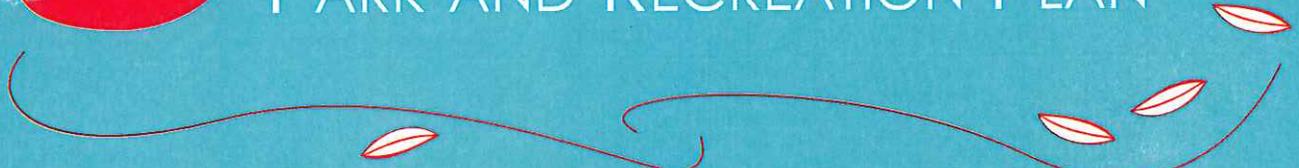


LA CRESCENT

PARK AND RECREATION PLAN



Hoisington Koegler Group Inc.

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DECEMBER, 2012

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Veterans Park



Veterans Park

CHAPTER I

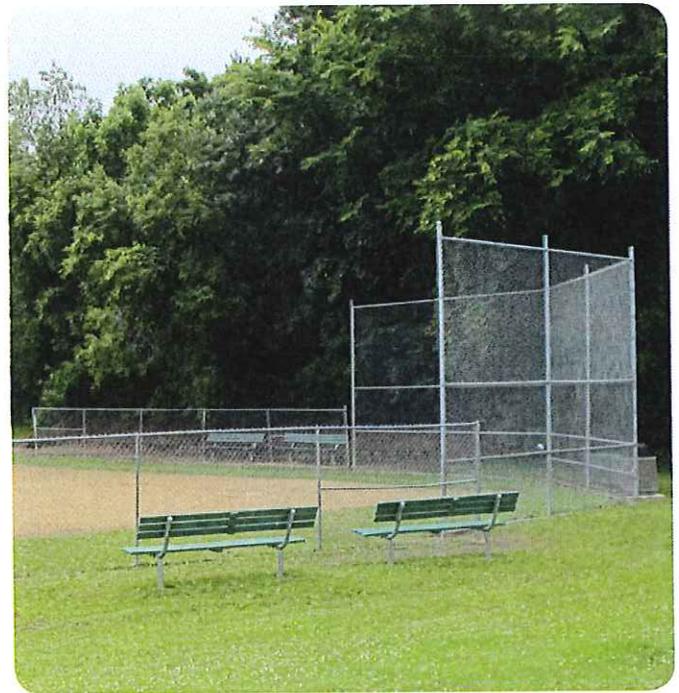
INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

Tucked in along the bluffs of the Mississippi River, the City of La Crescent's natural surroundings set the stage for a rich array of recreational opportunities. Opportunities for hiking, biking, boating, fishing, and wildlife observation exist within minutes of the front door of every house in La Crescent. People living in these kinds of environments tend to take their surroundings for granted and sometimes need to be reminded about what's so special about the place they call home. They also grow to take their local park systems for granted. While this plan is focused on further improvement of the La Crescent park system, it also serves as a reminder of the success that the City has had over the past 15 years in establishing an amazing park system.

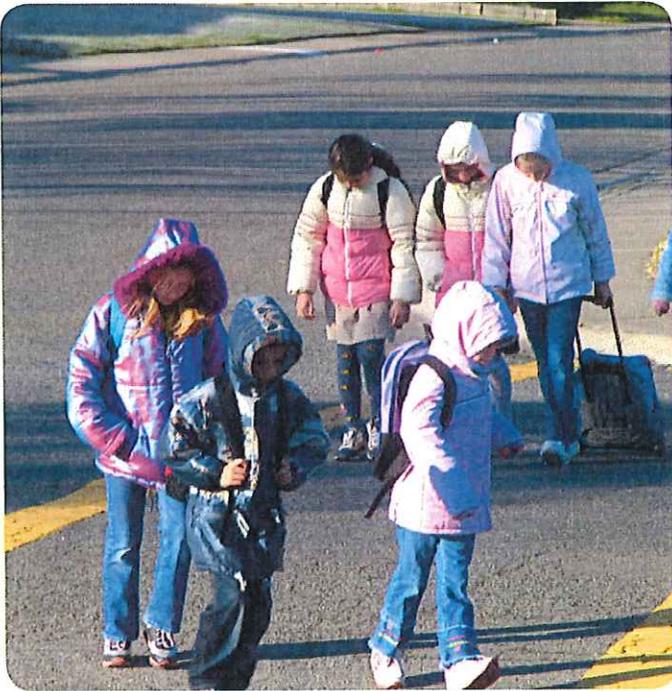
La Crescent's Park and Recreation Plan completed in 1994 has served as a road map for improving local parks and open space areas. The City has diligently followed its recommendations. The City has been the principal agent in bringing about change but it has not acted alone. La Crescent's total park and open space system also owes its existence to other entities including but not limited to La Crescent-Hokah Public Schools, local sports organizations, the La Crescent Area Healthy Community Partnership, the State of Minnesota and the State of Wisconsin. As a part of the larger La Crosse area, all of these entities have helped to establish and maintain wide-ranging recreational opportunities.



PLAN CONTEXT

Parks, trails, recreation and nature are vital to La Crescent's quality of life as well as the local economy. The Mississippi River valley is a regional tourist draw. La Crescent, the recognized "Apple Capital of Minnesota," draws people for a variety of sporting events and festivals, the primary one being Applefest which has been held in September for each of the past 60+ years.

Being a smaller community in a budget-tight environment, La Crescent is continually striving to make improvements using a variety of financial and partnership resources. General fund allocations are supplemented by cooperation with the local school district, local sports organizations, community volunteers and grass-roots organizations like the La Crescent Area Healthy Community Partnership to fund and implement park and open space improvements. Since state and local funding is unlikely to change dramatically in the next decade, the City will need to continually strive to make strategic, efficient investments in parks and open space. This plan is intended to serve as a guide to help ensure that the park and recreation system is both flexible and resilient. Creative funding, resourceful staff, political support, partnerships, volunteers and new ways of thinking will be required to continue the legacy of parks that La Crescent has built over the past two decades.



DEMOGRAPHICS

When La Crescent's Comprehensive Park and Recreation Plan was completed in 1994, projections called for the City to reach a 2000 population of 5,160 and a 2010 population of 5,882. In 2000, La Crescent's population was 4,923, close to the estimate contained within the 1994 plan. By 2010, however, La Crescent's population actually dropped slightly to 4,914 which is significantly below the 5,882 population level forecast in the prior plan.

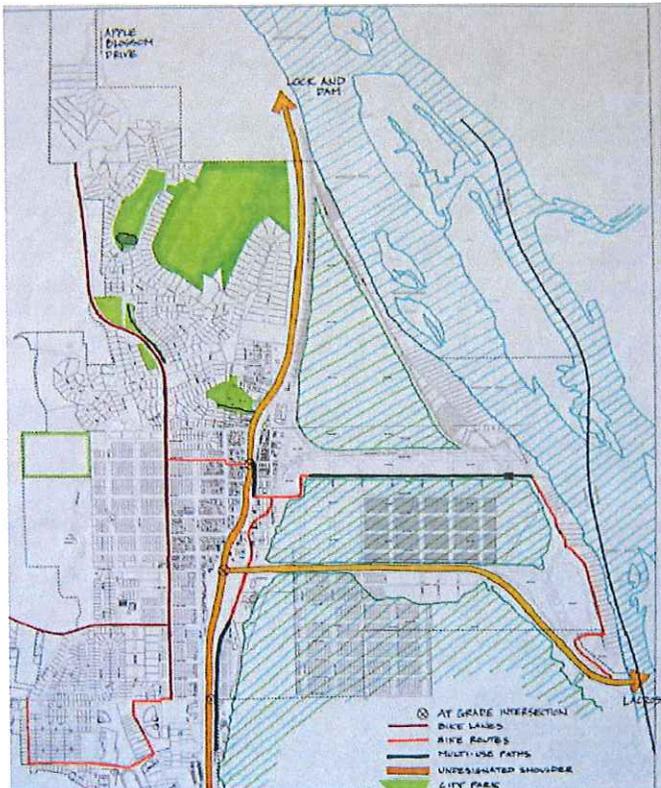
The population projections in the 1994 plan were a driving force in defining park acquisitions and improvements from 1994 to 2011. Over the past 18 years, the community has been diligently following the plan and has made great progress in improving the park system. La Crescent, like most communities, is now in a time of significantly less robust growth. Accordingly, population growth is not expected to be the dominant force impacting the park system over the next ten and even perhaps, the next twenty years. Other local interests and trends, however, will continue to impact park and open space needs.

ACTIVE LIVING

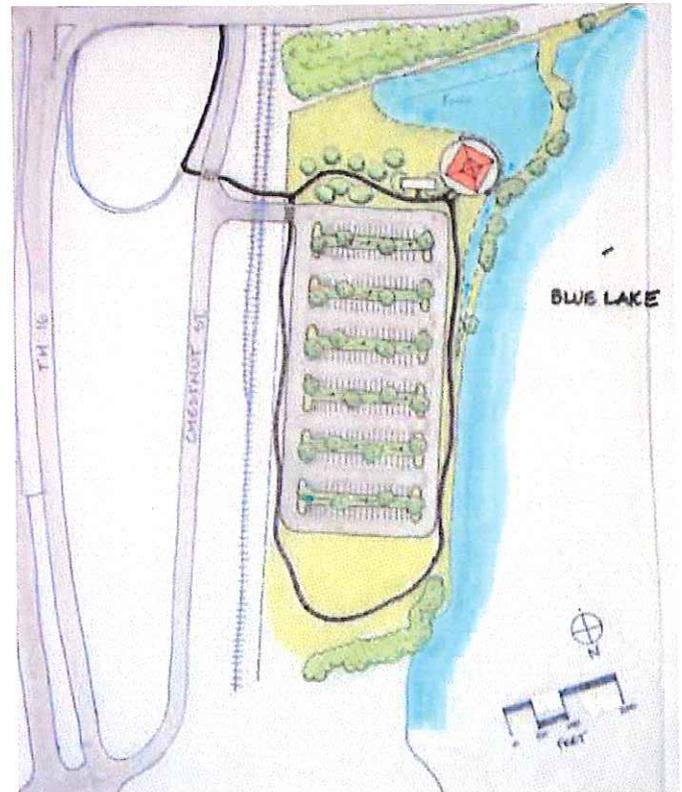
Active Living La Crescent has been a key collaborator with the City in improving the community's park system. Funded for a limited time through BlueCross BlueShield of Minnesota, the organization has initiated and funded a number of programs and improvements that the City otherwise would not likely have been able to accomplish. Some of the program's successes have included:

- Trail construction at Eagles Bluff Park.
- Installation of bike racks.

- Securing funds to help implement the Peaceful Playground at La Crescent-Hokah Elementary School.
- Assisting the La Crescent Area Historical Society with the establishment of My Old Kentucky Home Trail, the first of six historic walking and biking tours in and around the City.
- Establishing the Walk to School Week/Coulee Region Golden Shoe Challenge which helps fight childhood obesity by promoting walking.
- Establishing the Weekly Walking School Bus Program which awards prizes for student participation in safe, organized group walks to school.
- Establishing the bike shop in Kistler Park and now at Abnet Field that makes maintenance and repair equipment and expertise available for use by local bike riders.
- Helping to secure a Safe Routes to School grant to fund sidewalks connecting community neighborhoods and schools.
- Helping to influence the design plans for the new Interstate 90 Dresbach Bridge to ensure that the structure can accommodate options for a future trail crossing.
- Funding for the Active Living program is slated to sunset. A key challenge lying before the community will be to continue the efforts of the Partnership to promote wellness and active living through other funding sources and organizational structures.



Minnesota Design Team Sketch - 2008



Minnesota Design Team Sketch - 2008

MINNESOTA DESIGN TEAM

In 2008, the Minnesota Design Team visited La Crescent and suggested a number of community improvements, some related to parks and open space. Included among the recommendations were:

- Establish regional connections – complete the missing links in a continuous trail from Fountain, Minnesota to Reedsburg, Wisconsin passing through La Crescent.
- Implementation of bike lanes, bike routes and multi-use paths throughout the City.
- Establish a trail head and parking area at Blue Lake.
- Plan and promote a trail head location at Highway 61 and Third Street South.
- Create a planning group to promote the connection of La Crescent with the Root River Trail.
- Paint bike lanes.
- Complete the Wagon Wheel Trail.
- Create preservation plans for natural areas.
- Complete canoe/kayak launch amenities at Twilite landing.
- Complete bike trail to La Crosse.
- Complete a pedestrian bridge from downtown to the river.

PLAN PURPOSE

This plan establishes a course to build off of the successes of the 1994 plan to achieve an economically sustainable park and open space system. The Guiding Principles are intended to guide the continued improvement of the La Crescent park system while reducing operating and capital costs, enhancing efficiency, improving existing parks, adding new parks as appropriate, strengthening partnerships, connecting trails, increasing access to nature and continuing active living initiatives.

Great cities have always had great park systems. Since 1994, La Crescent has focused its efforts on expanding the park system. Having those accomplishments in place and facing a time of slow population growth, it's now time to focus efforts on improving rather than expanding the local parks and open spaces.

PLANNING PROCESS

This Comprehensive Park and Recreation Plan update is based on input received from the community, stakeholders, staff and city officials gathered in 2011 and 2012. The plan represents the collective wishes of the community and the expertise of the consulting team assisting the City in the preparation of the plan. Of particular note are the contributions of the La Crescent Park and Recreation Commission who oversaw the preparation of the plan.

PARK AND RECREATION PLAN OPEN HOUSE



The city of La Crescent is about to begin an update of its 1994 Comprehensive Park and Recreation Plan. The updated plan will address the City's park needs over the next 10 to 20 years and will include recommendations for park improvements, new parks, and specialized facilities like a dog park. The plan will also address options for expanded trails and sidewalks to encourage active living. An open house will be held on Thursday, September 15th at the La Crescent Community Building located at 336 South First Street from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. to present information about the plan update and to obtain thoughts from residents and businesspersons about the current park system and suggested future improvements.

This is the first of two open houses that will be held during the preparation of the plan. The study process is just getting started and no plans have been drawn or conclusions reached. The open house will offer opportunities to view maps and aerial photos of existing parks and trails and to talk to City staff and project consultants, Hoisington Koegler Group. A brief presentation will occur at 5:30 p.m. and be repeated again at 6:30 p.m. Please join us and share your thoughts and suggestions about La Crescent's park and trail system.



Community Open House
Comprehensive Park and Recreation Plan
Thursday, September 15th 5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
La Crescent Community Building
336 South First Street

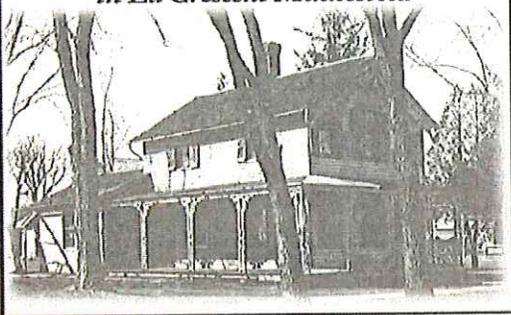


*More information about the
Comprehensive Park and
Recreation Plan update can be
found on La Crescent's website:
www.cityoflacscent-mn.gov
or by calling Bill Waller, City
Administrator at 507.895.2595.*

LA CRESCENT AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Historic Walking & Biking Trails

in La Crescent Minnesota



My Old Kentucky Home Trail

1.4 mile loop

This route encompasses the early days of La Crescent history. Within this route were Indian mounds, early businesses and the first houses built in La Crescent around 1857 by the controversial Kentucky Company. One of the known remaining Kentucky Houses is on the route.

CONSULTANT OBSERVATIONS

- The City has excellent park coverage. Virtually all community residents are within ½ mile of a community park.
- Eagles Bluff Park, Vetsch Park and Vollenweilder Park provide off-road trails for hiking.
- Sidewalks are located in many neighborhoods and additional sidewalks have been added recently using Safe Routes to School funding. Gaps in the existing sidewalk system still exist in a number of areas. Low traffic volume streets can be suitable for walking.
- With the exception of Elm Street, no on-road (striped lanes) bikeways exist in La Crescent.
- Highway 14/61/16 which separates the community from the Mississippi River and its adjacent lowland area is a significant barrier to pedestrian and bicycle movement.
- Additional active park facilities are needed, most notably a full sized soccer field and tennis courts.
- Continued development of local and regional trails will greatly enhance connectivity to La Crosse and other points both north and south along the river.
- Of the existing parks, Veterans Park is most in need of improvement. The park is underutilized and contains facilities that are outdated and in need of replacement. The recent vacancy of the house that lies within the boundaries of the park creates an opportunity to remove the structure and to repurpose the land for park uses.
- There is both a need and opportunity to create specialized park and open space areas that can accomplish a number of purposes including but not limited to a dog park, community entrance features/plazas and trailheads.
- The La Crescent Area Historical Society's Historic Walking & Biking Trails is a great initiative to encourage active living. Efforts are currently underway to expand this program.
- La Crescent strongly supports parks. A successful referendum on 2011 resulted in the reconstruction of the swimming pool in Frank J. Kistler Memorial Park. The new pool is a state of the art aquatics facility featuring a water slide, diving, a climbing wall, tot area and full wheelchair accessibility.

COMMUNITY INPUT

A community meeting was held early in the process to allow residents to provide their comments and opinions on La Crescent's park and open space needs. The following comments were received:

General:

- Check input from public meeting on trails
- Love the trails
- Need a trail connection from Vets Park to Eagles Bluff Park
- Need tennis courts
- Want more sidewalks
- We have funding for complete streets

Old Hickory Park:

- Need a sidewalk bisecting the park connecting the basketball court to Red Apple Drive and Jonathan Lane.

Eagles Bluff Park:

- Need to inform the community about Eagles Bluff Park – what it is and what it has
- Add skiing and sledding

Frank Kistler Memorial Park:

- Add a sidewalk connection between the park and the cul-de-sac just east of the park.
- Need at least 3 new tennis courts

Veterans Park:

- Tennis court?

Vetch Park and Vollenweilder Park:

- Would like to see historic gardens with fruit, vegetables and flowers of our ancestors (from Seed Savers, Decorah, Iowa) – this would be great for tourists and locals.





John S. Harris Park