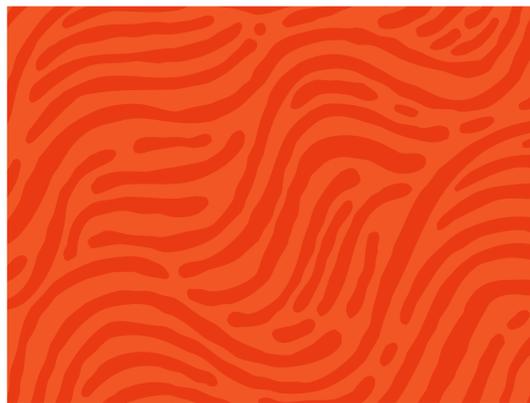


Dubuque Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan

Executive Summary

February 2026



Y(OUR) STORY

Dubuque
Parks and Recreation
Comprehensive Plan

THE CITY OF
DUBUQUE
Masterpiece on the Mississippi

INTRODUCTION

The Dubuque Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan's purpose is to offer strategies that provide guidance in order to meet the needs of current and future City of Dubuque residents. Dubuque city government's mission is to deliver excellent municipal services that support urban living; contribute to an equitable, sustainable city; plan for the community's future; and facilitate access to critical human services. The plan defines opportunities, challenges, and recommendations for the next 10 years and beyond. The second phase of community feedback received input on the draft plan from over 360 people.

The theme of the plan is Y(O)ur Story, based on the idea that a well-crafted Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan tells the story of a city, where we were, where we are, and where we are going. Over the past 8 months, an extensive outreach effort was conducted, including meetings with the community, numerous stakeholder organizations, user groups, and City leaders. In-person opportunities for input were conducted, a statistically-valid survey was administered, and an interactive project-dedicated website collected online feedback. Community participation is critical to the success of the plan and thousands of residents shared their thoughts to craft the collective story of Dubuque Parks and Recreation.

The Master Plan enables the City to continue telling this story and continue engaging in a public process to ensure future parks and recreation priorities and goals are resident driven and meet the community's evolving demands over the next decade. To tell this story, the plan has been organized around the following goals:

-  **Creating a comprehensive and compelling vision and direction for Parks and Recreation**
-  **Identifying our community's needs and priorities regarding our city's facilities, programs, parks, and services**
-  **Addressing land use planning, community needs and desires, environmental management, and resource assessment**
-  **Gaining understanding of current and desired levels of service and facilities in order to demonstrate more equitable services and opportunities**
-  **Identifying, assessing, and prioritizing the deferred maintenance of parks, pools, and facilities**
-  **Evaluating operations and maintenance practices and staffing with an aim to generate long-term sustainability and resilience benefits**

CRAFTING THE STORY

Y(O)ur Story, the city's Comprehensive Parks and Recreation master plan to date, included a robust community engagement strategy that resulted in thousands of community inputs. The values, goals, and recommendations that will be put forward by this plan will be truly shaped by the community. It is clear the City of Dubuque residents value and recognize the importance of parks and recreation. Dubuque's strong parks and recreation system, ample opportunities to connect with nature, and riverfront location, sets it apart from neighboring cities and provides the opportunity for Dubuque to be known as a great parks and recreation city. The development of this plan lays the groundwork to reinvigorate the parks system, continue a legacy of great parks and open spaces, recreation, and utilize parks, recreation, and open spaces as a catalyst for growth and economic development.

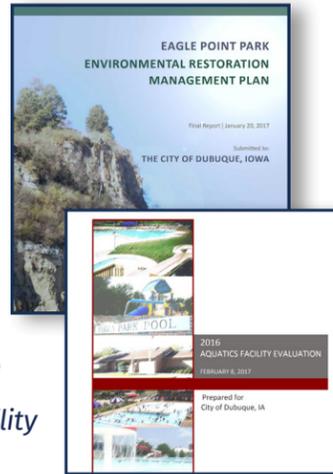
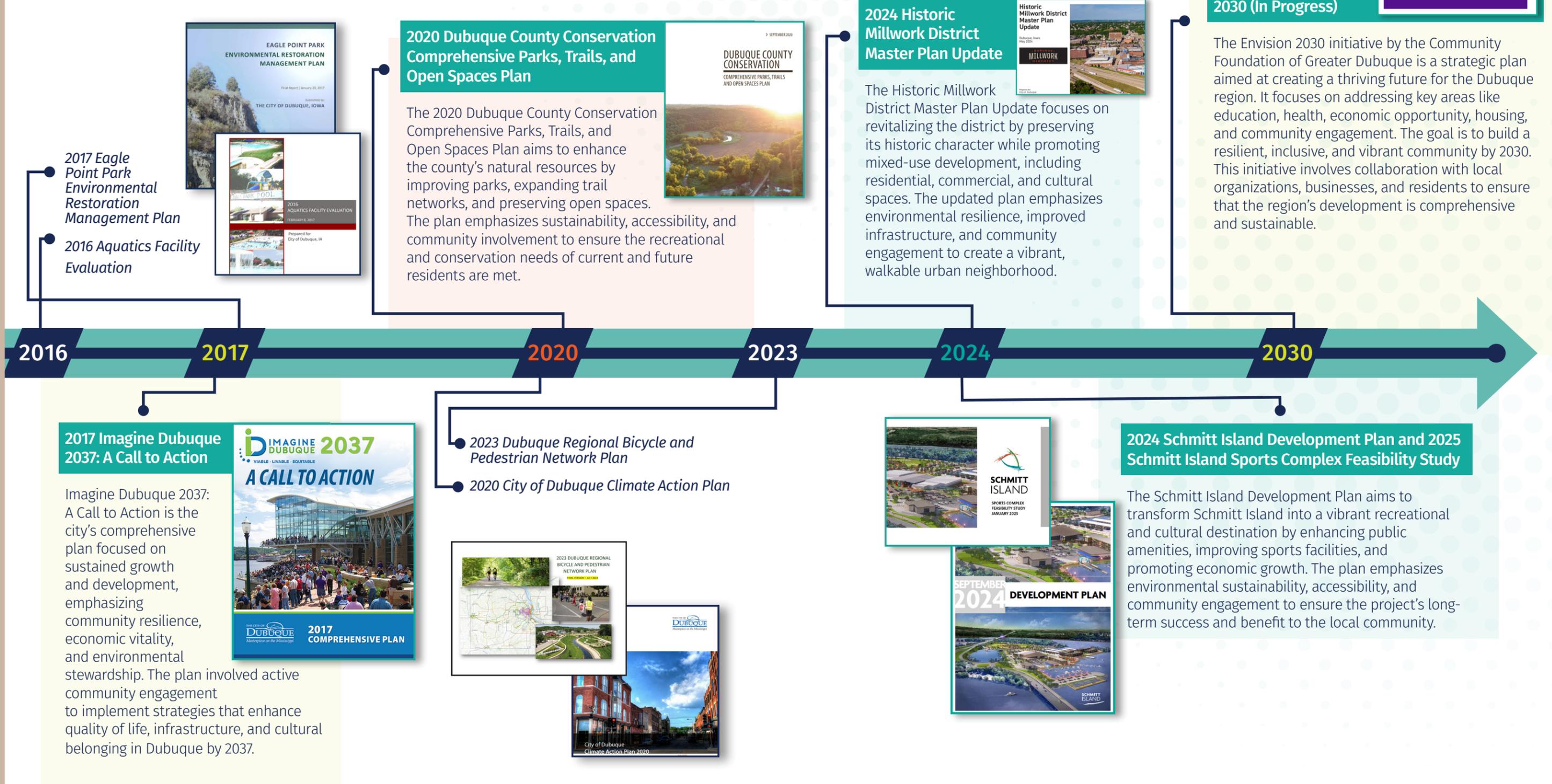
A CITY OF PARTNERSHIPS

Dubuque delivers its residents exceptional amenities and experiences that exceed expectations given its size and population. This is largely due to long-standing and successful partnerships. For decades, Parks and Recreation has sought out creative ways to deliver recreation opportunities to the community utilizing their limited resources, facilities, and funding to their full extent. To this day, the City of Dubuque and its residents have been greatly benefiting from these partnerships and solution-based decisions. Parks and Recreation leverages numerous partnerships, internally and externally, that allow the City to be good stewards of the land, a good neighbor, beautify the city, host regional-scale events, and utilize indoor facilities for programs. The City has a responsibility to preserve, maintain, and advance these partnerships while also recognizing the limitations of these partnerships and, in some cases, the need for parks and recreation dedicated facilities and additional staff. Parks and Recreation continues to build positive partnerships and seek out others with similar goals. Residents support these existing partnerships and seeking new partnerships to improve the parks and recreation system.



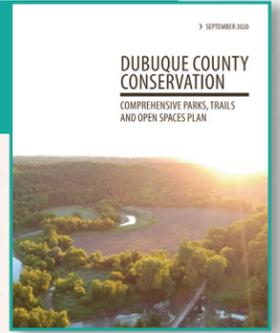
ALIGNMENT WITH KEY PLANNING DOCUMENTS

Recent planning efforts by Dubuque and its key partners demonstrate the City's commitment to planning for a successful future. This plan aims to align its values, goals, strategies, and recommendations in the context of the following key planning documents relating to parks and recreation.



2020 Dubuque County Conservation Comprehensive Parks, Trails, and Open Spaces Plan

The 2020 Dubuque County Conservation Comprehensive Parks, Trails, and Open Spaces Plan aims to enhance the county's natural resources by improving parks, expanding trail networks, and preserving open spaces. The plan emphasizes sustainability, accessibility, and community involvement to ensure the recreational and conservation needs of current and future residents are met.



2024 Historic Millwork District Master Plan Update

The Historic Millwork District Master Plan Update focuses on revitalizing the district by preserving its historic character while promoting mixed-use development, including residential, commercial, and cultural spaces. The updated plan emphasizes environmental resilience, improved infrastructure, and community engagement to create a vibrant, walkable urban neighborhood.



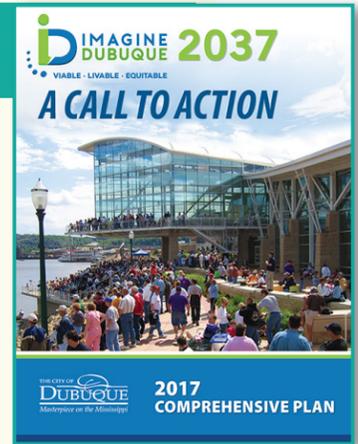
Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque Envision 2030 (In Progress)



The Envision 2030 initiative by the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque is a strategic plan aimed at creating a thriving future for the Dubuque region. It focuses on addressing key areas like education, health, economic opportunity, housing, and community engagement. The goal is to build a resilient, inclusive, and vibrant community by 2030. This initiative involves collaboration with local organizations, businesses, and residents to ensure that the region's development is comprehensive and sustainable.

2017 Imagine Dubuque 2037: A Call to Action

Imagine Dubuque 2037: A Call to Action is the city's comprehensive plan focused on sustained growth and development, emphasizing community resilience, economic vitality, and environmental stewardship. The plan involved active community engagement to implement strategies that enhance quality of life, infrastructure, and cultural belonging in Dubuque by 2037.

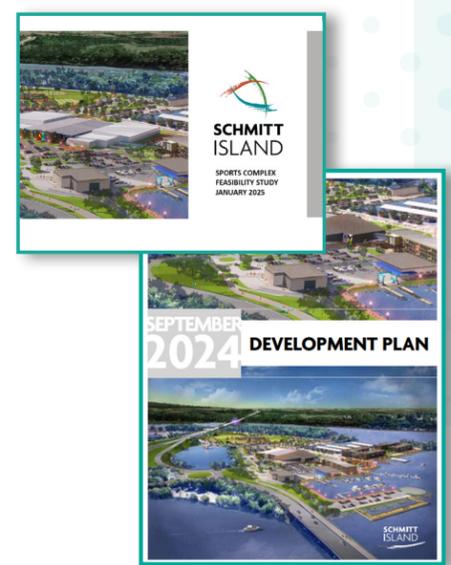


- 2023 Dubuque Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Network Plan
- 2020 City of Dubuque Climate Action Plan



2024 Schmitt Island Development Plan and 2025 Schmitt Island Sports Complex Feasibility Study

The Schmitt Island Development Plan aims to transform Schmitt Island into a vibrant recreational and cultural destination by enhancing public amenities, improving sports facilities, and promoting economic growth. The plan emphasizes environmental sustainability, accessibility, and community engagement to ensure the project's long-term success and benefit to the local community.



DUBUQUE PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

Who We Are...



Mission Statement

Dubuque Parks and Recreation is dedicated to providing safe, accessible, and well-maintained parks, recreation programs, and outdoor spaces. We aim to foster community, promote healthy lifestyles, and preserve natural resources for all people and future generations.



Vision

To create and maintain vibrant community spaces and memorable experiences that improve the lives of all residents through opportunity and connection.

Guiding Principles

Community Belonging and Connection

Our programs, spaces, and services strengthen the bonds between neighbors through shared experiences and ensuring residents feel heard and valued.

Excellence in Care and Maintenance

We take pride in clean, safe, and well-maintained parks and facilities, reflecting our respect for both our system and the people who use it.

Lifelong Enjoyment and Discovery

We create opportunities for recreation, learning, and wellness at every age — from childhood adventures to lifelong passions.

Community Engagement and Ownership

We ensure our improvements are guided by active community participation and transparent processes. We empower residents to take ownership of their public spaces, ensuring our parks remain welcoming, dynamic, and responsive to community needs.

Viability and Innovation

We embrace sustainable and fiscally responsible practices and forward-thinking solutions to meet today's needs without compromising tomorrow's resources.

Active Stewardship

We protect and preserve the natural landscapes and amenities that make our city unique ensuring their beauty and vitality for generations to come.

Pride of Place

We foster a deep sense of local pride — where every playground, trail, and park tells the story of our region's natural heritage and resilient spirit



PARKS AND RECREATION

The Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for a number of diverse offerings and elements. The department supports the following functions:



*Note: Not included in the master plan effort but a part of the Parks and Recreation Department is Grand River Center, Five Flags Civic Center, and ImOn Arena.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND TRENDS ASSESSMENT

Parks and recreation services will need to strategically invest, develop, and maintain parks and recreation facilities in relation to current and future resident needs and trends.

Recreation Trends

- The activities with the highest participation rates in Dubuque include walking for exercise, hiking, and swimming
- Dubuquers participated in fishing more than the national average. Less active youth and seniors are also most likely to participate in fishing as a means to get active.

PARKS AND RECREATION PRIORITY ASSESSMENT



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

The Y(O)ur Story Dubuque Parks and Recreation Master Plan utilized a comprehensive and widespread process to engage the community, understand needs, and analyze results of community feedback. The Master Plan's robust outreach process gathered input from staff, stakeholders, user groups, and thousands of residents to obtain diverse and well-rounded feedback on Dubuque Parks and Recreation currently and what opportunities exist for the future. A second phase included sharing a draft of the master plan with the community for feedback.

Focus Groups and User Groups

In addition to touch points with the public via pop-up events, social media, public meetings, website visits, and intercept feedback, groups that provided input include, but are not limited to, the following:

Audubon Society	Dubuque Zoo Boosters
Black Men Coalition	Friends of the Mines of Spain
City Departments	Greater Dubuque Development Corporation
Dream Center	Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Dubuque Arboretum Board	Montessori School
Dubuque Area Land and Water Legacy	Multicultural Family Center
Dubuque Community School District	NAACP
Dubuque County Conservation	Neighborhood Groups
Dubuque Girls Independent League	Program Partners
Dubuque Main Street	Sierra Club
Dubuque Pony League	Tri-State Trail Vision
Dubuque Trees Forever	Youth Sports Groups

*These are not all groups, but represent a cross-section of those who were contacted and participated.

Project Dedicated Website

The interactive, project-dedicated website is yourstorydubuque.com. The website provides updates on the project, events where community members can provide input, and interactive tools that allowed for one or multiple methods of participation. Visitors were encouraged to provide input utilizing the following website tools:

An electronic survey	Help determine priorities with an interactive budgeting tool
Interactive mapping tool	Submit general comments or inquiries
Share your big idea on a public forum	

Statistically Valid Survey

A statistically valid survey is one that uses proper sampling techniques to ensure that the results accurately and proportionally represent the entire City of Dubuque population demographically. Performing this type of survey helps in making informed decisions by providing reliable and unbiased data insights.

The community engagement results of the statistically valid survey and the website survey were incredibly well aligned, meaning the community is unified in the perception of the top capital needs and programming needs for Dubuque Parks and Recreation. This alignment also indicates the website survey results were not highly influenced by one specific special interest group and truly reflect the opinion of the broader community.

Community Outreach

The community engagement process prioritized meeting residents where they are and ensuring multiple ways to participate and provide feedback for the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The total number of inputs represents the number of touches with the community through website comments, business cards, survey responses, dotocracy votes, and other engagements. The estimated number of participants that provided feedback is 12,598.

Total
Inputs
35,384

Estimated Participants: 12,598





KEY CAPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND FUNDING SUPPORT

Dubuque residents recognize the importance of a strong parks and recreation system and largely support dedicating capital funding to improve and increase parks and recreation facilities.

97% of residents support improving existing park infrastructure

96% of residents support improving existing large community parks

94% of residents support improving existing swimming pools

93% of residents support improving existing nature preserves

92% of residents support improving existing paved walking and biking trails

90% of residents support improving existing small neighborhood parks

88% of residents support developing new trails that connect to existing trails

88% of residents support the development of new indoor recreation centers

87% of residents support improving existing youth sports fields

**data source: statistically valid survey*

A detailed inventory and existing conditions assessment has been completed at all parks within the system. A detailed report will be provided as part of the master plan document. Infrastructure and major amenities at many parks in the system were improved in the early 1990s or prior. They have reached or are rapidly approaching the need for lifecycle replacement. Based on the high-priority capital needs, some parks and facilities would require reimagining and new amenities to meet current and future user needs.

High-Priority CAPITAL NEEDS

Statistically-Valid Survey:

1. Aquatic/Pool Facilities
2. Multi-Use Paths and Trails
3. Walking/Running Track
4. Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitat
5. Fitness/Exercise Facilities (Indoor)
6. Recreation/Community Center
7. Pavilions/Picnic Shelters
8. Splash Pads
9. Off-leash Dog Parks
10. Fishing Areas

Website and Intercept Surveys:

1. Aquatic/Pool Facilities
2. Multi-Use Paths and Trails
3. Splash Pads
4. Recreation/Community Center
5. Off-Leash Dog Parks
6. Campsites
7. Playground Equipment (Outdoor)
8. Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitat
9. Multi-Use Fields
10. Walking/Running Track



RECREATION PROGRAM ANALYSIS

The Recreation Program Analysis studied the Department’s recreation program offerings to evaluate the effectiveness of its community recreation facilities and services. The evaluation aimed to answer key questions about the City’s programs and services, such as:

- What are the core programs, and do they align with community desires?
- Does the mix of recreation programs meet community needs?
- What challenges might prevent the City from delivering high-quality programs/services?
- Does the City allocate an appropriate number of resources to recreation?

High-Priority PROGRAM NEEDS

Statistically-Valid Survey:

1. Hobby/Interest Classes
2. Fitness and Wellness Classes
3. Art Programs
4. Free/Low-Cost Special Events
5. Outdoor Fitness Programs
6. Nature/Environmental Education
7. Senior Programs
8. Water Fitness Classes
9. Education Classes/Lectures
10. Adult Sports

Website and Intercept Surveys:

1. Free/Low-Cost Special Events
2. Nature/Environmental Education
3. Learn-to-Swim Programs
4. Youth Sports
5. Art Programs
6. Outdoor Fitness Programs
7. Pickleball Lessons/Leagues
8. Youth Day Camps
9. Adaptive Recreation Programs
10. Adult Sports

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE ASSESSMENT

The organization structure assessment evaluates the Department’s organizational and management structure, staffing, and financial investment in parks and recreation to assess its effectiveness and efficiency. Some staffing needs that have come from the assessment include:

Increase recreation programming staff to increase capacity for delivering program offerings. These include hobby/interest classes, more diverse programs for all ages, special events, and venue identification for programs.

Create a dedicated marketing role responsible for educating residents and other interested parties on the facilities, programming, and services offered by Dubuque Parks and Recreation. Most residents surveyed do not participate in parks and recreation activities because they do not know what is offered.

The city’s parks assets have evolved and grown at a pace faster than the city has hired additional full-time employees (FTEs) needed to maintain these spaces. Adding staffing and resources for the adequate maintenance of parks will be critical for the system moving forward. Comparative analysis with the National Recreation and Parks Association has been completed.

MAJOR PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Parks

Re-classify Eagle Point Park to a regional park

Focus investment on planning and providing further amenities at regional and community parks

Create a site-specific master plan for Eagle Point Park

Create a dedicated “Friends of” group to assist in advocacy, volunteer coordination, and fundraising

Create and maintain a parks infrastructure asset replacement plan

Recreation

Revitalize or create a new outdoor aquatic facility

Conduct a recreation center master plan for a new recreation facility

Conduct a fee study to determine competitive and accessible program fees

Start a formal special events program to expand opportunities directly through Parks and Recreation

Further activate the Port of Dubuque Marina by adding a boat ramp

Develop a practice facility at Bunker Hill Golf Course

Trails and Connectivity

Create a trail connection from city to landmarks like Mines of Spain

Conduct an alignment study to expand and further connect the existing trail network

Establish a trail connection between Eagle Point Park and Four Mounds

Further Mississippi River riverfront connections

Extend Heritage Trail connectivity

Open Spaces and Natural Resources

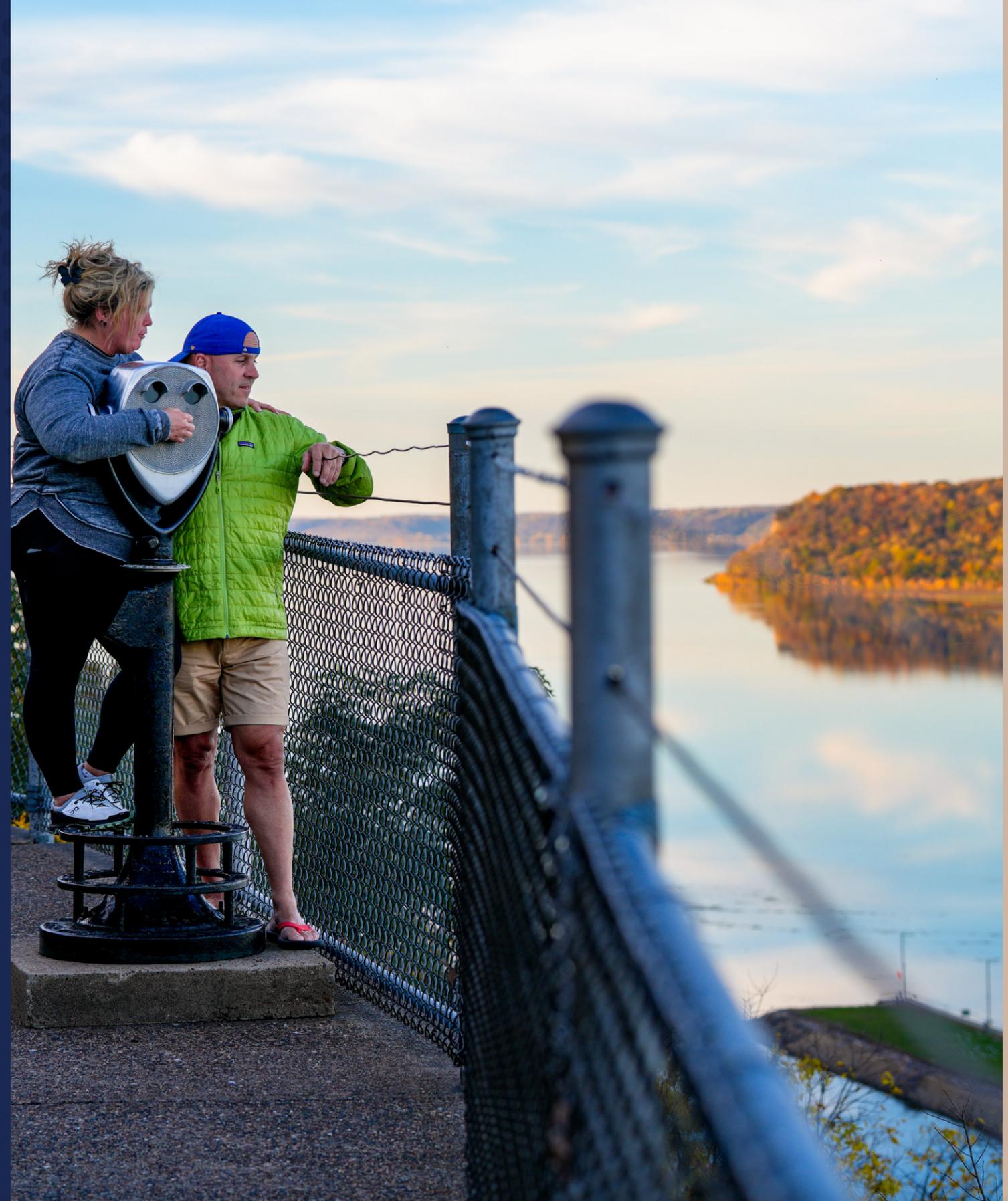
Add interpretive signage to prairie and forested areas in parks to further educate visitors

Adopt and regularly update a comprehensive tree program and urban forestry plan that invests heavily in new tree plantings and adaptation

Improve Maus Park for wildlife habitat and low-impact uses

Identify partnership opportunities for increased environmental education programs

Establish native landscape and low maintenance massings along Highway 20





THE CITY OF
DUBUQUE
Masterpiece on the Mississippi

February 2026



*Scan to view the
full master plan document*