



City of Ashland Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030



Acknowledgments

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Plan Purpose

This plan is a guide for the City of Ashland Parks and Recreation Department for the development and maintenance of parks and recreational facilities. It also serves as a tool to encourage participation in grant programs offered by the WI Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) and other state and federal agencies. This plan follows the Guidelines for the Development of Local Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan from the WDNR and describes:

- ◆ Information regarding demographic trends,
- ◆ an inventory of existing park and recreational facilities,
- ◆ an analysis of parkland and recreational needs and demands,
- ◆ general policy direction regarding park, open space, bicycle, and pedestrian facility planning and maintenance,
- ◆ recommendations for improving existing park facilities for bicycle and pedestrian activities,
- ◆ recommendations and strategies for new park, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities,
- ◆ and implementation strategies.

This plan identifies conceptual locations and recommendations for different types of parks, trails, natural areas, and recreational facilities. In nearly every case, more detailed planning, engineering, study, budgeting, and discussions will be necessary before decisions are made to acquire land or construct recreational facilities.

Mission Statement

The mission of Ashland Parks and Recreation is to enhance the quality of life for residents of the community, through a variety of special events, athletic and social programs. By providing a variety of activities, we hope to encourage lifelong learning, fitness and fun.

This plan also includes a framework for managing Ashland's park and recreation assets with fiscal and environmental sustainability in mind. The plan assesses current and future recreational needs, evaluates feasible options for meeting those needs and identifies the greatest priorities from the community. It is a strategic action plan for the long-term development and improvement of the Ashland parks and recreation system.

The City of Ashland appreciates the local support its parks receive and recognizes the benefit they bring to the community's character and quality of life. It is committed to meeting the active and passive recreational needs of current and future residents and visitors of all ages and abilities.

1.2 Planning Process

The City of Ashland’s previous Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) was adopted in 2019. In 2024, the City contracted with MSA Professional Services, Inc. to develop a Parks Master Plan (PMP). During this process, the City extended its contract to include an update of its CORP, which took place over an 4 month period beginning in January 2025. Since the PMP fulfilled many of the DNR’s requirements for Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans, it was determined that the two plans should be combined into one final document, with the elements of the PMP incorporated into the CORP.

Key milestones for this joint planning process include:

Phase I: Project Kick-Off & Community Engagement

February - May 2024

In early 2024, MSA Professional Services was hired as the consultant team to develop the City of Ashland Parks Master plan. The planning process formally kicked off in February 2024 with a project team meeting, including the Ashland Parks & Recreation Director, Public Works and Utilities Director, the City Administrator, and MSA staff.

Between March and May 2024, the Ashland community was asked to provide input on the project through a number of means, including a Public Input Meeting held at the Bretting Community Center (BCC) and an online survey. Additionally, MSA met with City Department heads during their site visit in June and conducted a virtual focus group with community leaders in early July. A summary of the community feedback gathered during the planning process can be found in Chapter 6.

Phase II: Existing Systems & Future Needs Analysis

June – July 2024

In June, two MSA staff traveled to Ashland to tour and assess the City’s park and recreation assets and meet with City leaders. Over the course of two days MSA staff were able to visit all of Ashland’s parks, tour the BCC, and gain invaluable insight into the issues and opportunities facing

the Ashland Parks and Recreation Department—and the City as a whole. Following the site visits, additional data was provided to the consultant team to inform their comprehensive assessment of park system.

Phase III: PMP Development

August – December 2024

During the Fall of 2024, MSA dug deeper into the Ashland parks system by assessing key park metrics in a national and regional context, synthesizing feedback into top community priorities, and developing guiding policy goals and objectives. MSA also evaluated APR budget and financial information and refined the plan’s long-term implementation strategies and recommendations. MSA worked with City staff to develop and capital improvement plan for improving the Ashland parks and recreation system over the next 5-year horizon. A draft PMP was presented at a joint meeting of the Ashland Parks and Recreation, Sustainability, and Public Works Committees in November, and again to the Committee of the Whole in December.

Phase IV: CORP Update

January – March 2025

In early 2025, MSA and City staff worked together to combine and restructure the PMP and complete the remaining elements needed to fulfill the DNR’s requirements for CORPs, which included some additional demographic and geographic analysis and background information. The public was also given another opportunity to weigh in on priority capital investments through a Public Open House held at the BCC on March 20, 2025.

Phase IV: Plan Adoption & Implementation

April – May 2025

A final draft of the CORP was presented to the Parks and Recreation Committee on April 21st, where they voted to recommend approval by the Ashland City Council. The plan was formally adopted on May X, 2025.

The City's intends to update this plan every five years, in-part to remain eligible for park and recreation grants, and as best practice to ensure that the plan remains relevant to the community's needs.

This plan was developed following the Guidelines for the Development of Local Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans of the 2019-2023 Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) created by the WDNR. Although the WDNR has adopted an updated SCORP for 2024-2028, the primary guidance for the development of CORPs is provided in the 2019 plan.



Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Grant

The Wisconsin Legislature created the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program (Stewardship) in 1989. Named for two of Wisconsin's most revered conservation leaders, Warren Knowles (Governor 1965-1971) and Gaylord Nelson (Governor 1959-1963, U.S. Senator 1964-1981), the purpose of the program is to preserve valuable natural areas and wildlife habitat, protect water quality and fisheries, and expand opportunities for outdoor recreation. The conservation and recreation goals of the Stewardship Program are achieved through the acquisition of land and easements, development of recreational facilities, and restoration of wildlife habitat.

The Stewardship grant program is the most widely used recreational grant program in the state. Eligibility for the program requires that a community maintain a local comprehensive outdoor recreation plan (CORP), updated every five years, and that the project for which grant funding is sought is described in the CORP. Many other similar state and federal recreational grant programs have similar requirements or have shown a tendency to favor those grant applications which are supported through previous community planning efforts.

1.3 Why Plan for Parks?

Parks are some of the only truly free, accessible, multi-functional public spaces. They contribute to the physical and mental health of individuals and communities, and provide public safety, environmental, and social equity and resilience benefits. The COVID-19 pandemic put parks in the spotlight as more people sought opportunities for safe recreation and engagement opportunities outdoors. Now, as more cities are focusing on sustainability and resilience, parks offer a range of health, fiscal, and environmental benefits including:

Healthy Lifestyles

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, children and adults were spending less time outside. Research from the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation showed that young children were engaging in less active play and unstructured outdoor exploration, which are critical activities for developing social and academic skills, as well as building personal resilience. The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) reports that physical activity at any age can reduce the risk of depression, heart disease, obesity, osteoporosis, stroke, and Type 2 diabetes.

Healthy communities have a range of active and passive options for people of all ages and abilities to spend time outdoors. While many people initially think of parks as places for playgrounds, trails, and ball courts and fields, they are also places where people can enjoy more passive activities like picnicking, wildlife watching, and leisurely enjoying the fresh air. According to a 2022 report from the Urban Institute, research suggests a link between measures of park access (proximity to parks and park quality) and higher rates of park use and physical activity. The City Parks Alliance reports that maintaining a healthy lifestyle can save more than \$1,800 annually in healthcare costs per person.

Economic Vitality

Leisure time is an important component of everyone's lifestyle, and increasingly people are choosing locations to live based on quality-of-

life factors that include recreational amenities. According to the NRPA's Engagement with Parks Report, four out of five adults in the US sought high-quality parks and recreation when choosing a place to live. The ability to retain and attract new residents has direct economic benefits to the local community. For this reason, a great park, recreation, and trail system can contribute directly to a community's economic development.

In a study completed by NRPA and George Mason University, 72% of 70 studied communities use parks and recreation images in their economic development materials. The study notes that parks and recreation contribute to economic development through business and talent attraction, retention, and expansion. If a park system is designed with connections to regional destinations, additional visitors can also be brought into a community. This additional tourism can be a significant benefit to local businesses.

Social Resilience

Parks are an excellent source of place-based planning and identity for communities. Park and recreation facility designs are highly responsive to local wants and needs. The most recent example is the transition of tennis and basketball courts into multi-functional 'sport courts' to respond to the explosion in popularity of pickleball. Public parks are also a place for community interaction and neighborhood activity. They can be places where residents gather for social events, recreational activities, and meetings about local issues, increasing social interaction and creating an overall sense of community. An additional benefit is that this 'social resilience' is a key component of responding to and recovering from natural disasters.

Information from the City Parks Alliance indicates that community involvement in the greening of vacant land has been shown to decrease crime and generate additional support for nearby park projects. Research from bicycle and trails advocacy organizations like the League of American Bicyclists and People4Bikes further suggests that the increase in trail traffic also has a depressing effect on crime.

Environmental Resilience

While parks, forests, and trails create opportunities to improve the health of individuals, they also contribute to the greater ecological health of a community. Parks are often tied together with environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands, floodplains, surface waters, or significant woodlands. Additionally, parks are a convenient place to introduce new stormwater retention and infiltration areas into the built environment, helping to manage stormwater runoff and mitigate localized flooding. These natural areas provide food and shelter for local wildlife and naturally retain stormwater. Individual parks can provide important “rooms” of natural resource activity; however, they become even more functional when they can be linked together through environmental corridors. Wildlife, plants, and water all depend on the ability to move freely within the environment, or from “room to room.” The City Parks Alliance reports that urban trees remove up to 711,000 tons of toxins from the air and reduce urban “heat island” effects, equating to \$3.8 billion in national savings.

Equity

In addition to being public open spaces, parks and recreational facilities are excellent places for local engagement. Many communities utilize park funding and infrastructure to revitalize blighted areas and rectify historic disinvestments in lower-income neighborhoods. This comes through reinvigoration of existing parks, and the addition of new parks in underserved areas. Coincidentally, as cities and villages across the United States see shifts in the ethnic makeup of their communities, more and more are investing in multilingual signs and rental form.

Two key parts of any parks and recreation plan includes physical accessibility through ADA-compliant design and walkability to the park. The Americans with Disabilities Act and statewide design guidelines ensure that people of any age and physical ability are able to access many activities throughout a park, from well-maintained paths and curb ramps to inclusive playgrounds. The walkability factor is defined by the NRPA as ensuring that no one lives farther than a 10-minute walk from a park.



CHAPTER 2

ABOUT ASHLAND

2.1 Local & Regional Context

Ashland is a uniquely beautiful City nestled along Lake Superior within the Chequamegon Bay located in Ashland and Bayfield Counties, roughly 70 miles east of Duluth, MN. Development patterns in Ashland have been deeply shaped by the natural landscape, with iron mining, stone quarrying, and lumber industries shaping early twentieth century development.

While population boomed alongside industry during the late 1800s and early 20th century, natural resources were depleted, and population growth slowed significantly. The past 50 years have refocused efforts towards economic stabilization, and acceptance of gradual declines in regional population.

No longer serving as an industrial port, the Chequamegon Bay around Ashland has reoriented as a outdoor recreation and tourist destination, used primarily for recreational boating, swimming, jet-skiing, sailboarding, and ice-fishing in the winter. The City has also transformed remnants its industrial past into one of kind attractions, including converting an abandoned rail line into paved walking and biking trails along the City's waterfront , known as the Ashland Rails to Trails System (ARTS), and the development of the Ashland Oredock, a unique walking promenade and public space built on the foundation of a former industrial mega structure.

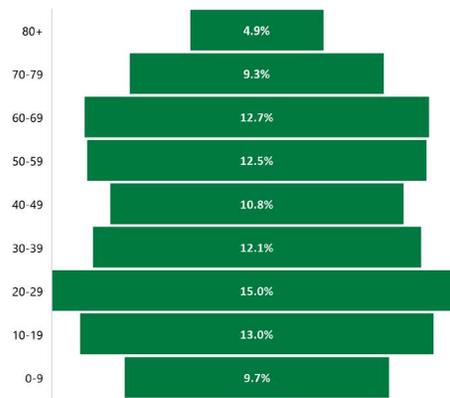


2.2 Demographics

Age Composition

The age distribution in Ashland is shown in Figure 2.1. Age cohorts are an important consideration because different age groups utilize different recreation facilities. As shown in Figure 2.1, the City of Ashland has a higher proportion of residents in their 20s - likely due to the university presence, and a large share of residents over the age of 50.

Figure 2.1 Age Cohorts



Households

As seen in Table 2.2, Ashland has seen a decrease in total number of households since 2010 and a decline in the percent of households with individuals under 18. Average household size is down since 2010 but has increased slightly since 2010. These findings are consistent with national and regional trends as the number of single person households has increased, and members of the Millennial generation delay childbearing or forego it altogether.

Table 2.2 Household Statistics

Households	
2000	3,513
2010 ACS	3,632
2022 ACS	3,411
Average Household Size	
2000	2.24
2010 ACS	2.12
2022 ACS	2.14
% of Households with individuals under 18	
2000	28.3
2010 ACS	29.3
2022 ACS	21.3

Table 2.1 Population History and Projections

	City of Ashland	Ashland County	Wisconsin
1980	8,602	16,783	4,705,642
1990	8,744	16,268	4,891,769
2000	8,601	16,866	5,363,675
2010	8,216	16,157	5,686,986
2020	7,908	16,027	5,893,718
Projections			
2025	7,917	16,187	6,086,628
2030	7,834	16,127	6,255,437
2035	7,691	15,952	6,353,901
2040	7,323	15,303	6,368,975
Change			
1980-2020	-694.0	-756.0	1,188,076.0
2020-2040	-584.8	-724.4	475,257.3
Percent Growth			
1980-2020	-8.1%	-4.5%	25.2%
2020-2040	-7.4%	-4.5%	8.1%

Population

There is a direct relationship between population and the need for more or less park space. Forecasting future population trends allows municipalities to more accurately plan for the future to ensure that the City maintains its park services in line with demand. As seen in Table 2.1, the population in Ashland has been declining for a number of decades, falling 8% between 1980 and 2020. Per the WI Department of Administration (DOA), the population is projected to continue declining through 2040. See page 23 for more information.

2.3 Natural Features

The following Section provides background information on some of the physical characteristics of Ashland and helps give an overall impression of the area.

Water Resources

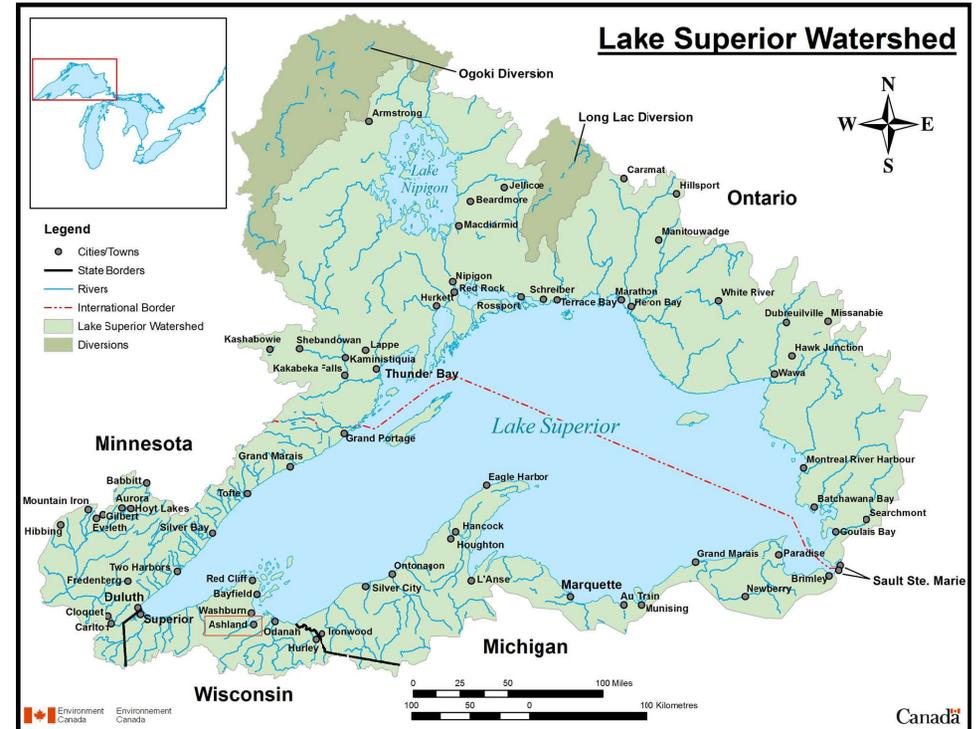
Water is the most vital natural resource to the City. Lake Superior, and in particular Chequamegon Bay, provides water to Ashland residents. Throughout the history of Ashland, the shallow and protected Bay has served a vital role in the economic and cultural development. Ashland's waterfront was once lined with oredocks, mills, and other industrial uses. Today, the waterfront is primarily used for recreation. Protection of these vital waters is of the utmost concern for the future health of the community and ecosystem.

Ashland is located in the Fish Creek Watershed, one of 16 watersheds draining into the Lake Superior Basin. The Chequamegon Bay alone is fed by more than 2,100 miles of rivers and tributaries. The Bay City Creek is the primary sub-watershed which originates near the John F. Kennedy Airport in southwest Ashland. The warm water stream naturally divides east and west Ashland.

Local Natural Resource Conservation Offices work with area farmers to develop natural vegetation plans to mitigate runoff contaminants from entering the waterways. Ashland also has glacial water from artesian wells located throughout the City, with quality drinking water sourced from deep underground. This glacial water is a prized resource of the City, and is popular among residents and tourists.

Flora & Fauna

The Bay area hosts a rich diversity of plants and animals. Rivers and wetlands are key habitat for lake sturgeon and other game fish. The Bay is also critical habitat for the piping plover bird, a federally endangered species. Though not all flora and fauna are located directly within Ashland, decisions made within the City impact the surrounding ecosystems.



Lake Superior Watershed, Source: Lakehead Region Conservation Authority



Birding participants, Source: Travel Ashland County

2.4 Existing Parks & Open Space

The information for this section was gathered from site visits conducted by MSA Professional Services, GIS Analysis, discussions with City staff and review of past planning documents. Complete park descriptions, inventories, and recommendations for improvements on all parks can be found in **Chapter 5**.

Mini Parks

Mini parks include specialized facilities that serve a concentrated population or specific group such as toddlers or senior citizens. Typical size is 1 acre or less, but parks may be categorized as mini parks simply based on the type and quantity of facilities they offer. The following parks in Ashland are categorized as mini parks:

- ◆ Bay City Park
- ◆ Downtown Mini Parks (Menard & Otis Parks)
- ◆ 6th Avenue Beach
- ◆ H. Pearson Plaza & Beach Pavilion
- ◆ East End Community Park
- ◆ Locomotive Park
- ◆ 10th Ave Scenic Overlook
- ◆ West End Skating Rink
- ◆ Marina Scenic Overlook

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks typically serve smaller areas of a community, and are typically of a size or scale that blends into the surrounding neighborhood, usually 3-10 acres. Typically, these parks feature one signature amenity. The following parks in Ashland are categorized as neighborhood parks:

- ◆ Bayview Park & Beach
- ◆ Beaser Park/Ball Fields
- ◆ Ellis Park
- ◆ City Dock Park
- ◆ Memorial Park
- ◆ Penn Park
- ◆ Central Railyard Park

Community Parks

Community parks are areas of diverse recreational activity and may include amenities such as athletic complexes, trails, and large swimming pools. Community parks are typically 10 acres or larger but may vary depending on facilities offered. The following parks in Ashland are categorized as community parks:

- ◆ Prentice Park
- ◆ Hodgkins Park
- ◆ Kreher Park
- ◆ Maslowski Beach

Special-Use Parks

Special use parks are areas for specialized or single purpose recreational activities such as golf courses, campgrounds, nature centers and skate parks. They may also be used to designate areas that are primarily used as event space, general gathering areas, expanded trail corridors or plaza space. The following parks in Ashland are categorized as special-use parks:

- ◆ Superfund Site
- ◆ Ashland Dog Park
- ◆ Marina Park
- ◆ Oredock Park

Conservancy, Open Space & Natural Areas/Undeveloped Parks

Conservancy parks and natural areas are established for protection and management of the natural or cultural environment with recreational facilities as a secondary objective. Open spaces are areas that currently offer no recreational facilities but have been reserved as future active or passive parkland. The following parks in Ashland are categorized as undeveloped or natural areas:

- ◆ Hot Pond
- ◆ Bay City Creek
- ◆ Pig Iron Dock
- ◆ Gilligan's Island

2.5 Other Park & Recreation Facilities

The City of Ashland is nestled amongst some of the state’s most beautiful natural landscapes, and is well-served by regional parks, state parks, and one national lakeshore and one national forest. There are several regional parks and open spaces in close proximity to the City of Ashland. This is not an exhaustive list, but provides a snapshot of the variety of recreational activities available to Ashland residents.

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore

Located just north of the City of Ashland, the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore is a series of 21 islands only accessible by boat. These scenic islands offer campsites for visitors who can take advantage of sea cave kayaking, as well as over 50 miles of hiking trails surrounded by scenic vistas and unique rock formations.

Big Bay State Park

Included in the Apostle Islands archipelago is Madeline Island, which is accessible by ferry. This state park hosts a 61-site campground, sandstone bluffs along the shoreline, beach access and hiking trails.

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest is 1.5 million acres of USDA Forest Service managed forest located southeast from Ashland. Recreational offerings include a number of trails, recreation areas, campgrounds, and waterfronts along the variety of lakes and rivers that run through the forest.

2.6 Other Relevant Planning Efforts

Ashland, Inspired: A Waterfront Development Plan (2019)

The waterfront development plan provided a concrete vision building on the importance of preserving the waterfront, including considerations for the Superfund Site and the Oredock Park. Recommendations included additional youth-focused play areas along the central waterfront, exploring the potential for a concert or event space at the Superfund Site, and consistent addressing of any issues that may cause a negative impact on water quality.

City of Ashland Trails Master Plan (2022)

This plan proposes a number of trails, including a concept plan for the former Memorial Medical Center (MMC), now Tamarack Health Medical Center and a plan for Central Railyard Park bike amenities.

For more information, see page 58.

Authentic Ashland: A Comprehensive Plan for Ashland, Wisconsin (2017)

Ashland Parks are at the center of the vision for preservation balanced with growth presented in the City’s Comprehensive Plan. One of the critical goals for the City includes leveraging the natural resources of Ashland to attract a younger workforce and increase tourism.

The plan highlights the importance of preserving the flow of public recreational land along the waterfront, and utilizing the existing park space as anchors to connect different parts of the City.



Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, Source: National Parks Service

CHAPTER 3

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, & POLICIES

3.1 Ashland Park System Goals

Goal 1: Provide a sufficient amount of active and passive parkland and amenities to meet the current and future recreational needs of the community.

Objectives:

- 1.1. To provide a range of park types and sizes to meet the needs of the community.
- 1.2. To provide a diversity of recreational opportunities so that residents of all ages and abilities have an equal opportunity to enjoy the park and open space system.

Policies:

- 1.3. Maintain a level of service of at least 10.5 acres of developed parkland per 1,000 residents.
- 1.4. Land which is undevelopable (i.e. contains wetlands or floodplains) or proposed for stormwater management facilities shall not be counted toward the required amount of parkland dedication for new subdivisions.
- 1.5. The type of park and open space facilities should be scaled to the needs of the area and population served, both present and future.
- 1.6. Whenever possible, all park sites and experiences will be made accessible to all potential users, in conformance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- 1.7. The park and recreation system should provide opportunities for all persons regardless of race, creed, age, gender or economic status.

- 1.8. Pursue additional land acquisition where existing neighborhoods are underserved by recreational land or where opportunities arise to add strategic parkland to the community which serves to implement one or more recommendations of this plan.
- 1.9. All parks should have multiple access points from surrounding neighborhoods.
- 1.10. Neighborhood parks should be sited and designed to enhance neighborhood cohesion and provide a common neighborhood gathering place.
- 1.11. Seek to ensure that all residential homes are within a 1/3-mile or less distance from a developed public park.
- 1.12. Create consistent building designs for park shelters, restrooms, etc.
- 1.13. Make every effort to repair, replace, or remove park facilities that become broken or otherwise become a safety hazard.

Goal 2: Develop, improve, and operate the City's Parks & Recreation programs in a cost-effective manner.

Objectives:

- 2.1. To maintain a park and open space system that is sustainable with respect to annual maintenance and operation costs and servicing capabilities of the community.
- 2.2. To continue funding the replacement of old and deteriorating recreation equipment in all City parks.

- 2.3. To invest funds for the development of facilities that will maximize existing park and recreation areas, with the intention of increasing park use.
- 2.4. To create a cost/benefit program for Parks & Recreation Programming.

Policies:

- 2.5. Maintain a capital improvement plan to replace worn or damaged recreational equipment and facilities. Use this plan to establish future capital improvement plans and annual budgets.
- 2.6. Take into consideration long-range maintenance and operations costs at the time new parklands are acquired through land dedications or other means.
- 2.7. Pursue grant funding from state, federal, recreation associations, or corporations which can aid in the purchase and/or development of desired park system improvements.

Goal 3: Coordinate park and recreation planning and development cross City Departments and with key community stakeholders.

Objectives:

- 3.1. To coordinate park activities/facilities with civic, private, City, County and State agencies and organizations to complement offerings without unnecessary duplication.
- 3.2. To preserve areas planned for future parks and recreational trails from development.
- 3.3. To provide opportunities for public participation in park and recreational facility development.
- 3.4. To formulate partnerships in the region to promote volunteer opportunities and strengthen relationships.

Policies:

- 3.5. Review and comment on park and recreational plans in adjacent communities.
- 3.6. Provide copies of this plan to adjacent municipalities, tribal communities, and the Ashland County Parks Departments.
- 3.7. Update the City Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) every five years and solicit input from City residents.
- 3.8. Complete regular reviews and updates, if needed, of this plan in coordination with the City-wide Comprehensive Plan.
- 3.9. Coordinate subdivision review with all departments responsible for providing or maintaining adequate park facilities.
- 3.10. Park facilities and school facilities should be shared by both entities to be mutually beneficial to both when appropriate and feasible. This is most likely to occur through a cooperative relationship and through good communication between the Park and Recreation Department and the School Districts.
- 3.11. Continued enhancement of Ashland trail system, incorporating recommendations from the Trails Master Plan and City of Ashland Bike Plan where applicable.

3.2 Park Maintenance Goals

The following goals and policies are intended to assist the Ashland Parks and Recreation department with decision making in the years ahead. These goals and policies were crafted to be responsive to parks system's greatest needs, priorities, and opportunities: reducing maintenance costs through sustainable and resilient practices; ensuring the recreational needs and priorities of residents are met; and further developing the City's waterfront and recreational assets to encourage economic development for the City as a whole. Together, these goals and policies will help build a stronger and more resilient park system for the City of Ashland.

Goal 1: Utilize cost-efficient and sustainable practices to maintain Ashland's park and recreation facilities.

Policies:

- 1.1. Utilize perennial native plant species in place of traditional lawn/turf where feasible to reduce mowing costs, increase biodiversity, and provide habitat for pollinators and other species native to the northern Great Lakes region.
- 1.2. Conduct an annual assessment of park facilities, including as playgrounds, shelters, restrooms, concessions buildings, etc., to track and plan for ongoing replacement and upgrade needs. Consider implementation of an asset management system to track facility assessments and manage maintenance efforts on an ongoing basis; see Section 5.2 for more detail.
- 1.3. Replace all wooden park amenities (bleachers, picnic tables, benches, fencing, etc.) at the end of their useful life with longer lasting and more durable metal alternatives.
- 1.4. When ordering new amenities (benches, picnic tables, etc.), select desired manufacturers and products that offer visual consistency and simplicity use prefabricated options when possible (dugouts, restrooms, shelter buildings, etc.).

Goal 2: Provide a park service level proportional to Ashland's current and projected population size.

Policies:

- 2.1. Identify underutilized parkland capable of converted into an alternative land use when appropriate funding or development opportunities arise.
- 2.2. Consider removing as opposed to replacing certain park facilities at the end of their useful life; factor community priorities and recommended NRPA benchmarks/standards into decision making process.
- 2.3. Before acquiring new park facilities or amenities via donation, assess and ensure the City is capable of taking on the long-term maintenance and operational costs associated with those facilities or amenities.

Goal 3: Ensure Ashland's park and recreation system meets the everyday needs of residents in balance with the City's tourist economy.

Policies:

- 3.1. Continue developing Ashland's interconnected, public waterfront properties into an appealing attraction and destination for tourism—both regionally and nationally.
- 3.2. Ensure neighborhood and community parks are meeting the day-to-day recreational needs of Ashland residents.

Goal 4: Pursue partnerships, programs, and projects capable of generating revenue or reducing maintenance costs for the Parks and Recreation department whenever feasible.

Policies:

- 4.1. Coordinate community groups, neighborhood associations, and other local organizations to help manage, maintain, or raise funds for specific parks projects. It is recommended these partnerships are formalized via Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between APR and the outside entity.
- 4.2. In partnership with other community organizations, utilize the City's public waterfront spaces (i.e. Marina, Superfund Site, Oredock) to draw regional visitors to Ashland through revenue-generating events and other programming.

CHAPTER 4

EXISTING PARK SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

Introduction

This chapter is a quantitative assessment of the Ashland parks system as it exists today in 2025. It compares Ashland’s service level and operational budget to that of its peers nationally. The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate how well the City is providing outdoor recreation services to its residents within the context of guiding national standards and peer communities.

Table 4.1 Park Classification Summary

Type	Use	Service Area	Desirable Size
Mini Park	Specialized facilities that serve a concentrated or limited population or specific group such as tots or senior citizens.	Less than ¼ mile radius	1 acre or less
Neighborhood Park	Areas for intense recreational activities, such as field games, court games, crafts, playground apparatus area, skating, picnicking, wading pools, etc.	¼ to ½ mile radius to serve a population up to 5,000 (a neighborhood)	3-10 acres
Community Park	Areas of diverse environmental quality. May include areas suited for intense recreational facilities, such as athletic complexes and large swimming pools. May be an area of natural quality for outdoor recreation, such as walking, viewing, sitting, picnicking. May be any combination of the above.	Several neighborhoods. 1 to 2-mile radius	10+ acres
Special Use	Areas for specialized or single purpose recreational activities, such as golf courses, nature centers, skateparks, marinas, zoos, conservatories, arboreta, display gardens, arenas, outdoor theaters, gun ranges, or downhill ski areas, or areas that preserve, maintain, and interpret buildings, sites, and objects of archaeological significance. Also, plazas or squares in or near commercial centers, boulevards, and parkways.	None	Variable
Conservancy	Protection and management of the natural/cultural environment with recreational use as a secondary objective.	None	Sufficient to protect the resource

4.1 Park Service Level Analysis

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is a standard bearer for park and recreation agencies and professionals across the U.S. Through their annual survey of nearly 1,000 agencies nation-wide they provide metrics by which agencies can compare their performance against one another to identify areas of excellence and potential improvement.¹

The most common method utilized by agencies across Wisconsin for quantifying a park system's level of service is to assess the acreage of parkland provided per 1,000 people in comparison to the NRPA's benchmark of 10.5 acres minimum of total parkland per 1,000 people. The national median for acres of parkland per 1,000 was 10.6 according to the 2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review. The 10.5 figure is derived the sum of service level standards for mini, neighborhood, and community parks (see Table 4.1, pg. 18).

Table 4.2 Existing City of Ashland Parks	
Mini Parks	9.8
Bay City Park	0.35
Downtown Mini Parks (Menard & Otis Parks)	0.39
6th Avenue Beach	0.62
H. Pearson Plaza & Beach Pavilion	1.88
East End Community Park	1.29
Locomotive Park	0.08
10th Ave Scenic Overlook	1.31
West End Skating Rink	1.03
Marina Scenic Overlook	2.80
Neighborhood Parks	36.0
Bayview Park and Beach	8.86
Beaser Park/Ball Fields	2.08
Ellis Park	2.06
City Dock Park	8.86
Memorial Park	3.33
Penn Park	2.29
Central Railyard Park	8.6

Community Parks	140.3
Prentice Park	98.6
Hodgkins Park	15.53
Kreher Park & Boat Landing Extension	21.08
Maslowski Beach	5.15
Special Use Parks	21.8
Ashland Dog Park	0.5
Marina Park	3.30
Oredock Park	18.00
Undeveloped Parks	42.6
Hot Pond	5.10
Bay City Creek	30.0
Pig Iron Dock	4.0
Gilligan's Island	3.5
Total	250.4

Trails	11.5 mi
Ashland Rails to Trails System (ARTS)	11.5 mi

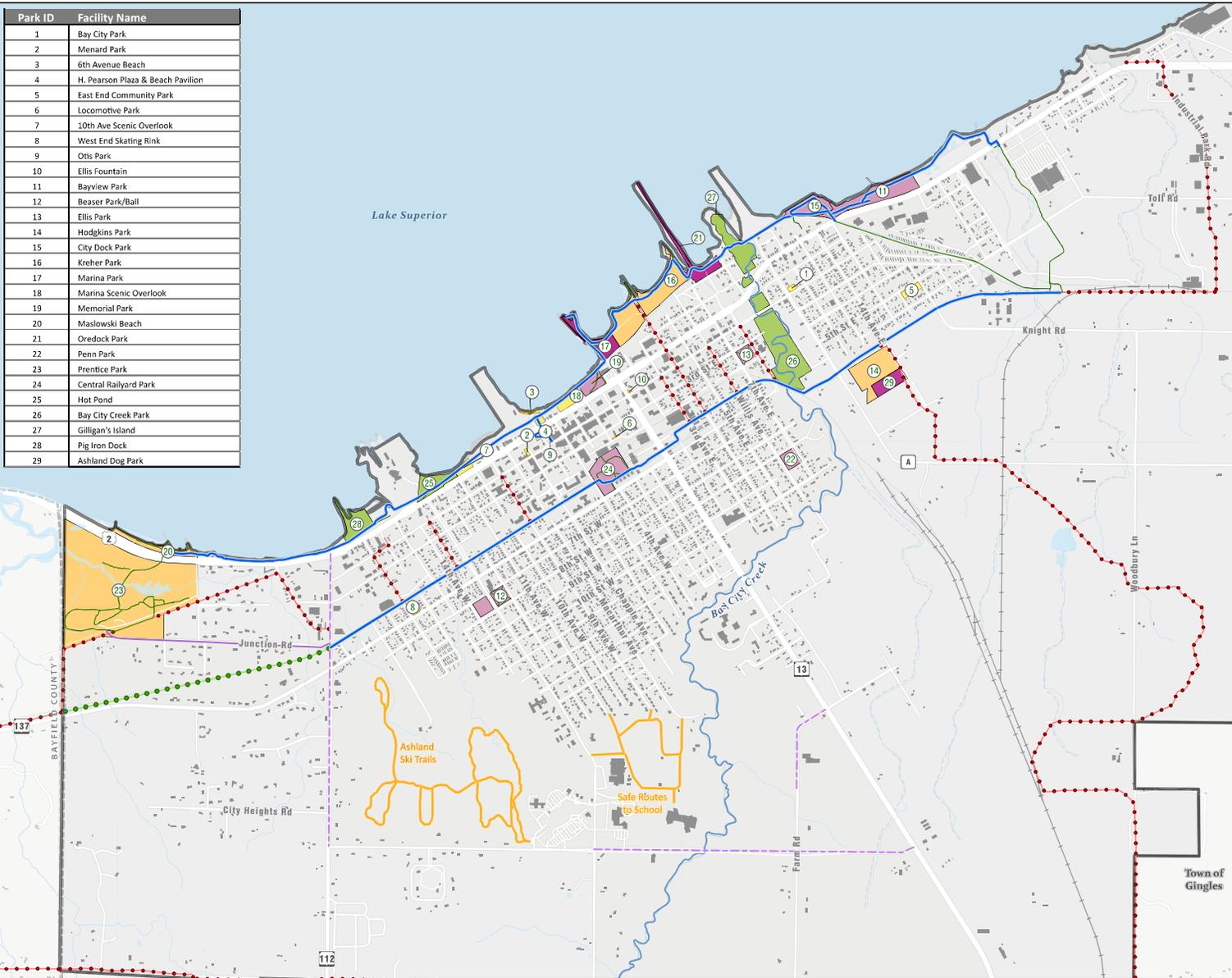
¹ NRPA 2024 Agency Performance Review, <https://www.nrpa.org/siteassets/research/2024-agency-performance-review.pdf>

Park ID	Facility Name
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20	Maslowski Beach
21	Oredock Park
22	Penn Park
23	Prentice Park
24	Central Railyard Park
25	Hot Pond
26	Bay City Creek Park
27	Gilligan's Island
28	Pig Iron Dock
29	Ashland Dog Park

EXISTING PARKS AND TRAILS

COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (CORP)

CITY OF ASHLAND
ASHLAND COUNTY, WISCONSIN



- City of Ashland Boundary
- ~ Bay City Creek
- ~ Waterbody
- Trail Type**
- ~ Ashland Rails-To-Trails System (ARTS)
- ~ Community Trail
- ~ Bike Lane
- ~ Bike Route
- ~ Park/Pedestrian Trail
- Seasonal Snowmobile/Pedestrian
- Snowmobile Trail/Allowed on Road
- Park Classification**
- Mini Park
- Community Park
- Neighborhood Park
- Special Use Park
- Undeveloped Park

Data Sources: Ashland County GIS (2025)
City of Ashland Public Works (2025)
Aerial: WDNR (Latest Leaflet)
Trail Solutions - Trail Data: Received 2025

Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community



The City of Ashland currently maintains 250 acres of total parkland, with 109 of those acres being developed parks (including playgrounds, sports courts, restrooms etc). The additional 141 acres of parkland are undeveloped and are made up primarily of Prentice Park (98 acres) and Bay City Creek (30 acres). Undeveloped parks typically are natural areas and wildlife habitat, with less intensive maintenance needs than developed parks. For the purpose of this analysis, only developed parkland assessed. The Kreher Park Boat Landing Extension (formerly referred to as the “Superfund Site”) was also excluded from the developed parkland analysis since it is not currently used for active recreation.

The Wisconsin Department of Administration (WDOA) 2024 population estimate for the City of Ashland was 7,775 people, resulting in a rate of 14 acres per 1,000 people for developed parkland; the rate for total parkland is 32 acres per 1,000 people. As seen in Figure 4.1 this rate is between the median and upper quartile distribution for agencies nationally serving less than 20,000 people, and exceeds the NRPA’s minimum benchmark.

Looking at the level of service standards for specific developed park classifications (Figure 4.2), Ashland has a abundance of mini and neighborhood park acreage given its population size; NRPA does not recommend specific service level standards for special use or undeveloped parks. The only park classification the city is deficit in are community parks, however this analysis excludes Prentice Park given that the majority of its acreage is natural area.

Figure 4.1: Acres of Parkland per 1,000 Residents
(Jurisdictions less than 20,000)

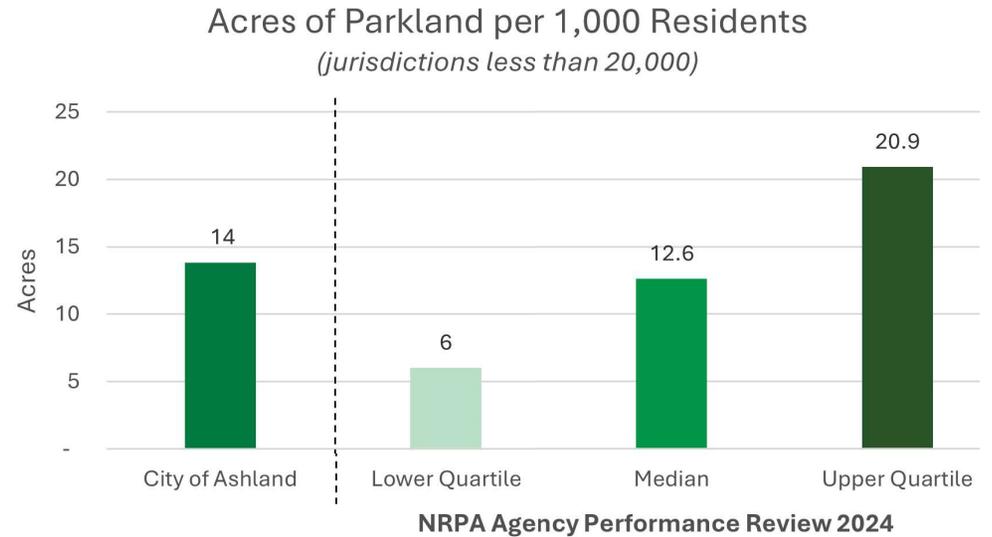


Figure 4.2: Level of Service Analysis by Park Classification

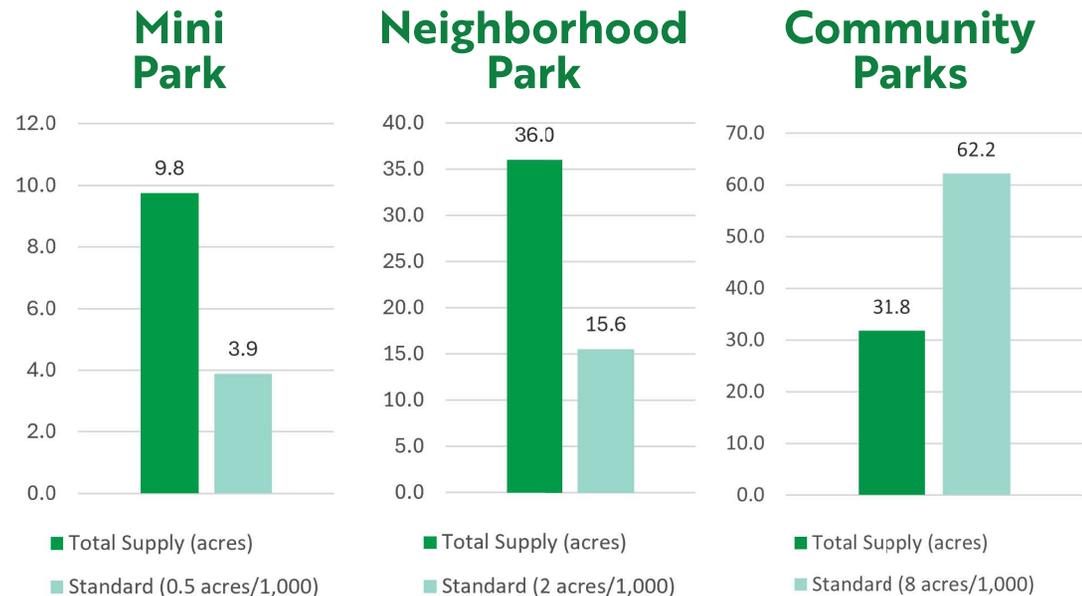


Table 4.3 outlines the demand and current count of various recreational facilities in Ashland compared to the median number of residents per facility in other cities with populations less than 20,000. APR currently maintains 10 playgrounds, with two additional playgrounds available to community members via Ashland’s elementary schools. While these facilities are not maintained by APR, they still help meet residents’ day to day recreational needs. Similarly, the City currently maintains numerous ball fields in comparison to other small jurisdictions across the country. Two additional ballfields are available to the public via Northland College, but require higher fees for use.

Table 4.3 Facility Needs and Demands				
Types of Facilities	Median # of residents per facility (>20,000)	Ashland Demand²	Current Count	Surplus/Deficit
Playgrounds or play structures	1,990	4	10	6
Diamond fields	1,833	4	8	4
Basketball courts, standalone	4,366	2	2	0
Rectangular fields	2,493	3	2	-1
Tennis courts	3,074	3	1	-2
Dog parks	10,327	1	1	0
Community gardens	8,800	1	1	0
Skateboard parks	11,284	1	1	0
Multi-use courts – basketball, volleyball, etc.	5,248	2	1	-1
Pickleball Courts	3,390	2	2	0
Volleyball courts, standalone	9,250	1	2	1
Ice rinks	8,015	1	1	0

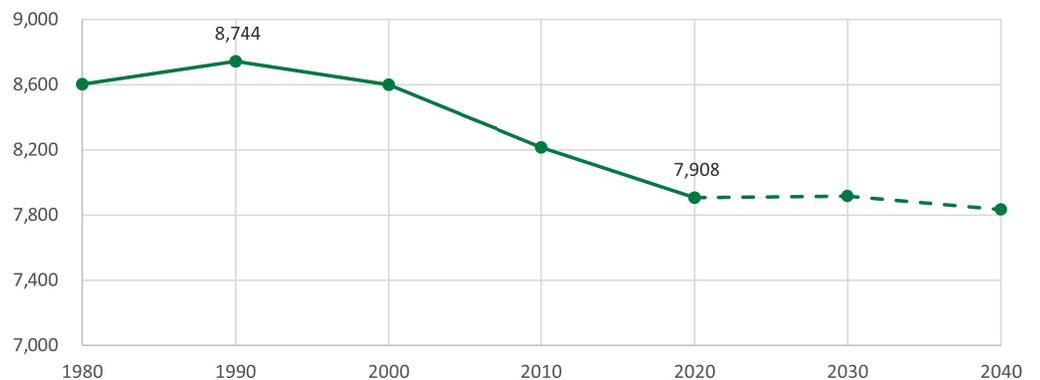
² Based on Ashland’s WDOA 2024 population estimate

Ashland generally has an abundance of parkland relative to its population size. Table 4.4 assesses the amount of surplus developed park acreage beyond the NRPA’s minimum threshold of 10.5 acres/1,000 between 2020 and 2040, with the assumption that no additional parkland is acquired during that time. As of the 2020 census, Ashland only needed 83 acres of parkland to meet the NRPA’s benchmark, therefore leading to a surplus of 26.3 acres given its developed acreage count of 109. Since the City’s population is projected to decline through 2040 according to the WDOA, Ashland’s surplus of parkland beyond the minimum threshold is likely to increase over the next decade and a half.

This analysis is a high-level assessment to determine if a system is generally the right size to meet the basic recreational needs of its residents. The mix of park types, diversity of facilities, and geographic distribution of parks throughout a community are other important indicators and Ashland is exceeding on that front as well. The City has a good mix of mini, neighborhood, and community parks as well as truly unique places like the Oredock and a wealth of public park land along Lake Superior’s waterfront. At the same time, park systems require extensive staff resources and inputs to be maintained, and the abundance of parkland in Ashland can lead to a backlog of deferred maintenance. Ashland must be strategic and creative in how it manages its wealth of public outdoor recreational resources.

Table 4.4 Total Park Acreage Surplus/Deficit (in acres)					
Year	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
Population	7,908	7,917	7,834	7,691	7,323
Total Supply (acres)	109	109	109	109	109
Standard (10.5 acres/1,000)	83.0	83.1	82.3	80.8	76.9
Surplus (10.5 acres/1,000)	26.3	26.2	27.1	28.6	32.4

Figure 4.3: City of Ashland Population Past, Present, and Future



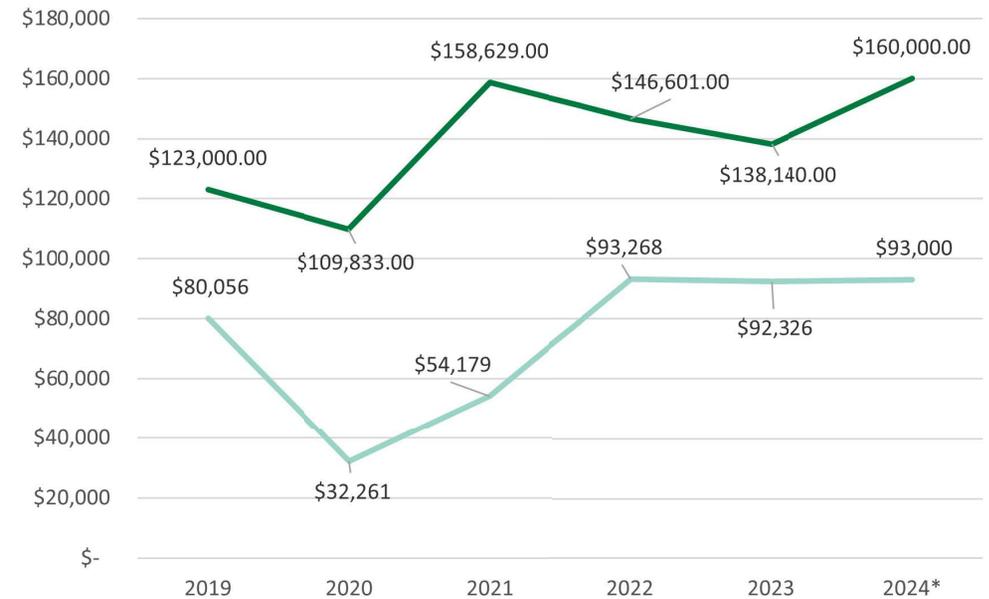
4.2 Department Budget & Staffing Analysis

This section evaluates Ashland’s budget and staffing capacity over the past 6 years and in relation to its peers nationally utilizing NRPA 2024 Agency Performance Review data.

Ashland’s recreation services are funded through the APR budget; their staff is responsible for running the Bretting Community Center (BCC) and its recreational programs; managing the City’s two public campgrounds; and applying for and overseeing grants that fund many of the planning and capital projects for the City’s park system. Grounds maintenance for Ashland’s parks is provided via a collaboration between Public Works and Parks Department staff and includes both Full Time Employees (FTE) and seasonal Limited Term Employees (LTE); they are responsible for mowing, weed control, equipment maintenance, and tree trimming and planting. In 2024, there were a total of 5.83 FTE equivalents between both departments. Additionally, the City of Ashland sets aside a portion of annual hotel and motel tax revenue into a Waterfront Development Fund. This money is used for City projects north of Hwy 2 or staffing dedicated to developing the waterfront, which includes APR employees. The department typically receives roughly \$145,000 a year through this fund and uses it as a match for grants.

In 2023, the total operating budget for both APR and the PW-Parks Grounds Maintenance was approximately \$316,000 and \$318,000, respectively. For APR, personnel costs comprised roughly 90% of total expenditure; for PW-Parks Grounds Maintenance, personnel costs comprised roughly 63% of total expenditure, followed by materials and supplies at 20% and services at 17%. Between 2019 and 2023 APR’s total operating budget increased nearly 11% while the PW-Parks budget increased nearly 27%.

Figure 4.4: APR & PW Grounds Maintenance Revenue 2019-2024*



*2024 Budget figures are estimates per 2025 City of Ashland budget.

Figure 4.5: APR and PW-Parks Grounds Maintenance: Revenue as a % of Total Expenditure (Cost Recovery)

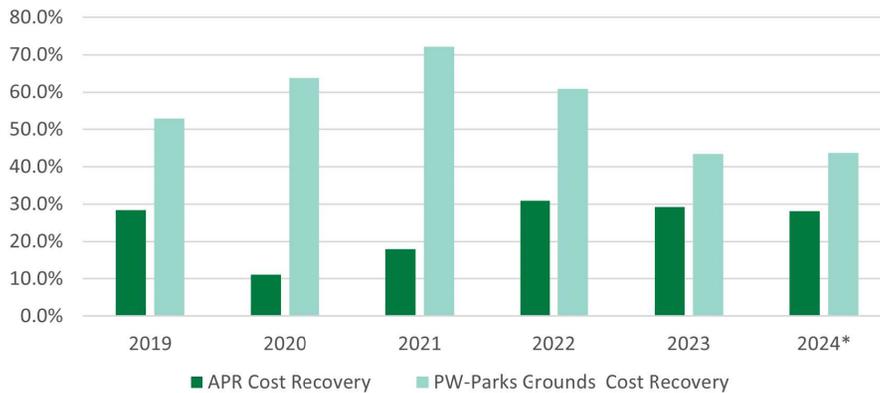
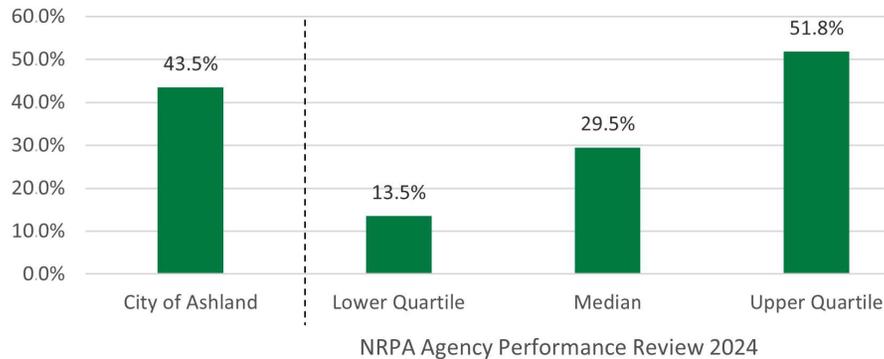


Figure 4.6: PW-Parks Grounds Maintenance: Revenue as a % of Operating Expenditure (jurisdictions less than 20,000)



The primary source of revenue for APR comes from recreational programs at the BCC and park system facility rentals; for PW-Parks the biggest source of revenue comes from campground rentals at Prentice and Kreher Parks. As seen in Figure 4.4, both departments saw a decrease in revenue between 2019 and 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in 2021 revenue from the City’s campgrounds increased significantly, likely due to higher demand for outdoor recreation as the country continued to face restrictions on indoor gathering because of the pandemic; conversely, this same dynamic is responsible for decreased revenue from the BCC in 2020 and 2021 and the spike in 2022 as indoor gathering restrictions lifted. From 2022 forward, both departments have seen increased revenue in comparison to the pre-pandemic era. With the major improvements underway at the Kreher campground, the City should expect this to be a reliable source of revenue in the years ahead.

Figure 4.5 compares the ratio of revenue to total expenditure, or cost recovery, for both APR and PW-Parks between 2019 and 2024. Overall, PW-Parks tends to have a higher cost recovery in comparison to APR. This dynamic is partly attributable to the different groups served by each department: campground facilities primarily serve out-of-town tourists while the BCC serves City residents. The City is able to charge higher fees for tourist-oriented services but must ensure fees at the BCC remain affordable and accessible to Ashland and the greater region’s families. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median household income for the City of Ashland in 2022 was \$47,239—42% lower than the median Wisconsin household.

According to the NRPA’s 2024 Agency Performance Review, PW-Parks 2023 cost recovery rate was between the median and upper quartile nationally for communities less than 20,000 (Figure 4.6).

Similarly, for agencies with budgets less than \$500,000, Ashland’s rate of developed parkland acreage per 1,000 is between the median and upper quartile nationally (Figure 4.7). On a total acreage per 1,000 basis, which includes Ashland’s undeveloped parks and natural areas, the City’s rate is nearly double the upper distribution for communities with small operating budgets. PW-Parks 2023 operating budget of roughly \$318,000 is below the lower quartile distribution for agencies nationally that manage 250 acres or less of parkland (Figure 4.8).

Ashland manages all its recreational programming, administration, and grounds maintenance with 5.83 FTE equivalents combined between the APR and the PW-Parks departments (Figure 4.9). For communities with less than 20,000 people, Ashland’s total FTE’s per agency is just below the lower quartile nationally (Figure 4.9). Overall, this analysis demonstrates that for its population size, the City of Ashland is managing a large park system and maximizing its municipal resources to the best extent possible for the benefit of its users.

Figure 4.7: Developed Parkland per 1,000 x Operating Budget
(Annual Budget > \$500k)

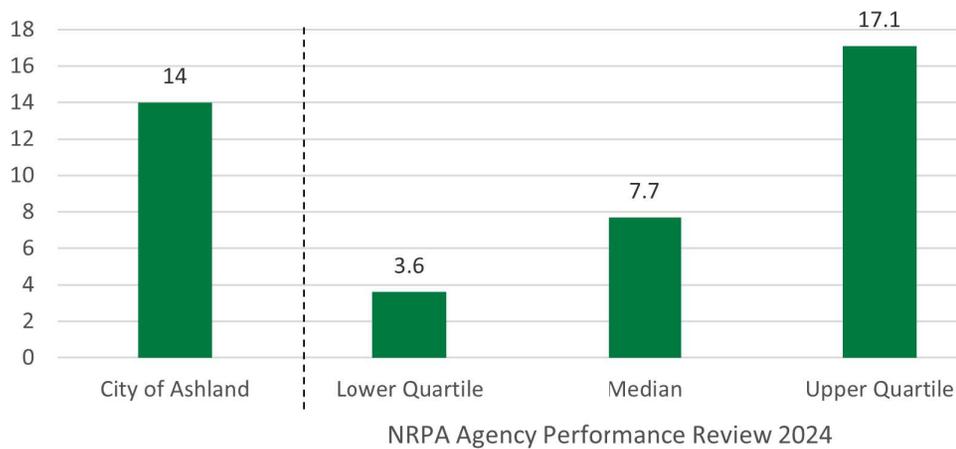


Figure 4.8: Operating Budget x Total Park Acreage Maintained
(250 acres or less)

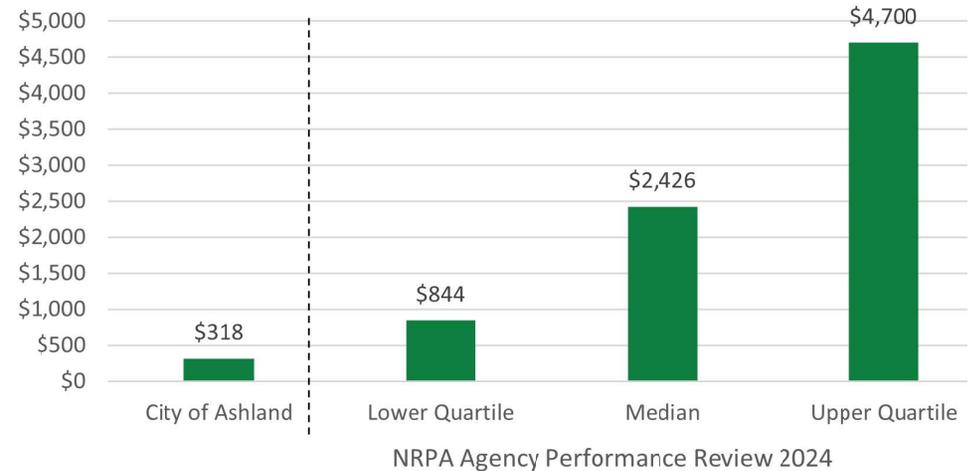
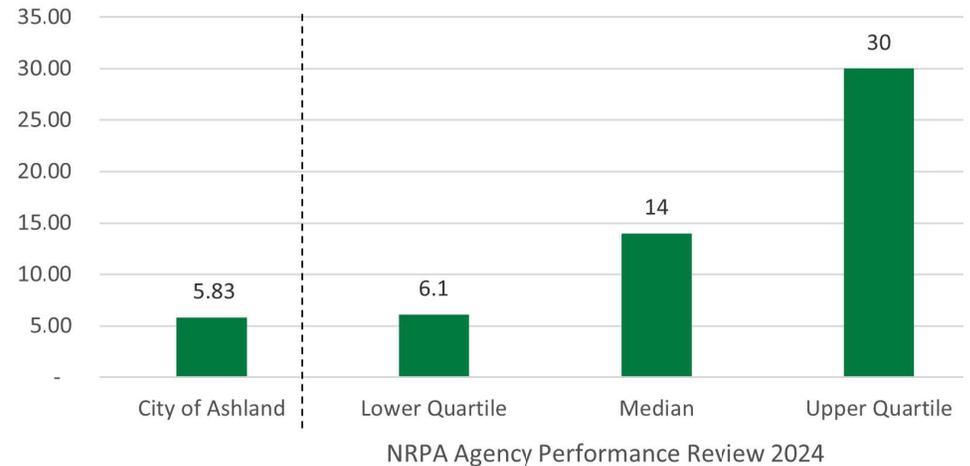


Figure 4.9: Staffing: Total FTE’s per Agency
(Jurisdictions less than 20,000)



4.3 Geographic Analysis

While the total acreage of parkland is an easy indicator of the presence of parks and recreational space, it is not the only indicator of how well a community is meeting the park and recreation needs of its residents. The NRPA advocates that the location of parkland, and the types of recreational facilities offered on that land, are just as important as the total acres available. Fortunately, Ashland residents have access to a wide range of recreational facilities and park types.

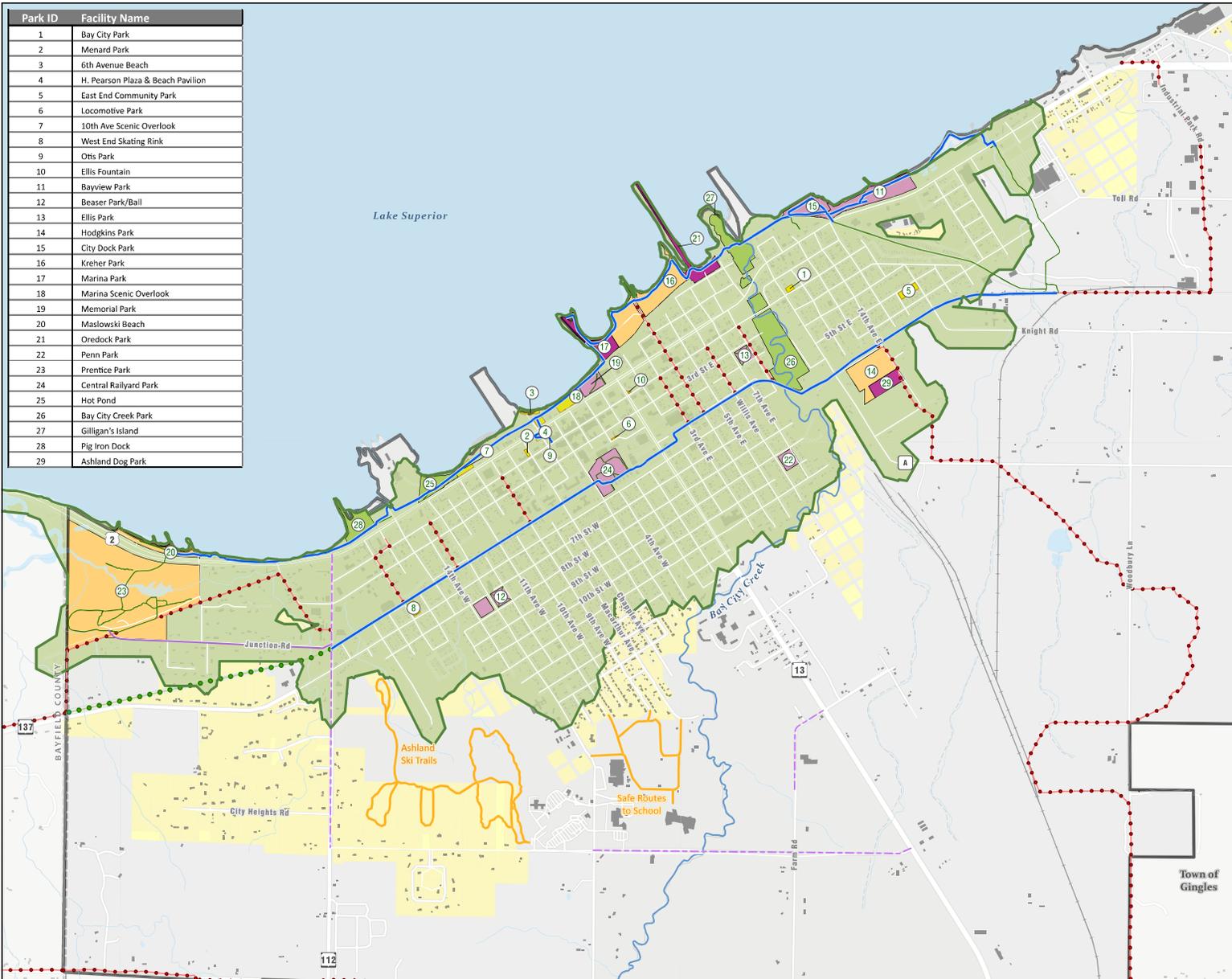
The NRPA, in partnership with the Trust for Public Land and the Urban Land Institute, promotes the 10-Minute Walk Campaign (<https://10minutewalk.org>), advocating for “a great park within a 10-minute walk of every person, in every neighborhood, in every city across America.” This service area standard assesses how equitably parkland is distributed geographically throughout a community. Using the 10-Minute Walk standard, the green area of the map on page 28 shows where City residents live within a 10-minute walk (approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile) of a City-owned park. This area is the aggregate of each park’s individual 10-minute walk radius. For areas outside the green 10-minute walk radius, the underlying residential zoning is displayed. On this map, all residential zoning districts are combined into one category classified as “Residentially Zoned Area Underserved by Parks. This is intended to represent areas where people live but are not within a 10-minute walk of a City-owned park. A map is available in Appendix B that breaks out the different residential zoning districts in the City and the location of existing City-owned parks.

The 10-Minute Walk Time Map on page 28 shows that within the central core of Ashland, residents are well served by City parkland within a convenient walk of their residence. The areas that fall outside the 10-minute walk area are located mostly along the edges of the City, primarily in the southwest, far east, and between 13th St and Ashland High School and Lake Superior Middle School. The southwest corner of the City is less densely populated than the City’s core, with housing units (as indicated by the gray building footprints) more spread out. Additionally, not all the land zoned for residential use is actually developed, as seen by the area southeast of Penn Park and the area on

the far east side of the City that lack building footprints. The area outside the 10-minute walk zone with the highest concentration of housing units is the area south of 13th St and north of Ashland High School. However, these residents could use the school facilities for day-to-day recreational use; they are excluded from this analysis because they are not under the jurisdiction of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Department.



Park ID	Facility Name
1	Bay City Park
2	Menard Park
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5	East End Community Park
6	Locomotive Park
7	10th Ave Scenic Overlook
8	West End Skating Rink
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10-Minute Walk Time to Parks

COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (CORP)

CITY OF ASHLAND
ASHLAND COUNTY, WISCONSIN

- City of Ashland Boundary
- ~ Bay City Creek
- ~ Waterbody
- Trail Type**
- ~ Ashland Rails-To-Trails System (ARTS)
- ~ Community Trail
- ~ Bike Lane
- ~ Bike Route
- ~ Park/Pedestrian Trail
- ~ Seasonal Snowmobile/Pedestrian
- ~ Snowmobile Trail/Allowed on Road
- 10-Minute Walk Time to City Park
- Residentially Zoned Area Underserved by Parks
- Park Classification**
- Mini Park
- Community Park
- Neighborhood Park
- Special Use Park
- Undeveloped Park

Data Sources: Ashland County GIS (2025)
City of Ashland Public Works (2025)
Aerial: WDNR (Latest Leaf Off)
Trail Solutions - Trail Data: Received 2025

Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community



CHAPTER 5

PARK SYSTEM INVENTORY

5.1 Park System Inventory

This chapter provides an overall assessment of each property within the Ashland parks system, highlighting the most pressing maintenance needs and concerns. These assessments are derived through a combination of MSA's site visit observations, conversations with APR staff, a review of the City's previous CORP, and a detailed facility condition assessment conducted by the architectural firm Kraus-Anderson in early 2024. To review the recommended facility maintenance actions, by year and with inflation adjusted cost estimates, prepared by Kraus-Anderson, please see Appendix C. Some parks within the Ashland parks system have recommended courses of action that go beyond mere maintenance; these recommendations are detailed in Appendix E: Ground Maintenance Considerations.

Mini Parks

Bay City Park

0.35 Acres

Located on the corner of 11th Avenue East and Main Street East, this park features an assortment of metal playground elements which predates the 1990s, a small plastic playground geared toward the toddler age group installed in 2021, a small open-air shelter, benches, and picnic tables. While the perimeter of the park facing the street has a wooden fence, there is no fencing or separation between the park and the adjacent private residence.

All of the park elements have reached the end of their expected years of service and are in poor condition according to the Facility Condition Assessment conducted by Kraus-Anderson (see Appendix C). Additionally, many of the metal play elements no longer meet contemporary playground safety standards. The estimated cost of replacing the all park's facilities is \$125,000.

See Appendix E for the recommended course of action for this park.

Facilities

- ◆ Playground Equipment
- ◆ Swing Set
- ◆ Benches
- ◆ Picnic Tables
- ◆ Small Open-Air Shelter
- ◆ Grill



Downtown Parks

0.39 Acres

The City of Ashland established two small parks on vacant lots for shoppers to visit and enjoy in downtown Ashland, which are maintained by the Ashland Beautification Council. Otis Park, located at 517 Main Street West, is a paved, landscaped alleyway that leads to Howard Pearson Plaza. Menard Park, located on the corner of Main Street West and Chapel Avenue, is a landscaped plaza featuring a small shelter, paving brick walkway, and a drinking fountain. The landscaping in these parks is maintained in part through volunteer efforts.

Near-term maintenance needs include:

- ◆ Replacing benches and pavers at Otis Park (recommended in 2030)
- ◆ Replacing brick pavers, gazebo, and drinking fountain at Menard Park (recommended in 2025)

Facilities

- ◆ Seating
- ◆ Trash Receptacles
- ◆ Water Fountain
- ◆ Small Shelter (Menard)



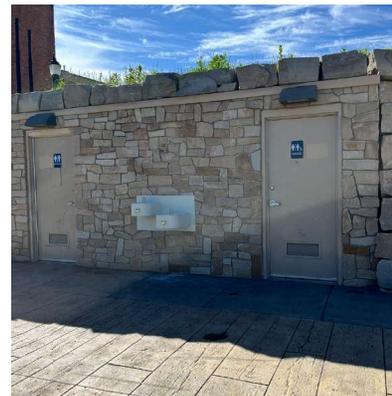
H. Pearson Plaza & Beach Pavilion 1.88 Acres

This revitalized facility was developed with Department of Transportation Enhancement Funds and offers manicured green space surrounded by wrought iron fencing and small picnicking pavilions. Public bathrooms with solar lighting are available during the summer months. On the north side of the plaza are stairs and a handicap accessible ramp leading to the Ed Griffiths Pedestrian Underpass, an underground tunnel offering safe passage across US Highway 2. This passageway connects downtown Ashland to the 6th Ave beach and Lakefront Trail.

The majority of the facilities at the plaza were installed or constructed between 2010 and 2018 and are in good to fair condition. The most immediate recommended maintenance work is replacing the concession building roof shingles, which were originally installed around 2000. Per Kraus-Anderson, the majority of the plaza's facilities will remain in good condition beyond 2030 (see Appendix C).

Facilities

- ◆ Public Restrooms
- ◆ Tunnel Passage
- ◆ Public Parking
- ◆ Seating



East End Community Park

1.29 Acres

The East End Community Park is a popular heavily used neighborhood park. During the winter the park's open space is converted into the only operating outdoor ice-skating rink in the City. A warming house, staffed by volunteers from the neighborhood association from December through March, provides bathrooms, concessions, and skate rentals for the rink. The park also features a playground—replaced in 2024— and a fenced in pickleball and basketball court which was also recently resurfaced. These park improvements were paid through a combination of donations from the neighborhood association and American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds.

The most pressing need for East End Community Park is the demolition and replacement of the existing concessions building which is approaching 30-plus years old. Building a new concession building with bathrooms that meet Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) standards is included within the APR's planned capital improvements projects for year 2025 and is expected to be paid primarily with outside donations (~\$35,000).

Facilities

- ◆ Tennis Courts
- ◆ Ice Skating Rink
- ◆ Restrooms
- ◆ Swings



West End Skating Rink

1.03 Acres

Located at 6th Street West and 17th Avenue, the West End Skating rink is a currently an underutilized property within the Ashland parks system. Fencing for an ice hockey rink was installed in 2012 but the rink has never been fully operational and the fencing has not been maintained. Currently, the area is used informally by residents as a dog park, and there are no future plans to make the ice rink operational.

See Appendix E for the recommended course of action for this park.



Locomotive Park

0.08 Acre

A number of years ago, the Soo Line Railroad donated a steam locomotive to the City. The locomotive was housed on the highway near the Oredock for a number of years, but during deconstruction of the Oredock trestle approach and rail overpass, the locomotive was moved to land across from the historic depot. The locomotive has been fenced and is a tourist attraction for visitors to the depot. This “park” is more of a parking spot for the historic relic. It generally requires minimal maintenance and upkeep. The City’s previous CORP recommends sandblasting and repainting the train at some point in the future.



10th Ave Scenic Overlook

1.31 Acres

This highway related facility offers travelers an opportunity to pull off the highway and enjoy the view of Ashland's waterfront. It features picnic tables and informational signage highlighting points of interest. This property generally requires minimal maintenance and upkeep. The City's previous CORP recommends replacing the overlook's picnic tables and informal signage, as well as clearing some of the brush and vegetative overgrowth.



Marina Scenic Overlook

2.80 Acres

Located just west of Memorial Park, this area provides visitors an opportunity to pull off the highway and take in lovely views of the Chequamegon Bay. This area more so natural space than a true park and is preserved to provide public access to the beauty of the region. This property generally requires minimal maintenance and upkeep.



Neighborhood Parks

Bayview & City Dock Parks

8.86 Acres

Bayview Park is located on Lake Shore Drive overlooking the Bay and 19th Avenue East, with City Dock Park directly adjacent to the west. A prime smelting site and home to Ashland's annual Bay Days festival, Bayview Park is highly utilized in every season, offering a pavilion, playground, access to waterfront trails, and one of the City's four public swimming beaches.

A new fishing, viewing, and swimming pier was constructed in 2018 with help from Wisconsin Coastal Management Funds, Sport Fish Restoration Funds, DNR Stewardship Funds, and the City of Ashland. Unfortunately, the pier was damaged by an ice storm the following year and has been closed to the public since 2019; the fate of the pier is currently tied up in litigation.

City Dock is primarily the natural area to the west of Bayview Park. The park has experienced issues with erosion and settling due to the wave action from Lake Superior, leading to safety hazards for City staff and the public alike. Per the City's CIP plan, considerable investment to stabilize and improve safety along the waterfront area at City Dock is planned for 2027. Additionally, the central portion of City Dock is one of Ashland's first experiments with intentional non-mowing as a cost savings strategy. For further recommendations regarding converting portions of lawn to prairie at Bayview and City Dock, see Appendix E.

Other major changes coming to Bayview Park include the construction of a splash pad and disc golf course planned for 2025. The splash pad will be paid for primarily through donations; however, given the high cost of water and maintaining the facility, the City is requesting an additional maintenance fund to help cover operating costs. A 9-hole disc golf course is planned for the City Dock area according to a concept developed by Leiviska Disc Golf in 2023.

Other near-term maintenance and replacement needs include:

- ◆ Replacing or updating the bathroom facilities, and potentially installing outdoor showers
- ◆ Converting the old well house into a concession stand, which would be operated by a private party.
- ◆ Replacing the 20+ year old playground at Bayview Park; scheduled for 2026 per the City's CIP plan.

Facilities

- ◆ Pavilion
- ◆ Fishing Pier
- ◆ Playground
- ◆ Seating
- ◆ Restrooms
- ◆ Scenic Overlook
- ◆ Trail Access
- ◆ Swimming Beach



Beaser Park & Ball Fields

2.08 Acres

This property spans two City blocks and is bisected by Beaser Avenue, with Beaser Park to the east and two ball fields, namely Martinsen and Babeau Fields, to the west.

Beaser Park contains nearly an acre of open green space, an asphalt basketball court, benches, a shelter, picnic tables, and playground equipment. This park also features the Ashland Community Garden, whose members maintain and tend the garden plots during the summer months. A water line to serve the garden was recently installed by the City.

The little league and softball fields on the west side of Beaser Avenue are used heavily during the spring and summer months by youth softball and little leagues. Each field complete with dugouts, bleachers and fencing. A port-a-potty is located in the northwest corner and is open during the summer for league use.

Per the Kraus-Anderson Facility Conditions Assessment (Appendix C), the majority of facilities within the park and ball fields are in fair-to-poor condition having been installed in the 1990's or early 2000's and are recommended to be replaced between 2025-2030. It is also recommended

that the remnants of the 'X' shaped walking paths be fully removed, but not replaced, in the near future as they pose a tripping hazard.

Lastly, a portion of the open space within Beaser Park is recommended to be converted from lawn to prairie in an effort to reduce the City's mowing costs and provide pollinator habitat. See section Appendix E.

Facilities

- ◆ Little league & softball fields
- ◆ Restrooms
- ◆ Basketball court
- ◆ Playground
- ◆ Seating
- ◆ Walking trail
- ◆ Small Shelter
- ◆ Community garden



Ellis Park

2.06 Acres

Located along 3rd Street East and Stuntz Avenue, this neighborhood park formerly served as an elementary school playground for the Ellis School across the street. The park features a small playground in the southeast corner, an asphalt basketball court, benches, picnic tables, and a pavilion donated by the Ashland Lions Club. The remainder of the park is open green space, with a small hill on the northwest corner.

The most pressing maintenance need is the replacement of the basketball court and hoops, which are poor condition. Per the Kraus-Anderson assessment, the merry-go-round and teeter totter playground pieces are approaching 30+ years old and are recommended to be removed in the next few years; the remaining facilities will most likely need to be replaced in the next 10-to-15 years. Similar to Beaser Park, the remnants of the 'X' shaped walking paths crossing the park are recommended to be fully removed, but not replaced, in the near future as they pose a tripping hazard.

Lastly, the western half of the park is recommended to be converted from lawn to prairie as part of this plan's mowing cost reduction strategy. See Appendix E for more detail.

Facilities

- ◆ Playground
- ◆ Basketball courts
- ◆ Seating
- ◆ Pavilion



Memorial Park

3.33 Acres

Located on the north side of US Highway 2 and Lakeshore Drive overlooking the Marina, this property features the Memorial Park Band Shell—a registered historic building—and excellent views of the Ashland waterfront. A small Veterans Memorial is also located within the park, as well as a connection to the Lakefront Trail.

Given the band shell is approaching 100 years old, significant investment is needed to repair its deteriorating condition. The City’s CIP plan estimates \$300,000 in 2027 is needed for structural repairs and electrical updates, removal of some of the park’s aging benches, and construction of an ADA compliant restroom facility. The City foresees approximately half this cost being covered by outside donations or grants.

Facilities

- ◆ Bandshell
- ◆ Seating
- ◆ Veterans Memorial



Penn Park

2.29 Acres

Penn Park spans an entire City block at the intersection of 9th St E and Willis Avenue. This park is comprised solely of a baseball field used by the Babe Ruth league. The ball field is completely fenced-in and features a backstop, dugouts, scoreboard, and concessions building; the majority of these facilities are aging and in poor condition. The field is not lighted and parking is limited to the street.

See Appendix E for the recommended course of action for this park.

Facilities

- ◆ Ball fields
- ◆ Seating



Central Railyard Park

8.60 Acres

Located northeast of Vaughn Avenue and Sixth Street West, Central Railyard Park is home to two little league fields with digital score boards, a concession building with restrooms, lighted tennis courts, a skate park, an open-air pavilion, a toddler playground, and the “Purple Park” playground; new batting cages were installed in 2024. The Bretting Community Center, home to Ashland Parks & Recreation, is located at the north edge of this complex. Walking paths are woven throughout the park and connect to the 5th Street Corridor & ARTS trails. Ample parking surrounds the park to accommodate little league fans and park users. The little leagues who utilize the park’s ball fields assist the City with routine maintenance and fundraising for new facilities when needed.

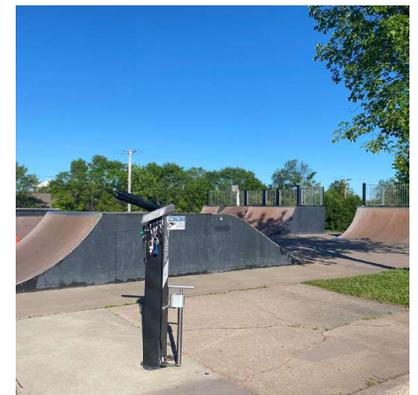
The tennis courts at Central Railyard park were built on top a former brownfield site, leading to ongoing issues with settling and cracking. Additionally, this park has faced challenges with vandalism and homelessness, leading to the removal of picnic tables from the concessions building and its restroom facilities only being open during little league

games or other events. The City’s CIP plan also includes a request for timed lighting at the skate park to help deter vandalism and unwanted behaviors (2029).

In 2025, the Purple Park playground will be 20 years old and is slated to be replaced according to the City’s CIP plan in 2027. According to the Kraus-Anderson analysis, the majority of the park’s other facilities will not need to be replaced until after 2030 and are in fair condition.

Facilities

- ◆ Tennis courts
- ◆ Ball fields
- ◆ Ice rink
- ◆ Playground
- ◆ Restrooms
- ◆ Seating
- ◆ Walking paths
- ◆ Public parking



Community Parks

Prentice Park

98.60 Acres

Prentice Park is Ashland's largest and oldest park. The property is primarily a natural area composed of boreal forest and wetlands, providing rich habitat for wildlife. There are extensive walking trails throughout the park, including a fishing bridge and connection to Maslowski Beach and Lake Superior. Its developed features include pavilions, a playground, sand volleyball pit, multiple day use picnic sights, and scenic overlooks are in the eastern portion of the park. The western portion of the park includes tent and RV camping, which provides a revenue stream for APR. The park also features a number of artesian wells (natural springs) that have been in use since the 1890's. Highly utilized by Ashland residents and visitors alike, Prentice Park is the crown jewel of Ashland's park system.

At the same time, many of the developed facilities at Prentice Park are in need to repair and replacement due to age, particularly the picnic pavilions, restrooms, boardwalks, and ADA-accessible sidewalks. Per the City's CIP plan, a campground expansion is planned in 2028. While the playground was replaced in the last few years, community members have expressed concerns about the safety of some of its features for small children.

In response, the City is planning to install additional equipment geared toward the toddler age group in 2025. Maintaining the park's extensive natural area acreage requires significant time and investment on the part of the City, and staff have partnered with universities and other institutions for assistance.

Facilities

- ◆ Walking and biking trails
- ◆ Campsites
- ◆ Restrooms
- ◆ Seating
- ◆ Pavilions
- ◆ Sand volleyball
- ◆ Playground
- ◆ Fishing



Hodgkins Park & Ashland Dog Park

15.53 Acres

Hodgkins park, located at the intersection of Pufall Dr and 14th Ave East, is the largest baseball and softball complex in the City, featuring three ball fields that are used extensively by local youth and adult leagues. The park also includes a concessions building, small playground, and is adjacent to the Ashland Dog Park, which includes a roughly 1-acre fenced in area for dogs to go off-leash. The park's wooden bleachers, originally installed in the 1980's and were in poor condition, were removed with the assistance of the National Guard in the summer of 2024. The dugouts and fencing are also aging and in need of replacement in the near future. Additionally, drainage remains an ongoing issue in all the fields.

A holistic investment in upgrading the facilities at Hodgkin's Park is needed. To meet this need, the City is planning for a series of capital investments over the next few years to improve the ball fields at Hodgkins Park; some of the most pressing near-term facility investments include new metal bleachers and dugout upgrades.

Lastly, there is opportunity to expand the Ashland Dog Park into the adjacent wooded area. APR staff's preference would be to incorporate walking trails through this area as opposed to cutting down trees in order to expand the fenced in area.

Facilities

- ◆ Ball fields
- ◆ Playground
- ◆ Restrooms
- ◆ Seating
- ◆ Dog park



Kreher Park

11.08 Acres

Located along Ashland’s waterfront, Kreher Park offers residents and tourists alike unique access to the Chequamegon Bay. A key feature of the property is the RV campground, offering 33 camping sites with electrical hookups directly on the Lake Superior waterfront. The RV campground is an important source of revenue for the Ashland Parks Department, but also requires significant staff resources to operate and coordinate reservations. A playground, parking lot, swimming beach, and picnic shelters are located near the RV camp sites. Kreher Park also features the Ashland’s primary boat launch into Lake Superior, with access to the Ashland Marina to the west through the Superfund Site.

Beginning in 2024 and continuing into 2025 and 2026, the City is undertaking a major redevelopment of the Kreher Park RV campground. This project will provide upgraded 55-amp electrical service to all existing RV sites, install new water lines, and construct a new ADA compliant bathhouse. The project will also reconnect and extend the ARTS pedestrian trail away from the waterfront, which was eroding due to wave action from the lake and repave the central campground road. Finally, the project will also develop 7 new RV campsites on recently acquired railroad property. This project is an important investment for Ashland’s tourist economy.

Of similar importance is the planned boat launch reconstruction at Kreher Park. As of this plan’s writing the City has secured over \$1 million Recreational Boating Facilities Grant through the WDNR. Design and construction documentation for the new boat launch will take place in 2025, with construction planned for 2026. Completing this project is a top priority for Ashland residents.

Finally, while the playground at the park was replaced recently, Ashland residents and parents have expressed safety concerns about some of its features, especially for the youngest users. To respond to this concern, the City’s CIP plan includes the installation of additional toddler-oriented play equipment and possible removal of existing slide in 2025.

Facilities

- ◆ Beach
- ◆ Playground
- ◆ Pavilion
- ◆ RV Park



Kreher Park Cont. - Boat Landing Extension 10 Acres

The area of the Ashland waterfront commonly referred to as “the Superfund Site” among community members was formerly the location of the City’s wastewater treatment plant and a private manufactured gas facility. In 1989, the site was found to have contaminated soil and groundwater. Investigation and cleanup of the site was led by the WDNR for many years before the site was petitioned for inclusion on the National Priorities List and Cleanup by the EPA under CERCLA, also known as Superfund. The site was formally added to the program in 2002.

As of the writing of this plan the cleanup is largely complete, with the focus shifting to how the site will be reused for recreational purposes going forward. However, any potential reuse of the site will be limited by the relatively shallow (18 inches deep) underground of contamination cap which cannot be punctured, in addition to other restrictions. The most plausible future use of the site will be as an outdoor event community event space, complemented by its proximity to the Ashland Marina, and the Oredock. The site is now considered an extension of the Kreher Park boat landing. Given the site’s large size (approximately 10 acres) and prime waterfront location, any future events have the potential to draw regional visitors and tourists into Ashland.

Facilities

- ◆ Open space



Maslowski Beach

5.15 Acres

Maslowski Beach is linear park located on lakeshore. It is used primarily as a swimming beach and a highway rest stop by travelers on US Highways 2 and 13; a historical marker commemorating the Radisson-Grossielliers exploration of the region in 1659 reinforces the highway-related aspect of the park. The park features a playground, sand volleyball court, picnic pavilion, permanent restrooms, benches, and an artesian well. The park is also the western terminus of the waterfront trail.

Maslowski Beach faces a number of issues due to its waterfront nature. The beaches are highly susceptible to wind and wave damage as a result of spring storms, leading to reoccurring issues with erosion. Additionally, the City is responsible for monitoring water quality given its use for swimming; the beaches are prone to closure due to E. Coli primarily related to the presence of waterfowl. Per Ashland's 2019 CORP, the City was awarded a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to develop and implement a beachfront green infrastructure project to improve water quality and protect the beach against erosion. Phase I of this project has been implemented for the easternmost beach; Phase II, which is slated to begin in 2026, will focus on upgrades to the westernmost beach (from the pavilion to the end of the park).

Facilities

- ◆ Beach
- ◆ Trail access
- ◆ Seating
- ◆ Artesian water well
- ◆ Playground
- ◆ Restrooms



Special Use Parks

Oredock Park

18 .0 Acres

Ashland's Oredock – formerly the Soo Line Oredock – has been an iconic feature of Ashland's waterfront since its construction in the early 1900s. Stretching nearly 2,000 feet long by 66 feet wide with its base at Stuntz Avenue near Water Street, the dock originally had a tall superstructure along its entire length, used for loading ore from rail cars above to ships berthed alongside. Despite community efforts to preserve the superstructure, it was dismantled in 2013 for safety reasons given that the Oredock was largely unmaintained for many years. Over the past decade, the City of Ashland has worked to implement a plan developed by SmithGroup JJR to redesign the Oredock as a flexible, contemporary public space that celebrates the history on the site.

As of this plan's writing, nearly the entire length of the Oredock is open to the public with Phases I-III of the redevelopment plan implemented. The site is a truly unique walking promenade and public space, featuring signage, seating, vegetation, and sculptural elements. Phase IV of the redevelopment plan is underway and will continue into 2026. This phase is focused on remediation of the area surrounding the entrance to the Oredock, referred to as the "uplands," and improving access to the site.

Facilities

- ◆ Benches
- ◆ Walking promenade



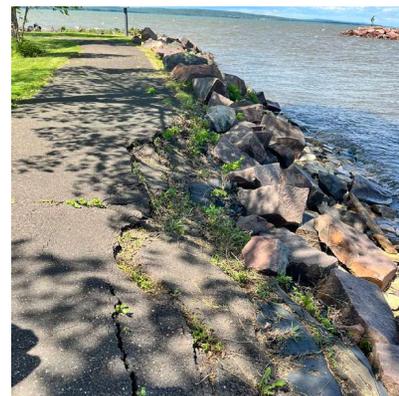
Marina Park

3.30 Acres

In 1983, the City of Ashland purchased what was known as “the old pulp hoist site” from Northland College for \$145,000. Financing for this site utilized a Federal EDA grant, State of Wisconsin Economic Development Funds, County funds (from the sale of Oak Island), and an additional \$100,000 from the City of Ashland—this money was used for the construction of a break wall, 26 boat slips, and the marina building. In 1988, the Marina Park was constructed on the east side of the pulp hoist site and a parking lot and road were paved as part of TIF III. An additional 46 slips were installed in 1989. To complement the Marina Park, the Chequamegon Hotel and restaurant were developed on North Ellis Avenue. The Marina Park is adjacent to the Superfund Site. Future improvements to both sites should be done in coordination with creating a coordinated and well-connected waterfront experience, particularly from the Marina Park to the Oredock.

Facilities

- ◆ Boat slips
- ◆ Marina building
- ◆ Trail access



ARTS Ashland Rails to Trails

11.5 Miles

The ARTS Trail System is a 11.5-mile pedestrian loop following the old railroad grade through the center of Ashland and along the Lake Superior Shoreline. The trail was developed in collaboration with grant funding made available specifically for rehabilitating old, abandoned railroad rights-of-way. This included repaving the section of the Tri-County Corridor that runs east-to-west through Ashland, as well as developing the waterfront trail. The system is primarily used for bicycle and pedestrian traffic, though snowmobiles use a designated portion of the 5th St Corridor. In 2012, new trails were created through Prentice Park to officially connect the entire system. The City is responsible for maintain the trail, and has a number of planned repairs per its 2025-2029 CIP:

- ◆ **22nd Ave W Outfall to Sanborn Ave Construction:** this portion of the trail along the shoreline is failing due to erosion from Lake Superior; it was also impacted by the 2018 rainstorm and storm surge. Aging stormwater culverts are also undermining the trail causing it to slough. Funding would be used to purchase heavy rip rap to revert the shoreline, rent equipment, and repave approximately 150 feet of the trail. This project is planned for 2025.
- ◆ **ARTS Connector - Junction Road Connector and Signage:** Funding would be used to make a obvious and direct pedestrain/bike route from the 5th St Cooridor Section of the ARTS to Junction Rd. Funding would also be used to place signage along Junction Rd showing how to get from the 5th St Corridor to Prentice Park (or vice versa). This project is planned for 2026.
- ◆ **5th St Corridor Vaughn Bridge Railing Repair:** The City would work with the Ashland County Snowmobile Association to apply for a DNR Snowmobile Aid grant to assist in upgrading the railing on the Vaughn Bridge. This project is planned for 2028.
- ◆ Repaving and updating the waterfront trail and 24th Ave Connector is planned for 2030.



Facilities

Undeveloped Parks

Bay City Creek

30.0 Acres

The Bay City Creek is a large, 30-acre natural area located between Stuntz Ave and 11th Ave E, spanning from the Lake Superior waterfront to the southern extent of the City. East-west car access through the site is provided via Hwy 2 and Main St SE, and pedestrian access via the Tri-County Corridor along the lakefront and south near Pufall Dr. The City is planning a number of major projects and investments in the coming years to improve the habitat of this critical natural and develop pedestrian access through it, including:

- ◆ **Rehabilitation Plan of the Bay City Creek Riparian Corridor:** the City has been awarded \$750,000 through the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) Coastal Program and Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) to assess the creek, create a management plan to rehabilitate the habitat, and improve water quality as it runs into Lake Superior.
- ◆ **Bay City Creek Pedestrian Trail:** Planning for the newest pedestrian corridor in the City linking the Oredock to Northland College and the Ashland School District is set to begin in 2028.
- ◆ **Bike Trail System- Phase 2:** In 2022 a concept plan was created to construct up to 10 miles of mountain bike trails in the City of Ashland using both public and private property. This 2nd phase would be to construct up to 3 miles of trails in the Bay City Creek ravine between the Stuntz Ave Bridge and Main St. This work is planned to take place in 2028.



Gilligan's Island

3.5 Acres

Gilligan's Island, also known as the Bay City Creek Peninsula, is an undeveloped natural area along Ashland's waterfront located just west of the Clarkson Coal Dock. Since the demolition of the Oredock superstructure, wave and wind action have been eroding the shoreline from the Oredock east to the mouth of Bay City Creek, affecting the Waterfront Trail, Historic Boat Houses, Gilligan's Island. A shoreline stabilization and restoration project is planned for this area within the City's CIP.



Historic Boat House

Located along the waterfront at the terminus of 9th Ave, these historic boat houses are privately owned structures, the majority of which are in poor to very poor condition. There are ongoing conversations between the City and State over management of this site.



Hot Pond

5.1 Acres

Located directly adjacent to the Xcel power plant, warm effluent water flows into the lake making it a popular fishing spot. Boats are also able to launch from this area, and the Lakefront Trail passes through the area.



Pig Iron Dock

4.0 Acres

This land is leased to the City from the Xcel Power Plant. It is primarily used for fishing. The area gets its name from the leftover low quality iron shards found along the shoreline.



5.2 Opportunities on the Horizon

Oredock Park - Upland Gateway

The next phase in the ongoing Oredock redevelopment project involves the area referred to as the ‘Upland Gateway’ in the original concept design developed by SmithGroup. This is located near the base of Oredock Park, south of Water Street between Willis Ave and Stuntz Ave. Over the last few years this area has been undergoing environmental remediation, which is nearly complete. The City hopes to open this area up for tourism-oriented redevelopment opportunities over the medium term.

The City is also interested over the medium-to-long term in establishing a boat service launched out of the Oredock to shuttle tourists and residents alike to the popular recreational destinations of the Apostle Islands and Madeline Island. Currently, the only way to access the islands is a ferry service based out of the City of Bayfield, so adding additional service out of Ashland presents an important opportunity to expand access to the islands and bring additional tourism activity and revenue to the City.

Ashland Mountain Bike Trails Phases 1 & 2

Adopted in 2022, the Ashland Trails Master Plan proposes the construction up to 10 miles of mountain bike trails in the City of Ashland using both public and private property. This first phase would construct 3 miles of trail on Tamarack Health property. This project would be a public private partnership and could begin as early as 2026. The second phase would construct up to 3 miles of trails within the Bay City Creek ravine between the Stuntz Ave Bridge and Main St; this phase could begin as early as 2028. See the Future Parks and Trails Map on page 59 for more detail on proposed trail development.

Bay City Creek Restoration Project

The City of Ashland has been awarded a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) Coastal Program Grant to conduct an assessment and create a management plan for the rehabilitation of the Bay City Creek corridor. This project is aimed toward improving water quality as it runs into Lake Superior. The City is also waiting on a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Grant that would also buttress this project. Bay City Creek is a dynamic system and has been drastically effected by urbanization. As referenced in the Trails Master Plan, this effort also includes the installation of the newest pedestrian corridor within the City, linking the Ashland Oredock to Northland College and the Ashland School District. This planning phase is slated to begin in 2028.

Potential Acquisitions of Reis and Clarkson Coal Docks

Over the long term (20+ year time horizon), the City of Ashland has an interest in acquiring the Clarkson and Reis Coal Docks, identified as A and B on the Future Parks and Trails Map on page 59, respectively. The Clarkson Coal Dock is more likely to be acquired first and would primarily be used as a natural space given its connection to existing waterfront parks. The acquisition of the Reis Coal Dock would be over an even longer time frame given that is currently semi-operational. Upon purchasing it, the City would focus first on remediation, and finding a private partner to help operate and manage the site.

Re-Use of the Old Municipal Water Treatment Plant

Located near the waterfront, Ashland’s former sand filtration water treatment plant is a historic structure with potential to be reused or re-purposed for an alternative use. Potential projects and redevelopment strategies would need to be identified first.

CHAPTER 6

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Introduction

Community input and feedback is an essential part of any planning process. The Ashland community was invited to share their opinions on opportunities, challenges, and top priorities for the park system through a few different channels, namely:

- ◆ An Online Survey – 414 responses
- ◆ Public Input Meeting #1 – 12 attendees
- ◆ Focus Group – 4 participants.
- ◆ Public Input Meeting #2 - 15 attendees

The following chapter summarizes the qualitative feedback received from each engagement activity and highlights community members top priorities.



6.1 Online Survey

In the spring of 2024, an online survey was available for Ashland residents to provide input on their usage of the park system and priorities for improving it; the full results of the survey are available in Appendix A. It is clear from the results that parks play an integral role in the daily lives of Ashland residents—38% of respondents visit Ashland parks multiple times a week, with another 37% visiting multiple times per month. The most popular parks that respondents reported visiting in the last year included:

1. Maslowski Beach - 72%
2. Kreher Park - 67%
3. Prentice Park - 67%
4. Bayview Park - 58%
5. Ashland Rail to Trail System (ARTS) - 48%

Additionally, nearly 70% (67.6%) of survey respondents reported paying for a service provided through the Ashland Parks and Recreation Department. The majority of those services were for recreational programming like gymnastics or summer classes (48%) and pavilion or plaza rentals (32%).

Survey participants were asked to rank their priorities for park maintenance. Basic facility maintenance (bathroom cleanliness, park shelter upkeep, etc.) ranked high, with 55% of respondents naming it at their top priority. Waste pick-up and lawn mowing ranked as the 2nd and third priorities, respectively. Weeding was ranked last, with over half of respondents putting it in 8th place on the priority list.

Figure 6.1: “How often do you visit or use City of Ashland parks and trails?”

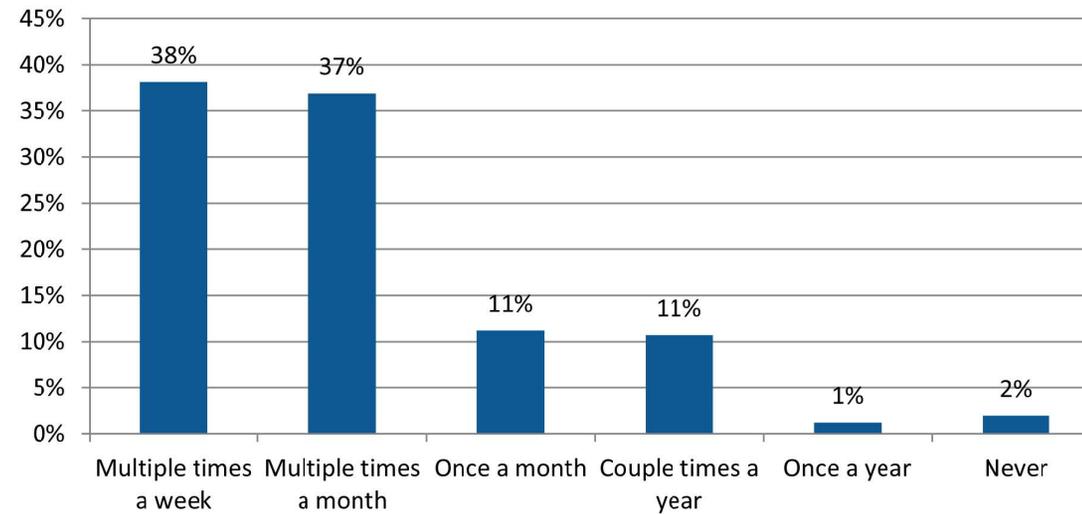


Table 6.1 Park Maintenance Priority Ranking*	
Facilities Maintenance	1st
Waste Pick-Up	2nd
Lawn Mowing	3rd
Paved Trail Maintenance	4th
Beach Grooming	5th
Hiking Trail Maintenance	6th
Dog Park Maintenance	7th
Weeding	8th

*See page 7 in Appendix A to view the full survey data for this question (Q5)

Survey takers were presented with a budgeting exercise and asked to allocate a hypothetical \$100 amongst a range of fundings categories. Those categories are listed in order of funding allocation from largest to smallest:

- 1) Maintenance, repairs, and replacement of existing park amenities, such as lawn mowing, weeding, painting shelters, and repairing paths (\$37 weighted average)
- 2) Replacing facilities for long-term savings on upkeep and maintenance (\$30 weighted average)
- 3) Existing programming for Ashland Parks (day camps, facility, classes, etc.) (\$24 weighted average)
- 4) Ecological management for existing parks, such as invasive species removal, native plantings, and prescribed burning (\$20 weighted average)
- 5) Marketing, outreach, and events at Ashland Parks and Recreation (\$13 weighted average)

Finally, survey respondents were asked to leave any additional comments related to prioritizing recreational facilities and services for the City of Ashland. A number of themes emerged from the 179 open-ended comments received. First, it is clear that improving or replacing the boat launch at Kreher park is a top community concern with about a quarter of comments relating directly to this issue. Commenters noted the missed opportunity for tourism and economic development due to the poor state of the existing boat launch, especially given the City's prime location on Lake Superior.

Of those who took the survey...

- **66% are City of Ashland residents;** the majority of non-residents live in Ashland County (57%), Bayfield County, Washburn, or another nearby community.
- 34% were 25-34 years old, 26% were 35-44 years old, 16% were 45-54 years old, and 19% were 55+.

"Boat landings are vital. Please add and maintain them!"

"Our parks are a huge part of the community. They also say a lot about what we are to our visitors in all seasons."

"Think Inclusion. All age kids and of all abilities."

Second to comments about Ashland’s boat launch were concerns relating to recently replaced playgrounds within City parks, particularly at Prentice Park. Many survey takers had concerns about the safety of the playground’s features for toddler-age children, specifically the slide. Many commenters noted a need for more playground equipment geared specifically to the youngest users (0-6 years old), as well as more inclusive playgrounds or features for children with disabilities. Other topics that emerged from the open-ended survey responses included the need to fix the broken pier at Bayview park, a desire for more programming and events within City parks, and improved outreach and marketing of the City’s current park and recreation offerings, including a better map of the existing park system.

6.2 Public Input Meetings

The first Public Input Meeting (PIM) was held on April 18th at the Bretting Community Center. The meeting included a short presentation, followed by a series of activities designed to gauge park usage and budget priorities for participants, similar to those asked in the online survey.

For those who attended the PIM, the ranking for budget allocation resulted in a priority ranking as follows:

1. Ecological management for existing parks, such as invasive removal, native plantings and prescribed burning
2. (TIE) Maintenance, repairs, and replacement of existing park amenities, such as lawn mowing, weeding, painting shelters, and repairing paths
3. (TIE) Replacing facilities for long term savings on upkeep and maintenance
4. Existing programming for Ashland Parks (day camps, facility, classes, etc.)
5. Marketing, outreach and events at Ashland Parks and Recreation

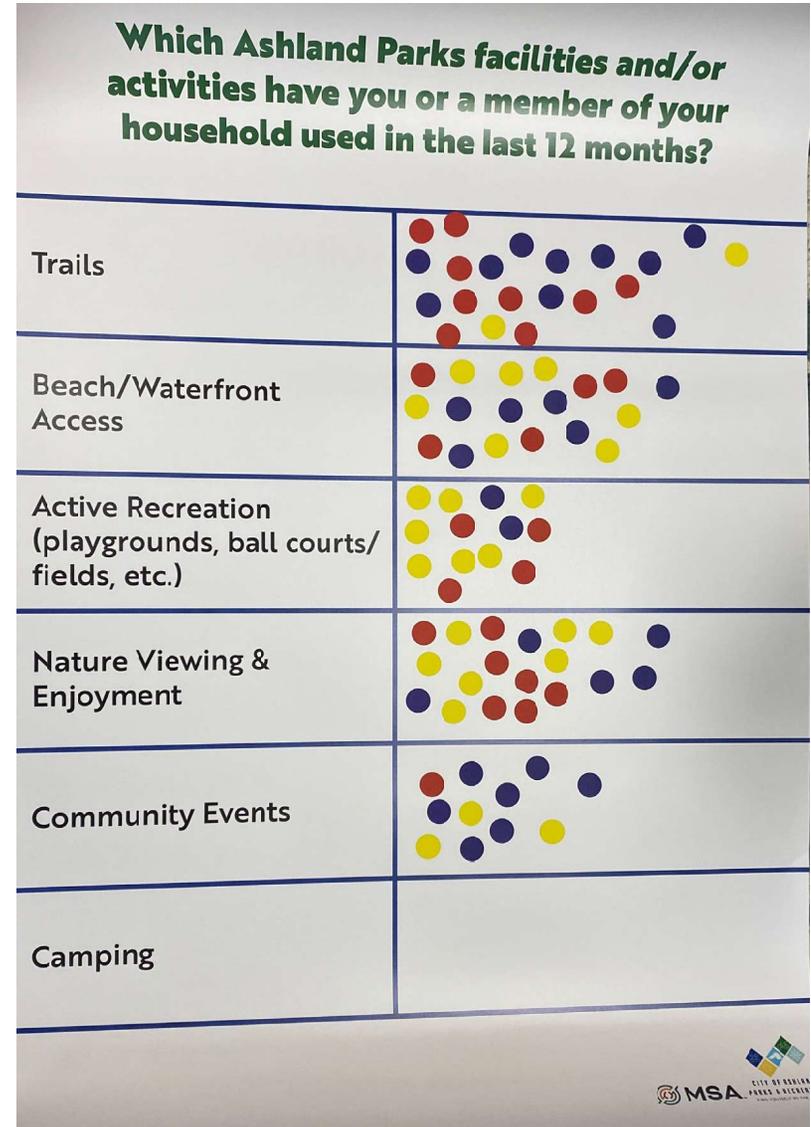
When asked which facilities or activities attendees had used in the last 12



months, public beaches and the walking trails received the highest tally. Additionally, open-ended comments noted a need for additional boat storage, more cross-country ski trails, and more opportunities for urban agriculture, specifically a community orchards or additional community garden space.

The second Public Input Meeting was held on March 20, 2025 at the Bretting Community Center. At this meeting, the planning team presented a highlight of recommendations made based on the Parks Master Plan efforts, including discussion on reduced mowing strategies for more cost-effective maintenance, and park retirements.

Most importantly, community members were presented with the 2026-2030 Capital Projects and Major Maintenance (CIP Table) and asked to leave comments and rank community priorities on the CIP Table. Resulting comments and priority ranking have been incorporated into the final CIP table in Appendix D.



6.3 Focus Groups

Economic Development & Regional Tourism

Focus groups are an important way to receive direct, meaningful input from community stakeholders around given topic or issue. MSA and APR staff facilitated a focus group centered on economic development and regional tourism with public and private officials, including Chamber of Commerce members, the Marketing Director for Tamarack Health, and the Water Quality Program Coordinator for the Lake Superior Basin branch of the WI Department of Natural Resources.

Participants agreed that outdoor recreation was the number one pull for the region, a key link for all economic development in Ashland. The representative for Tamarack Health also noted that outdoor recreation was the biggest draw in recruiting new workers to City. Participants also agreed that the parks system, as well as downtown Ashland, need a better system of signage and wayfinding to help direct residents and visitors to different recreational attractions. It was noted that creating cohesive wayfinding for the park system included the opportunity for educational signage about the history and customs of the region's indigenous people. The development of such a system could also be leveraged into a more comprehensive tourist-focused promotional campaign related to Ashland's waterfront and outdoor recreation opportunities. Another opportunity identified by the focus group was the need for more waterfront community events with a regional draw, noting that Ashland could participate in Lake Superior Day—an event held annually in July with communities all along the Lake Superior coastline.

Focus group attendees also touched on broader issues facing Ashland, including a lack of both market rate and affordable housing leading to difficulties recruiting new residents, especially professionals who likely face a pay cut relocating to the City. Overall, collaboration between different organizations was identified as an essential to improving Ashland's parks and in turn leveraging its outdoor recreational assets as an engine for economic development.

City Staff & Department Heads

MSA spent significant time discussing operational strengths and weaknesses with APR and Public Works staff members during their site visits in June 2024. These conversations revealed challenges related to staffing and staff capacity. The department struggles to fill seasonal/LTE grounds maintenance positions during the summer, and the small number of full-time staff are spread thin given their breadth of their responsibilities, which span over 200 acres of ground maintenance, trail maintenance, managing all recreational programs at the BCC, managing reservations at the City's two RV parks, coordinating volunteers, and more. Given that the majority of APR's budget is dedicated to funding the small number of full-time staff positions, little money is left over for parks maintenance and larger capital projects, therefore most park planning and capital projects rely on outside funding from grants. This is another responsibility of the Parks and Recreation director, who devotes a significant amount of time securing grant funding and donations for major park improvement projects.

MSA also attended a City Department Heads meeting while visiting in June 2024. Department heads stressed the importance of ensuring the quantity of parkland and amenities is right sized to the community and that community needs are met while also being fiscally realistic. Additionally, department heads highlighted the importance of the Ashland Marina and other planned improvement projects at the City's campgrounds and Oredock as important drivers for economic development and tourism for the community overall.

CHAPTER 7

IMPLEMENTATION

7.1 Funding Opportunities

Grant Programs

Implementation dollars are available for acquisition and development of recreation spaces and facilities. Linear parks and trails can be funded through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) or the Department of Transportation (WDOT). The WDNR also provides funds for the acquisition of lands, the stabilization of shoreland, and the protection of environmentally sensitive areas. The high cost of park improvement projects necessitates the acquisition of outside funding to enable development. Grant funding provides seed money and crucial capital for leveraging additional community dollars and support. While many projects identified in this plan would benefit from the acquisition of outside funding sources, some projects will require grant funding if they are to be realized.

Community Fundraising & Volunteer Groups

Community groups and civic organizations are sometimes willing to organize fundraising efforts to assist with costs, and they may also be able to marshal volunteer labor to assist with small development projects such as trail creation or playground installations, especially if they are a potential user group. The City should coordinate with potential user groups when planning new facilities to see if cost-sharing, donation or outright purchase options exist. Groups that could potentially be involved include youth sports groups, private organizations and the school district.

Local business and corporate support should also be sought. Funders can be acknowledged with plaques, signs, or walkway bricks, including the option of park or feature naming rights for major donors.

501(c)3 Foundation and Planned Giving

The City can set up an endowment fund as an additional means of providing continual financial support for park acquisition and development. An endowment fund works like a permanent savings account. The amount individuals give, which is the principal, is never spent. Only the interest income is spent, thereby providing a continual source of money. A park endowment fund can provide a means for residents to make gifts of any size (including estate bequests), with the certainty that the money donated will only be used for the advancement of recreation in the community. Gifts to an endowment fund are typically tax deductible under federal and state law.

Donations

In many communities, parkland development occurs with the availability of land. Donations of private land for a public purpose is not uncommon, and criteria for accepting these lands is needed. A formal procedure should be in place for how the land will be planned and used in the best interest of the community. An established planned giving program through the City would allow prospective patrons to dedicate land in a legal manner that provides a legacy for how the land will be utilized over time.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

Tax increment financing (TIF) is a tool that allows municipalities to promote economic development by earmarking property tax revenue from increases in assessed values within a designated TIF district. As part of a broader plan to redevelop an area, the City can use tax increment financing to assist with parkland or trail acquisition and development. There are some limitations to what revenues from a TIF district can be used to pay for, generally the costs of constructing public buildings cannot be funded with TIF. TIFs are typically created for the purpose of stimulating redevelopment and new public and private investments. According to the 2023 WI DOR the City of Ashland has three active TIF Districts.

7.2 Adoption and Amendment Process

Parks and Recreation Committee

The Committee should meet to review the plan and pass a motion to recommend approval of the plan or plan amendment by the City Council.

Public Hearing (Optional)

Prior to adopting this plan, or plan amendment, the City can hold at least one public hearing to discuss the proposed plan or plan amendment; however, a public hearing is not required by the DNR to adopt this plan. If a public hearing is held, at least 30 days prior to the hearing a Class 1 notice must be published that contains, at minimum, the following:

- The date, time, and location of the hearing.
- A summary of the proposed plan or plan amendment.
- The local government staff who may be contacted for additional information.
- Where to inspect and how to obtain a copy of the proposed plan or amendment before the hearing.

The notice should also provide a method for submitting written comments, and those comments should be read or summarized at the public hearing.

Plan Adoption

This plan and any future amendments become official City policy when City Council passes, by a majority vote of all elected members, an adoption resolution. The City Council may choose to revise the plan after it has been recommended by the Parks and Recreation Commission, and after the public hearing (optional).

Plan Amendment vs. Plan Update

Amendments can be made at any time, but the City should not amend the plan more than once per year. A commonly recommended approach is to establish a consistent annual schedule for consideration of minor plan amendments.

This plan should be updated every five years to maintain eligibility for Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Stewardship Funding. Unlike an amendment, a plan update should revisit the entirety of the plan content and include more robust opportunities for public participation.

Table 7.1 Common State and Federal Grant Recreation Programs

Funding Programs By Category	Maximum Award	Application Due Date	Granting Agency
Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program			
The Stewardship Program was established in 1989 to preserve Wisconsin's most significant land and water resources for future generations and to provide the land base and recreational facilities needed for quality outdoor experiences. These goals are achieved by acquiring land and easements for conservation and recreation purposes, developing and improving recreational facilities, and restoring wildlife habitat. This is an umbrella program that funds the following grants:	50% local match required	1-Mar	DNR
<p>Aids for the Acquisition and Development of Local Parks (ADLP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps to buy land or easements and develop or renovate local park and recreation area facilities for nature-based outdoor recreation purposes (e.g., trails, fishing access, and park support facilities). <p>Urban Green Space (UGS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps to buy land or easements in urban or urbanizing area to preserve the scenic and ecological values of natural open spaces for nature-based outdoor recreation, including non-commercial gardening. <p>Urban Rivers (UR)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps to buy land on or adjacent to river flowing through urban or urbanizing areas to preserve or restore the scenic and environmental values of riverways for nature-based outdoor recreation. <p>Acquisition of Development Rights Grants (ADR)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps to buy development rights (easements) for the protection of natural, agricultural, or forestry values, that would enhance nature-based outdoor recreation. 			
Funding Programs By Category			
Land and Water Conservation Fund (LAWCON)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This fund is used to implement projects that are identified by both the local and the state Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. In general, land acquisition, development, and renovation projects for public outdoor recreation purposes are eligible LWCF projects. LWCF does not include the "nature-based outdoor recreation" restriction that the Stewardship Local Assistance Programs do. 	50% local match required	1-May	DNR
Recreational Trails Program Grant			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eligible projects include: maintenance and restoration of existing trails, development and rehabilitation of trailside and trailhead facilities and trail linkages, construction of new trails, and acquisition of easement or property for trails. May only be used on trails which have been identified in or which further a specific goal of a local, county or state trail plan included or reference in a statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plan required by the federal LAWCON. 	Up to 80% of the total project costs of a recreational trail project (20% match required). Payments are reimbursements on costs incurred after project approval.	1-May	DNR
Urban Forestry			
Provides technical service and financial assistance to communities for developing urban forestry programs. Priorities include:	50% local match required.	1-Oct	DNR
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Communities needing to develop an urban forestry plan; Communities needing worker training; and Communities needing to conduct a street tree inventory. 	Grants range from \$1,000 to \$25,000.		
Eligible projects include 1) Undertaking street tree inventories; 2) Training for Village tree workers; 3) Developing urban open space programs; 4) Developing urban forestry plans; 5) Developing a tree ordinance; 6) Developing a public awareness program; and, 7) Tree planting and maintenance			
Lake Protection and Classification Grants			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designed to assist lake users, lake communities and local governments as they undertake projects to protect and restore lakes and their ecosystems. Eligible projects include: Purchase of property or a conservation easement Restoration of wetlands Development of local regulations or ordinances Lake classification projects that allow counties to design and implement local land and water management programs that are tailored to specific classes of lakes in response to various development and recreational use pressures (these grants are limited to \$50,000). Lake protection projects recommended in a DNR-approved plan including watershed management, lake restoration, diagnostic feasibility studies, or any other projects that will protect or improve lakes. 	25% local match required. \$200,000 maximum per project.	1-May	DNR
Recreational Boating Facilities Grant			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construction of capital improvements to provide safe recreational boating facilities and for feasibility studies related to the development of safe recreational facilities. Also includes purchase of navigation aids, dredging of channels of waterways, and chemically treating Eurasian water milfoil. 	50% local match required	Established quarterly	DNR
Sport Fish Restoration Funding			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sport Fish Restoration - Fishing Pier (SFR-FP) grants may be used to construct fishing piers that are primarily designed to provide public access for shore fishing. 	25%-50% local match required	1-Oct	DNR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sport Fish Restoration - Boat Access (SFR-BA) grants may be used to construct motorboat access projects. Eligible components include boat ramp construction and renovation, along with related amenities such as parking lots, accessible paths, lighting, and restroom facilities. 		1-Feb	