for inclusive, accessible and adaptable recreational spaces that enhance quality of life for all. This section provides a comprehensive snapshot of Grinnell’s population, highlighting key trends that guide strategic planning and investment in parks and recreation for years to come.



Population Trends and Projections

1. Population and Age Distribution
- As of 2025, Grinnell’s estimated population is 9,429, reflecting a modest decline of approximately 1.14% since 2020 (source: World Population Review). This slight downturn aligns with broader demographic patterns affecting rural areas throughout Iowa.
- Grinnell’s age distribution is notably shaped by two key populations: a sizable senior demographic and a vibrant student community. The median age is 37.9 years, with 21.5% of residents aged 65 and older—underscoring a trend toward an aging population. Concurrently, Grinnell College contributes significantly to the 18–24 age group, resulting in a distinctive demographic composition that blends older adults with young adults.
2. Racial and Ethnic Composition
- Grinnell remains predominantly White (non-Hispanic), accounting for approximately 86.6% of the population. However, it exhibits greater racial and ethnic diversity than many similarly sized communities in Iowa, largely influenced by Grinnell College’s international presence. Other notable demographic groups include:
- Asian (Non-Hispanic): 3.94%
 - Black or African American (Non-Hispanic): 2.05%
 - Two or More Races (Non-Hispanic): 3.52%
 - Hispanic or Latino (of any race): 3.9%
- These figures indicate a modest yet meaningful

- multicultural presence that contributes to the community’s social and cultural richness.
3. Income and Economic Characteristics
- Grinnell’s economy is diverse and anchored by strong employment sectors such as education, manufacturing, healthcare and retail. Major employers, including Grinnell College and Grinnell Regional Medical Center, provide economic stability and help maintain unemployment rates typically below the national average.
- Income indicators present a nuanced picture:
- Median Household Income: Estimated between \$55,000 and \$64,426, slightly below the national median
 - Per Capita Income: Approximately \$36,382
 - Poverty Rate: About 10.9% of residents live below the poverty line



- Unemployment Rate: 6.3% which is higher than the national average
- These data points reflect a predominantly working- and middle-class community supported by a mix of professional, service and industrial employment.
4. Educational Attainment
- Grinnell benefits from high educational attainment levels, driven in part by the presence of Grinnell College, a nationally recognized liberal arts institution. Among residents aged 25 and older:
- High School Graduate or Higher: 95.3%
 - Bachelor’s Degree or Higher: 41.1%
- These rates are particularly notable for a rural Midwestern community. In addition to higher education, the local K–12 school system plays a crucial role in fostering academic achievement and supporting community vitality.

Demographic Implications

- Aging Population: A significant share of older adults highlights the growing need for expanded healthcare services, age-friendly housing and community programming tailored to seniors.
- Economic Development: Median income levels and a measurable poverty rate point to opportunities for initiatives that support job creation, small business growth and workforce development.
- Diversity and Inclusion: While Grinnell remains majority White, the presence of minority populations underscores the importance of inclusive planning and culturally responsive public services.
- Education and Workforce: High levels of educational attainment position Grinnell to attract knowledge-based industries and strengthen its local workforce, potentially spurring long-term economic growth.

Comprehensive Demographic Summary

Grinnell is home to approximately 9,429 residents, reflecting a slight population decline in recent years that mirrors trends across many rural Iowa communities. The city’s age composition is characterized by a significant senior population—over 21% of residents are aged 65 or older—alongside a sizable 18–24-year-old demographic largely influenced by Grinnell College. This results in a distinctive multi-generational community with diverse recreational interests and accessibility needs. Grinnell remains predominantly

White (86.6%), but the community also reflects a growing degree of racial and ethnic diversity, with notable Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic and multiracial populations contributing to the city’s cultural richness.

Economically, Grinnell is anchored by stable industries such as education, manufacturing, healthcare and retail, with leading employers like Grinnell College and Grinnell Regional Medical Center providing workforce opportunities. While the community demonstrates economic resilience, median household income levels—estimated between \$55,000 and \$64,426—fall slightly below national averages and roughly 10.9% of residents live below the poverty line, underscoring the need for equitable, affordable recreational opportunities. Educational attainment in Grinnell is notably high for a rural community, with over 41% of adults holding a bachelor’s degree or higher, bolstered by the presence of Grinnell College and strong local schools.

These demographic patterns reveal several key implications for Grinnell’s future: an aging population will require accessible, age-friendly park designs and passive recreation spaces; a vibrant student population demands active, social and flexible amenities; modest cultural diversity highlights the need for inclusive, culturally responsive programming; and high education levels present opportunities to integrate learning and environmental stewardship into parks and public spaces.



Why This Matters for the Future of Grinnell’s Parks and Recreation System

Understanding Grinnell’s demographic composition is critical to building a parks and recreation system that reflects and serves the entire community. The aging population signals an urgent need to expand accessible walking trails, passive recreation opportunities and year-round wellness programs, activities and events tailored to older adults. Simultaneously, the presence of a large student and young adult population demands active spaces, social gathering areas and connected trail networks that promote recreation, mobility and community engagement.

Grinnell’s modest but meaningful cultural diversity makes it essential to design parks and programs that are welcoming and inclusive for all residents, ensuring that cultural celebrations, multilingual signage and diverse recreational offerings reflect the city’s evolving population.

Additionally, the city’s strong educational foundation provides unique opportunities to embed environmental education, outdoor classrooms and student-led stewardship initiatives into the park system.

With income levels slightly below national benchmarks and a measurable poverty rate, equitable access to parks and affordable programming must remain a top priority, ensuring that all Grinnell residents—regardless of age, income, or background—have the opportunity to enjoy high-quality recreational spaces. By aligning future park investments with these demographic realities, Grinnell can create a more inclusive, resilient and vibrant parks and recreation system that enhances quality of life and meets the evolving needs of its diverse, multi-generational community.

From Demographic Summary to Parks and Recreation Recommendations

Grinnell’s evolving demographic landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for shaping an inclusive, responsive and resilient parks and recreation system. With a population of approximately 9,429, the community reflects characteristics typical of many small Iowa cities, yet with unique distinctions that influence recreational needs. An aging population—over one in five residents are 65 or older—coexists with a vibrant student demographic fueled by Grinnell College, creating a distinctly multi-generational community. Modest but meaningful racial and ethnic diversity adds cultural richness, while the city’s strong educational foundation and economic realities underscore the need for both affordability and innovation in park planning.

Grinnell’s median household income remains below the national average, with approximately 10.9% of residents living below the poverty line. At the same time, educational attainment levels, particularly among adults with bachelor’s degrees or higher, far exceed typical rural benchmarks. These dynamics reveal both the importance of equitable access to parks and the potential to integrate learning, wellness and cultural expression into public spaces.

For Grinnell, thoughtful investment in parks and recreation is not just about maintaining amenities—it is about responding to these community realities. The following recommendations outline how demographic trends can and should directly shape the future of Grinnell’s parks, trails, programs and public spaces.



Implications for Parks and Recreation Planning in Grinnell

1. Accommodating an Aging Population

Grinnell’s growing senior population demands an intentional focus on accessibility, comfort and wellness in park design. To ensure older residents remain active, engaged and connected to the community, the City should:

- Expand paved, ADA-compliant trails, accessible restrooms, shaded seating areas and other age-friendly infrastructure.
- Offer more passive recreation options, such as walking clubs, gardening spaces, tai chi areas and bird-watching stations.
- Dedicate or enhance senior-focused amenities, including bocce courts, shuffleboard and pickleball courts.
- Collaborate with healthcare providers and the senior center to bring health and wellness programming into parks, such as fitness classes, wellness fairs and educational workshops.

2. Serving College Students and Young Adults

With Grinnell College shaping the city’s young adult demographic, parks must offer amenities that promote active lifestyles, social connection and mobility. Priorities include:

- Developing active recreation spaces, such as basketball and volleyball courts, disc golf and flexible sports fields.
- Creating social gathering spaces, including amphitheaters, WiFi-equipped shelters and open-air event spaces for concerts, movie nights and cultural events.
- Improving trail connectivity to link the college campus with parks, neighborhoods and commercial areas, supporting walking and biking as primary modes of transportation.
- Designing flexible green spaces that accommodate casual sports, studying outdoors, yoga and pop-up community events.

3. Supporting Families and Working-Class Households

For Grinnell’s many working- and middle-income families, parks provide essential spaces for recreation, affordability and community connection. To support these households:

- Ensure equitable distribution of parks across all neighborhoods, with an emphasis on free or low-cost access.
- Prioritize family-friendly amenities, including playgrounds, splash pads, picnic areas and informal play fields.
- Expand affordable after-school and summer programs, ideally in partnership with schools, nonprofits and local employers.
- Invest in safe, accessible routes for walking and biking to parks, particularly in areas with limited car ownership.

4. Embracing Cultural Diversity

Grinnell’s growing racial and ethnic diversity enriches the community and calls for parks that celebrate inclusivity and cultural expression. Key actions include:

- Actively engaging underrepresented groups in park planning to ensure their needs, traditions and preferences are reflected.
- Hosting multicultural festivals, food events and cultural markets in parks to foster community cohesion and celebrate diversity.
- Incorporating inclusive design features, such as multilingual signage, culturally significant landscaping, public art and spaces that accommodate large, multi-generational gatherings.



5. Leveraging Educational Assets

Grinnell’s high levels of educational attainment and the presence of Grinnell College present unique opportunities to blend recreation with learning and environmental stewardship:

- Develop nature education areas, interpretive trails and outdoor classrooms in collaboration with local schools and the college.
- Engage students and faculty in volunteer programs, park improvement projects and sustainability initiatives.
- Integrate STEAM-focused play elements—such as science- and art-themed playgrounds—to spark curiosity and learning among young park users.

Strategic Planning Takeaways

Informed by these demographic realities, Grinnell’s parks and recreation system should be guided by the following principles:

- Rely on data-driven needs assessments and robust community engagement to shape investments.
- Design parks to be multi-generational, inclusive, adaptable and reflective of Grinnell’s evolving population.
- Strengthen partnerships with schools, healthcare providers, cultural organizations and the business community to amplify impact.
- Ensure equitable access, with particular focus on under-served neighborhoods and lower-income households.
- Proactively pursue diverse funding sources, including grants, public-private partnerships and community fundraising, to support infrastructure improvements and program expansion.

By aligning park planning with the community’s demographic profile, Grinnell can ensure that its parks, trails and recreation programs foster inclusion, promote health and wellness, celebrate cultural diversity and enhance quality of life for residents of all ages and backgrounds—now and for generations to come.







03 SECTION

Inventory & Assessment

Introduction

Grinnell Park System

Park by Park Inventory & Analysis

Inventory & Assessment of Existing Facilities

Introduction

Grinnell’s network of parks, trails and open spaces serves as a cornerstone of the community’s quality of life. These outdoor resources provide residents and visitors with essential opportunities for recreation, wellness, ecological interaction and social engagement. The following assessment captures the current inventory, spatial distribution, functional roles and emerging opportunities associated with these vital assets. This analysis serves as a foundation for identifying investment priorities, system gaps and opportunities for greater connectivity and inclusivity in the future.

Public Parks Inventory

Grinnell maintains a system of ten municipally owned parks, providing a variety of active and passive recreation opportunities. These spaces range in scale and function—from large community parks to smaller neighborhood greenspaces—each contributing uniquely to the city’s recreation system.

Park Name	Acreage	Classification
Arbor Lake Park	81.4 ac	Community Park
Miller Park	22.3 ac	Community Park
Merrill Park	8.7 ac	Neighborhood Park
Van Horn Park	8.2 ac	Neighborhood Park
Summer Street Park	5.2 ac	Neighborhood Park
Bailey Park	4.0 ac	Neighborhood Park
Central Park	3.8 ac	Special Use
Grinnell Mutual Family Aquatic Center	3.2 ac	Special Use
Thomazin Park	2.7 ac	Neighborhood Park
Lion Park	2.6 ac	Neighborhood Park

- Arbor Lake Park, the largest city-owned park, anchors the system with expansive natural areas and potential for enhanced trailheads, water-based recreation and nature interpretation features.
- Miller Park and Merrill Park serve broader community needs, offering playgrounds, shelter facilities and open fields.
- Smaller parks such as Bailey, Central and Thomazin provide close-to-home access to recreation within residential neighborhoods.

The park system overall provides strong spatial coverage, with most residents within a half-mile of a public park. However, as the community grows, ensuring equitable park access—especially in developing areas—will be increasingly important.

Open Space Areas

In addition to traditional parks, Grinnell manages several undeveloped and semi-developed open spaces that enhance ecological value, stormwater function and potential parkland flexibility.

Key Open Space Properties:

- Zimmerman Park – A naturalized site with future potential for passive recreation and nature interpretation.
- Trail Park – A linear open space that supports trail access and quiet, reflective use.

These sites play important roles in conservation, habitat connectivity and green infrastructure. With appropriate investment, they can be further activated through restoration, interpretive signage and trail integration while maintaining their natural character.

Privately Managed Recreation Space

Grinnell’s park and recreation network is enhanced by Ahrens Park, a significant privately owned but publicly accessible recreation facility. Though the exact acreage is to be confirmed, Ahrens Park plays a vital role in meeting community needs through:

- Athletic fields and courts
- Walking trails and green space
- Event and gathering facilities

Its continued partnership with the city will be essential in maintaining and expanding recreational opportunities for all residents.

Trails and Connectivity

Grinnell’s trail network includes a combination of shared-use paths, natural trails within parks and regional trail connections. One of the system’s most prominent features is the trail link to Rock Creek State Park, which provides access to natural landscapes beyond the city.

While Grinnell’s trail system is growing, it remains incomplete and fragmented in several areas. Continued investment in trail connectivity will advance multiple community goals—linking neighborhoods to parks, promoting active transportation and enhancing safety for all users.

Key Trail Expansion Priorities:

- Complete the citywide trail loop, particularly on the east and north edges of town
- Improve crossings and connections across major roads (e.g., Highway 146)
- Integrate on-street bike/ped routes with off-street paths
- Establish trail linkages to downtown, Grinnell College and public schools

A more unified and accessible trail system will improve daily quality of life and make recreation more inclusive and sustainable.

Conclusion

Grinnell’s parks, trails and open spaces provide a strong and diverse framework to support physical activity, community gathering and nature-based experiences that promote wellness and environmental stewardship. The current system reflects a legacy of thoughtful historical investment, with a wide variety of park types, recreational amenities and green infrastructure.

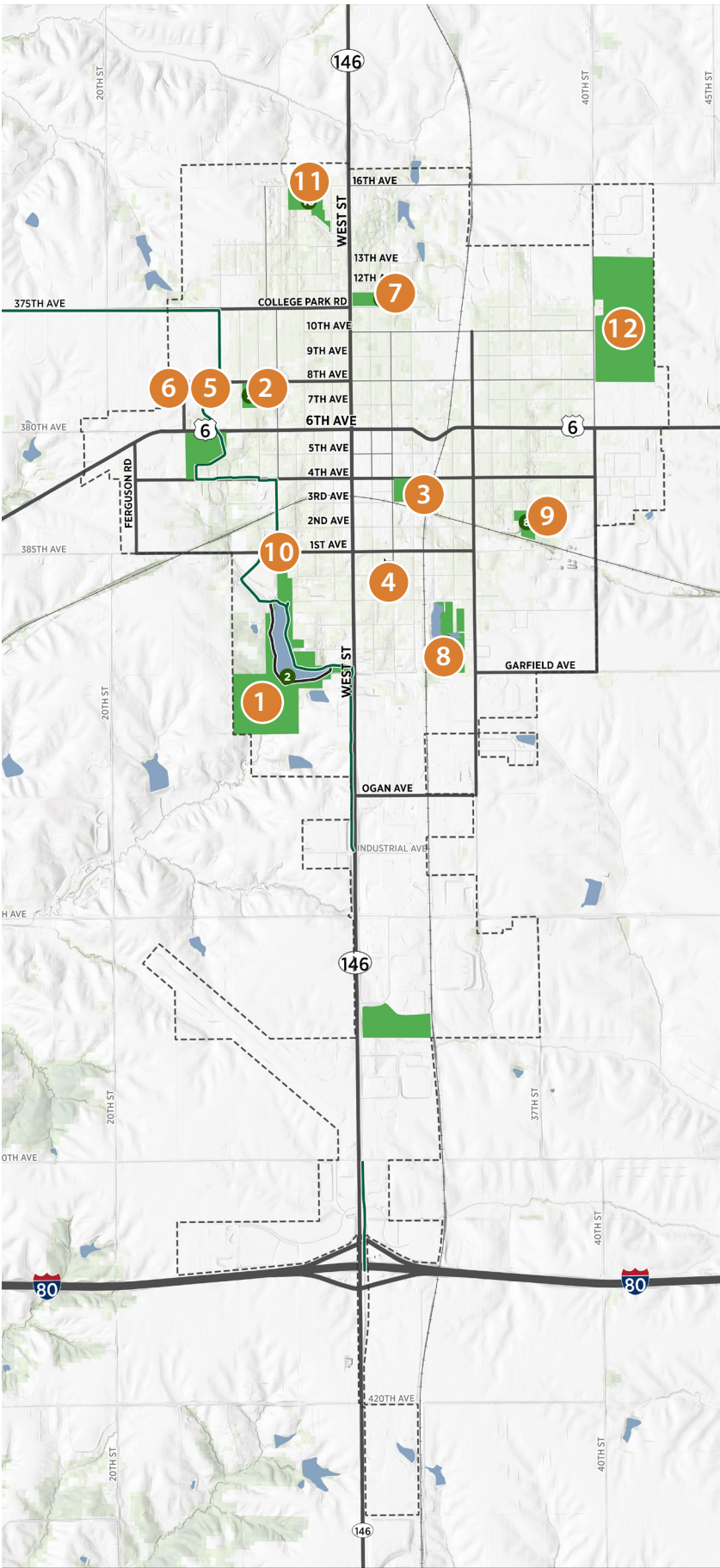
At the same time, this inventory reveals clear opportunities for enhancement—particularly in strengthening connectivity between parks and within individual park sites, upgrading aging infrastructure, integrating stormwater management systems, completing the park signage network, improving universal accessibility and addressing the uncertainty of facility access at Ahrens Park. Equitable access remains a guiding concern as the city grows and evolves.

This inventory and assessment serve as a foundation for the next phase of planning, which will include detailed evaluations of facility conditions, environmental assets and compliance with accessibility standards. These findings will inform a comprehensive set of strategies designed to align the parks and recreation system with the values, needs and aspirations of the Grinnell community—building toward a healthier, more inclusive and more resilient future.

GRINNELL PARK SYSTEM

LEGEND

- 1 Arbor Lake (81.4 Acres)
- 2 Bailey Park (4.0 Acres)
- 3 Central Park (3.8 Acres)
- 4 Davis Park
- 5 Grinnell Mutual Family Aquatic Center (3.2 Acres)
- 6 Lion Park (2.6 Acres)
- 7 Merrill Park (8.7 Acres)
- 8 Miller Park (22.3 Acres)
- 9 Summer Street (5.2 Acres)
- 10 Thomazin Park (2.7 Acres)
- 11 Van Horn Park (8.2 Acres)
- 12 Private Park
 - Ahrens Park (TBD Acres)
- 13 Open Space
- 14 Open Space



ARBOR LAKE PARK

123 Pearl Street
Natural Resource Area

Overview

Arbor Lake is a valued natural area located on the northwest edge of Grinnell. Centered around a small reservoir originally developed for water supply purposes, the site has evolved into a community park with recreational trails, wildlife habitat and water access. The park serves as a tranquil destination for passive recreation, environmental education and nature appreciation, while also supporting neighborhood access to green space.

Role in Park System

Arbor Lake Park serves as a vital natural and recreational asset within the Grinnell Park System, offering residents and visitors a unique opportunity to experience nature, outdoor recreation and environmental stewardship in the heart of the community. Situated on the west side of Grinnell, Arbor Lake Park is centered around Arbor Lake, a 14.6-acre man-made reservoir originally constructed in 1903. Over time, the surrounding area has been transformed into a public park, contributing to the City’s commitment to providing diverse recreational spaces and preserving ecological resources.

INVENTORY

Undeveloped Land	81.4 acres
Trails	0.60 miles
Basketball Court	0
Playground	1
Soccer Field	0
Tennis Court	0
Pickleball Court	0
Volleyball Court	0
Skate Park	0
Golf Driving Range	0
Dog Park	0
Exercise Station	0
Disc Golf Course	0
Swimming Pool	0
Spray Grounds	0

As one of Grinnell’s most prominent natural areas, Arbor Lake Park plays an important role in stormwater management, habitat preservation and providing passive recreation opportunities such as walking, wildlife observation and fishing. It also serves as a key element of the broader Grinnell Lakes system, which includes Lake Nyanza and is the focal point for ongoing water quality restoration efforts.

Amphitheater	0
Pavilion	1
Shelter	0
Benches	2
Picnic Tables	6
BBQ Grills	0
Bike Rack	1
Drinking Fountain	1
Bridge	2
Historical Features	0
Water Feature /	1
Detention Pond	2
Parking	2
Restroom Building	1

Existing Amenities

The park’s existing amenities include a network of multi-use trails, pedestrian bridges, fishing areas, jetties and natural surface trails that traverse adjacent woodlands. Several stormwater retention basins and wetlands have been implemented within the park to improve water quality, reduce sedimentation and enhance habitat. The park also features timber stands and riparian areas that support wildlife and contribute to the park’s natural character. While recreational development is more passive in nature, recent assessments have identified opportunities to rehabilitate infrastructure, enhance shoreline access and further invest in restoration to support both ecological health and recreational enjoyment.



ARBOR LAKE PARK

123 Pearl Street
Natural Resource Area

LEGEND

- 1 Lake Arbor
- 2 Sediment Retention Basin - BMP 6
- 3 Sediment Retention Basin - BMP 7
- 4 Fishing Jetties
- 5 Trail
- 6 Parking
- 7 Shelter
- 8 Playground



BAILEY PARK

1220 Prairie Street
Neighborhood Park

Park Assessment

Bailey Park is a small, accessible neighborhood park located within a residential area on the south side of Grinnell. Positioned adjacent to Bailey Park Elementary School, the park serves both the school community and surrounding neighborhoods. Its compact size and simple amenities make it ideal for informal play, small group gatherings and family use.

Role in Park System

Bailey Park plays a key role in meeting neighborhood-level recreational needs in southeast Grinnell. Its proximity to an elementary school and residential areas enhances its importance as a daily-use green space for children and families. While modest in size and programming, the park provides foundational access to outdoor play and social gathering within walking distance for many residents. Opportunities exist for modest upgrades to infrastructure, ADA access and play features to increase long-term use and value.

INVENTORY

Developed Land	4.0 acres
Trails	0.14 miles
Basketball Court	0
Playground	1
Soccer Field	0
Tennis Court	0
Pickleball Court	0
Volleyball Court	0
Skate Park	1
Golf Driving Range	0
Dog Park	0
Exercise Station	0
Disc Golf Course	0
Swimming Pool	0
Spray Grounds	0

Existing Amenities

- **Playground Equipment:** A central play structure serves as the park’s main recreational feature, offering age-appropriate equipment suitable for elementary-age children. The playground is used daily by neighborhood residents and students from the adjacent school.
- **Open Turf Area:** An informal grassy lawn accommodates a variety of recreational uses including tag, catch, and other spontaneous games. It also functions as an overflow area for school recess and community use.
- **Small Shelter:** A modest open-air shelter provides shaded space for small group gatherings or picnics. While simple, it supports casual use by families and caregivers.

Amphitheater	0
Pavilion	0
Shelter	1
Benches	0
Picnic Tables	5
BBQ Grills	0
Bike Rack	1
Drinking Fountain	1
Bridge	0
Historical Features	0
Water Feature /	0
Detention Pond	0
Parking	1
Restroom Building	1

- **Mature Trees:** Perimeter shade trees contribute to the park’s comfort and character, offering seasonal shade and a pleasant aesthetic backdrop.
- **Sidewalk Connectivity:** Sidewalks along Prairie Street and school pathways provide accessible connections to surrounding neighborhoods and school grounds. Internal paths are minimal, presenting an opportunity for future enhancement to meet accessibility goals.



BAILEY PARK

1220 Prairie Street
Neighborhood Park

LEGEND

- 1 Skate Park
- 2 Shelter
- 3 Playground
- 4 Parking



CENTRAL PARK

925 3rd Ave.
Community Park

Overview

Central Park is Grinnell’s historic and symbolic downtown green space, spanning 3.8 acres at the heart of the city. As a highly visible and accessible civic space, it serves as a central hub for community gatherings, cultural events and informal recreation. Following a major renovation in 2017, the park now reflects a balance between preserving historical character and incorporating modern amenities.

Role in Park System

Central Park functions as a civic anchor within Grinnell’s park system. It is central to community identity and plays a critical role in downtown vibrancy, cultural programming and special events. Its recent reinvestment ensures long-term viability as a signature public space and sets a standard for high-quality urban park design in small communities.

INVENTORY

Developed Land	3.8 acres
Trails	0.26 miles
Basketball Court	0
Playground	1
Soccer Field	0
Tennis Court	0
Pickleball Court	0
Volleyball Court	0
Skate Park	0
Golf Driving Range	0
Dog Park	0
Exercise Station	0
Disc Golf Course	0
Swimming Pool	0
Spray Grounds	1

Existing Amenities

- Central Plaza and Green Space: The open lawn areas support both passive use and organized events, serving as the primary gathering space for concerts, festivals and civic functions.
- Amphitheater: A small outdoor stage provides infrastructure for performances, public speaking events and cultural programming.
- Gazebo: A historically inspired structure used for intimate gatherings, musical performances and as a shaded rest area.
- Playground and Splash Pad: A fully accessible playground with modern play

Amphitheater	1
Pavilion	1
Shelter	1
Benches	15
Picnic Tables	8
BBQ Grills	0
Bike Rack	1
Drinking Fountain	3
Bridge	0
Historical Features	1
Water Feature /	0
Detention Pond	0
Parking	1
Restroom Building	1

- structures is located adjacent to a seasonal splash pad, offering high activity value for families and young children.
- Picnic Shelter: A reservable shelter includes electrical service, picnic tables and is located near restroom access. It supports both daily use and organized rentals.
 - History Walk: Interpretive signage highlights Grinnell’s civic and cultural heritage, integrating education and placemaking into the park experience.
 - Multi-Use Paths: Paved walkways support pedestrian circulation and connectivity within the downtown grid and adjacent neighborhoods.

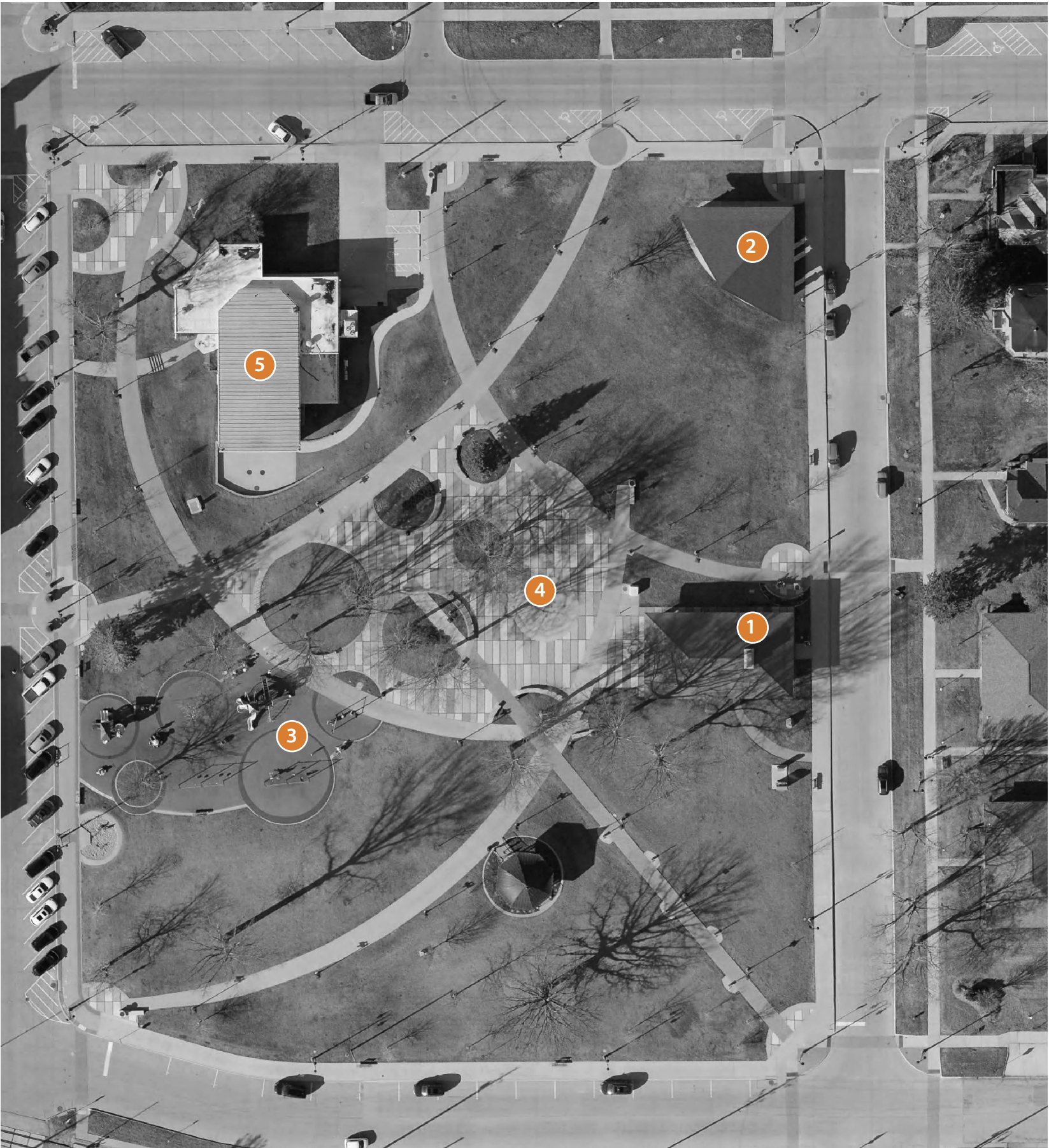


CENTRAL PARK

925 3rd Ave.
Community Park

LEGEND

- 1 Shelter / Restrooms
- 2 Amphitheater
- 3 Playground
- 4 Splash Pad
- 5 Future Veterans Memorial



DAVIS PARK

818 Hamilton
Community Park

Overview

Davis Park is a newly established neighborhood park located on the former site of Davis Elementary School, positioned within a well-established residential area in southcentral Grinnell. The park represents a successful example of community reinvestment and adaptive reuse—transforming a former school ground into a public green space that meets the evolving needs of local residents.

Role in Park System

As one of the newest additions to the Grinnell Park System, Davis Park fulfills a critical need for quality green. Its transformation from a former school site into a public park aligns with broader community goals of sustainability, accessibility, and equitable park distribution.

INVENTORY

Developed Land	1.24 acres
Trails	0 miles
Basketball Court	0
Playground	1
Soccer Field	0
Tennis Court	0
Pickleball Court	0
Volleyball Court	0
Skate Park	0
Golf Driving Range	0
Dog Park	0
Exercise Station	0
Disc Golf Course	0
Swimming Pool	0
Spray Grounds	1

Existing Amenities

- **Playground:** A playground structure provides safe, inclusive play opportunities for children of various ages.
- **Multi-Use Lawn:** The open lawn remains a defining feature of the park. It offers flexible space for informal sports, group activities, community events, and unstructured recreation.
- **Shade Trees & Landscaping:** Newly planted shade trees enhance the park’s aesthetics and comfort.

Amphitheater	1
Pavilion	0
Shelter	0
Benches	0
Picnic Tables	0
BBQ Grills	0
Bike Rack	1
Drinking Fountain	0
Bridge	0
Historical Features	0
Water Feature /	0
Detention Pond	0
Parking	1
Restroom Building	0

- **On-Street Parking & Sidewalk Access:** Street parking along Hamilton Avenue and surrounding side streets, along with sidewalk extensions, provide convenient and safe access to the park for pedestrians and vehicles.



DAVIS PARK

818 Hamilton
Community Park

LEGEND

- 1 Playground
- 2 Open Lawn Area
- 3 Street Parking
- 4 Sidewalk Access



GRINNELL MUTUAL FAMILY AQUATIC CENTER

120 8th Ave West

Community Park

Overview

The Grinnell Mutual Family Aquatic Center is a regional aquatic facility. Open seasonally, the center serves as Grinnell’s primary public swimming and water recreation venue. It offers a range of water-based amenities suitable for all ages and is a central gathering point during the summer months. Its location and design integrate with surrounding parkland and youth recreation facilities, enhancing its role in the community’s active lifestyle offerings.

Role in Park System

The Grinnell Mutual Family Aquatic Center plays a specialized role within the city’s park and recreation system, providing high-capacity aquatic programming that is not available in other facilities. It serves residents and regional visitors, supports youth development through swim lessons and recreation and acts as a summer anchor for families. As a purpose-built facility, it contributes significantly to community wellness, seasonal tourism and intergenerational recreation. Future investments may focus on facility updates, expanded programming, or energy efficiency improvements.

INVENTORY

Developed Land	3.2 acres
Trails	0.08 miles
Basketball Court	0
Playground	0
Soccer Field	0
Tennis Court	0
Pickleball Court	0
Volleyball Court	0
Skate Park	0
Golf Driving Range	0
Dog Park	0
Exercise Station	0
Disc Golf Course	0
Swimming Pool	1
Spray Grounds	0

Existing Amenities

- Leisure Pool Area: A large zero-depth entry pool with interactive water features is designed for young children and families, providing a safe and engaging water play environment.
- Lap Pool: The facility includes a multi-lane lap swimming area for exercise, swim lessons and recreational use.
- Water Slides: Two large twisting water slides serve as signature attractions, offering thrill-based recreation for older youth and teens.
- Diving Area: A designated deep-water zone includes diving boards and is staffed by certified lifeguards.

Amphitheater	0
Pavilion	0
Shelter	0
Benches	0
Picnic Tables	20
BBQ Grills	0
Bike Rack	2
Drinking Fountain	1
Bridge	0
Historical Features	0
Water Feature /	0
Detention Pond	0
Parking	1
Restroom Building	1

- Lazy River: A gently flowing current channel allows for relaxed floating and recreation suitable for all age groups.
- Splash Pad Features: Ground-level spray elements and geysers enhance accessibility and cater to younger users and those with mobility limitations.
- Concessions & Seating: The facility includes a full-service concessions stand, shaded seating areas, picnic tables and lounge chairs.
- Bathhouse: On-site restrooms, showers and changing areas provide convenience and support daily operations.



GRINNELL MUTUAL FAMILY AQUATIC CENTER

120 8th Ave West
Community Park

LEGEND

- 1 Leisure Pool
- 2 Lap Swimming
- 3 Lazy River
- 4 Slide
- 5 Parking
- 6 Drop-Off
- 7 Administration / Restroom / Concessions Building



LIONS PARK

220 8th Ave. W

Special Use Park

Overview

Lions Park is a small but active neighborhood park located within a residential area near the core of Grinnell. The park offers essential recreational amenities in a compact, walkable setting, providing daily-use green space for nearby families. It is particularly oriented toward youth activity and informal outdoor play.

Role in Park System

Lions Park serves a focused role in the Grinnell park system as a walkable, family-oriented green space. Its simplicity and proximity to residential areas make it ideal for frequent, informal use by children and caregivers. While limited in scope, the park fills an essential function by providing access to outdoor recreation within a short distance of many homes. Future considerations could include modest upgrades to ADA access, play surfacing and shade structures to improve year-round usability.

INVENTORY

Developed Land	2.6 acres
Trails	0.18 miles
Basketball Court	0
Playground	1
Soccer Field	0
Tennis Court	0
Pickleball Court	0
Volleyball Court	0
Skate Park	0
Golf Driving Range	0
Dog Park	0
Exercise Station	0
Disc Golf Course	0
Swimming Pool	0
Spray Grounds	0

Existing Amenities

- **Playground:** The park features a modest playground area with age-appropriate equipment. The design encourages safe and active use by younger children and promotes social interaction.
- **Open Lawn Area:** An open turf area supports flexible recreation, including informal ball games, small gatherings and unstructured play.

Amphitheater	0
Pavilion	0
Shelter	1
Benches	2
Picnic Tables	4
BBQ Grills	1
Bike Rack	1
Drinking Fountain	0
Bridge	0
Historical Features	0
Water Feature /	0
Detention Pond	0
Parking	0
Restroom Building	0

- **Picnic Tables and Benches:** Seating is available in shaded and sunny areas, allowing for passive recreation and casual socializing.
- **Shade Trees and Perimeter Planting:** Mature trees provide comfortable shade throughout much of the park, while perimeter planting enhances the park’s aesthetic and neighborhood integration.



LIONS PARK

220 8th Ave. W
Special Use Park

LEGEND

- 1 Trail
- 2 Playground
- 3 Shelter



MERRILL PARK

801 11th Ave.
Neighborhood Park

Overview

Merrill Park is a centrally located neighborhood park in Grinnell, offering both passive and active recreational opportunities within a well-established residential area. Its mature tree canopy, open lawn areas and core amenities make it a popular destination for local families and visitors seeking a relaxed park experience. The park’s layout encourages informal gathering, outdoor play and casual sports.

Role in Park System

Merrill Park serves as a classic neighborhood park, supporting casual recreation within walking distance for nearby residents. While not highly programmed or equipped for large events, it fulfills an important role in providing everyday access to nature and play for local families. Modest improvements to ADA infrastructure, playground surfacing and shelter amenities could enhance the park’s utility and inclusiveness over time.

INVENTORY

Developed Land	8.7 acres
Trails	0.42 miles
Softball Field	1
Playground	2
Soccer Field	0
Tennis Court	0
Pickleball Court	0
Volleyball Court	0
Skate Park	0
Golf Driving Range	0
Dog Park	0
Exercise Station	0
Disc Golf Course	0
Swimming Pool	0
Spray Grounds	0

Existing Amenities

- **Playground:** Merrill Park features a standard playground structure suitable for a range of age groups. The equipment supports physical activity and social play in a shaded, visible area of the park.
- **Open Green Space:** Expansive lawn areas provide flexibility for picnicking, tossing a frisbee, playing catch, or hosting small-scale community gatherings.

Amphitheater	0
Pavilion	1
Shelter	1
Benches	5
Picnic Tables	9
BBQ Grills	1
Bike Rack	1
Drinking Fountain	1
Bridge	0
Historical Features	0
Water Feature /	0
Detention Pond	0
Parking	1
Restroom Building	1

- **Picnic Shelter:** This structure supports informal family use and small group functions. A single shelter includes:
 - Picnic tables
 - Grilling station
 - Nearby access to open areas and the playground
- **Shade Trees and Landscaping:** The park is lined with mature deciduous trees, offering seasonal beauty and significant shade. Low-maintenance landscaping enhances the park’s natural character.



MERRILL PARK

801 11th Ave.
Neighborhood Park

LEGEND

- 1 Ball Field
- 2 Shelter / Restroom
- 3 Playground
- 4 Parking



MILLER PARK

1130 Nyanza Dr.
Community Park

Overview

Miller Park, also known as James H. Miller Park, is a 22.3-acre community park located in north-central Grinnell. Anchored by the natural amenity of Lake Nyanza, the park offers a balance of passive and active recreational opportunities. Its location and diversity of features make it a key component of Grinnell’s park system.

Role in Park System

Miller Park functions as a neighborhood and community gathering space. It supports both programmed recreation (disc golf, picnicking, playground use) and unstructured leisure (walking, nature enjoyment). Its multi-use character and natural amenities position it as a high-value asset for ongoing park improvements and community engagement initiatives.

INVENTORY

Developed Land	22.3 acres
Trails	0.0 miles
Basketball Court	0
Playground	1
Soccer Field	0
Tennis Court	0
Pickleball Court	0
Volleyball Court	0
Skate Park	0
Golf Driving Range	0
Dog Park	0
Exercise Station	0
Disc Golf Course	1
Swimming Pool	0
Spray Grounds	0

Existing Amenities

- Lake Nyanza: A central visual and recreational feature of the park, Lake Nyanza provides scenic value and enhances the passive recreational character of the site.
- Disc Golf Course: Established in 2009, the park includes an 18-hole disc golf course (Par 54, 5,020 feet). The course is designed around the lake and through mature tree stands, featuring concrete tee pads and Mach V baskets. It is free and open to the public, with scorecards available through the Recreation Department.
- Playground: A traditional play area provides opportunities for family and youth recreation.

Amphitheater	0
Pavilion	2
Shelter	2
Benches	4
Picnic Tables	6
BBQ Grills	3
Bike Rack	1
Drinking Fountain	1
Bridge	0
Historical Features	0
Water Feature /	0
Detention Pond	1
Parking	0
Restroom Building	1
Community Garden	1

- Picnic Shelters
 - *Large Shelter*: 24’ x 42’, equipped with electrical service, picnic tables, a grill and adjacent restrooms. Available for rental (\$20/first four hours; \$5 per additional hour, max \$60/day).
 - *Little Shelter*: 9’ x 21’, includes a grill, handicap-accessible table and access to water. Restroom access is provided via the larger shelter nearby.
- Trails: A series of paved and natural trails wind through the park, offering walking and jogging routes that connect park features and provide scenic lake views.

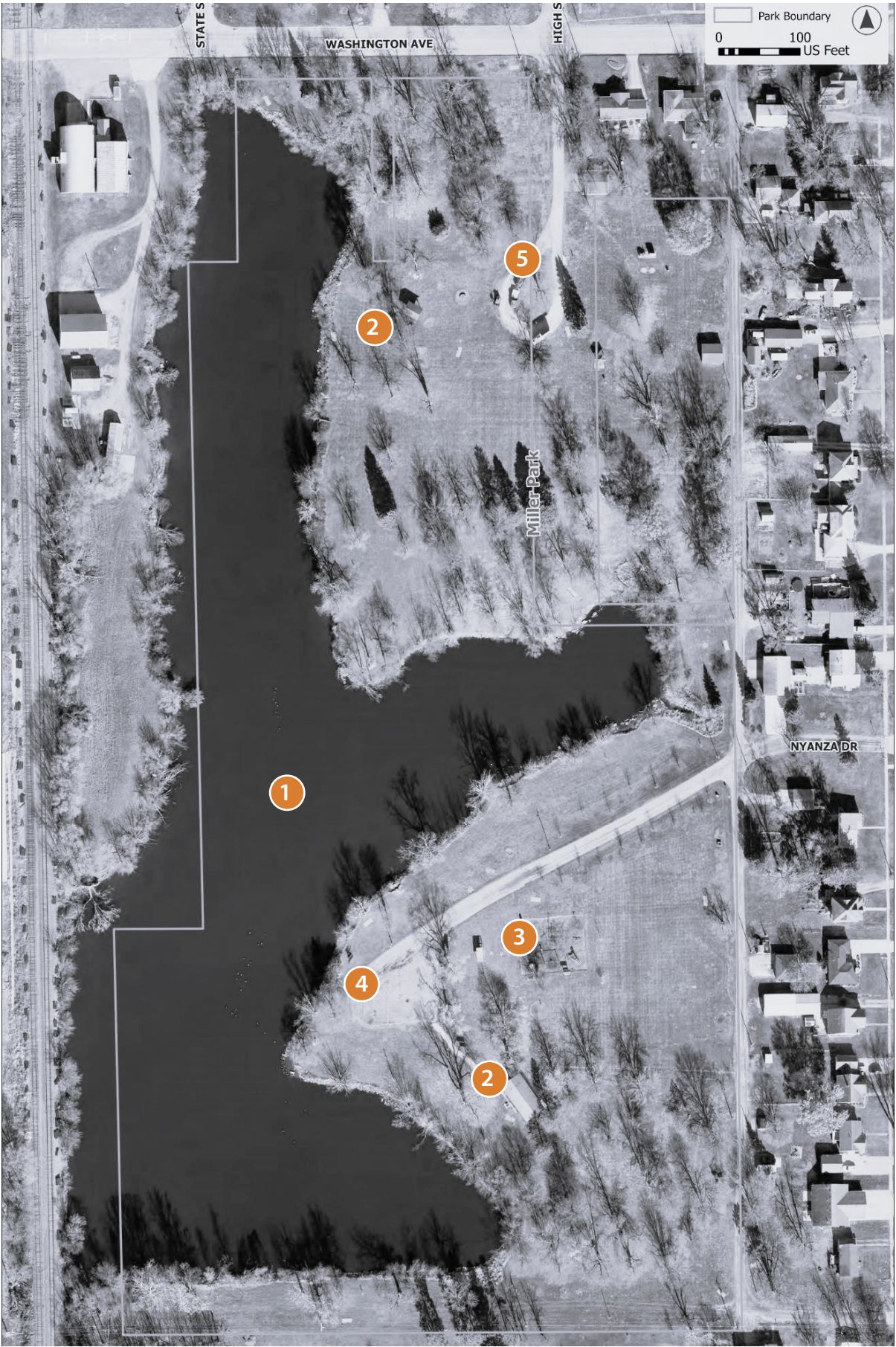


MILLER PARK

1130 Nyanza Dr.
Community Park

LEGEND

- 1 Lake Nyanza
- 2 Shelter / Restroom
- 3 Playground
- 4 Parking
- 5 Disc Golf



SUMMER STREET PARK

720 Summer St.
Neighborhood Park

Overview

Summer Street Park is a small but well-loved neighborhood park situated within a quiet residential area of Grinnell. Tucked away along Summer Street, the park provides a welcoming green space for passive and active recreation within easy walking distance for nearby residents. The park’s mature trees, open lawn areas and play amenities create an inviting environment for families, individuals and small groups seeking casual outdoor experiences. Its layout encourages informal gathering, children’s play and unstructured recreation.

Role in Park System

Summer Street Park serves a vital role within Grinnell’s park system as one of the few public green spaces located in the southern portion of the community. Its presence ensures that residents in this area have convenient, walkable access to outdoor recreation, play opportunities and informal gathering space. While modest in size and programming, the park helps address geographic equity in park distribution across Grinnell, providing essential everyday access to nature and recreation for nearby families and individuals.

INVENTORY

Developed Land	5.2 acres
Trails	0.09 miles
Basketball Court	0
Playground	1
Soccer Field	0
Tennis Court	0
Pickleball Court	0
Volleyball Court	0
Skate Park	0
Golf Driving Range	0
Dog Park	0
Exercise Station	0
Disc Golf Course	0
Swimming Pool	0
Spray Grounds	0

Existing Amenities

- **Playground:** Summer Street Park features a playground structure suitable for young children, providing opportunities for physical activity and imaginative play in a shaded, easily visible area of the park.
- **Open Green Space:** Grassy lawn areas offer flexible space for casual activities such as tossing a ball, reading, or simply relaxing under the trees.

Amphitheater	0
Pavilion	1
Shelter	0
Benches	0
Picnic Tables	3
BBQ Grills	0
Bike Rack	1
Drinking Fountain	0
Bridge	0
Historical Features	0
Water Feature /	0
Detention Pond	0
Parking	0
Restroom Building	0
Community Garden	1

- **Shade Trees and Landscaping:** Mature trees along the park’s edges provide shade and seasonal beauty, contributing to the park’s inviting, neighborhood-oriented character. Simple landscaping helps maintain an attractive and low-maintenance appearance.
- **Benches:** Several benches are placed throughout the park, offering convenient seating for caregivers, visitors and individuals enjoying the outdoor setting.



SUMMER STREET PARK

720 Summer St.
Neighborhood Park

LEGEND

- 1 Nature Inspired Playscape
- 2 Shelter
- 3 Trail
- 4 Garden
- 5 Creek
- 6 Parking



THOMAZIN PARK

304 1st Ave

Neighborhood Park

Overview

Thomazin Park is a well-established neighborhood park located on the southwest side of Grinnell, offering accessible recreational space for residents of nearby neighborhoods. The park features mature trees, open green space and core amenities that support both passive and active recreation. Its quiet, residential setting and inviting layout make it a convenient destination for families, individuals and small groups looking to enjoy the outdoors close to home. The park’s simple design encourages informal play, relaxation and social interaction.

Role in Park System

As one of the few park spaces located in Grinnell’s southwestern neighborhoods, Thomazin Park plays an important role in promoting equitable access to parks and recreation throughout the community. Its location ensures residents in this part of town have a nearby, walkable option for outdoor play, relaxation and connection with nature. While modest in its size and amenities, the park helps fill a geographic gap in Grinnell’s park network, supporting everyday recreation needs for surrounding households.

Future enhancements such as improved playground surfacing, seating, or landscaping could further strengthen the park’s role as a valued neighborhood resource.

INVENTORY

Developed Land	2.7 acres
Trails	0.0 miles
Basketball Court	0
Playground	1
Soccer Field	0
Tennis Court	0
Pickleball Court	0
Volleyball Court	0
Skate Park	0
Golf Driving Range	0
Dog Park	0
Exercise Station	0
Disc Golf Course	0
Swimming Pool	0
Spray Grounds	0

Amphitheater	0
Pavilion	0
Shelter	0
Benches	0
Picnic Tables	1
BBQ Grills	0
Bike Rack	0
Drinking Fountain	0
Bridge	0
Historical Features	1
Water Feature /	0
Detention Pond	0
Parking	0
Restroom Building	0
Community Garden	0

Existing Amenities

- **Playground:** Thomazin Park features a playground structure designed for young children, offering opportunities for climbing, sliding and imaginative play in a shaded, easily supervised area of the park.
- **Open Green Space:** The park provides a grassy lawn area ideal for casual recreation such as tossing a ball, playing catch, or enjoying a picnic. The flexible open space invites informal, unstructured activities.
- **Shade Trees and Landscaping:** Mature shade trees enhance the park’s natural character and provide relief from the summer sun. Basic landscaping contributes to the park’s attractive, low-maintenance appearance.



THOMAZIN PARK

304 1st Ave

Neighborhood Park

LEGEND

1 Playground



VAN HORN PARK

340 16th Ave

Neighborhood Park

Overview

Van Horn Park is a neighborhood-scale park located on the northeast side of Grinnell. Surrounded by residential housing, the park offers essential outdoor amenities for families and youth, with a focus on unstructured play and casual recreation. Though modest in size and programming, it provides convenient access to green space within walking distance for nearby households.

Role in Park System

Van Horn Park plays a supportive role in Grinnell’s park system by serving the everyday recreational needs of nearby residents. Its quiet character and accessible location make it especially valuable for young families and caregivers seeking low-barrier outdoor space. While not a destination park, it is essential in maintaining equitable park access throughout the community. Improvements such as ADA pathway connections, updated surfacing and enhanced play elements could further increase the park’s value and usability.

INVENTORY

Developed Land	8.2 acres
Trails	0.28 miles
Basketball Court	1
Playground	1
Soccer Field	0
Tennis Court	0
Pickleball Court	2
Volleyball Court	0
Skate Park	0
Golf Driving Range	0
Dog Park	0
Exercise Station	0
Disc Golf Course	0
Swimming Pool	0
Spray Grounds	0

Amphitheater	0
Pavilion	1
Shelter	0
Benches	2
Picnic Tables	1
BBQ Grills	0
Bike Rack	0
Drinking Fountain	0
Bridge	0
Historical Features	0
Water Feature /	0
Detention Pond	0
Parking	0
Restroom Building	0
Community Garden	0

Existing Amenities

- **Playground:** The park includes a basic playground area featuring swings and climbing structures appropriate for young children. It supports daily active use and helps meet local demand for family-friendly outdoor play areas.
- **Open Green Space:** Lawn areas are available for informal play and neighborhood gatherings. The park’s open layout allows for flexible use such as catch, frisbee and picnicking.
- **Picnic Tables and Seating:** Scattered seating and picnic tables provide resting spots and gathering places for families and small groups.
- **Shade Trees:** Mature shade trees line the perimeter and interior of the park, offering natural cooling and visual appeal.

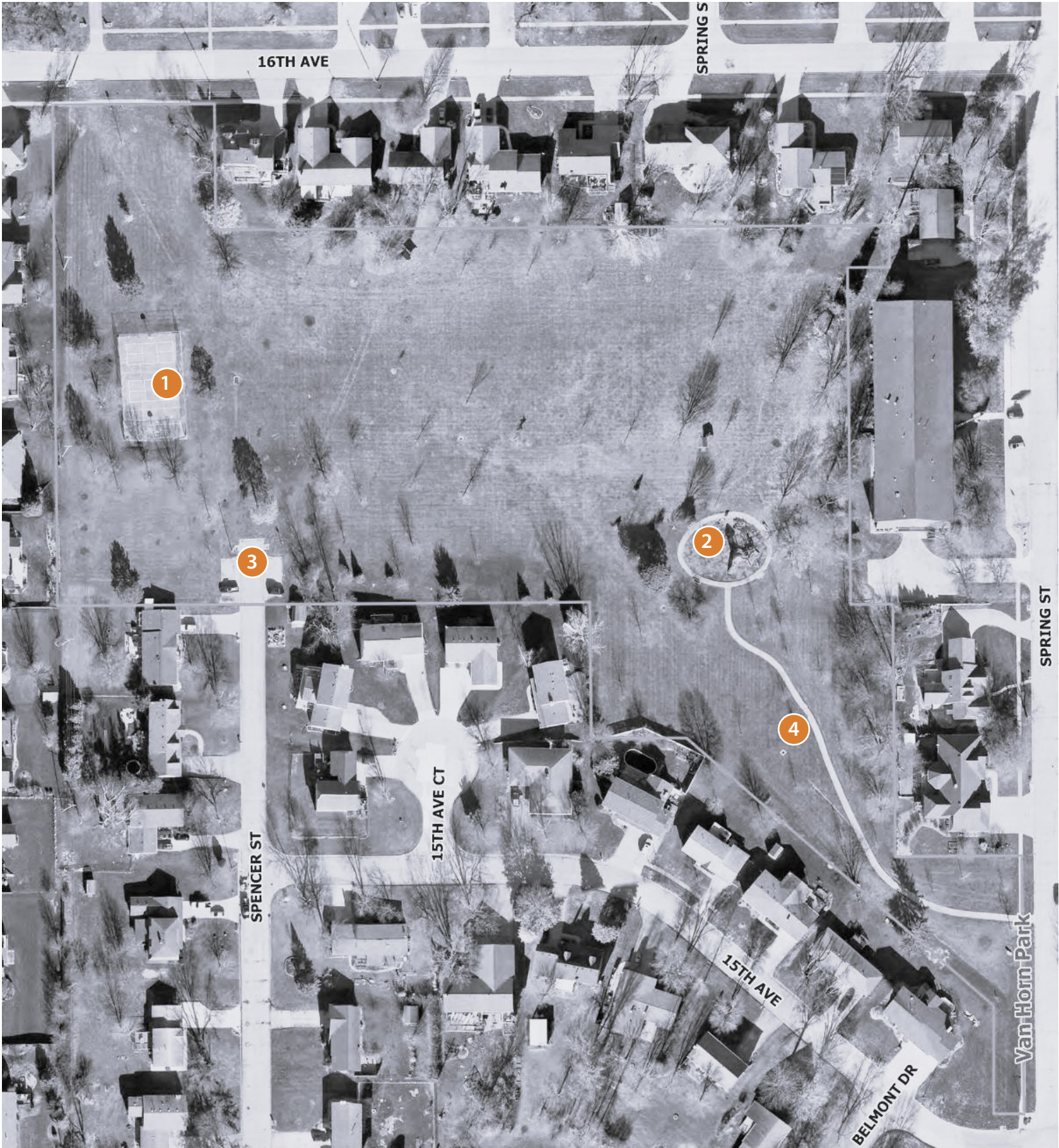


VAN HORN PARK

340 16th Ave
Neighborhood Park

LEGEND

- 1 Basketball Court
- 2 Playground
- 3 Parking
- 4 Trail



OPEN SPACE PARK

400 6th Ave W

Special Use Park

Overview

BMP 2 is a constructed stormwater detention pond located south of 6th Avenue West, adjacent to the Grinnell Trail and near a newly restored stream corridor. Though primarily designed as an engineered stormwater management facility, the pond also functions as a naturalized open space that contributes to the ecological and recreational character of the surrounding area. With its vegetated banks, potential habitat for wildlife and proximity to the trail system, the pond enhances the area’s environmental quality while providing opportunities for passive outdoor experiences such as bird watching and nature observation.

Role in Park System

While not a traditional park, BMP 2 serves a unique dual role within Grinnell’s open space network. Its primary function is to reduce flooding and improve water quality by capturing, storing and treating stormwater runoff before it enters the adjacent stream restoration project. At the same time, the pond will contributes to the city’s broader goals of environmental stewardship, habitat enhancement and passive recreation.

INVENTORY

Undeveloped Land	8.07 acres
Trails	0.14 miles
Basketball Court	0
Playground	0
Soccer Field	0
Tennis Court	0
Pickleball Court	0
Volleyball Court	0
Skate Park	0
Golf Driving Range	0
Dog Park	0
Exercise Station	0
Disc Golf Course	0
Swimming Pool	0
Spray Grounds	0

Its location along the Grinnell Trail offers residents and visitors visual access to a functioning stormwater feature that doubles as a natural amenity. The site also presents educational opportunities, with potential for interpretive signage or outdoor classroom experiences that highlight the importance of stormwater management and ecological restoration within the community.

Amphitheater	0
Pavilion	0
Shelter	0
Benches	0
Picnic Tables	0
BBQ Grills	0
Bike Rack	0
Drinking Fountain	0
Bridge	1
Historical Features	0
Water Feature /	1
Detention Pond	0
Parking	0
Restroom Building	0
Community Garden	0

Existing Amenities

- Stormwater Detention Pond: A professionally designed basin that captures and slows stormwater runoff, reducing flood risk and improving water quality through sediment settling, phosphorus removal and biological processes.
- Vegetated Habitat: The pond’s embankments and surrounding areas support native vegetation, providing habitat for aquatic life, birds and other wildlife.
- Grinnell Trail Connection: The nearby trail provides easy visual access to the site, encouraging observation of the pond and its associated habitat.



OPEN SPACE PARK

400 6th Ave W

Special Use Park

LEGEND

- 1 Trail
- 2 Underpass
- 3 Creek



OPEN SPACE PARK

1450 West St S

Special Use Park

Overview

The site, a stormwater management area, is located on former agricultural land at the transitional edge of Grinnell’s urban boundary. This area represents a unique intersection of open fields, natural character, and adjacent infrastructure. Although no formal stormwater facility will be developed, the site remains a valuable open space with potential for future community-oriented use or ecological preservation.

Role in Park System

While not currently programmed as a traditional park or pond facility, the site holds value within Grinnell’s broader parks and open space network. Its location and open nature present opportunities for future low-impact recreation, habitat conservation, or educational interpretation aligned with the City’s long-term goals for green infrastructure and public access to natural landscapes.

INVENTORY

Undeveloped Land	25.08 acres
Trails	0.0 miles
Basketball Court	0
Playground	0
Soccer Field	0
Tennis Court	0
Pickleball Court	0
Volleyball Court	0
Skate Park	0
Golf Driving Range	0
Dog Park	0
Exercise Station	0
Disc Golf Course	0
Swimming Pool	0
Spray Grounds	0

Amphitheater	0
Pavilion	0
Shelter	0
Benches	0
Picnic Tables	0
BBQ Grills	0
Bike Rack	0
Drinking Fountain	0
Bridge	0
Historical Features	0
Water Feature /	1
Detention Pond	0
Parking	0
Restroom Building	0
Community Garden	0

Existing Amenities

- The site is currently undeveloped with no formal park amenities in place.



OPEN SPACE

PARK

1450 West St S
Special Use Park

LEGEND

- 1 Wetland (Stormwater BMP)







SECTION 4

Community Needs Assessment & Public Engagement

Introduction

Staff, Focus Groups and Public Meetings

Public Engagement

Trends in Recreation and Park Usage

Benchmarking with Comparable Communities

Community Needs Assessment

Introduction

The Community Needs Assessment forms a vital cornerstone of the Grinnell Parks and Recreation Master Plan, providing a clear understanding of current conditions and identifying opportunities to enhance recreational experiences for all. Informed by community input, demographic trends and system evaluation, this assessment reflects both the strengths of Grinnell’s existing recreation system and the exciting potential for growth and reinvestment.

With anticipated changes to public access at Ahrens Park, the community faces a unique opportunity to reimagine the future of parks and recreation in Grinnell. While transitions like these bring uncertainty, they also create space for innovation, collaboration and the development of new facilities and programs that continue to support Grinnell’s strong tradition of youth sports, adult recreation and community wellness.



Demographic Context

Grinnell is a vibrant, engaged community that reflects a rich diversity of ages, backgrounds and interests. Young families, students, working professionals and older adults all contribute to the city’s active and welcoming environment. Participation in programs like youth sports, open gym activities, senior wellness offerings and community events demonstrates the shared value residents place on recreation and connection.

As Grinnell continues to grow and evolve, so too does the opportunity to provide inclusive, intergenerational spaces and programs that meet the needs of everyone. Planning for the future allows the community to build upon its strengths, ensuring that accessible, high-quality recreation remains a defining feature of life in Grinnell.



Evolving Recreation Landscape and Opportunities

As access to some of Ahrens Park transitions to private or more limited use, the community of Grinnell has an exciting opportunity to reimagine and reinvest in its parks and recreation system. This moment invites the community to explore new facilities, expand recreational programs and ensure that cherished traditions continue to thrive in fresh and innovative ways.

Several amenities that have long been central to the City’s recreation offerings provide a natural starting point for envisioning how future needs can be met—and even surpassed:

- **Grinnell Athletic and Recreation Center (GARC)**
While future access to GARC remains uncertain, this change creates a valuable



opportunity to explore new spaces for indoor recreation. Community members have expressed a desire for facilities that support open gym play, youth and adult sports leagues, volleyball, pickleball, batting cages and inclusive programming for all ages.

- **Ahrens Family Center**
With programs like swim lessons, taekwondo, basketball and event rentals historically offered here, future planning can focus on identifying alternative spaces and partnerships to ensure these beloved programs continue to thrive.
- **Soccer Complex and Driving Range**
The strong interest in soccer and golf presents the ideal opportunity to explore options for new fields and practice spaces that support both recreational and competitive play.
- **Event Space and Parking**
Community traditions such as Trunk or Treat and Kites Over Grinnell have long brought residents together. Future investment in flexible, accessible event spaces can ensure these cherished celebrations—and others yet to be imagined—remain a vibrant part of Grinnell’s identity.

By viewing this time of change as a chance to grow, the community of Grinnell can create a parks and recreation system that is welcoming, accessible and meets the needs of the entire community.

Staffing and Resource Needs

As Grinnell’s parks and recreation system prepares for an exciting period of reinvention, expanding staff capacity and resources will be essential to supporting this vision. With changes to access at Ahrens Park, the Grinnell Parks and Recreation Department is uniquely positioned to take the lead in shaping new spaces, programs and partnerships that meet the evolving needs of the community. To do so successfully, the department will need the tools and support to:

- Plan and manage new or reimagined recreation spaces
- Forge new partnerships with schools, nonprofits and private venues
- Secure sustainable funding for capital improvements and operations

Priority Needs Moving Forward

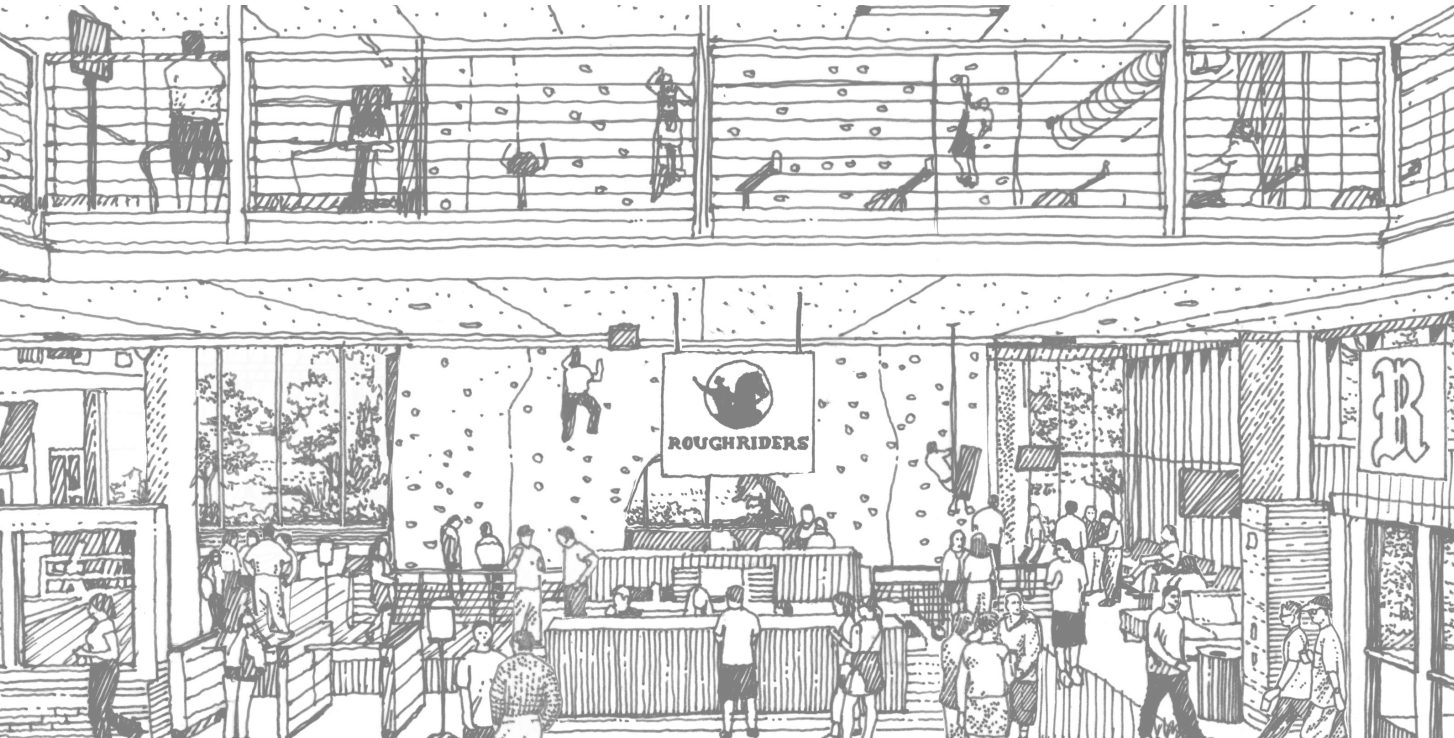
As Grinnell looks to the future of its parks and recreation system, it is clear that creating vibrant, inclusive spaces and programs will require a community-wide effort. The City of Grinnell is prepared to lead this important work, but success will depend on strong collaboration with local partners—including schools, nonprofits, businesses and residents alike. Together, the community can build on its strengths and invest in the resources that will keep Grinnell active, connected and thriving.

Key priorities for the future include:

- 1. Expanded and upgraded athletic fields**
Replacing fields lost at the Soccer Complex and adding new spaces for multi-sport use will support youth and adult athletics. Achieving this goal will rely on creative partnerships and shared investment.
- 2. A new indoor recreation center**
Developing a modern, centrally located facility will provide year-round access to sports, open play, wellness programs and community activities. This project will require coordinated efforts across public and private partners to bring the vision to life.
- 3. Continuation of youth and adult programs**
Ensuring the long-term success of popular programs—including those previously hosted at GARC and the Ahrens Family Center—will require collaborative planning and resource sharing among the City, schools and local organizations.



- 4. Flexible spaces for community events and rentals**
Maintaining Grinnell’s cherished community traditions means investing in adaptable spaces that can host events, celebrations and civic gatherings. Making this possible will take broad community support and partnership.
- 5. Enhanced staffing and operational support**
Growing the City’s recreation team and ensuring stable operational funding is a key part of sustaining high-quality services. Leveraging partnerships and shared resources will be essential to meeting these needs.



Conclusion

The transition of Ahrens Park facilities marks a turning point for parks and recreation in Grinnell—but it is also a moment filled with possibility. This Community Needs Assessment reflects both the challenges and the tremendous opportunity to come together as a community to build something stronger.

While the City of Grinnell is ready to help lead this next chapter, creating a more accessible, inclusive and resilient parks and recreation system will require the energy, ideas and resources of many. Schools, nonprofits, local businesses and residents all have an important role to play. Through collaboration, shared investment and a unified vision, Grinnell can not only replace what has been lost, but create new spaces and opportunities that strengthen the community for generations to come.

Public Engagement

Introduction

Public engagement was a cornerstone of the Grinnell Parks and Recreation Master Plan process. From the outset, the City and project team prioritized creating a plan shaped by the voices of those who use and value Grinnell’s parks every day. A variety of outreach tools were used to engage residents of all ages and backgrounds — including community surveys, open houses, stakeholder meetings, social pinpoint mapping and comment forms. This inclusive approach generated hundreds of responses and thousands of individual data points, offering a nuanced understanding of the community’s values, preferences and priorities.

Throughout this process, one message came through clearly: residents of Grinnell care deeply about their parks and recreation system. Whether advocating for greater access to restrooms, expanded trails, a modern indoor recreation facility, or more equitable geographic investment, residents expressed a strong commitment to preserving and enhancing the community’s recreational assets. Their feedback not only informed the goals and strategies within this plan, but also helped shape a shared vision for the future — one rooted in accessibility and pride of place.

A. Public Engagement Summary: Community Survey and Online Tools

Grinnell’s residents have shown tremendous dedication to shaping the future of the community’s parks and recreation system. Through surveys, open comments and online tools, a wide range of voices came together to express not only concerns but also creative ideas and a shared vision for enhancing recreational opportunities for all. The feedback reflects a deep appreciation for what exists and a strong desire to build on that foundation to create an even more vibrant, accessible and welcoming system for everyone.

Key Themes and Community Priorities

1. Restrooms, Maintenance and Basic Infrastructure

Residents expressed strong support for modern, clean and well-maintained park facilities. The desire for restrooms that are open during warm months, additional pet-friendly fountains and improved trail surfaces highlights the community’s commitment to making parks welcoming and convenient for all users. A citywide strategy to maintain shelters, playgrounds and shared-use spaces will help ensure Grinnell’s parks remain safe, functional and enjoyable year-round.

2. Indoor Recreation and the Evolving Role of GARC

The potential transition of the Grinnell Athletic and Recreation Center (GARC) sparked a positive call to action, with residents excited about the opportunity to envision a modern, multi-use indoor facility. Suggested amenities include courts for basketball, volleyball and pickleball, indoor

turf for year-round sports, walking tracks, fitness areas, an indoor pool and flexible spaces for community gatherings. Many saw this as a chance to create a YMCA-style hub that not only serves local residents but also draws regional tournaments and visitors to Grinnell.

3. Trail Connectivity, Walkability and Soft-Surface Expansion

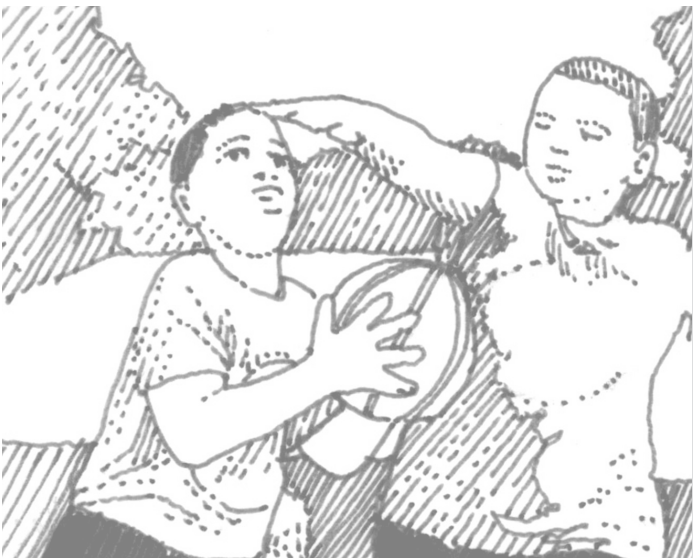
Grinnell’s flat landscape and compact size offer an ideal foundation for expanding its trail network. Residents shared enthusiasm for a connected, citywide system that links neighborhoods, parks, schools and downtown. Priorities include continuous hard-surface loops, safer bike routes, expanded soft-surface nature trails and improved winter maintenance. Many see Grinnell poised to become a leader in trail-based recreation and mobility.

4. Park System Equity and Geographic Investment

The community expressed excitement about the potential to invest in under-served areas—particularly the south side of Grinnell. Suggestions included transforming the Davis School property into a vibrant recreation hub, enhancing Summer Street and Thomazin Parks and improving trail safety and connectivity. Residents recognize this as an opportunity to ensure all parts of the city benefit from high-quality recreational spaces.

5. Nature, Shade and Environmental Stewardship

Residents value Grinnell’s natural beauty and see parks as places to connect with nature. There is strong interest in expanding shaded seating, native plantings, unstructured



play areas and environmental learning opportunities. Restoration of Arbor Lake and Lake Nyanza, improved access for fishing and kayaking and more tree planting were among the most common suggestions to make parks cooler, greener and more inviting for everyone.

6. Aquatic Facility and Water Recreation

The Grinnell Aquatic Center is a beloved community gem and residents expressed excitement about opportunities to improve the experience with more shade, picnic areas and accessible parking. There is also strong interest in exploring year-round aquatic options, including an indoor facility to support swim lessons, therapy and water fitness.

7. Programming Quality and Youth Experience

Residents shared their appreciation for the dedicated coaches and staff who bring recreation programs to life. At the same time, many expressed a desire to enhance program quality, expand options for teens and non-competitive participants and improve scheduling for busy families. Strengthening collaboration with schools, local organizations and volunteers was seen as key to providing a wide range of engaging, accessible programs for all ages.

8. Funding, Partnerships and Strategic Stewardship

There is clear community support for thoughtful investment in Grinnell’s parks and recreation system. Residents emphasized the importance of fairness, transparency and long-term sustainability. Popular ideas included pursuing grants, fostering public-private partnerships and working with

Grinnell College, the school district and regional organizations to share resources and strengthen the system.

9. Communications, Marketing and Community Visibility

Residents are eager to be informed and involved. Suggestions included better use of digital tools, social media, signage and coordinated calendars to promote events and underused parks. By improving visibility and outreach, the community can make sure everyone feels welcome and aware of the full range of recreational opportunities available.

10. Park-Specific Feedback and Place-Based Opportunities

- Community members shared a wealth of ideas for specific parks, demonstrating pride and a desire to enhance these special places:
- Merrill Park: Desire for trail loops, native plantings and improved water access.
 - Bailey Park: Enthusiasm for expanding the skatepark, new restroom and shelter.
 - Central Park: High praise
 - Summer Street Park: Seen as a hidden gem with potential for revitalization.
 - Arbor Lake: Strong community interest in enhancing nature access and education.
 - Miller Park: Support lake restoration and future trail expansion

B. Public Engagement Summary: Focus Groups and Stakeholders

Introduction

Grinnell’s parks and recreation planning process has been strengthened by the insight and collaboration of key community stakeholders. Through a series of focus group discussions, representatives from local organizations, schools, health providers, businesses and City leadership came together to share ideas, priorities and solutions. These conversations highlighted the community’s shared vision for a parks and recreation system that supports wellness, connection and economic vitality.

Key Takeaways

1. Connectivity & Access

Stakeholders see tremendous potential to create a more connected Grinnell through linked parks, safe trails and clear signage. Improved walkability and accessibility are top priorities to ensure that parks are welcoming and convenient for everyone.

2. Indoor Facilities

There is broad support for addressing the shortage of gym and recreation space. Stakeholders identified strong opportunities for the City, schools and other partners to work together to develop a shared, flexible indoor facility that serves all ages.

3. Programming Diversity

Expanding recreational offerings for young adults, seniors and families was a common goal. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of collaboration and clear roles across organizations to deliver a wide variety of programs that meet community needs.



4. Collaboration & Governance

The conversations reinforced the value of formal partnerships and shared planning. Stakeholders encouraged the development of coordinated messaging and governance structures to ensure efficient use of resources and consistent service delivery.

5. Sustainable Funding

Stakeholders expressed confidence that Grinnell can achieve its recreation goals through cost-sharing models, creative fundraising, grant opportunities and long-range infrastructure planning.

6. Community Development

Parks and recreation were recognized as essential to Grinnell’s quality of life, talent recruitment and tourism. There is strong enthusiasm for positioning parks as central to the city’s identity and promoting them through integrated branding efforts.

7. Ahrens Park Distinction

As Ahrens Park transitions, stakeholders see the importance of clearly communicating its private-public model, realigning leases and costs and working together to relocate programs that may be affected. This moment presents an opportunity to reimagine recreation spaces in ways that benefit the entire community.

C. Trends in Recreation and Park Usage

Introduction

Across the United States, parks and recreation systems are evolving to meet the changing needs, values and lifestyles of the communities they serve. What were once considered purely leisure amenities are now recognized as essential public infrastructure—critical to public health, economic development, social equity and environmental resilience.

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent shifts in work-life patterns have further elevated the importance of accessible, high-quality public spaces. People are increasingly seeking outdoor experiences, flexible recreation opportunities and places that foster connection—both to nature and to each other. As a result, park systems nationwide are adapting with innovative designs, inclusive programming and collaborative planning strategies.

This section highlights the key national trends shaping the future of parks and recreation, offering insight into how communities like Grinnell can stay responsive, resilient and relevant in the years ahead.

1. Increased Demand for Trails and Connectivity

- Walking, biking and hiking trails are among the most desired amenities.
- Urban and suburban communities seek connected greenway systems for recreation and transportation.
- Parks are increasingly seen as multi-functional networks rather than isolated sites.



2. Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility

- Focus on removing barriers to access for marginalized groups (e.g., low-income families, communities of color, people with disabilities).
- Trends include ADA upgrades, culturally inclusive programming and parks located within a 10-minute walk for all residents.
- Designing for neurodiversity and mental health needs is also gaining traction.

3. Multi-Generational & Intergenerational Use

- Facilities and programs are being reimagined to serve all ages, not just youth or seniors.
- Growth in family-oriented amenities (e.g., inclusive playgrounds, splash pads, gathering spaces).

- Increased demand for pickleball courts, walking loops, outdoor fitness stations and nature play.

4. Physical and Mental Health & Wellness

- Parks are positioned as essential infrastructure for public health—a trend accelerated by the pandemic.
- Outdoor recreation is promoted as a preventive health strategy, with trails, green space and programming to reduce stress, obesity and isolation.
- Partnerships with healthcare providers and public health departments are growing.

5. Year-Round and Indoor Recreation Needs

- Communities are investing in flexible indoor recreation spaces to offer consistent access during colder seasons and inclement weather.

- There is increased interest in shared-use agreements between schools, parks and community centers to address indoor space shortages.

6. Environmental Sustainability & Climate Resilience

- Parks are increasingly seen as tools for stormwater management, heat mitigation and pollinator habitat creation.
- Native landscaping, green infrastructure and regenerative design (e.g., flood management and mitigation measures, woodland and prairie restoration, rain gardens) are trending.
- Demand is growing for carbon-neutral operations and low-maintenance, drought-resistant landscaping.

7. Programming Flexibility and Innovation

- Pop-up programming (e.g., mobile rec, temporary installations) is used to meet people where they are.
- Hybrid events, nature-based programs, arts & culture and outdoor education are expanding.
- Demand for technology-enhanced experiences like fitness apps, digital wayfinding and augmented reality in parks is increasing.

8. Partnerships and Alternative Funding

- Municipalities are increasingly forming public-private partnerships and seeking nontraditional funding sources (grants, sponsorships, foundations).
- Community-based co-management of parks, especially in underserved neighborhoods, is also emerging.

9. Rise in “Third Spaces” and Placemaking

- Parks are being designed as community hubs, providing not only recreation but also space for gathering, markets, food trucks, events and civic engagement.
- Investments in placemaking—murals, lighting, shade structures, social seating—help attract more diverse users and longer stays.



D. Benchmarking with Comparable Communities

Introduction

To better understand Grinnell’s position within the broader landscape of parks and recreation planning, this benchmarking analysis evaluates the community’s park and recreation system alongside three peer Iowa cities: Pella, Decorah and Storm Lake. These communities were chosen based on comparable population size, regional context and a demonstrated commitment to public investment in parks, trails and recreation amenities.

However, with the anticipated loss of access to key facilities at Ahrens Park, including indoor recreation space, athletic fields and programming venues, Grinnell’s standing relative to its peers is poised to change significantly. What was once a balanced comparison must now be reframed to reflect this new reality. The withdrawal of these assets introduces critical service gaps—particularly in year-round recreation, youth sports and community programming—that may affect equitable access, resident satisfaction and the City’s ability to meet growing demand.

The following revised benchmarking narrative considers this evolving context, highlighting where Grinnell now stands and identifying emerging priorities in light of its shifting infrastructure landscape.

Reevaluated Peer Community Comparison

With the impending transition of key facilities at Ahrens Park to non-public use, Grinnell faces a substantial reduction in its parks and recreation assets. This change impacts not only program delivery but also Grinnell’s relative standing compared to peer communities. A reevaluation of Grinnell’s position alongside Pella, Decorah and Storm Lake offers a clearer understanding of the challenges ahead and highlights pathways for strategic investment.

Grinnell (Updated & Excluding Ahrens/Paschall) | Decorah | Storm Lake | Pella
Parks & Acreage Summary

City	Total Acreage	Est. Population (2023)	Acres per 1,000 Residents
Grinnell	142.1 acres	~9,200	15.4 acres / 1,000
Decorah	~664 acres	~7,500	88.5 acres / 1,000
Storm Lake	~100+ acres	~11,300	8.8+ acres / 1,000
Pella	Data not specified	~10,600	(Unknown due to acreage gap)

Note: Ahrens/Paschall Memorial Park not included in Grinnell's acreage to maintain fair peer comparison.

Grinnell Parks Breakdown (Excluding Ahrens/Paschall)

Park	Acreage	Key Features
Arbor Lake	81.4	Fishing, trails, largest park in Grinnell
Miller Park	22.3	Trails, open space, shelter
Van Horn Park	8.2	Open green space, playground
Merrill Park	8.7	Playground, shelter
Summer Street Park	5.2	Neighborhood park, playground
Bailey, Central, Lion, Thomazin, Aquatic Center	16.3	Mix of playgrounds, shelters, downtown events space
Total: 142.1 acres across 10 parks + aquatic center		

Park Acreage and Access

All four communities have historically prioritized access to parkland, open space and trails. Pella and Storm Lake boast regional park destinations and extensive multi-use trail systems. Decorah emphasizes natural terrain and ecological recreation along rivers, hillsides and forests. While Grinnell maintains a strong baseline of neighborhood parks, the removal of public access to Ahrens Park reduces the total available acreage and limits centralized recreational access for thousands of residents. Grinnell will need to explore park acquisition or re-purposing strategies to maintain equitable access across neighborhoods.

Facilities and Amenities

Grinnell will experience the most notable decline in facilities among its peers. The potential closure of GARC, the driving range and indoor amenities at the Ahrens Family Center will eliminate key indoor recreation spaces—spaces that Pella and Storm Lake offer through well-maintained community centers and aquatic facilities. Decorah’s natural amenities, while less reliant on indoor spaces, are complemented by well-integrated outdoor venues. In comparison, Grinnell will lack a year-round, multi-use recreation facility unless new investments are made. This gap places the city at a competitive disadvantage in terms of attracting and retaining families, supporting youth sports and serving the wellness needs of residents during winter months.

Facilities & Amenities Overview

City	Key Facilities	Amenities
Grinnell	Aquatic Center, Arbor Lake, Central Park, Miller Park	Trails, fishing, playgrounds, shelters, events space
Decorah	Ice Rink, Pool, Trout Run Trail, Campground	Extensive trail network, camping, skiing, tennis
Storm Lake	Lakeside Parks, Campgrounds, Public Docks	Trails, beach, shelters, fishing piers, volleyball
Pella	Indoor Rec Center, Aquatic Center, Gardens	Indoor track, pools, flower gardens, playgrounds



Programming and Community Engagement

With the loss of Ahrens Park as a host site, many of Grinnell’s long-standing programs will face displacement or potential discontinuation. Peer communities continue to offer robust, year-round programming supported by stable facility access. Pella’s programming thrives through school-facility integration and a modern recreation center. Storm Lake provides culturally inclusive programming with a focus on youth and multilingual access. Decorah blends outdoor recreation with targeted seasonal programs. In contrast, Grinnell’s programming will contract unless alternative spaces and staffing support are secured, leaving gaps in youth enrichment, adult fitness and senior wellness—especially during winter and after-school hours.

Recreational Programming

City	Youth Programs	Adult Programs
Grinnell	To Be Determined (Ahrens Park)	To Be Determined (Ahrens Park)
Decorah	Soccer, biking, canoeing, camp programs	Cross-country skiing, golf, adult leagues
Storm Lake	Youth camps, lake activities	Adult rec leagues, beach fitness, kayaking, festivals
Pella	Youth basketball, t-ball, swimming lessons	Co-ed leagues, senior fitness, aquatic classes



Staffing and Organizational Capacity

Peer communities typically operate with dedicated full-time recreation staff and strong partnerships with school districts or foundations. The shift away from shared use of Ahrens facilities will place additional operational pressure on Grinnell’s Parks and Recreation Department. With fewer venues and more decentralized programming, the department will require greater logistical capacity, potentially more staffing and new community partnerships to maintain continuity. Pella and Storm Lake both illustrate how public investment in facilities strengthens the department’s ability to lead with flexibility and innovation.

Staffing Levels & Budgets

City	Full-Time Parks & Rec Staff	Part-Time/ Seasonal Staff	Parks & Rec Budget (2023 Est.)
Grinnell	4 FT	25–30 seasonal (aquatics, parks, youth programs)	~\$800,000–\$1.2M (estimate based on prior reports)
Decorah	6–8 FT	40–50 seasonal	~\$1.5M+ (includes trail maintenance and campground ops)
Storm Lake	5–6 FT	50+ seasonal (includes marina, beach, lake ops)	~\$1.3M+ (lakefront requires higher ops/maintenance)
Pella	8+ FT	60–70 seasonal	~\$2M–\$2.5M (larger indoor facilities, more complex programming)

Data based on public budgets, parks & rec department reports and population-adjusted estimates where official figures weren’t available.

Financial and Strategic Implications

Peer cities benefit from a combination of dedicated public funding, philanthropic partnerships and foundational support—mechanisms that enable them to build and sustain facilities long-term. For Grinnell, the sudden loss of high-use, low-cost facilities raises questions about fiscal resilience and equity. The city will need to consider new funding models—such as bond referendums, recreation levies, capital campaigns, or public-private partnerships—to replace what is lost and reestablish a service standard comparable to its peers.

Conclusion: A New Urgency for Investment

In its previous state, Grinnell’s parks and recreation system offered a competitive, well-rounded set of services relative to peer communities. With the removal of Ahrens Park programming and infrastructure, Grinnell now faces a critical crossroads. While Pella, Decorah and Storm Lake continue to expand and evolve their offerings, Grinnell must now rebuild capacity, reimagine public spaces and reinvest strategically to remain a leader in community health, youth development and civic life. This comparison underscores not only the gaps created by this transition but also the clear models and strategies Grinnell can adopt to move forward.

Key Takeaways

Grinnell’s Strengths

- Provides 15.4 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, a strong showing for a city of its size.
- Includes diverse parks and a major natural feature (Arbor Lake), even without Ahrens/Paschall.
- Cost-effective operations with a lean full-time staff and well-leveraged seasonal workforce.

Peer City Highlights

- Decorah excels with 88.5 acres per 1,000 residents, due to large natural areas and trail networks.
- Storm Lake emphasizes water recreation but has lower per-capita parkland.
- Pella’s strength lies in its larger staff, robust rec programming and indoor infrastructure.



CHAPTER TWO: THE PLAN



SECTION 05

Mission Statement, Guiding Principles, Goals & Objectives

Introduction

Mission Statement

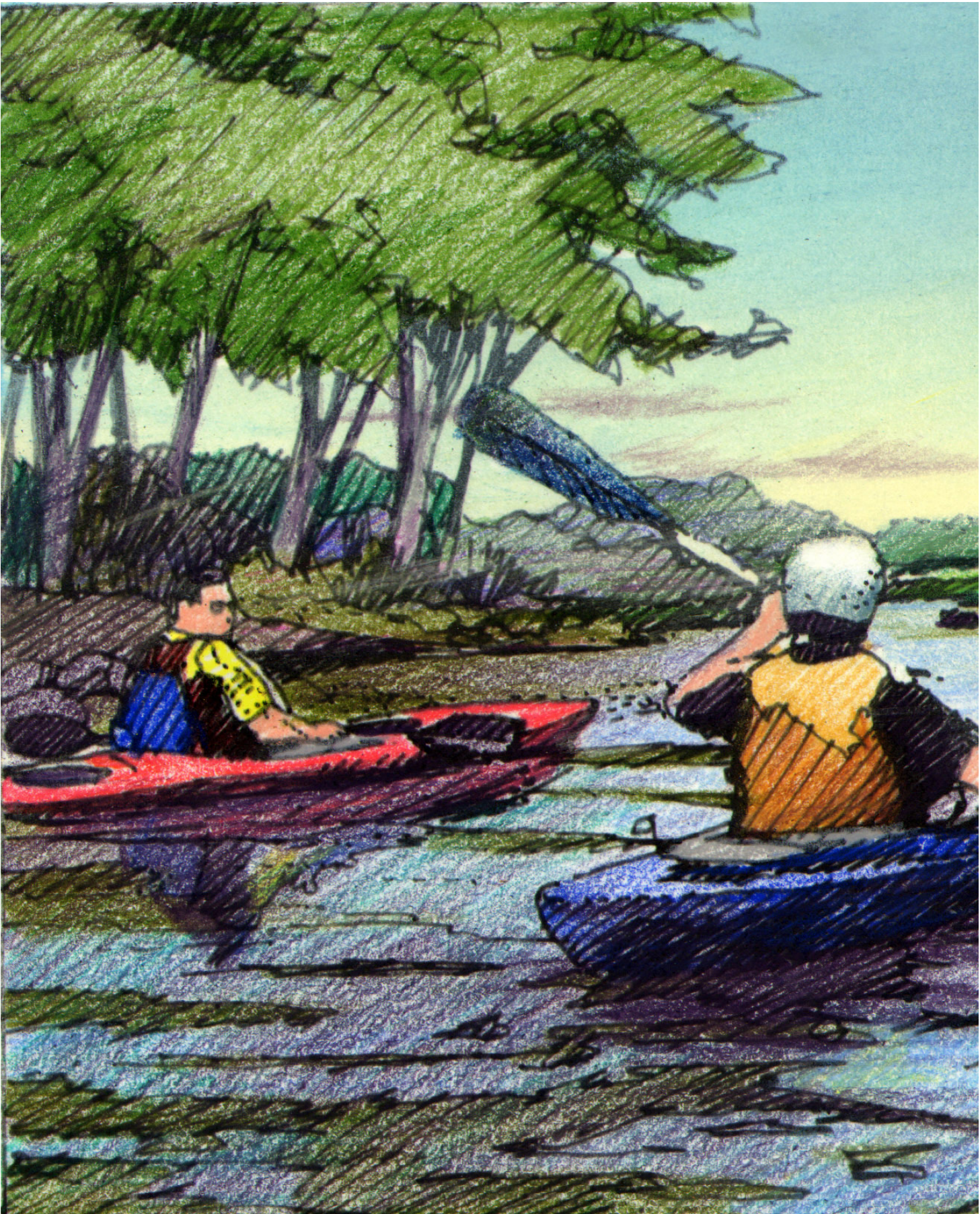
Guiding Principles, Goals and Objectives

Prologue: The Plan

Chapter Two of the Grinnell Parks and Recreation Master Plan translates the insights and values gathered during the Discovery phase into a forward-thinking vision for the future. It defines the community’s shared aspirations and outlines the strategic direction needed to create a more inclusive, connected and resilient parks and recreation system. This chapter is grounded in guiding principles and a mission statement that reflects public input, equity goals and environmental priorities. It also presents clearly defined goals and measurable objectives to support year-round recreation, nature-based design, accessible infrastructure and community well-being.

The Plan offers a comprehensive framework that balances citywide strategies with site-specific recommendations. It includes detailed park classifications, system-wide assessments and park-by-park recommendations to guide physical improvements, programming and investment. It addresses emerging challenges, such as the anticipated loss of access to Ahrens Park and proposes bold, actionable solutions to strengthen Grinnell’s recreation system for the next decade and beyond.

Together, these elements ensure that the City’s parks and trails not only respond to current needs but also help shape a thriving, healthy future for all residents.



Mission Statement, Guiding Principles, Goals & Objectives

Introduction & Background

The Grinnell Parks and Recreation Master Plan is more than a list of projects—it is a shared vision for how parks, trails, open spaces and recreational facilities will shape the city’s future. At its core are a mission and guiding principles that reflect Grinnell’s values and aspirations, shaped through extensive community engagement and a thorough assessment of current conditions and future needs.

Residents voiced clear priorities through surveys, meetings and pop-up events: improved restrooms and shelters, inclusive play areas, better park connectivity, year-round activities, natural resource protection and responsible investment. These priorities were reinforced by data analysis highlighting system strengths and challenges around access, infrastructure, maintenance and environmental quality.

This input laid the foundation for a unifying mission and actionable principles that guide decisions on policy, design, programming and funding. These elements bring clarity and alignment to the plan, ensuring Grinnell’s parks and recreation system remains responsive, inclusive and forward-thinking—transforming the master plan into a practical, community-driven guide that will serve generations to come.

Together, we’re building a stronger, healthier and more connected Grinnell.



Parks for Everyone

Guiding Principle:

Our parks, trails and programs are safe, welcoming and accessible for all—kids, teens, adults and seniors.

Goal:

Ensure that all parks, trails and recreational programs in Grinnell are inclusive and accessible to people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.

Objectives:

- Upgrade outdated restrooms and facilities to meet accessibility and safety standards.
- Install inclusive playgrounds in at least two neighborhood parks within five years.
- Conduct a full ADA audit and integrate improvements into the CIP.
- Apply universal design principles in all future development and renovation.
- Incorporate inclusive signage where appropriate.



Connecting People & Places

Guiding Principle:

We build trails and pathways that connect parks, neighborhoods, schools and families across Grinnell.

Goal:

Create a connected network of trails, sidewalks and greenways linking parks and community destinations.

Objectives:

- Complete trail gaps to form a continuous citywide loop.
- Improve neighborhood sidewalk connectivity at all ports-of-entry to parks.
- Improve crossings, signage and wayfinding at key access points.
- Align trail expansions with public works and infrastructure projects.
- Publish a comprehensive trail and connectivity map.



Supporting Families & Community

Guiding Principle:

Our parks bring people together—offering spaces for play, celebration and connection.

Goal:

Develop spaces and programs that support family recreation, social connection and community events.

Objectives:

- Build or renovate three picnic shelters or gathering spaces prioritized in the CIP.
- Establish outdoor venues for seasonal events, performances and cultural gatherings.
- Expand recreation programming for families and all generations.
- Include flexible-use areas in park designs to accommodate informal gatherings.
- Collaborate with community partners to deliver affordable or free family programming.



Caring for Nature

Guiding Principle:

We protect natural areas, create opportunities to explore the outdoors and use sustainable and resilient practices to manage stormwater throughout our community.

Goal:

Preserve and enhance Grinnell’s natural areas while promoting stormwater management while improving responsible access and nature-inspired recreation.

Objectives:

- Restore native vegetation and riparian buffers in key parklands.
- Expand natural trail systems with educational signage in Arbor Lake, Summer Street and Zimmerman Park.
- Implement green infrastructure (e.g., rain gardens, permeable surfaces) in at least two parks.
- Establish a community stewardship program for ecological restoration.
- Create interpretive content and programming to promote environmental awareness.



Smart, Sustainable Growth

Guiding Principle:

We invest responsibly, plan for the future and work with partners to make every dollar count.

Goal:

Guide park investment and growth through sustainable planning, collaboration and long-term stewardship.

Objectives:

- Allocate funding through a phased, data-informed CIP focused on equity and need.
- Seek at least five external funding or partnership opportunities annually.
- Create a life-cycle asset management plan for all park infrastructure.
- Ensure new residential growth areas include accessible park space.
- Monitor progress and adjust priorities annually through public reporting and feedback.



Fun All Year Long

Guiding Principle:

We offer recreation, events and facilities that keep people active and connected through all seasons.

Goal:

Ensure Grinnell residents have access to engaging recreational experiences year-round.

Objectives:

- Expand indoor recreation through community partnerships.
- Add one four-season amenity (e.g., ice loop, splash pad, heated shelter) in a priority park.
- Publish a quarterly programming calendar with seasonal activities.
- Improve lighting, access and comfort features to extend evening and winter use.
- Evaluate existing parks for seasonal flexibility and plan upgrades accordingly.





SECTION 6

Park System Master Plan

Introduction

Park Classification

Park-by-Park Master Plan

Park Classifications, System Overview & Park-by-Park Recommendations

Introduction

This section outlines the strategies and actions that will shape the future of Grinnell’s parks, trails and open spaces. Building on the vision, goals and guiding principles established earlier in the Master Plan, this section translates community priorities into tangible recommendations that respond to both current needs and future opportunities.

At the heart of this section is a park-by-park master plan, which provides detailed recommendations for improving individual parks throughout the city. These recommendations are tailored to each site’s unique role within the system and guided by community input, existing conditions and long-term objectives. In addition, a comprehensive trail system master plan outlines strategies to improve connectivity across Grinnell—linking parks, neighborhoods, schools and key destinations through safe, accessible, multi-modal pathways. Lastly, this section highlights key recommendations from the Grinnell Lake Restoration Feasibility Study, identifying opportunities to restore ecological health, expand recreational access and protect vital natural resources at Arbor Lake, Lake Nyanza and surrounding landscapes. Together, these elements form a cohesive vision for an active, resilient and inclusive parks and recreation system.

Organizing the Park System

The City of Grinnell’s park system includes a diverse range of parks and open spaces, each serving unique functions within the community. Organizing these spaces into standardized park classifications ensures that Grinnell can deliver equitable and high-quality recreation opportunities across all neighborhoods. Classifications are based on park size, service area, amenities and intended use—ranging from neighborhood parks to community-wide and special-use destinations.

This section outlines Grinnell’s existing parks by classification, identifies system strengths and gaps and highlights the urgent challenge posed by the potential loss of access to Ahrens Park—a privately owned but publicly relied-upon facility.

Neighborhood Parks

Definition:

Walkable, mid-sized parks (1–10 acres) that provide a balance of active and passive recreation for local residents. They serve as daily-use spaces for families and individuals.

Service Area:

0.25–0.5 mile (preferably without crossing major roads)

Typical Features:

- Playgrounds and small sport courts/fields
- Picnic shelters and restrooms
- Shaded seating and benches
- Walking paths and landscaping
- Public art or interpretive elements

Community Parks

Definition:

Large-scale parks (10+ acres) that attract visitors from multiple neighborhoods or across the city. These parks offer diverse recreation types, support large events and often include significant infrastructure.

Service Area:

0.5–3 miles

Typical Features:

- Athletic fields and multi-use courts
- Trails and open space
- Event shelters and gathering areas
- Splash pads or large playgrounds
- Parking, restrooms and lighting
- Spaces for festivals, concerts and markets

Special Use Parks

Definition:

Parks developed for a unique function, such as specialized recreation, sports complexes, or cultural venues. Their size and draw vary widely.

Service Area:

Citywide or regional

Typical Features:

- Aquatic centers and dog parks
- Amphitheaters or heritage facilities
- Indoor recreation or sport-specific infrastructure

Grinnell Example:

- Grinnell Mutual Family Aquatic Center (3.2 acres)

Nature Areas & Open Space

Definition:

Natural preserves emphasizing ecological value, passive recreation and environmental education. They often include stormwater or conservation features.

Service Area:

Citywide

Typical Features:

- Trails, boardwalks and overlooks
- Wildlife habitats and restoration areas
- Interpretive signage and educational features
- Lakes, wetlands, prairies and rain gardens

Grinnell Example:

- Arbor Lake (81.4 acres)

PARK SYSTEM

LEGEND

- 1

Arbor Lake
- 2

Bailey Park
- 3

Central Park
- 4

Davis Park
- 5

Grinnell Mutual Family Aquatic Center
- 6

Lion Park
- 7

Merrill Park
- 8

Miller Park
- 9

Summer Street
- 10

Thomazin Park
- 11

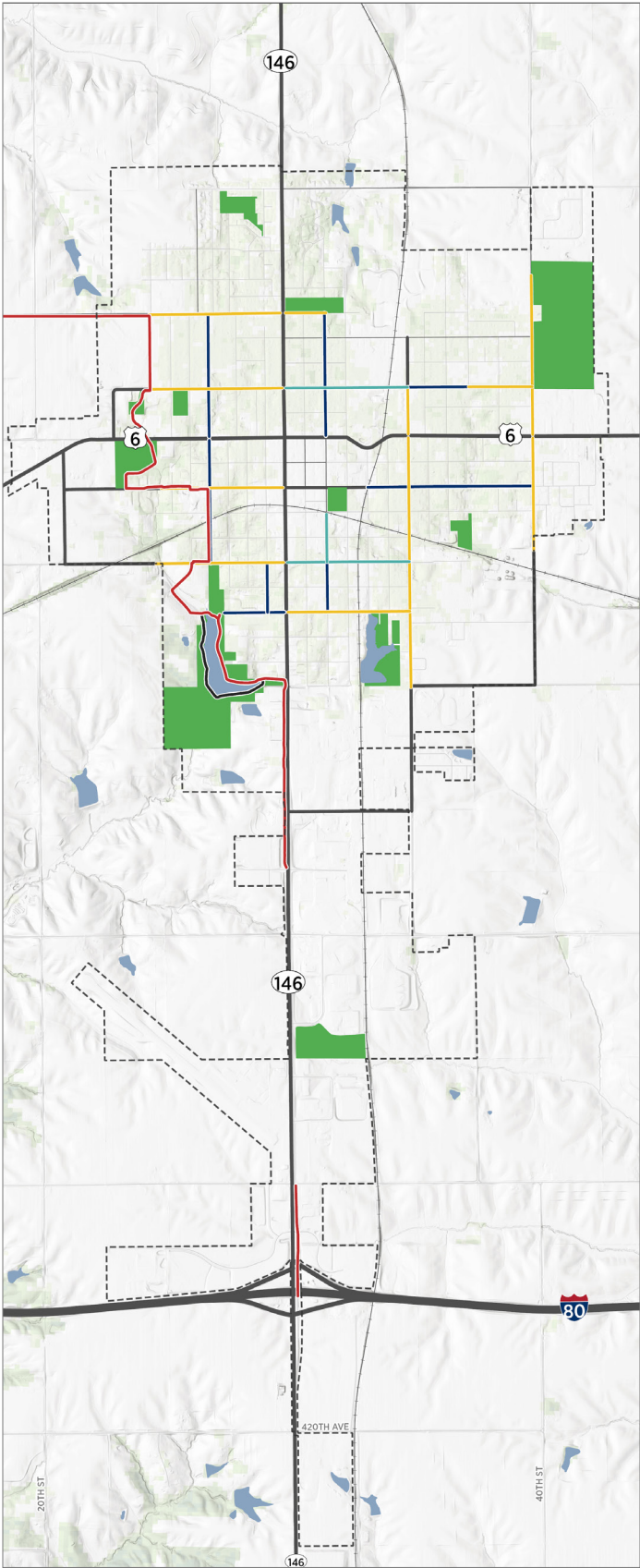
Van Horn Park
- Private Park

12

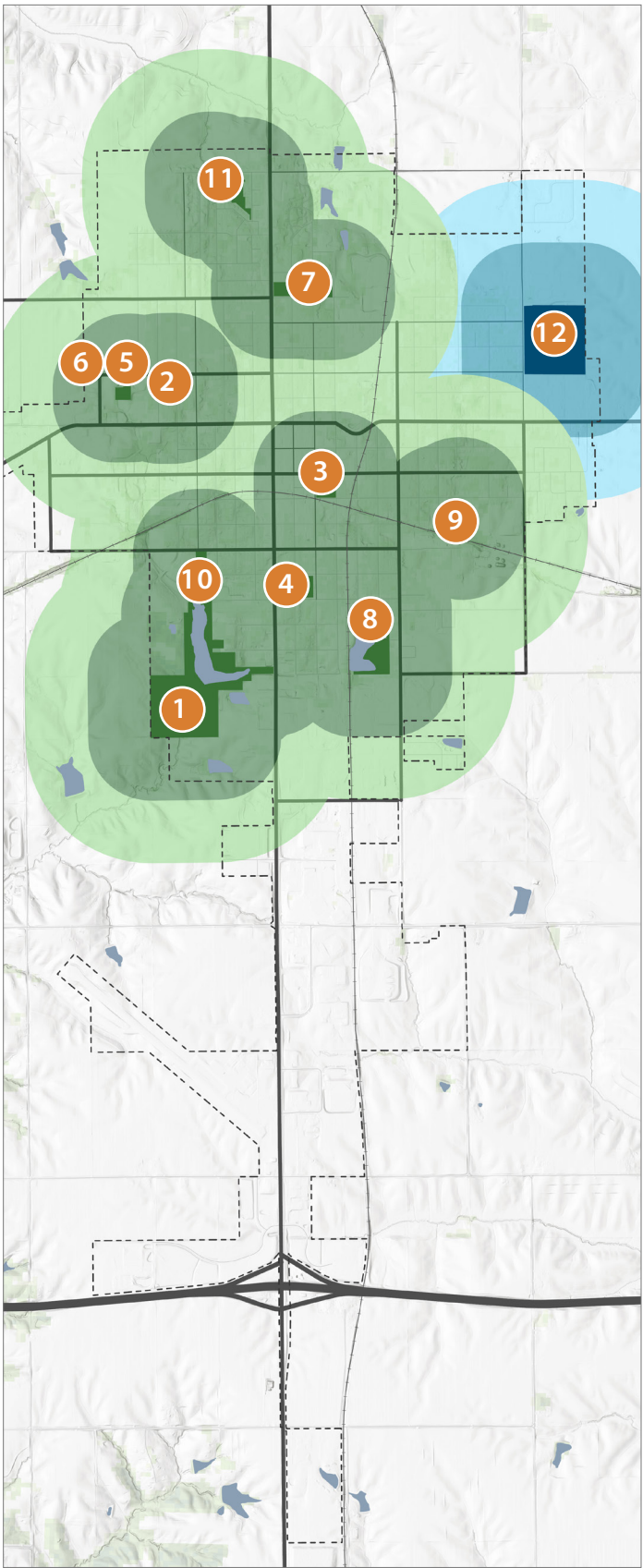
Ahrens Park

Trails

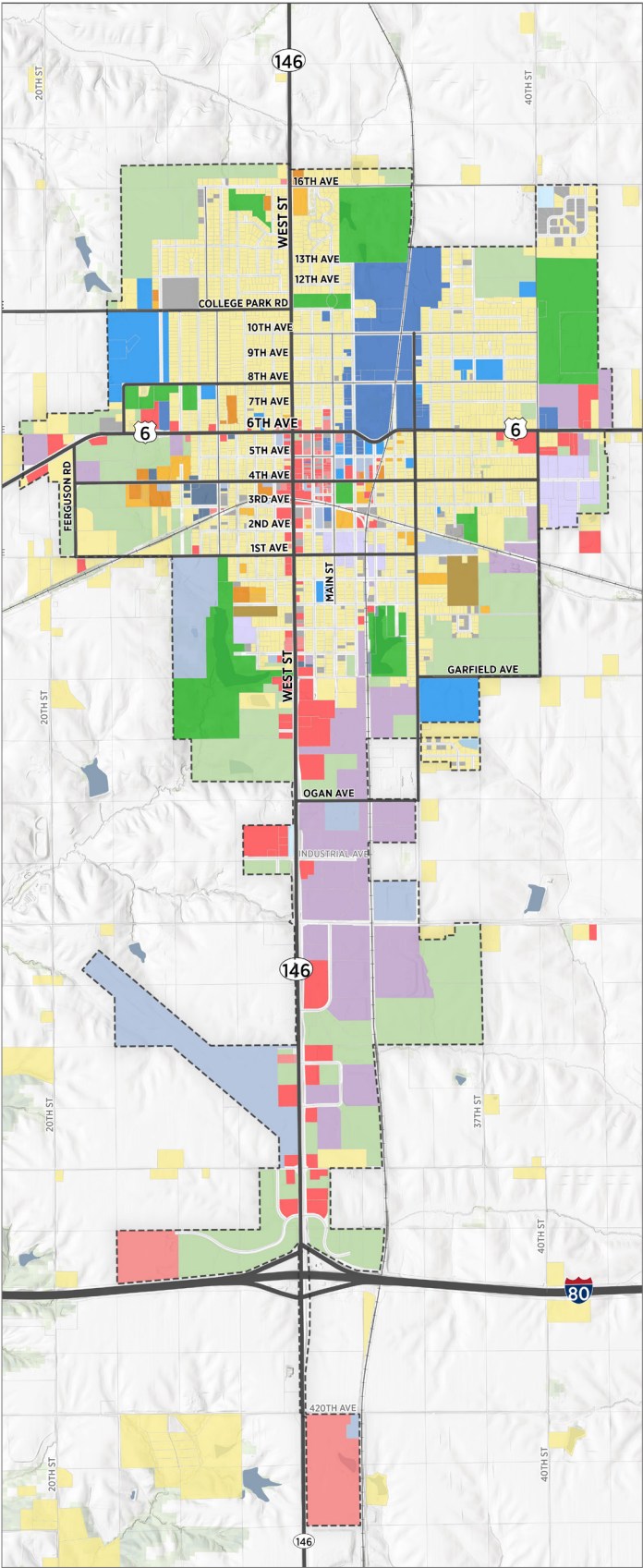
- Existing
- Gravel
- Alternate No Parking Bike Route
- No Parking Bike Lane
- No Parking Bike Route
- Parks



The trail system relies on streets and roads to bring connectivity.



The Grinnell Park System meets the standard 1/4 to 1/2 mile walking radius.



As the community of Grinnell grows, so too will the parks and recreation system.

ARBOR LAKE

PARK

123 Pearl Street
Natural Resource Area

Park Vision

Arbor Lake is reimagined as a nature-inspired recreational destination that unites ecological restoration with inclusive, community-focused amenities. This transformation will establish a welcoming environment for individuals of all ages and abilities, rooted in the site’s natural beauty.

Community Feedback Summary

Community engagement revealed clear priorities for enhancing Arbor Lake’s role within the regional park system:

- Restoration of natural ecosystems
- Expanded recreational opportunities for all age groups
- Modernized infrastructure and public amenities
- Enhanced environmental features and accessibility
- Improved connections to trails, neighborhoods and regional ecosystems

Recommended Facilities & Amenities

Lake Restoration

Modeled after the Houston Arbor Lake Restoration Plan, this initiative emphasizes:

- Enhanced water quality
- Shoreline stabilization
- Improved aquatic habitat
- Integrated green infrastructure

Key strategies include dredging to increase depth, establishing native plant buffers, constructing sediment forebays and incorporating floating wetlands — all aimed at restoring ecological balance and promoting recreational use.

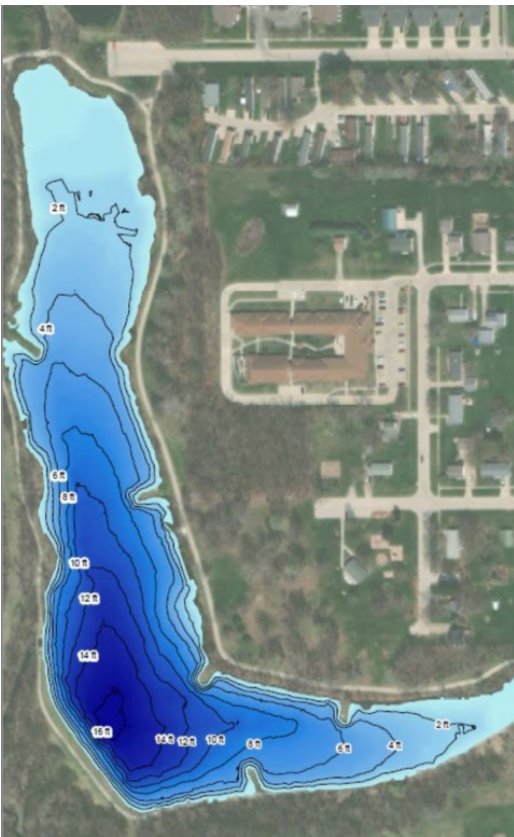


Photo by Houston Engineering



Photo by Houston Engineering



Photo by Houston Engineering

ARBOR LAKE PARK

123 Pearl Street
Natural Resource Area

Recommended Facilities & Amenities

The Lodge

A versatile indoor facility serving as the park’s core community hub. Program Elements:

- Environmental education classroom
- Community meeting and event space
- Restrooms and storage
- Covered patio overlooking the lake

Adventure Hub

A high-energy zone for active, nature-based recreation. Program Elements:

- Nature-themed playground
- Climbing and bouldering features
- Zip line or rope course (if feasible)
- Restrooms and drinking fountains
- Pump track and extended bike loop



Photo by IRIS22 Productions LLC



Photo by GrowCycling



Photo by Go Ape Treetop Adventure Course

Pavilions

Open-air structures for small group gatherings and picnics. Program Elements:

- Picnic tables and grills
- Electrical service for events
- Convenient proximity to trails and playgrounds

The Commons

The heart of outdoor social and recreational life at Arbor Lake. Program Elements:

- Flexible lawn for events and informal play
- Shelter and restrooms
- Nature-inspired play elements
- Event infrastructure (lighting, power)
- Terrace with lake access
- Expanded parking

The Landing

- Shaded seating area
- Adjacent terrace
- Fishing access
- Picnic amenities

The Portage

Vehicle access point for watercraft launch and recovery. Program Elements:

- Durable access path
- Lake ramp
- Wayfinding signage



Photo by RDG Planning & Design



Photo by Sunset Regional Park



Photo by L.L.Bean

ARBOR LAKE PARK

123 Pearl Street
Natural Resource Area

Recommended Facilities & Amenities

Scattering Gardens (Columbarium / Art Garden)

A peaceful, naturalized area for reflection, memorials and art. Program Elements:

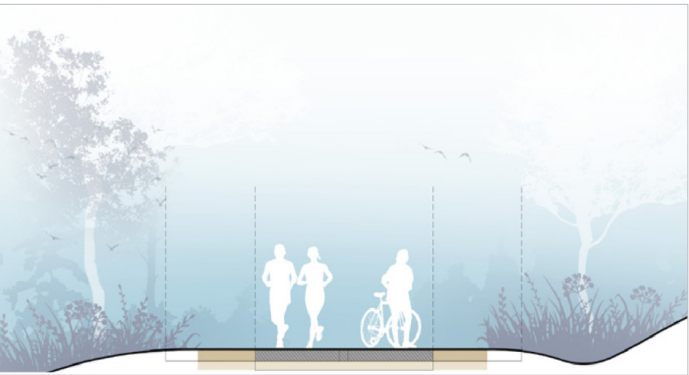
- Quiet seating nooks
- Memorial stones or sculpture
- Columbarium features
- Native landscaping with interpretive signage



Photo by Jamaica Area Mountain Bike Alliance

Pedestrian and Trail Enhancements

- Hard Surface Trails: ADA-compliant, multi-seasonal pathways
- Soft Surface Trails: Natural trails for walking, birdwatching and low-impact recreation



Park Signage

A comprehensive signage system will include:

- Wayfinding: Clear navigation for park users
- Interpretive: Educational insights into the site’s natural and cultural history
- Regulatory: Guidance for safe and respectful use

Landscape Improvements

- Prairie & Meadow Restoration: Pollinator support and aesthetic interest
- Woodland Restoration: Expanded canopy cover and wildlife corridors
- Shoreline Stabilization: Erosion control and habitat support
- Wetland Enhancement: Enhanced biodiversity and stormwater management



Benefits to the Park System

The revitalization of Arbor Lake will:

- Promote physical and mental health through outdoor recreation and nature immersion
- Foster ecological resilience and habitat diversity
- Improve accessibility and inclusion across user groups
- Support education and community stewardship
- Establish a regional model for sustainable, nature-based park design



Photo by Brent Kryda

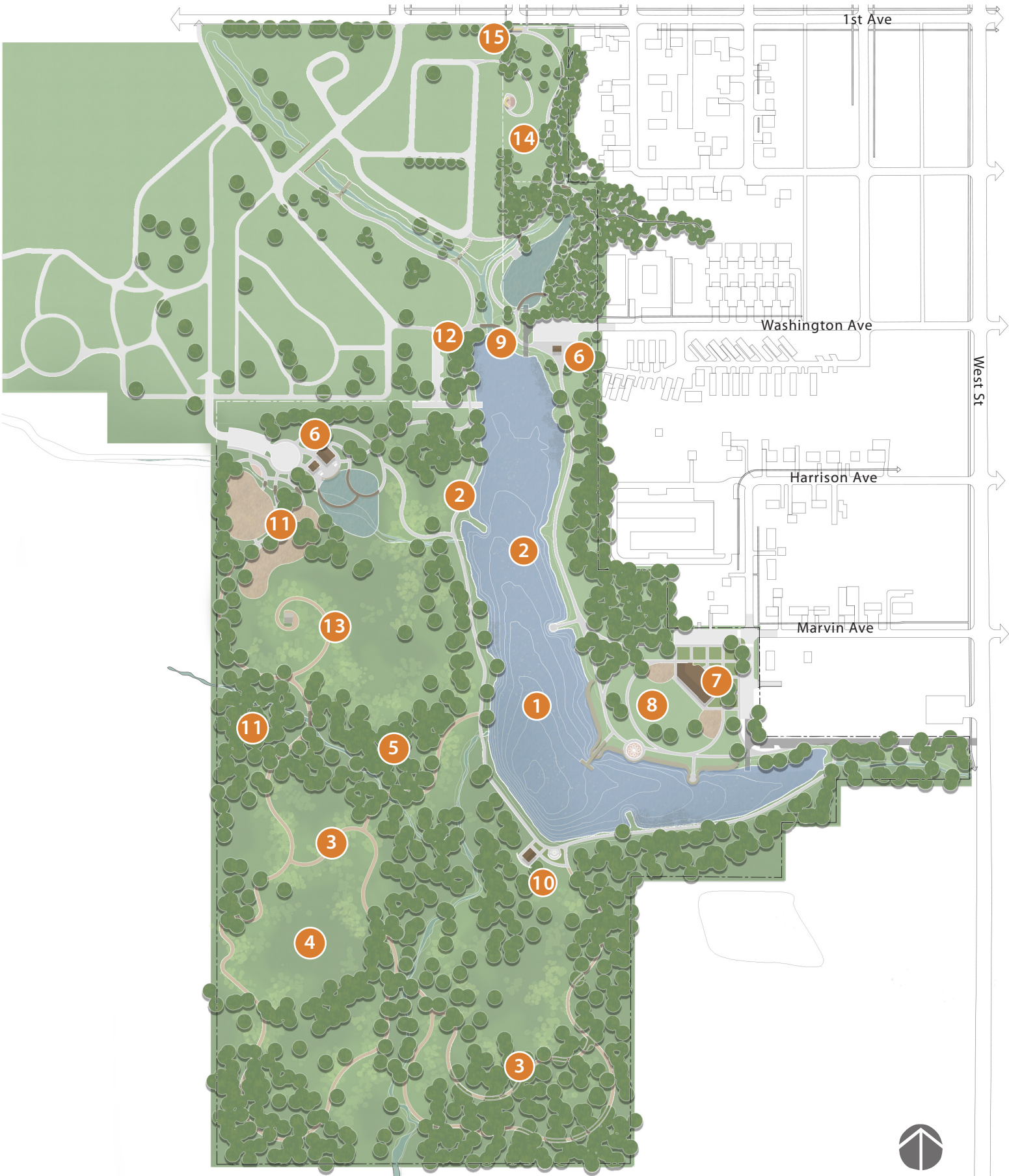
ARBOR LAKE PARK

123 Pearl Street
Natural Resource Area

LEGEND

- 1 LAKE RESTORATION
- 2 HARD SURFACE SHARED USE TRAIL
- 3 SOFT SURFACE TRAIL
- 4 PRAIRIE / MEADOW RESTORATION
- 5 WOODLAND RESTORATION
- 6 PAVILION AND RESTROOM
- 7 DAY LODGE
- 8 'THE COMMONS'
- 9 'THE LANDING'
- 10 WATERS EDGE PAVILION
- 11 ADVENTURE HUB
- 12 'THE PORTAGE'
- 13 'THE OVERLOOK'
- 14 SCATTERING GARDENS
- 15 COMMUNITY ART ELEMENT

See Program Definitions in Appendix.



BAILEY PARK

1220 Prairie Street
Neighborhood Park

Bailey Park, located at 1220 Prairie Street in Grinnell, Iowa, is a valued neighborhood park that serves as an important recreational and social resource for the community. Nestled between Bailey Park Elementary School to the east and the Grinnell Mutual Family Aquatic Center to the west, the park occupies a strategic location that offers diverse recreational opportunities to a broad range of users.

Recommended Features and Amenities

As part of a collaborative planning process that included public engagement sessions and input from the project steering committee, the following upgrades have been recommended to enhance the park’s facilities and user experience.



Playground Enhancements

Replace the existing playground with updated equipment designed to meet the needs of children ages 2–5 and 6–12, incorporating modern, inclusive and engaging play elements.

Expanded Skate Park

Increase the size of the existing skate park by extending the street course area to the east, providing more space and features for youth and teens.

New Shelter & Restroom Facility

Replace the current structure with a modern, accessible facility that meets contemporary standards for comfort and usability.

Multipurpose Court Development

Create a flexible court area to support a variety of recreational activities such as basketball, pickleball and other community sports.

Sidewalk Improvements & Connectivity

Upgrade and expand the park’s internal sidewalk system to improve access and circulation. Enhance pedestrian connectivity between the park, the aquatic center and the elementary school.

On-Street Parking Improvements

Resurface the existing on-street parking areas along both the east and west sides of the park to improve accessibility and appearance.

Enhanced Signage

Install improved destination signage and regulatory signs to better orient visitors and support safe and enjoyable park use.



Burgess Park Woodland Play Area



Photo by RDG Planning & Design

Benefits to the Park System

Upgrading Bailey Park provides numerous benefits not only to its immediate users but also to the broader Grinnell parks and recreation system:

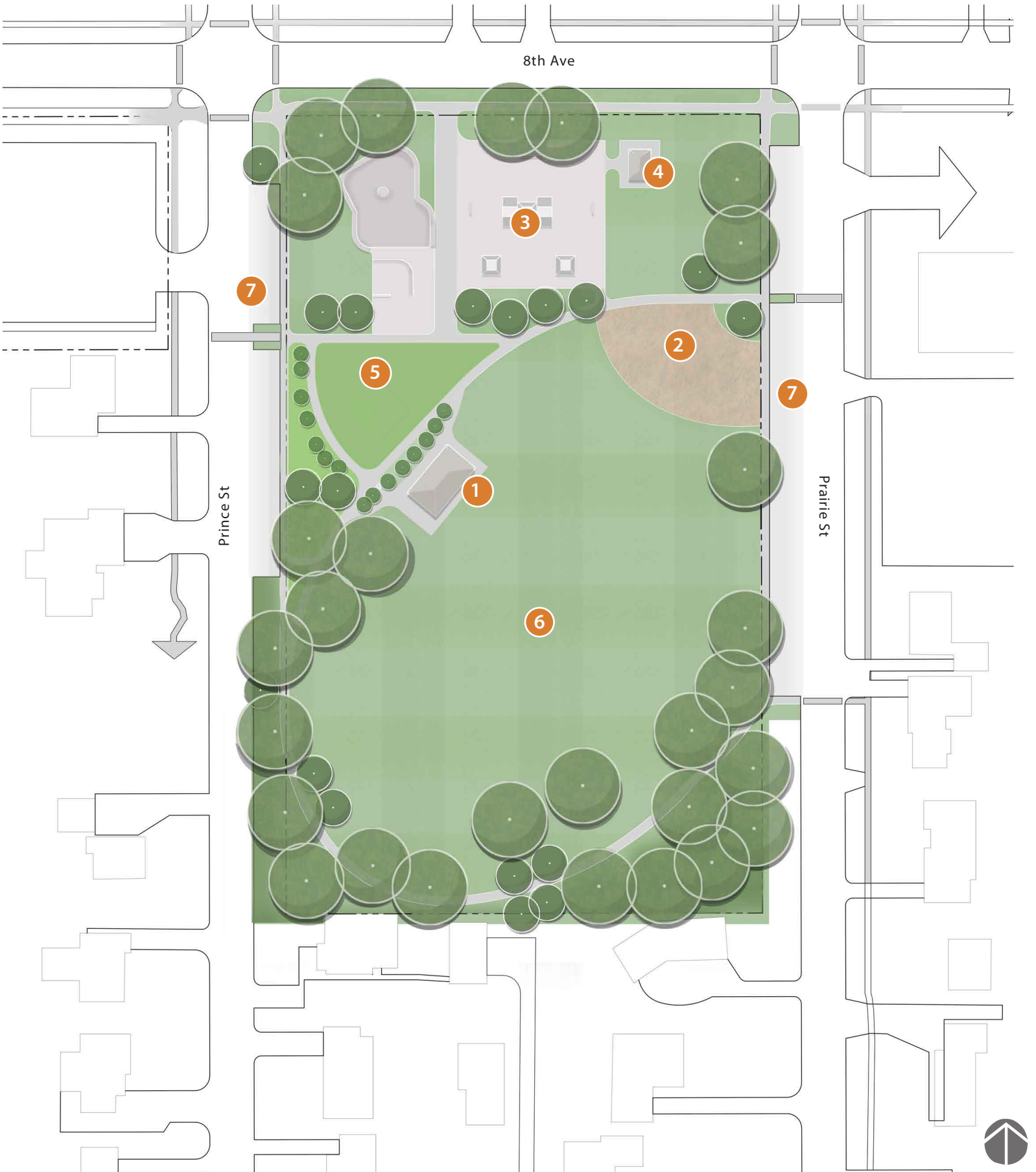
- **Enhanced User Experience:** Modern amenities improve safety, accessibility and enjoyment for visitors of all ages and abilities.
- **Support for Youth and Families:** Playgrounds, skate parks and courts provide active recreation opportunities that promote youth development and family activity.
- **Improved Accessibility and Connectivity:** Sidewalk upgrades and connectivity to nearby facilities support walkability and safer routes to school and recreation.

BAILEY PARK

1220 Prairie Street
Neighborhood Park

LEGEND

- 1 SHELTER WITH RESTROOM
- 2 NEW PLAYGROUND
- 3 EXPANDED SKATE PARK
- 4 SHADE STRUCTURE
- 5 MULTIPURPOSE SPORT COURT
- 6 OPEN LAWN
- 7 ON-STREET PARKING IMPROVEMENTS



CENTRAL PARK

925 3rd Ave.
Community Park

Central Park is a treasured green space located in the heart of downtown Grinnell, Iowa. Spanning about 3.8 acres, it plays a vital role as a gathering place for community events, recreation and quiet relaxation. In 2017, the park underwent a major revitalization, adding new features and amenities while honoring its historic charm and significance.

Recommended Features and Amenities

After the recent removal of the aging Veterans Memorial Building due to structural concerns, plans for a new memorial and plaza were proposed in March 2024. The project has since received funding and is set to be completed within the next year.

Veterans Memorial & Plaza

This new memorial will be a meaningful tribute to our local military veterans—designed to inspire reflection, connection and appreciation for their service. The following are key elements:

Sculptural Design

The centerpiece will be a striking curved metal sculpture, shaped like a flag in motion. It’s a powerful symbol of strength, perseverance and honor.

Illuminated at Night

Internal lighting will make the memorial glow after dark, creating a peaceful and respectful presence in the park throughout the evening hours.

Walkable Pathway

A circular walkway around the sculpture invites visitors to explore and reflect at their own pace, offering a space for personal and shared moments of remembrance.

Honoring Local Veterans

The memorial is expected to feature names, plaques, or other interpretive displays that recognize and celebrate veterans from all branches of the military who call Grinnell home.



Photo by Ritland+Kuiper and JTL studio

Benefits to the Park System

The new memorial and plaza will bring a wide range of benefits to Central Park and to the Grinnell community as a whole:

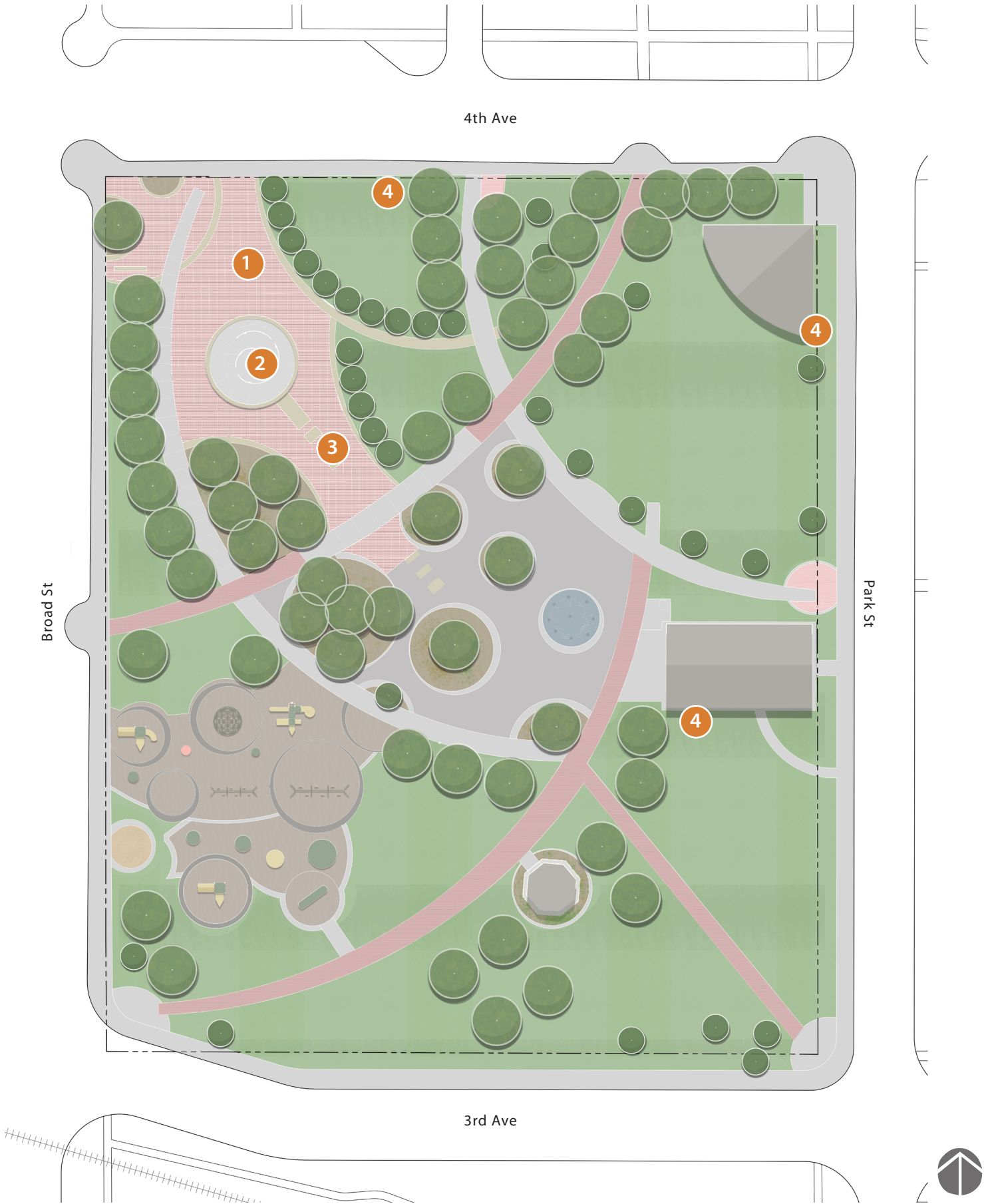
- A Place of Honor: It will offer a lasting and visible way to honor our veterans—a place for gratitude, remembrance and civic pride.
- A Year-Round Destination: With its lighting and thoughtful design, the memorial will be a place to visit and reflect throughout the year, both day and night.
- A Meaningful Addition: The memorial will complement the park’s existing features by adding a new space for quiet reflection, ceremonies and community connection.
- Drawing Visitors In: As a unique and inspiring landmark, the Veterans Memorial & Plaza is likely to attract visitors from across the region, helping showcase what makes downtown Grinnell special.

CENTRAL PARK

925 3rd Ave.
Community Park

LEGEND

- 1 VETERAN'S MEMORIAL PLAZA
- 2 SCULPTURE
- 3 SPECIAL PAVING
- 4 ADDITIONAL ELECTRICAL THROUGHOUT



DAVIS

PARK

818 Hamilton
Community Park

Davis Park, located at 1020 Broad Street in Grinnell, Iowa, is a centrally positioned neighborhood park that plays a vital role in the city’s recreational network. Bordered by residential neighborhoods and within walking distance of the Grinnell College campus, Davis Park offers both passive and active recreational opportunities. With its mature tree canopy, historical significance, and open green space, the park serves as a treasured community gathering place and a backdrop for seasonal events, informal play, and family outings.

Recommended Features and Amenities

As part of a coordinated planning and public engagement effort, which included input from neighborhood residents, community stakeholders, and the project steering committee, the following park enhancements have been proposed to revitalize Davis Park’s functionality and community appeal.

Playground Replacement

- Remove and replace the aging play equipment with a new, inclusive playground that accommodates children ages 2–5 and 6–12.

Picnic Shelter & Restroom Renovation

- Develop shelter and restroom facility to meet current ADA standards and community expectations for comfort, cleanliness, and durability. The new shelter will support family gatherings and small community events.

Flexible Open Space Improvements

- Enhance the park’s central lawn area with grading, turf restoration, and subtle grading.

Walking Loop and Sidewalk Enhancements

- Introduce a perimeter walking loop to encourage casual exercise, with benches, lighting, and native landscaping.

Historic Character & Interpretive Signage

- Celebrate the park’s legacy by installing interpretive signage that highlights its history, natural features, and connection to Grinnell’s cultural identity. Design elements should be complementary to the park’s traditional character.

Improved Park Entry & Signage

- Install a new park identity sign at the Broad Street entrance, along with directional and regulatory signage throughout the park to improve visibility, wayfinding, and user safety.



Benefits to the Park System

Revitalizing Davis Park supports broader goals of the Grinnell parks and recreation system by offering:

- **Enhanced Community Value:** Upgrades will elevate Davis Park’s role as a civic asset, providing flexible spaces for recreation, relaxation, and public events.
- **Support for Multigenerational Use:** New play and gathering areas are designed to appeal to children, teens, adults, and seniors, encouraging intergenerational activity.

- **Strengthened Connectivity:** Sidewalk improvements and wayfinding enhancements will create safer, more intuitive pedestrian routes to and through the park.

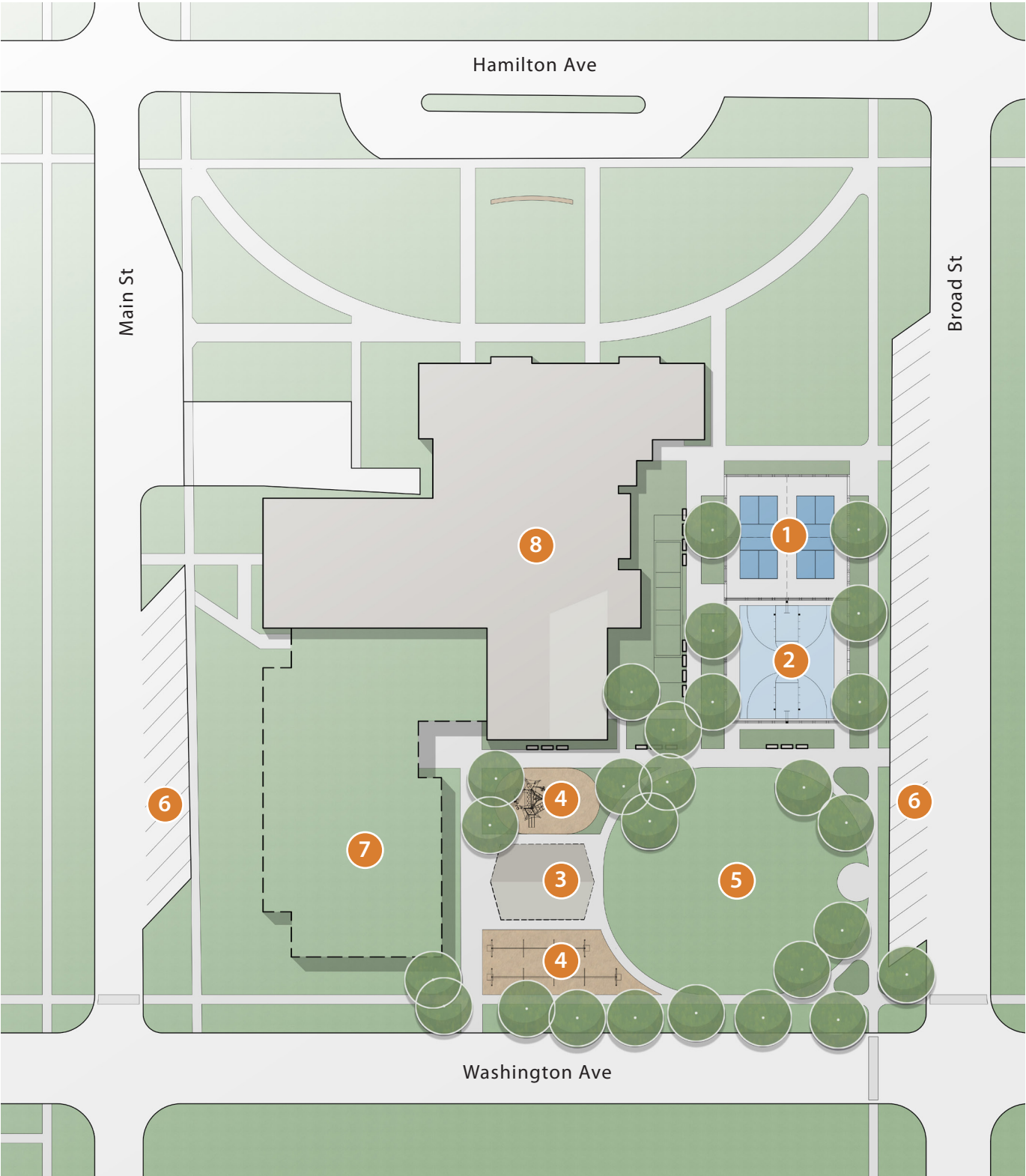
DAVIS

PARK

818 Hamilton
Community Park

LEGEND

- 1 Pickleball Courts
- 2 Multipurpose Courts
- 3 Shelter Restroom
- 4 Playground
- 5 Lawn
- 6 Angled Parking
- 7 Future Building Addition
- 8 Davis Building



GRINNELL MUTUAL FAMILY AQUATIC CENTER

120 8th Ave West
Community Park

The Grinnell Mutual Family Aquatic Center is a valued community asset, praised during public engagement for its family-friendly atmosphere and diverse aquatic offerings.

Community feedback highlighted three priority enhancements to improve the center’s functionality and bolster its role as a summer recreational destination:

- Expansion of water play amenities
- Modernization of support facilities
- Improvement of parking access

Recommended Amenities

Spray Ground / Splash Pad: A spray pad offers interactive, no-depth water play with ground-level and vertical features. Adding one inside the Aquatic Center would:

- Extend seasonal, inclusive programming for all ages
- Provide a low-overhead recreation option
- Attract users beyond traditional pool-goers
- Offer a safe, accessible way to cool off without swimming

Modernized Office, Restrooms & Concessions

Upgrading support facilities improves operations and guest experience:

- Enlarged office for better staff workflow, visitor service and medical response
- ADA-compliant restrooms to accommodate peak crowds
- Revamped concessions with expanded, healthier food options and more efficient service

Additional Parking

Previously planned but unfunded, expanded parking remains a priority:

- Eases congestion during peak use
- Reduces overflow in residential areas
- Improves safety and access for families and those with mobility needs

Benefit to the Park System

Enhancements to the Grinnell Mutual Family Aquatic Center are a strategic investment in community recreation. By expanding water play, upgrading amenities and adding parking, the improvements will:

- Boost capacity and functionality
- Attract a broader, more diverse audience
- Promote health, wellness and community connection
- Strengthen its role as a key summer destination in Grinnell’s park system



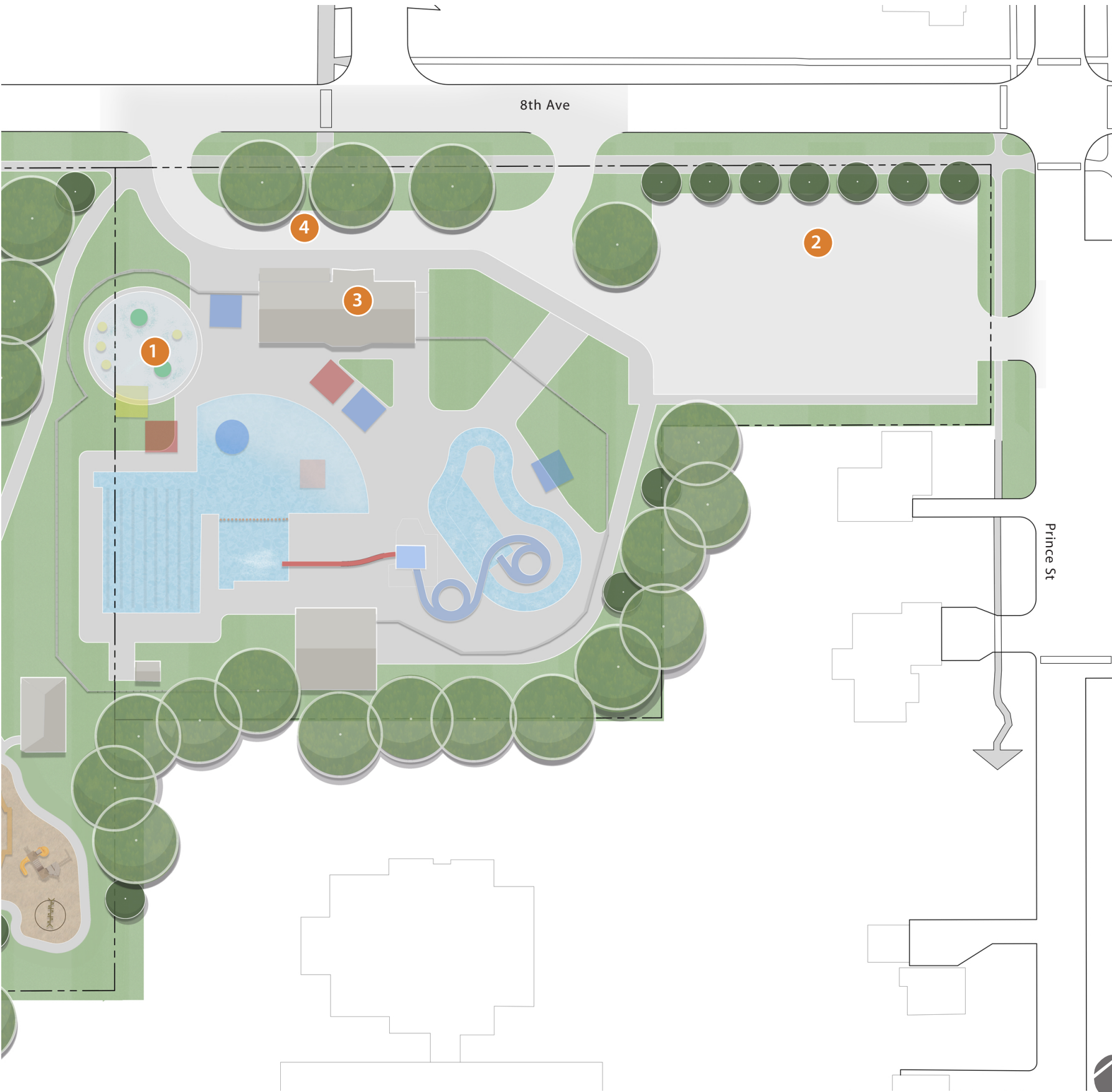
Photo by Outdoor Recreation Products

GRINNELL MUTUAL FAMILY AQUATIC CENTER

120 8th Ave West
Community Park

LEGEND

- 1 SPLASH PAD
- 2 EXPANDED PARKING
- 3 BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS
- 4 VEHICULAR DROP OFF



LIONS

PARK

220 8th Ave. W
Special Use Park

Lions Park in Grinnell is a 2.6-acre public space designated as a Special Use Area due to its proximity to the Grinnell Mutual Family Aquatic Center . Lions Park offers limited amenities. The park features a playground area surrounded by a walking path, with benches placed beneath the shade of mature trees, creating a comfortable and inviting environment for families. Along the west side of the park, visitors can access the Grinnell Area Recreational Trail, providing opportunities for walking, running and biking.

Recommendations for Facilities and Amenities

Sidewalk Improvements & Connectivity

Upgrade and expand the existing internal sidewalk network to improve circulation within the park. Strengthen pedestrian connectivity to the aquatic center.

Enhanced Signage

Install improved wayfinding and regulatory signage to help orient visitors, ensure safety and enhance the overall user experience.

- Landscape Enhancements
 - *Woodland Restoration:* Remove invasive species, introduce native understory vegetation and implement measures

to promote long-term health of the tree canopy.

- *Ground Plane Plantings:* Incorporate native grasses, ferns and wildflowers to add seasonal interest, support pollinator species and enrich the park’s ecological character.

Benefits to the Park System

The recommended enhancements offer a variety of benefits to both Lions Park and the broader Grinnell park system:

Improved Accessibility

Upgraded sidewalks and stronger pedestrian connections promote inclusivity and support walkability between key community assets, including the aquatic center.

Enhanced User Experience

Better signage and wayfinding reduce confusion and help orient visitors, contributing to a safer and more enjoyable park visit.

Environmental Stewardship

The focus on native landscaping and woodland restoration demonstrates a commitment to sustainable park management and biodiversity, aligning with broader conservation goals.



LIONS PARK

220 8th Ave. W
Special Use Park

LEGEND

- 1 TRAIL ADDITION
- 2 LANDSCAPE ENHANCEMENT



MERRILL PARK

801 11th Ave.
Neighborhood Park

Merrill Park is one of the most beloved and frequently visited parks in Grinnell, offering a balance of passive and active recreation opportunities for all ages. It serves as a key destination within the city’s park system, drawing residents and visitors alike for its natural beauty, central location and recreational amenities.

Recommended Features and Amenities

During public engagement sessions, a significant amount of input was provided regarding both the benefits and challenges of the park’s current layout—particularly the alignment of Broad Street, which bisects the park. This division creates difficult pedestrian crossings at the northern and southern ends and effectively separates the park into three disconnected zones: west Merrill Park, east Merrill Park and a central lawn that currently offers limited function and benefit.

The revised layout of Merrill Park addresses these challenges by unifying the park into a cohesive whole, introducing targeted recreation zones and significantly improving pedestrian safety and accessibility throughout. The new layout includes the following improvements and enhancements:

Broad Street Realignment with Circle Drive & Parking

A major feature of the new design is the realignment of Broad Street, shifting it from its current bisecting configuration to a circle drive layout. This transformation will eliminate the existing division of the park, creating a unified and continuous green space. The circle drive will enhance traffic calming, improve safety for pedestrians and allow for better visibility across the park.

Parking will be incorporated along the outer curb of the circle drive, providing convenient access to key amenities while preserving the central area for recreation and pedestrian use. This design not only supports accessibility and wayfinding but also helps establish a welcoming gateway to the park.

Multipurpose Lawn

The existing softball field will be transformed into a flexible multipurpose lawn with a relocated backstop, offering a versatile space for informal sports, community gatherings and seasonal events.

Playground Enhancements

The current eastern playground will be relocated west of the proposed Broad Street Circle, resulting in a more central and accessible location. This new area will accommodate multiple play zones tailored to children ages 2–5 and 6–12, featuring modern, inclusive and engaging equipment that supports both physical and social development.

Historic Shelter and Restroom

The existing shelter on the west side of the park, a key historic feature, will be carefully restored and updated to preserve its character while improving functionality. Enhancements may include upgraded restrooms, lighting and seating, making it a more inviting gathering space for park users.



MERRILL PARK

801 11th Ave.
Neighborhood Park

New Pavilion and Restroom Facility

A new pavilion will be constructed to provide a flexible, shaded structure for public use, such as picnics, community events, or programming. It will be supported by a new restroom facility to improve comfort and accessibility for park visitors, especially during larger events.

Existing Shelter and Restroom (East)

The existing shelter facility on the east side of the park will receive significant updates. These may include structural improvements, better accessibility features and added amenities like picnic tables, making it a more functional and attractive asset for the community.

Sidewalk Improvements & Connectivity

The park’s internal sidewalk system will be upgraded and expanded to create more intuitive, accessible and safe pedestrian routes. A key improvement will be enhancing east-west connectivity across Broad Street, unifying the park and ensuring safe circulation for all users.



On-Street Parking Improvements

The existing on-street parking areas along the south and east boundaries of the park will be resurfaced and potentially reconfigured to improve both access and visual appeal, while supporting increased park use.

Landscape

- The **west side** of the park will serve as an active recreation zone, with well-maintained lawns and strategically planted trees for shade and comfort.
- The **east side** of the park will be designed to reflect a more nature-inspired setting, featuring native groundcovers, woodland savanna plantings and informal trails.
- The **Broad Street Circle** will become a vibrant central hub, potentially incorporating ornamental gardens, public art installations and features like a fountain or maze to engage visitors of all ages.

Enhanced Signage

New and improved signage will be installed throughout the park, including wayfinding, destination and regulatory signs. These enhancements will help orient visitors, communicate park rules and support a safer and more enjoyable user experience.



Benefits to the Park System

The improvements to Merrill Park will yield broad and lasting benefits to the overall park system, including:

- **Enhanced Safety and Accessibility:** By addressing pedestrian barriers and improving connectivity, the park will be safer and more inclusive for all users.
- **Modernized Amenities:** Updated shelters, restrooms and playgrounds will better meet the needs of today’s parkgoers, supporting both recreation and community programming.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** The introduction of native landscapes and sustainable features promotes biodiversity and reduces long-term maintenance costs.
- **Optimized Land Use:** Consolidating and strategically locating amenities enhances the park’s usability and ensures that it remains a valuable community resource for generations to come.

MERRILL PARK

801 11th Ave.
Neighborhood Park

LEGEND

- 1 CIRCLE DRIVE WITH PARKING
- 2 MULTIPURPOSE LAWN
- 3 CONSOLIDATED PLAYGROUND
- 4 NATURALIZED LANDSCAPING
- 5 RESTORED WEST SHELTER
- 6 MODERNIZED EAST SHELTER
- 7 NEW PAVILIONS WITH RESTROOMS
- 8 WALKING PATH
- 9 CIRCLE GARDEN



This concept features a synthetic turf surface designed to accommodate two U6 soccer fields, one U8 soccer field and an overlaid striped baseball/softball field complete with a backstop.



This concept illustrates a natural turf field capable of supporting a wide variety of recreational uses.

MILLER PARK

1130 Nyanza Dr.
Community Park

Miller Park is a 22.3-acre community park anchored by the Lake Nyanza. It offers a diverse array of outdoor experiences. The primary recreational facility is a 18-hole, par-54 disc golf course that winds around the lake and throughout the park. The course features concrete tee pads and Mach V targets, creating a balance of open-field throws and technical water hazard shots.

Recommended Features and Amenities

The following recommendations are the result of a collaborative planning process that included community engagement, stakeholder input and alignment with the Houston Engineering Lake Restoration study.

Lake Nyanza Restoration and Enhancements

Recommendations based on the **Houston Engineering Lake Restoration Plan** include:

- Dredging and Sediment Removal: Improve water depth and quality, restore aquatic habitats and increase recreational usability by removing built-up sediment.
- Native Buffer Plantings: Establish native wetland and prairie buffer zones along the shoreline to reduce nutrient runoff, filter pollutants and discourage geese.

- Aeration System Installation: Incorporate subsurface aerators or floating fountains to increase dissolved oxygen levels, control algae blooms and improve overall water clarity.
- Stormwater Management Features: Integrate bioswales or rain gardens to manage runoff before it reaches the lake, supporting sustainable watershed practices.

Playground Enhancements

- Replace the aging playground equipment with inclusive, ADA-compliant play structures tailored to children ages 2–5 and 6–12.
- Include sensory play elements, shade structures and nature-based play features to enhance developmental play and social interaction.



Photo by Canningham Group Architecture, Inc.

- Incorporate rubberized safety surfacing and accessible routes to ensure usability by all children and caregivers.

18-Hole Disc Golf Course Enhancements

To elevate the disc golf experience:

- Improve Course Design Flow: Reevaluate hole sequencing for better player navigation and natural traffic flow, including clearer paths and signage.
- Install Tee Signage and Course Map: Add detailed tee signs with par, distance and



Photo by Built Work Photography



map layouts at each hole, along with a comprehensive course map at trailheads.

- Add Alternate Pin Placements: Create rotating basket positions to offer variety and preserve turf.
- Construct Seating and Bag Rests: Provide benches and bag hangers at tees for user comfort.
- Enhance Landscaping and Safety: Use landscaping to define fairways and buffer zones between holes and public paths, reducing the chance of interference or accidents.

New Shelter & Restroom Facility

- Construct a new, energy-efficient pavilion with covered seating, picnic tables and modern restrooms that meet ADA standards.
- Design the facility to accommodate group rentals, public gatherings and events with features like power access, water fountains and weather protection.



Big Creek Park Disc Golf Course

MILLER PARK

1130 Nyanza Dr.
Community Park

Sidewalk Improvements & Connectivity

- Expand and resurface internal sidewalk loops to create a safe, walkable network throughout the park.
- Ensure accessible connections between parking areas, playgrounds, shelters, the disc golf course and lakeside areas.
- Introduce pedestrian lighting, bike racks and rest nodes with benches to support multi-modal access and leisure use.

Enhanced Signage

- Install wayfinding signage with clear directions to amenities, trail loops and facilities.
- Add interpretive panels about local ecology, park history and conservation efforts.
- Use consistent, branded graphics for park identity and regulatory messaging to reinforce civic pride and safety.

Benefits to the Park System

Environmental Stewardship

- Lake restoration and native plantings enhance local biodiversity, improve flood management and water quality and support long-term sustainability of the natural environment.

Health and Wellness

- Upgraded playgrounds, disc golf and trail access promote physical activity and mental well-being across all ages and abilities.
- Encourages outdoor socialization and reduces screen time, supporting public health goals.
- Potential grant opportunities.



MILLER PARK

1130 Nyanza Dr.
Community Park

LEGEND

- 1 LAKE DREDGING & RESTORATION
- 2 WETLANDS
- 3 BOARDWALKS
- 4 HARD SURFACE TRAIL
- 5 NEW PLAYGROUND
- 6 DISC GOLF IMPROVEMENTS
- 7 NEW SHELTER WITH RESTROOMS
- 8 SHADE PAVILION



SUMMER STREET PARK

720 Summer St.
Neighborhood Park

Summer Street Park is an underutilized yet valuable neighborhood green space located on the southwest side of Grinnell. While modest in size, it plays a crucial role in providing access to outdoor recreation and nature for residents in the surrounding community.

What makes Summer Street Park is its intimate scale, natural character and strong potential to serve as a demonstration site for sustainable design and nature-based play. Its adjacency to a small creek enhances ecological richness and offers unique learning opportunities. Additionally, its location within a walkable residential area supports increased use, particularly through improved connectivity to the north.

Recommended Features and Amenities

As part of a collaborative planning process—including public engagement sessions and input from the project steering committee—the following improvements are recommended to enhance the park’s facilities and user experience:

Natural Playground Enhancements

Enhance the existing nature-inspired playscape to stimulate creativity and sensory play:

- Use natural materials such as logs, boulders, tree stumps and sand for climbing, balancing and imaginative construction.
- Introduce loose parts play zones where children can interact with natural elements like sticks, stones and leaves.
- Incorporate habitat features, including pollinator gardens, insect hotels and small water elements.
- Blend play features into the landscape using sculpted earth mounds and vegetated berms.
- Install interpretive signage to explain natural processes, habitats and ecological functions.
- Include traditional play structures with a nature-inspired theme—such as swings, slides, zip lines and climbing elements.

New Pavilion

Construct a multi-functional shelter designed for flexibility:



- Ensure ADA accessibility and convenient access to playground areas.
- Include utilities such as electrical outlets and lighting to support events and programming.
- Use durable, sustainable and vandal-resistant materials with a nature-inspired design.

Giving Garden

Enhance the inclusive community garden to promote health, learning and stewardship:

- Install accessible raised planting beds suitable for all ages and abilities.
- Implement a rainwater harvesting system for irrigation.
- Introduce composting stations for community use and sustainability education.
- Partner with local schools and organizations to host workshops and volunteer events.
- Provide educational signage with planting guides and harvesting tips.
- Add flowering native plant borders to support pollinators and visual appeal.
- Develop a dedicated storage facility for tools and supplies.

Creek Walk

Improve the natural corridor along the creek for recreation and exploration:

- Construct meandering trails with crushed stone or boardwalk surfaces,

accompanied by interpretive signage.

- Add overlooks or small platforms for birdwatching and nature viewing.
- Design creek access points with natural stone steps or low platforms.
- Incorporate environmental art installations made from reclaimed materials.
- Restore native riparian plantings to stabilize streambanks and enhance habitat.



SUMMER STREET PARK

720 Summer St.
Neighborhood Park

Sidewalk Improvements & Connectivity

Improve access and circulation within and beyond the park:

- Upgrade sidewalks to be wider, smoother and ADA-compliant.
- Add looped walking trails to encourage continuous movement and exercise.
- Integrate clear wayfinding signage for increased accessibility.
- Create trail connections to the north, accessing 3rd Avenue.

On-Street Parking Improvements

Enhance parking access and usability:

- Add a surfaced parking area on the west side of the park.
- Ensure compliance with ADA standards and clearly delineate accessible spaces.



Photo by RDG Planning & Design

Enhanced Signage

Improve visibility, orientation and education throughout the park:

- Install a welcoming entry sign featuring a park map and overview.
- Add directional signage guiding visitors to key amenities.
- Include interpretive panels covering local ecology, history and garden features.
- Provide regulatory signage with park hours, rules and safety information.

Landscape Enhancements

Restore and enrich the park’s natural systems:

- Woodland Restoration: Remove invasive species, plant understory vegetation and support long-term tree health.
- Ground Plane Plantings: Introduce native ferns, grasses and wildflowers for seasonal interest and pollinator support.
- Creek Riparian Zone: Stabilize streambanks with bioengineering techniques, improve water quality and enhance biodiversity through native buffer plantings.



Benefits to the Park System

The proposed enhancements to Summer Street Park offer wide-ranging benefits, both locally and across the park system:

- **Equity & Accessibility:** Improved pathways, inclusive play features and ADA-compliant amenities ensure all community members can access and enjoy the park.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** Restored natural areas and sustainable systems—like rainwater harvesting and composting—demonstrate green infrastructure and ecological responsibility.
- **Identity & Pride:** These enhancements elevate the park’s visibility and character, fostering a stronger sense of place and community ownership.

SUMMER STREET PARK

720 Summer St.
Neighborhood Park

LEGEND

- 1 PLAYGROUND IMPROVEMENTS
- 2 PAVILION
- 3 GIVING GARDEN IMPROVEMENTS
- 4 OPEN LAWN
- 5 CREEK WALK
- 6 HARD SURFACED TRAIL
- 7 SOFT SURFACED PATH
- 8 ENTRY SIGNAGE
- 9 PRAIRIE / NATIVE PLANTINGS
- 10 WOODLAND RESTORATION



THOMAZIN PARK

304 1st Ave
Neighborhood Park

Thomazin Park, located adjacent to Hazelwood Cemetery, currently serves as a peaceful neighborhood green space in Grinnell. Though modest in scale, it offers a tranquil setting for individuals and families—a place for leisure, quiet reflection and a meaningful connection to local history.

As part of a broader community planning initiative, it is recommended that Thomazin Park be merged with Arbor Lake Park and rebranded under a unified name: Arbor Lake. This proposed integration seeks to create a more expansive, cohesive public recreational area—one that elevates the visitor experience while honoring the park’s environmental, historical and cultural significance.

The reimagined Arbor Lake would seamlessly weave together Hazelwood Cemetery, Thomazin Park and the existing Arbor Lake Park into a continuous natural landscape. This unified environment would foster a deeper connection to nature, enhance opportunities for recreation and provide a dignified space for remembrance.

Park Context: A Legacy Honored

Thomazin Park stands as a tribute to the enduring contributions of the Thomazin

family to the Grinnell community. Although specific historical records about the park’s establishment are limited, its name commemorates Clara Isabelle Thomazin (1910–1991), a dedicated Grinnell resident whose legacy of service left an indelible mark.

Born in Rising City, Nebraska, Clara moved to Grinnell in 1940 with her husband, Robert H. Thomazin Sr. During her time in Grinnell, she served as a nurse’s aide at Community Hospital and as a cook in local establishments. Perhaps most notably, she directed “Uncle Sam’s Club” for over 25 years—a community hub that provided young people with a safe and engaging environment. Her life was one of service, compassion and steadfast commitment to community enrichment.

A Family’s Continued Influence

The Thomazin family’s legacy extends beyond Clara’s contributions. In 2018, following the passing of her son, Robert H. Thomazin Jr., memorial gifts were directed toward Thomazin Park. In recognition of this support and the family’s enduring impact, the Grinnell Parks and Recreation Board approved the installation of a memorial bench in his honor, further rooting the family’s presence in the community landscape.

Nestled next to Hazelwood Cemetery, Thomazin Park offers a quiet, reflective environment for families and individuals. While modest in size, it plays a meaningful role in honoring local history and providing a space for leisure and remembrance.

Proposed Art Element Honoring the Thomazin Family

To celebrate the Thomazin family’s enduring contributions, the plan proposes the installation



Photo by KMT Columbusia

of a public art piece within the newly unified Arbor Lake. Suggested dedication language:

“This public art installation honors the Thomazin family’s unwavering commitment to service, youth enrichment and community care. Clara Isabelle Thomazin, a pillar of Grinnell’s civic life, and her family are remembered here not only in name but in spirit—through a space designed to inspire reflection, creativity and togetherness. This piece stands as a lasting symbol of gratitude for a legacy that continues to shape our community.”

Benefits to the Park System

The recommendation to merge Thomazin Park and Arbor Lake Park into one unified entity under the Arbor Lake name is driven by several key benefits:

Improved Visibility & Recognition: Currently, many residents and visitors are unaware that Thomazin Park is a designated park. Unifying it under the well-known Arbor Lake name increases its visibility and ensures it is recognized as part of the broader park system.

Enhanced User Experience: A cohesive park identity encourages exploration, use and enjoyment of the entire area. The integration will promote better wayfinding, signage and connectivity between green spaces.

Preserved Legacy with Broader Impact: Rather than diminishing the Thomazin name, this approach embeds it into a larger and more visited public space—supported through interpretive elements and public art that elevate the family’s story.

Maintenance Efficiency and Stewardship: Managing the space as a single, contiguous park allows for more streamlined maintenance and operations, reducing redundancies and improving care.

THOMAZIN PARK

304 1st Ave
Neighborhood Park

LEGEND

- 1 COLUMBARIUM
- 2 SCATTERING GARDEN
- 3 HARD SURFACE TRAIL
- 4 COMMUNITY ART ELEMENT



VAN HORN PARK

340 16th Ave
Neighborhood Park

Van Horn Park is a valued mid-sized neighborhood park located on the northern edge of Grinnell. Blending structured recreational amenities with expansive open green space, the park serves as a vital community resource—supporting active lifestyles, fostering social connection and providing a peaceful setting for relaxation. Its tree-lined perimeter and well-kept landscape offer an inviting environment for a wide range of users, from children and families to seniors and casual visitors.

This planning effort aims to thoughtfully enhance the park’s amenities while preserving its natural character—building upon its existing strengths without overdeveloping the space. The focus is on maintaining a balanced, accessible and welcoming environment that continues to meet the evolving needs of the community.

Recommended Features and Amenities

As part of the input from public engagement sessions and the project steering committee, the following upgrades have been proposed to enhance the park’s amenities and improve the overall user experience without overdeveloping the park:



Playground Enhancements

Introduce a second playground designed specifically for children ages 6–12. The new play area will incorporate modern, inclusive and engaging equipment that promotes creativity, physical activity and social interaction among youth.

Basketball Court

Upgrade the existing basketball court to support recreational and competitive play. Improvements may include resurfacing the court, adding new hoops with breakaway rims and installing seating or shade structures nearby to support spectators and increase comfort for all users.

Bocce Ball Courts

Introduce dedicated bocce ball courts to provide a low-impact recreational opportunity for users of all ages. The courts will be designed with high-quality materials and adjacent seating, fostering both casual play and friendly community tournaments.

New Shelter & Restroom Facility

Construct a new, modern shelter and restroom facility that is fully accessible and designed for year-round usability. This upgrade will improve



visitor comfort, support community gatherings and enhance overall accessibility within the park.

Multipurpose Court Development

Develop a flexible-use court that can accommodate a variety of activities, including basketball, futsal, pickleball and other emerging sports. This multi-use space will increase recreational options for residents and allow for adaptable programming over time.

Sidewalk Improvements & Connectivity

Upgrade and expand the park’s internal sidewalk system to improve connectivity between park features. These enhancements will increase safety, promote accessibility for all users—including those with mobility devices—and encourage more pedestrian activity throughout the park.

Enhanced Signage

Install improved destination and regulatory signage to better orient visitors, share park rules and support safe and enjoyable use of park facilities. Wayfinding signs will also reinforce park identity and improve the overall visitor experience.



Benefits to the Park System

The proposed enhancements to Van Horn Park deliver meaningful benefits to both the park itself and the larger community:

- Expanded Recreational Opportunities: By diversifying recreational amenities, the park will better serve a broader range of ages, interests and physical abilities.
- Improved Accessibility & Inclusivity: Upgrades such as the accessible restroom, modern playground design and sidewalk network will ensure the park is usable by all members of the community.
- Increased Park Use & Longevity: Modernized facilities and added amenities will attract more visitors, extend length of visits and ensure the park remains relevant and well-used for years to come.
- Support for Events & Programming: The addition of multi-use spaces and shelters enables greater flexibility for hosting events, recreational leagues and community programming.
- Aesthetic & Functional Upgrades: Enhancing signage, circulation and visual appeal will elevate the overall user experience, reinforcing the park as a valued community asset.

VAN HORN PARK

340 16th Ave
Neighborhood Park

LEGEND

- 1 EXISTING PLAYGROUND
- 2 ADDITIONAL PLAYGROUND
- 3 BASKETBALL COURT IMPROVEMENTS
- 4 BOCCE BALL COURTS
- 5 SHELTER WITH RESTROOM
- 6 SIDEWALK IMPROVEMENTS



OPEN SPACE

PARK

400 6th Ave W
Special Use Park

Recommendations

A stormwater detention pond is proposed for construction south of 6th Avenue West near the Grinnell Trail, designed to manage runoff flowing into the new stream restoration area. This pond will help control flooding during moderate to large storm events by slowing stormwater rates and reducing runoff volumes through absorption, evapotranspiration and controlled outflows. It will also improve water quality by capturing sediment and removing phosphorus.



Photo by Cao Yang

OPEN SPACE

PARK

400 6th Ave W
Special Use Park

LEGEND

- 1 EXISTING TRAIL
- 2 NEW HARD SURFACE TRAIL
- 3 SHADE STRUCTURE
- 4 PRAIRIE
- 5 STORMWATER DETENTION



OPEN SPACE

PARK

1450 West St S
Special Use Park

Recommendations

The purpose of the stormwater wetland basin constructed east of W Street S and directly north and east of the Comfort Inn and Suites on the south side of Grinnell is primarily related to stormwater management and water quality improvement.



Photo by London Wetland Centre, Ron Gilbey

OPEN SPACE

PARK

1450 West St S
Special Use Park

LEGEND

- 1 PARKING AREA
- 2 SHADE PAVILION
- 3 SOFT SURFACE OR MOWED TRAIL
- 4 PRAIRIE
- 5 BOARDWALK
- 6 STORMWATER DETENTION



System Strengths, Challenges & Strategic Responses

Grinnell’s park system is anchored by a well-distributed network of neighborhood parks: the centrally located Central Park , Grinnell Mutual Family Aquatic Center and the city’s premier natural open space at Arbor Lake. Together, these assets support a wide range of opportunities for recreation and community wellness.

However, the system also reveals key gaps and future opportunities. Notably, Grinnell currently lacks any Mini Parks (Pocket Parks) and has only one fully city-owned Community Park—Miller Park—limiting space for large-scale recreation and community events. In response, the following opportunities should guide future investment:

- Partner with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to advance lake restoration and habitat enhancement at Arbor Lake and Lake Nyanza, improving water quality, biodiversity and recreational experiences for paddling, walking, fishing and nature education.

- Explore the addition of Mini Parks in under-served neighborhoods or high-density areas, increasing access to green space and casual recreation close to home.
- Reimagine Miller Park as a true multi-functional Community Park, with the capacity to host events, sports and flexible use spaces that serve the entire city.
- Enhance accessibility and trail connectivity, linking parks to neighborhoods, schools and downtown through a cohesive walking and biking network.
- Diversify park amenities year-round to meet the needs of all age groups and abilities—supporting active lifestyles, social connection and inclusive play.
- Upgrade park infrastructure including restrooms, shelters and playgrounds.

Future Challenge: Loss of Access to Ahrens Park

For decades, Ahrens Park has functioned as a cornerstone of Grinnell’s recreation network, despite its private ownership. The site includes youth soccer fields, indoor recreation facilities (GARC), fields, courts, playgrounds, trails and essential parking infrastructure. While not officially part of the City’s inventory, it has fulfilled the role of both a Community Park and Special Use Facility.

The potential loss of public access to Ahrens Park would have a significant and system-wide impact, including:

1. Loss of Community-Scale Recreation Space
Ahrens Park currently fills a critical gap in large-scale recreational infrastructure. With only one underutilized City-owned Community Park (Miller Park), Grinnell lacks the capacity to absorb displaced events or sports programming.

2. Youth Sports Displacement
The park’s soccer fields support a wide array of youth and adult leagues. Without comparable City-owned fields, participation in organized sports will be significantly reduced.
3. Indoor Wellness & Recreation Gaps
Closure or restricted access to GARC eliminates the City’s only indoor fitness and recreation space—limiting access to exercise and wellness during winter months and inclement weather.
4. Parking & Event Capacity Limitations
Loss of large parking areas will reduce the City’s ability to host community events, tournaments or regional gatherings, even in existing park spaces.
5. Strain on Neighborhood Parks
Smaller parks are not designed or equipped to meet the demands of large-scale programs. Increased pressure on these spaces could lead to overuse, user conflict and deteriorating park experiences.

Why This Matters for Grinnell’s Future

The City of Grinnell’s Parks and Recreation Master Plan and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) are grounded in principles of equitable access, year-round recreation and responsible growth. The potential loss of Ahrens Park access threatens to undermine these values by:

- Reducing access to affordable and inclusive recreation opportunities
- Limiting spaces for families to gather, play and engage in wellness activities
- Creating disparities in recreation access—particularly for youth, seniors and lower-income households
- Increasing barriers to active, healthy lifestyles
- Forcing costly decisions related to land acquisition, facility development and programming

Strategic Response & Path Forward

To address this system-wide challenge and ensure alignment with the community’s vision, the City of Grinnell must implement a proactive, collaborative and strategic response. Key actions include:

- Engage the Grinnell-Newburg School District to better understand future plans for Ahrens Park and explore shared-use opportunities or long-term access agreements.
- Reimagine and invest in Miller Park as a flexible, fully equipped Community Park capable of supporting citywide events, field sports and expanded programming.
- Pursue acquisition or development of an indoor recreation facility, led by the City and supported by public-private partnerships to share capital and operational costs.
- Collaborate with the Iowa DNR to implement a phased restoration and improvement plan for Arbor Lake and Lake Nyanza, enhancing both ecological health and public recreation.
- Form partnerships with regional institutions and organizations to secure access to facilities that meet evolving community needs.
- Continue robust community engagement, ensuring all investments reflect resident priorities, especially from historically underrepresented and underserved groups.
- Strengthen the City’s control and stewardship of its park system, reducing reliance on third-party facilities and ensuring long-term equity, reliability and resilience.







SECTION 07

Trails, Open Space and Signage

Introduction

Trail Type Definitions

Trail Signage

Greenways and Open Space

Trails, Greenways and Connectivity

Introduction

An integrated trail and greenway system is essential to building a healthy, connected and vibrant community. In Grinnell, trails serve not only as recreation amenities but as important transportation corridors—linking residents to parks, neighborhoods, schools, commercial centers and regional attractions like Rock Creek State Park. As the community grows and interest in active lifestyles increases, enhancing Grinnell’s trail network is key to advancing equity, sustainability and quality of life.

This section provides a detailed analysis of Grinnell’s existing and proposed trail infrastructure. It identifies current gaps in connectivity, recommends enhancements to safety and access and offers design guidance for trail types, wayfinding and user experience. The goal is to create a network that supports walking, biking and rolling for people of all ages and abilities—connecting destinations while enhancing the character of the community.

Trail Type Definitions

Shared-Use Paths (Within Parks)

Shared-use paths are wide, paved or crushed stone trails located within parks or green spaces. These paths are designed for use by pedestrians, cyclists, strollers and other non-motorized users. They typically follow scenic routes, loop around play areas or athletic fields and provide safe, accessible circulation within park boundaries.

Key Features:

- Located inside parks
- Accommodate multiple user types (walkers, runners, cyclists)
- Often looped or meandering
- Vary in surface type (asphalt, concrete, crushed stone)

Sidepaths / Sidewalks

Sidepaths are paved, off-street trails that run parallel to roadways, typically within the public right-of-way. Unlike sidewalks, sidepaths are wider (typically 8–10 feet or more) and designed to support two-way travel by both pedestrians and bicyclists. They provide safe alternatives to on-street travel, especially along higher-traffic corridors.

Key Features:

- Adjacent to roads but physically separated
- Serve as extensions of the trail network
- Suitable for pedestrians, cyclists and mobility devices
- Often used to connect neighborhoods to key destinations

Multi-Use Trails

Multi-use trails are fully separated from roads and motor vehicle traffic, often located in greenways, utility corridors, or natural areas. These trails support safe, uninterrupted travel for a range of non-motorized users and often connect major destinations across the community or region.

Key Features:

- Physically separated from roads
- Located in natural corridors, parks, or utility easements
- Designed for walking, biking and other forms of active transportation
- Often used for long-distance or regional connections

On-Street Bicycle Routes

On-street bicycle routes are designated roadways that accommodate bicycles within the public street network. These may include dedicated bike lanes, marked shared lanes, or signed routes. They offer flexibility and fill trail network gaps where off-street facilities are not feasible.

No-Parking Bike Lane

A no-parking bike lane is a striped lane on the roadway exclusively designated for bicycles, located between the travel lane and curb. Parking is prohibited to ensure the lane remains unobstructed.

Key Features:

- Marked lane with bicycle symbols
- Physically part of the roadway
- No on-street parking allowed
- Clear right-of-way for cyclists

No-Parking Bike Route

A no-parking bike route is a signed roadway that encourages bicycle travel but may not include a dedicated bike lane. Parking is prohibited to give cyclists more room within the travel lane. Often used where road width limits formal bike lanes.

Key Features:

- Marked with “Bike Route” signage
- Shared roadway with vehicular traffic
- No on-street parking permitted
- Provides continuity in the bicycle network

Opportunities for Enhancement

Strategic enhancements to Grinnell’s trail network can significantly improve safety, accessibility and user experience—often at modest cost. Recommendations include:

- Filling key network gaps to complete a citywide loop
- Improving crossings at major intersections
- Extending trails into under-served neighborhoods and new developments
- Adding lighting, benches and bike racks at trailheads
- Enhancing trail visibility and continuity through surface markings and signage

Future Trail Network Vision

The proposed trail expansion in Grinnell follows six core principles:

- Fill Gaps – Address breaks in the existing system to create seamless routes.
- Overcome Barriers – Improve crossings at highways, railroads and major streets.
- Connect Destinations – Prioritize links between parks, schools, downtown and civic facilities.
- Leverage Existing Infrastructure – Utilize public rights-of-way, easements and greenways.
- Design for Everyone – Ensure accessibility for all ages and abilities
- Strengthen Regional Links – Enhance connections to Rock Creek State Park, the Iowa Valley Scenic Byway and surrounding trail systems.

Key Enhancements to Consider

- Enhancing Park Pathways and Trail Connectivity
- Sidewalk Implementation at Park Access Points
- Improve Signage for Trails and Bike Routes
- Strengthen Regional and Community Trail Linkages and expand trail connections between major destinations such as:
 - All City Parks: Ensure every park is accessible via off-street or safe on-street pathways.
 - Downtown Grinnell: Support economic vitality and multimodal access to

- downtown business and events.
- Grinnell College and GRMC: Prioritize these institutional anchors for health, academic and mobility synergies.
- Schools and Neighborhoods: Improve safe routes to schools and ensure equitable access accross the community.

Summary: Building a Connected Grinnell

Grinnell’s trail and greenway network is a vital asset—enhancing recreation, supporting mobility and contributing to health and sustainability goals. With strategic investment, stronger connectivity and enhanced wayfinding, the city can realize a system that is not only functional, but also memorable and inclusive.

The vision is clear: a city where every resident can safely walk, bike and roll to parks, schools, downtown and beyond—supported by trails that reflect the identity, values and aspirations of the Grinnell community. - Plan Grinnell

Grinnell Parks & Trails Signage Master Plan

The Grinnell Parks, Recreation and Trails Signage Package establishes a comprehensive, cohesive approach to how the City communicates with park and trail users across its outdoor system. As Grinnell continues to invest in parks, greenways and active transportation infrastructure, a clear and consistent signage program is essential for enhancing accessibility, supporting safety, strengthening wayfinding and reinforcing the city’s visual identity. This signage package provides design standards, placement

strategies and messaging guidelines that ensure every sign—from entry monuments to trail markers—reflects Grinnell’s character, values and commitment to creating welcoming, connected spaces for all residents and visitors.

Objectives

Create a consistent visual identity for all parks and trail signage

- Improve wayfinding and navigation for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers
- Support safety, accessibility and educational engagement
- Reinforce Grinnell’s branding and sense of place
- Reduce visual clutter with a simple, scalable signage system

Signage Types & Functions

Type	Purpose	Key Features
Gateway/Monument Signs	Identify major parks and trailheads	Stone, wood, or metal materials; large scale; Grinnell logo; consistent typography
Wayfinding Signs	Direct users to destinations within parks or along trails	Pedestrian or bike scale; arrows and distances; icons for amenities (e.g., restrooms, playgrounds)
Trail Directional Signs	Show route options, loops, or connections	Simple arrows; trail names; estimated time or distance
Interpretive/Educational Signs	Highlight history, ecology, or public art	Full-color panels; ADA-compliant fonts; images and diagrams
Regulatory Signs	Inform users of rules, hours, permitted uses	Park rules, leash laws, trail etiquette; uniform layout
Kiosks/Information Hubs	Serve as trailhead orientation or park overview	Maps, brochures, events, notices; weather-resistant materials
Pavement Markings	Reinforce trail direction and safety on shared routes	Symbols (bikes, walkers), lane lines, yield indicators

Visual Identity & Branding Guidelines

- Color Palette: Use earth tones with accent colors that reflect Grinnell’s natural and cultural heritage.
- Typography: Consistent, legible fonts (e.g., sans-serif for wayfinding, serif for interpretive signs).
- Logo Placement: Incorporate the Grinnell logo or “Grow Grinnell” identity on all primary signs.
- Materials: Durable, weather-resistant and low-maintenance (e.g., powder-coated steel, high-pressure laminate, sustainably sourced wood).
- Modular Design: Ensure signs can be updated or expanded as parks and trails grow.

Hierarchy & Placement Strategy

In Parks:

- Gateway sign at main entrance
- Kiosk with map near parking or central node
- Directional signs at path intersections
- Interpretive signage in natural or historical areas
- Regulatory signage near play areas, restrooms and shelters

On Trails:

- Trailhead kiosks with maps and rules
- Directional signs every 0.25–0.5 miles

- Reassurance signs along long stretches
- Redirection signs at all forks or crossings
- Pavement markings at key conflict zones (e.g., intersections)

ADA & Equity Considerations

- Mount signs at accessible heights (generally 48–60 inches to centerline)
- Use high-contrast colors and tactile elements where appropriate
- Include QR codes or web links for mobile access to trail maps and audio-guided content
- Ensure signs serve multilingual or visual literacy needs where appropriate

Implementation Priorities

Start with high-visibility locations and key corridors. Suggested Phase 1 rollout:

- Arbor Lake and Lake Nyanza (interpretive & natural signage)
- Miller Park and Central Park (gateway and

wayfinding)

- Trail segments near schools and Grinnell College (directional & safety)
- Major trailheads (kiosks and branding signage)

Maintenance & Management

- Establish a signage inventory and maintenance schedule
- Replace damaged signs with matching materials and layout
- Periodically review for relevance, wear and branding consistency
- Engage volunteers or “Adopt-a-Sign” programs for upkeep

Greenways & Open Space

Introduction

Greenways and open spaces are essential components of a vibrant, sustainable and connected parks and recreation system. In Grinnell, these natural corridors and landscapes not only offer opportunities for recreation and wellness, but also serve as critical environmental infrastructure—protecting natural systems, improving stormwater performance and increasing community resilience. As the city grows and development pressures rise, investing in greenways and open space becomes a proactive strategy to support environmental health, mobility, recreation equity and quality of life.

A well-planned greenway network can follow natural features such as streams, floodplains

and wetlands, while providing linear access to parks, schools and neighborhoods. Open space areas—both passive and active—create essential breathing room in the urban fabric, support native habitat and manage the impacts of stormwater runoff through nature-based solutions.

Purpose & Value of Greenways and Open Space

Grinnell’s greenway and open space strategy is driven by a multi-benefit approach that aligns with community values and infrastructure needs. These areas are not just scenic buffers or recreational corridors—they are high-performing systems that deliver lasting value across multiple dimensions:

- Stormwater Management: Greenways and open spaces reduce flooding, filter pollutants and slow runoff by incorporating bioswales, wetlands, prairie buffers and permeable surfaces.
- Environmental Protection: Preserve and restore native habitats, streambanks, floodplains and biodiversity corridors.
- Recreation & Connectivity: Provide scenic trails, nature-based amenities and safe pedestrian/bicycle routes between destinations.
- Health & Wellness: Create calming, restorative environments that promote mental and physical well-being.
- Equity & Access: Improve proximity to parks and nature, especially in underserved areas.
- Economic & Resilience Benefits: Enhance property values, reduce infrastructure costs and contribute to long-term climate and ecological resilience.

Recommended Greenway Locations & Priorities

Several natural and utility corridors in Grinnell offer ideal conditions for expanded greenways and restored open spaces. These locations can improve trail connectivity, enhance ecological function and provide innovative solutions to stormwater challenges.

1. Arbor Lake / Lake Nyanza Greenway Corridor

- Role: Grinnell’s anchor natural destination, with potential for greater ecological restoration, recreation and education.
 - Opportunities:
 - » Partner with the Iowa DNR to implement shoreline stabilization, lake restoration and aquatic habitat improvements.
 - » Introduce stormwater features like native vegetated swales, rain gardens and wetland buffers.
 - » Add boardwalks, soft-surface trails and interpretive signage.
- Connectivity: Link to neighborhoods, Lake Nyanza and the Highway 146 trail extension.

2. Stormwater Corridors and Drainageways

- Role: Dual-purpose greenways that manage runoff and expand trail routes.
- Opportunities:
 - Use natural lowlands and streams as linear greenways.
 - Integrate stormwater detention, riparian plantings and accessible trail loops.

- Connectivity: Improve east-west access between Van Horn Park, Summer Street Park and future growth areas.

3. Utility Easement Greenways (East and South Grinnell)

- Role: Underused corridors with potential for shared recreation and stormwater improvements.
- Opportunities:
 - Install trails with bioswale edges and native grass buffers.
 - Include stormwater-friendly landscaping, pollinator habitat and safe crossings.
- Connectivity: Create north-south links to Grinnell College, the trail loop and industrial parks.

4. Prairie & Zimmerman Park Extensions

- Role: Demonstration sites for integrated green infrastructure, nature-based recreation and ecological education.
- Opportunities:
 - Expand native prairie restoration with interpretive signage.
 - Design trails to accommodate seasonal flooding and runoff absorption.
 - Host community programs focused on native planting and watershed awareness.

Design Considerations for Stormwater Integration to Parks

- Green Infrastructure Elements:
 - Rain gardens, bioswales and constructed wetlands

- Permeable trail surfaces
- Grassed channels and infiltration basins
- Minimum Widths: Preserve 50–100 feet of continuous buffer where possible for ecological and hydrological function.
- Trail Types: Use natural materials (limestone fines, boardwalks) in flood-prone or environmentally sensitive areas.
- Interpretive Features: Educate the public on stormwater systems through signage and community workshops.

Conclusion

Greenways and open spaces are critical tools in Grinnell’s efforts to manage stormwater, promote sustainability and expand equitable recreation. By protecting and enhancing these natural systems, the City can reduce infrastructure costs, improve public health

and build a more connected and climate-resilient community. Ongoing community-led stormwater restoration initiatives—particularly those aimed at improving Arbor Lake, Lake Nyanza and adjacent drainageways—demonstrate the power of collaborative action. In partnership with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, these efforts will improve water quality, restore habitat and increase recreational value, while serving as a model for nature-based solutions across the city. Investing in greenways is not only a recreational or environmental priority—it’s a strategic infrastructure solution that will define how Grinnell grows responsibly, beautifully and sustainably for future generations.







SECTION 8

Funding and Implementation Strategies

Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

Funding Strategies

Operation and Maintenance Sustainability

Community Priorities

Funding & Implementation Strategy

Building a Sustainable Future for Parks, Recreation and Trails

Introduction

A strong and reliable funding and implementation strategy is essential for turning the Grinnell Parks and Recreation Master Plan from vision into reality. This section provides a practical guide for advancing priority projects, maintaining system integrity and ensuring that parks, trails and recreation facilities evolve in step with community growth and expectations. Grinnell’s strategy is built around long-term planning, phased investment and diversified funding—designed to maximize impact while respecting the community’s fiscal capacity.

1. Capital Improvement Plan (CIP): A Phased and Prioritized Investment Strategy

The City of Grinnell utilizes a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) as a multi-year, strategic tool to guide the budgeting, planning and phased implementation of major public improvements. The CIP identifies, prioritizes and schedules large-scale projects that go beyond routine maintenance—ensuring public resources are invested wisely to meet current and future needs.

Key Elements of the CIP:

- Project Identification: Defines major capital projects such as park renovations, trail

expansions, new facility development and accessibility improvements

- Prioritization: Aligns project phasing with community-identified needs, safety considerations, equity goals and strategic City initiatives
- Cost Estimates: Provides realistic financial projections for design, construction and long-term maintenance
- Funding Strategies: Identifies diverse revenue sources, including local taxes, grants, bonds, partnerships and private contributions
- Phased Implementation: Outlines a logical, manageable schedule for delivering improvements over multiple years
- Transparency & Accountability: Provides residents, staff and elected officials with clear insight into how projects are selected, funded and delivered

Key CIP Priorities for the Grinnell Parks and Recreation Department Include:

- Stormwater-integrated natural area restoration at Arbor Lake and Lake Nyanza
- Modernization of neighborhood parks, including restrooms, shelters and accessible play
- Soccer facilities
- Reinvestment in Miller Park as a multi-use community destination
- Greenway and trail expansion, including trail loop completion and park-to-neighborhood linkages
- Indoor recreation feasibility and facility

planning, particularly in response to the potential loss of GARC and Ahrens Park access

- Wayfinding and signage improvements to strengthen system identity and navigation

The CIP should be updated annually to reflect project progress, funding changes and emerging needs.

2. Funding Strategies: Diversifying Resources to Leverage Local Investment

To implement the master plan effectively, Grinnell must draw from a broad mix of funding sources and partnerships. The following strategies can help amplify local resources and accelerate progress:

Local Funding Tools

- Annual CIP Allocations: Dedicated annual city budget commitments based on priority projects
- General Obligation Bonds: Used for larger capital investments, such as new facilities or major park overhauls
- Park Dedication or Impact Fees: Collected from new developments to offset demand for park services
- Hotel/Motel Tax Revenue: A portion of these funds could support park amenities that boost tourism, such as trails, events, or special-use parks

State and Federal Grants

- Iowa DNR Programs (e.g., REAP, Resource Enhancement and Protection grants)
- Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

- Iowa Great Places Grants
- Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) for trail and greenway infrastructure
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) for habitat and stormwater projects

Public-Private Partnerships

- Naming rights and sponsorships for facilities, trail segments and amenities
- Collaborations with non-profits, foundations and civic groups
- In-kind contributions or shared-use agreements, particularly for indoor or specialty recreation

Philanthropy and Volunteerism

- Grants from community foundations or donor-advised funds
- Friends of the Parks organizations or booster clubs for targeted fundraising
- Adopt-a-Park/Trail programs for volunteer maintenance and improvement

3. Operational and Maintenance Sustainability: Planning for Lifecycle Care and Fiscal Responsibility

Long-term success hinges on maintaining the quality and usability of parks and facilities. The plan recommends a sustainable approach to operations, including:

- Developing an asset management system to track infrastructure conditions and lifecycle costs
- Establishing a dedicated parks maintenance fund within the City budget
- Exploring shared staffing or regional contracts for specialized maintenance tasks

- Designing new facilities with low-maintenance materials and sustainable infrastructure
 - Integrating stormwater management features (e.g., rain gardens, bioswales) to reduce runoff and infrastructure load
- 4. Plan Implementation and Oversight:**
Staying Accountable and Adaptable
- Successful implementation requires collaboration, transparency and regular evaluation. The City should:
- Appoint a parks implementation task force to guide CIP rollout and community partnerships
 - Publish an annual progress report tracking metrics, completed projects and funding milestones
 - Continue robust community engagement to refine priorities and identify new opportunities
 - Coordinate across departments (Public Works, Planning, Schools) for integrated delivery of capital improvements

Community Priorities

The following Community Priorities reflect the values, aspirations and needs voiced by Grinnell residents throughout the planning process. Developed through robust public engagement—including surveys, stakeholder interviews and community meetings—these priorities offer a clear roadmap for investment in Grinnell’s parks, trails and recreation services.

They represent a blend of near-term improvements and long-term visions, emphasizing equity, access, wellness and environmental stewardship. Each priority is

- supported by both qualitative feedback and quantitative data (such as survey rankings), ensuring they reflect the voices of a diverse cross-section of the community.
- The following outlines the top fourteen priorities, organized by theme and relative support. Collectively, they illustrate a strong community desire to enhance the quality, accessibility and programming of public spaces—creating a more inclusive, connected and vibrant park system for all:
- 1. Enhanced Natural Areas & Soft-Surface Trails**
 - Residents desire more opportunities to connect with nature, including improved natural areas, habitat restoration and expanded soft-surface trail systems at locations such as Arbor Lake and Lake Nyanza.
 - 2. Expanded Paved Trails & Connectivity**
 - Improving trail connectivity between parks, neighborhoods, schools and downtown is vital for recreation, active transportation and equitable park access.
 - 3. Restroom Improvements**
 - Outdated and insufficient restrooms limit park usability. Modern, accessible, year-round restroom facilities are a high priority, with a focus on high-traffic parks and trailheads.
 - 4. Indoor Recreation & Wellness Facility**
 - With the Grinnell Athletic and Recreation Center no longer available, a modern indoor facility for fitness, programs and social gathering is a top priority, with planning efforts already underway.
 - 5. Park Shelters & Gathering Spaces**
 - Upgrading shelters with modern amenities,

- accessible seating and landscaping will better support events, rentals and everyday park use.
- 6. Unique & Inclusive Playgrounds**
 - There is strong demand for more creative, inclusive play spaces with adventure elements and universally accessible surfacing.
 - 7. Nature-Based Water Recreation**
 - Expanding paddle sports access at Lake Nyanza and Arbor Lake—including boat launches, docks and shoreline improvements—will capitalize on Grinnell’s natural assets.
 - 8. Outdoor Programs & Events**
 - Infrastructure to support concerts, movies, performances and community programs will enrich park use and foster year-round community gathering.
 - 9. Expanded Sport Courts & Recreation Amenities**
 - New or improved pickleball, basketball, sand volleyball and other courts, along with features like a pump track, will meet recreational demand.
 - 10. Redeveloped Skate Park**
 - A modern skate facility, developed in partnership with local advocates, will serve youth and teen recreation needs.
 - 11. Sports Field Upgrades**
 - Modernizing soccer, baseball and other fields through turf replacement, improved lighting and upgraded amenities is essential for both youth and adult sports.
 - 12. Accessibility & Inclusivity**
 - Across all parks and facilities, ADA improvements, sensory-friendly spaces and inclusive play equipment will ensure

- equitable access for all residents.
- 13. Expanded Programming (Athletic & Non-Athletic)**
 - There is broad interest in growing both athletic and non-athletic programming, including leagues, camps, arts, wellness and environmental education.
 - 14. Support Amenities (Dog Parks, Wayfinding, Disc Golf)**
 - Additional amenities, though lower in priority, contribute to a welcoming and diverse park system that reflects the community’s broad recreational interests.
 - 15. Pickleball Facilities**
 - Dedicated pickleball courts emerged as a high-demand amenity across all age groups. Constructing new courts—or converting existing spaces—will support a growing interest in this accessible, social and fast-growing sport.

Conclusion

The Grinnell Parks and Recreation Master Plan outlines a bold yet practical vision shaped by community priorities and guided by a clear implementation strategy. From trail connectivity and inclusive play to indoor facilities and emerging amenities like pickleball, the plan reflects the values and evolving needs of Grinnell residents.

Its success will rely on phased investment, diversified funding and strong partnerships. With thoughtful planning, responsible stewardship and continued community engagement, Grinnell is well-positioned to grow its legacy of high-quality parks, vibrant recreation and accessible public spaces for all.





SECTION 9

Implementation and Action Plan

Short-term, Mid-term and Long-term Action Items

Timeline and Prioritization of Projects

Responsible Parties for Implementation

Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Implementation & Action Plan

Annual Capital Programming Approach

Grinnell may adopt a flexible 5-year rolling capital improvement program (CIP) with annual budgeting and appropriations. This ensures adaptability to changes in community priorities, economic conditions, and partnership opportunities.

Leadership Structure

Implementation of this plan will require coordinated leadership across City departments and community partners:

- **Grinnell Parks & Recreation Department** – Lead agency for planning, oversight, and execution.
- **Public Works** – Responsible for engineering and infrastructure-related components.
- **City Administration & Finance** – Ensures alignment with funding strategies and municipal budgeting processes.
- **Planning & Zoning** – Integrates projects into broader land use, transportation, and development planning efforts.
- **Volunteer Organizations** – Groups like Imagine Grinnell will play a critical role in supporting outreach, stewardship and targeted project implementation.

Key Funding Sources

- City CIP & Local Option Sales Tax
- Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP)
- Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)
- Greater Poweshiek Community Foundation
- USDA and Rural Development Programs
- Recreation Equipment Partnerships (REI, IMBA, PetSafe, etc.)

Project Description 0-5 Years	HIGH PRIORITY 0-5 Years	MEDIUM PRIORITY 6-10 Years	LONG TERM PLANNING 10+ Years	Project Leadership	Financial Partners
Arbor Lake - Dredging and Shoreline				City	IDNR / City
Arbor Lake - Landscape Restoration				City	IDNR / City
Arbor Lake - Pavilion Parking				City	IDNR / City
Arbor Lake - Pavilion Boat Ramp				City	IDNR / City
Arbor Lake - Recreational Trail					
Arbor Lake - The Commons				City	IDNR / City
Arbor Lake - The Landing				City	IDNR / City
Arbor Lake- The Hub				City	IDNR / City
Lake Arbor - Signage Package				City	IDNR / City
Lake Nyanza				City	IDNR / City
Aquatic Center - Modernize Administration Office				City	IDNR / City
Aquatic Center - Parking				City	IDNR / City
Aquatic Center - Drop-off				City	IDNR / City
Bailey - Restrooms				City	City
Bailey - New Sidewalk				City	To Be Determined
Bailey - Multipurpose Court				City	To Be Determined
Bailey - Signage				City	To Be Determined
Central Park - Memorial Plaza				City	To Be Determined
Central Park - Electrical Outlets to Support Events				City	To Be Determined
Davis Park - Pickleball Courts				City	To Be Determined
Davis Park - Shelter & Restroom				City	To Be Determined
Davis Park - Sidewalks and Lighting				City	To Be Determined
Merrill - Multipurpose Lawn				City	To Be Determined
Merrill - New Pavilion& Restroom (if Soccer)				City	To Be Determined
Merrill - Walking Paths				City	To Be Determined
Merrill - On Street Parking Improvements				City	To Be Determined
Merrill - Signage				City	To Be Determined
Miller - Pathways and Boardwalk				City	To Be Determined
Miller - New Shelter Restroom				City	To Be Determined
Miller - Sigange				City	To Be Determined
Summer Street - Creek Walk				City	To Be Determined
Summer Street - Walking Paths				City	To Be Determined
Summer Street - Signage				City	To Be Determined
Summer Street - Restroom & Shelter				City	To Be Determined
Summer Street - Playground Upgrade (Health & Safety)				City	To Be Determined
Thomazin - Creek Restoration				City	To Be Determined
Thomazin - Trails				City	To Be Determined
Thomazin - Signage				City	To Be Determined
Soccer Feasibility Study				City	To Be Determined
Park Signage & Wayfinding Master Plan				City	To Be Determined
Recreation & Wellness Feasibility Study				City	To Be Determined

Projects, Facilities & Amenities

Introduction

This plan presents a series of recommendations to guide Grinnell’s parks and recreation investments over the next decade. As with any long-range planning initiative, not all projects can be undertaken simultaneously. Setting clear priorities helps ensure that available resources—whether financial, staffing, or community-driven—are allocated effectively and strategically.

The priorities outlined here are shaped by community input, Park Board discussions, and an assessment of current conditions and future needs. This prioritization framework is intended to strike a balance between short-term actions and long-term goals while remaining flexible as new opportunities and circumstances arise.

To promote transparency, the prioritization process is guided by clearly defined criteria rooted in the values and vision of the Grinnell community.

Prioritization Criteria

Alignment with Guiding Principles

Each project is evaluated for its consistency with the plan’s core values, which were developed through:

- Community engagement (including surveys, public meetings, and stakeholder interviews)
- Analysis of existing conditions and opportunities
- Established best practices in parks and recreation planning

Health, Safety, and Welfare

Projects that directly address safety concerns, ADA accessibility, or improvements to public health and wellness are given elevated priority.

Leverage and Partnerships

Initiatives that include external funding sources—such as county, state, or private contributions—or partnerships that help offset City costs receive higher consideration.

Community Demand and Equity

Projects that respond to strong public interest or address critical service gaps, particularly in underserved neighborhoods, are prioritized.

Operational Readiness and Phasing

The ability of a project to move forward—based on its feasibility, permitting status, or level of design completion—along with logical phasing opportunities, influences timing and implementation.

Impact and Visibility

Projects that offer broad community benefit, serve multiple generations, or have the potential to significantly enhance quality of life are given additional weight.

Maintenance and Sustainability

Consideration is given to long-term maintenance and operational costs, as well as the sustainability of proposed improvements. This includes strategies such as native landscaping, energy efficiency measures, and the use of durable, low-maintenance materials.



Priority Project Descriptions

Priority No. One: Arbor Lake Park

Estimate Cost Range: (\$6.8 - \$7.2 Million)

Priority Description

Arbor Lake is a valued natural and recreational asset in Grinnell, but decades of runoff, sedimentation, and nutrient loading have degraded water quality and habitat. Shoreline erosion, aging infrastructure, and algal blooms further limit its use. With technical assessments complete and a funding partnership underway with the Iowa DNR, now is the time to advance restoration efforts.

Project Description

The Arbor Lake Restoration Project includes stormwater BMPs, stream stabilization, dredging, alum treatment, shoreline repairs, and dam rehabilitation. These improvements aim to reduce pollution, restore habitat, and improve recreational access—ensuring the lake remains a long-term community resource.

Alignment with Guiding Principles

The project supports the Master Plan’s goals by:



Parks for Everyone

Improves access for all ages and abilities through ADA-compliant trails, shoreline grading, and kayak launches, supporting Grinnell’s broader inclusion goals.



Connecting People & Places

Enhances trail surfaces, signage, and entry points, reinforcing Arbor Lake’s role as a hub in the city’s trail and greenway network.



Supporting Families & Community

Adds upgraded jetties, picnic areas, and gathering spaces that encourage recreation, events, and family-friendly use.



Caring for Nature

Reduces pollution and erosion through stream stabilization, wetland restoration, and native vegetation—supporting habitat and water quality.



Smart, Sustainable Growth

Leverages Iowa DNR funding and aligns with the City’s CIP to maximize impact and ensure long-term stewardship.



Fun All Year Long

Enhances year-round use with improved access, wildlife viewing, and flexibility for seasonal programming and outdoor activities.



Priority Project Descriptions

Priority No. One: Arbor Lake Park

Estimate Cost Range: (\$6.8 - \$7.2 Million)

The Adventure Hub

Phase One: Upland Improvements

- Preliminary Study – Vehicular Access
- Preliminary Study – Adventure Programing
- Preliminary Study – Leisure Facilities
- Coordinate - Sediment Basin Integration
- Conceptual Design – The Hub Layout
- Design & Construct– Grading Plan

Future Phase: Upland Improvements

- Design & Construction – Vehicular Access
- Design & Construction– Adventure Hub
 - Shade Structures & Terrace
 - Pump Track & Trails
 - Adventure Play Structures
- Design & Construct– Signage



1-Parking, 2-Dropoff, 3-Shade Structures, 4-Terrace, 5-Adventure Play, 6-Pump Track, 7-Sediment Basin with Boardwalks, 8-Trails

The Commons

Phase One: Upland Improvements

- Preliminary Study – Vehicular Access
- Preliminary Study – The Commons
- Preliminary Study – Pedestrian Circulation
- Design & Construct– Grading Plan
- Design & Construct– Lake Trail
- Design & Construct – Shoreline

Future Phase: Upland Improvements

- Design & Construction – Vehicular Access
- Design & Construction– The Commons
 - Pathways & Landscape
 - Shade Structures & Terrace
 - Community Day Lodge
 - Nature-Inspired Playground
- Design & Construct– Signage



1-Parking, 2-Walk System, 3-Day Lodge, 4-Nature-Inspired Play, 5-Lawn, 6-Trail, 7-Shoreline & Fishing Piers

The Landing

Phase One: Upland Improvements

- Preliminary Study – Vehicular Access
- Preliminary Study –Path, Terrace & Shelter
- Design & Construct– Boat Ramp
- Design & Construct– Grading Plan
- Design & Construct– Basin
- Design & Construct– Shoreline

Future Phase: Upland Improvements

- Design & Construction – Vehicular Access
- Design & Construction– The Landing
 - Pathways & Landscape
 - Shade Structures & Terrace
 - Interaction with Basin
- Design & Construct– Signage
- Design & Construct – Pedestrian Bridge



1-Parking, 2-Basin, 3-Shelter, 4-Boat Ramp, 5-Boat Ramp Option B, 6-Pedestrian Bridge

Recreational Trail

Phase One: Upland Improvements

- Design & Construct – Recreational Trail
 - First Avenue to The Landing
 - Finalize Arbor Lake Trail
 - Arbor Lake to West Street



1-Street Access, 2-The Landing Access (trailhead), 3-West Street Access

Priority Project Descriptions

Priority No. Two: Lake Nyanza at Miller Park

Estimate Cost Range: (\$680,000 - \$1.4 Million)

Priority Description - Why Now?

Due to poor water quality and limited depth, traditional restoration is not feasible. Converting Nyanza to a wetland is a cost-effective, sustainable solution that aligns with community goals and complements ongoing Arbor Lake improvements. With technical assessments complete and a funding partnership underway with the Iowa DNR, now is the time to advance restoration efforts.

Project Description

The Lake Nyanza project proposes converting the shallow, degraded lake into a constructed wetland. This includes shoreline improvements, native vegetation, habitat enhancements, and a new jetty—transforming the area into a naturalized space for wildlife and passive recreation.

Alignment with Guiding Principles

The project supports the Master Plan’s goals by:



Parks for Everyone

Adds accessible shoreline areas and a jetty, creating a safe and welcoming space for passive recreation and nature enjoyment.



Connecting People & Places

Enhances a key park along the city’s trail network, encouraging access by foot and bike and reinforcing neighborhood connectivity.



Supporting Families & Community

Offers a peaceful, family-friendly setting for outdoor learning, wildlife viewing, and informal gatherings.



Caring for Nature

Converts a degraded lake into a healthy wetland, improving water quality, native habitat, and stormwater function.



Smart, Sustainable Growth

Uses a nature-based solution that reduces long-term maintenance and leverages funding opportunities, including partnership potential with the Iowa DNR.



Fun All Year Long

Creates a year-round destination for birdwatching, walking, and environmental education in all seasons.



Priority Project Descriptions

Priority No. Two: Lake Nyanza at Miller Park

Estimate Cost Range: (\$680,000 - \$1.4 Million)

The Point

Phase One: Upland Improvements

- Preliminary Study – Vehicular Access
- Preliminary Study – Restroom / Shelter
- Preliminary Study – Playground
- Coordinate & Construct – Water Edge
- Design & Construct – Grading Plan

Future Phase: Upland Improvements

- Design & Construct – Vehicular Access
- Design & Construct – Restroom / Shelter
- Design & Construct - Playground
- Design & Construct – Signage



1-Parking, 2-Dropoff, 3-Shelter/Restroom, 4-Playground, 5- Shoreline

The Boardwalk & Trail System

Phase One: Upland Improvements

- Preliminary Study – Trail System
- Preliminary Study - Boardwalk
- Preliminary Study – STEAM Stations
- Design & Construct – Grading Plan

Future Phase: Upland Improvements

- Design & Construct – Trail System
- Design & Construct – Boardwalk
- Design & Construct – STEAM Station
- Design & Construct - Signage



1-Recreational Trail, 2-Boardwalk

Disc Golf

Phase One: Upland Improvements

- Design & Construct – Golf Course



1-Parking, 2-Basin, 3-Shelter, 4-Boat Ramp, 5-Boat Ramp Option B, 6-Pedestrian Bridge

Priority Project Descriptions

Priority No. Three: Davis Park

Estimate Cost Range: (\$1.2 - \$1.3 Million)

Priority Description - Why Now?

Timing is critical for this project, as the Davis School property is in transition for development and is at risk of losing its long-standing role as a neighborhood park. With no alternative property available in the area to replace this amenity, acting now is essential to preserve this vital community space for current and future residents.

Project Description

Davis Park is being redeveloped from a former school site into a vibrant neighborhood park alongside new housing. Planned improvements include new playground equipment, two pickleball courts with a multi-use surface, landscaping, sidewalks, benches, lighting, a shelter with restrooms, and flexible indoor space for community use.

Alignment with Guiding Principles

The project supports the Master Plan’s goals by:



Parks for Everyone

Features accessible play, paths, and amenities for all ages and abilities.



Connecting People & Places

Links seamlessly with nearby housing and sidewalks for walkable access.



Supporting Families & Community

Provides indoor and outdoor spaces for play, gatherings, and programs.



Caring for Nature

Adds sustainable landscaping and lighting in a natural setting.



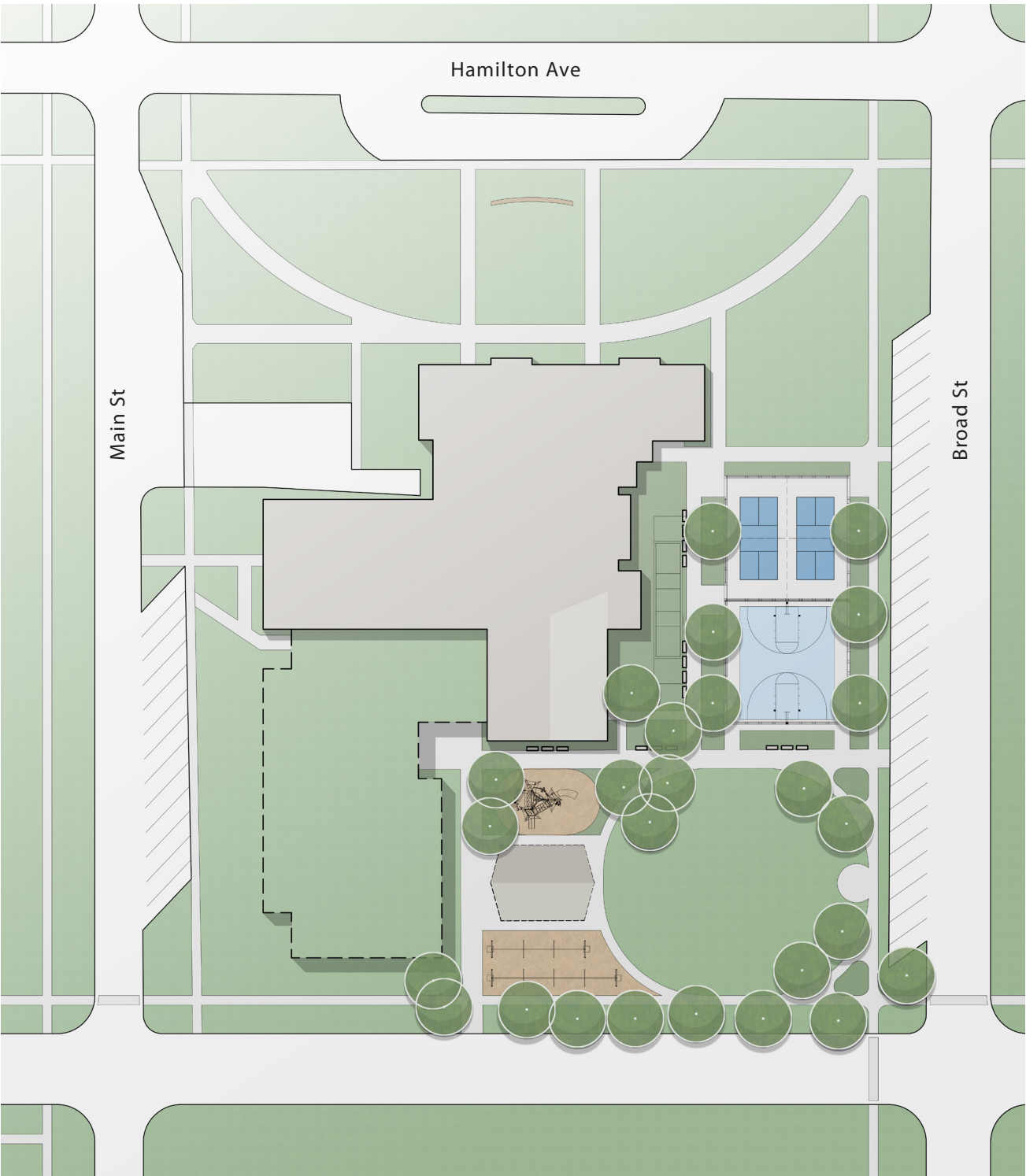
Smart, Sustainable Growth

Reuses a former school site alongside new housing for efficient land use.



Fun All Year Long

Includes indoor space and all-season amenities for year-round activity.



1-New Playground Equipment, 2-Two Pickleball Courts, 3-Landscape & Site improvements, 4-Indoor Enhancements, 5-Sidewalk, 6-parking, 7-Shelter / Restrooms, 6-Signage



Priority Project Descriptions

Priority No. Four: Central Park

Estimate Cost Range: (\$1.3 - \$1.4 Million)

Priority Description - Why Now?

A meaningful tribute honoring Grinnell’s military veterans, the project features a curved metal sculpture resembling a flag in motion, set within a reflective space designed for remembrance, appreciation, and quiet reflection.

Project Description

The memorial offers a lasting way to recognize the service of local veterans while enriching Central Park as a civic and cultural destination. Advancing this project now supports community identity, historical appreciation, and shared values.

Alignment with Guiding Principles

The project supports the Master Plan’s goals by:



Parks for Everyone

Creates an inclusive, contemplative space accessible to all visitors.



Connecting People & Places

Strengthens Central Park’s role as a civic gathering place in the heart of the city.



Supporting Families & Community

Serves as a unifying landmark for remembrance, ceremonies, and reflection.



Caring for Nature

Enhances the park’s landscape with thoughtful, low-impact design.



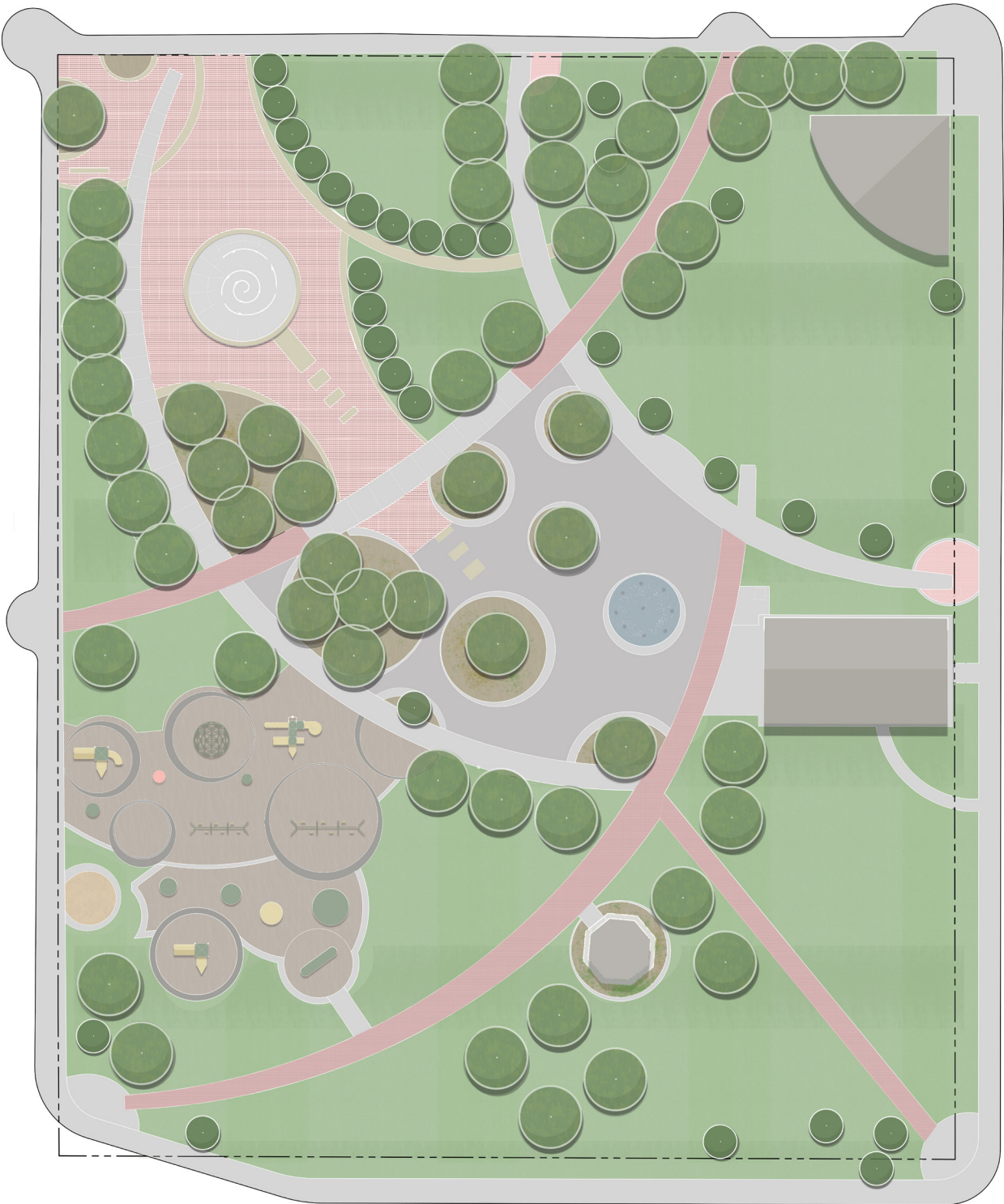
Smart, Sustainable Growth

Leverages existing park infrastructure to honor community legacy.



Fun All Year Long

Adds a year-round point of interest that supports cultural and seasonal events.



1-Veterans Memorial Plaza, 2-Sculpture

Priority Project Descriptions

Priority No. Five: Recreation & Wellness Center

Estimate Cost Range: (\$85,000 - \$125,000)

Priority Description - Why Now?

With the future of the GARC uncertain and major changes coming to Ahrens Park, Grinnell must act now to plan for year-round recreation and wellness needs. A feasibility study will define priorities, assess operational and financial models, and explore design options, ensuring a seamless transition, coordinated funding, and a facility that serves residents of all ages for decades to come.

Project Description

The City of Grinnell faces an urgent need to plan for the future of indoor recreation. The aging GARC facility has an uncertain future, and no alternative currently exists to serve residents year-round. Rising demand for health, fitness, and inclusive community spaces makes now the right time to assess options and develop a forward-looking, sustainable plan to guide future investment and facility development.

Alignment with Guiding Principles

The project supports the Master Plan’s goals by:



Parks for Everyone
The study supports accessible, inclusive indoor recreation for all ages and abilities.



Caring for Nature
The study promotes sustainable design and environmentally responsible site planning.



Connecting People & Places
It explores how a new facility could link with parks, trails, and neighborhoods.



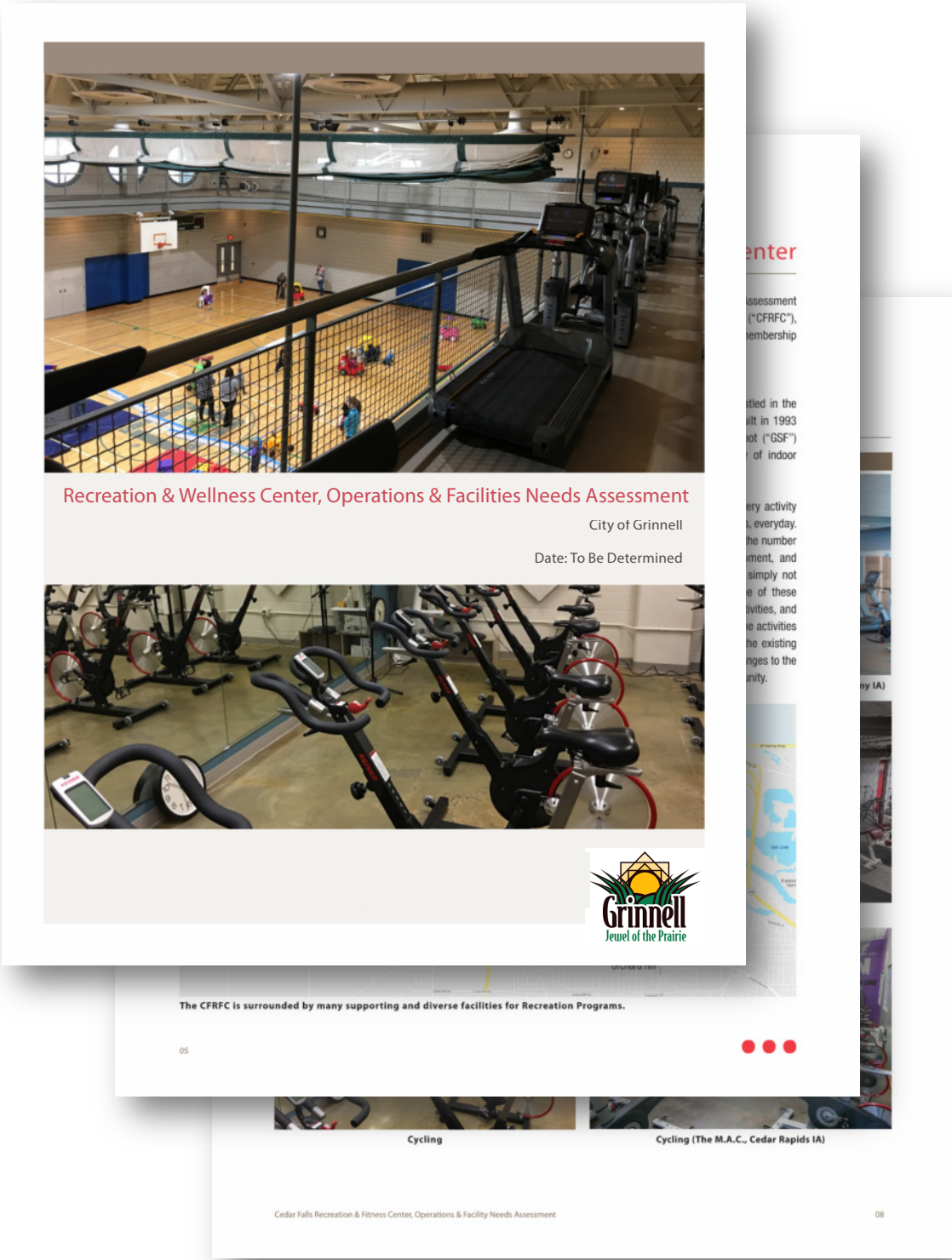
Smart, Sustainable Growth
It prepares for the future through data-driven planning and potential partnerships.



Supporting Families & Community
It identifies spaces for programs, gatherings, and multi-generational activities.



Fun All Year Long
It addresses the need for indoor recreation, especially with the uncertain future of GARC.



Priority Project Descriptions

Priority No. Six: Soccer Complex Feasibility Study

Estimate Cost Range: (\$50,000 - \$80,000)

Priority Description - Why Now?

Soccer participation in Grinnell continues to grow, yet existing fields are limited, overused, and lack amenities. With increased demand from youth, schools, and adult leagues, now is the time to plan for a facility that meets community needs, supports programming, and positions Grinnell to host local and regional events.

Project Description

The Soccer Facility Feasibility Study will evaluate the need, location, and design options for a dedicated soccer complex in Grinnell. The study will assess field demand, site suitability, facility components, partnership opportunities, and funding strategies to guide future development of a high-quality, multi-field venue.

Alignment with Guiding Principles

The project supports the Master Plan’s goals by:



Parks for Everyone

The study considers how a new facility can serve players and spectators of all ages and abilities.



Connecting People & Places

It explores potential sites with access to trails, neighborhoods, and schools.



Supporting Families & Community

It supports family recreation, youth sports, and community events.



Caring for Nature

The study encourages environmentally responsible design and stormwater management.



Smart, Sustainable Growth

It helps plan for long-term recreation demand and identifies funding and partnership opportunities.



Fun All Year Long

It explores facility types that could support extended seasons and multi-sport use.



Priority Project Descriptions

Priority No. Seven: Merrill Park

Estimate Cost Range: (\$275,000 - \$340,000)

Priority Description - Why Now?

Phase One of Merrill Park offers a timely solution by creating a large, multi-use lawn and trail network that can support casual community activities. Moving forward now ensures the city can respond to shifting recreational needs and demonstrate early progress on the broader park vision.

Project Description

Phase One of Merrill Park will establish a central great lawn, a system of trails and sidewalks, and enhanced landscaping to define the park’s open-space character. These improvements will provide flexible space for recreation, community events, and informal play, while improving access, circulation, and overall park appearance.

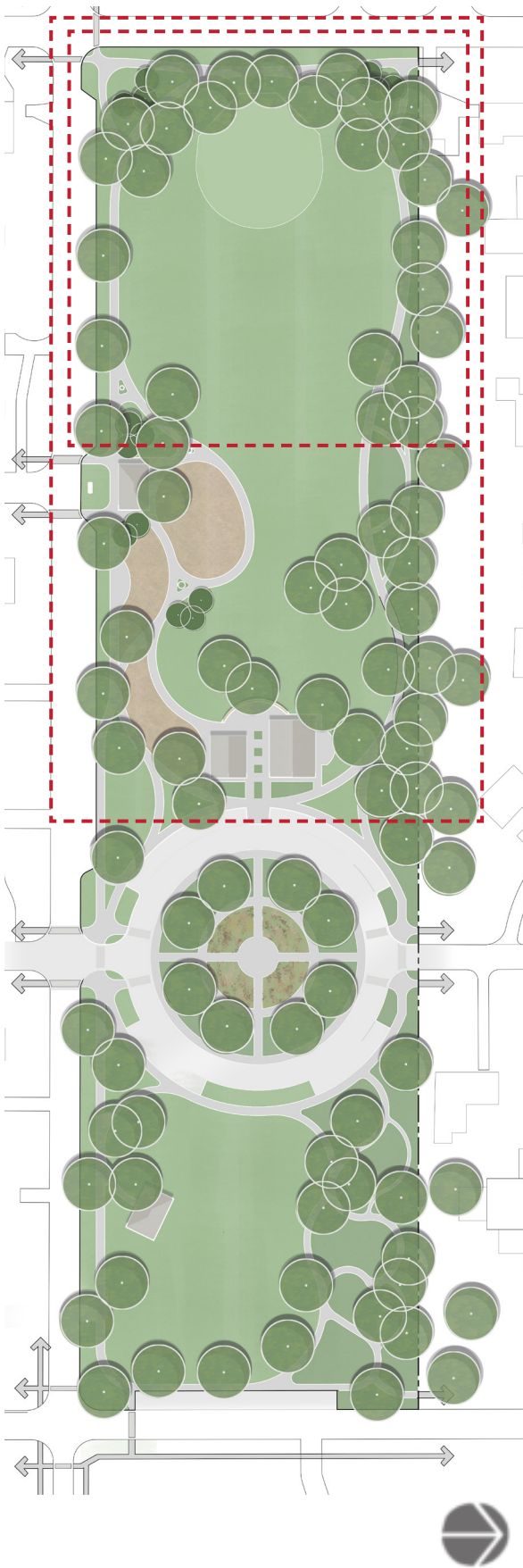
The Great Lawn

Phase One: Upland Improvements

- Preliminary Study – Playground
- Preliminary Study – Restroom / Shelter
- Preliminary Study – Trail & Sidewalks
- Coordinate & Construct – Parking
- Design & Construct– Grading Plan
- Design & Construct – Great Lawn
- Design & Construct – West Trail & Sidewalks
- Design & Construct – Softball Backstop
- Design & Construct - Lighting
- Design & Construct - Signage

Future Phase: Upland Improvements

- Design & Construct – Parking Improvements
- Design & Construct – Restroom / Shelter
- Design & Construct – Playground
- Design & Construct – Roundabout
- Design & Construct – Trail & Sidewalks
- Design & Construct – Ex. Shelter Upgrades
- Design & Construct – Landscape / Art
- Design & Construct– Signage



Alignment with Guiding Principles

The project supports the Master Plan’s goals by:



Parks for Everyone

Creates accessible open space and walkways for users of all ages and abilities.



Connecting People & Places

Establishes internal trails and sidewalks that improve park circulation and neighborhood access.



Supporting Families & Community

Provides a flexible lawn for gatherings, casual play, and community events.



Caring for Nature

Enhances natural character with landscaping and green space preservation.



Smart, Sustainable Growth

Responds to the loss of Ahrens Park fields and advances the long-term park vision.



Fun All Year Long

Supports seasonal use with trails and open areas for walking, playing, and informal recreation.

Priority Project Descriptions

Priority No. Eight: Summer Street Park

Estimate Cost Range: To Be Determined Based on Schedule

Priority Description - Why Now?

The current playscape at Summer Street Park is aging and limited in accessibility. Upgrading this space now addresses an immediate need for inclusive neighborhood play, aligns with ADA goals, and builds on the park’s unique identity as a nature-based destination for families.

Project Description

The Summer Street Park project will upgrade the existing nature-inspired playscape and introduce a new accessible playground to better serve children of all ages and abilities. The design will retain the park’s natural character while incorporating inclusive features, safety surfacing, and modern equipment to enhance play value and usability.

Alignment with Guiding Principles

The project supports the Master Plan’s goals by:



Parks for Everyone

Adds an accessible playground and upgrades play features for all abilities.



Connecting People & Places

Strengthens a neighborhood park that is easily reached by walking or biking.



Supporting Families & Community

Provides safe, engaging spaces for children and family interaction.



Caring for Nature

Enhances natural character with landscaping and green space preservation.



Smart, Sustainable Growth

Improves an existing park through thoughtful reinvestment and inclusive design.



Fun All Year Long

Encourages seasonal use with durable, all-weather play elements.



Priority Project Descriptions

Priority No. Nine: Bailey Park

Estimate Cost Range: To Be Determined Based on Schedule

Priority Description - Why Now?

The shelter and restroom at Bailey Park are outdated and no longer meet user needs or accessibility standards. Replacing them is a critical first step to improve safety, comfort, and usability. As one of Grinnell’s most visible parks, Bailey Park is well-positioned for phased investment that enhances its role as a hub for play, skating, and neighborhood gathering.

Project Description

The Bailey Park improvement project will begin with the replacement of the existing shelter and restroom, addressing urgent infrastructure needs. Future priorities include upgrading the existing playscape, enhancing sidewalk access, expanding the skatepark, improving signage, and evaluating landscaping and site features. Together, these improvements aim to modernize the park while supporting inclusive, active use for all ages.

Alignment with Guiding Principles

The project supports the Master Plan’s goals by:



Parks for Everyone
Replaces outdated shelter and restroom with accessible, modern amenities.



Connecting People & Places
Improves sidewalk access and wayfinding to strengthen neighborhood connections.



Supporting Families & Community
Enhances space for play, gatherings, and skate-friendly recreation.



Caring for Nature
Incorporates landscaping and site improvements that support a healthier environment.



Smart, Sustainable Growth
Prioritizes reinvestment in a well-used park through phased, cost-effective upgrades.



Fun All Year Long
Expands skatepark use and upgrades infrastructure to support year-round activity.



1-Shelter & Restroom, 2-Sidewalks, 3-New traditional playscape

Priority Project Descriptions

Priority No. Ten: Grinnell Mutual Family Aquatic Center

Estimate Cost Range: To Be Determined Based on Schedule

Priority Description - Why Now?

The aquatic center is a key regional destination, but increased use has outpaced its current capacity and amenities. Upgrading the site now will improve safety, circulation, and user experience, while adding features like a splash pad to better serve families with young children and extend seasonal use.

Project Description

This project will upgrade the Grinnell Mutual Family Aquatic Center with expanded parking, a dedicated drop-off area, improvements to the administration building, and the addition of a splash pad. These enhancements will improve functionality, safety, and accessibility while expanding recreational offerings for families and visitors.

Alignment with Guiding Principles

The project supports the Master Plan’s goals by:



Parks for Everyone

Enhances access, safety, and comfort for all users through upgraded facilities and a new splash pad.



Connecting People & Places

Adds improved parking and a drop-off area to support better circulation and access.



Supporting Families & Community

Expands amenities for family-friendly recreation and multi-generational use.



Caring for Nature

Offers opportunities to incorporate sustainable site design and stormwater improvements.



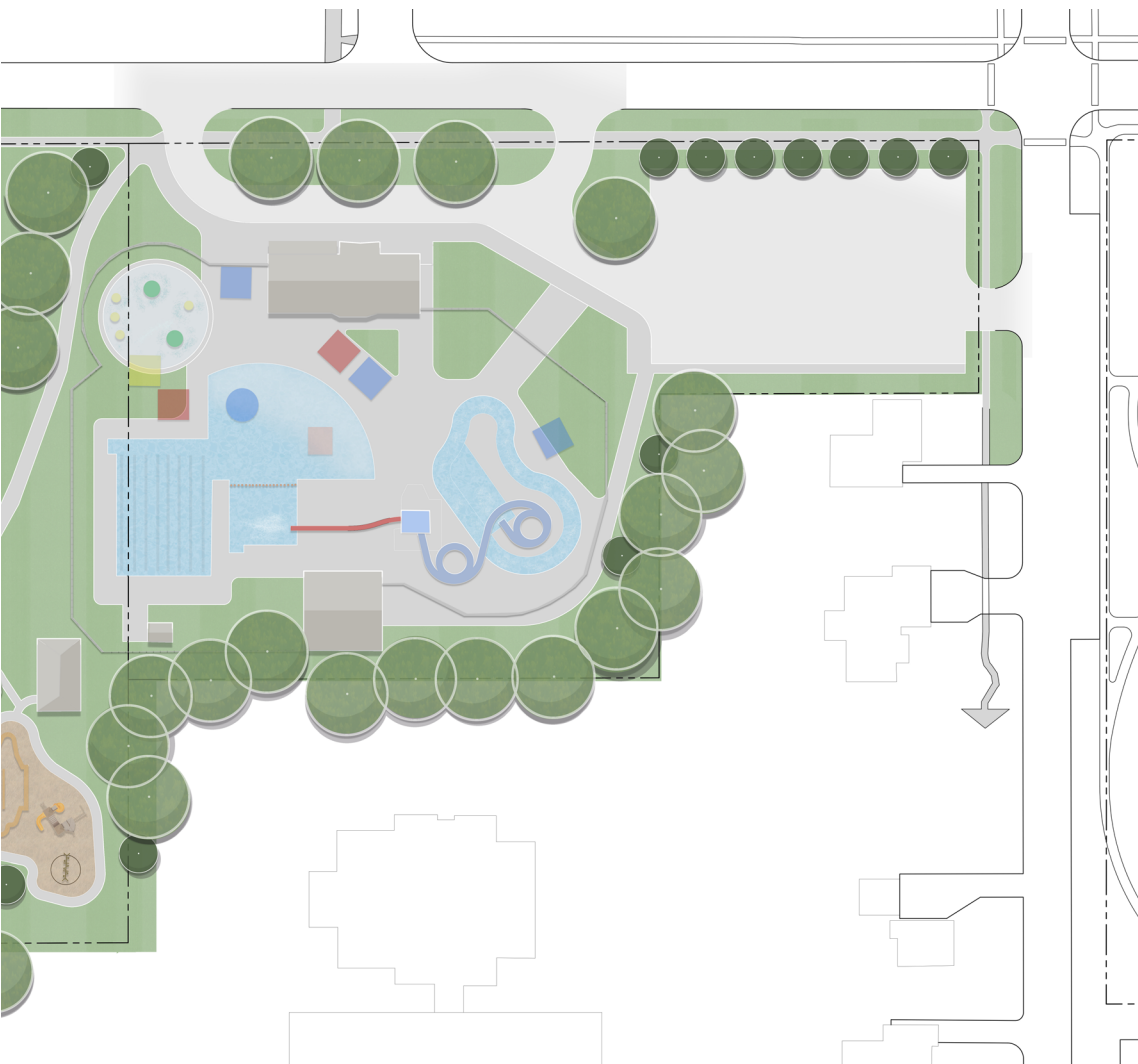
Smart, Sustainable Growth

Reinvests in a high-use facility with long-term value for residents and visitors.



Fun All Year Long

Adds features like the splash pad that extend seasonal enjoyment and increase daily use.



1-Parking & Drop-off, 2-Building Improvements

Priority Project Descriptions

Priority No. Eleven: Signage & Wayfinding Master Plan

Estimate Cost Range: \$40,000-\$65,000

Priority Description - Why Now?

Over the next decade, the City of Grinnell and its partners will be making significant investments in the parks and recreation system—adding new amenities, improving infrastructure, and enhancing user experiences. As these improvements take shape, the ability to clearly communicate, inform, and brand these spaces becomes increasingly important. Grinnell’s park system has grown more dynamic and expansive, with new trails, upgraded facilities, and increased community engagement. However, inconsistent signage and the absence of a cohesive wayfinding system currently limit visibility, accessibility, and the overall quality of park experiences. With the implementation of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan now underway, this is the ideal moment to establish a unified signage and wayfinding strategy that reflects the City’s identity, guides users with clarity, and strengthens the presence of Grinnell’s parks in the community.

Project Description

The Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan will provide a comprehensive framework for directional, interpretive, and identity signage across Grinnell’s parks and trail system. The plan will inventory existing conditions, identify gaps, establish design standards, and prioritize phased implementation. It will consider multilingual, ADA-compliant, and bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly signage, while reinforcing the city’s visual branding. A well-executed wayfinding system will improve safety, support tourism, encourage active recreation, and ensure every user can confidently explore Grinnell’s parks.

Alignment with Guiding Principles

The project supports the Master Plan’s goals by:



Parks for Everyone

The plan promotes universal access through clear, inclusive and ADA-compliant signage to support all ages and abilities.



Caring for Nature

Environmentally sensitive design and messaging will help users understand and protect natural resources and habitats.



Connecting People & Places

It strengthens physical and visual connections between parks, neighborhoods, downtown, schools and regional destinations.



Smart, Sustainable Growth

The plan aligns with long-term growth by offering a scalable system that can expand with future parks and trail improvements.



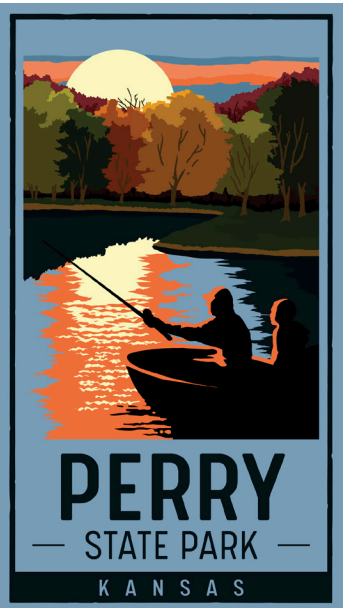
Supporting Families & Community

Well-designed signs support family outings, group events and discovery-based learning through interpretive and educational features.



Fun All Year Long

Seasonal and event signage can promote year-round programming and guide users to winter amenities, special events and indoor options.







APPENDIX

Glossary

Park Facilities and Amenities

To ensure clarity and consistency across the individual park master plans that follow, the following glossary defines park facilities, amenities, and support structures commonly referenced throughout the document. Each entry is accompanied by a concise description to aid in the interpretation of recommendations and park-specific legends.

Park Structure Facilities

Well-designed park structures are essential to user comfort, safety, and operational flexibility. These elements support both active and passive recreation and contribute to the overall function and appeal of each park.

- **Day Lodge**
A medium-sized enclosed building designed for day-use recreation and group functions. Typically includes heating/cooling systems, restrooms, multipurpose rooms, and catering or kitchen space. Ideal for seasonal rentals, community meetings, or youth programs.
- **Pavilion**
A large, open-air structure with a permanent roof—often equipped with lighting, electrical service, and picnic tables. Pavilions support gatherings, rentals, and special events, and often serve as visual anchors within larger parks.
- **Shelter**
A smaller, covered structure with open sides, usually located near picnic areas or playgrounds. These offer informal gathering space and protection from the elements for small groups and families.
- **Restroom**
Permanent, seasonal, or modular facilities that provide critical sanitation services. Designs may include single- or multi-stall units with ADA accessibility, water fountains, and changing stations.
- **Shade Structures**
Freestanding or integrated covers that reduce sun exposure in high-use areas like playgrounds or plazas. Materials may include metal, fabric, or wood. These enhance comfort and prolong recreational use during warmer months.

Playground Facilities

- **Traditional Play Structures**
Modular playground systems made of metal and plastic that include swings, slides, climbers, and bridges. Designed to promote gross motor development and active play.
- **Nature-Inspired Play Structures**
Incorporate natural materials and forms—such as logs, boulders, and earth mounds—to create immersive, landscape-integrated play environments. These support imaginative and sensory-rich play.
- **Accessible Play**
Features designed to meet ADA standards, ensuring play elements are physically usable by children with mobility challenges. Includes ramps, transfer platforms, smooth surfacing, and ground-level features.
- **Inclusive Play**
Playgrounds that support children of all abilities—physical, cognitive, sensory, and social. Inclusive designs foster cooperative play, emotional development, and social engagement for children with and without disabilities.

Sports and Fitness

Recreation Centers

Indoor multi-use facilities supporting a wide range of recreational, athletic, and wellness programming. Common features include gymnasiums, fitness rooms, tracks, multipurpose spaces, and childcare areas.

Fields

- **Baseball**
Diamond-shaped fields with backstops, dugouts, and turf infields/outfields. Serve youth and adult leagues.
- **Softball**
Similar to baseball but with smaller dimensions and shorter base paths.
- **Soccer**
Outdoor fields for youth and adult leagues, often supported by lighting, restrooms, parking, and spectator seating.
- **Flexible Athletic Fields**
Multi-lined turf areas that accommodate multiple sports such as soccer, football, or lacrosse. Often feature movable goals and field lighting.

Courts

- **Basketball**
Full or half courts with standard hoops and surface striping.
- **Pickleball**
Small paddle sport courts suitable for all ages; typically hard-surfaced with nets and perimeter fencing.
- **Multipurpose Sports Court**
Versatile court for basketball, volleyball, futsal, or other similar games.
- **Tennis**
Hard-surface courts for singles or doubles play, often enclosed and lit for evening use.

Courses and Stations

- **Miniature Golf**
Small-scale putting courses with themed obstacles, suitable for all ages.
- **Disc Golf**
Outdoor course with basket targets, promoting walking, accuracy, and outdoor recreation.
- **Outdoor Fitness Stations**
Durable, weather-resistant equipment for strength and aerobic training. Often located along trails to support circuit workouts.

Adventure & Challenge-Oriented Facilities

- **Tree Adventure Climbing**
Harnessed climbing features built into trees or platforms for elevated, nature-based activity.
- **Climbing Wall / Bouldering**
Vertical or low-height climbing elements for physical challenge and coordination.
- **Vertical Adventure Play**
Tall multi-story structures with bridges, ropes, and slides.
- **Challenge / Ropes Course**
Ground-level or elevated obstacle systems promoting group interaction, agility, and personal growth.
- **Adventure Play**
Informal areas with logs, loose parts, and sand to encourage creativity and unstructured play.
- **Obstacle / Parkour Course**
Structured courses that promote strength, agility, and movement through jumping, climbing, and balancing.
- **Zipline**
Elevated cable rides offering short-distance thrills and panoramic views.

Water-Based Recreation

- **Pool Recreation**
Built aquatic facilities with lap lanes, slides, diving wells, or therapy features. May be indoor or seasonal outdoor venues.
- **Splash Pads**
Zero-depth water play areas with interactive spray features, safe for young children and ADA-accessible.
- **Natural Water Access**
Lakes, creeks, or ponds offering passive recreation (fishing, paddling, birdwatching) with designated access points.
 - Kayaking / Canoeing / Paddleboarding: Flatwater boating supported by launch zones.
 - Creek Walks / Boardwalks: Trails or platforms offering immersive access to riparian zones.

Winter Recreation Amenities

- **Sledding Hill**
Graded slopes designed for snow play with clear runouts and climbing paths.
- **Ice Rink / Ice Ribbon**
Flat or meandering surfaces for skating and hockey, ranging from natural freeze to mechanical installations.
- **Snow Play Area**
Informal open space for unstructured snow activities like building snowmen or forts.
- **Cross-Country Ski & Snowshoe Trails**
Seasonal trails groomed or natural for non-motorized winter travel.
- **Winter Walking Loops**
Maintained pathways plowed and treated for pedestrian access in cold months.
- **Outdoor Firepits**
Gathering spaces with warming amenities to encourage winter park use and socialization.

Nature-Based & Low-Impact Infrastructure

- **Nature Play Zones**
Natural materials and textures (logs, sand, water) that support exploratory, hands-on play.
- **Birdwatching Areas**
Quiet habitat zones with perches, interpretive signage, and visual screening.
- **Scenic Overlooks**
Elevated platforms or locations offering panoramic views.
- **Nature-Inspired Features**
Park elements that draw from local ecology and materials to strengthen sense of place.
- **Low-Impact, Naturalized Areas**
Sustainable landscapes using native plants and permeable surfaces to reduce environmental impact.

Wellness & Mind-Body Recreation

- **Community Gardens**
Shared plots for growing produce and plants, encouraging environmental learning and food access.

Trail Classifications

Trail categories reflect user type, surface, and intended function.

- **Shared Use / Multi-Use Trail**
Paved or compacted trails for cyclists, walkers, and mobility devices (10–14’ wide).

- **Sidepaths**
Parallel paved trails along roads, typically 8–12’ wide with separation from traffic.
- **Natural Surface Trails**
Earthen or mulched paths for hiking, nature walks, or mountain biking.
- **Park Trails / Internal Loops**
Casual walking or jogging loops located within park boundaries (6–10’ wide).
- **Connector Trails**
Short trail links connecting parks, neighborhoods, or destinations. Surfaces vary.

Green Infrastructure Integration

Parks increasingly serve dual roles as recreational and ecological assets, improving environmental resilience and sustainability.

- **Rain Gardens**
Vegetated basins that capture and filter stormwater.
- **Bioswales**
Grassy or planted channels that slow and treat stormwater runoff.
- **Native Prairie Restoration**
Reestablishment of native vegetation to enhance soil, habitat, and biodiversity.
- **Pollinator Habitat**
Flower-rich zones supporting bees, butterflies, and beneficial insects.

Park Signage System

A comprehensive park signage system provides a unified visual language that enhances user experience, supports navigation, and reinforces the identity of the park system. By integrating clear, consistent, and accessible signage across all parks and facilities, it ensures visitors can easily find their way, understand park rules, and engage with the environment.

Donor Signs

Specialty signage that recognizes individuals, families, businesses, or organizations who have contributed financially or in-kind to park development. These signs may be integrated into benches, structures, gardens, or standalone markers and help reinforce community stewardship.