

# Chapter 1 – Introduction



## Background and Purpose

Park and open space planning in Washington County dates back to the 1970's as part of a regional effort led by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC). The first regional park and open space plan was adopted by SEWRPC in 1977. Since then, updated park and open space plans specific to Washington County have been published in 1989, 1997, and 2004 and were subsequently adopted by the Washington County Board of Supervisors and SEWRPC. A detailed explanation of the history of park and open space planning in Washington County and park and trail system improvements can be found in Appendix A.



The Washington County Planning and Parks Department was given the duty of updating the county's park and open space plan. The new plan is based upon updated information related to land use, population levels and distribution, anticipated growth and development, and natural resources. In addition, Plan recommendations focus on priority park and open space acquisition and development opportunities within the context of satisfying the strategic goals established by the Washington County Board of Supervisors. The County's strategic goals are outlined throughout the following pages. The primary focus of the Plan is to ensure that the Washington County Park and Trail System is sustainable, well-maintained, safe, improved and strategically expanded in a financially responsible manner, and improves quality of life for the citizens and visitors of Washington County. The updated Plan is further intended to maintain County eligibility to apply for and receive Federal and State aids in partial support of the acquisition and development of park and open space sites and facilities. The new plan, with a design year of 2035, is documented in this report.



By welcoming and valuing public opinion throughout the planning process, this Plan is designed to reflect the public's will, resulting in desired recreational and nature-based opportunities. Through numerous surveys and public input opportunities, it is evident that the Washington County Park and Trail System is highly valued by the residents of Washington County due to its positive impact on their lives through improved physical health, decreased stress levels, and improved overall quality of life. This Plan analyzes existing opportunities and provides a roadmap of where and how Washington County should expand recreational and nature-based opportunities to enhance benefits experienced by the public, capitalize on economic returns from parks and open spaces, and continue to improve quality of life in Washington County.



## Washington County Vision, Mission and Strategic Priorities —

In 2015, and updated in 2018, the Washington County Board of Supervisors identified a vision, mission, and four strategic goals for services that are provided directly to improve the quality of life of the citizens of Washington County, along with a set of practices designed to achieve each goal.

### *Washington County Vision*

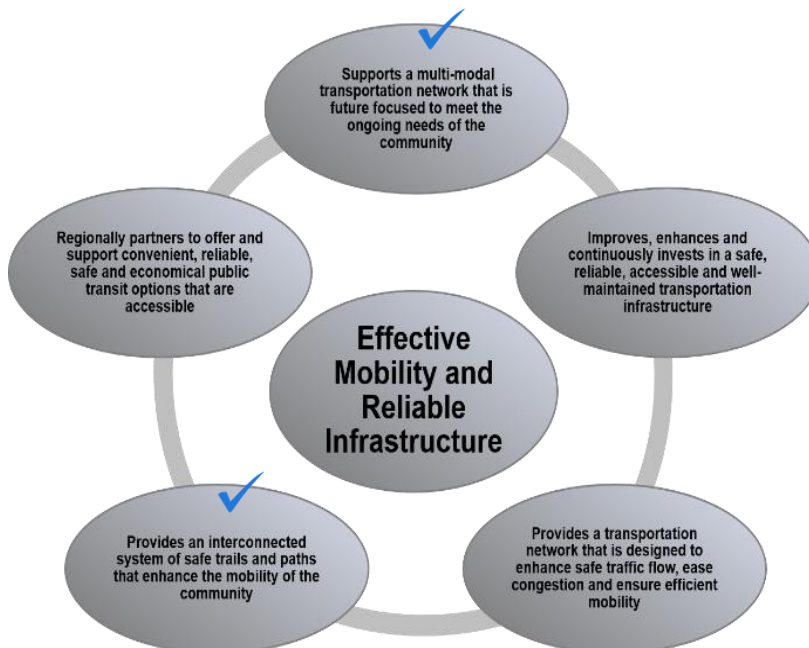
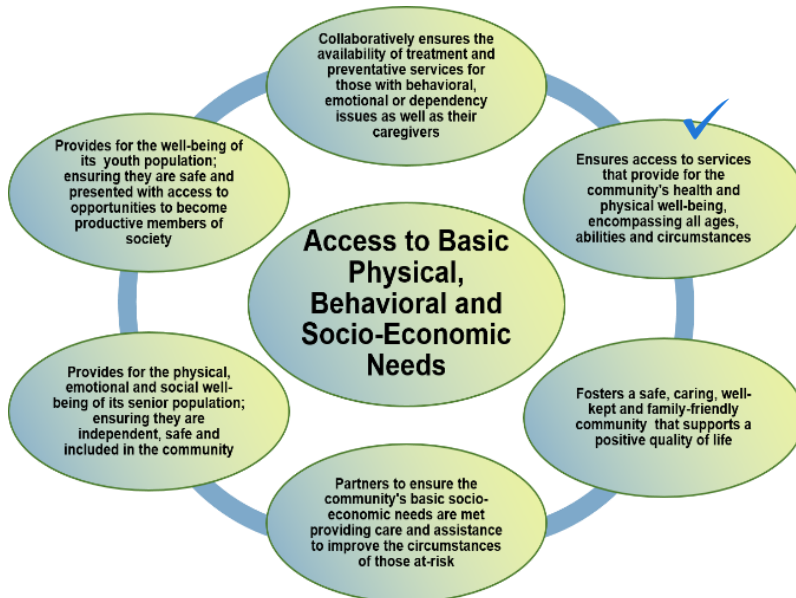
*Washington County strives to cultivate its rich heritage, vibrant economy and attractive communities through the distinct values that define us.*

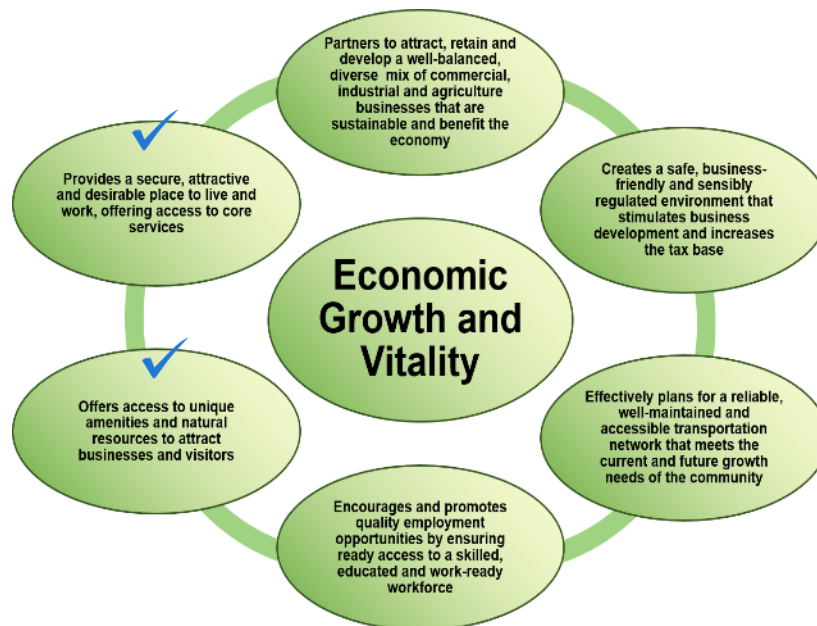
### *Washington County Mission*

*We create an environment for residents and businesses to enjoy our authentic quality of life through a well-governed and administered county dedicated to safe and secure communities; economic growth and vitality; effective mobility and reliable infrastructure; and access to basic needs.*

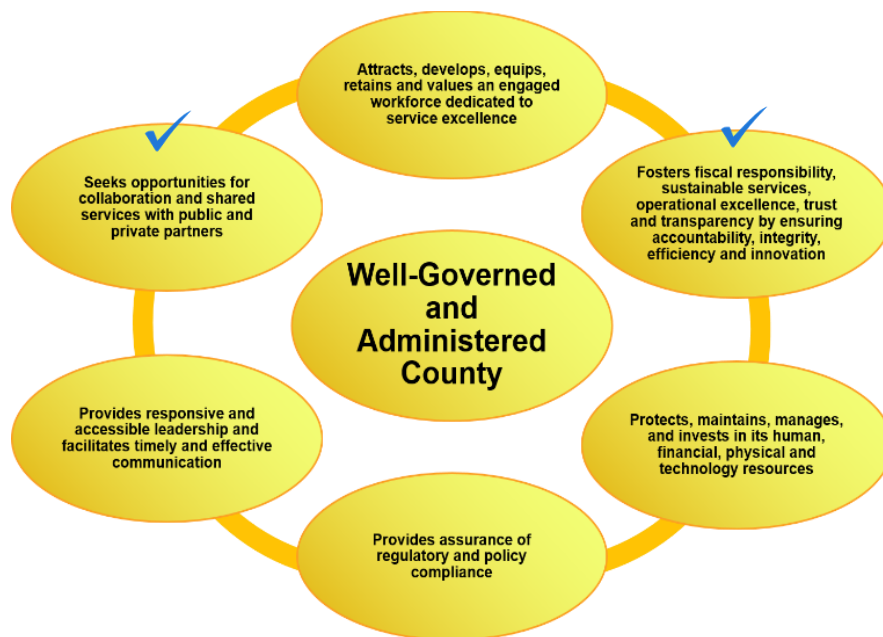


The below Results Maps provide the framework for the County to prioritize programs and think strategically on issues impacting County government. Practices that align with the Park and Open Space Plan are marked with checkmarks.





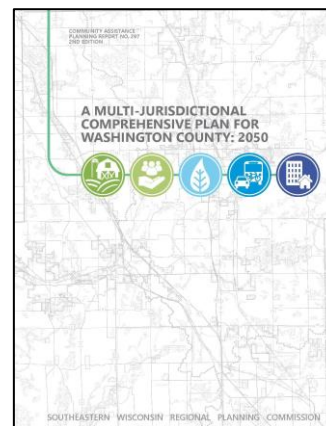
The County Board also established a strategic priority for programs that do not provide direct services to citizens, but support the direct services provided by other County programs. This governance result is shown below.



## Relationship to Other Plans

### ***A Multi-Jurisdictional Comprehensive Plan for Washington County: 2050***

Since adoption of the 2004 park and open space plan, Washington County has adopted a comprehensive plan<sup>1</sup> that fulfills the requirements of *Wisconsin Statutes* 66.1001. The comprehensive plan addresses park and open space issues with numerous goals, objectives, policies, programs, and suggestions for local governments. The comprehensive plan includes a goal to provide an integrated system of priority public parks and related open space areas that positively contribute to the quality of life for County residents by providing opportunities to participate in a wide range of outdoor recreational activities. The plan also includes many specific policies and programs related to the protection of natural resources and groundwater. The comprehensive plan also supports the implementation of the Washington County Park and Open Space Plan and, in turn, this Plan is designed to address the related recommendations identified in the comprehensive plan.



*Washington County Comprehensive Plan adopted on April 10, 2019.*

<sup>1</sup> A Multi-jurisdictional Comprehensive Plan for Washington County: 2035 was adopted by the Washington County Board of Supervisors on April 15, 2008. The Plan was updated and adopted on April 10, 2019.

Recommendations identified in *A Multi-Jurisdictional Comprehensive Plan for Washington County: 2050* related to open space preservation, natural resource protection, and park and outdoor recreation are below.



- Develop an expanded and interconnected multi-use trail system implementing the Washington County Bikeway and Trail Network Plan.
- Pursue partnerships that enhance maintenance, education and recreation of the County park and trail system.
- Collaborate with local governments and organizations to improve parks, trails, and lake access throughout the County.
- Maintain and improve the County priority parks, trails, natural areas, and operations in a fiscally responsible manner.
- Promote and market the power of parks and trails to increase their use by individuals and families.
- Work to protect primary environmental corridors through the County subdivision review process.
- Continue to implement programs related to surface and groundwater resources to support the development of land use patterns to protect wetlands in the County from pollution.
- Protect primary environmental corridors, isolated natural resource areas, natural areas, critical species habitat sites, floodplains, and wetlands and surface waters outside primary corridors and isolated natural resource areas from incompatible urban development by enforcing applicable County regulations.
- Restrict urban land uses and other incompatible land uses and structures in wetlands by enforcing applicable County regulations. Require mitigation if wetlands are destroyed as part of a development project.
- Continue monitoring and testing County owned swimming beaches for safe water quality.
- Implement the recommendations identified in the Aquatic Invasive Species Strategic Plan through a partnership with County lake organizations. Control and reduce the spread of invasive plant species in Washington County.

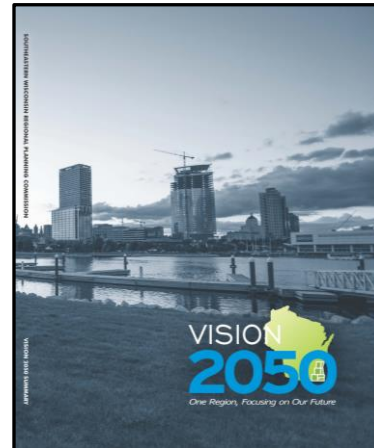
- Continue to promote and assist with joint watershed planning programs between communities in Washington County to minimize urban and rural storm water runoff and improve water quality as part of the WDNR's TMDL Program.
- Continue to promote groundwater infiltration in areas associated with natural groundwater recharge by minimizing impermeable areas and promoting wetland creations, enhancements, and restorations.
- Encourage the protection of groundwater recharge areas identified in the regional water supply plan. Continue to raise awareness about groundwater quality and quantity, groundwater levels, water infiltration, and aquifer recharge. Increase awareness and promote action for proper groundwater protection practices.
- Encourage sound, well planned development that protects the natural resources of the County.
- Support efforts that protect and maintain woodlands, primary environmental corridors, exceptional water resources, geologic areas, and threatened and endangered species in Washington County.
- Protect, conserve and improve the quality and quantity of groundwater from the loss of recharge areas, overly concentrated pumping, inappropriate private onsite wastewater treatment systems and agricultural practices in order to provide safe drinking water.
- Develop methods to ensure that the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users are considered, and appropriate facilities are provided when County highways are designed, constructed, or reconstructed.
- Accommodate bicycle travel on County arterial streets and highways through bicycle lanes, widened outside travel lanes, widened and paved shoulders, or separate bicycle paths as outlined in the Washington County Bikeway and Trail Network Plan.
- Work to ensure consistency between regional, County, and local land use and transportation plans so that the arterial street network, transit services, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities are safe, efficient, appropriately sized and located to serve all County users, including vehicular traffic, bicyclists, pedestrians and farm equipment.





***Vision 2050: A Regional Land Use and Transportation System Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin<sup>2</sup>***

VISION 2050, Southeastern Wisconsin’s long-range land use and transportation plan was produced by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC). VISION 2050 seeks to build on the Region’s existing strengths and improve areas in order to increase the quality of life for residents and businesses while attracting new growth to the Region.



*The VISION 2050 plan sets forth fundamental concepts intended to guide the development of the Region.*

VISION 2050 recommends:

- Encouraging sustainable and cost-effective **growth**
- Preserving the Region’s **most productive farmland and primary environmental corridors**, which encompass the best remaining features of the Region’s natural landscape
- Encouraging **more compact development**, ranging from high-density transit-oriented development to traditional neighborhoods with homes within walking distance of parks, schools, and businesses
- Significantly **improving and expanding public transit**, including adding rapid transit services and commuter rail, as well as improving and expanding local and express transit services to support compact growth and enhance the attractiveness and accessibility of the Region
- **Enhancing the region’s bicycle and pedestrian network** to improve access to activity centers, neighborhoods, and other destinations
- Keeping existing major streets in a **state of good repair** and **efficiently using the capacity** of existing streets and highways
- Strategically adding capacity on highly congested roadways, incorporating “complete streets” roadway design concepts to **provide safe and convenient travel for all**, and addressing key issues related to moving goods into and through the Region

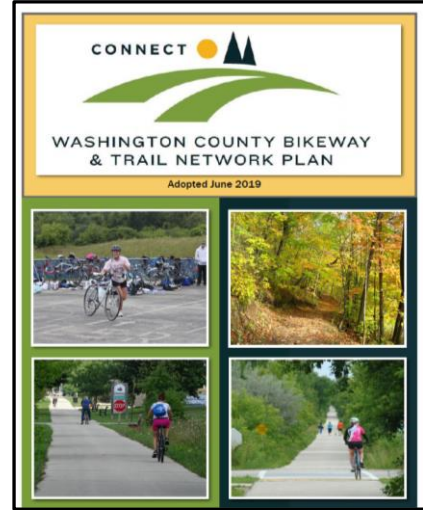


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<sup>2</sup> Vision 2050: A Regional Land Use and Transportation System Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin was adopted by the SEWRPC Commission on July 28, 2016.

**Washington County Bikeway & Trail Network Plan**

The *Washington County Bikeway & Trail Network Plan*, developed in cooperation with Toole Design Group and the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission was adopted by the County Board of supervisors on June 12, 2019 to enhance the quality of life for all residents. The Plan will help guide the County as it makes investments in bikeways and trail corridors connecting all incorporated cities and villages in the County. At full build-out, there will be 348 miles of bikeway and trails including 72 miles of trails, 81 miles of side paths, and 195 miles of on-street treatments such as marked bike routes, bike lanes and paved shoulders. Successful implementation will be completed in small, incremental steps and will depend on effective collaboration between County departments, local governments, non-profit organizations, businesses, and land owners.



*Washington County Bikeway & Trail Network Plan adopted June 12, 2019*



*Rubicon River Trail*

## Park and Trail System Improvements

Numerous park improvements have been completed since the 2004 adoption of the Park and Open Space Plan. For a complete list of improvements, see Appendix A.

### Online Reservation Site



In 2016, Washington County released an online reservation site for park shelter and facility rentals.

### Park Entrance Fees



Park entrance fees were implemented in January 2018. Kiosks with new signage and license plate reading cameras were placed at each of the priority park entrances.

### Lizard Mound County Park



At Lizard Mound County Park, an interpretive center was constructed and restoration efforts were conducted to return a portion of the site to its historical state. In February 2020 the Washington County Board adopted a resolution to convey Lizard Mound to the State for anticipated ownership by the Milwaukee Audubon Society.

## Glacier Hills County Park



*Glacier Hills Hall is newly renovated including an outdoor patio. A new ADA accessible ramp and deck were added to the Glacier Hills Chapel.*



*In the spring of 2019, the four rustic cabins at Glacier Hills County Park were renovated and are now rentable for overnight stays.*

## Leonard J. Yahr County Park



*Since 2004, Leonard J. Yahr County Park has been developed and includes a playground, flush restroom, open shelter, swimming beach, fishing pier, carry-in boat launch, and a VRBO.*

## Heritage Trails County Park



*Improvements at Heritage Trails County Park include the construction of an 18-hole disc golf course, foot golf course, and a new roof was put on the barn.*

## Henschke Hillside Lake Access



*As recommended in the 2004 County park and open space plan, public boat access is now provided by the County on Silver Lake. Henschke Hillside Lake Access is located on the east shore of Silver Lake.*

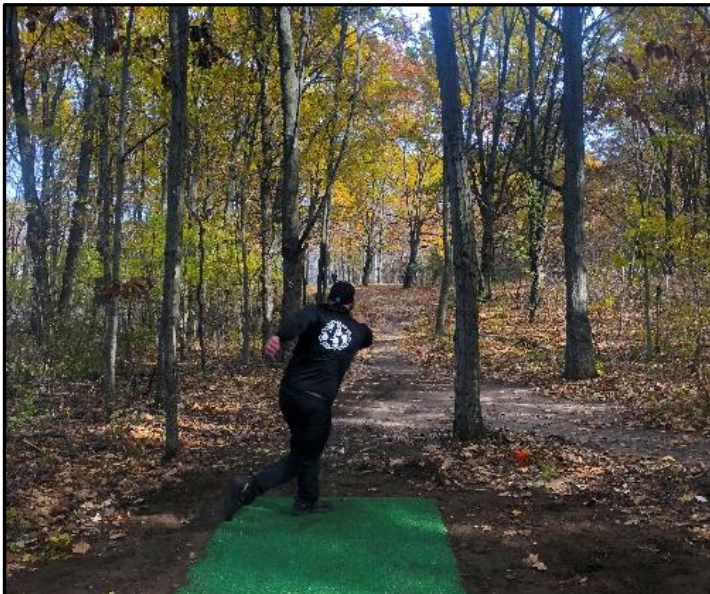
### Homestead Hollow County Park



*A portion of Homestead Hollow County Park was transformed into a 10-acre dog park in the spring of 2018.*



### Sandy Knoll County Park



*An 18-hole disc golf course was installed throughout Sandy Knoll County Park in 2017 – 2018.*

## Park and Trail System Events and Partnerships

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Numerous park events have taken place since the 2004 adoption of the Park and Open Space Plan.

### Wild About Parks



*In 2015 and 2016, the County Parks, in partnership with WI DNR and numerous conservation organizations, hosted a series of Wild About Parks Events throughout the County Park System.*

### Riverside Golf Shop



*County Parks partnered with Riverside Disc Golf Pro Shop, which recently relocated to Sandy Knoll County Park in 2018. The shop sells various discs, snacks and other miscellaneous disc golf gear.*

### Black Husky Brewing Beer Gardens



For the summer of 2019, Washington County Parks partnered with Black Husky Brewing out of Milwaukee. Throughout the summer, this traveling beer garden series was held across numerous County parks every Friday & Saturday night. Black Husky supplied the beer and various local food trucks attended each week with occasional live music acts & activities.

### Bilda's Brews, Bands & BBQ

During the summer of 2019, the County Parks partnered with Bilda's Friess Lake Pub to bring a new, monthly, Thursday night mini music festival series to Washington County.

### Parks Without Borders

Washington and Waukesha County Parks partnered to offer the "Parks Without Borders" program providing free reciprocal park admission.



## Planning Area

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The planning area for this Park and Open Space Plan includes all of Washington County and those portions of the City of Hartford and Village of Newburg that extend outside Washington County. Washington County encompasses a total of 278,756 acres, or about 436 square miles. About 56 acres of the Village of Newburg extend into Ozaukee County, and about 308 acres of the City of Hartford extend into Dodge County.

The Village of Kewaskum owns about 60 acres in the Town of Auburn in Fond du Lac County, which is considered part of the Village. The site is a former landfill and is leased to Wings over Wisconsin as a bird sanctuary. The site will not be developed.

The County is bordered on the north by Fond du Lac and Sheboygan Counties, on the west by Dodge County, on the south by Waukesha County, and on the east by Ozaukee County. Milwaukee County is located to the southeast.

## Planning Process

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The development of this Park and Open Space Plan involved four basic stages. The Plan compiled inventories to determine what exists and what is lacking, conducted public outreach to create a vision for the future, developed strategies and actions, and formulated a roadmap for implementation to fulfill the public's needs. The four stages are further described in Figure 1.1.

## Park and Open Space Plan Technical Advisory Commission

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This report was prepared under the guidance of the Washington County Park and Open Space Plan Technical Advisory Commission (TAC). The TAC was established to guide the preparation of the Plan, review Plan chapters, and identify recommendations for Plan goals, objectives, and actions. A complete membership list of the Commission is provided on the inside front cover of this report. The Commission's recommendations were forwarded to the Washington County Public Works Committee and the Washington County Board of Supervisors for their consideration.



*This report was prepared under the guidance of the Washington County Park and Open Space Plan Technical Advisory Commission (TAC).*



Figure 1.1

WASHINGTON COUNTY PARK AND OPEN SPACE PLANNING PROCESS

