

## **VII. Village of Weston Recreation Issues**

### **Primary Environmental Corridors**

Environmental corridors are groupings of natural resources that are usually situated along a linear waterway or drainage feature. They all contain some type of water feature, such as a river, stream, lake, or wetland, and are typically bounded by areas of steep topography, or “rims”. They also typically contain a variety of woodlands, grasslands, and other native plant communities and wildlife habitat areas. Environmental corridors usually contain approximately 95% of a community’s natural resources. Primary environmental corridors are the highest quality corridors within the community. They have the largest land areas, the richest diversity of wildlife, and the highest quality water features. Also, primary environmental corridors typically run along the entire length of a water body.

The Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) has established guidelines for designating primary environmental corridors. Their guidelines establish that primary environmental corridors must be a minimum of 400 acres in size, be at least two miles long, and have a minimum width of 200 feet. Based on these guidelines, the Village of Weston has four areas that meet the criteria for a primary environmental corridor:

- Eau Claire River Corridor
- Sandy Creek Lowland Corridor
- Cedar Creek Corridor
- Bull Creek Corridor

These primary environmental corridors provide unique opportunities for recreational development. They provide opportunities for fishing, swimming, hiking, hunting, cross country skiing, and nature interpretation. Multi-purpose trail development along these corridors would provide users with a variety of year-round, barrier-free recreation opportunities.

The Eau Claire River Corridor has the highest potential for recreational development. Approximately one half of the corridor lies in a wetland protection district. The Eau Claire River, which is accessible by canoe or small boat, is known for bass, pan fish, and northern pike fishing. The Eau Claire River corridor has a number of scenic woodlands, rapids, and other natural, cultural, and historic features within the Village. There are currently three Village parks, several scout camps, and other private associations that own and preserve land on the Eau Claire River. Finally, there are existing and proposed city and county parks on the Eau Claire River in adjoining jurisdictions.

A section of the Bull Creek Corridor was developed in 2009. At the headwaters of the Bull Creek is the Business Park South Conservancy Area. This area contains an observation tower, two picnic areas and a waterfowl pond. The Conservancy Area allows

patrons a place to picnic in a natural setting. The area will also provide an excellent opportunity for people to observe nature and partake in bird watching/photography.

The Village should continue to explore the possibility of acquiring additional land and easements, and developing additional parks, appropriate facilities, and multi-purpose trails along the primary environmental corridors to provide access to the Village's existing natural resources. Also, the Village should cooperate with other jurisdictions (particularly the City of Wausau and Marathon County) to develop appropriate parks and trails within the primary environmental corridors in and adjacent to the Village of Weston.

### **Trail System Development**

One of the highest priorities identified in the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is the need for more facilities to accommodate walking, jogging, and bicycling. The Village should continue to strive in developing an overall trail system that could connect existing and future Village Parks to each other, and to other local and regional trail systems, and would provide Village and County residents a greater opportunity to have access to other areas of the region. Currently the Eau Claire River Trail is located along the Eau Claire River and connects to the Mountain Bay State Trail. The trail system also continues north over the Eau Claire River along Ross Avenue and connects with the Sandy Lane and River Pines sub-divisions. Ross Avenue was reconstructed with the addition of biking/walking lanes on each side of the road spanning from the western edge of the Village to the Ross Avenue bridge.

A ten-foot walking path was also constructed in 2006 along with the reconstruction of CTH X, south of Weston Avenue to Howland Avenue. CTH X, north of Ross Avenue to Northwestern Avenue was reconstructed in 2011 with the addition of a ten-foot walking path. Walking and bike access now spans from the southern edge of the Village to the northern edge of the Village, connecting with Wausau on Northwestern Avenue.

Constructed in 2011 was a pedestrian walking bridge over HWY 29 on Birch Street. Along with the walking bridge is a ten-foot walking path extending south to Weston Avenue. Future plans in 2014 are to continue to extend south to Shorey Avenue and then branching east to Camp Phillips Road and west to Alderson Street.

Plans are also being looked at to connect the trail system in the Village of Weston with the Village of Rothschild. In 2004 Rothschild built a walking bridge over the Wisconsin River near Domtar, connecting the east and west banks of the Wisconsin River. The trail system connects the Town of Rib Mountain to the Village of Rothschild and potentially the Village of Weston.

The Village should continue to cooperate with Marathon County as it develops Mountain Bay Trail System facilities in the Village. Furthermore, the Village should cooperate with developers and other communities in the development of public trails and greenways in new developments that could connect to Village, County, and State trail systems.

**Parkland Development**

In accordance with the goals and objectives outlined earlier, park development (as distinguished from acquisition) should coincide with the percentage of residential development within the proposed park service area. Although the parkland should be secured as soon as possible, development should not begin until 25% of the proposed park's service area is developed, unless grants or other special sources of revenue (such as TIF) are available for development. Once park development begins, it should continue at a rate that is comparable with the overall residential development in the park service area.

**Mini-Parks**

The development of mini-parks within a community should be reviewed carefully. Although mini-parks provide a place for tots to play in proximity to their homes, they are becoming less attractive to park systems due to their high maintenance costs. However, mini-parks do have a role in the community and many residents within existing neighborhoods as well as developers feel future mini-park development is warranted. Their position is that mini-parks often provide an alternative to children who might otherwise play in the streets.

To protect the Village from excessive mini-park development and maintenance costs it is advised that the Village insist that the neighborhood association or developer assume responsibility for the development and maintenance of such facilities. If a developer or neighborhood association requests a mini-park, a covenant and agreement should be developed between the Village and the neighborhood association. This covenant and agreement should stipulate the specific obligations and responsibilities of maintaining the mini-park: The association will own, operate, and maintain the mini-park. If the association allows the mini-park to deteriorate or become a safety hazard, the Village can order the association to correct the safety hazard. If the association does not comply with an order to correct a safety hazard, the Village should correct it and assess the costs to the neighborhood association. If the neighborhood association fails to pay for the costs of maintaining the mini-park in a safe condition, these costs should be placed on the tax bill of the park property and/or other property within the neighborhood.

**Park Security/Safety**

Safety and security are important concerns in the planning and design of recreational facilities. The perceived security and actual safety of these facilities will affect the overall utilization and ultimate success of a park. Parks that experience crime or intimidation of users, or do not feel "safe" will have a lower utilization, will usually experience vandalism, and generally will decline as viable recreation areas. Conversely, parks that are warm, inviting, visible, and have a "safe" feeling will have higher utilization, lower vandalism, and will be viable recreation areas.

There are several means of making a park more secure and safe. Some of these factors are tangible safety measurers, while others give a psychological “feeling” of security. These factors include:

- Visibility – Buildings and sites should be located in areas that are clearly visible from streets, buildings, and other areas of observation. This will facilitate periodic patrolling by police officers, and constant visibility to neighborhood residents and visitors.
- Proximity – Buildings and activity areas should be located near other activity areas and facilities, and should not be isolated by themselves. This will give facility users a feeling of security, increase utilization, and decrease the temptation for vandalism and other crime.
- Lighting – Lighting of recreation facilities, buildings, and pathways will not only allow night use, but also discourage crime by illuminating the activity areas and making them visible. Critical facilities such as restrooms, children’s play areas, and frequently used paths should be illuminated all night to further discourage crime or inappropriate use.
- Screening – Individual areas should be specifically designed so that they do not provide hiding places for criminals. Generally, earth berms, hedges, low-branched evergreen trees, or fences higher than 3 feet should not be situated in or around activity areas. Furthermore, paths that pass through wooded areas should have at least 6 feet of cleared land between the edges of the path and vegetation or obstructions. Also, paths that pass through wooded areas that receive night use should *always* be well lighted, and should not have benches that cannot be seen from public streets. Children’s play areas should also be kept away from potential hiding places, and should normally be located in the most visible and secure part of the park.
- Materials – Recreational facility materials should be appropriately selected for their intended use and location. Materials should be sturdy enough to withstand normal use, *and anticipated abuse*. If a particular facility receives such abuse that no material can withstand it, the Village should consider relocating the facility or adding some other safety or security measure. Also, all materials used in park facilities should meet the appropriate U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) guidelines for that facility.
- Surveillance – The installation of surveillance devices, such as cameras, can reduce vandalism, but are generally expensive to install and operate. These devices require periodic maintenance and an operator to monitor them. Also, surveillance devices themselves can be the target of theft or vandalism. Surveillance devices are typically not cost effective in park facilities.

- The Village will have an extensive surveillance system installed at the Aquatic Center and skate park in 2013 to help curb vandalism and illegal behavior.
- However, routine surveillance of park facilities by law officers, park staff, and residents can significantly reduce vandalism and crime. Neighborhood residents, and Neighborhood Watch groups in particular, should be encouraged to monitor activities in their local neighborhoods and to report suspicious activities to local law enforcement officials. In particular, bicycle patrols by law enforcement officials and neighborhood resident “foot patrols” can reduce the likelihood of crime and vandalism in a park.

Park security and safety is challenging, but achievable. Using common sense and following these suggestions can make most parks made safer and more secure. These considerations are taken into account in the development of each recommendation of this plan.

### **Universal Design/ADA**

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) is a sweeping civil rights law, which is intended to eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities in all aspects of American life. ADA includes provisions regarding employment, state and local government services, state and local government public transit service, public accommodations provided by private entities, and communications.

Under ADA, any unit of state or local government is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of disability in the provision of state or local government services against an individual who, with or without a reasonable accommodation, meets essential eligibility requirements for receipt of that service. State and local government services are broadly interpreted to include every program, service and activity of such an entity. A reasonable accommodation shall include but is not limited to, the changing of rules, policies, and practices; the removal of architectural, transportation, and communication barriers; and the provision of auxiliary aids and services. Units of local government must conduct a self-analysis to identify discriminatory practices and barriers, and shall remove all barriers as soon as is possible.

Using this definition, municipalities are required, under ADA to provide reasonable access to park and recreation facilities and opportunities. Also, municipalities are required to upgrade non-accessible facilities and opportunities to allow reasonable access to parks and other recreation opportunities. ADA does not necessarily require that municipalities upgrade all park facilities within their jurisdiction, only that the municipalities provide reasonable access to the park and recreation system.

A realistic method for complying with ADA is Universal Design. Universal design is an evolving idea, a method of looking at facilities and opportunities objectively, that results

in programs, services, and facilities that work for everyone. This is very different from providing special facilities that highlight the differences between people.

Universal design results in equal opportunity facilities that enable all people to benefit from their desired recreation experiences. The needs of all users are incorporated as an integral part of the architecture, landscape design, and program. All people are welcome to use the facilities with little or no assistance needed. This offers feelings of dignity, independence, self-reliance, and the opportunity to socialize with other users. Mainstream participation is facilitated through careful consideration of different physical, mental, and social needs. These human factors are matched with the natural opportunities and limitations of a site in the design process. Success is best portrayed by simple solutions that solve many problems and support many types of use. This “one size fits all” approach is initially more complex during design, but results in simple but multi-functional solutions.

Recreation site designs based on these principles, can offer understandable choices for all users. The Village of Weston should continue to make a commitment to designing new recreation facilities to be barrier free and meet the intent of universal design. Also, the Village should routinely monitor existing facilities, and upgrade them as necessary to provide reasonable barrier free access to the park and recreation user. However, the Village should also be cognizant of the natural limitations of the park sites, and should not “force” barrier free facility designs onto landscapes that are not suitable for them.

Furthermore, the Village of Weston should strive to assure that groups that use Village parks and recreation areas do not violate the spirit, if not the letter of the ADA. The Village should include a clause in their facility use/rental agreement to require that public and private groups who use public facilities do not discriminate against potential park users. This clause would place the burden of complying with ADA on the user groups, and would reduce, if not eliminate the burden of compliance on the Village.

- Suggested Statement
  - I, (name), (position), of the (organization), agree that while we use Village of Weston facilities, we will not discriminate on the basis of disability.

### **Urban Forestry**

The Village of Weston’s urban forest is comprised of the trees on the Village’s park lands and open spaces, public rights-of-way, boulevards and terraces, and privately owned and maintained gardens, yards, and open spaces. These resources are important since they are visually pleasing, they are environmentally beneficial, and they are an important (if not the only) link between community residents and the natural environment. They provide habitat and sanctuary for birds and other wildlife, they help rejuvenate oxygen and control air pollution, and they provide shade and microclimate control for urban structures. Also, they provide an important visual break, or softening, from the often-harsh urban environment of streets, parking lots, and buildings. It is very important to the

residents of the Village, and society in general, to preserve, enhance, and maintain these important natural resources.

It should be the goal of the Village to establish and maintain an urban forest in parks, boulevards, terraces, preserves, and other public right-of-way lands. This urban forest will provide community residents with high-quality, convenient, economical, and healthy exposure to trees and native plant communities, and their associated benefits to the environment as well as to individuals. Furthermore, it should also be the goal of the Village to regulate certain private trees on private property in order to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the general public. Specifically, the Village should:

- Provide services to develop and maintain its urban forest
- Maintain an adequate amount of land to meet current and future urban forest needs.
- Regulate “public nuisance” trees on private property
- Stress the benefits of urban forestry to the public
- Utilize all available resources to develop and maintain the quality of the Village’s urban forest
- Maintain “Tree City USA” status for the Village

To meet the goals of establishing and maintaining an urban forest, and regulating “public nuisance” trees on private property, the Village should maintain its commitment to the urban forestry plan.

### **Historic Resources**

The Village of Weston, like many other communities, has numerous historic resources. These historic resources, such as effigy mounds, historic structures, and historic sites, are significant community resources and should be protected. Furthermore, some of the historic resources provide opportunities for residents and visitors to interpret the social and cultural heritage of the area.

Some historic resources, such as effigy mounds and certain structures and sites, have state or regional significance and fall under the jurisdiction of the Wisconsin State Historical Society or other similar agency. However, many other historic sites, buildings, and other features are significant to the local community, and are not protected by any regulatory agency. Under Wisconsin state law, communities may adopt a historic preservation ordinance, which would permit the community to designate, preserve, and promote historic resources within their jurisdiction.

The Village of Weston should consider adopting a historic preservation ordinance to identify, designate, preserve, and promote historic resources within the Village. These resources could become a significant component of the Village park system.

### **Organized Athletic Facilities**

In addition to Village Parks and Schools, there are several private suppliers of public recreation facilities located within the community that meet identified needs for public recreation. These private suppliers own and maintain softball diamonds, volleyball courts, golf courses, and support facilities that are available for public use. These facilities are available to the public on a non-discriminatory basis. The general public can pay a fee to use these facilities, or they can belong to an organized team that pays a fee to use the facilities, just as if the facility was managed by the Village of Weston Park Department.

As long as these private suppliers of public recreation facilities continue to provide these facilities on a non-discriminatory basis, there is no need for the Village to develop these facilities themselves. However, the Village should monitor the private suppliers on a periodic basis to ensure that their services meet public needs. If, for some reason, the private suppliers fail to adequately meet the recreation needs of community residents, the Village should consider developing these organized athletic facilities in Village parks or recreation areas.

Furthermore, as the community grows, the Village will need to develop additional parks, including community parks. Community parks typically contain a variety of organized athletic facilities as well as passive recreation facilities. The Village should acquire appropriate parkland and develop park facilities that meet the needs of community residents, including the need for organized athletic facilities, particularly; soccer fields, softball diamonds, volleyball courts, basketball courts, and Little League baseball fields.

### **Park Operations and Maintenance**

The operations, maintenance, and upkeep of park and recreation facilities are an important component of the overall community recreation experience. It is important that the Village of Weston make a commitment to maintain adequate staff and budget appropriate funds to maintain their parklands.

The Village of Weston currently has a full time park superintendent, a full-time (shared) secretary, two park maintenance employees and 3-4 seasonal part-time maintenance employees. The Village of Weston Park Department is an independent organizational unit within the Weston Municipal Government. The park superintendent, who receives policy and program guidance from the Weston Park Committee, administers park and recreation department duties and guidance on operations matters from the Village Administrator. The Park Committee, in turn, receives guidance and approval on policy, procedure, and budget issues from the Weston Village Board.

The Village of Weston owns and maintains several pieces of capital equipment necessary to maintain Village parks. This equipment includes: four riding mowers, a tractor, four pick-up trucks, a skid-steer and other smaller equipment. Furthermore, the Park Department has access to other Village equipment, when necessary, for park maintenance. The Village maintains this equipment in good condition, but needs to work on a regular replacement schedule for all capital equipment.

The Weston Park Department currently provides an adequate level of park administration and park maintenance, but they are deficient in the recreation programming that they provide. The Village of Weston should consider providing a full time recreation director. However, since most of the recreation programs in the Village are provided and administered by private suppliers and/or service groups, and since the school district employs a community education director, the Village may not need its own recreation director for the immediate future. A future recreation director would be able to expand the amount and types of recreation offered as well as be a possible source of revenue to the Village through user fees and donations.

Implementing the recommendations of this Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan will result in increased park operations and maintenance needs.

The Village should maintain its current administrative structure, with an independent park department that is administered by a park and recreation superintendent who answers to the Village administrator and receives policy direction from an independent park board.

In order to implement the operations and maintenance recommendations proposed in this section, the Village must make a commitment to hire the staff and purchase the equipment necessary to perform these duties. These recommendations may seem expensive, but they are necessary to provide adequate operations and maintenance services as the Village of Weston develops and expands its park and recreation system. The Village should “phase” the implementation of the operations and maintenance recommendations to coincide with the development of its park facilities. This phasing will help mitigate the increased cost of operations and maintenance, while providing an appropriate level of service.

### **Recreation Programming**

The Village of Weston currently does not offer recreation programs to its residents. Private (both non-profit and for-profit organizations) and school district organizations provide adult athletic recreation leagues, as well as offering youth athletic leagues and other recreation programs. These programs are administered, staffed, and funded by these outside organizations, and held in many Village Parks. Recreational Programming can be a valuable source of revenue to a park system. As the Village park system expands, the Village Park and Recreation Board should consider hiring a part-time recreation supervisor to provide additional and expanded recreation programs in Village parks.

### **Facility Use Policy**

The Village of Weston currently has a system that regulates the use of park shelters, Kennedy Hall and the aquatic center. These facilities are available for rent on a first come first serve basis. There is a schedule of fees that determine the cost for various

groups and residents versus non-residents. Currently the Village has a policy that charges for-profit groups that use of athletic fields. The Village should adopt a policy that charges all user groups for field use or require the group to invest in the fields. Such a policy, with appropriate guidelines, would not only help generate revenue to help offset park operations and maintenance costs, but it also would help clarify responsibilities, obligations, and priorities for the use of public recreation facilities. The Village should modify its park ordinance or adopt a separate policy for use of its athletic fields that: 1) is equitable to Village residents, 2) establishes priorities for use of Village recreation facilities, and 3) helps defray the cost of operation and maintenance of park facilities.

- Suggested Policy

1. Village organized athletic facilities (soccer fields, softball diamonds, baseball diamonds, tennis courts, etc.)
  - A. These facilities should be available on a first come, first served reservation basis.
  - B. These facilities could be available, at a predetermined rate (or at no charge), to individuals or organizations that provide recreation programs that benefit the residents of the Village.
  - C. These facilities could be available, at an established fee, to individuals or organizations that provide recreation programs that benefit users from outside of the Village.

Although there is no current policy in place for athletic field use, the Village does receive compensation for the use of fields from all major user groups such as youth soccer, youth football and youth baseball.