

8. Parks and Recreation

Chapter 8 is organized into the following sections:

- A. Overview
- B. Goals
- C. Key Findings
- D. Objectives and Strategies

Purpose:

The purpose of the Parks and Recreation Chapter is to describe the existing park and trail system in Northfield and plan for its future extension.

A. Overview

Two land use principles (Principles 2 and 12) in Chapter 4, Land Use, that relate to Parks and Recreation state that “the natural environment will be protected, enhanced and better integrated in the community”, and “opportunities will be created to walk and bike throughout the community.”

Northfield provides a variety of recreational opportunities for its residents. Whether it is swimming at the Northfield municipal pool, participating in a soccer match in Spring Creek Park or a baseball game at Sechler Park, enjoying quiet time along the Cannon River or riding a bicycle on one of the community’s trails, a full range of recreational pursuits is offered in the community.

Over the last several years, Northfield has added parks and trails as development has occurred in various parts of the community. Public and private schools supplement the recreational facilities supplied by the City, and St. Olaf and Carleton Colleges both provide recreational facilities, some of which are available to the community at-large.

In 2008, the City will consider approval of a document called the “Northfield Parks, Open Space, and Trail System Plan” (referenced in this chapter as the “2008 Park System Plan”). Although not yet adopted by the City Council as of the date of adoption of the 2008 Comprehensive Plan, the 2008 Park System Plan was considered complete. This chapter of the 2008 Comprehensive Plan based its goal, findings, objectives, and strategies on the 2008 Park System Plan. Over the next 20 years, the community will need to continue to build the park and trail system in order to keep pace with the recreational demands of a growing population. This means investing in park and trail infrastructure as described in the 2008 Park System Plan.

The 2008 Park System Plan was developed using information from a Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) completed in 2005, and a Greater Northfield Area Greenway System Action Plan completed in 2007. The 2008 Park System Plan serves as a foundation for this Comprehensive Plan chapter. In the event there is a conflict between this chapter and the 2008 Park System Plan, the 2008 Park System Plan will prevail.

B. Goal

A goal is a policy statement that states a desired outcome in general terms. The goal for parks and recreation is provided below. The goal was developed by considering key findings related to parks and recreation, and integrating public input generated as part of the Plan update.

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.

C. Key Findings

The 2008 Park System Plan noted several influences for the future development of the park and trail system in Northfield. First, demographic influences such as new families with young children moving into the community, the growth in population of “empty nesters” and seniors and the influence of the large college student population in Northfield. Second, recreational trends such as the difficulty in engaging today’s youth in “traditional” recreational activities influence the types of park land uses and programs that should be developed. Third, public input received in the creation of the park plan also guides City leaders in the development of the park system.

- Community parks typically serve a broader and more specialized purpose than neighborhood parks. Their focus is on meeting community-based recreational needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces. For example, “Everybody’s Playground”, located within the Spring Creek Soccer Athletic Complex, is a playground created specifically to meet disabled children’s needs.
- Nature parks are lands set aside for preserving natural resources, remnant landscapes and open space, and providing visual aesthetics/buffering. They also provide passive use opportunities.
- Athletic complexes are consolidated programmed adult and youth athletic fields and associated facilities.

The City maintains a volunteer citizen advisory board called the Park and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB), which advises City Staff and public officials regarding the public park system and on recreational facilities within the city. The PRAB also assists with long-range planning for land acquisition of parks, natural areas and trails, as well as detailed plans for park development, and the development of recreational facilities.

Existing Park and Trail System Plan

Currently, there are 31 public parks in Northfield, 21 miles of trails and numerous athletic facilities (Map 8.1). Parks are divided into neighborhood parks, community parks, nature parks, and athletic complexes (Table 8.1). Some of these facilities, including the soccer fields, ballfields and ice arena, are owned by the City. Other facilities, such as school playground areas, are owned by various organizations, such as the School District. In addition, there may be existing trails located on private property, such as St. Olaf or Carleton Colleges, which may not be available to the general public. Below is a description of the types of parks within Northfield:

- Neighborhood parks are the basic unit of the park system and serve a recreational and social purpose. Development focuses on informal recreation. Programmed activities are typically limited to youth sports practices and, very occasionally, games.

MAP 8.1 – EXISTING PARK AND TRAIL SYSTEM PLAN

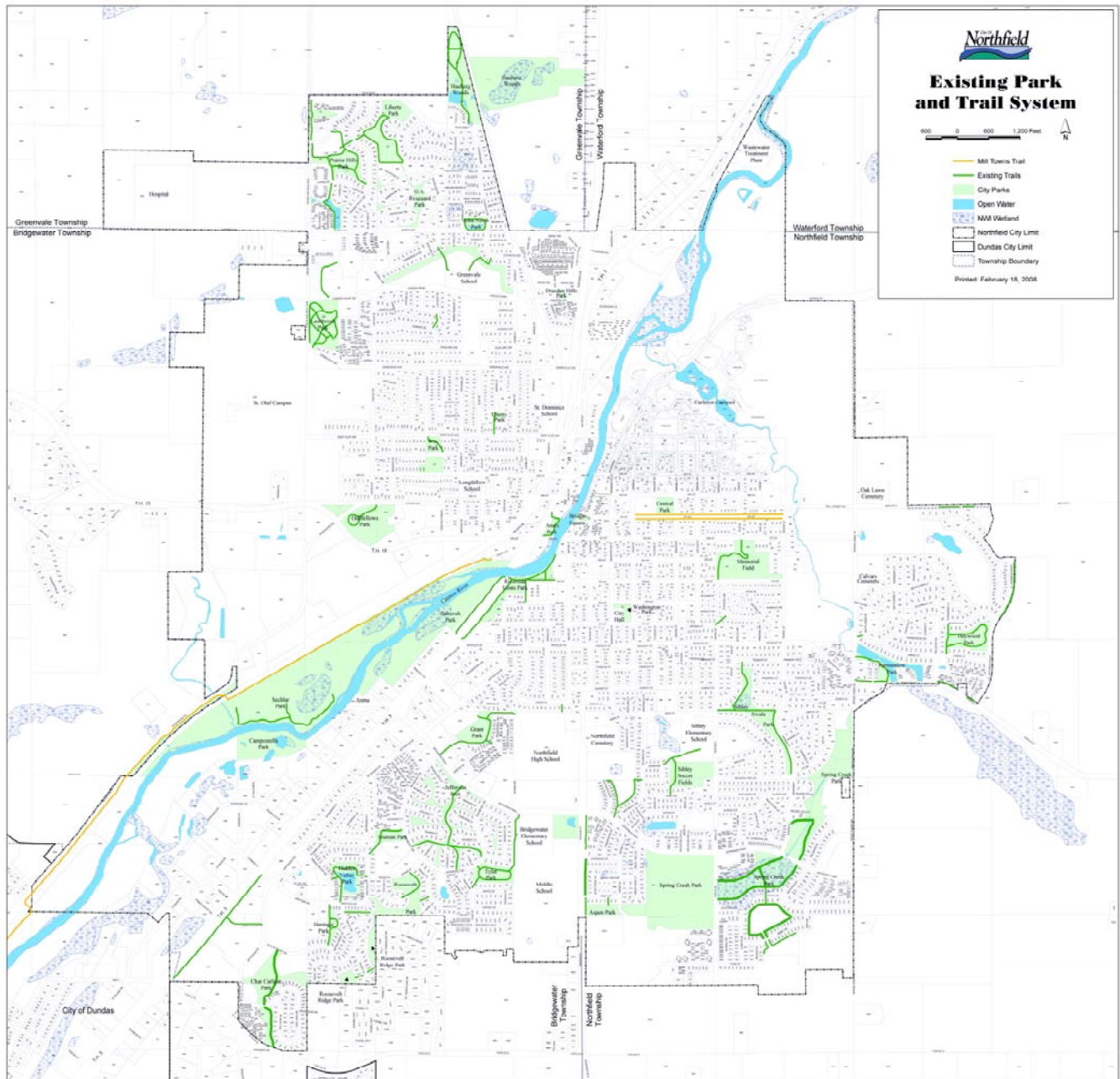


TABLE 8.1 – EXISTING NORTHFIELD PARKS

Name	Type of Park
Aspen Park	Neighborhood
Central Park	Neighborhood
Cherry Park	Neighborhood
Dresden Hills Park	Neighborhood
Grant Park	Neighborhood
Heritage Park	Neighborhood
Heywood Park	Neighborhood
Jefferson Park	Neighborhood
John North Park	Neighborhood
Lashbrook Park	Neighborhood
Liberty/Prairie Hill Park	Neighborhood
Roosevelt/Roosevelt Ridge Park	Neighborhood
Sibley Swale Park	Neighborhood
Truman Park	Neighborhood
Tyler Park	Neighborhood
Washington Park	Neighborhood
Way Park	Neighborhood
Downtown area:	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ames • Bridge Square • Babcock • Riverside Lions 	
Memorial Park	Community
Oddfellows Park	Community
Campostella Park	Nature
Char Carlson Park	Nature
Hidden Valley Park	Nature
Hauberg Woods	Nature
Parmeadow Park	Nature
Spring Creek Park	Nature
Sechler Park	Athletic Complex
Spring Creek Soccer	Athletic Complex

Source: City of Northfield

Proposed Park and Trail System Plan

The 2008 Park System Plan describes the goals for the next several years in developing the parks and trails system in Northfield (Map 8.2), and emphasizes quality of the system as opposed to quantity (number of parks and trails). The following are some highlights of the proposed system plan:

Natural greenway corridor system:

The proposed trail plan for the city will be consistent with the Greater Northfield Area Greenway System Action Plan, adopted in 2007. The greenway corridor system is defined as a connected system of protected natural areas and cultural resources for human use that will consist of both publicly-owned and privately-owned land perpetually protected as open space. The natural greenway system plan is one of the most ambitious and inspired aspects of Northfield’s overall park, open space

and trail system. It will also be one of the most challenging to implement given the many parcel-by-parcel acquisition variables that will have to be addressed as land use decisions are made over time. Nonetheless, the public value of such a system has consistently proven to be very high and fully justifies the local commitment that will be needed to attain it.

City and School District cooperation:

The 2008 Park System Plan is intrinsically interconnected to School District properties. This is especially the case with athletic facilities, in which continued collaboration is necessary to effectively and efficiently serve local needs. Currently, the City and the School District have a recreation program agreement in place, which allows for cooperation in use, operations, and maintenance of athletic facilities for various sites. Continuing this relationship remains important in order to maximize the efficient use of land and funding sources to meet local needs.

Stewardship Plan:

Another important component of the 2008 Park System Plan is to establish a Stewardship Plan, which would be an on-going effort to protect natural areas. The Cannon River corridor is one of numerous examples in the city where maintaining its high value as a natural resource amenity will require a long-term commitment to its ecological health. Lacking that commitment, this type of resource will slowly degrade due to lack of natural processes and the collective impact of invasive species, fragmentation and hydrological changes associated with adjacent development.

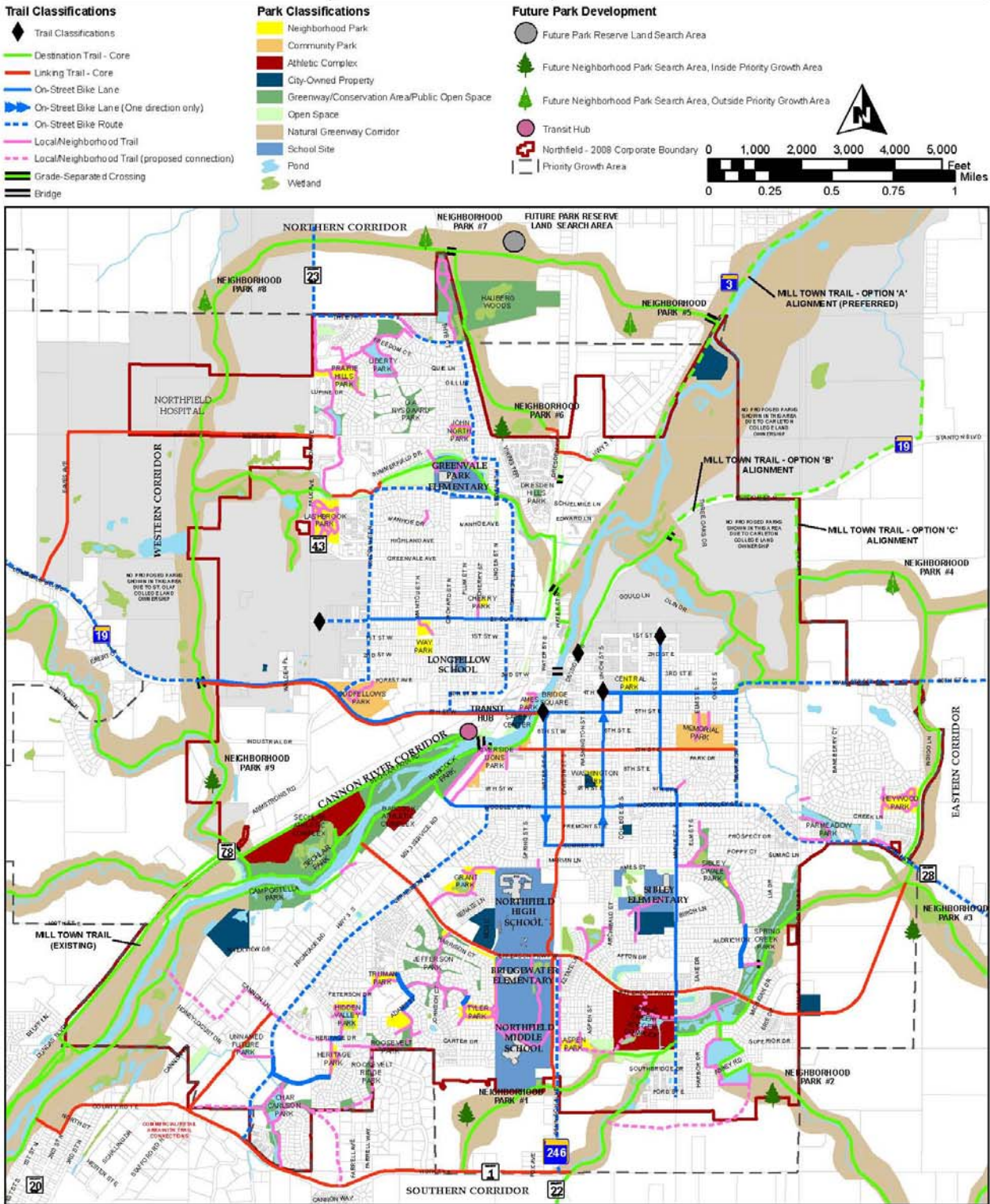
D. Objectives and Strategies

Outlined below are eight objectives and 24 strategies. The objectives indicate a specific policy direction and help organize strategies. Strategies are detailed actions necessary to initiate or complete an objective such as a program, policy or a project.

Objective 1: Implement a cohesive, effective and efficient comprehensive system plan.

PR 1.1 Routinely evaluate and update the 2008 Park System Plan and recreational needs of the community to ensure adequate parks, athletic facilities, open space and trails are provided.

NORTHFIELD PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND TRAIL SYSTEM PLAN



Based on the Northfield Parks, Open Space and Trail System Plan

Updated Oct. 8, 2008

PR 1.2 Use the 2008 Park System Plan for the purpose of guiding implementation.

Objective 2: 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.

PR 2.1 Enhance the quality of life within the city by providing adequate parkland and natural areas to fulfill the present and future needs of residents.

PR 2.2 Use the parks, natural areas and interconnecting trail corridors as a major factor in shaping development.

PR 2.3 Maintain and enhance the natural character of the community by providing parks and natural areas.

PR 2.4 Encourage sequential growth within the city in harmony with the natural environment.

Objective 3: Provide residents with a high-quality, interconnected trail system for recreation and transportation as a means to tie parks and open space together.

PR 3.1 Provide a trail system that emphasizes harmony with the natural environment.

PR 3.2 Allow for relatively uninterrupted pleasure hiking, biking, and other uses to and through the City's park and open space system and developed areas.

PR 3.3 Effectively tie the various parks together into an interconnected, high-quality system and effectively tie the City trail system with those of the adjacent townships and regional park and trail system.

PR 3.4 Protect trails from future development and from vehicular traffic.

Objective 4: Provide for the preservation and conservation of ecological systems and natural resources within the city.

PR 4.1 Preserve significant natural resources as open space and a highly valued aspect of the overall open space system.

PR 4.2 Maintain and enhance the character or appeal of the community through interconnected natural open spaces.

PR 4.3 Encourage orderly and sequential growth within the community and in harmony with the natural environment.

PR 4.4 Ensure sustainable and desirable natural resource areas and ecological systems are protected and managed within the city.

Objective 5: Establish an effective, ongoing means of communicating and interacting with residents about issues related to parks and recreation facilities, programs and future development. Provide residents with opportunities to participate in recreational activities and programs throughout the City and various civic and volunteer organizations.

PR 5.1 Promote active and ongoing interaction between the City and its constituents to ensure effective recreational programming and facility development.

PR 5.2 Promote ongoing communication between the Park and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) and residents.

PR 5.3 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.

Objective 6: 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 townships, counties, churches and civic organizations.

PR 6.1 Fairly and equitably integrate the City's park and recreation facilities with those of the other partners.

PR 6.2 Fairly and equitably integrate the City's programs with those of the other partners.

Objective 7: Secure the funding necessary to carry out the mission of the 2008 Park System Plan.

PR 7.1 Define the funding options available for implementation of the 2008 Park System Plan and to maximize the use of each source.

PR 7.2 Prepare an implementation plan that defines the relative timing and extent of acquisition and development of system components.

Objective 8: 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.

PR 8.1 Support local recreational providers' efforts to meet local needs, including those of children, teens, adults, elderly and the disabled.

PR 8.2 Support and encourage a wide diversity of recreation interests within the community.

PR 8.3 Work with program providers to provide adequate facilities for programmed use on a fair and equitable basis to ensure that all individuals receive reasonable access to facilities.