

## SECTION 2

# VISION STATEMENT AND POLICY PLAN

## A COMMON VISION



As a river town with a significant historic context, Northfield is well-positioned to maintain its high quality of life in part through the provision of parks, open spaces, and trails.

## SYSTEM PLAN GOALS AND POLICIES

The public process and open conversation that the City has had with its residents in 2007 was instrumental in creating a common vision for the community. A key underpinning of this vision is fostering a high quality of life through the provision of parks, open spaces, recreational facilities, and trails within the context of responsible land stewardship, long-term sustainability, and economic viability.

### MISSION STATEMENT

The mission statement is an outgrowth of the common vision and reflects the City's commitment to its desired lifestyle and providing a balanced overall system. The mission statement is to:

*"Promote a high quality of life in Northfield by providing a balanced and sustainable system of parks, natural open spaces, athletic facilities, and trails consistent with the historic sense of place in the community."*

### CONSISTENCY WITH OTHER PLANS

The *Parks, Open Space, and Trail System Plan* (System Plan) is intended to be consistent with, and complementary to, the vision, goals, and policies of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

The forthcoming goals are broad statements that chart the course for achieving the stated mission. They define desired future conditions and outcomes. Accompanying objectives qualify specific goals. Policy statements articulate strategies or actions necessary to achieve specific objectives.

Note that policies are not ordinances and thus allow for some discretion by the Park & Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) and City Council as to their application.

### SHARED GOALS WITH SCHOOL DISTRICT AND ADJOINING CITIES, TOWNSHIPS, AND COUNTIES

The City will continue to foster mutually beneficial relationships with the School District, surrounding cities, townships, and counties in serving local residents' parks, open spaces, and trail system needs. Where applicable, the following goals and policies are intended to be consistent with, and complementary, to those of its partners.

## PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND TRAIL SYSTEM PLAN

**Goal Statement:** To implement a cohesive, effective, and efficient comprehensive system plan.

**Objectives:**

- To routinely evaluate and update the system plan and recreational needs of the community to ensure adequate parks, athletic facilities, open space, and trails are provided
- To use the plan for the purpose of guiding implementation

**Policy Statements:**

- The plan shall be used to guide park, athletic facility, and trail development within Northfield
- All development shall be consistent with the system plan, unless approved otherwise by PRAB and City Council action
- Review and updating of the plan shall be undertaken as warranted; revisions should be made based on documented changes in community needs, unique conditions, or unforeseen circumstances/opportunities
- The plan shall be adopted by the City Council and referenced in the *Comprehensive Plan*
- Residents shall be given an opportunity to participate in the planning process (i.e., through needs assessment studies, neighborhood meetings, etc.) to ensure that their needs are understood and acted upon
- Copies of the plan shall be made available to residents for review on the City's website
- Copies of the plan shall be available for review at City Hall, and available for purchase at cost

## PARKS AND OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT

**Goal Statement:** To provide residents with parks and natural areas for recreational uses, protection of the natural environment, and visual/physical buffering of land development as a means to maintain the sense of place, ambiance, appearance, and history of the community.

**Objectives:**

- To enhance the quality of life within the city by providing adequate parkland and natural areas to fulfill the present and future needs of residents
- To use the parks, natural areas, and interconnecting trail corridors as a major factor in shaping development
- To maintain and enhance the natural character and aesthetic qualities of the community by providing parks and natural areas
- To encourage sequential growth within the city in harmony with the natural environment

**Policy Statements:**

- When in compliance with the system plan, the City shall reserve the right to acquire or otherwise secure land within all developments for park, open space, and trail purposes
- Parkland dedication policies and ordinances shall be used by the City to require each developer (of all land use categories) to dedicate land or, at the discretion of the City, an equivalent cash value contribution for parks and open space acquisition and development; at the discretion of the City, parkland dedication fees can be waived to achieve other public values consistent with other City plans if doing so serves the best interest of the City
- Parks, natural resource areas, and related recreation facilities shall be acquired and developed by the City in accordance with the system plan
- Alternatives to direct acquisition of property shall be used where appropriate to set aside land for park and open space purposes; this includes conservation easements and other means as defined by the system plan
- Acquisition of specific parcels of land for park uses shall be based on the quality of the land and natural resource, its suitability for the desired uses, and its location as defined in the system plan (or accepted alternative); undesirable land parcels with limited park and natural resource value shall not be accepted
- A reasonable effort shall be made to eliminate physical barriers that deter individuals from using parks and recreation facilities; barrier-free design principles shall be applied in accordance with accepted guidelines and laws
- Design and maintenance procedures shall be consistent with industry standards; design and maintenance of all parks and recreation facilities shall emphasize high quality and user safety
- The PRAB and city staff shall review with landowners/developers all parkland, natural open space, and trail corridor dedication, acquisition, and development goals and objectives on a given property prior to the preparation of formal development plans to ensure a common understanding of desired public outcomes; subsequently, the PRAB shall review conceptual development plans prior to the preparation of a formal development submittal package to ensure that the goals and objectives as set forth are being reasonably achieved
- Parks and trails shall be named in accordance with the *Park and Trail Naming Procedures Policy* prepared and periodically updated by the PRAB and approved by the City Council

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**TRAIL CORRIDORS ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT**


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**Goal Statement:** To provide residents with a high quality interconnected trail system for recreation and transportation and as a means to tie parks and open spaces together.

**Objectives:**

- To provide a trail system that emphasizes harmony with the natural environment
- To allow for relatively uninterrupted hiking, biking, and other uses to and through the City's park and open space system and developed areas
- To effectively tie the various parks together into a interconnected, high quality system and effectively tie the City trail system with those of adjacent townships and regional park and trail system
- To safely protect users from developmental encroachment and associated vehicular traffic

**Policy Statements:**

- Trail easement policies and ordinances shall be used to require developers to dedicate land for the core system of trails and provide access from new subdivisions to those trails
- Trail corridors shall be developed in conjunction with and integral to future developments, parks, greenways, and roadway projects as defined by the system plan
- The trail system shall be developed to minimize conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles
- Trail types, development standards, and general location shall be in accordance with the system plan and accommodate a range of activities (i.e., walking, hiking, bicycling, and in-line skating)
- Trail support facilities should be provided as warranted (including trail signage and striping, benches, picnic tables, bridges, restrooms, parking, shelters, etc.)
- Trail design shall be sensitive to the natural environment and character of the area
- Trails shall be designed to be accessible wherever feasible given the specific setting
- Trails shall be constructed to require minimal maintenance and limit vandalism
- Screening and buffering shall be provided where necessary along trail corridors to provide a physical and perceptual separation between the trail and adjacent land uses
- Motorized vehicles shall be prohibited on trails unless required for maintenance and safety

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**NATURAL RESOURCES STEWARDSHIP**


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**Goal Statement:** To provide for the preservation and conservation of ecological systems and natural resources within the city.

**Objectives:**

- To preserve significant natural resources as open space and a highly valued aspect of the overall open space system
- To maintain and enhance the character or appeal of the community through interconnected natural open spaces
- To encourage orderly and sequential growth within the community and in harmony with the natural environment
- To ensure sustainable and desirable natural resource areas and ecological systems are protected and managed within the city

**Policy Statements:**

- A well-defined natural resources stewardship plan shall be implemented for the purpose of enhancing and protecting the natural resources and ecological systems within the city
- Residents shall be educated and informed about ecological issues so that they better understand the importance of restoration and management programs and their role in protecting the natural resources of the community
- Natural resource areas may, at the discretion of the City, be set aside (through direct purchase, developer's agreements, conservation easements, or by other means) to preserve the natural character of the community; these areas shall be considered as desirable additions to, rather than substitutes for, other types of parkland
- Natural resource areas shall be defined to include all lands that are considered by the City to be natural amenities and/or of ecological significance; land areas exhibiting steep slopes and other non-buildable features may, at the City's discretion, be set aside as natural resource areas and included as part of the park, greenway, and trail system
- Policies and ordinances protecting natural resources and ecological systems within the city shall be reviewed, including the review of wetland and shoreland management policies to ensure that they are consistent with accepted statewide standards and requirements; a water quality management plan shall also be developed and implemented by the City
- Property owners and local business community shall be encouraged to preserve the natural character of their properties

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

**Goal Statement:** To establish an effective, ongoing means of communicating and interacting with residents about issues related to parks and recreation facilities, programs, and future development. To provide residents with the opportunity to participate in recreational activities and programs through the City and various civic and volunteer organizations.

**Objectives:**

- To promote active and ongoing interaction between the City and its constituents to ensure effective recreational programming and facility development
- To promote ongoing communication between the PRAB and residents
- To promote ongoing volunteer programs and civic and athletic/youth organizations to encourage residents and community organizations to assist in park improvements, maintenance, and providing recreation programs

**Policy Statements:**

- Information sharing and education programs shall be used as needed to enhance participants/residents knowledge of the existing programs and facilities (e.g., community newspaper/ activities brochure, etc.).
- Community participation and interaction shall be promoted to determine the needs and desires of the residents; periodically scheduled public meetings, needs assessment surveys, neighborhood meetings, focus groups, interviews, etc., shall be used as tools to assess the needs of the community
- The formation of athletic/youth/civic groups and associations shall be promoted to assist in the continued development of recreation programs and facilities
- Residents and PRAB shall work together to define park facilities and programs that are needed, can be provided, and what residents can do to assist (e.g., Adopt-A-Park)
- Volunteerism shall be promoted through the development of various volunteer programs (e.g., Adopt-A Park, etc.)

## PARTNERSHIPS

**Goal Statement:** To maximize the park and recreational opportunities available to residents through the development of fair and equitable working partnerships between the City and the local recreational program providers, local school district, adjacent cities and township, county, churches, and civic organizations. "Fair and equitable" is defined as being in the best interest of the City while respecting the need for partners to also realize value in a given relationship.

**Objectives:**

- To fairly and equitably integrate the City of Northfield parks and facilities with those of the other partners
- To fairly and equitably integrate the City of Northfield programs with those of the other partners

**Policy Statements:**

- A cooperative effort shall be undertaken between all partners to encourage the optimal use of limited resources and minimize duplication of park sites, facilities, and services
- All agreements - although intended to be fair and equitable to all partners - shall be made in the best interest of the City of Northfield
- Clearly defined joint-use agreements and policies shall be formally adopted between all partners
- Where feasible, new facilities shall be planned in consideration of the needs of other partners
- Where feasible, new facilities shall be located adjacent to property owned by other partners to facilitate shared use and programming
- Ongoing information sharing, communication, and interaction between all partners shall be undertaken to promote each one's system and programs
- The City shall appoint a staff person to be responsible for coordinating facility use and program development; each partner shall be encouraged to do the same

## FUNDING

**Goal Statement:** To secure the funding necessary to carry out the mission of the Northfield Parks, Open Space, and Trail System Plan.

**Objectives:**

- To define the funding options available for implementation of the system plan, and to maximize the use of each source
- To prepare an implementation plan that defines the relative timing and extent of acquisition and development of system components

**Policy Statements:**

- All forms of funding for implementing the system plan shall be pursued on an ongoing basis and in a time frame consistent with community need and development
- Public-private partnerships shall be used where appropriate to help fund or defer costs to implement the system plan; this includes the use of conservation development and/or form-based approaches to development planning when it serves the best interest of the City in maximizing public values
- A complete analysis of financing mechanisms available to the City for implementation of the system plan shall be undertaken and updated on a periodic basis
- A review of the park dedication formula and program fees (resident and non-resident) shall be undertaken on a periodic basis
- A priority ranking system and an implementation plan shall be prepared prioritizing future improvements where future costs can be reasonably projected
- Shared-cost and joint-use agreements between the City and any partners shall be reviewed on a periodic basis to determine if they are equitable and cost effective

## RECREATION PROGRAMS

**Goal Statement:** Working with local recreational program providers, the City will strive to provide residents with the opportunity to participate in recreation activities and programs through well-designed, effective, and interesting recreation programs.

**Objectives:**

- To support local recreational providers efforts to meet local recreation needs, including those of children, teens, adults, elderly, and the disabled
- To support and encourage a wide diversity of recreation interests within the community
- To work with program providers to provide adequate facilities for programmed use on a fair and equitable basis to ensure that all individuals and groups receive reasonable access to facilities

**Policy Statements:**

- In cooperation with other program providers, standards shall be established that apply uniformly to all programs, sites, and facilities and shall include: a) identification of the recreational program objectives and related facility needs for specific activities; b) ensuring that adequate support of local recreation providers is in place for program viability and success; and c) undertaking a seasonal review of the effectiveness of City support for each recreational program that uses local public facilities
- In concert with program providers, leadership and Code of Conduct guidelines for each activity and program shall be developed defining acceptable and appropriate actions and behavior of individuals responsible for overseeing specific programs and activities that use city parks and facilities
- An ongoing communication strategy shall be established between the City and program providers to encourage across-the-board collaboration among providers, broaden recreation interests, and track demand/recreation trends affecting the city
- The City shall encourage all program providers to provide an equal opportunity to participate in recreation
- Parks and trails use policies, rules, and regulations shall be prepared and periodically updated by the PRAB and approved by the City Council; this includes policies, rules, and regulations associated with signage and activities provided by local associations using City facilities

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A number of guiding principles support the vision and mission statements. These include:

- Implement a balanced system plan offering multiple community values
- Allow for some flexibility in implementing the plan to adjust to realistic financial limitations and unforeseen events
- Maintain a high and consistent standard of quality throughout the system
- Plan and design parks for their entire lifecycle (i.e., 15 to 20 years)
- Adhere to a standardized planning and design process for individual parks to ensure consistency in public involvement and outcomes

## ACHIEVING THE COMMON VISION

Achieving the common vision will require the use of conventional and non-conventional approaches to planning, development, and funding. Successful implementation of the plan will also require a steadfast commitment to collaborating with the development community for a couple of key reasons:

- The nuances of integrating open spaces, parks, and trails into new developments requires a high level of collaboration and flexibility to achieve the highest public values
- The cost of implementing the system plan to its fullest potential is likely to be well beyond the City's means using conventional funding mechanisms, park dedication policies, and past approaches to acquisition and development

By combining standard regulatory controls with alternative approaches to the development process (such as conservation development), achieving the vision and goals set forth in this and the City's Comprehensive Plan becomes more realistic. Lacking that, realizing the full potential of the system plan becomes significantly more of a challenge, and perhaps even unlikely.

Achieving the common vision will also require expanding on the cooperative relationship between the City and its partners as defined in various sections of this plan.

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