

BELDING OUTDOORS

City of Belding 2027 - 2031
Parks & Recreation

Adopted:

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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

The City of Belding is a warm and welcoming community, a great place to raise a family and grow a business. Downtown is filled with historical buildings, and residents are proud of their community. The seven parks and a trail system that boasts local and regional connections provides many opportunities for residents to recreate, move, and have fun. The community calendar is full of events and programs that bring people together year-round. Many residents have lived in the community for decades.

Building on the City's Parks and Recreation Plan 2022-2026, this updated plan continues the call for ongoing maintenance and upkeep for the City's numerous parks, recreation, and trail amenities. A new long-term vision for enhancements along the "blue spine" of the Flat River that emerged during the development of the city's recent master plan update is also articulated. The plan will guide City officials in implementing future recreational enhancements.

Developed through a community engagement process, this plan presents a pragmatic yet exciting guide to the future of parks, recreation, and trails planning for the City of Belding. The community survey and booth at the Belding Labor Day festival provided the foundation for community input that was used to inform the development of the plan's goals and action plan found in chapters 6 and 7. The Belding Recreation Advisory Committee, which is charged with directing recreation matters for the community, provided project direction as the project steering committee. The community's input grew from the last plan, which shows an ongoing and increased awareness and call for investment in the City's recreation assets and amenities.

The completion of the City's plan establishes the five-year eligibility for recreation grants administered through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The plan is intended to meet the requirements set forth by the DNR for the development of community park, recreation, and trail plans.

The plan reflects the needs, desires, and long-term vision of City staff, officials, and residents who call Belding home. The plan will direct the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of park, recreation, and trail facilities as well as outline the vision for future investments for the next five years and beyond.



CHAPTER 2:
COMMUNITY PROFILE



COMMUNITY PROFILE

The Community Description Section of the plan provides an overview of the population of the City of Bending and a review of existing natural features and land development which may impact recreational development.

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Social characteristics focus on the history, culture, and composition of the people living within the City. The U.S. Census data provides a snapshot of the general population size, age, and other factors significant to the development of recreation.

REGIONAL LOCATION

The City of Belding contains 4.9 square miles and is in the northwest corner of Ionia County. It's close to the borders of Kent County and Montcalm County. The closest cities are Greenville, Rockford, Ionia, Lowell, and Grand Rapids. Major roads in the city are M-44, Bridge Street, and Ellis Street. M-91 is another major corridor that lies due west of the City's boundaries. The Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Trail is a major paved trail that runs southwest to northeast in the City. Since the City is 25 miles northeast of Grand Rapids, it is beginning to see some minor population growth that follows the trend in the Grand Rapids metropolitan region.

COMMUNITY HISTORY

Settled in the 1850s, Belding's growth was the result of silk manufacturing established by Hiram H. Belding and Alvan N. Belding, for which the community was eventually named in 1871. The City of Belding by 1930 had a population of 4,140. The Great Depression of the 1930s brought hard times to the silk industry and the citizens of Belding. Since the downturn in the silk manufacturing industry, the local economy has become more diverse. Today, Belding is home to several businesses that produce a wide variety of products and services.

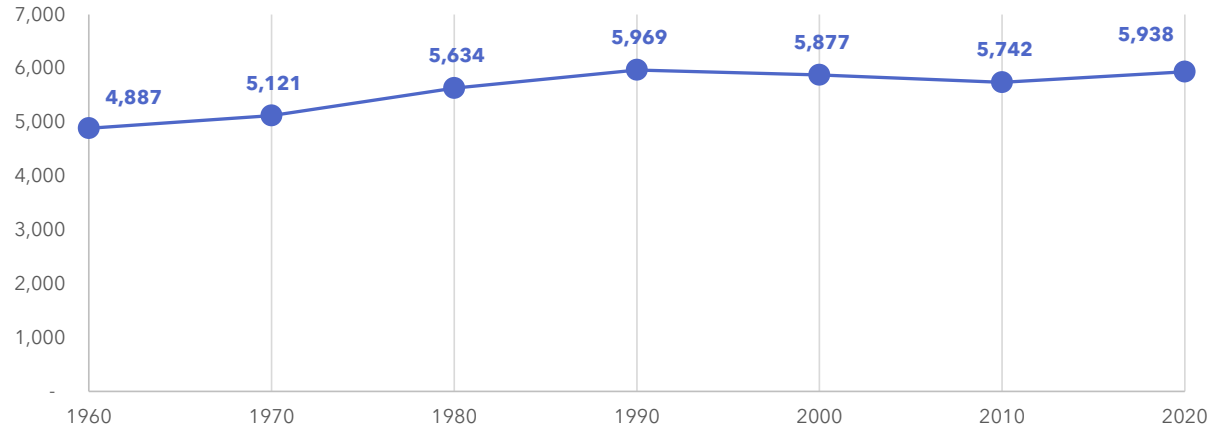
Typical residential development up to the early 1970s followed the grid street system with small platted lots. Since the 1970s, residential development has been less structured, with meandering streets and increased lot sizes.

Population

The 2020 U.S. Census data reported a total population within the City of Belding of 5,938 persons. This population number indicated a growth in population of 196 persons, or 3.0%, since 2010. This stable population suggests that recreational needs are likely to focus on maintaining and improving existing parks and facilities.

According to the 2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, the City has a total of 2,157 households with an average household size of 2.71 persons, similar to that of Ionia County (2.71). Additionally, 27.1% of households have children under the age of 18 living at home, indicating that many residents are families with school-aged children.

Figure 2.1. Population Trend (1960-2020)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (1960-2020)

Race

The City of Belding's population is predominantly White (90.2%), with the remaining 9.8% of residents representing a variety of racial backgrounds, including individuals identifying as Two or more races (5.5%).

Figure 2.1. Population by Race, 2020

Race	Number	Percent
White	5,359	90.2%
Two or more races	325	5.5%
Some Other Race	163	2.7%
Black or African American	43	0.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native	30	0.5%
Asian	15	0.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders	3	0.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2020)

Age

The City's age distribution reflects a balanced population with residents represented across all age groups. Adults between the ages of 40 and 59 make up the largest share of the population (26.9%), followed by residents ages 25 to 39 (21.4%) and those 60 years and older (21.0%). Children and teenagers remain a significant portion of the population, with 13.6% of residents between the ages of 5 and 14 and 13.7% between the ages of 15 and 24.

This balanced age profile highlights the need for a park system that provides playgrounds and athletic facilities for youth, trails and open spaces for adults, and accessible amenities, walking paths, and passive recreation opportunities for older adults.

Senior Population

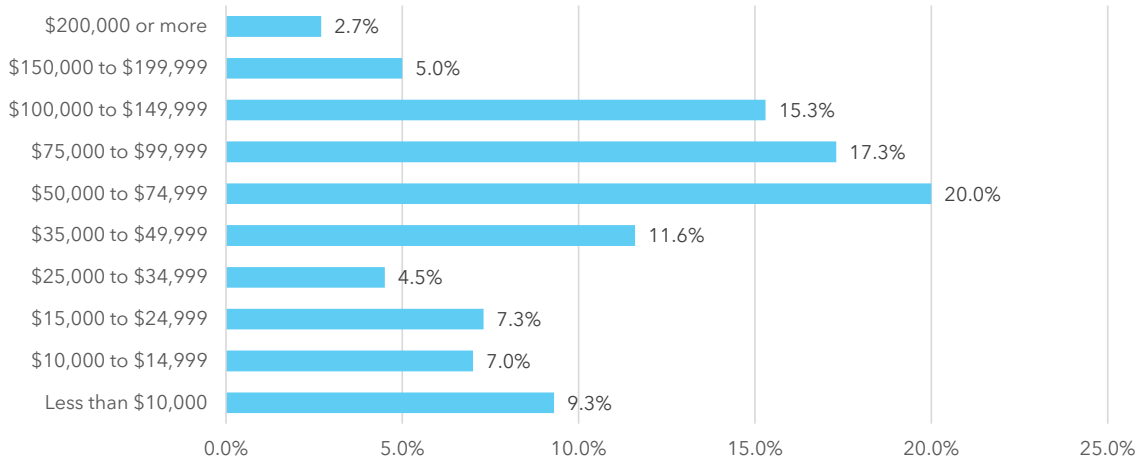
Compared to 2010, the 65 and older age group has grown to approximately 776 residents (13.0% of the population). Additionally, residents age 60 and older account for 21.0% of the City's population, reflecting the aging of the population. This trend is consistent with the aging of the Baby Boomer generation and increasing life expectancy. As a result, parks and recreation planning should continue to emphasize accessible facilities, paved walking trails, benches, rest areas, and low-impact recreational opportunities that support the needs of older adults.

INCOME

Public parks, trails, playgrounds, and community events provide low-cost recreational options that promote health, wellness, and social interaction for residents of all income levels.

As shown in Figure 2.2, household incomes in the City vary, with the largest share of households (20.0%) earning between $50,000 and $74,999 annually, while approximately 28.1% of households earn less than $35,000 per year. The City's median household income is $60,373, which is below both the county median household income of $75,611 and the Michigan median household income of $72,875. This suggests that maintaining affordable, accessible parks and recreation amenities is important to ensure recreation for all residents.

Figure 2.2. Income Cohorts, 2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates)

ALICE

ALICE is the acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed – the households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but less than the basic cost of living. While conditions have improved for some households in Ionia County, many continue to struggle. According to the 2024 Michigan ALICE Report, of the 2,223 households in the City of Belding, 27% are below the ALICE threshold.

Housing

The City contains 2,294 housing units, of which 94.0% are occupied and 6.0% are vacant, indicating a stable housing market. Of the occupied housing units, 71.8% are owner-occupied while 28.2% are renter-occupied. The City's renter-occupied housing rate of 28.2% is higher than the county average of 22.7%. The City's median housing value is $173,600, which is lower than both the County median housing value of $210,300 and the statewide median of $250,500.

Employment

According to the 2024 ACS 5-year estimates, 63.0% of residents age 16 and older participate in the civilian labor force, with 2,902 residents employed and an unemployment rate of 3.4%. Additionally, 26.8% of households receive retirement income, indicating that a significant portion of the community is retired or approaching retirement. This means that a majority of the workforce was employed, yet there is a portion of the population that is retired. Recreational activities offered in Belding should be developed with universal design features and include passive recreation.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Physical Characteristics Section of the plan provides an overall summary of the major natural and man-made land features that affect the growth and use of the land within the City.

Topography

The land is characterized by a gently rolling landscape and occasional low-lying wetland areas. Steep riverbank slopes exist along some portions of the Flat River, as can be seen in Map 1. Many of the steep slopes along the river valley create attractive views. The majority of the City lies between 744 and 785 feet in elevation.

Hydrology

The predominant water feature in Belding is the Flat River. The Flat River serves the economic and recreational needs of the residents. Recreational activities such as fishing and boating are easily enjoyed with the close proximity of the river. The river is a designated Michigan Natural River under the authority of Part 305, Natural Rivers of PA 451 of 1994. There is also an abundance of wetlands in the City. They provide fish and wildlife habitat, serve as natural filtration systems for surface water entering the river, and offer an attractive, aesthetic amenity to the area's quality of life. The unique system of wetlands and the river in the City provide fishery habitats of regional significance and can be seen in Map 2.

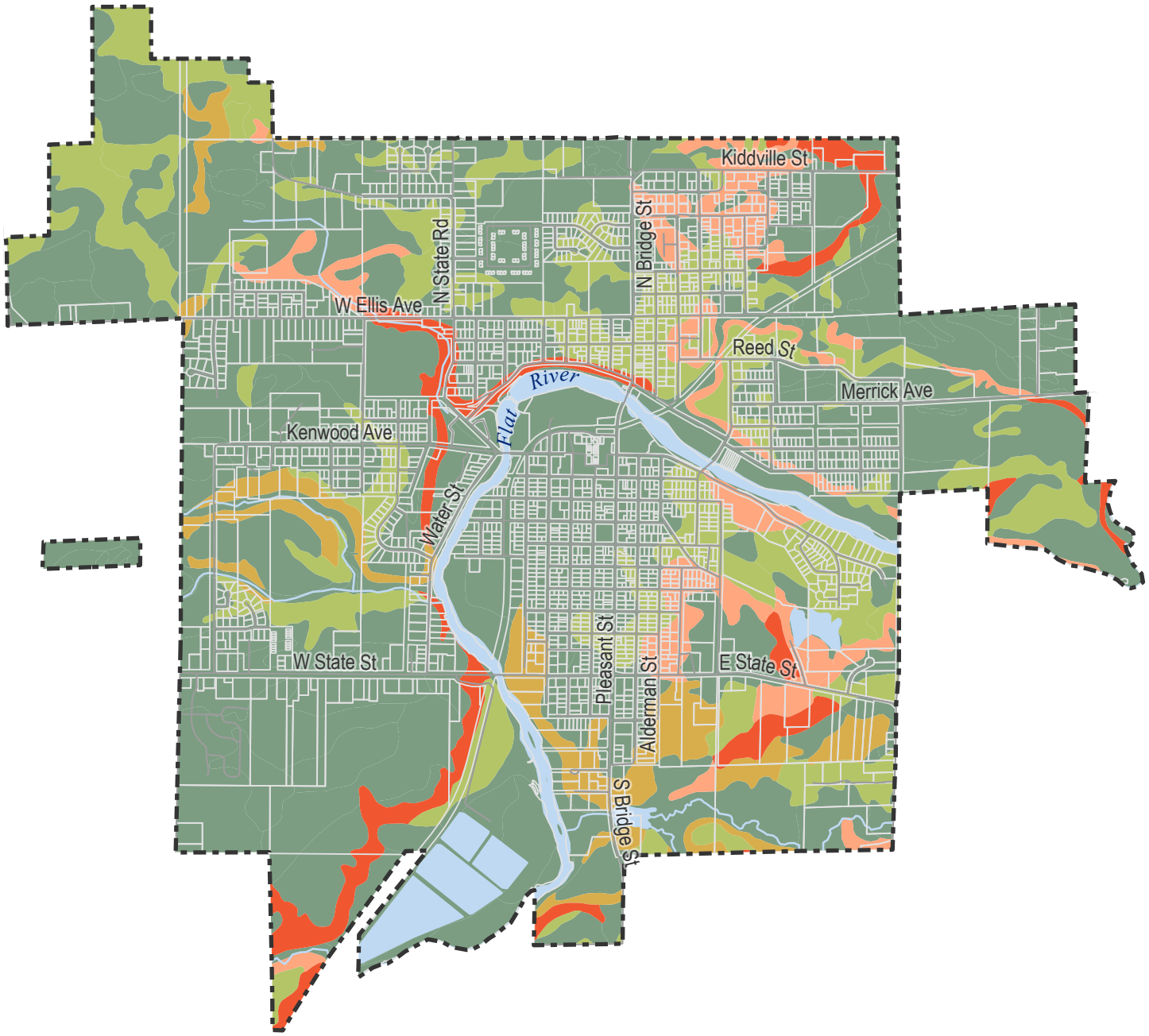
Vegetation

Mature trees are common throughout the City, lining streets and found on many residential lots. City parks and state-owned land are heavily wooded, like Lightning Bend and Flat River Valley State Game Area. Natural vegetation is varied and ranges from ash, willow, poplar, and elm in lowland areas to beech, maple, and hemlock associated with steep slopes and seasonal wetland areas. Vegetation found in the City is predominantly maple, linden, oak, and ash tree species and evergreen varieties, including white pine, spruce, and fir, used in residential landscapes.

Land Use

The City of Belding is predominantly a residential community. The central business district is in the heart of downtown. Business and industrial uses are primarily located on the south side of the City. The industry is also located on the northwest corner of the City. A variety of residential land uses are found throughout the city limits. Single-family homes are the most common residential use.

Map1: Topography



Legend

Degree of Slope

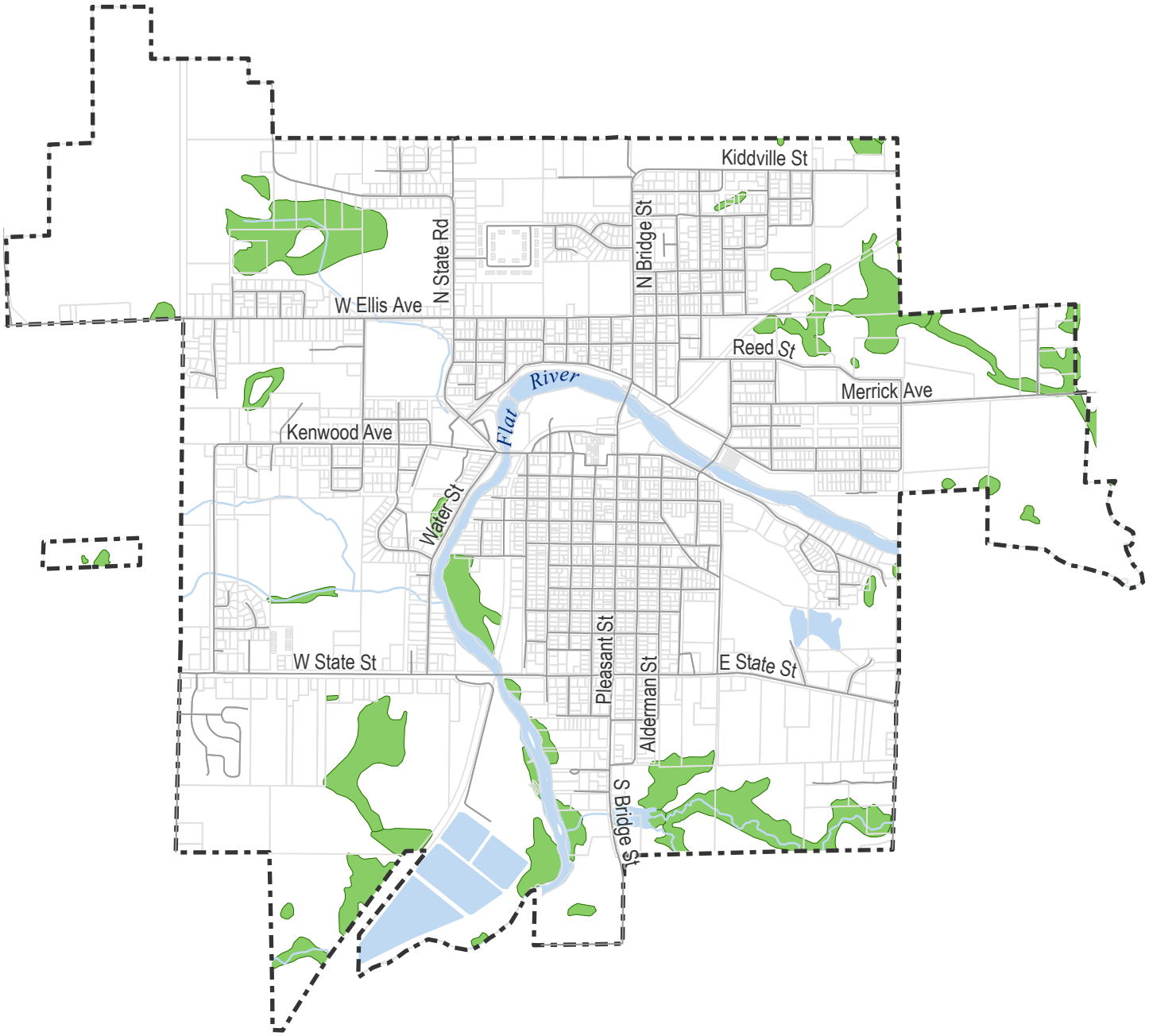
- <5 degrees
- 5 to 9 degrees
- 10 to 14 degrees
- 15 to 19 degrees
- 20 degrees or more

0 ¼ ½ 1 Mile

N

Data Sources: MI Open Data Portal; NRCS; City of Belding

Map 2: Hydrology



Legend

- Wetlands
- Lakes
- Rivers

0 ¼ ½ 1 Mile

Data Sources: MI Open Data Portal; EGLE; City of Belding



CHAPTER 3:
ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE



ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

CITY GOVERNMENT

The City Council is comprised of five members that are elected at-large to four-year terms, with two elected one year and three others on alternate years. The mayor is elected every two years after the election by the council members and chairs the meetings. Current members of the City Council and the Mayor are Bonita Steele (Mayor), Shelley Gladding, Linda Curtis, Nikolai Zerkle, and Tristin Miller. The role of the City Council and Mayor regarding parks and recreation facilities and programs is to approve planning and development within the City, establish the annual fiscal budget, and oversee the selection and management of the City Manager.

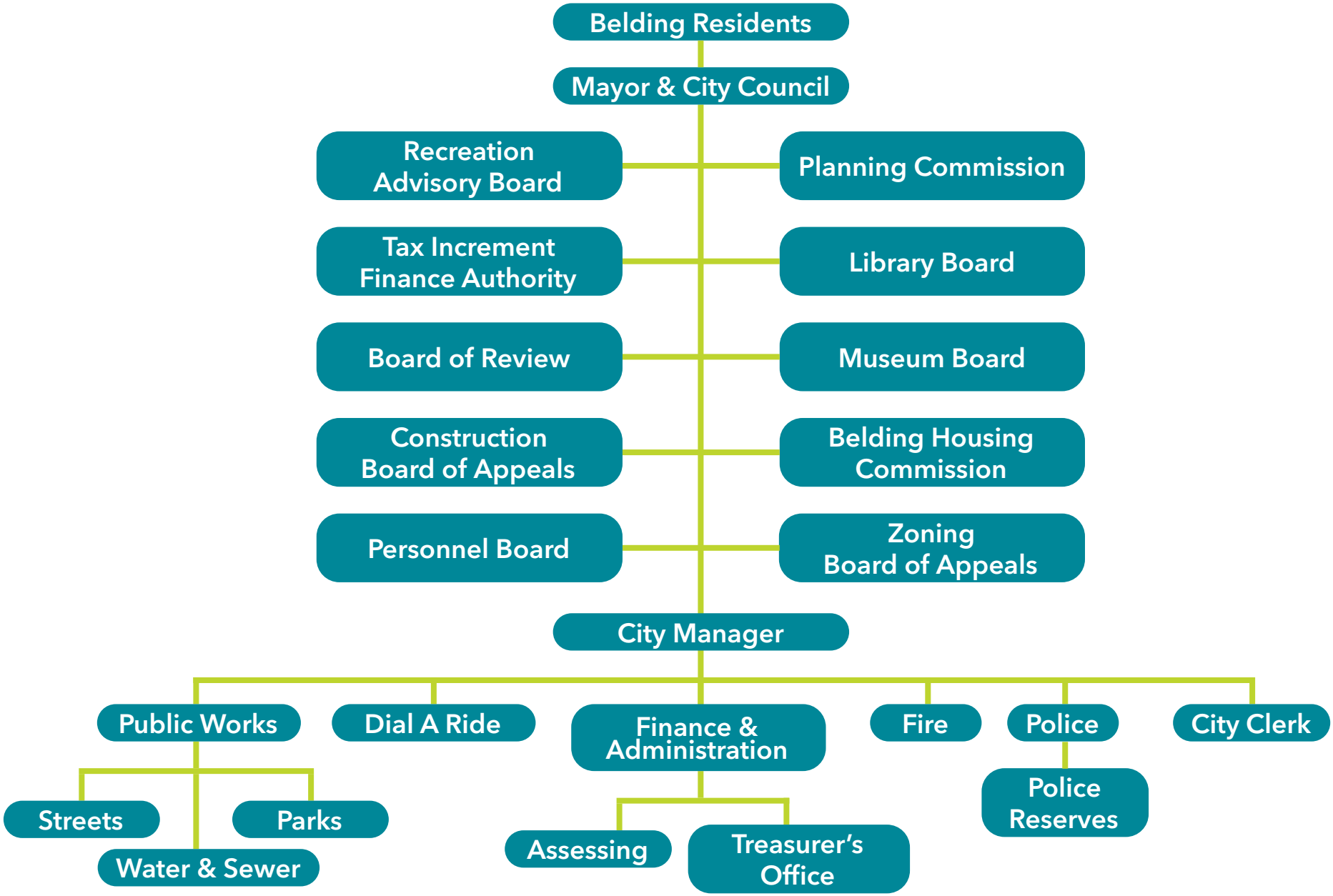
The City Manager is appointed by the City Council and is responsible for the implementation of City policies and budgets, including parks and recreation, through management of staff. There are 38 full-time and 45 part-time city employees. The City Manager or designee serves as the liaison between the Recreation Advisory Board and the City, answers park related questions from the public, and coordinates recreation programs. There is no dedicated staff to oversee park and recreation facilities and programs in the City. The implementation of facility developments in the parks is the responsibility of the City Manager. Park maintenance is the responsibility of the Public Works Department.

The City of Belding Organizational Chart is found on the next page.

City Parks Budget

City Parks are funded by a variety of sources, including the city general fund, the capital improvement fund, and state and local grants. The 2026-2027 annual budget for parks operation and maintenance is $161,050, and the projected annual budget for the following year is $163,880.

City of Belding: Organizational Chart



Recreation Advisory Board

The Recreation Advisory Board is an advisory panel to the City Council. The Board was established on April 6, 1976, following ordinance number 332. The members of the Board are appointed by the City Council. One member elected by the Board serves as the Chair. The Recreation Advisory Board provides an advisory role in park and recreation facility planning, development, maintenance, and programming.

The Board is responsible for the overall development of the Parks and Recreation 5-year Plan and is submitted to the City Council for final approval. The Board advises the City Council and City Manager on matters concerning recreation in the City and makes recommendations on the location of sites for parks and recreational areas to the City Council. The Board also provides recommendations as needed to support the betterment of the city recreation program.





CHAPTER 4:
PARKS & RECREATION INVENTORY



PARKS & RECREATION INVENTORY

This chapter provides an overview of the park and recreation facilities and programs available in the City and an accessibility assessment.

ACCESSIBILITY

Per the Michigan Department of Natural Resources guidelines, an assessment of the accessibility of each park to people with disabilities is required in this recreation plan. This assessment considers the accessibility of the facilities and the access routes to them. The accessibility grading system is based on compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) through a five-point system as defined in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 - MDNR Grading System for Accessibility

Accessibility Grade	Number
1	None of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines.
2	Some of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines.
3	Most of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines.
4	The entire park meets accessibility guidelines.
5	The entire park was developed/renovated using the principles of universal design.

CITY OF BELDING PARKS & RECREATION FACILITIES

The following section contains information about the park and recreational facilities in the City. The methods used to determine site accessibility and inventory were based on a compilation of information from the previous recreation plan, verification through site visits, and information provided through City officials.

City-Owned Parks

Armstrong Park

The City owns a stretch of land on the northern side of the Flat River across from Central Riverside Park. Developed with riverside boardwalks and seating in the 1920's, it has been decades since any capital improvements have occurred in the park. Decades ago, the Park facilities had fallen into disrepair and were removed. The site has no facilities and is undeveloped.

Accessibility Score: 1

Central Riverside Park

Located along the Flat River and in the central business district of the City, the 5-acre park is the hub of recreation within the community. A dog park can be found within this community destination. Amenities include soccer fields, 2 tennis courts, a skate park, playground equipment, 2 picnic shelters, 2 basketball courts, a sand volleyball court, the Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Trail and trailhead, restroom facilities, drinking fountains, and parking. The Belding Area Soccer Club calls the park home.

Accessibility Score: 3

Demorest Field

Located in the west part of the City, the 30-acre park contains several recreational ball fields. The park is used daily throughout most of the year by youth and adult leagues. Shuffleboard tournaments are held on the shuffleboard court. Amenities include 2 adult softball fields, 4 youth ball fields, a pony ball field, a running track, playground equipment, restroom and concession facility, a shuffleboard court, picnic facilities, Silk Trail Natural Trail access, and accessible parking.

Accessibility Score: 3

East Riverside Park

Located on the east side of the City along the south side of the Flat River, the 1.5-acre park is nestled within a neighborhood. The pavilion is from a previous City Water Works facility, and the boat launch has a removable dock/pier. The park gardens are sponsored by the Silk City Nature Association. The paved trail extends from the park to Ashfield Street. Amenities include a picnic pavilion, accessible restrooms, playground equipment, accessible boat launch, access to the Flat River, Silk City Nature Trail, and accessible parking.

Accessibility Score: 3

Gathering Place

Located on the south bank of the Flat River, southwest of Central Riverside Park and west of downtown, the 4.8-acre park is largely undeveloped. The open field is a former industrial site. In 2016 a park master plan was completed. Amenities include a mural, benches, part of the Silk City Nature Trail, and Flat River Access.

Accessibility Score: 3

Lightning Bend Preserve

Located in the northeast section of the City, the 138-acre nature preserve on the north side of the Flat River is the largest recreational facility owned by the City. The Preserve includes nearly a mile of riverfrontage on the Flat River and a wood forest with three small ponds. A future bridge across the river is envisioned connecting the Preserve to the East Riverside Park. Amenities include an accessible picnic shelter, rustic, accessible toilets, miles of hiking trails, dedicated mountain bike trails, Flat River Access, wooded forest and natural ponds, and accessible parking. Vernal ponds that appear seasonally also exist in the preserve and are reachable by an accessible path. The 18 -hole SMASH disc golf course is also located within the park. SMASH is managed by the Michigan Disc Golf Empire

Accessibility Score: 3

Water Street Park

Located in the west part of the City, the 2.25-acre park is on the south side of the Flat River. The park is within a neighborhood. Facilities include picnic tables, benches, a part of the Silk City Nature Trail, a boat launch, Flat River Access, restrooms, and accessible parking. Playground structures have been recently removed, as they needed to be upgraded. New structures plan to be installed within the next year.

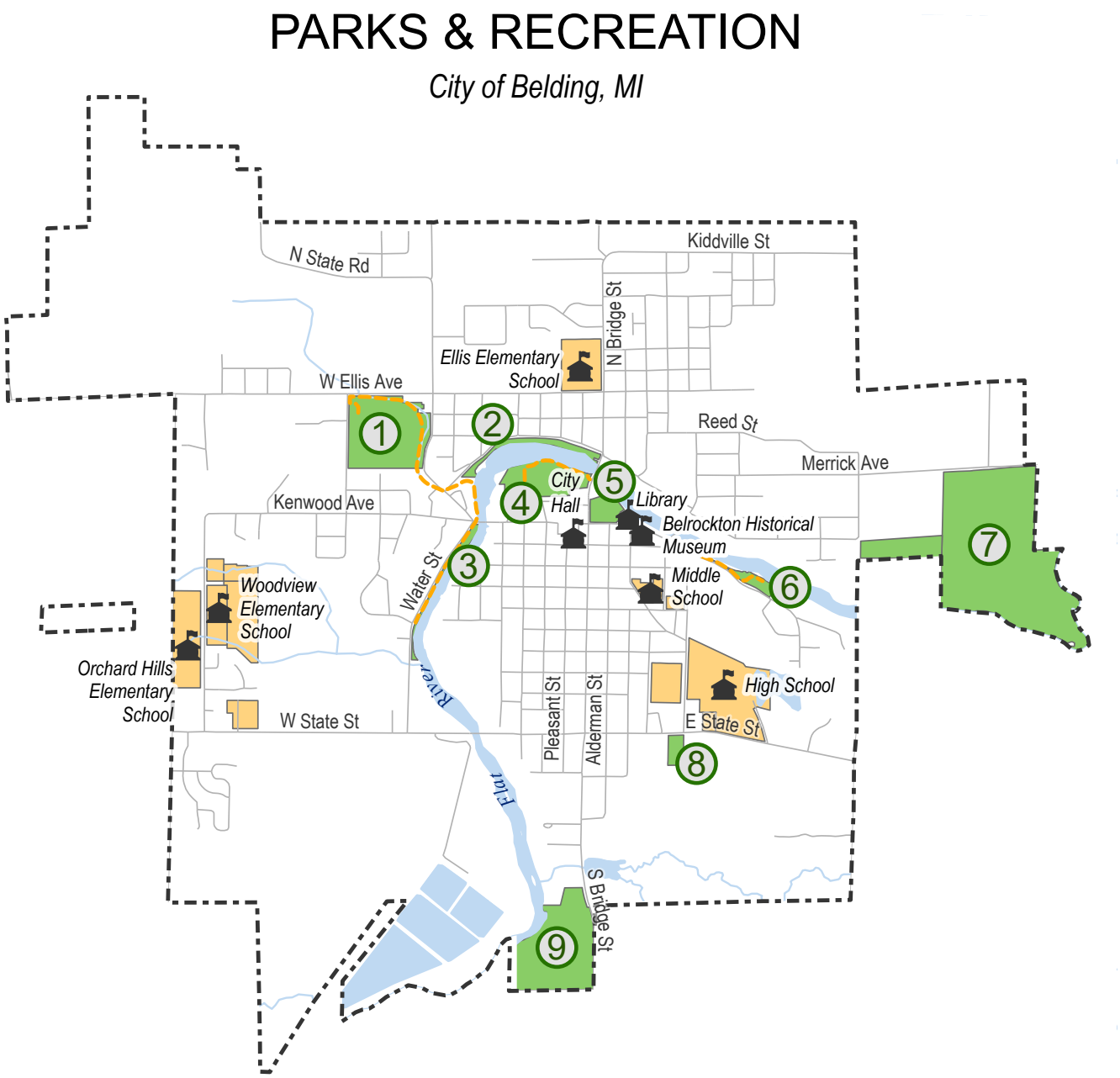
Accessibility Score: 2

Silk City Natural Trail

The paved path that provides a nonmotorized connection to many parks across the City and runs along part of the Flat River. The trail connects to the regional Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Trail. The goal is to have all City parks connected via this trail and to provide linkages to the M-44 business district, the schools, and neighborhoods, becoming a vibrant part of the community's identity. Amenities include picnic tables, benches, and a wildlife observation/fishing deck.

Accessibility Score: 3

Map 3: Parks & Recreation



Legend

- Public Buildings
- Silk City Nature Trail
- Public Property
- School Property

Data Sources: MI Open Data Portal; City of Belding

Park & Recreation Facilities

1. Demorest Field
2. Armstrong Park
3. Water Street Park
4. Central Riverside Park
5. Gathering Place
6. East Riverside Park
7. Lightning Bend Preserve
8. Old Cemetery
9. River Ridge Cemetery

0 ¼ ½ 1 Mile

Other Recreational Assets

The Denny Craycraft Veterans Freedom Park

The park is owned and maintained by a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and is led by volunteers. Located at 100 Depot Street, adjacent to Central Riverside Park, this park has been funded by donations from community members and local businesses. Amenities and facilities include a WWI War Memorial, WWII War Memorial, Korea War Memorial, Vietnam War Memorial, Desert Shield/Desert Storm Operations Memorial, Prisoner of War/Missing In Action Memorial, and benches. The City owns the land that the park resides on.

Community Gardens

Located across from Woodview Elementary, the community garden plots were developed in 2012 and updated with grant funds from the Greenville Area Foundation in 2023. The Community Partnership is a collaboration among the Garden Group, the Belding Area Schools, and the City of Belding. The garden supports local families. The community project has received many awards and accolades. The project started with 16 garden beds, including 6 accessible bed.



Candlestone Golf Course

Located on 200 hundred acres in the northwest section of the City, this privately-owned facility offers an 18-hole championship golf course and cross-country ski trails in the winter.

Belding Schools Recreation Inventory

The City of Belding is served by the Belding Area Public Schools District. Most of the district's facilities are in the City and offer many recreational facilities available to residents. The Belding Area School District is comprised of approximately two thousand students. Special school-sponsored programs such as concerts and plays, as well as sporting events, are often the focus of community entertainment and enjoyment.

Belding High School

Located in the southeast section of the City, the high school campus was constructed in the mid-1970s on a twenty-four-acre site. Outdoor amenities include a fenced baseball field, a baseball practice area, a lighted football/soccer field with bleachers, a softball diamond, a track with a second practice football field, and parking. Indoor amenities include two gymnasiums with locker rooms, a weight room, a wrestling room, a Performing Arts Center, a Commons Area, and indoor track. These facilities are made available for public use and youth athletics to the extent possible.

Belding Middle School

Once the site of the old high school, the middle school has been renovated. Although the site is limited, the school has an outdoor basketball court, an outdoor play structure, indoor gym facilities, additional indoor activity spaces, and a cafeteria with a stage.

Ellis Elementary School

Situated on a 7-acre site in the northern section of the City, the school offers an indoor gym with a stage area, an indoor full music facility adjacent to the stage, an outdoor experiential learning area, an outdoor playground area, a T-ball/kickball-sized play field, and a small soccer field. Additional land is available at this site for the potential development of play fields.

Orchard Hills Elementary School

The school is located on a 15-acre site in the west section of the City. Recreation facilities include a playground area, a 12-acre woodlot with trails, two outdoor basketball courts, two small ball fields, an exercise/fitness area, and an indoor gym.

Woodview Elementary School

The school is located on the west side of town. The facilities available include a gym with locker rooms, an indoor music facility adjacent to the stage, outdoor playground areas, an outdoor basketball court, a T-ball/kickball-sized field, and an additional open space.

Nonmotorized Assets

Fred Meijer Flat River Vally Trail

The Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Trail runs throughout the City, from the northeast to the southwest. The trail runs through the communities of Greenville, Belding, and Lowell. The portion of the trail that runs through the City is paved. The route through the City is also part of the larger Fred Meijer Midwest Michigan Trail Network that connects many communities in west and mid-Michigan.

M-44 Sidepath

MDOT owns the sidepath on M-44 that runs from Orchard Street and Water Street.

Regional Park & Recreation Facilities

Ionia Recreation Area

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources owns the recreation area which offers a wide variety of outdoor activities, including a day-use beach and picnic facility, camping, dog trial area, hiking, and other activities.

Flat River Game Area

The Flat River Game Area incorporates several square miles of property and includes land available for hunting, fishing, and snowmobiling.

Ionia County Fairgrounds

Located in the nearby City of Ionia, the Fairgrounds offers the annual fair, concerts, and special events.

Bertha Brock County Park

Bertha Brock is an Ionia County Park. It is located west of the City of Ionia. Facilities include winter sledding, picnic facilities, a play area, ball diamonds, and primitive camping.

Pickerel Lake County Park

Owned by Kent County, Pickerel Lake offers nature trails and a boardwalk across the lake and wetlands area.

Fallsburg County Park

Fallsburg is a Kent County Park located in the Lowell area. The park is located on the Flat River with a historic covered bridge, picnic shelters, a play area, ball diamonds, restrooms, and parking.

Wabasis Park and Campground

Wabasis Park is a Kent County Park located near Greenville. The park is on Wabasis Lake and has modern and primitive camping, a nature center, beach swimming, boat launch, a play area, a ball diamond, a basketball court, restrooms, and parking.

Townsend Park

Townsend Park is a Kent County Park located in Canonsburg. The park is located on Bear Creek. It offers hiking trails, ballfields, picnic facilities, restrooms, and parking.

Double R Ranch

A privately-owned campground with over 150 sites located in Otisco Township.

Snows Lake Campground

Privately owned facility with over 300 camping sites in Bushnell Township.

Existing Recreation Programs

The City of Belding does not sponsor recreational activities or leagues. Recreational programs are provided primarily by nonprofit organizations staffed and operated by local citizens and by Belding Area Schools Community Education. Programs offered by others include the following:

Belding Youth Baseball/Softball League

This organization provides summer youth baseball and softball programs for youths from six to sixteen years old.

Belding Rocket Football League

This organization administers the summer and fall youth football program.

Belding Area Soccer Club

The Belding Area Soccer Club provides youth soccer programs for kids from ages 3 1/2 to 14 years old in the spring and fall.

Candlestone Inn Golf Leagues

Various men's and women's golf leagues are available to the public through the privately-owned course. These leagues operate throughout the spring, summer, and fall.

Belding Shuffleboard Club

A volunteer-based shuffleboard club that provides free weekly lessons to the community, weekly tournament play for club members, and tournaments.

Belding Area Schools Community Education

Community Education offers enrichment classes to the community. These classes are scheduled through Community Education and utilize school facilities. Programs include dog obedience classes, tae kwon do, walking track, co-ed volleyball, open gym, and gymnastics classes.

Michigan Disc Golf Empire

The Michigan Disc Golf Empire is a volunteer-based club that provides community outreach for all levels of play. The group is based out of Lightning Bend Preserve. They host a range of local and national events.

Previous Michigan Department of Natural Resource Grants

The following is a list of past DNR grants that have been awarded to the City of Belding.

Project No. 26-00308

Project Year: 1972

Project Title: Central Riverside Recreation Park

Project Status: Closed

Grant Amount: $62,658.29

Elements: Picnic area, group shelter, tot lot, 3 tennis courts, croquet court, badminton court, ice rink, parking, lighting, site improvements, landscaping, sewer and water.

Project No: BF90-279

Project Year: 1990

Project Title: Center Riverside Park-Ph 1

Project Status: Closed

Grant Amount: $31,000

Elements: Basketball court, lights, fitness trail, 1 volleyball court, 2 horseshoe courts, playground equipment.

Project No: CM00-128

Project Year: 2000

Project Title: Demorest Field

Project Status: Closed

Grant Amount: $210,000.00

Elements: Pony baseball diamond, youth baseball diamonds, paved parking lot, walkways, site preparation, park sign.

Project No: TF01-139

Project Year: 2001

Project Title: Belding Pathway

Project Status: Closed

Grant Amount: $211,640.00

Elements: Site preparation & removals, sand fill, retaining walls/railing sheet piling, 10' pathway, benches, trash receptacles, boardwalk and overlook along river, pathway signs, and landscaping.

Project No.: TF05-052

Project Year: 2005

Project Title: Silk City Nature Trail

Project Status: Closed

Grant Amount: $166,400.00

Elements: Site preparation, pathway, retaining walls, curb cuts, railings, fishing/observation decks, signage, renovated Water St. parking lot.

Project No.: TF10-048

Project Year: 2010

Project Title: Lightning Bend Preserve Addition-Acquisition

Grant Amount: $226,700.00

Project Status: Closed

Elements: Acquisition of 38 acres

Project No: TF12-073

Project Year: 2012

Project Title: Silk City Nature Trail Extension

Grant Amount: $264,800.00

Project Status: Closed

Elements: Pathway, retaining wall, overlook, benches, signage.

Project No: TF17-0061

Project Year: 2017

Project Title: Silk City Nature Trail Gathering Place Connector

Grant Amount: $192,300

Project Status: PA Executed

Elements: Development of the new Gathering Place Park in downtown City of Belding. The project will include a 650-foot extension of the Silk City Nature Trail along the Flat River and connection to the Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Trail, a fishing and wildlife observation deck, interpretive and pathway identification signage, benches and landscaping.

-Waiting for DNR access to MiGrants (State Website) to document recent LIGHTNING BEND grant-



CHAPTER 5:
PLANNING & PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS



PLANNING & PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

PLANNING METHODS

The City of Belding Parks and Recreation Plan was initiated to provide direction for future City parks, trails, and recreation projects, administration, and ongoing operation and maintenance. The timetable for review and approval began with a kickoff meeting with the City of Belding Recreation Advisory Board and ended with local support of the plan in early 2027. Community input was gathered via a community survey and a tabling event held during the Labor Day Festival.

Numerous tools can be used to determine the recreational needs of a community. One way to assess a community's needs is to compare park metrics or data. Another way is to use a systems planning approach to identify local issues, priorities, and levels of service that can be determined via a community survey to inform the planning process. Both of these methods are employed in the City's Parks and Recreation Plan.

Comparison to Park Metrics

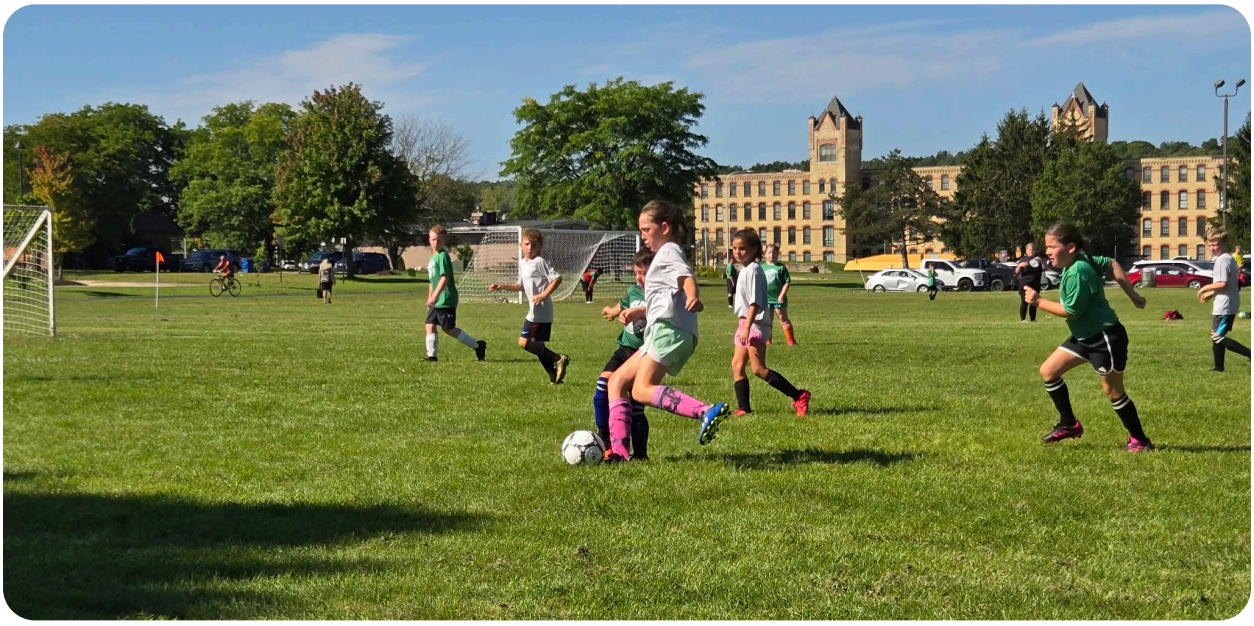
The recreation classification system and facility development standards developed by the National Recreation and Park Association have data on different types of parks, their desired site characteristics, size, and service area. The following tables provide some findings with recreation development standards and classification systems to help inform the planning process.

Mini - Park	
Use	Specialized facilities that serve a concentrated or limited population or specific group, such as tots or senior citizens.
Service Area	Less than ¼ mile radius
Desirable Size	1 acre or less
Desirable Site Characteristics	Within neighborhoods and in close proximity to residential developments or housing for the elderly.
Local Mini Parks	Water Street Park

Neighborhood Park	
Use	Area for intense recreational activities such as field games, court games, crafts, playground apparatus area, skating, picnicking, wading pools, etc.
Service Area	¼ to ½-mile radius to serve a population up to 5,000 (a neighborhood).
Desirable Size	15+ acres or 1-2 acres per 1,000 people
Desirable Site Characteristics	Accessible to the neighborhood population, Safe walking and bike access.
Local Neighborhood Park	East Riverside Park

Community Park	
Use	Area of diverse environmental quality. May include areas suited for intense recreational facilities, such as athletic complexes and large swimming pools. May be an area of natural quality for outdoor recreation, such as walking, viewing, sitting, and picnicking. May be any combination of the above, depending upon site suitability and community need.
Service Area	Several neighborhoods. 1-to-2-mile radius.
Desirable Size	25+ acres or 5-8 acres per 1,000 people
Desirable Site Characteristics	May include natural features such as water bodies and areas suited for intense development. Easily accessible to neighborhood served.
Community Park	Central Riverside Park Demorest Field Lighting Bend Reserve

Regional Park	
Use	Area of natural quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation such as viewing and studying nature, wildlife habitat, conservation, swimming, picnicking, hiking, fishing, boating, camping, and trail uses. May include active play areas. Generally, 80% of the land is reserved for conservation and natural resource management, with less than 20% used for recreation development.
Service Area	Several communities. 1 hour driving time.
Desirable Size	1,000+ acres; sufficient area to encompass the resource to be preserved and managed.
Desirable Site Characteristics	Diverse or unique natural resources such as lakes, streams, marshes, flora, fauna, and topography.
Regional Park	Ionia Recreation Area



Systems Planning

Conducting a survey can also help determine a community's needs when using the systems planning approach to park and recreation development. The community survey was conducted during the fall of 2026, and a table promoting the project and opportunity to provide community feedback was at the Belding Labor Day Festival. The results of these community engagement activities are found in the Appendix.

Community Survey

The City was interested in comparing the community survey results from the 2022–2026 plan to survey results for this plan. Comparing some of the highlights of both community surveys shows the following:

City of Belding Parks & Recreation Plan Community Survey Comparison Chart		
Statement	**2027 - 2031 Plan**	**2022 - 2026 Plan**
Parks, trails, and open spaces were very important to their household's quality of life.	Yes	Yes
What is the most important thing to improve parks and recreation in the City?	Maintaining the existing parks is the most important way to continue to provide park and recreation facilities for respondents.	Maintaining the existing parks is the most important way to continue to provide park and recreation facilities for respondents.
Park most in need of improvements	#1 Water Street Park* #2 Central Riverside Park	Central Riverside Park
Items most in need of repair	1. Playground equipment* 2. Restrooms 3. Picnic Tables 4. Playground surface	1. Restrooms 2. Picnic shelters/pavilions 3. Lighting 4. Playground equipment
Top 5 new recreation amenities desired	1. Walking trails 2. Children's play equipment 3. Outdoor water recreation (splash pad, fountains) 4. Picnic Pavilion^ 5. Trailhead with restrooms^ 6. Bike trails^ 7. Organized athletic programs^	1. Walking trails 2. Outdoor water recreation (like a splash pad) 3. Children's play equipment 4. A dog park 5. Trailhead with restrooms
How adequately do you feel that the community is served by area recreation programming?	Inadequately	Somewhat inadequately

**Note: During the development of this plan in the fall of 2026, the City was in the midst of updating parts of Water Street Park. The park's playground equipment has been removed, and the area is under construction. This has not been widely advertised by the City, and many residents do not likely know that the City is currently working on buying and installing new play equipment. The park appears to be in disarray. This may have influenced their responses to this question.*

^There was nearly a 4-way tie between these items.

Pop-Up Table at Labor Day Festival

The planning process also included gathering resident feedback during the Saturday Vendor Market at the Belding Labor Day Festival. For two hours market attendees were invited to provide feedback on improvements desired within the parks along the Flat River and asked about new facilities or park improvements that are needed within the City parks. Highlights from the public comments include. A summary of the comments received are as follows:

Flat River-Related Comments

- More water access via ideas like an improved fishing deck, kayak launch, and boat launch
- Deter kids from accessing water with a fence in between the play area and the river
- Open beach by river at Lighning Bend

Trail-Related Comments

- Pave the Flat River Trail

Demorest Field

- Desire for tennis courts

Water Street Park

- Update playground & vicinity

Central Riverside Park

- Fix tennis courts or put in pickleball courts

East Riverside Park

- Fix pavilion flooring and pavement

General Comment

- Make ADA accessible playground

The results from this phase of the planning process were used to develop the goals, objectives, and action statements in subsequent plan chapters.

Parks & Recreation Analysis

Combining the results of the community engagement activities and park metrics comparison, residents provided specific information that's useful to consider. Residents identified improvements desired at each park, which the City can use to inform the list of deferred maintenance items. Generally speaking, residents desire updated playgrounds, updated tennis courts, or the installation of new pickleball courts, improved Flat River access, and updated ground or floor covering.

In the previous Parks and Recreation Plan, through the survey results, residents shared that they saw the City's parks as a place to enjoy the outdoors and nature, improve health and wellness, and protect the natural environment and wildlife. In this plan's survey results, residents' values continue to be similar. They continue to seek the City's parks, trails, and recreation amenities as places to enjoy the outdoors and nature, provide athletic spaces, and provide places for improved health and wellness. Residents really value the space to move and play and the access parks provide to the natural features found in this part of west Michigan.

Using the results from the engagement, the City should continue to focus on maintaining and repairing facilities within City parks and continue to consider how the unmet recreation programming needs can be addressed.

Public Meeting & Plan Adoption

Following preparation of the Plan, residents were provided an adequate opportunity (at least 30 days) to review and comment on the plan prior to the official recommendation by the City of Belding Recreation Advisory Board and adoption by the City of Belding City Council.

A draft of the Plan was submitted to the Recreation Advisory Board and staff for their review and comments. A notice was published in the local newspaper (Daily News Greenville) on _____ 2026 notifying the public of the availability of the plan to provide them the opportunity to review and comment. The Plan was available for public review at City Hall and the City's website. Suggestions received to improve the Plan were incorporated into the document.

The Recreation Advisory Board made a motion to recommend adopting the plan to Belding City Council on _____. The City of Belding City Council adopted the Plan on January _____, 2027.



CHAPTER 6:
GOALS & OBJECTIVES



GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Considering community input and the existing conditions of the City's parks, trails, and recreation amenities and programs, the following goals and objectives were developed to form the foundation of the plan. The goals are intended to help Belding aspire to accomplish big ideas. The goal statements are general and are considered attainable through focused efforts. The objective statements are more specific and may be regarded as milestones to achieving the goal. These are also important if the City pursues DNR grants.

Goal 1

The City of Belding Parks and Trails will be well-maintained assets that community members can use to enjoy, recreate, and improve the quality of life.

Objectives

a. Develop a "wants and needs" list to identify the park project items, cost, resources needed, and priority level to systematically address park and recreation maintenance needs for City facilities and programs.

b. Address the list of improvements that are outlined in the action plan in Chapter 7.

c. Reinstate a "wants and wish" list to hand out to local businesses.

d. Use an informed volunteer network to support City maintenance efforts that can help in small, meaningful ways, like litter cleanup, light trail maintenance, and spring and fall cleanup events.

e. Continue to protect and support the natural spaces within the City's parks so that residents can continue to use them to enjoy wildlife and nature.

f. Any new facilities installed or infrastructure improvements will meet ADA standards and strive for universal design.

Goal 2

Continue to provide and maintain access along the Flat River for a variety of user groups and activities.

Objectives

a. Preserve river views that are a part of the City's identity and that residents enjoy.
b. Within the City's Parks and along the trails, establish clearly identified and maintained Flat River access points that distinguish areas where public access is permitted from areas where river access is discouraged.
c. Develop park design plans for all City parks and trails along the Flat River, using the waterway as a "blue spine" to create a connected network of visual, environmental, and recreational destinations throughout the community.
d. Provide safe, accessible small watercraft launches.

Goal 3

Maintain the connected network of trails, sidewalks, and other non-motorized infrastructure to link the City's parks, waterfront, schools, neighborhoods, and business districts to support recreation and healthy lifestyles.

Objectives

a. Prioritize maintenance opportunities on trails and sidewalks. Look for ways to partner with agencies who would support the City's maintenance needs.
b. Improve wayfinding signage along the trail, including street signage at trail/street crossings.
c. Ensure that all facilities are built to ADA standards and strive for universal design.

Goal 4

The community will have a point person to lead and manage park and recreation programs, facilities, and issues.

Objectives

a. Pursue a paid Parks and Recreation Director position that could lead the development of park and recreation programs, as this is an important unmet community need. C
b. Consider unique ways to fund the position, including re-establishing the co-op position that was previously shared with Belding Public Schools.
c. Consider a park's millage to provide additional funding to provide foundational support for this effort.



CHAPTER 7:
ACTION PROGRAM



ACTION PROGRAM

The following section details the strategic actions and the general direction that the City of Belding will take to maintain and improve the park and recreation facilities and programs in the community.

Strategic actions should meet all ADA requirements, where appropriate. Although a five-year time period will not be sufficient to accomplish all the items outlined in the action program, this list is intended to prioritize projects that may be achievable within five to ten years.

The recommendations in the section are intended to be flexible, and the following list of projects is not exhaustive. Future circumstances, such as funding and available opportunities, will likely influence the time and duration of projects. The following recommended actions are based on the input received from the community survey, City of Belding officials and staff, and an inventory of existing conditions.

Parks and Recreation Facilities Upkeep & Maintenance

One of the biggest issues from the previous City of Belding Parks and Recreation Plan, and continues to be a common theme through this plan, is to remain addressing the maintenance needs of the park, trails, and recreation facilities in the City of Belding. This would be the City's top priority. Belding's recreational assets are cherished, and residents have continued to support the investment and upkeep of the City's existing facilities. Each of the City parks has a number of facilities that need upkeep and grounds that need to be maintained. The City has tackled park maintenance issues that were highlighted in the previous plan, and this should continue.

Flat River Access

The Flat River is an incredible natural resource that flows through the City, attracting residents and tourists to its scenic vistas and inviting recreational opportunities. The shoreline and surrounding landscapes form an ecological corridor through Belding, providing an important connection to nature in an urban setting. Preserving and strengthening this connection has emerged as a priority through the recently adopted City of Belding Master Plan and this Parks and Recreation Plan update.

Several City parks and trails provide direct or indirect access, and there are opportunities to make those connections more visible, accessible, and intentional. Children already play and explore along shallow stretches and small beaches, and anglers enjoy seasonal fishing opportunities. These existing uses and connections provide a strong foundation for enhancing river access. A long-term vision for a Flat River "blueway" could connect these individual experiences into a cohesive river network. Enhanced access points, improved connections to parks and neighborhoods, and places to pause, explore, and enjoy the water could make the river an even more integral part of community life. Though this effort may take years, and perhaps decades, to realize, this vision is exciting!

Parks and Recreation Leadership

A Parks and Recreation Director is needed to support the on-going recreational program needs of the community. Years ago, the City of Belding and the Belding Public Schools partnered in supporting the position. The duties and responsibilities of the Director included community-wide programming for youth and adult sports leagues, identifying the growth and maintenance needs of the parks and trail system, and managing the daily issues and facilities of the City's parks, trails, and recreation facilities. The partnership ended several decades ago, yet the need for a Director staff position within the City remains. Residents continue to call upon leadership from the City to address this gap in the Belding community.

City of Belding Parks & Recreation Plan Community Survey Comparison Chart		
Improvement	**Relates to Goal**	**Priority**
Central Riverside Park		
Relocate riverside/far pavilion	1,2	High
Update restrooms	1, 2	Medium
Install wayfinding signage within park	1,2	Medium
Install lighting along trail	1,3,4	Low
Install signage to deter the feeding of geese, ducks, and other wildlife	1,2	Medium
Upgrade sport courts for either tennis or pickleball	1	High
Demorest Field		
On-going field and fence maintenance	1,2,3	High
ADA accessible picnic shelter	1	Medium
Concession stand maintenance	1	Low
Parking lot resurfacing	1	Medium

City of Belding Parks & Recreation Plan Community Survey Comparison Chart		
Improvement	**Relates to Goal**	**Priority**
Lighting along trail	1,3	Low
Install an accessible playscape	1	Medium
East Riverside Park		
Continue to renovate pavilion	1,2	Medium
Continue trail maintenance	1,3	High
Install an accessible path to playground	1	Medium
Install signage to deter the feeding of geese, ducks, and other wildlife	1	Low
Gathering Place		
Reading gardens behind Library	1	Medium
Consider location of amphitheater in this or other park space	1,2	Medium
Lightning Bend Preserve		
Use DNR grant money to complete Master Plan recommendations	1,3	High
Update bathrooms	1	High
Complete electrical work	1	High
Pursue grants or other funds to support projects in the preserve, especially as it relates to SMASH Park	1, 4	High
Water Street Park		
Install an accessible boat ramp and launch	1,2	High
Install benches	1	Medium
Food truck electrical hook ups	1	Low
Trail resurfacing	1,3	Medium
Fishing Dock	1,2	Medium
Install signage to deter the feeding of geese, ducks, and other wildlife	2	Low
Raise funds for park improvements	1,4	High
Update playground equipment and make additional park improvements	1,2	High

City of Belding Parks & Recreation Plan Community Survey Comparison Chart		
Improvement	**Relates to Goal**	**Priority**
Nonmotorized Infrastructure		
Wayfinding signage along the trail to park and other community destinations	1,3	Medium
Trail resurfacing	1,3	High
Connection from Ashfield Street to Lightning Bend Preserve	3	Low
General		
Develop a wayfinding signage network to help people navigate the local parks and trails system	1	Low