



## ***Parks, Open Space & Environmental Features Plan***

The parks, open space, and environmental features in a community contribute significantly to the overall quality of life, image, character, desirability, and aesthetics of that community. These areas provide places for residents and visitors in which recreate and enjoy. The City of Marion operates a number of parks and open spaces that come together with environmental features such as Indian Creek and Squaw Creeks. These areas of open space and undeveloped land add to the quality of life of Marion residents.

The recommendations of the Parks and Open Space Plan are intended to protect and enhance Marion's natural areas, expand the park and trail system in growth areas as well as established residential neighborhoods, and improve access to regional assets. The Plan also seeks to ensure the adequate provision of recreational facilities and programming for residents of all age groups.

## ***Parks and Recreation Department***

The mission of the City of Marion's Parks and Recreation Department is to provide and maintain quality parks, facilities, open and natural space, programs, and services to enhance the physical, social, and emotional well being of all the citizens of Marion. The department maintains 19 public parks and several recreational facilities including:

- Ascension Park. (Playground, picnic tables, soccer, basketball)
- Boyson Park. (Trail and picnic tables)
- Butterfield Park. (Gazebo, basketball and baseball)
- City Park. (Picnic tables, pavilion, caboose)
- Donnelly Park. (Playground, basketball, trail)
- Elza Park. (Picnic tables, playground)
- Faulkes Heritage Woods. (trail, woodlands)
- Gill Park. (Trail, playground, baseball, gazebo)
- Glenbrook Cove. (Trail, open space)
- Hanna Park. (Baseball, basketball, picnic tables, playground)
- Khrumhotz Woods. (Mountain biking, walking trail)
- Lininger Park. (Playground, baseball, picnic tables)
- Lowe Park Arts & Environment Center. (Parks & Recreation offices, conference space, playground, trail)
- Oakshade Cemetery.
- Starry Park. (Picnic tables, baseball)
- Taube Park. (Pavilion, picnic tables, basketball, playground)
- Thomas Park. (Playground, frisbee golf, tennis, trail, picnic tables)
- Tower Park. (Open space)
- Willow Park. (Baseball, tennis, playground)
- Willowood Park. (Pool, pavilions, grills, playground)

## ***Programming***

The Parks and Recreation Department operates youth programs including softball, baseball, soccer, basketball, football and swimming. All of these programs are reported to be popular, but the size of some programs is limited due to a lack of regularly available facilities to host program activities. While it is believed that there is ample demand for such programs, the department does not have access to dedicated facilities such as a wellness or recreation center to accommodate them. Adult programs are not offered due to facility availability. The department's programming constraints are related to a dependence on local schools for facilities.



### ***School District Partnerships***

The Parks and Recreation Department is engaged in intergovernmental agreements with the local school districts. Under these agreements, the department provides local schools with fields for soccer, football, physical education classes, and softball/baseball at Lowe Park. In exchange, the Linn-Mar Community School District provides gym space in four schools for Parks and Recreation programs and uses some park land at Wilkins Elementary School for playground and open space. The Parks and Recreation department also utilizes the parking lot at Oakridge Middle School for baseball/softball parking between May and July.

Local school gymnasiums are used by the department on a limited basis as school programs get priority for use of these facilities. As the City's parks and recreation facilities are expanded and programming needs change, the City should work with local school districts to reshape existing usage agreements.

### ***Facility Needs***

The department is in need of a multi-purpose gym facility, so it can offer an expanded list of programs including fitness, organized sports, and general open play. Other facilities the Parks and Recreation Department expressed a desire for included an aquatic center, maintenance and storage facilities, additional recreational fields, and an expanded network of trails to better connect the public to existing and future facilities. Community input received during the comprehensive planning process indicated that Marion's residents shared the desire for some type of community recreation and aquatic center and a more expansive trail network.

### ***Park Land and Open Space Dedication***

The number of existing public parks in Marion is insufficient given the size and location of its population. It is common for communities to have a park land dedication ordinance that requires new residential developments to contain parks and open space. The absence of a park land dedication requirement in Marion has limited the number of parks throughout the residential areas of the community. Such a regulation is necessary to ensure that adequate amounts of land for parks, schools, and other public uses are available to the City's growing population.

A park land dedication ordinance could be written a component of the City's Subdivision Ordinance requirements for residential development. Developers could be required to dedicate park land large enough in size to sufficiently meet the needs of future residents in that subdivision and bordering areas. If an adequate park site cannot be provided, or is undesirable, within a new residential development, the developer could pay a fee-in-lieu of land that could be used to finance park improvements and the purchase of park land elsewhere in the City. The amount of a fee-in-lieu contribution would be dictated by the amount of land required, the value of land within the City, and the cost of construction and long-term maintenance of park land.



## **Community Parks**

Park land dedication ordinances typically deal with the provision of neighborhood scale park space and facilities that are intended to serve the needs of residents living nearby. The City should also identify sites for larger scale community parks and facilities in future growth areas.

New community parks could accommodate some of the recreational facilities needed by the parks and recreation department to host sporting events, such as league play, open play, or possible tournaments. These parks are likely to draw larger number of visitors and could potentially include sports field lighting. As such, community parks should be well-buffered from future residential uses and located along collector or arterial streets.

Lowe Park represents a community park facility intended to serve the needs of the Marion's northern and northwestern growth areas and beyond. The Marion Master Trails Plan also identifies community parks in 29th Subarea and at 50th Street and 29th Avenue. Figure 10 illustrates these areas and others where community parks may be needed in the future.

The City should continue to secure funds for the acquisition of park land in growth areas. In addition, the City should work with developers to set aside land for community park facilities. While a single development is not likely to set aside the significant amount of land needed to accommodate a community park, the City may be able to assemble a large park through negotiations with adjacent developments.





## ***Park Opportunities***

While land dedication requirements are vital to creating parks, open space, or schools in newly developed areas, they cannot be used to correct past mistakes or “catch up” in other areas. Legally, a dedication (or exaction) must be clearly attributable or benefit the development or population that triggered it. In previously built out areas the City should work to improve access to community assets such as local parks and tot lots through incremental and targeted land acquisition.

### **Service Areas**

The areas highlighted in blue in Figure 10 indicate the service areas for the City’s existing neighborhood parks and open space areas. The residents who live in the portions of Marion that lie outside of these blue areas are beyond a park’s typical service area. The Highway 13 corridor and areas east are especially in need of new parks and this need will only grow as the population in these areas expands.

The City should identify opportunities to acquire additional open space throughout established residential areas. While unique opportunities for park land acquisition will present themselves as individual properties become available for purchase, Figure 10 identifies target areas where new park land would ideally be located. These target areas are based on the location of existing parks and neighborhoods and intended to be generalized areas where new park land would yield the highest benefit to underserved residents.



## **Trails**

The City of Marion has several off-road trails and on-street bike trails which can be used for recreational and transportation purposes. While these trails are currently disconnected from one another and scattered throughout the community, the Marion Park and Recreation Department has developed the Marion Master Trails Plan (2006) to establish an extensive and continuous recreational trails system for Marion residents to enjoy. A detailed discussion of the *Marion Master Trails Plan* can be found in the Trails and Transit Plan component of this Comprehensive Plan.

The successful implementation of the Marion Master Trail Plan will likely be achieved through a combination of public and private development. As new development is constructed in Marion, the City should require developers to build new trails linking to existing and planned paths, parks, and areas of open space. These new trails should be designed and integrated into their respective developments.

## **Greenways**

Indian Creek and Squaw Creek span the community from north to south and possess the potential to connect residential neighborhoods to the City's parks and other natural areas as well as to one another. The greenways provide opportunities for additional parks, open space areas, and trail connections throughout Marion's established neighborhoods and growth areas.

The Marion Master Trails Plan highlights these greenways as top priority trail corridors. Squaw Creek is a priority one trail that will connect Squaw Creek County Park to a new community park in northeast Marion. The plan also identifies connections to the existing Boyson Trail in the Indian Creek corridor including a link to the CeMar Trail which will connect Marion residents to Cedar Rapids trail system.



## ***Squaw Creek County Park***

One of the most significant parks in the area is Squaw Creek Park, a 692-acre park located on the City's southeastern border. Squaw Creek Park straddles a tributary of the Cedar River and is bounded by Highway 100 to the north, Highway 13 to the east, and agricultural land to the south, and portions of Squaw Ridge road to the west. Squaw Creek is a County Park overseen by the Linn County Conservation Board. The Park contains large areas of woodlands and open space and with camping grounds and an extensive network of trails. The park also borders the 18-hole Donald K. Gardner Golf Course which is operated by the City of Cedar Rapids. The main entrance for the park is located off of Highway 100.

Squaw Creek represents a regional asset to which Marion residents are fortunate to live within close proximity. Trail connections to this park would increase its benefit to local residents. The City should work with Linn County Conservation Board and LCTA to establish a continuous trail connection to Squaw Creek Park and its various trails and various facilities. The Squaw Creek Trail proposed in the Marion Master Trails Plan would establish a connection between residential areas in eastern portions of the City. The benefit of this trail would be greatly expanded with the completion of the Marion Trail project currently planned by Corridor MPO.

## ***Golf and Recreation***

Three golfing facilities contribute to the "open space" and overall "green" character of the City and provide open space and recreational amenities to residents. They include:

- Indian Creek Country Club, located off of Indian Creek Road south of 25th Avenue;
- Hunters Ridge Golf Course, which was incorporated into the design of a new subdivision in northern Marion; and
- Donald K. Gardner Golf Course which is located to the southeast of Marion adjacent to Squaw Creek County Park and operated by the City of Cedar Rapids.

Other public and private recreational facilities in the City of Marion include the Marion YMCA, Genesis indoor baseball/softball hitting/fielding facility, and Midwest Athletic Club private wellness/fitness center.

## ***Sensitive Areas***

The area within the City of Marion and its planning jurisdiction is the location of numerous environmental features that should be protected and enhanced. The Sensitive Areas identified in Figure 11 represent generalized areas where environmental features are known to be located. Sensitive Areas are defined as *floodplains and wetlands, creeks and watercourses, and wooded areas*. Though not identified in Figure 11, areas with steep slopes, which are flood prone and sensitive to erosion, should also be recognized for their sensitive nature.

In addition to the park land dedication ordinance amendment discussed previously, Sensitive Areas should be more formally identified and appropriate measures which limit their disturbance should be encouraged. A Sensitive Areas ordinance should be developed which provides specific parameters for development of the identified areas (similar to the Sensitive Lands and Features article contained Section 14-5I of the Zoning Code for Iowa City, Iowa).

### **Wetlands**

Wetlands generally occur in areas adjacent to surface watercourses and drainage ways, and in other isolated locations. They are defined by vegetation, hydric soils, and surface and groundwater conditions.

### **Floodplains**

Floodplains consist of areas near watercourses and drainage ways that have a history of flooding, or have been identified as prone to flooding.

### **Creeks and Watercourses**

There are several watercourses that flow throughout the City that contribute to the network of environmental corridors and landscape features. The most notable features include Indian Creek and Squaw Creek.

### **Wooded Areas**

Numerous mature woodlands and tree lines are located along and near the City's creeks and watercourses and in other areas of the community not yet subdivided/developed. The abundant wooded areas contribute greatly to the character and aesthetic of the City. Wooded areas often run along road frontages, screening uses found on interior portions of the sites.