

## 6. PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND TRAILS PLAN

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Population Growth Patterns and Demographic Change**

As discussed earlier in the Comprehensive Plan, the population in the County is expected to increase from the current 85,000 to more than 194,000 people by 2030, which translates into an additional 50,000 more households and 25,000 more jobs. To accommodate this projected growth, land in Carver County will continue to be subdivided for residential housing, commercial, and industrial uses as cities spread out into the surrounding townships. Inherently, this growth impacts the demand for parks, open spaces, and trails.

Whereas traditional family households will continue to expand in Carver County, the general aging of the population will also bring a higher propensity for “empty nesters” or households without school age children. The senior population will also likely continue to grow, albeit at a slower pace than more gentrified communities.

Recreational trends - which are greatly influenced by demographics and other societal factors - will continue to evolve in response to new demands by new populations. For example, today’s younger age groups have much more diverse interests than in past generations, at times making it more difficult to engage them in traditional recreational activities. In Carver County, observations suggest growing regional park use by Latino, Asian, and Russian immigrant populations - each bringing with them new expectations.

The changing demographic character of the county coupled with the changing recreational trends underscore the need for a well-balanced and flexible system that can respond to evolving, broad-based needs. The plan places considerable emphasis on addressing this issue by ensuring that a full cross-section of interests and needs of current and future residents can be reasonably accommodated.

#### **General Findings from Public Process**

Public input into the planning process occurred at several levels: Public open houses, comments from stakeholder groups, meetings with local cities & townships, and work sessions with the Park Commission and County Board were all used to gain direct public input on key planning issues. Formal presentations to the County Board were undertaken to ensure consistency with overall perspectives, goals, and priorities. All of the findings from the process were instrumental in shaping planning decisions related to parks, open spaces, and trails throughout the county. The relationship between the County and local cities and townships remains important to efficiently and effectively providing parks and trails, preserving open spaces, and providing recreational opportunities; the public is well aware that a high level of coordination and inter-reliance between public agencies will be important to meeting future needs and preserving open space in spite of inevitable growth

In 2008, Carver County undertook a comprehensive survey to give residents a chance to rate the quality of life in the county and provide their opinion on a variety of topics. The survey was conducted by the National Research Center Inc.

Key overall survey findings include:

- The characteristics that survey respondents liked most about the county were the availability of both parks and trails; ratings for these natural amenities were above the national norm for other counties
- The majority of residents surveyed felt safe in parks and on trails
- As in 2004, the majority of Carver County respondents supported the acquisition of new areas of open space and parks, with two-thirds saying that they were willing to pay new property taxes to fund such acquisitions
- Respondents suggest a growing sense that access to opens space is declining

### **Outdoor Recreation Participation Trends**

Recent findings by the Metropolitan Council, MN DNR, and other agencies suggests that future growth in participation in many areas of outdoor recreation is not as assured as was the case a decade or two ago. In numerous activities, research indicates that participation rates are expected to actually decline as Minnesotans shift their activity patterns based on evolving interests, age, and access to newer forms of recreation. Other key findings include:

- Decreasing participation in nature-based activities: fishing, hunting, wildlife-watching, state park attendance, etc.
- Growing disconnection with nature, which impacts personal development, societal well-being, stewardship of natural areas; and contributes to nature-deficit disorder in youth
- Barriers to getting outdoors include time, family obligations, work responsibilities, lack of money, weather, bugs (uncontrollable environment), lack of outdoor skills and equipment, lack of information and knowledge, and concerns about personal safety
- Aging population is affecting recreational trends
- More ethnically diverse population with widely varying expectations
- Obesity/health issues on the rise, with lifestyle choices being a key factor
- Greater diversity in recreational opportunities available to all age groups
- Funding issues - less local government aid (LGA) dollars for acquisition and improvements; suggests greater need for non-traditional approaches
- Increasing urbanization - urban sprawl is eating away at the rural environment with often limited regard for natural open space
- Technology is competing for people's discretionary time and creating more sedentary time
- Energy costs are rising and limiting people's willingness to travel

## Trends in Park Visits

In spite of concerns about per capita participation rates, with increasing population comes an increase in the number of actual park visits. When looking further into park visit trends, the numbers become even more telling as to the demands that will be placed on regional park resources.

According to the Metropolitan Council, annual use estimate of the Regional Park System is summarized as follows:

- An estimated 33,437,100 visits were made to the Metropolitan Regional Parks System in 2005
- Estimated annual visits have increased 39.8 percent since 1995, when visits were estimated at 23.9 million; 40 percent of the increase is attributed to the opening or inclusion of 13 parks and trails to the Regional Park System during this period; a total of 77 park and trail units were sampled in 2005 compared to 73 units sampled in 2004, and 64 in 1995

As of 2005, Carver County’s overall share of regional visitation is lower than expected relative to the county’s percentage of the metro population, suggesting that some residents are visiting regional parks outside of Carver County. The most likely reasons for this is either the lack of developed parks and facilities within Carver County that meet resident needs or the desire by residents to visit a particular regional park for its intrinsic values, such as the Chain of Lakes Regional Park in Minneapolis. Also, visits to Carver Park Reserve are not included in Carver County visitor counts since the park is managed by Three Rivers Park District. The chart below compares regional visits and population for Metro Regional Park agencies.

TABLE 6.1 REGIONAL PARK SYSTEM VISITOR DISTRIBUTION (2008)

Metro Regional Park Agency	2008 Visits (1,000s)	% of Total System Visitation
Minneapolis Park Board	15,442.4	40.09%
City of St. Paul	6,649.7	17.26%
Three Rivers Park District - Hennepin Co.	6,472.6	16.80%
Ramsey County	3,286.2	8.53%
Anoka County	3,280.7	8.52%
Washington County	1,158.4	3.01%
Dakota County	879.6	2.28%
City of Bloomington	526.8	1.37%
Three Rivers Park District - Scott Co.	302.0	0.78%
Carver County	265.0	0.69%
Scott County	259.9	0.67%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38,523.4</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Source: Metropolitan Council, Annual Use Estimate of the Metropolitan Regional Parks System for 2008

## Vision, Values, and Goals Statement

### Vision Statement

The vision is an outgrowth of the County's comprehensive planning process. The vision statement is as follows:

*"Where the future embraces the past in keeping Carver County a great place to live, work and play for a lifetime."*

To provide focus and direction for the vision statement as it relates to parks, open spaces, and trails, the Carver County Board of Commissioners will:

- Continue the practice of focusing growth in and near the existing growth centers and transportation corridors
- Continue to have Carver County be a community where a person can successfully live their entire life; supporting planning and design of communities that allow for persons of all ages to successfully live, work and play.
- Use methods consistent with existing laws to preserve natural areas, parklands, lakes and streams; in recognition that citizens of Carver County have a history of placing a high value on the natural resources found throughout the county

### Values Statements

The vision statement is supported by a number of value statements, including:

- Fostering the health and well being of Carver County, its residents and businesses by providing a balanced network of parks, recreational lands, and conserved open space sufficient to meet present and future needs
- Preserving the geographical characteristics and environmental/high value natural resource areas for historic, cultural, and educational purposes
- Providing areas of diverse natural resources as settings for outdoor recreational activities consistent with regional standards
- Preserving cultural resources for their intrinsic and historical values
- Providing residents with facilities to support a variety of enjoyable recreational activities that are located in a physically attractive setting
- Ensuring that recreational opportunities are affordable and accessible (by various modes of transportation) to all citizens
- Fostering a fully integrated and seamless system of regional, local, state, and federal parks, trails, and conservation lands

### Benefits in Support of Vision and Values

The provision of parks, recreational facilities, open spaces, and trails offer many benefits to those living in and visiting Carver County, as Figure 6-1 illustrates.

FIGURE 6.1 BENEFITS OF PARKS, RECREATIONAL FACILITIES, OPEN SPACES, AND TRAILS



Given the many benefits, it is reasonable to surmise that parks, recreational facilities, open spaces, and trails positively affect residents’ quality of life. As growth continues in the county and the sense of open space changes, the value of setting aside land for parks and open spaces will be that much more important to retaining the values that residents have come to expect and enjoy.

**Active Living by Design Philosophy**

The “active living by design” idea is a complementary philosophy to that of Carver County’s own vision and values. Key principles of this movement that apply to Carver County Parks & Trails planning include:

- Everyone, regardless of age, gender, language, ethnicity, economic status or ability, should have safe, convenient and affordable choices for physical activity
- Buildings and outdoor spaces should be designed and oriented to promote opportunities for active living for all levels of ability
- Parks, green space, and trails, should be safe, accessible and part of a transportation network that connects destinations of interest, such as housing, worksites, schools, community services and other places with high population density

### **A “Complete Streets” Vision in Support of Trail Plan**

As is the case with parks, open spaces, and trails, the active living philosophy can be applied to the street level, whereby local transportation systems are more routinely designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. In essence, local streets and roadways become an integrated part of an overall system of a pedestrian-friendly infrastructure that takes residents from their doorstep to local parks, trails, local businesses, and any variety of destinations. This includes pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities seeking a reasonable opportunity to safely and enjoyably move around a local city and throughout the county.

### **Alignment with Carver County Public Health Initiative**

Carver County Public Health promotes practices and behaviors that help people stay healthy. The following summarizes policy directions and accompanying strategies that are in alignment with County’s broader public health initiative.

**Physical Activity and Social Capital:** Build neighborhoods with safe and attractive places for recreational exercise and create a comprehensive network of trails that allow residents opportunities for active transportation. Encourage the use of parks and trails as a way to socially connect communities.

**Mental Health:** Maintain parks, trails and open spaces to promote mental health and reduce stress.

**Air Quality:** Prioritize parks, trails and open space to keep air clean.

**Water Quality:** Use parks and as part of natural infiltration and stormwater management system to enhance surface and sub-surface water quality.

**Food Access:** Incorporate healthy food sources within public parks and along trail corridors. Encourage private vendors to do the same.

**Safety and Convenience:** Provide all residents with safe and convenient access to parks, trails, and open space areas for recreation, health and fitness, and transportation.

## **Parks, Open Space, and Trails Goals**

The following goals are broad statements that chart the course for achieving the stated vision.

### **COUNTY GOAL POST-1**

To prepare and implement a cohesive, effective, and efficient parks, open space, and trail plan for the purpose of fostering the health and well being of Carver County, its residents, and businesses by providing recreational and conservation lands sufficient to meet present and future needs.

Objectives in Support of Goal Statement:

- To routinely evaluate and update the plan to ensure it accurately reflects the needs of county residents
- To use the plan for the purpose of guiding implementation in a logical, efficient manner

### **COUNTY GOAL POST-2**

To provide residents with parks and natural areas for recreational uses, protection of the natural environment and geographical characteristics of the county, as visual/physical buffering of land development, and as a means to maintain the sense of place, ambiance, appearance, and cultural and natural history of the county.

Objectives in Support of Goal Statement:

- To enhance the quality of life within the county by providing adequate parkland and natural areas to fulfill the present and future needs of residents
- To use the parks, natural areas, and interconnecting trail corridors as a major factor in shaping growth and development
- To maintain and enhance the natural character and aesthetic qualities of the county by providing parks and natural areas
- To encourage sequential growth within the county in harmony with the natural environment
- To provide recreational facilities consistent with approved park master plans
- To provide facilities that complement those provided by other park agencies within Carver County

### **COUNTY GOAL POST-3**

To provide residents with a high quality, interconnected trail and bikeway system for recreation, fitness, and transportation and as a means to tie parks and open spaces together with local communities.

Objectives in Support of Goal Statement:

- To provide a trail system that emphasizes harmony with the natural environment
- To develop a system of high value trails and bikeways, with a focus on providing a high quality experience to encourage high levels of use
- To allow for relatively uninterrupted walking, hiking, biking, and other uses to and through the County's park and open space system and developed areas
- To effectively tie the various parks together into an interconnected, high quality system; and to effectively tie the county trail system with those of local communities
- To safely protect users from developmental encroachment and associated vehicular traffic

#### COUNTY GOAL POST-4

To provide County residents with opportunities to engage in a variety of recreational activities that are enjoyable, in a physically attractive environment, and are affordable to citizens. In coordination with other local recreational services providers, the County will strive to provide residents with well-designed, effective, and interesting programs and services that complement other public and private providers.

Objectives in Support of Goal Statement:

- To provide programs and services in concert with other local providers to meet defined needs of county and regional residents, including those of children, teens, adults, elderly, and the disabled
- To support and encourage a wide diversity of recreation interests within the county
- To work with program providers to provide adequate facilities for programmed use on a fair and equitable basis to ensure that all individuals and groups receive reasonable access to facilities

#### COUNTY GOAL POST-5

To maintain an effective, ongoing means of communicating and interacting with residents about issues related to parks, open spaces, trails, recreation facilities, programs, and future development. To provide residents with the opportunity to participate in recreational activities and programs through the County and various public and private partners.

Objectives in Support of Goal Statement:

- To promote active and ongoing interaction between the County and its residents to ensure effective recreational programming and facility development
- To promote ongoing communication between the Park Commission and residents
- To promote ongoing volunteer programs and encourage civic and community organizations to assist in implementation of the plan and provide recreational programs

#### COUNTY GOAL POST-6

To maximize the park, open space, trail, and recreational opportunities available to residents through the development of fair and equitable working partnerships between the County and other public agencies, local recreational program providers, local school districts, local cities and townships, and civic organizations.

Objectives in Support of Goal Statement:

- To fairly and equitably integrate County parks, open spaces, trails, and facilities with those of other public and private partners
- To fairly and equitably integrate County programs and services with those of other public and private partners

#### COUNTY GOAL POST-7

To secure the funding necessary to carry out the vision of the Carver County Parks, Open Space, and Trail Plan.

Objectives in Support of Goal Statement:

- To define the funding options available for implementation of the plan, and to maximize the use of each source
- To maximize the use of public-private partnerships where appropriate to help fund or otherwise defer costs to implement the plan.
- To prepare an implementation plan that defines the relative timing and extent of acquisition and development of system components

#### **Parks, Open Space, and Trails Goals Policies**

##### COUNTY POLICY POST-1 PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND TRAIL PLAN:

- All implementation should be consistent with this plan, unless approved otherwise by PRAB and County Board action.
- Review and updating of the plan should be undertaken as warranted; revisions should be made based on documented changes in needs, unique conditions, or unforeseen circumstances/ opportunities.
- Residents should be given an opportunity to participate in the planning process (i.e., through needs assessment studies, public meetings, etc.) to ensure that their needs are understood and acted upon.

##### COUNTY POLICY POST-2 PARKS AND OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT:

- Parks, natural resource areas, and related recreation facilities should be acquired and developed by the County in accordance with this plan.
- Acquisition of specific parcels of land should be based on land and natural resource qualities, suitability for the desired uses, location, and willing landowners; undesirable land parcels with limited park and natural resource value should not be accepted.
- A reasonable effort should be made to eliminate physical barriers that deter individuals from using parks and recreation facilities; barrier-free design principles should be applied in accordance with accepted guidelines and laws.
- Design and maintenance procedures should be consistent with industry standards; design and maintenance of all parks and recreation facilities shall emphasize high quality and user safety.

##### COUNTY POLICY POST-3 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

- Information sharing and education programs should be used as needed to enhance participant/resident knowledge of the existing programs and facilities (e.g., local newspaper/ activities brochure, website, etc.).
- Community participation and interaction should be promoted to determine the needs and desires of the residents; periodically scheduled public meetings, needs assessment surveys, local meetings, focus groups, interviews, etc.,
- The formation of civic groups and associations should be promoted to assist in the continued development of recreation programs and services.

- Residents and PRAB should work together to define park facilities and programs that are needed, can be provided, and what residents can do to assist.
- Volunteerism should be promoted through the development of various volunteer programs (e.g., Adopt-A Park, etc.).
- Information sharing and education programs should be used as needed to enhance participant/resident knowledge of the existing programs and facilities (e.g., local newspaper/ activities brochure, website, etc.).

#### COUNTY POLICY POST-4 PARTNERSHIPS

- A cooperative effort should be undertaken between all partners to encourage the optimal use of limited resources and minimize duplication of park sites, facilities, and services.
- Clearly defined joint-use agreements and policies should be formally adopted between all partners.
- Where feasible, new facilities should be planned in consideration of the needs of other partners.
- Where feasible, new facilities should be located adjacent to property owned by other partners to facilitate shared use and programming.
- Ongoing information sharing, communication, and interaction between all partners should be undertaken to promote each one's system and programs.

#### COUNTY POLICY POST-5 FUNDING

- All forms of funding for implementing this plan should be pursued on an ongoing basis and in a time frame consistent with need and development opportunities.
- Public-private partnerships should be used where appropriate to help fund or defer costs to implement this plan.
- A complete analysis of financing mechanisms available to the County for implementation of this plan should be undertaken and updated on a periodic basis.
- A priority ranking system and an implementation plan should be prepared prioritizing future improvements where future costs can be reasonably projected.
- Shared-cost and joint-use agreements between the County and any partners should be reviewed on a periodic basis to determine if they are equitable and cost effective.

Trail projects should be funded in accordance to the Cost Participation Policy Applicable to Cooperative Highway Projects Between Carver County and Municipalities, or the Policies for Cost Participation Between Carver County and Other Agencies for Standalone Cooperative Trail Improvement Projects as applicable and as adopted.

#### COUNTY POLICY POST-6 PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

- In cooperation with other program providers, standards should be established that apply uniformly to all programs, sites, and facilities and should include: a) identification of the recreational program objectives and related facility needs for specific activities; b) ensuring that adequate support of local recreation providers is in place for program viability and success; and c) undertaking a seasonal review of the effectiveness of County supported recreational programs and services.

- In concert with other program providers, leadership and Code of Conduct guidelines for each activity and program should be developed defining acceptable and appropriate actions and behavior of individuals responsible for overseeing specific programs and activities that use county parks and facilities.
- An ongoing communication strategy should be established between the County and other program providers to encourage across-the-board collaboration among providers, broaden recreation interests, and track demand/recreation trends affecting the county.
- The County shall provide an equal opportunity to participate in recreational services.

Parks and trails use policies, rules, and regulations should be prepared and periodically updated by the PRAB and approved by the County Board; this includes policies, rules, and regulations associated with activities provided by other providers using County facilities.

## PARKS PLAN

### Overview

Carver County is one of ten implementing agencies for the regional park system overseen by the Metropolitan Council. The Council's 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan adopted in 2005 establishes a vision and funding priorities for regional parks and trails out to 2030. The role regional park implementing agencies have in "revising the vision" of the 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan is limited to the following:

- Defining the boundaries of proposed parks and alignments of proposed trails identified in the 2030 Parks Policy Plan via the preparation of master plans for these new units. The master plans are subject to review and approval by the Metropolitan Council.
- Amending the boundaries of existing parks via master plan amendments and amending alignments/boundaries of existing trails via master plan amendments. These master plan amendments are subject to review and approval by the Metropolitan Council.

Carver County's Parks and Trail System is based on current and anticipated needs and expectations of residents as well as the vision, values and goals defined earlier in this plan. It will consist of a seamless network of parks, and trails throughout the county connecting the following:

- Existing regional parks and park reserves
- Proposed regional park search areas
- State Wildlife Management Areas (MN DNR) and State Recreation Areas (MN DNR) - existing and proposed expansion
- National Wildlife Refuges (USFWS) - existing and proposed expansion
- Local parks and open spaces

### Park and Open Space Classifications

The Plan consists of a variety of parks and open spaces defined under various classifications. Each of the following classifications serve a particular purpose in meeting regional, county, and local park and recreation needs. The classifications as applied here are based on the guidelines consistent with the Metropolitan Council's regional-level classifications and the National Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenways Guidelines and Planning and Urban Design Standards (American Planning Association, 2006) for local-level classifications.

#### Regional Parks (Regional Park System Classification)

Regional parks contain a diversity of nature-based resources, either naturally occurring or human-created. The recreational quality of a regional park is measured by the presence of outstanding resources and the ability to provide adequately for a wide range of natural resource-related recreational opportunities. Access to water bodies suitable for recreation - such as swimming, boating and fishing - is particularly important and many regional parks focus on lakes, rivers or streams. A regional park should be large enough to accommodate a variety of activities, preserve a pleasant natural aspect, and buffer activity areas from each other and from surrounding land uses. In terms of size, this is interpreted as 200 to 500 acres of land. Occasionally, because of the quality of the resource, an exception may be made and a regional park may be as small as 100 acres. Experience has shown this to be the minimum size acceptable for the range and type of activities expected to be accommodated.

### **Park Reserves (Regional Park System Classification)**

Park reserves, like regional parks, are expected to provide for a diversity of outdoor recreational activities. The major feature that distinguishes a park reserve from a regional park is that the former is also intended to provide, protect and manage representative areas of the original major landscape types in the metropolitan area to permit appreciation and enjoyment of the natural resources that influenced the region's development. Given its resource focus, park reserves are substantially larger than regional parks and encompass a diversity of natural resources that can be protected and managed while accommodating compatible outdoor activities. Experience has shown that an optimum size exceeds 2,000 acres, while the minimum is about 1,000 acres. To establish and maintain an uncompromising sense of nature and protect high quality natural resources, at least 80 percent of each park reserve must be managed as wild lands that protect the ecological functions of the native landscape. This allows up to 20 percent of a park reserve to be developed for compatible recreational activities. For park reserves, as for regional parks, the implementation potential (i.e., ability to acquire land) is also an important factor in the designation of new candidate sites.

### **County Parks (County Park System Classification)**

These are land areas exhibiting natural or ornamental quality for outdoor recreation such as walking, viewing, picnicking, canoe/boat access, and, occasionally, could have some field and court games. County Parks are used to complement the regional park system by providing recreational services that are not regionally significant, but still have local value. Local cultural, historical, recreational, and environmental needs are often addressed with a county park, with the County having the flexibility to determine what is of local significance and appropriate to address local interests.

### **Local-Level Classifications**

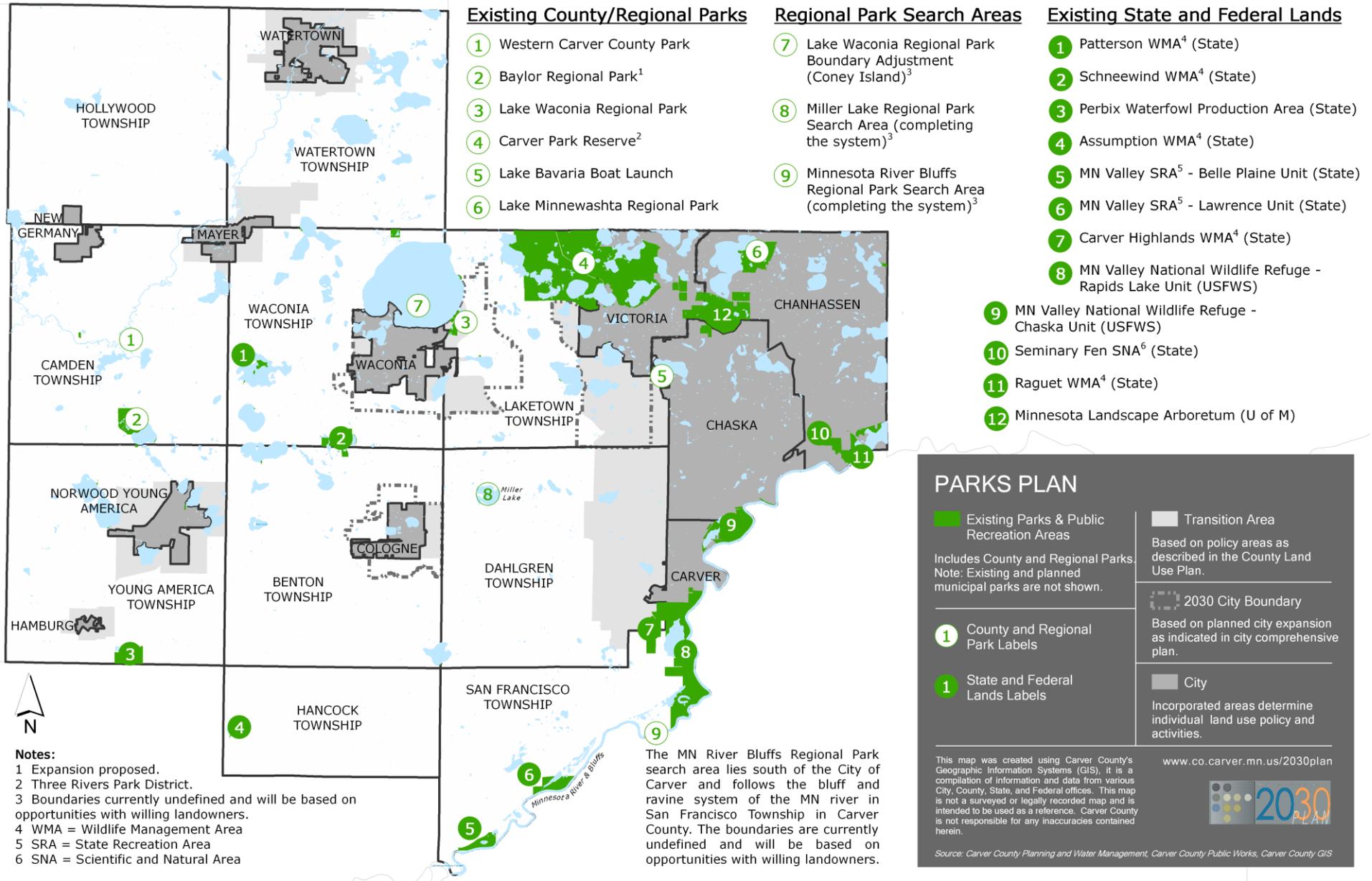
Local units of government provide facilities relatively close to where people live and are able to respond to the differing needs of small, localized groups, like neighborhoods or communities. Local-level facilities tend to be population and activity-based, while the regional system is primarily resource-based.

### **Schools and private operations**

Schools and private operations also make substantial contributions to the development of facilities and the provision of recreational services. The most prominent facilities provided by the private sector are golf courses, horseback riding facilities, marinas, day camps and downhill ski areas. There are also multiple recreational open space areas owned and operated by corporations, employee associations, benevolent associations and nonprofit social agencies. These private facilities reduce the burden on the public sector, provide additional opportunities and help to preserve thousands of acres of land in open space.

Figure 2 shows existing and proposed regional and county elements of the parks system. Local units, school, private operations, and state and federal lands are not included in this figure.

FIGURE 6.2 PARKS PLAN (SOURCE: CARVER COUNTY)



## Baylor Regional Park

### Location

The park is located in western Carver County on Eagle Lake, which is just north of Norwood Young America on County Road 33, 2 ½ miles north of highways 5 and 212.

### Overview

Baylor Regional Park offers great views to Eagle Lake and is situated among cattail marshes, maple basswood forests, and prairie areas. Currently, the park is 201 acres in size. Existing park activities include camping, picnicking, swimming, softball, tennis, sand volleyball, horseshoes, and disc golf course.

### Planning Context

Baylor Regional Park is modest in size yet offers an variety of recreational opportunities to serve the more rural western park of the county. As growth in the county continues, so will the importance of this park.

### Existing Facilities

- 35 electrical and water hookups
- 15 primitive sites
- Group camping area
- Picnic areas
- Shower house
- Swimming beach
- Beach house
- Reservable picnic shelters
- Ball field
- Onan Observatory - the Minnesota Astronomical Society owns and operates the facility for the benefit of students, teachers, the public-at-large, and members of the Society
- Tennis courts
- Sand volleyball court
- Horseshoe pits
- 18-hole disc golf course
- Boardwalk trail
- Hiking trails
- Cross-country ski trails (skis can be rented on the weekends)
- Community room (up to 100 people)
- Boat ramp for access to Eagle Lake

#### Expansion Plans and Surrounding Land Use Issues

Although not formally defined, some expansion of the park (100 acres) is proposed to accommodate new demands as the regional population grows. Of particular interest in expanding the park is acquiring the shoreline, wetland, and select adjoining upland areas on the northeast and southwest sides of Eagle Lake, as land becomes available from willing sellers.

#### Trail Interconnections

As illustrated on the Trail and Bikeways Plan (Section 4), connecting Baylor Regional Park to Norwood Young America via a destination trail is proposed. This would allow local residents to have a direct trail connection from the local trail system to a major regional park.

Group gatherings are popular at the park in the summer, especially holidays.

#### Master Plan Overview

Preparation of an updated comprehensive master plan for the park is envisioned in forthcoming years. Future development initiatives will likely include upgrades to existing facilities and introducing new features based on specific demands at that time. As an example, the need for paved trail loops within the park will be assessed, especially in light of the potential trail connection between the park and Norwood Young America.

## Lake Minnewashta Regional Park

### Location

The park is located off of TH 41 west of Chanhassen between TH 5 and TH 7.

### Overview

Lake Minnewashta Regional Park is a modest sized destination park situated on the shores of Lake Minnewashta and offers an extensive cross-section of ecological systems in its 341 acres. Natural systems found across the site range from forested and prairie areas to wetland edges along the lake.

### Existing Facilities

- Boat launch facilities with parking
- Walking trails
- Groomed skiing and walking trails in winter
- Fishing pier
- General picnicking areas
- Improved swimming beach
- Beach bathhouse
- Concessions at beach
- Reservable picnic shelters
- Volleyball courts
- Large creative playground
- Off leash dog park - A new off-leash dog area was developed in 2007. Thus far, the facility has proved very popular.

### Expansion Plans and Surrounding Land Use Issues

The adopted master plan does not include expansion of the park boundary. As an established park, the relationship with adjoining land uses is well defined. Broader concerns include making sure external land uses do not encroach into the park and limiting pedestrian access points to those defined under the master plan, or otherwise agreed upon by Carver County and City of Chanhassen. Trail Interconnections

With respect to Carver County's plan, the proposed regional-level trail connection from the Lake Minnewashta Regional Park to the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum and then over to the regional trail in Victoria is an important consideration that is not defined in the current master plan for the park.

### Master Plan Overview

A master plan adopted in 2001 guides future development of the park (Figure 6.3).

The adopted master plan for Lake Minnewashta Regional Park includes a combination of upgrading existing facilities, consolidation of boat access locations, and adding new facilities. Key components of the master plan include:

- Preparing a comprehensive natural resources stewardship and water resources management plan
- Relocating select existing recreational facilities to be more compatible with the site's ecological characteristics and recreational use patterns; most notable of these was eliminating one of two boat launches to reduce the built footprint and consolidate this use to one area
- Removing redundant roadway systems to reduce the built footprint without compromising service; where feasible, old roadbeds will be used for trail corridors to provide a higher level of pedestrian access to various use areas -- especially bicycles

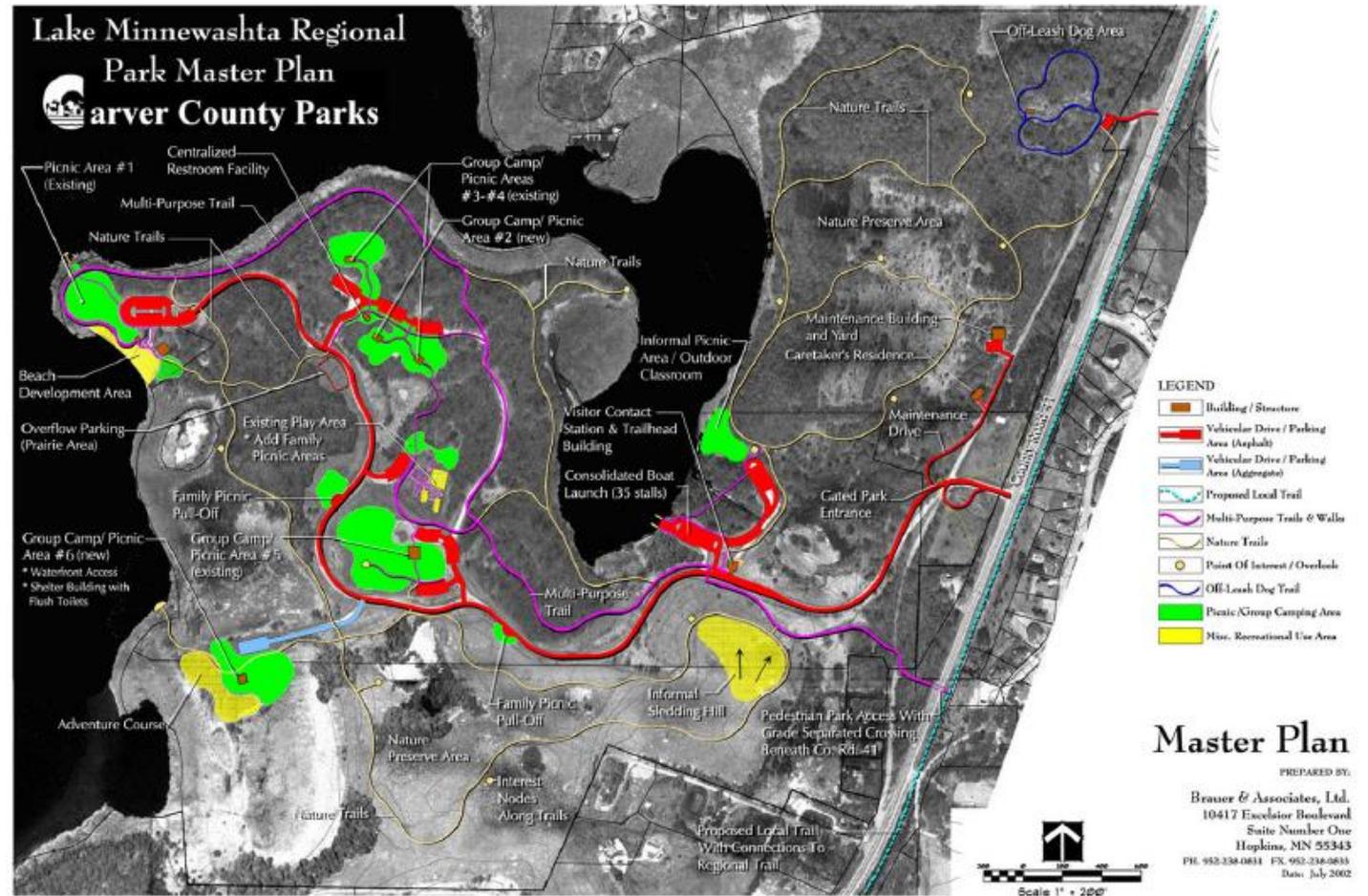
- Expanding recreational opportunities based on trend research and public input; this includes a new group camp area with an adventure course, expanded group picnic facilities, and a more extensive trail system

Future development features under the master plan include:

- Additional group camp areas

- Additional formal picnic areas
- Improved and new shelter buildings with restrooms
- Additional informal picnic areas
- Informal sledding hill
- Outdoor classroom
- Multi-purpose paved trail
- Additional nature trails
- Interest nodes along trails
- Improved pedestrian access, with grade-separated crossing under County Road 41

FIGURE 6.3 LAKE MINNEWASHTA REGIONAL PARK MASTER PLAN



## Lake Waconia Regional Park

### Location

The park is located east of the City of Waconia on the southern shore of Lake Waconia. Vehicular site access is from TH 5, with trail connections provided from various directions.

### Overview

Lake Waconia Regional Park will be relatively small in size but expansive in recreational opportunity in an area of the county that is expecting significant growth under 2030 growth forecasts. As such, the park will become an increasingly important component of both local and regional park systems. The recent realignment of TH 5 along the south boundary of the park was a major step in setting the stage for expanding the park as defined under the master plan. Both currently and in the future, the beach area and accompanying picnic areas will be the center of activity, with proposed facilities greatly expanding recreational opportunities along the lakefront.

### Existing Facilities

- Reservable group picnic shelter
- Play equipment
- Restrooms
- Swimming beach
- Picnic tables
- Volleyball court
- Grills
- Sledding hill
- Boat access (provided outside the park at the MN DNR boat access located on the northeast side of the lake, along with private marines located in Waconia.
- The newly improved beach area has proved a very popular amenity.

### Expansion Plans and Surrounding Land Use Issues

The adopted master plan includes expansion of the park from 105 acres as of 2007 to an ultimate size of 130 acres. Given the its location and topography, clearly defining the boundary of the park by adjoining roads and landforms is important to limiting the extent to which external land uses encroach into the park- actual and perceived. As illustrated on the Trail and Bikeways Plan, Lake Waconia Regional Park is a major destination, which underscores the importance of local and regional trail interconnections with the park, as is illustrated on the park plan.

### Master Plan Overview

The development of a comprehensive master plan for Lake Waconia Regional Park (which was completed in 2001) was initiated in response to planning for the realignment of Highway 5 and County Road 30 - which allowed for the expansion of the park to encompass approximately 130 acres (Figure 6.4). The vision for the park includes restoring natural communities in areas previously disturbed by a variety of land uses. This includes reestablishing natural wetland and pond systems that will help improve park and lake water quality and enhance the natural character of the site. Providing a variety of new recreational features on the site is also proposed, as listed below.

As of 2008, select portions of the master plan have been implemented. This includes development of a sledding hill, initial restoration of the old roadway alignments, and expansion/improvement of the beach area. Nearer-term expansion of the children's play area is also envisioned.

Future development features under the master plan include:

- Multi-purpose building and activity area
- Natural areas with boardwalks and overlooks
- Picnic Shelters
- Public parking (235 spaces)
- Park buildings/features on boardwalk system
- Concessions
- Lifeguard station
- Changing rooms, restrooms, storage, seating areas
- Overlooks
- Boat launch with parking for 40 vehicles with boats/trailers, plus 20 single spaces
- Beaching area for motorized and non-motorized boats
- Trail access from various directions
- Gatehouse
- Park I.D. signs
- Multi-purpose group activity area
- Building with overlook
- Group camping, with gravel access drive and parking

FIGURE 6.4 LAKE WACONIA REGIONAL PARK MASTER PLAN



## Carver Park Reserve

(Note: Carver Park Reserve is Managed and Operated by Three Rivers Park District)

### Location

The park reserve is located on the west edge of the metro area in Victoria. Access is from Carver County Road 11 (Victoria Drive), which lies south of State Highway 7 and north of State Highway 5.

### Overview

Carver Park Reserve is 3,700 acres of rolling, wooded terrain and interconnected lakes and marshes that support a large wildlife population - including trumpeter swans and barred owls. The reserve is also home to Lowry Nature Center, which was the first public environmental education center of its kind in the state. The park also features miles of trails, the historic Grimm Farm, the King Waterbird Sanctuary, four lakes, an off-leash dog area, Lake Auburn Campground, and groomed cross-country ski trails in the winter. Carver Park Reserve is the only large park reserve unit within Carver County. Visitors are attracted to the reserve for the expansive open space and the Nature Center. The reserve is popular for lake access and water-based recreational opportunities, picnicking, hiking and bicycling trails set in a natural setting, and children's play area. Group camping is also a popular activity, as is the off-leash dog park that opened in 2007. Effectively connecting the park reserve to Carver County's proposed destination trail system is a primary plan objective, consistent with site master plans prepared by Three Rivers Park District.

### Existing Facilities

- Lowry Nature Center
  - Public campground with swimming beach and small play area
  - Group campsites
  - Historic Grimm Farm Site - historical/interpretive feature
  - Fishing piers and boat launches
  - Paved bike/hike trail
  - Turf hiking trails
  - Horse trails
  - Dog trails (1 mile turf pet trail)
  - Dog off-leash area
  - Cross-country ski trails
  - Snowmobile trail
  - Sledding, snowshoeing, and kicksledding
  - Access to Lake Minnetonka LRT Regional Trail
- Expansion Plans and Surrounding Land Use Issues

The currently adopted master plan identifies inholding parcels within the park reserve boundary have not been acquired to date. As an established park reserve, the relationship with adjoining land uses is well defined. Three Rivers Park District will determine any changes to the park reserve boundary or site master plan.

### Trail Interconnections

With respect to Carver County's plan, the proposed regional-level trail connection between Lake Waconia and Victoria via a route through the park reserve is the most important consideration. Note that Three Rivers Park District has finally authority on trails within the park reserve.

### **Existing County Parks**

- Lake Bavaria Boat Launch (County Park)
- Western Carver County Park - undeveloped 30 acre parcel along the Crow River suitable for a canoe launch, picnicking facilities, and nature trails. A master plan is needed for the latter of these to guide future development.

### **Proposed Regional Parks**

#### **Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Park Search Area**

##### Search Area Location

The search area lies south of the City of Carver and follows the bluff and ravine system of the MN river in San Francisco Township. Natural landmarks in the area include Bevens Creek, and Minnesota River Bluffs/Valley. The search area limits are subject to opportunities with willing landowners as they surface over time, and to San Francisco Township input. The proposed regional park in this search area complements the open space lands along the Minnesota River Valley that are owned, managed, and operated by MN DNR and USFWS. In terms of general uses, the regional park will focus on “developed” recreational facilities as more typical to regional parks including but not limited to trails for hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, and inline skating, interpretation, Picnic areas, Campgrounds, Sledding hill, Fishing pier, and boat launch (if water access to river or lakes is provided), Off leash dog park, Equestrian trails, etc. The MN DNR and USFWS lands would focus more on “undeveloped” or “wildlife-dependent” recreation such as hunting, and fishing. Complementary uses include various forms of “limited developed”, which includes nature/wildlife observation and photography, education/interpretation, and nature trails for hiking.

##### Park Size Requirements

Regional parks are typically 200 to 500 acres in size, with 100 acres generally considered the minimum acceptable to accommodate a basic set of facilities. If located directly adjacent to the other public lands along the river, the overall size of this park can be on the lower end of the typical size spectrum since the other public land units can complement what is offered. This assumes that the master plans for each jurisdictional land unit truly complement the others, thus allowing visitors access to different types of recreational experiences appropriate for each land designation. For example, direct access to nature trails within the Wildlife Refuge from the regional park would greatly expand that recreational opportunity beyond what might otherwise be available to visitors within the confines of the regional park.

##### Desirable Land Characteristics for Regional Park in this Search Area

Specific goals for selecting land for this regional park include preserving natural open space, fostering ecological diversity, enhancing wildlife habitat, retaining scenic qualities, and retaining rural landscape character. In this case, the desire to acquire lands that either complement or, where feasible, directly adjoin USFWS and MN DNR lands along the river corridor is also an important consideration in land selection.

### Trail Interconnections

Trail connections between the regional park, adjoining public lands, and the larger county-wide trail system are important. This includes providing paved destination trails linking the park to the Wildlife Refuge's Visitor Center and the local and regional trails within Carver (and points beyond). In the longer-term, paved destination trails within the park would likely be part of the Minnesota River Bluffs Trail described in the trails section.

### Partnership Opportunities/Private Land Ownership Issues and Concerns Associated with Site Selection

Setting aside land for this regional park will require a working partnership with landowners, MN DNR, and the USFWS. The County will pursue land opportunities with willing landowners.

Note that the above listing identifies typical facilities, with each requiring detail evaluation as to appropriateness and need. For example, the need for a visitor center is greatly reduced if a paved trail connection could be made between the regional park and the Wildlife Refuge's Visitor Center. Also, special consideration may be given to allowing hunting as a permitted use in select areas, depending on the circumstances associated with land acquisition and partnership opportunities with the MN DNR and USFWS.

## Miller Lake Regional Park Search Area

### Search Area Location

The search area lies south of Waconia and Victoria and northeast of Cologne in the vicinity of Miller Lake. Natural landmarks in the area include Miller Lake and Carver Creek. The search area limits are subject to opportunities with willing landowners as they surface over time. In terms of general uses, the regional park will focus on "developed" recreational facilities as listed below. Exploring collaborative opportunities with the MN DNR and USFWS to set aside lands in this area for public open space will also be pursued. Note, however, that a collaborative outcome would require that "undeveloped" or "wildlife-dependent" recreation such as hunting, and fishing would have to be accommodated. There would also be certain use and access restrictions related to property that either of these other agencies acquired. Complementary uses could include various forms of "limited development", which includes nature/wildlife observation and photography, education/interpretation, and nature trails for hiking. In spite of any potential limitations, a collaborative approach may have some merit and is worthy of due consideration.

### Park Size Requirements

Regional parks are typically 200 to 500 acres in size, with 100 acres generally considered the minimum acceptable to accommodate a basic set of facilities. Since this search area does not abut any other public lands, the overall size of this park should be on the middle to higher end of the typical size spectrum. The extent to which the park land interconnects with destination trails is also an important consideration in determining the minimum size needed to meet the space needs for common facilities. This is especially the case with paved trails, which could play a significant role in meeting the need for looped trails.

#### Desirable Land Characteristics for Regional Park in this Search Area

Miller Lake and the area directly adjacent to it are especially important natural amenities to include in the search area for this park. Specific goals for selecting land for this regional park include preserving the lake amenity, preserving natural open space, fostering ecological diversity, enhancing wildlife habitat, retaining scenic qualities, and retaining rural landscape character.

#### Trail Interconnections

Trail connections between the regional park and the larger county-wide trail system are important. This includes providing paved destination trails linking the park to nearby cities, including Waconia, and Carver, as defined in the trails section.

#### Partnership Opportunities/Private Land Ownership Issues and Concerns Associated with Site Selection

Setting aside land for this regional park will require a working partnership with landowners, MN DNR, and the USFWS. The County will pursue land opportunities with willing landowners.

#### Potential Facilities and Amenities Overview

Potential future development features typically considered for a regional park include:

- Paved trails for hiking, biking, and inline skating
- Nature trails for hiking, interpretation and, potentially, mountain biking
- Picnic areas with picnic shelters
- Campgrounds serving a cross-section of campers
- Group camp areas
- Restrooms
- Sledding hill
- Outdoor classroom
- Visitor/interpretive center
- Boat launch facilities with parking
- Groomed cross-country ski trails and winter hiking trails
- Fishing pier (if water access to river or lakes is provided)
- Boat launch (if water access to river is provided)
- Volleyball courts
- Creative playground
- Off leash dog park
- Canoe/kayak launch
- Equestrian trails
- Access drives and parking lots
- Archery range
- Disc golf course
- Outdoor performance area

Note that the above listing identifies typical facilities, with each requiring detail evaluation as to appropriateness and need.

## **State Lands, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Federal U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Lands**

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) own, manage, and operate a number of land holdings within Carver County as public open space. The following provides an overview of the type and extent of existing land holdings by MN DNR and USFWS within the context of Carver County's parks and opens space plan. Existing and future opportunities for collaborative opportunities are also discussed relative to each agency.

### **University of MN Landscape Arboretum**

The University of MN owns and operates the Landscape Arboretum in Chanhassen. The Arboretum provides educational and recreational opportunities to all-age spectrums and is open to members and at times, the general public.

### **DNR Wildlife Management Areas**

WMAs are part of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system established to protect lands and waters having a high potential for wildlife production, public hunting, trapping, fishing, and other compatible recreational uses. Funding for WMAs is through the Minnesota's Legislature, with sportsmen playing a major role. Hunting license fees and surcharges, bonding funds, Reinvest in Minnesota funds, including Critical Habitat License Plate dollars, and Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ETF) funds have been used to buy WMAs. Conservation groups also donate land and money to support the acquisition of WMA lands.

The location of existing WMAs in Carver County include:

- Patterson WMA - 22 acres; consists of islands on Lake Patterson, which are surrounded by emergent vegetation and some areas of open water; islands protect and are managed for forest species and various species of aquatic orientated birds, such as egrets or herons
- Assumption WMA - 67 acres, managed mainly for wetland wildlife species; contains one large wetland basin and is predominantly open water with some cattails, wet meadow and grassland; surrounding area is heavily farmed; purpose of this WMA is to preserve habitat for waterfowl and other wetland wildlife species
- Schneewind WMA - 245 acres; predominantly a wetland with surrounding uplands that have been planted to prairie; managed for grassland as well as wetland species
- Carver Highlands WMA - 302 acres; managed mainly for grassland wildlife; predominantly upland grasses within 3 distinct parcels, two of which are along Co. Rd. 45 and the third is next to Co. Rd. 50, 0.3 miles east of Co. Rd. 45; parcels are located adjacent to USFWS land along the MN River; purpose is to preserve and enhance upland grass habitat
- Raguet WMA - 270 acres; unit is entirely within the floodplain of the Minnesota River. It contains floodplain forest, wetland and grassland.

### **State Recreation Areas (SRAs)**

SRAs are also part of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system. Within Carver, a relatively small portion of the Lawrence and Belle Plaine units of the Minnesota Valley State Recreation Area lies on the west side of the Minnesota River. The Lawrence Unit occupies a portion of the present Minnesota River flood plain as well as part of a large Glacial River Warren terrace. To the southwest, the Belle Plaine Unit exists completely within

the active flood plain of the Minnesota River. Given that the Minnesota Valley State Recreation Area is an extremely complex unit, the SRA is more like a landscape region than a park when considering management planning. Major recommendations for SRA include providing interpretive services, natural resource management, and trail development, with a focus on development of a multiuse trail system. Within the Lawrence Unit, key areas of focus include resource management, especially to the south and east of Kelly Lake to protect an outstanding remnant of flood plain forest.

### **State Natural Areas (SNAs)**

SNAs are used to preserve and perpetuate the ecological diversity of Minnesota's natural heritage, including landforms, fossil remains, plant and animal communities, rare and endangered species, or other biotic features and geological formations, for scientific study and public edification. SNAs are open to the public for nature observation and education, but are not meant for intensive recreational activities. The 73-acre Seminary Fen SNA is located in Carver County. This site contains one of the rarest types of wetland in the United States - a calcareous fen, which has special protection under Minnesota state law and may not be drained, filled or otherwise altered or degraded.

### **MN DNR Collaborative Partnership Opportunities**

There are a number of significant future collaborative partnerships opportunities between Carver County and MN DNR.

### **Metro Greenways Program**

MN DNR's Metro Greenways program was launched in 1998 in response to Metro Greenprint, a citizens report that called for stronger efforts to protect nature in the face of urban growth. The Metro Greenways program helps local units of government and citizens more effectively incorporate nature into their communities. By coordinating funding sources, providing technical assistance and grants, and identifying significant natural features, the program empowers communities to preserve the resources that are important to them in a way that earns local support. To date, the program has committed millions of dollars to protect some of the region's best remaining natural areas and open spaces by means of Metro Greenways Protection and Restoration Cost-Sharing Funds. This money has also been used to leverage millions of dollars from other funding sources. Carver County will continue to work with MN DNR on taking advantage of program offerings as opportunities arise.

### **Expansion of WMAs, SRAs, and SNAs as Part of Larger Open Space Strategy**

There are numerous potential opportunities to collaborate with MN DNR to preserve open space for mutual benefit. Expansion of WMAs and SRAs (as previously described) are distinct possibilities in select areas within the county, as is the case with SNAs. This will require a working partnership with landowners and the MN DNR, and should only be pursued with willing landowners.

### **Other Collaborative Opportunities with MN DNR**

MN DNR has an extensive array of financial assistance and grant programs that may be accessible to Carver County and/or local property owners, depending on the circumstances. The Financial Assistance Directory on MN DNR's website provides up-to-date information on these programs, which as of 2008, the directory included the following categories:

- Remediation Fund Grant Program
- Metro Greenways Protection and Restoration
- Landowner Incentive Program
- Native Prairie Bank Program
- Native Prairie Tax Exemption Program
- Natural and Scenic Area Grant Program
- Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Critical Habitat Match Program
- Aquatic invasive species
- Wildlife conservation
- Community conservation assistance
- Education, planning and research
- Enforcement (snowmobile & OHV safety)
- Fire Protection Programs
- Forest management
- Habitat improvement
- Land conservation
- Recreation (general, trails, and water)

### **USFWS Existing Lands**

As with MN DNR, USFWS manages lands in Carver County, virtually all of which located along the Minnesota River as part of a the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge is a corridor of land and water that stretches 34 miles along the Minnesota River from Fort Snelling State Park to Jordan, MN. It comprises 14,000 authorized acres under eight units, five of which have trails and interpretive signs. Two units are located at least partially in Carver County, each of which offering a variety of attractions and seasonal activities.

The Chaska Unit is nestled in the floodplain between the river towns of Chaska and Carver. This 600 acre proposed unit consists of a marsh-edged lake surrounded by farmland and floodplain forest. Currently, this area contains a lot of "edge" habitat, areas where fields meet forests. USFWS has begun restoring the native floodplain forest to benefit migrant songbirds, including many types of warblers, as well as hawks, owls, wood ducks, herons and eagles.

The Rapids Lake Unit is located south of Carver and consists of 1,500 acres of prairie restoration in old upland farm fields, oak savanna, goat prairies clinging to steep bluffs, bottomland forests, and Minnesota's largest private wetland restoration (completed in 1992). Preserving the oak savanna systems is a high priority on this unit to enhance habitat for turkeys, squirrels, deer, and many other species. Former agricultural land is also being restored to native prairie through prescribed burns and seeding. The Rapids Lake Education and Visitor Center located in this unit has been completed and is located about 3 miles south of Carver. The Center focuses extensively on partnering with local schools on educational programming, with the facility serving as an extension of a science classroom. In addition, hiking and walking trails will be under construction during the summer of 2008.

### **Collaborative Opportunities with USFWS**

As with MN DNR, there are a number of significant future collaborative partnership opportunities between Carver County and USFWS within the context of Carver County's parks and open space plan, as the following considers.

#### **Wildlife Refuge lands**

In addition to Wildlife Refuge lands, USFWS also acquires select lands for restoration and preservation under its Waterfowl Production Areas (WPA's) program. WPAs are lands that are purchased and managed to provide high quality wetlands and nesting cover for waterfowl and many other species of wildlife. The average size of WPAs across the country is 90 acres, although few hundred acres or more is considered more optimal. WPA staff also manage wetland easements, which are perpetual contracts with willing private landowners that protect their wetlands from draining and filling with soil.

#### **Expansion of Minnesota Valley Wildlife Refuge**

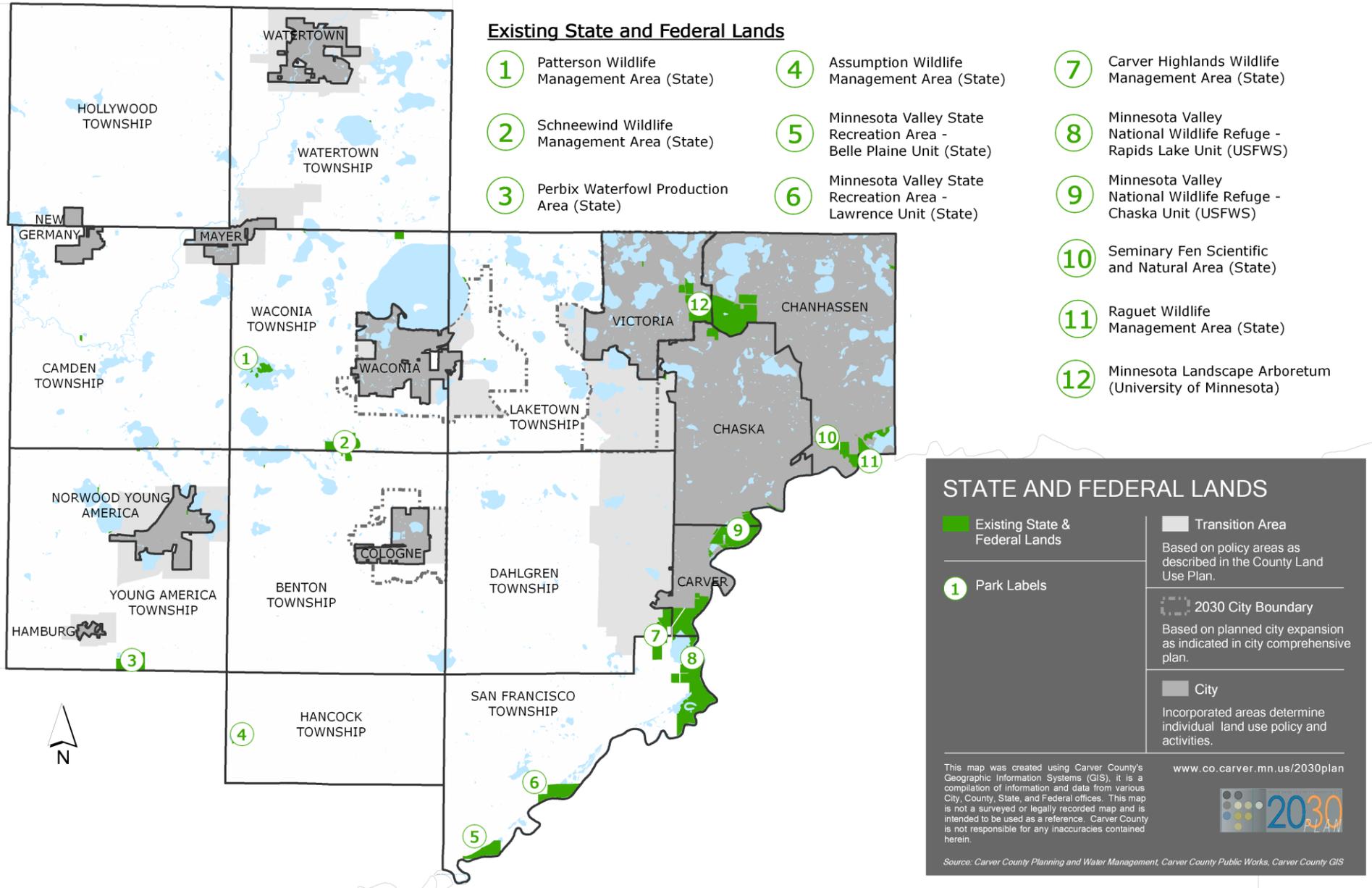
The most significant opportunity for collaboration between Carver County and USFWS relates to the Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Park Search Area. Coordinating efforts to expand the refuge along with a new regional park could create a seamless concentration of public lands along the river valley, there is an opportunity for each agency to achieve its individual goals of preserving natural open space while collectively serving a broad cross-section of public recreational needs in an efficient and effective manner.

#### **Other Collaborative Opportunities with USFWS**

In addition to the Wildlife Refuges and Waterfowl Production Areas, USFWS also works extensively with private landowners through voluntary partnerships that enhance private lands for waterfowl and other wildlife. Existing Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Private Land Programs of particular note include:

- Partners for Wildlife Wetland Restoration - used to improve water and soil quality, restore wildlife habitat, and flood control on private properties; provides up to 100% cost share to private landowners making improvements to their land following the eligibility requirements of the program; landowner retains ownership of property
- Partners for Wildlife Grassland Restoration - similar goals as last program, only focused on grassland restoration; provides up to 100% cost share to private landowners making improvements to their land following the eligibility requirements of the program; landowner retains ownership of property
- USFWS Wetland Easement - similar goals as previous programs, but include payment to landowner for purchase of perpetual easement that is recorded on property deed; focus is on naturally occurring or restorable wetlands
- USFWS Habitat Easement - similar goals as previous programs, but include payment to landowner for purchase of perpetual easement that is recorded on property deed; focus is on tracts of land exhibiting existing or restorable wetlands and grasslands

FIGURE 6.5 STATE AND FEDERAL LANDS (SOURCE: CARVER COUNTY)



# TRAIL AND BIKEWAY PLAN

## Overview

The trail system is underpinned by the common vision defined in Sections 1 and 2. The over-arching goals of the trail system are to:

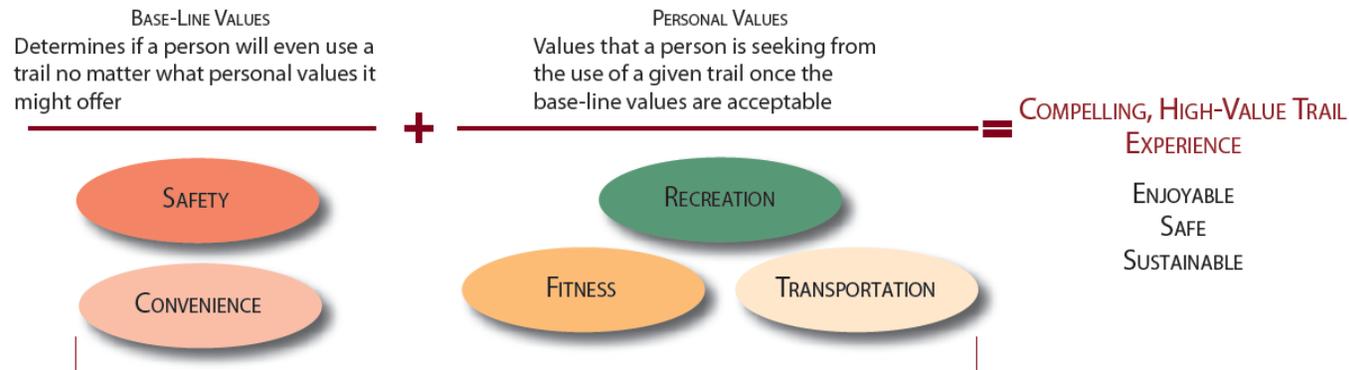
- Develop an interlinking system of high value trails throughout the county that connect with local cities and townships
- Provide reasonable trail access to parks, open spaces, and natural resource amenities within the county without unduly compromising their integrity and natural qualities
- Provide an appropriate level of universal accessibility to trails throughout the system

The trail and bikeway plan is consistent with MN DNR’s Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines (2007) for designing and developing sustainable, high value trails. The DNR guidelines are recognized as the most comprehensive standards for trails and address trail planning, design, and development. All trail development should be consistent with these guidelines as applicable to the classifications used in Carver County.

A key concept of the guidelines is maximizing the value of trails and bikeways to local and regional residents. The values ascribed to trails are important because they are at the core of why a person uses a particular trail on a repeat basis. Studies clearly indicate that trail users make a distinction between trails based on their perception of value, as Figure 6.6 illustrates.

**FIGURE 6.6 PERSONAL VALUES ASCRIBED TO TRAILS**

Source: MN DNR’s Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines (2007)



Attention to the principles of trail design when trails are being planned will help ensure that each of these values will be maximized, resulting in high-quality trails to which users will return time and again

As the graphic illustrates, safety and convenience are base-line determinants for whether a person will even use a trail irrespective of its quality. Once these two values are perceived as being acceptable, then the personal values will be given more consideration by a trail user. The following considers each of these values in greater detail.

**Safety** - A sense of physical and personal safety is the most important trail value in that without it people are disinclined to use a trail irrespective of how many other values it might provide.

**Convenience** - Convenience is important to day-to-day use of a trail. Studies have shown that the vast majority of trails are used by those living within a few miles of the trail they use most frequently.

**Recreation** - Of all the values ascribed to a trail, its recreational value is the most important in terms of predicting its level of use, assuming that safety and convenience are not issues. In general, trails offering a high-quality recreational experience are those that:

- Are scenic and located in a pleasant park-like setting, natural open space, or linear corridor away from traffic and the built environment
- Provide a continuous and varying experience that takes visitors to a variety of destinations and is a destination unto itself
- Offer continuity with limited interruptions and impediments to travel

This underscores that trail planning must be based on criteria that go beyond simply providing miles of trail - with considerable emphasis on the quality of the trail experience as much or more than quantity. Communities that have successfully integrated these types of trails often highlight them as key aspects of the local quality of life.

**Fitness** - Fitness is a growing value that is generally achieved if safety, convenience, recreational, and transportation values are met. Most critical to accommodating this value is developing an interlinking trail system that provides numerous route options with trail lengths necessary for the types of uses envisioned.

**Transportation (Commuting)** - The transportation (commuting) aspect of trails is valuable to a growing subset of the user population. Transportation purposes includes using the system to get to work, school, local stores, or around the neighborhood, along with other utilitarian trips that would otherwise be done using a motor vehicle. To that end, realizing the use of the system for transportation will only be successful if it is perceived as safe, convenient relative to a user's skill level, and of a high quality. Without such a system, residents will simply use their vehicle.

### **Trail and Bikeway Classifications**

The plan consists of a various types of trails and bikeways, each of which serving a particular purpose in meeting local needs. The distinction between classifications is important due to the variability in their recreational and other values to the user, which greatly affects the value of the system to residents and the degree to which a trail or system of trails will actually be used. The classifications applied to Carver County's trail and bikeway system are consistent with MN DNR's Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines (2007). Figure 6-5 on the next page provides an overview and basic comparison of the trail and bikeway classifications being applied to Carver County.

### **Inventory**

With cooperation from local cities, Carver County has assembled a baseline inventory of trails provided by local cities across the county. The inventory will be periodically updated and made available on the County's website. The inventory will be used to understand the extent to which

trails are provided, identify gaps in the system, and avoid duplication. Over time, all of the trails included in the inventory will be classified using the classification system provided in this section. This will allow for both a qualitative and quantitative assessment of trails provided in the county.

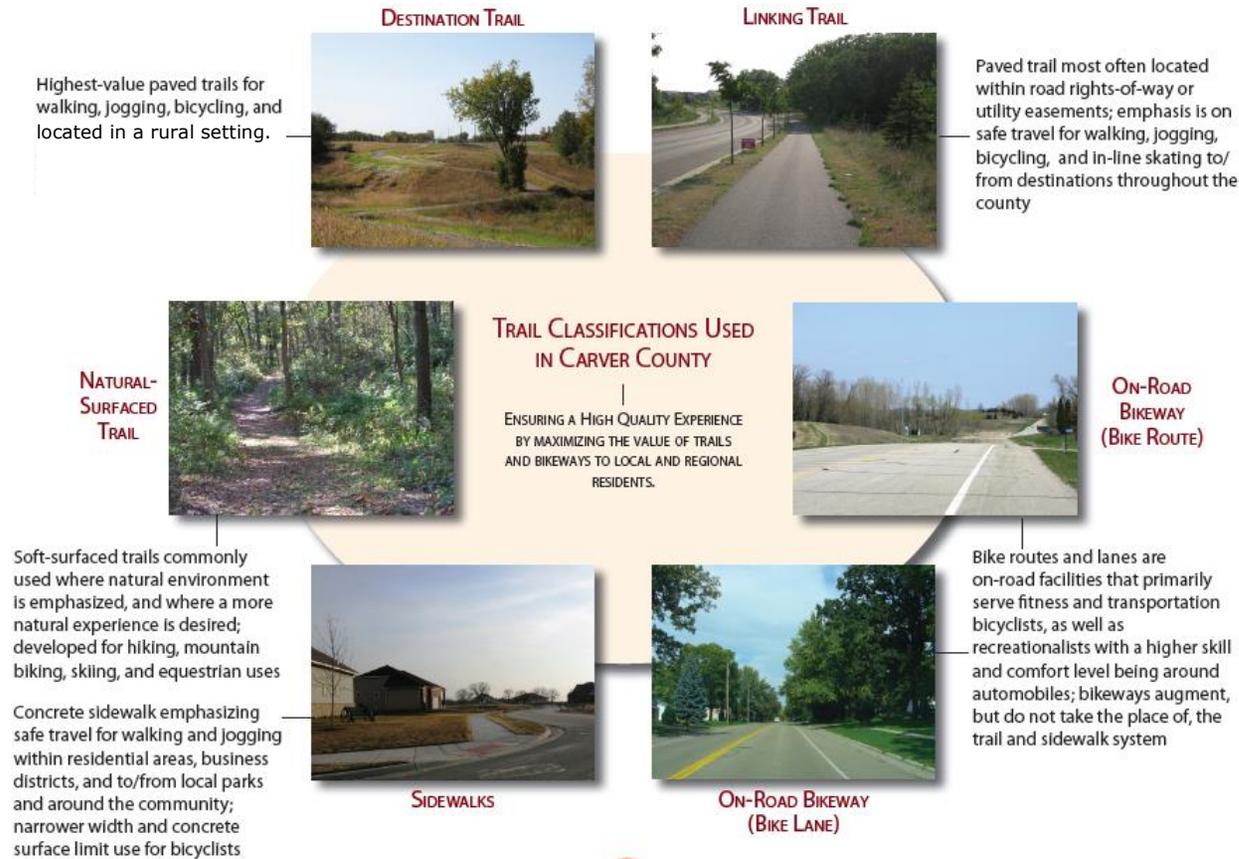
### Map of Core Elements of County/Regional Level Trail and Bikeway System

The plan consists of the following core elements:

- **Destination Regional Trail Corridors** - Often located within a regional park, open space corridor, or rail to trail corridor. These trails have high aesthetic value for walking, jogging, bicycling, or inline skating; emphasize a natural, scenic setting, and create a sequence of events that appeal to the users' desire to recreate away from a built environment. To serve pedestrians and bicyclist equally well, trail width is generally 10' or greater, bituminous surface is preferred but a suitable natural surface may also be used, and generally has fewer intersections with roadways and accommodate longer trips. Destination trails are designated as regional or state trails.
- 
- **Linking Regional Trail Corridors** - Paved trail most often located within road right-of-way or utility easements; emphasis is on safe travel for walking, jogging, bicycling, and inline skating to/from destinations throughout the County. Linking trails often provide nearby trail connections to a local park and trail system and can connect to destination areas in and outside of city limits. Often developed in partnership between the County and municipality, they are generally 10 foot wide bituminous surface and serve pedestrians and bicyclist equally well. Linking trails may be designated as a regional trail through the Metropolitan Council's Park and Open Space System Plan, but may be non-regional as well.
- **Local Trails** - Trails developed within a municipality's local road right-of-way or parks and open space areas, or permitted by the County in county right-of-way. Regional and state trails that are constructed and managed by the County, a city, or a township are not included.

Figure 6.7 illustrates trail classifications. Figure 6.8 illustrates existing and planned trail and bikeway route classifications on a county map:

FIGURE 6.7 OVERVIEW OF TRAIL CLASSIFICATIONS USED IN CARVER COUNTY



Quick Trail and Bikeway Classification Comparison Guide:

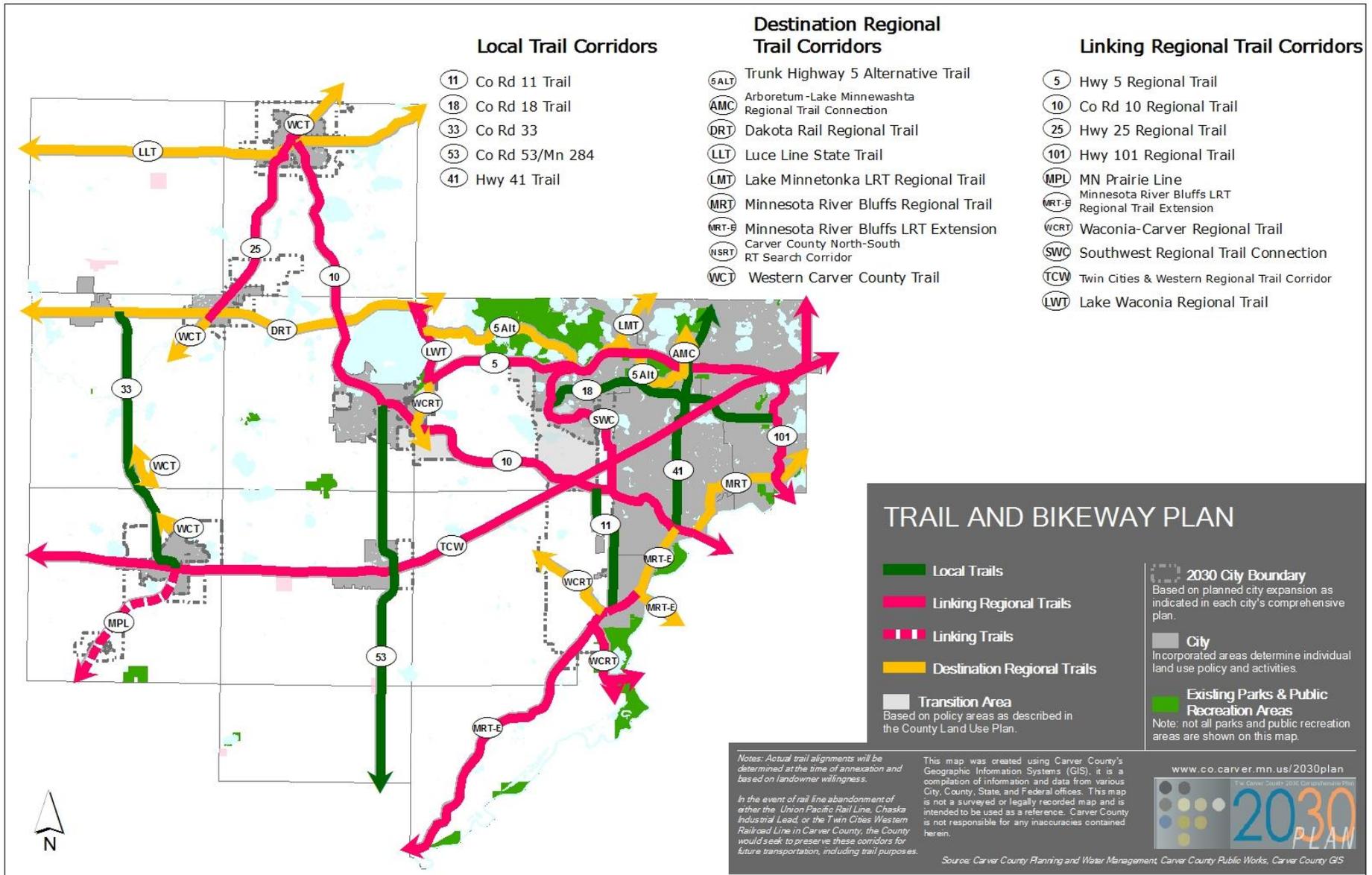
Destination trail – 10 to 12 feet wide asphalt surfaced, located in conservation corridor or park-type setting, and serves pedestrians and bicyclists equally well.

Linking trail – 10 feet wide asphalt surfaced, located in road or street right-of-way setting, and serves pedestrians and bicyclists equally well.

Sidewalk – 6 to 8 feet wide concrete surfaced, located in street right-of-way setting. Serves pedestrians more than bicyclists due to narrower width and surfacing (i.e., concrete crack control joints are rougher to bicycle on than seamless asphalt pavement).

On-Road Bikeways – 6-foot minimum width preferred. These serve bicyclists, but not pedestrians.

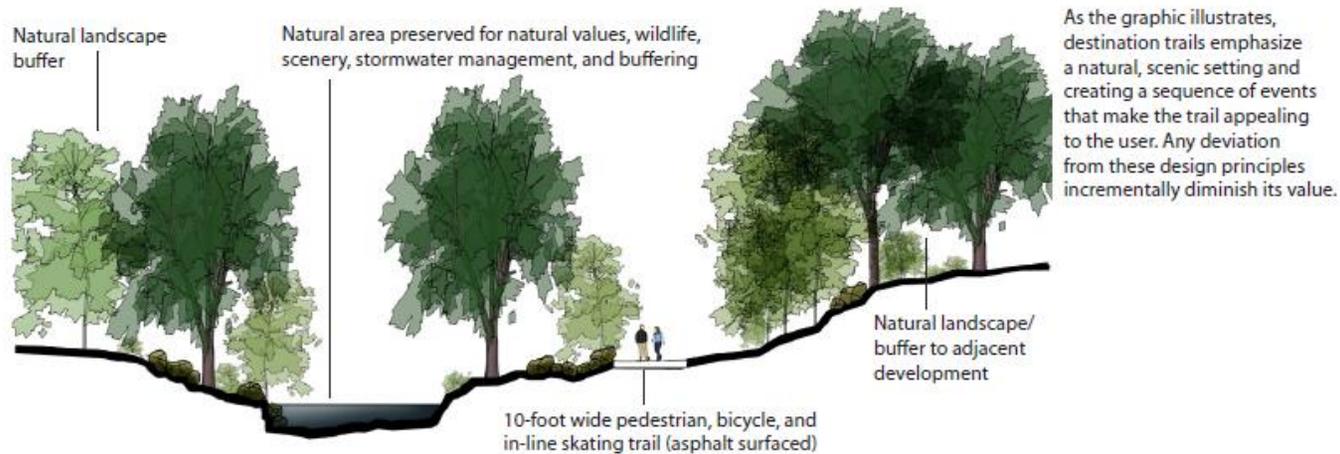
FIGURE 6.8 TRAIL AND BIKEWAY PLAN (SOURCE: CARVER COUNTY)



### Regional Destination Trail System

Destination trails are the highest value trails typically located in a rural setting for walking, jogging, bicycling. Destination trails are 10 to 12 feet wide, ideally asphalt surfaced, but can be of a suitable natural surface located in conservation corridor or park-type setting, and serve pedestrians and bicyclists equally well. Under this plan, developing destination trails focuses on areas subject to growth within the 2030 time frame. These are the areas where demand for this type of trail will be highest and the opportunity to establish these corridors more time sensitive. Working collaboratively with local cities, landowners, and developers will be critical to successfully implementing the 2030 destination trail system. For added context, the following provides a general overview of each of the existing and proposed destination trail corridors as illustrated on the Trail and Bikeway Plan.

FIGURE 6.9 REGIONAL DESTINATION TRAIL ILLUSTRATION



## Existing Destination Trails

### Luce Line State Trail

The Luce Line Trail is an aggregate surface State trail located in a former rail bed and managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

### Dakota Rail Regional Trail

The Dakota Regional Trail is in a former rail bed. As of 2012, the trail is asphalt paved to the Carver/McLeod County line.

### Lake Minnetonka LRT Regional Trail

Lake Minnetonka Regional Trail has pavement through the downtown area of the City of Victoria. The remainder of the trail is primarily in an aggregate trail surface to the east County line.

### Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail

The Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail is primarily aggregate surfaced. In 2013 a section of the trail was paved leading into Chaska along HWY 61 and Engler Blvd.

## Planned 2030 Destination Trails

### Minnesota River Bluffs RT Extension

As illustrated on the Trail and Bikeway Plan, this destination trail is essentially an extension of the Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail. A trail master plan was completed and adopted by Carver County and the Metropolitan Council in 2011 and amended in 2013. In Carver County, the trail corridor extends from Athletic Park in Chaska to County Road 40 and Carver Bluffs Parkway in Carver. In the future the corridor is proposed to be extended as it heads southwest to the new visitor center at the National Wildlife Refuge. Continuation of the trail to the undetermined location of the Minnesota River Bluff regional park and on to Belle Plaine is also envisioned, although most likely in a post-2030 time frame. This portion of the trail is classified as a linking regional trail on Figure 6.8, because the trail is envisioned to be within the County Road 40 right of way. Due to current road conditions, collaboration with San Francisco Township and landowners will be key in establishing a corridor for all stages of planning, including the master planning process, as well as seeking regional status in the Metropolitan Council RPPP.

A key concern with this trail corridor is coordinating its alignment with Chaska, Carver, USFWS, and MN DNR. The trail will be located within an approved corridor or adjacent to the refuge or WMA lands. Note that current USFWS and MN DNR land use and management policies do not allow paved trails to be developed on refuge and WMA lands. It is also not common practice for these agencies to provide an easement for a paved trail since that can inhibit land management and hunter access.

Another important aspect of this trail is making a connection to regional trails in Scott County, most likely via an existing road corridors or new MN river crossing. Another option for making the connection is to establish a trail crossing in the existing rail corridor in the City of Carver. Should it not be practical to cross the MN River at that location, the trail is envisioned to be within the County Road 40/County Road 11 right of way to Jordan.

#### **Waconia - Carver Regional Trail Corridor (formerly known as North-South Regional Trail)**

From south to north, this destination trail corridor will ultimately connect the Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail in Carver, to the ultimate location of the Miller Lake Regional Park, and to the Lake Waconia Regional Park in Waconia. In the 2030 time frame, the focus will be on establishing the south and north ends of this trail corridor in the growth areas of Carver and Waconia. Once beyond the 2030 growth boundaries of these cities, the possible alignment options for the trail become less certain given land acquisition concerns and issues previously expressed by some of the landowners in this area. Multiple planning considerations will need to be considered, including development patterns, desire to follow natural corridors, timing and location of Miller Lake regional park, land acquisition concerns and issues previously expressed by some of the landowners in this area. Collaboration between the County, the cities of Carver and Waconia, the townships of Dahlgren and Laketown, and any affected landowners will be key in establishing a corridor.

#### **Trunk Highway 5 Alternate**

From east to west, this destination trail corridor makes a connection between the proposed Lake Waconia Trail and Carver Park Reserve. As with other trails, Carver County will have to work collaboratively with Waconia, Laketown Twp and Victoria along with landowners and developers to establish trail alignments.

Once to Carver Park Reserve, Three Rivers Park District will determine the final alignment of the trail within the context of the larger master plan for the reserve. Both Carver County and Three Rivers Park District will have to collaborate with Victoria to make the trail connection between Carver Park Reserve and the existing Lake Minnetonka LRT Regional Trail that now ends in Victoria.

#### **Western Carver County Regional Trail Corridor**

From south to north, this regional trail corridor will ultimately make a connection between the City of Norwood Young America, Baylor Regional park, the Dakota Rail Regional Trail in Mayer and linking trail north to the Luce Line State Trail in Watertown. In the 2030 time frame, the focus will be on establishing the trail corridor in the growth areas of the three cities.

Once beyond the 2030 growth boundaries of these cities, the possible alignment options for the trail become less certain given land acquisition concerns and issues previously expressed by some of the landowners in this area. Multiple planning considerations will need to be considered, including following the Hwy. 25 right-of-way in select locations and the anticipated development of a new school along Hwy. 25 between Mayer and Watertown. Note: Watertown Township acknowledges that the Metropolitan Council's regional park policy plan identifies the Crow River Regional Trail (referred to as the Western Carver County Regional Trail in the 2030 County Plan) with a potential future alignment through the township as a linking trail. The establishment of any future trail alignment will result from a master plan process done in cooperation with Watertown Township, Carver County, and others. Within Watertown Township, the Western Carver

County Regional Trail will run along State Highway 25 within the right of way of the State Highway. At the time the trail is to be built, the Watertown Township Board will determine the final location of the trail through public process with Watertown Township residents.

**Arboretum - Lake Minnewashta Regional Trail Connection**

As the Trail and Bikeway Plan illustrates, a trail connection is proposed between Lake Minnetonka LRT Regional Trail in Victoria and Lake Minnewashta Regional Park in Chanhassen via a trail corridor through, or on the periphery of, the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. The intent with this alignment is to create a high value destination trail experience via a greenway-type corridor through various parks, and the arboretum site, versus directly following the TH 5 corridor, which is a far less appealing experience for the trail user. Local Connections under discussion about local trail connections in Chanhassen, defining an acceptable alignment through the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum property is the most challenging aspect of this corridor that will take a collaborative effort to address. Nonetheless, given the much higher value user experience, due diligence by Carver County, Chanhassen, and the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum is justified and recommended in finding an agreeable alternative route to the TH 5 corridor. Within Chanhassen, the challenge will be maintaining a greenway context through existing and future developments prior to entering the regional park.

### **Linking Trail System**

Linking trails are paved trails most often located within road right-of-way or utility easements. Emphasis is on safe travel for walking, jogging, bicycling, and in-line skating to/from destinations throughout the county. Linking trails are 10 feet wide; asphalt surfaced, located in road or street right-of-way setting, and serves pedestrian and bicyclists equally well. As the Trail and Bikeway Plan illustrates, a number of east-west and north-south county roads are identified as Bikeway/ Linking Trail Corridors. Linking trails along these routes complement the destination trail system and are also used to make key connections to destinations within growth areas. Linking trails also serve an important alternative transportation function in growth areas. For example, providing a linking trail along the CSAH 18 corridor in Victoria and Chanhassen is especially important from an alternative transportation perspective, as is the case with other routes in developing areas.

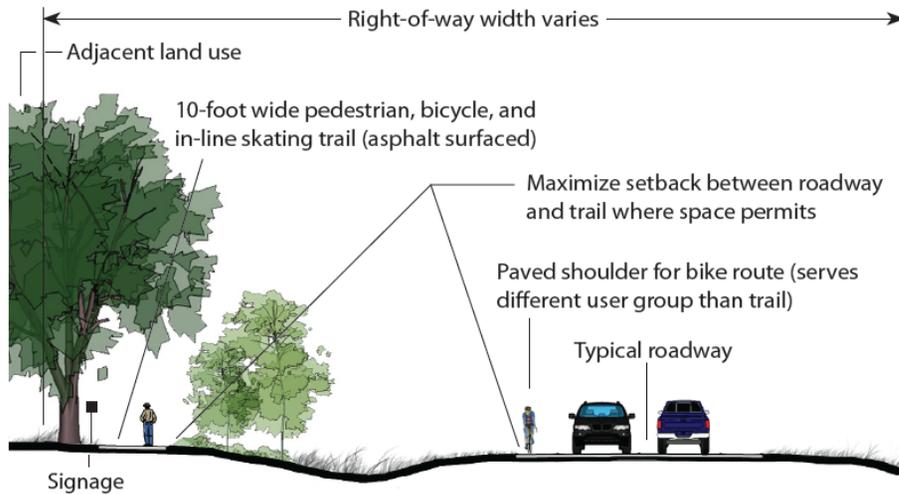
Bikeways (which in most cases will take the form of a 6-foot or wider shoulder) along identified routes are used to meet the needs of subgroup of bicyclists preferring to ride on streets and roadways for recreation, fitness, and transportation.

As with destination trails, development of the linking trail system will focus initially on growth areas. Since these trails typically fall within road rights-of-way, their development will likely occur as roads are upgraded or new roads are built to accommodate growth. To the extent possible, trails will be proactively included as part of new roadway designs consistent with Table 2 of the 2014 amendment to the 2030 Roadways Systems Plan to avoid retrofitting situations, which too often leads to substandard results and lower levels of use.

Development of the linking trails along county roads will also be coordinated with development of local level trails to ensure continuity and avoid duplication. At the county-level, developing linking trails along identified routes will take into consideration the location of nearby destination trail corridors to both avoid duplication and to take advantage of the best alignment for the user experience. Most often, the destination trail alignment will be the preferred option along any given corridor since this type of trail offers higher recreational value.

On occasion, linking trails will be used to fill in gaps in a destination trail corridor. A common example is of this is where a road corridor is the only option available to link two segments of a destination trail corridor together due to land acquisition issues, wetlands, or some other physical impediment.

FIGURE 6.10 RIGHT-OF-WAY-BASED LINKING TRAIL ILLUSTRATION



As the images illustrate, the setting for linking trails greatly affects their recreational value as judged by scenic quality, continuity, and separation from vehicular traffic.

Roadway right-of-way widths are defined and determined in the Roadway System Plan.

### Linking Trails

#### Southwest LRT Connection Regional Trail (Connects Lake Minnetonka LRT and Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trails)

This linking trail corridor connects the Lake Minnetonka LRT and Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trails as shown on the plan map. The latter of these currently ends in the City of Chaska, with the northern trail ending in the City of Victoria.

A master plan for this trail connection was completed in 2006 and consists of a combination of existing local trails and newly proposed regional trail alignments, with an overall length of 13 miles. The Master Plan was approved by the Metropolitan Council, which makes the trail eligible for regional funding.

Although not identified as part of the master plan for this connection, a river crossing near the downtown area of Chaska over to the Minnesota River Valley State Trail, which connects to Shakopee, is provided via the CSAH 41 bridge structure.

#### Lake Waconia Regional Trail Corridor

From south to north, this destination trail corridor makes a connection between Lake Waconia Regional Park and Dakota Rail Regional Trail on the north side of the lake. As illustrated on the Trail and Bikeway Plan map, the alignment of this trail is optimally located along the shoreline of the lake until CSAH 30, which it would then parallel (heading north) until CSAH 155. The trail would connect to the existing boat launch near the junction of CSAH 30 and 155. Once to CSAH 155, establishing the trail along the west side of the roadway would provide the most appealing experience to the trail user, albeit in close proximity to the road. The challenges with developing the trail

following this alignment include limited space, steep grades, and established vegetation along the lakeshore, each of which posing significant constraints to trail development.

Future options should be explored to replace the road along the eastern edge of Lake Waconia from Lake Waconia Regional Park to the Dakota Rail Regional Trail. Presumably, the existing roadway would be relocated further to the east as part of future roadway and development planning. (Importantly, the existing private properties would require assured access under any roadway realignment scenario. The advantage, presumably, to these landowners would be that their properties would front a greenway versus a county road, with direct access to an extensive trail system and open space.)

### **Highway 101 Regional Trail**

The Metropolitan Council RPPP identifies a proposed Highway 101 Regional Trail, which will connect the Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail to the Lake Minnetonka Regional Trail.

### **Highway 5 Regional Trail**

The RPPP identifies the proposed Highway 5 Regional Trail, which will connect the proposed Highway 101 Regional Trail to Carver Park Reserve and Lake Waconia Regional Park. An alternate alignment which would route this regional trail corridor through the Carver Park Reserve and via the Lake Waconia Regional Trail is presented on the trail map. The county would seek re-alignment of this corridor in the RPPP.

### **Twin Cities and Western Regional Trail Corridor**

Existing rail corridors provide opportunities for long term trail corridors as evidenced by the Luce line and Dakota trail corridors. Of particular note is the Twin Cities Western Railroad through the county. Although the TCW line is not anticipated to be abandoned within the 2030 time frame, this corridor offers a high value opportunity for a trail if it was ever to be abandoned. Accommodating a trail along this corridor if it is ever converted to a rail transit corridor should also be considered at such time as part of a multi-modal approach to transportation.

### **Minnesota Prairie Line Trail**

Existing rail corridors provide opportunities for long term trail corridors as evidenced by the Luce line and Dakota trail corridors. Of particular note is the Minnesota Prairie Line heading south out of Norwood Young America and through Hamburg. Although the Minnesota Prairie Line is not anticipated to be abandoned within the 2030 time frame, this corridor offers a high value opportunity for a trail if it was ever to be abandoned. Accommodating a trail along this corridor if it is ever converted to a rail transit corridor should also be considered at such time as part of a multi-modal approach to transportation.

### **County Road 10 Regional Trail**

Intended to follow the road right of way. The establishment of any future trail alignment will result from a master plan process done in cooperation with affected Cities, Township, Carver County, and others. At the time the trail is to be built, the appropriate Cities and Townships will determine the final location of the trail through public process with residents.

**County Road 25 Regional Trail**

Intended to follow the road right of way. The establishment of any future trail alignment will result from a master plan process done in cooperation with affected Cities, Township, Carver County, and others. At the time the trail is to be built, the appropriate Cities and Townships will determine the final location of the trail through public process with residents.

### **Local Trail System**

Local trails are developed within a municipality's local road right-of-way or parks and open space areas, or permitted by the County in County right-of-way. Regional and state trails that are constructed and managed by the County, a city, or a township are not included.

### **Local Trails**

All identified County local trails are intended to follow the road right of way.

- County Road 33**
- County Road 53/MN 284**
- County Road 11**
- County Road 18**
- County Road 41**

Although the Trail and Bikeway Plan highlights a number of routes for linking trails, the County is encouraged to secure enough space when acquiring future county road rights-of-way for the eventual development of linking trails separated from the roadways. This would ensure that the linking trail system could be expanded as demand warrants as growth occurs across the county.

With the bikeway system, classified as local trails in Figure 6.8, the primary goal with the routes shown on the plan is to create a series of loops across the county that link small towns with the larger growing cities. Providing a wide shoulder and bike route signage along these roads will allow a bicyclist to safely use county roads when out for longer recreation and fitness rides, or using their bike for transportation.

## Other Trail Considerations

### Hiking Trails

Natural-surfaced trails for hiking will be provided in all of the regional parks at some level, with the larger parks having more extensive looped systems to complement the paved destination trails. Natural surfaced trails may also be provided along select corridors, depending on individual site opportunities.

### Mountain Biking

Natural-surfaced trails for mountain biking may also be provided in select regional parks as warranted by documented demand. Determining the most appropriate location for these trails will be determined as part of the master planning process for individual regional parks.

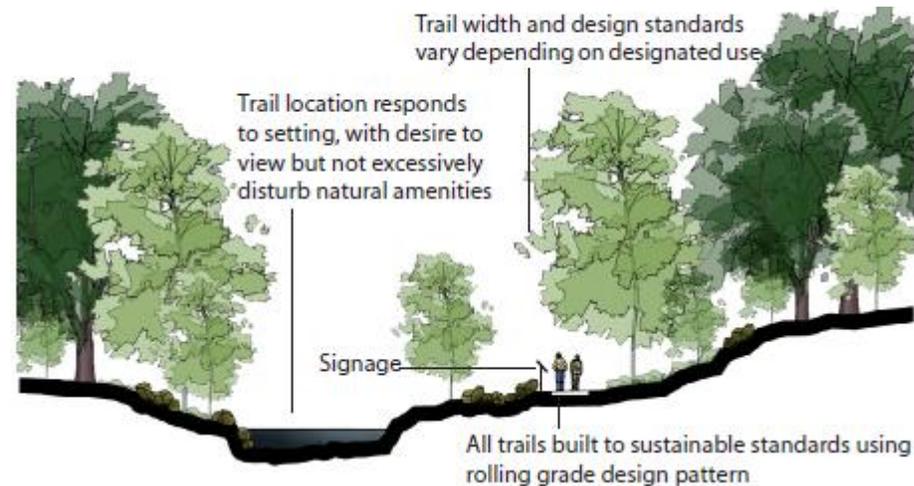
### Equestrian Trails

Currently, trails for horseback riding are provided in Carver Park Reserve, which is managed by Three Rivers Park District. At this time, there are no designated or anticipated locations for equestrian trails within any of the existing or planned regional parks within Carver County (since these land units are not likely to be large enough to develop long enough trail loops). The trail plan does, however, leave open the option to consider developing an equestrian trail within a select and limited number of corridors. It is desirable but not a requirement that future equestrian trails connect with Carver Park Reserve and/or state and federal lands where equestrian trails are provided. Final determination on developing equestrian trails in these corridors would be based on several key factors, including (at a minimum): 1) clearly documented demand; 2) adequate corridor width/condition to limit impact of trail development on natural systems; and 3) approval by administering agencies of lands that the equestrian trails would connect to (i.e., USFWS, MN DNR, and Three Rivers Park District, as appropriate).

### Water Trails

Water trails offer unique canoeing and kayaking opportunities to explore Carver County. The viability of routes need additional consideration under separate master planning processes as does defining and addressing adjoining landowner access, trespassing, and encroachment concerns. Detailed route mapping, clearly defined access points, and routine monitoring and periodic clearing of downfalls and debris along water trails are the most important development considerations. Otherwise, development can be as simple as creating a small parking lot, some walk-in put-in points, or providing a small dock for launching a canoe at strategic locations. Access points should be reasonably spaced to accommodate day outings or, possibly, overnight trips.

FIGURE 6.11 NATURAL SURFACED TRAIL IN A PARKLIKE SETTING ILLUSTRATION



## Local System Connections

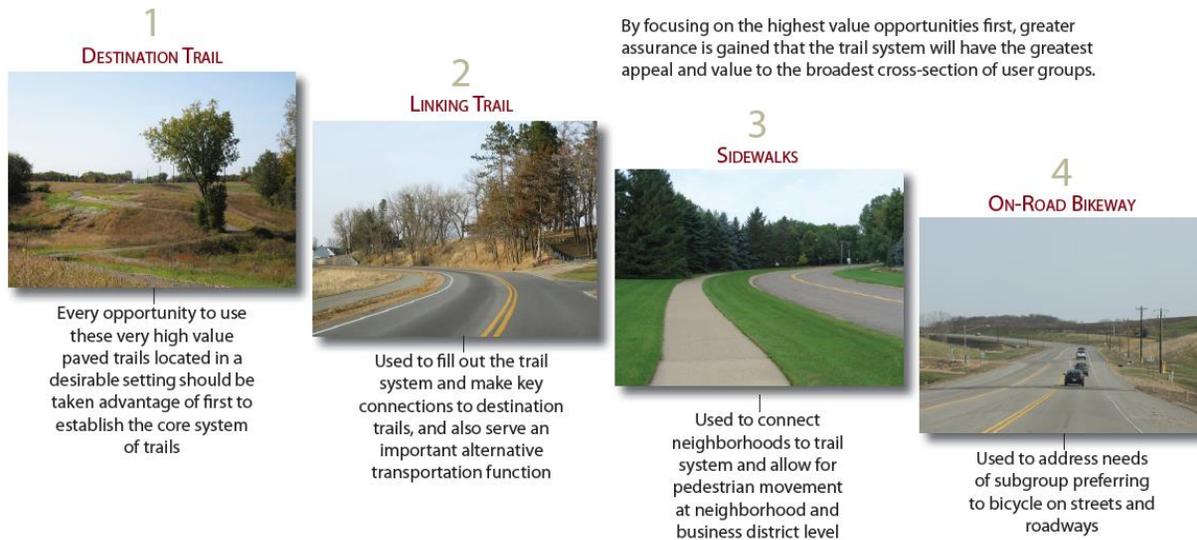
### Common Opportunities and Recommendations Supported By Carver County Plan

#### Adopting Common Classification System for Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails

To ensure consistency between local and county systems, adopting a common classifications system for parks, open spaces, and trails is recommended. With respect to trails, Carver County’s classifications are consistent with the MN DNR’s Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines (2007). The objective with adopting these guidelines is to ensure state-wide consistency of trail classifications and associated development standards.

In terms of hierarchy between classifications, the general recommendation is to maximize the use of destination trails at the county and local level given their high value to users. Linking trails should be used to fill in missing links and connect important destinations. Sidewalks should be used to link neighborhoods and business districts together and to the trail system. On-road bikeways are used to complete the system. Figure 7 illustrates this recommended hierarchal relationship between trails, sidewalks, and bikeways.

FIGURE 6.12 HIERARCHY BETWEEN TYPES OF TRAILS, SIDEWALKS, AND BIKEWAYS AT A SYSTEM PLANNING LEVEL



### **Adopting Active Living by Design & Complete Streets Principles**

Adopting the “active living by design” philosophy at the local level would ensure that these principals become an automatic consideration whenever parks, trails, or recreational facilities are designed. Key principles at the local level include:

- Everyone, regardless of age, gender, language, ethnicity, economic status or ability, should have safe, convenient and affordable choices for physical activity
- Building and outdoor spaces should be designed and oriented to promote opportunities for active living for all levels of ability
- Parks, green space, and trails, should be safe, accessible and part of a transportation network that connects destinations of interest, such as housing, worksites, schools, community services and other places with high population density
- foster more extensive opportunities for pedestrian-level transportation, recreation, and fitness at the street level.
- new or upgraded streets are designed to enable safe access and movement for all modes of transportation - especially as it relates to connecting local neighborhoods to the local and regional trail system.

### **Adopting Safe Routes to School Program (SRTS)**

As defined by The National Center for Safe Routes to School, Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs encourage and enable more children to safely walk and bike to school. According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), about half of all students walked or bicycled to school in 1969 compared to fewer than 15 percent today. As research and anecdotal evidence shows, the decline in walking and bicycling has had an adverse effect on traffic congestion, air quality around schools, pedestrian and bicycle safety, greater potential for childhood health problems.

Safety issues remain a big concern for parents, who consistently cite traffic danger as a reason why their children are unable to bicycle or walk to school. The purpose of the Federal Safe Routes to School Program is to provide funding for programs and projects that encourage children and their parents to walk and bicycle safely to school. By adopting a SRTS program, local communities can position themselves to submit grant applications for federal funding to develop safe routes to schools.

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The strategy for implementing the plan and establishing priorities is underpinned by two objectives:

1. Developing a balanced system offering multiple values to residents
2. Taking advantage of opportunities as they arise

At times, these objectives will be in conflict in that opportunities to develop various aspects of the system will present themselves in an unbalanced, “out-of-order” manner. As such, the implementation of the plan inherently requires a degree of flexibility to respond to opportunities as they arise. The Parks Commission and County Board will have to consider these issues as they occur and determine the best course of action, which may include a rethinking or departure from the stated priorities.

### Regional Parks

Lands for regional parks remain the top priority because it is intrinsically linked to marketplace economics and risk of opportunity lost. Setting aside these lands must occur in a timely fashion if it is to occur at all. Following through on the plan will require close collaboration between Carver County, local governments, willing landowners, and other public agencies such as MN DNR and USFWS. Acquisition priorities are as follows:

1. Acquisition of land for expansion of Lake Waconia Regional Park - this is the top priority due to existing and growing demand for regional park facilities in this area of the county
2. Acquisition of land for expansion of Baylor Regional Plan - although demand is not as high as Lake Waconia Regional Park, the opportunity to acquire additional land adjacent park boundary is inherently time sensitive
3. Refinement and ultimate acquisition of land for regional parks in the two search areas - given the time involved in this process, establishing a protocol for working with local townships, cities, and landowners to refine the search areas and develop an acquisition strategy for each parcel is a top priority. The County will ensure that land acquisition in these areas be based on opportunities arising from available land and willing landowner participation.

### Fostering Local System Connections

Determining system connections with local cities coinciding with land use changes and development in growth areas is critical to the success of the destination trail system. Important steps in this process to ensure alignment on common outcomes include:

1. Formalizing local adoption of key provisions of the plan and recommendations for local system connections to ensure alignment on key planning issues and desired outcomes
2. Establish protocol for joint implementation to achieve desired public values defined under the plan for mutual benefit
3. Coordinate funding requests for acquisition and development of regional parks and regional/local trails for mutual benefit
4. Coordinate approaches to working collaboratively with landowners and developers to achieve desired public values coinciding with land uses changing or development occurring

### Development of Existing Regional Parks

With respect to development of existing regional parks, the pace of improvements will be timed with funding availability. Priorities between and within each park will be updated on a periodic basis in line with facility demands. These priorities will be reflected in the County's 5-Year CIP Program and within requests for regional park funding through the Metropolitan Council. Development priorities will possibly be influenced by a variety of circumstances, including: partnership opportunities with LGUs or other agencies to gain efficiencies, control costs, leverage funding; taking advantage of a private/public partnership; contributions (direct funding or in-kind services) from user groups, and foundations that might be focusing on a particular element of the system.

For each of the existing parks, a list of development initiatives already envisioned include the following (items are not listed in priority order):

#### Lake Waconia Regional Park:

- Multi-purpose building and activity area
- Natural areas with boardwalks and overlooks
- Picnic Shelters
- Public parking (235 spaces)
- Park buildings/features on boardwalk system
- Concessions
- Lifeguard station
- Changing rooms, restrooms, storage, seating areas
- Overlooks
- Boat launch with parking for 40 vehicles with boats/trailers, plus 20 single spaces
- Beaching area for motorized and non-motorized boats
- Trail access from various directions
- Gatehouse
- Park I.D. signs
- Multi-purpose group activity area
- Building with overlook
- Group camping, with gravel access drive and parking

#### Lake Minnewashta Regional Park:

- Improved pedestrian access, with grade-separated crossing under County Road 41
- Additional group camp areas
- Additional formal picnic areas
- Improved and new shelter buildings with restrooms
- Additional informal picnic areas
- Informal sledding hill
- Outdoor classroom
- Multi-purpose paved trail
- Additional nature trails
- Interest nodes along trails

#### Baylor Regional Park:

Undefined until updated master plan is completed.

### **Development of Trails and Bikeways**

Given its routine rating as the highest value recreational activity by people across age groups, developing the trail system is justifiably a very high priority within the county. The implementation strategy for destination trails will likely occur as demand warrants and funding is made available.

In terms of priority areas, nearer-term efforts to develop destination trails will be focused in growth areas, especially in the Waconia-Victoria and Carver areas, as illustrated on the Trail and Bikeway Plan. Completion of the Southwest Regional Trail Connection between the Lake Minnetonka LRT and Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trails also remains a top priority that will be implemented. A master plan for this trail was created in 2006.. In all of the cases, the County will work collaboratively with the local cities and townships to develop these trails in a timely manner. The County will also ensure that collaboration with willing landowners is a necessary piece of any trail development.

The Dakota Rail Regional Trail was originally identified as an implementation priority and is now open to the public. Phase I construction consisted of a 7 mile segment from the East County Line to the City of Mayer in 2010. Construction work on the 5 mile segment between the City of Mayer and the West Count Line of Phase II Phase began in 2012 and was open for use in 2013.

With respect to linking trails along county roads, the top priority will be working with local cities to complete regional trail links within and between local systems in growth areas. Development of on-road bikeways along proposed county road routes will be coordinated with roadway upgrades, with the main focus being to include a minimum 6-foot wide shoulder along select county roads for use as a bike route. Note that development of trail/bikeway corridors could include either a linking trail or bikeway, or both, depending on the specific route circumstances and user groups being accommodated. (It is important to recognize that each of these facilities serve distinct users groups, as defined in Section 4.)

### **Delivery of Public Programs and Services**

Delivery of public programs and services is listed a bit lower in terms of priority due to the fact that being able to provide these is contingent on the availability of land and facilities. In fact, the delivery of programs and services should be considered lock-step with the development of a facility. Carver County's programming and related services function will continue to evolve, with continued emphasis on enhancing formal, well-organized programming. In addition, greater emphasis will be placed on informal, self-guided, and drop-in participation type of programming. More attention will also be given to staging events that bring larger groups to the various regional parks for group activities and social interaction in a natural setting. In addition to current offerings, cultural events such as music or arts-in-the park and charity programs will be considered.

### **Recreational and Educational Programming (and Related Services) Function**

The programming function of Carver County will proactively strive to provide an ever increasing variety of high quality visitor and participant experiences by organizing, promoting and delivering environmental education and recreation-based programs consistent with its mission.

Specific strategies to proactively advance this function include:

- Exploring collaborations/partnerships with other organizations, businesses, and groups to improve and expand both environmental and recreational program offerings

- Developing a proactive marketing plan for promoting program offering by the County and its partners, with specific strategies targeting each program offering being developed as demand or opportunity warrants
- Implementing services and programs that include people with disabilities and people from diverse ethnic backgrounds that reflect the population of Carver County and the local communities
- Acquiring demographic data outlining current and projected regional population and recreation trends to view emerging trends
- Further developing the interpretive potential of the various regional parks, with an emphasis on the unique qualities that each possess
- Ensuring staff and volunteer levels are adequate to ensure high quantity experiences for participants
- Exploring online program registration and the opportunities for online program delivery to take advantage of and respond to, advances in technology

**Customer/Visitor Services Function**

Enhancing customer service includes identifying customer expectations and determining the level of program, facilities, and services required to meet those expectations. Major issues relating to customer service include:

- Quality assurance - providing the services most important to park visitors; special focus needs to be placed on complaint handling, special requests, reservations, security, and customer information; the goal is to ensure that every customer request is addressed promptly and every effort is made to meet and exceed customer expectations
- Feedback management - establishing a customer-oriented and effective input process for visitors to communicate their concerns or suggestions
- Employee education and training - continually enhancing the capacity of all County staff to perform at a high level in meeting customer needs
- Reservation systems - building upon the current system, providing a customer-friendly and efficient reservation system will continue to play a key role in providing quality customer service; using modern technology to reserve campsites, picnic shelters, meeting facilities, or to register for a program is important to enhancing service; expansion of web-based and online services will be a particular point of continued focus

**Administrative Function: Operational and Maintenance Services**

Carver County is charged with the operation of the County’s parks, open space, and trail system. The Carver County Board of Commissioners establishes policies and goals for the system and, through an annual budgeting process, provides capital and operating funds for implementing the plan. A Parks Commission, appointed by the County Board of Commissioners, serves as an advisory committee advocate for enhancing park facilities, expanding programs and services, and developing new trails.

The specific responsibilities of the Parks Commission, which are outlined in County Ordinance Title III Section 30, are as follows:

- Review proposals and make recommendations concerning park and trail acquisition and development
- Review and make recommendations concerning recreation programming, fees for facility use and park use policies
- Recommend supporting or enhancing natural resources in County parks and regional trail corridors

- Provide input into the County Park Policy Plan and Park Master Plans for park development site planning
- Review and make recommendation on the Parks Capital Improvement Program, signage, kiosks, and trail connections

**County Ordinances Related to Parks and Trails**

Public use and enjoyment of the County park system is controlled by Ordinance Title III Section 30, Park Ordinance, (the Ordinance) which was last codified November 2007 and applies only within County Parks and trail areas. The Ordinance incorporates pertinent Minnesota statutes, and addresses the following issues:

- Regulation of Public Use
- Regulation of General Conduct
- Regulations Pertaining to General Parkland Operation
- Protection of Property, Structures, and Natural Resources
- Regulation of Recreation Activity
- Regulation of Motorized Vehicles, Traffic and Parking

**Administrative Function: Public Involvement**

Carver County is committed to continuing public involvement through the implementation of the plan. The degree to which this will occur will vary depending on what aspect of the plan is being implemented. For larger scale projects, such as development or redevelopment of a larger amenity within a regional park, public involvement in the design process may be fairly extensive and involve representation from key stakeholders. In addition, forums for broader public input (e.g., open houses and presentations) will also be used as needed to communicate and exchange ideas with interested citizens. For smaller scale projects, notifications of interested parties would be a more appropriate approach.

The objectives associated with involving citizens in the implementation process include:

- Define stakeholders and their interest in a particular development initiative
- Understand their needs and unique perspectives
- Identify and understand concerns and problems
- Develop alternatives and find appropriate solutions with input from stakeholders

In addition to formalized processes for particular projects, Carver County will use the Parks Commission to advise the County Board on implementation initiatives as they occur. The public is welcome to attend its regularly scheduled meetings. Also, Carver County uses numerous tools to provide a consistent level of communication with interested citizens.

**Funding Sources**

The availability of funding to implement the Plan will have direct impact on the level of acquisition and development that can be undertaken. The following table provides an overview of funding source opportunities and probability.

TABLE 6.2 FUNDING SOURCES AND LIMITATIONS/PROBABILITY

Source	Description/Overview	Limitations/Probability
County CIP	Currently a 5-year listing of park projects are developed and updated by the Parks Department to track priorities. Selected projects are then transferred to the County CIP as funding becomes allocated.	Funding levels are typically too limited to address the full range of possible acquisition and development projects. Resident willingness to increase taxes for this purpose plays a key role in funding levels under this program.
County Bonding	This mechanism is available for parks, open spaces, and trails within the limits established by the County.	To date, bonding has not been used as a means to fund parks, open spaces, and trails. There is a more likely prospect that this approach will be used for acquisition (since that is often time sensitive), and less so for development.
County Highway Department	Funding is available for acquiring road rights-of way and providing a shoulder on County roads.	Very useful program for items listed, but limited funding potential beyond that at this time.
Metropolitan Parks CIP Funding	Typically, the largest source of grant funds for parks in Carver County. Matched with state funds on a 60/40 basis, the Metropolitan Council allocates between \$5.0 million and \$15.0 million per year to the 10 agency metropolitan regional park system. Carver County's share of that fund is typically about 2.4%, or between \$120,000 and \$360,000 per year. These grants are made at 100% with no matching requirement.	The most effective strategy is to support the Metropolitan Council and the other agencies in lobbying for funding at the state level
Metropolitan Parks Acquisition Opportunity Fund	Provides funding for acquisition of time-sensitive targeted lands. As of the end of 2008, the Council provides up to \$1.7 million per agency to finance up to 75 percent of the costs to acquire land. The remaining 25 percent is not eligible for reimbursement.	Providing the match at the local level can be a significant limitation on the use of the funding source, as is the limited capital that is available.
Metropolitan Council Park Future Reimbursement Policy	Reimburses CIP improvements that occur prior to metro allocations.	Requires upfront CIP funding, with an uncertain time frame on payback.
Metropolitan Council Parks O&M Appropriations	Enabling legislation requires the state to finance at least 40 percent of the Regional System's O&M costs.	The 40 percent obligation has not been provided since the law was enacted in 1985. Funding has declined annually.

TABLE 6.2: FUNDING SOURCES AND LIMITATIONS/PROBABILITY (CONT)

Source	Description/Overview	Limitations/Probability
State Outdoor Recreation, LCCMR, and Federal Grants	The State of Minnesota annually allocates funds for park acquisition and development projects that meet recreational needs identified by the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. The grants are competitive and awarded through the Department of Natural Resources according to project merits.	Qualifying for funding for restoration and management of the County’s natural resources has some potential. Very competitive, but Carver County has been successful with funding from the Metro Greenways program (MN DNR) and Federal Flood Mitigation Fund (administered by MN DNR)
Land and Water Conservation Fund	The federal government allocates monies each year to states for public acquisition and development projects. The State of Minnesota administers these grants through the Department of Natural Resources.	Funding availability through this program has been limited in recent years. However, there is a growing likelihood that this program will be funded at a higher level in forthcoming years.
ISTEA / T-21	The federal government allocates monies each year for alternative forms of transportation, which includes bicycle trails that focus on transportation.	Funding availability through this program has been robust in recent years. The potential for receiving funding for local trails is relatively high.
Fees/ Enterprise Funds	Minnesota statute allows counties to prescribe and provide for the collection of fees for the use of any park or other unit of the park system or any facilities, accommodations, or services provided for public use therein.	Becoming a much more relied upon funding source, especially for singular use facilities ranging from wave pools to picnic shelters.
Partnerships	Relates to partnerships formed with other agencies, local cities, other counties, and school districts to develop, maintain, and operate parks and recreational facilities on a joint-use basis.	With limited funding options, forming partnerships to spread the cost of providing a specific type of service will play a role in funding park and recreation initiatives.
Donations	Relates to cash donations, gifts, volunteerism, and professional services donated for planning, acquisition, or development purposes.	Limited potential from a cash perspective, but important with respect to the use of volunteers to offset some program costs.

TABLE 6.2: FUNDING SOURCES AND LIMITATIONS/PROBABILITY (CONT)

Source	Description/Overview	Limitations/Probability
Parks and Trails Fund, distributed by the Metropolitan Council	Provides sales tax proceeds from the Legacy Funding Constitutional amendment for new or enhanced visitor services and access, to accelerate the management, restoration and protection of natural landscapes and resources, to accelerate facility maintenance and rehabilitation, improve energy conservation by providing infrastructure enhancement. Carver County's share is anticipated to be between \$200,000 and 300,000 annually, beginning State FY 2010 and ending State FY 2035. The Regional Parks Foundation may present additional future opportunities.	Very useful program for supplementing other funding sources to complete new larger projects or provide funding for new smaller projects and services. Unfortunately the dollar amount available is not sufficient enough for large scale development or land acquisitions.