

City of Belding Parks and Recreation Plan 2022 - 2026



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Chapter I Introduction & Purpose of Plan

Community park and recreation plans serve a variety of purposes. They guide local decision-making regarding park and recreational opportunities and enhancements. A thorough plan for a community's park and recreational facilities contributes greatly to the vitality of the community. Completion of a park and recreation plan also establishes the five-year eligibility for recreation grants administered through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Therefore, this plan is intended to meet the requirements and provisions set forth by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for the development of community park, recreation, open space, and greenway plans.

This is a five-year plan that reflects the desires of the City of Belding community. Public input was gathered via a community survey and conversations with community leaders. The Belding Recreation Advisory Committee, who is charged with matters concerning recreation in the city, provided project direction as the project steering committee. The inclusive, community-based planning process provided a formal framework for the City to consider, develop, and establish their future park and recreation goals and action plan.

The City of Belding is excited to have a park and recreation plan that reflects the community's needs and desires. The plan will direct the future development of park and recreation facilities, amenities, and services over the next five years and beyond. By coming together, the community has worked hard to determine how best to continue to use its resources to support the park and recreational amenities.



Chapter 2 Community Description

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 nonmotorized facility 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. A location map is on the next page.

Physical Characteristics

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. 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 both 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.

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, and beech, maple, and hemlock associated in steep slope 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.

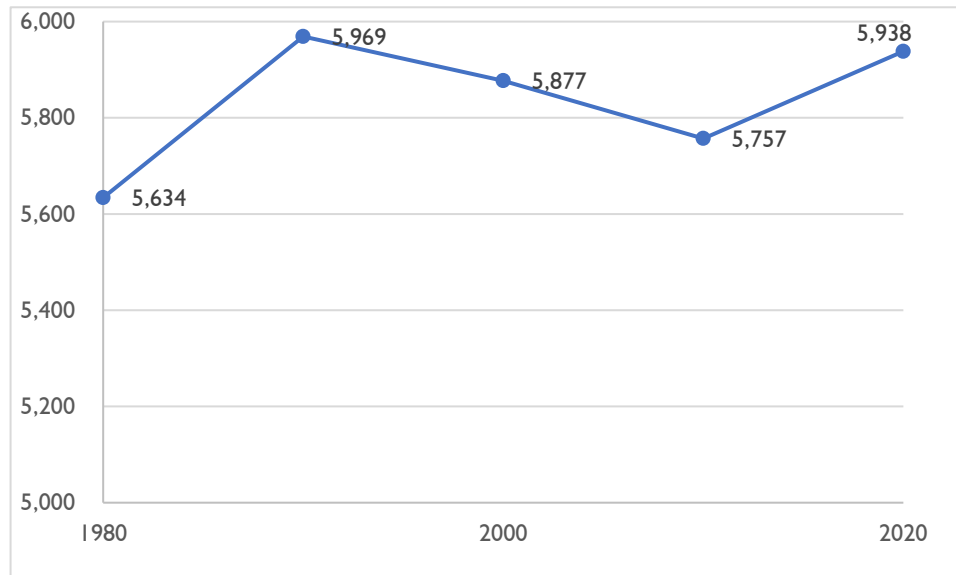
Land Use

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. 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.

Demographic Information

The total population for the City of Belding for the 2020 census is 5,938 people. It has remained fairly stable in the last twenty years, fluctuating by less than 1,000 people in the last 50 years.

Figure 2.1 City of Belding Population 1980 - 2020



Year Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1980 - 2020

The following are population and housing trends in the City of Belding that may influence the recreation needs and desires of the community:

- **Age.** In 2019, The median age of residents in Belding was 34.1 years. The population age composition has changed over the last several years to the community having more younger residents than older residents. The retired population has shrunk considerably. The two largest population groups in Belding are those under 18 years of age (28.6%) and 20–40 years of age (28%). This means more of the recreation facilities and programs should favor younger age groups and families.
- **Education.** In 2019, 88.5% of the population has a high school graduate degree or higher, while only 11.8% of the population has a Bachelor's degree or higher.
- **Household Size.** In 2019, the average household size for Belding was 2.52. This is slightly smaller than the Ionia County average of 2.63, but larger than the State of Michigan average of 2.49.
- **Occupancy.** Over 95% of houses are owner-occupied, while less than 5% of the housing was vacant. This is higher than the rates of owner-occupied houses in Ionia County (93.7%) and Michigan (88.4%). This shows that people are vested in their houses and community, meaning that they will be likely looking for local, nearby recreational opportunities.
- **Home Value.** In 2019, the median home value was \$93,300 in Belding, which was less than the median home value of \$130,100 in Ionia County in 2019. The median home value in Michigan in

2019 was \$154,900. This trend may support recreational opportunities that are available to households of modest means.

- **Income.** In 2019, the median household income for Belding residents was \$41,812. The median household income for households with two incomes and no kids was \$62,868. This means that a majority of recreational activities should be for households with modest income means.
- **Labor Force.** In 2019, 91.9% of the civilian labor force living in Belding was employed, and 37.9% of the total population not in the labor force. 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 include be developed with universal design features and include passive recreation.
- **ALICE.** This 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 2021 Michigan ALICE Report, of the 2,223 households in the City of Belding, 52% are below the ALICE threshold.



Chapter 3 Administrative Structure

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 of the meetings. Current members of the City Council and the Mayor are: Bruce Meyers (Mayor), Mike Scheid, Jorel Davis, and Bonita Steele. The Mayor Pro Tem position is currently vacant. The role of 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 over 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 Council 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's Organizational Chart is found on the next page.

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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 2021 annual budget for parks operation and maintenance is \$170,296 and the projected annual budget for the following year is \$175,000. The City was recently awarded a DNR grant for improvements at Lightning Bend Park is awarded, and will contribute \$430,000 of local funds to the site.

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 recommends such measures as it deems necessary and proper for the betterment of the city recreation program.

Chapter 4 Recreation Inventory

This chapter provides an overview of the park and recreation facilities and programs available in the Township 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 both the facilities themselves (as appropriate) as well as 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	Definition
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 Recreation Facilities

The following section contains information about the park and recreational facilities located in the Township. 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, information provided through Township officials, and knowledge provided through other local entities.

Belding Parks and Recreation Areas

The following list of parks including the park name, size, description of general use and amenities, and accessibility evaluation, per the national accessibility classification standards that are listed on the previous page. All parks are located with the City of Belding.

Armstrong 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. Amenities and facilities include Flat River Frontage.

Accessibility Score: 1

Central Riverside Park

Located along the Flat River and in the central business district of the City, the 5-acre park contains many developed facilities. The park is the hub of recreation within the community. Amenities and facilities include soccer fields, 2 tennis courts, a skate park, playground equipment, 2 picnic shelters, 2 basketball courts, a sand volleyball court, 10 trail-side exercise stations, the Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Trail and trailhead, restroom facilities, drinking fountains, and parking. The next page contains a conceptual image of the Park's master plan. The map is a visual representation of the long-term vision of the facilities and amenities that could be located in the park, but there would need to be significant investment for this to occur. Any major future improvements would be reviewed by the Belding community.

Accessibility Score: 2

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 and facilities include 2 adult softball fields, 4 youth ball fields, a pony ball field, a running track, playground equipment, restroom and concession facility, shuffleboard court, picnic facilities, Silk Trail Natural Trail access, and accessible parking.

Accessibility Score: 3

East Riverside Park

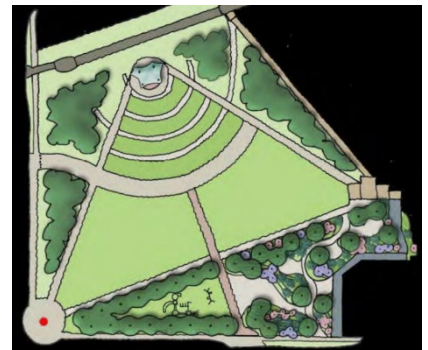
Located on the east side of the City along the south side of the Flat River, the 1.5-acre park is nestled within a neighborhood. The pavilion is from a previous City Water Works facility, and the boat launch has a removable dock/pier. The park gardens are sponsored by the Silk City Nature Association. The paved trail extends from the park to Ashfield Street. Amenities and facilities 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. The park has become the home of the Belding Beatnik Bazaar, an event that is held on many weekends during the spring and summer. Amenities and facilities include: a mural, benches, part of the Silk City Nature Trail, and Flat River Access. The image of the park is a conceptual design, and shows what could be possible within the boundaries of the area.

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 western 38 acres of the park were acquired with the assistance of a MNRTF grant in 2013. The Preserve includes nearly a mile of river frontage 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 and facilities include an accessible picnic shelter, rustic, accessible toilets, miles of hiking trails, dedicated mountain bike trails, an 18-Hole Disc Golf Course, Flat River Access, wooded forest and natural ponds, and accessible parking. An image from the park master plan is found on the following page.

Accessibility Score: 2

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. Amenities and facilities include playground equipment, picnic tables, benches, a part of the Silk City Nature Trail, a boat launch, Flat River Access, restrooms, and accessible parking.

Accessibility Score: 2

Silk City Natural Trail

The paved path along the Flat River is a pleasant facility within the City, and also provides a non-motorized connection to many parks across the City. 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 vibrant part of the community's identity. Amenities and facilities include the paved trail, picnic tables, benches, wildlife observations/fishing deck.

Accessibility Score: 3

Other Recreational Assets

The Denny Craycraft Veterans Freedom Park

The park is owned and maintained by a 501c3 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 Sheild/Desert Storm Operations Memorial, Prisoner of War/Missing In Action Memorial, and benches.

Community Gardens

Located across from Woodview Elementary, the community garden plots were developed in 2012. 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 Food Pantry, and God's Kitchen Belding. The community project has received many awards and accolades. The project started with 16 garden beds, including 2 accessible beds, and one designated for a local pantry.

Candlestone Golf Course

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

Schools

The City of Belding is served by the Belding Area Public Schools District. Most 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 1970's on a twenty-four-acre site. Outdoor amenities include a fenced baseball field, baseball practice area, lighted football/soccer field with bleachers, softball diamond, track with a second practice football field, and parking. Indoor amenities include two gymnasiums with locker rooms, weight room, wrestling room, Performing Arts Center, 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 also been recently renovated. Although the site is limited, the school has an outdoor basketball court, outdoor play structure, indoor gym facilities, additional indoor activity spaces, and cafeteria with stage.

Ellis Elementary School

Situated on a 7-acre site in the northern section of the City, the school offers an indoor gym with stage area, indoor full music facility adjacent to stage, outdoor experiential learning area, outdoor playground area, T-Ball/kick ball sized play field, and 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, indoor music facility adjacent to stage, outdoor playground areas, outdoor basketball court, T-Ball /Kick Ball sized field, and additional open space.

Trail Assets

M-44 Sidepath

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

Fred Meijer Flat River Valley 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. Though most of the trail surface is unpaved, the stretch that runs through the City of Belding was paved with asphalt in 2014. The route through the city is also part of the larger Fred Meijer Mid-West Michigan Trail Network that connects many communities in west and mid-Michigan.

Regional Park and 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, play area, ball diamonds, and primitive camping.

Pickerel Lake County Park

Owned by Kent County, Pickerel Lake offers nature trails and 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, 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, nature center, beach swimming, boat launch, play area, ball diamond, 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 non-profit 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.

SAY Soccer

SAY Soccer provides youth soccer programs in the Belding area.

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.

Previous Michigan Department of Natural Resources 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 I

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, 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.



Chapter 5 Planning & Public Input Process

Planning Methods

The City of Belding Parks and Recreation Plan was initiated to provide direction for future park projects, administration, and ongoing operation and maintenance. The timetable for review and approval began with a kickoff meeting with the Recreation Advisory Board (the project steering committee), and ended with local support of the plan in early 2022. Community input was gathered by talking to members of the Recreation Advisory Board, focus groups with community leaders, and by the public completing the community survey.

Numerous tools can be used to determine the recreational needs of a community. One way to assess a community’s needs is to compare 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 of Belding Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Comparison to Park Metrics

The recreation classification system and facility development standards developed by the National Recreation and Park Association has data on different types of parks, their desired site characteristics, size, and service area. The following tables provide a comparison with recreation development standards and classifications 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
Acres per 1,000	0.25 to 0.5 acres per 1,000 population
Desirable Site Characteristics	Within neighborhoods and in close proximity to apartment complexes, townhouse development or housing for the elderly.
City of Belding Mini-Parks	Water Street Park

Neighborhood Park / Playground	
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
Acres per 1,000	1 to 2 acres per 1,000 population

Desirable Site Characteristics	Suited for intense development. Easily accessible to neighborhood population geographically centered with safe walking and bike access. May be developed as a school park facility.
City of Belding 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, large swimming pools. May be an area of natural quality for outdoor recreation, such as walking, viewing, sitting, 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
Acres per 1,000	5 to 8 acres per 1,000 population
Desirable Site Characteristics	May include natural features such as water bodies and areas suited for intense development. Easily accessible to neighborhood served.
City of Belding Community Parks	Central Riverside Park Demorest Field Lighting Bend Reserve

Regional Park Preserve

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.
Acres per 1,000	Variable
Desirable Site Characteristics	Diverse or unique natural resources such as lakes, streams, marshes, flora, fauna, and topography.
Regional Park Preserves near City of Belding	Ionia Recreation Area

Systems Planning

Community Survey

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 2021. The results of the survey are found in the Appendix. Based on the results of the survey, the following highlighted issues and results were used to guide the development of the goals, objectives, and action plan.

- Respondents indicated that parks, trails, and open spaces were very important to their household's quality of life.
- Maintaining the existing parks was the most important way to continue to provide park and recreation facilities for respondents.
- Central Riverside Park was identified as the park most in need of improvements.
- Many respondents indicated that restrooms, picnic shelters/pavilions, lighting, and playground equipment were the facilities most in need of repair.
- Paved, multi-use trails were the preferred trail type to be built if the City considers investing in future non-motorized infrastructure.
- Respondents felt that areas recreation programming could be improved to better serve the community.
- The top five recreation amenities that the respondents would like to see in the community were, in order of preference: walking trails, outdoor water recreation (like a splash pad), children's play equipment, a dog park, and trailhead with restrooms.
- Respondents indicated that security could be improved to deter and address vandalism and illegal activity that is occurring at local parks.

Focus Groups

The planning process also included engaging with three unique focus groups. The first Community Stakeholders focus group was comprised of community leaders and City of Belding leadership staff that work to address park and recreation issues. The second focus group was made up of community members who actively use the trails and sidewalks in Belding, and they addressed questions related to biking and walking infrastructure. The third focus group was a Belding High School leadership class that had students in 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades. A focus group summary report that summarizes the discussion is found in the Appendix. Highlights of the focus group report is listed here:

- Diversity of parks/trails amenities available and activities offered was a strength.
- Participants talked about how people in the community enjoy using the parks. There is a lot of community pride in the City parks.
- Park safety and vandalism is an ongoing issue. Suggestions to address this included having cameras that where in hard-to-reach places to catch the people who are doing this and having more community members out using the parks to deter the vandalism.
- Participants enjoy the nature that can be experienced, seen on trails.
- Students enjoy the skate park because their friends hang out there.
- Trails are popular for students to walk with friends and family, and are a destination because they are scenic.

- Identified Needs
 - Maintenance for many things – various park facilities, groundskeeping, trails. Many aspects of the parks and trails are falling into disrepair.
 - Participants noted that a paid Parks and Recreation Director would be helpful to manage and oversee park and recreation facilities and programs.
 - Trail map would be helpful for those on the trail and on a website to help people plan trips.
 - Wayfinding signs within parks and on trails
 - Lighting to and on trails

Parks and Recreation Analysis

Combining the results of the systems planning approach that includes the results of the survey and focus groups, and the park metrics comparison, the City of Belding should continue to focus its efforts on the maintenance needs of the park and recreation facilities and programs of the community. New facilities could be added, but it should be done in a strategic way that follows the goals, objectives, and action program found in this plan. Additionally, the community should consider how it should best use its limited resources to support Belding parks and recreation.

Public Meeting and Plan Adoption

Following preparation of the Plan, citizens 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 December 17, 2021 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, which was then revised and finalized.

The Recreation Advisory Board made a motion to recommend adopting the plan to Belding City Council on January 10, 2022. The City of Belding City Council adopted the Plan on January 18, 2022.



Chapter 6 Goals and Objectives

Considering community input and the existing conditions of City of Belding, the following goals and objectives were developed to form the foundation of the Plan. The goals are intended to help the community aspire to accomplishing 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.

1. Maintenance

The City of Belding Parks and Trails will be well-maintained and enhance the community.

- a. Create a Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement and Deferred Maintenance Plan that will be used to identify the cost, resources needed, and priority level to systematically address park and recreation maintenance needs for City facilities and programs.
- b. Pursue funding opportunities to address park and recreation maintenance needs.
- c. Develop volunteer network to support City maintenance efforts that can help in small ways like litter clean-up days and spring and fall clean-up events.
- d. Any new facilities installed or infrastructure improvements will meet ADA standards and strive for universal design.

2. Security

The City of Belding parks, trails and recreation facilities will be safe for residents and visitors.

- a. Engage the City of Belding Police Department to identify ways to develop park surveillance and/or a security program.
- b. If vandalism occurs, address it soon after it occurs.
- c. Work with community members and leaders to educate them about the issues and determine how they might be able to help.

3. Leadership

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

- a. Pursue a Parks and Recreation Director paid position that could lead the development of park and recreation programs and facilities and address related challenges.
- b. Consider unique ways to fund the position, including re-establishing the co-op position that was shared with Belding Public Schools.
- c. Consider a parks millage to provide additional funding to provide foundational support for this effort.

4. Non-Motorized Infrastructure

Develop a 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.

- a. Continue non-motorized planning efforts to connect segments into a connected system.
- b. Pursue maintenance opportunities on paved trails and sidewalks.
- c. Improve wayfinding signage along the trail, including street signage at trail/street crossings.
- d. Ensure that all facilities are built to ADA standard and strive for universal design.

Chapter 7 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. A description of each action is provided to indicate a basis for action, identify relevant goals, and provide a plan for such action. In addition, strategic actions should meet with all ADA requirements, where appropriate. Although a five-year time period will not be sufficient to accomplish all of the goals and objectives, the action program is intended to prioritize projects that may be achievable within five 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, focus groups, City of Belding officials and staff, and an inventory of existing conditions.

Parks and Recreation Leadership

The City of Belding and the Belding Public School system used to partner in paying for a Parks and Recreation Director. That person was in charge of community-wide programming for youth and adult sports leagues, they helped direct the growth and maintenance needs of the parks and trail system, and they managed the daily issues of the park and recreation facilities in the City. Years ago, this unique approach to providing a park and recreation leadership position in Belding was stopped, and the time has come again to consider how this role can be reestablished. Focus group participants indicated that this person could help alleviate the burden volunteers have to currently bear to keep the youth athletic programs going. Having a paid position would allow the community to take a stream-lined approach to handling the park and recreation issues of the community. The City is struggling to find resources to pay for this position out right, as it already has a tight budget. If the community can provide a contribution for the position in the short-term, the position may be able to generate enough revenue in the coming years to contribute to its own funding.

Non-motorized System

Respondents to the community survey indicated that they were interested in more paved trails. Focus group participants felt that Belding had a unique opportunity with a regional trail running through the heart of the community that it was not yet capitalizing on. More could be done to help route visitors through the community and to amenities like local restaurants or stores. Belding could become a regional biking destination or hub, helping diversify its economic base. They also said that more should be done to provide a connected loop or “backbone” trail system within the City, as the existing non-motorized network is fragmented and unconnected.

Trails can be a great way for people to exercise and increase their well-being. Belding has sidewalks in some neighborhoods, and a sidewalk gap assessment could be done to assess where new sidewalks are needed and what older ones need repair. Residents know that the Silk City Nature Trail provides a safe, accessible, flat, paved surface that they can rely on. Friends can meet for a social walk. Families can enjoy the trail together walking, scooting, or rolling. The mobility impaired can enjoy a ride around the trail or

use it to reach some destinations within the City. Some segments of the Silk City Nature Trail also connect with the Fred Meijer Flat River Vally Trail, and residents can travel along the path to reach destinations beyond the City’s limits. Future events could even be held at the existing trail or future facilities to provide a common place for the community to gather and celebrate. Consideration should be made to keep the existing trails in a safe, smooth condition.

Parks and Recreation Facilities Upkeep - Maintenance & Vandalism

One of the biggest issues that all focus groups and the community survey respondents talked about was addressing the maintenance needs of the park and recreation facilities in the City of Belding. Though Belding has a number of lovely parks and the Silk City Nature Trail, the maintenance of these facilities has not been consistently addressed in recent years. The paved trail spurs in the City’s non-motorized system have fallen into disrepair and need resurfacing. Each of the City parks has a number of facilities that need upkeep and grounds that need to be maintained. Goose dropping plague many of the parks that run along the Flat River. Though the parks are a sense of pride in Belding – “A gem in the rough” one focus group member said – much needs to be done to repair and upgrade the amenities. The City could develop a prioritized list of the repairs, and then systematically address the issues over the next several years.

Along with this issue is the growing problem of vandalism that is plaguing the park system. A new level of disrespectful behavior and illegal activity began occurring in the Spring of 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown when many kids were out of school. Local leaders continue to be troubled by this and are looking for ways to stop the disruptive, mischievous activities.

Table 7.1 Parks and Recreation Action Program is on the next page.



Table 7.1 Parks and Recreation Action Program

Improvement	Relates to Goal	Priority
Central Riverside Park		
Relocate riverside/far pavilion	1,2	High
Install security measures	1,2,3	High
Update restrooms	1,2	Medium
Install wayfinding signage within park	1	Low
Install lighting along trail	1,4	Low
Install signage to deter the feeding of geese, ducks, and other wildlife	2	Medium
Demorest Field		
On-going field maintenance	1,2,3	High
ADA accessible picnic shelter	1	Medium
Concession stand maintenance	1	Low
Parking lot resurfacing	1	Medium
Lighting along trail	1,4	Low
Install accessible playscape		Medium
East Riverside Park		
Move/renovate pavilion	1,2	Medium
Wood trail maintenance	1,4	High
Install 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
Open play lawn	1	Low
Lightning Bend Preserve		
Use DNR grant money to complete Master Plan recommendations	1,4	High
Water Street Park		
Install accessible boat ramp and launch	1	High
Food truck electrical hook ups	1	Low
Expanded Art in the Park	3	Low
Trail resurfacing	1	Medium
Fishing Dock	1,4	Medium
Install signage to deter the feeding of geese, ducks, and other wildlife	2	Low
Non-motorized Infrastructure		
Wayfinding signage along the trail to park and other community destinations	1,4	Medium
Trail resurfacing	1,4	High
Connection from Ashfield Street to Lightning Bend Preserve	4	Low