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# Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Dialogue

## Community Committee Meeting

### July 30, 2020

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**PLAN FORWARD 2050**  
Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Department



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# Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

## Introduction

Over the next several months the Planning Department will be coordinating presentations with topic experts and discussions on various topics for the Community Committee meetings. This will be one of the key ways the Community Committee will have an opportunity to provide input on these topics. The discussion topic for the Community Committee meeting on July 30<sup>th</sup> will focus on parks, recreation, and open space. This document is being provided to you as a resource in advance of the July 30<sup>th</sup> meeting.

## Parks and Open Space Policies in LPlan 2040

The current City-County Comprehensive Plan, LPlan 2040, contains many parks, recreation, and open space strategies and goals. All of these strategies and goals are found in [Chapter 9, Parks, Recreation, and Open Space](#) and [Chapter 3, Environmental Resources](#). These strategies and goals lay a good foundation for development of PlanForward 2050. Some of these goals have been accomplished over the last 10 years whereas others may be removed or carried forward in the new Comprehensive Plan. While the Comprehensive Plan lists over 100 goals and strategies related to parks, recreation, and open space, a smaller sample of the strategies and goals is provided below. These will continue to be discussed and examined as PlanForward 2050 is developed.

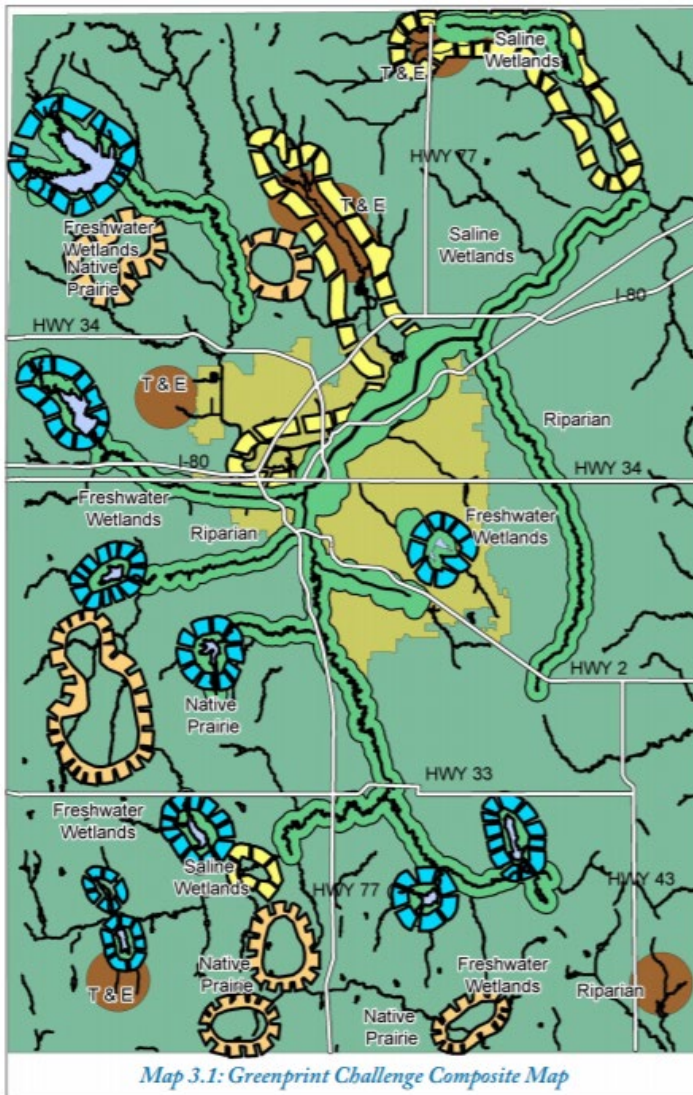
The City should work with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District (NRD) to provide recreation facilities around the Salt Valley Lakes and other natural resource sites.
Continue to enhance opportunities for interpretation of native landscapes and ecosystems indigenous to eastern Nebraska through acquisition of additional parcels for buffering and enhancement of visitor facilities at the Pioneers Park Nature Center.
Continue to develop a cooperatives relationship with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Lower Platte South Natural Resource District to provide recreation facilities within rural areas of the community.
Acquire additional land adjacent to parkland at N 98 <sup>th</sup> and Adams. This property is currently adequate for a Community Park but it is desirable to increase the size to serve a Regional Park function.
Locate Community Parks on a collector or arterial street to accommodate automobile access and parking; park sites should also be readily accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists from a commuter/recreation trail.
Provide buffering between Community Park activities and adjacent residential areas to minimize traffic and noise impacts.
Select sites for Community Parks that allow for multiple functions, such as stormwater management or habitat conservation.
Locate Neighborhood Parks close to the center of residential areas and within walking distance of a majority of residents; park sites should be readily accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists.
Develop "Sparks" such that site planning and development is coordinated, anticipating that the primary use of the Spark will be school students during the school day and related after school programming; Sparks will be available for use of neighborhood and community residents during the evening, weekend, and summer hours.
Identify opportunities to acquire and develop Neighborhood Parks in established neighborhoods that are deficient in Neighborhood Park resources.
An activity center should include a large multi-purpose space, public restrooms and shared office and storage space for community agencies and organizations offering programs in the center.
Complete a major renovation of Star City Shores, adding new features.

Construct a new Community Pool facility similar to Star City Shares at Mahoney Park.
Utilize greenway linkages for commuter/recreation trails.
Promote a diverse mix of tree species and ages in public tree plantings.
In anticipation of the arrival of the Emerald Ash Borer, work with public and private partners to develop and implement a response plan and funding strategy that would involve phased removal and replacement of ash trees and preservation of some high value ash trees.
Replace public ash trees on a one-to-one bases with a diverse mix of tree species.
Lancaster County boasts a diverse set of environmental resources and landscape types that should be respected and maintained.
Urban and rural areas should receive equal priority in the planning process as the natural resource features are found throughout Lancaster County.
Maintaining a balance between the natural and human built environment is always a delicate one. Planning policy and regulatory approaches employed in achieving the Plan’s Vision and Greenprint Challenge should strive to be effective, tempered, pragmatic, circumscribed, and respectful of private property rights.
Plants and animals do not exist in isolation. They interact with each other and reside within an integrated habitat. Implementation of LPlan 2040 needs to respect biological connections that exist today and provide responsive means for maintaining those associations.
“Green space” can come in a wide variety of forms. The policies of LPlan 2040 should strive to incorporate such uses in the full range of urban and rural landscapes.
As cities and villages expand, establishing corridors and districts of green should be part of the growth process. This often requires the advance delineation of these areas and the means for securing their ongoing protection and maintenance.
Securing the long term permanence of green space is a basic dilemma in natural resources planning. The use of “green space development incentives” (e.g., setting aside non-buildable areas, creating green space preserves, density bonuses) should be a primary consideration in implementing this plan.
Pursue the active coordination of all future trail network extensions and enhancements. The urban network of trails should connect employment centers, shopping areas, schools, and residential neighborhoods. Trails should be an integral part of the community’s green spaces and corridors.
Continue to develop a County-wide open space plan.
Encourage the retention of linear connections of green spaces wherever possible. Efforts should be made to preserve small stream corridors throughout future developments.
Pursue greenways connecting urban and rural areas. Such corridors should follow stream courses and connect valuable natural resource areas.
Continue the Pioneers Park trail network along Haines Branch to connect with Conestoga Lake and then continue south by the Village of Denton and on to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. These connections would form a corridor encompassing over 2,000 acres of native prairie and two premier prairie education centers – Pioneers Park Nature Center and Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center.

## Parks and Recreation 10 Year Facilities Plan

[The Parks and Recreation 10-Year Facilities Plan](#) is updated every two years prior to preparation of the City operating budget and capital improvement program. Information from the facilities plan is used in developing the Department’s funding request for capital improvements. The facilities plan is organized by quadrants of the city that correlate with the Department’s park maintenance districts. The plan encompasses all facilities managed by the Parks and Recreation Department including parks, trails, public trees, public gardens, pool, recreation centers, and golf courses. An emphasis of the plan is “taking care of what we have” identifying needed repair and replacement of current facilities to keep the open and available to the community. New neighborhood parks and trails in response to community growth to be funded through impact fees collected on construction of new homes are included in the facilities plan. New recreation opportunities are also identified within the facilities plan.

## Greenprint Challenge



[The Greenprint Challenge](#) is an integral part of an overall long-range planning effort designed to provide the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County with an approach for sound and sensitive urban and rural development. This approach weaves the community's desire for maintaining and enhancing the long term ecological and economic benefits that derive from our natural and historic cultural environment into our community's planning and implementation process.

Suitable water and air quality, flood plain governance, habitat protection, and soils management all contribute to a vigorous ecosystem. Proper land use planning and plan implementation can also aid in maintaining an overall healthy natural system.

The Greenprint Challenge looks beyond single issues and functions to incorporate common principles of ecological design and considers the multiple attributes and their interactions across various landscapes. The ultimate implementation of the Greenprint Challenge is fundamental in preserving and enhancing the quality of life through the community. Such an integrated system can highlight and enhance natural systems and provide significant social and economic benefit.

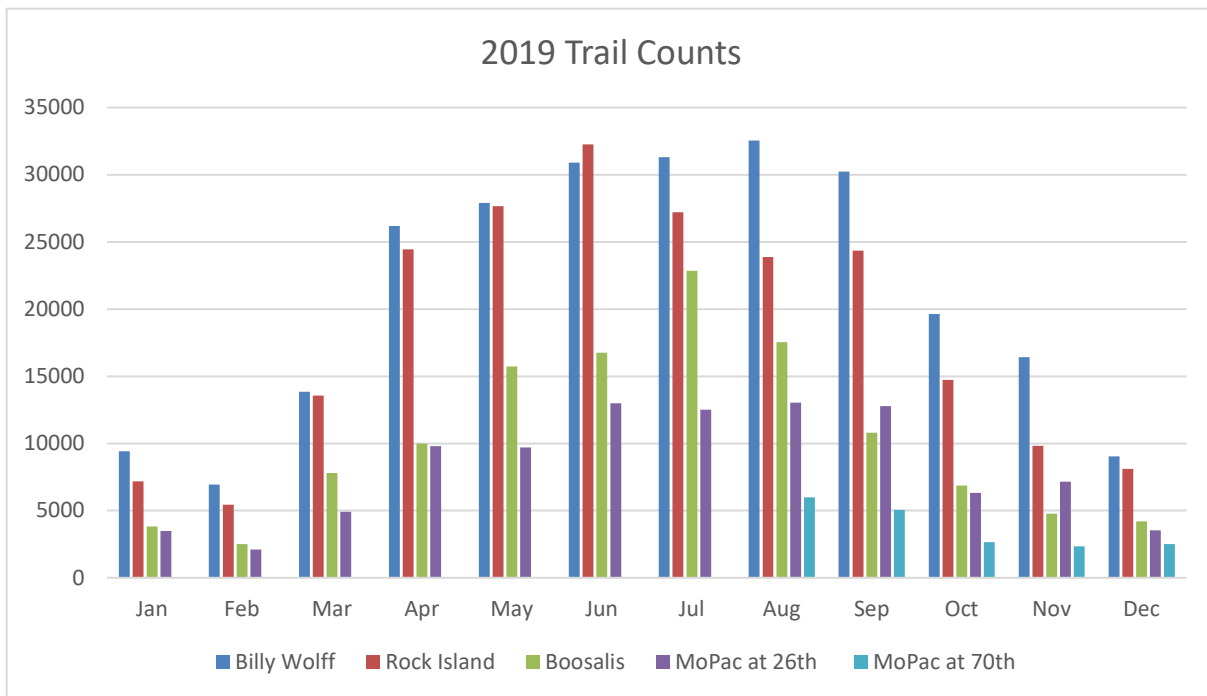
## Emerald Ash Borer

The Emerald Ash Borer is a small, metallic-green beetle that is about ½" in length. The larvae feed on the inner bark of ash trees, disrupting the tree's ability to transport water and nutrients. Emerald Ash Borer was confirmed in Lincoln when it was located in a trap within the city limits in August 2018. Of almost 112,400 planted public trees (along streets, in parks and golf courses), nearly 14,150 are ash and does not include trees on private property. The City of Lincoln, in conjunction with the USDA-APHIS and the Nebraska Forest Service Best Management Practices have prepared an [EAB Response and Recovery Plan](#).

## Trails

Partnership for a Healthy Lincoln (PHL) approached the City about additional funding that could be used for equipment purchase. The City partnered with PHL and [Great Plains Trails Network](#) (GPTN) to purchase one mobile counter and four permanent counters. The mobile counter was purchased in the fall of 2015. The mobile trail counter is intended to be used for special events (i.e. Streets Alive, etc.) and weeklong counts along the trails network that are not currently served by permanent counters. The four permanent counters were added to the system in 2017, bringing the total number of permanent counters on the trail system to five.

- The Rock Island Trail Counter was installed and has been recording users since July 2014. In 2019, the Rock Island Trail Counter recorded 218,634 users.
- The Billy Wolff Trail Counter was installed and has been recording users since August 2017. In 2019, the Billy Wolff Trail Counter recorded 254,370 users.
- The Helen Boosalis Trail Counter was installed and has been recording users since October 2017. In 2019, the Helen Boosalis Trail Counter recorded 123,628 users.
- The MoPac West Trail Counter was installed in August 2017. In 2019, the counter recorded 98,351 users.
- The MoPac East Trail Counter was installed in August 2017. In 2018, the MoPac East Trail Counter was under maintenance from January through July, The rest of the year, the counter recorded 18,565 users.



## Lincoln Parks Foundation

As a non-profit organization, the [Lincoln Parks Foundation](#) works in partnership with the Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department. The Lincoln Parks Foundation's sole mission is to help sustain and improve the parks and recreation facilities and programs, beyond what city tax dollars provide.

Past successful campaigns include a \$1.7 million renovation Sunken Gardens, a \$350,00 renovation of Antelope Park Rose Garden, a \$4.75 million capital campaign for Union Plaza, a \$2.2 million renovation of historic Sherman Field, and a \$9.6 million capital campaign to Revitalize Nebraska’s Centennial Mall. Current projects include Mini Grants for neighborhood parks, Parker Pals scholarships for children to attend recreation center programs and swimming lessons, a \$5.6 million campaign to renovate Woods Tennis Center, and the development of a tall grass Prairie Corridor on Haines Branch.

## Community Indicators Report

The Planning Department publishes an annual report known as the [Community Indicators Report](#). This report is used to evaluate and monitor changes in the community and assess if assumptions in the Comprehensive Plan continue to be valid. The report is divided into six major areas of interest, including Recreation. A sample of the key recreation indicators are provided below, and you can view the full report online.

In 2019, about 83.7 percent of homes (102,724) were located within a 10 minute walk of a City park facility or open area. There were 16.3 percent of homes (20,011) located beyond a 10 minute walking distance.
In 2019, the City of Lincoln had 161 parks and recreation facilities on 7,389 acres of parkland and open space. This figure includes 5 golf courses on 781 acres of land.

## Staff Discussions

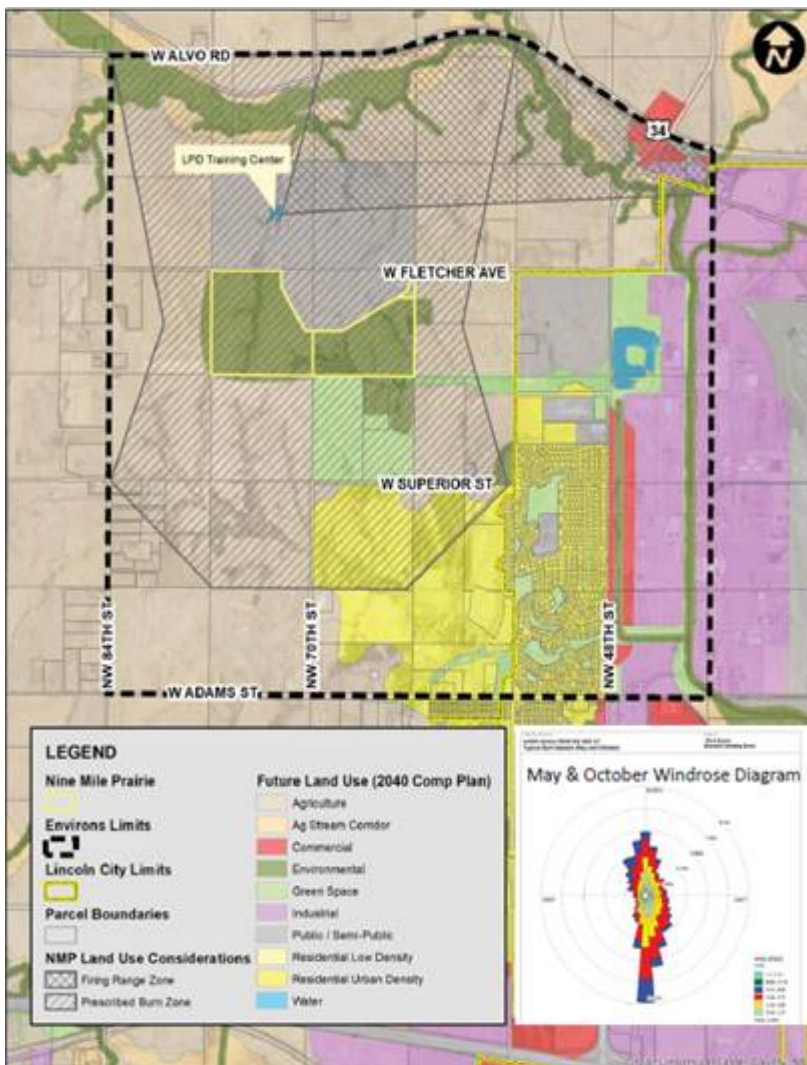
Planning Department staff began engaging with various City and County Departments in 2019 to discuss the upcoming Comprehensive Plan Update. Below is a summary of staff comments that relate to parks, recreation, and open space.

Reviewing the possibility of installing a bike park with jumps and tracks.
Discuss the option of a plant conservatory similar to Lauritzen Gardens in Omaha.
Keep an eye on new and emerging trends in sports. Currently adventure sports are becoming more popular.
There will need to be a discussion about adding another community park while looking to 2050.
There may be an opportunity for a new community park, and potentially a regional park, in the Stevens Creek area.
Jensen Park could be the 6 <sup>th</sup> regional park in the community.
Parks has an overall goal to have more baseball and softball fields and a tournament baseball facility in the Oak Lake area.
Parks is considering a second aquatic facility.
Continue to develop multiple use facilities between schools, parks, and the YMCA.
Continue planning and management of urban forest.
Continue goal to have trails within 1 mile of every house.
Evaluate street design to slow traffic on neighborhood streets in other ways than just breaking up streets. This makes it difficult for bicyclists and other modes to pass through neighborhoods.
Host a community discussion on another Parks Quality of Life Bond to use for maintenance, repair, and upgrades of existing facilities, as well as installation of new parks and trails in new growth areas.
Discuss the idea of water trails in the community. This may require a need to change state law.
Continue the Prairie in the Parks initiative.

## Prairie Corridor on Haines Branch

The [Prairie Corridor on Haines Branch](#) is a tallgrass prairie passage and trail that will build on our nationally recognized trail and greenway system and will link two of Lincoln and Lancaster County’s premier environmental resource and education centers. It will follow the Haines Branch of Salt Creek from the Pioneers Park Nature Center, to the Conestoga Lake State Recreation Area, extend down through the Village of Denton and on to the Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. The Corridor will support economic development, build on Lincoln’s nationally recognized trail system, support environmental education and promote the enhancement and preservation of one of Nebraska’s most valuable resources—tallgrass prairie.

## Nine-mile Prairie



The original tallgrass prairie stretched from Manitoba to Texas and east to Indiana covering approximately 200 million acres. According to the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project (2011), less than 1% of the original tallgrass prairie area remains today in the continental U.S. and about 2% in Nebraska in remnant pieces of 80 acres or less making [Nine Mile Prairie](#) (NMP) an outlier with an area of 230-acres. NMP and surrounding environs are home to a wide variety of tallgrass prairie plants and animal species that constitute a subset of Nebraska species statewide. Based on research findings, NMP itself is home to over a quarter of the plant diversity across Nebraska and one-fifth of the bird species.

The NMP master plan goal is to encourage and facilitate long-range land management strategies that are compatible with tallgrass prairie conservation and protection for NMP and surrounding area. Furthermore, the planning effort strives to instill an extended management and utilization philosophy in the surrounding public and private-owned landscape that creates a lasting land buffer around NMP. This also includes working with willing landowners within the NMP Environs to manage, protect and conserve tallgrass prairie on their respective properties.

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## Spring Creek Prairie

Audubon established Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center in 1998 on the site of the former O'Brien ranch approximately 20 minutes southwest of Lincoln, Nebraska (3 miles south of Denton). The O'Brien family had operated the property as a farm and ranch from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the time of Audubon's purchase of the land.

[Spring Creek Prairie \(SCP\)](#) is comprised of 850 acres of tallgrass prairie, spring fed wetlands and native woodlands. A sustainably built visitor center was constructed in 2006 and is open to the public year round. Over 600 acres of SCP is virgin tallgrass prairie with the remaining prairie acres in some stage of restoration.

SCP is part of a larger almost 3000 acres tallgrass prairie landscape in private and public ownership. This is one of the largest remaining tracts of tallgrass prairie in Nebraska. Tallgrass prairie is one of the world's most threatened ecosystems with only 2% of tallgrass prairie remaining in the world – that number is consistent with the percentage remaining in Nebraska. More than 235 species of birds, 370 species of plants and multiple other wildlife have been documented at SCP. Historic 19<sup>th</sup>-century wagon ruts from a cutoff to the Oregon Trail also remain visible on the property.

This 850-acre tallgrass prairie sanctuary offers over three miles of walking trails enjoyed by more than 12,000 visitors annually. SCP hosts multiple youth education programs for public and private schools and homeschools within southeast Nebraska. Special events and public programs are held throughout the year as well both at Spring Creek and in local communities.

Spring Creek Prairie also works with many partner organizations and local landowners conduct prescribed fire and other key management practices to sustain the health and diversity of the prairie and the corresponding habitat. SCP also uses grazing from cattle and haying in rotation to support prairie health.

Spring Creek Prairie is also one of the four primary partners, and the southernmost trailhead, of the Prairie Corridor on Haines Branch. The Prairie Corridor project is a long term project focused on linking Pioneers Park Nature Center to Spring Creek Prairie via hiker bike trail as well as promoting the conservation or restoration of tallgrass prairie between PPNC, SCP, and Conestoga Lake.

## Lower Platte South Natural Resources District

The [Lower Platte South Natural Resources District](#) (LPSNRD) operates and maintains 200 flood control dams, 13 miles of levees, approximately 12 miles of urban stream channels, 50 miles of trails, 9 wildlife management areas, 11 public wetlands, and monitors ground water quantity and quality. This is done in a six county area of southeastern Nebraska in nearly one million acres of land. LPSNRD also provides project planning and management for additional projects/studies, environmental education, and administers programs that provide annually over \$1M in cost-share assistance to landowners to install best management practices (terracing, meters, buffer strips, well decommissioning, etc.) to improve water quality and protect natural resources.

LPSNRD has a history of innovation and leadership; for example, being among the first of the NRDs to utilize conservation easements as a resources protection tool, to develop and manage recreational trails, to acquire and restore wetlands, and to partner with a municipality (City of Lincoln) in stormwater quality and quantity management. The successful implementation of the programs and projects is due in large part to a commitment of cooperation and collaboration with other local, state, and federal agencies and private organizations and individuals.



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## Prairie Pines

In 1959, University of Nebraska, Lincoln (UNL) Forestry Assoc. Professor Walter Thaine Bagley and wife Virginia purchased the 145 acre row crop farm with a 10 acre native prairie, that is now the [Prairie Pines Nature Preserve](#). They transformed the farm to woodlands, windbreaks, grassland and wildlife habitat with diverse trees, an arboretum and reclaimed grassland. It became the first “choose-and-cut” Christmas tree farm, the first home for Raptor Recovery, and the first Conservation Easement in Nebraska. Prairie Pines was donated to the University of Nebraska Foundation in 1992 to be “protected forever as a place that would provide a pleasant habitat for all beings – plant and animal.” The Prairie Pines mission is to sustain a habitat for all living things through conservation, education and experience to promote a lasting connection with the natural world and its resources.

Prairie Pines is home to a rich collection of natural resources in its plants and wildlife. That richness is amplified by the restorative, aesthetic and educational experiences to be found. It is a place for wildlife to exist and for humans to discover their place and duty in the natural world, a world that is ever present yet ever changing and inviting discovery. The arboretum and woodland represent a fifty year effort by the Bagleys to create a forest in their lifetime. Planted almost exclusively from seed or seedling, the tree success demonstrates the benefit of planting trees as communities rather than individuals.

Prairie Pines is a collaboration of organizations working together to honor the efforts to the Bagleys. It is owned by the University of Nebraska Foundation, leased by the University Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources and physically managed by the Nebraska Forest Service. The Prairie Pines Partners 501(c)(3) nonprofit is involved in promoting contact with nature, providing nature-based and natural resource conservation programming, events and increasing public access to the site. Prairie Pines is open to the public every Saturday with plans to expand access in the future. It features many grassed trails and interpretive signage. The proposed Prairie Pines Connector Trail is planned to connect it to the Murdock Trail. This will provide non-motorized access to the site and extend the Lincoln trail system.

## Parks, Recreation, and Open Space in Other Comp Plans

Planning staff have been researching what innovative practices for parks, recreation, and open space are happening in other cities. Some sample goals and priorities from other cities’ comprehensive plans are listed below. You can also view the full documents by clicking on the links that are provided.

### Minneapolis, MN Comprehensive Plan

The Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan includes 13 policies on parks and open space. These policies frame numerous action items that evaluate the need for new parks and access to parks. Other policies encourage sustainable water system management, stormwater management, and preserving and enhancing public lakes and waterways. Some of the key action items are included below, and you can also view the [Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan online](#).

Identify parts of the city that have long lacked adequate accessibility to parks as well as areas in need of open spaces to support newly-emerging residential neighborhoods and identify new tools to support equitable park access.
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Ensure in locations where park gaps overlap with City-identified priority areas for coordinated development activities, that implementation planning includes conceptual design and funding strategies for new parks.
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Continue to coordinate capital improvement planning between the City and Park Board in order to improve pedestrian and bicycle connections to and within parks.
Consider and address physical barriers to park access, such as busy streets, lack of public transit options, and unsafe pedestrian crossings, when conducting citywide transportation planning.
Discourage reduction to existing access to park amenities and encourage proactive mitigation of negative impacts to said potential reductions.
Consider climate forecasts to ensure that infrastructure and water quality investments are informed by climate projections.
Educate and motivate individuals and business owners to reduce negative impacts of road salt on water resources, soil, and drinking water.
Regulate development of land adjacent to public waters in a manner that preserves and enhances the quality of surface waters while also preserving their economic and natural environmental value.
Recognize and promote the value of the built environment and landscape as an asset that enhances community identity and a sense of place.
Consider design approaches that encourage creative solutions for transitions between varying intensities of building types and land uses.
Protect aquatic habitat from invasive species that may pose an economic, water quality or public health issue.
Increase habitat and natural areas around public stormwater infrastructure and natural water bodies while maintaining and prioritizing stormwater function and controlling invasive species through an integrated pest management program.

## Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Comprehensive Plan

The Oklahoma City Comprehensive plan, planokc, is organized in a hierarchy with the broadest category being “Big Ideas” that define the overall direction of the plan. One of the seven Big Ideas is “Natural Character.” This big idea is explained below, and the entire [planokc](#) can be viewed online.



### Natural Character

PRESERVE RURAL CHARACTER AND NATURAL RESOURCES.

Our rivers, watercourses, lakes, woodlands, prairies, and sky are major assets that are highly valued by citizens and vital to the environment and to our physical and mental health.

We need to recognize the importance of these resources, protect them as we develop, and use regulations and incentives that allow the city to grow without compromising the integrity of our natural and rural areas.

## Madison, WI Comprehensive Plan

The Madison, WI Comprehensive Plan is organized by topic areas, strategies and action items. The topic of Green and Resilient includes 9 strategies that are listed below. The complete [Madison Comprehensive Plan](#) is also available for viewing online.

Protect Madison’s water supply and infrastructure to provide safe, clean drinking water.
Improve lake and stream water quality.
Increase the use and accessibility of energy efficiency upgrades and renewable energy.

Acquire parkland and upgrade park facilities to accommodate more diverse activities and gatherings.
Improve and preserve urban biodiversity through an interconnected greenway and habitat system.
Develop a healthy and diverse urban tree canopy.
Improve public access to the lakes.
Reduce landfilled waste.
Support sustainable farming and gardening practices that protect the ecosystem and public health.

## New Trends

### Bike Park



A bike park typically is a network of trails that takes advantage of the natural elevation for biking, typically mountain biking. Some bike parks incorporate pump tracks which is a circuit of rollers, banked turns and features designed to be ridden completely by riders “pumping” – generating momentum by up and down body movements, instead of pedaling or pushing.

### Adventure Sports



Adventure sports are activities perceived as involving a higher degree of risk. These activities often involve speed, height, a high level of physical exertion and highly specialized gear. These include but are not limited to zip lines, climbing facilities, and adventure runs.

### Technology

Technology has had an impact on parks, recreation, and open space. Apps and games like Pokemon Go have helped get people out exploring the parks and trails within the community.