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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.
DEM ToGRAPHICS
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.

LA CRESCENT RECREATION AND PARK PLAN 7
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 Twillite 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.
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 business persons 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, Holsinger Kogler 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.cityoflacrescent-mn.gov or by calling Bill Waller, City Administrator at 507-895-2295.
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 Vollenweider 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 Vollweilder 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.
CHAPTER 2
TRENDS
Outdoor Recreation Activities
of Minnesota Adults
(population 20 years and older, participating annually)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percent of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boating of all types</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming or wading all places</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving for pleasure on scenic roads</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picnicking</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing of all types</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biking outdoors of all types</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting outdoor zoos</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camping of all types</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting nature center</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2004 Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey

Over the next decade, La Crescent’s park system will be less influenced by the growth in the number of people and more by changes in the population (aging, growth in ethnic populations, etc.), changes in technology, changes in attitudes, and cultural changes. Recreation is driven by people. There will always be demand for traditional park activities such as baseball, soccer, softball and tennis. Technology, available leisure time, and levels of disposable income also drive park and open space needs. The La Crescent park and open space system needs to keep pace with these changing needs. The plan and the park system must remain flexible to adapt to new changes that occur in order to maximize investments.

The following are key trends that are expected to influence the La Crescent park system.

RECREATION TRENDS

Demographic, social, cultural, economic and environmental changes influence recreational trends over time. Changes in recreation interests and habits affect park and recreation facility needs and desires. Significant recreation trends that may affect La Crescent include:

INCREASED MOBILITY

In community surveys, trails are frequently mentioned as the number one desired recreation amenity. According to the Minnesota State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), 54% of Minnesota’s residents participate in walking and 29% are involved in biking. Many people are also interested in passive and natural resource based recreation. In Minnesota, 36% of the population takes part in picnicking, 30% participate in fishing, 26% are involved in camping and 25% visit nature centers. In La Crescent, all of the top recreation activities noted in the SCORP are available to residents within either a short drive, walk or bike ride.
NON-TRADITIONAL SPORTS
Non-traditional sports and recreation activities such as skateboarding, in-line skating, off-road biking, geocaching and disk golf continue to increase in popularity and are competing for space in existing parks. Creating facilities for these non-traditional recreation pursuits also challenges limited budgets which are frequently stretched thin just to support traditional endeavors. La Crescent recently received inquiries about establishing a Cricket pitch and disc golf in one of the City parks. This request is indicative new options for recreational facilities that are likely to occur due to changes in community demographics and interests.

HEALTH CONSCIOUS POPULATION – FIGHTING OBESITY
Although Minnesotans are generally healthier than residents of other states, the obesity rate is increasing. From 1990 to 2006, obesity increased by 132%. Obesity is a factor in an array of health problems including diabetes. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 1964, 50% of kids rode their bikes to school and the obesity rate was 12%. Forty years later, 3% of kids rode their bikes to school and the obesity rate was 45%. Outdoor recreation is one way for people to stay active and prevent obesity.

Studies also have found a link between urban living and health. Residents living in urban areas tend to weigh less than residents living in sprawling communities. Promoting walkability, active recreation, and healthy food choices benefits all segments of the population. Demand is expected in increase for more fitness and trail opportunities as well as increased active living opportunities. The trend for locally grown food is also expected to increase. The La Crescent Farmers’ Market will remain a popular community activity.
DOGS
The 2011-2012 National Pet Owners Survey found that 39% of the households in the United States own at least one dog. Since a significant number of households have more than one dog, on average, there are almost two dogs per household (1.69). A 2009 study done in the Twin Cities showed similar results. In the Twin Cities area, households with dogs (36%) exceeded the number of households with children (26%). A high level of dog ownership is likely in La Crescent as well.

As pet ownership has grown, off-leash dog parks and dog walking have become very popular. La Crescent has a local animal shelter but has no off-leash dog parks at the present time. The need for a dog park was referenced frequently in the early stages of the preparation of this plan.

SAFETY CONCERNS
According to Minnesota's SCORP, many users of outdoor recreation facilities are concerned about safety and security. Parents may be cautious about letting their children use neighborhood parks without adult supervision. Whether the fears are realistic or based on inaccurate perceptions, they discourage use of park and open space facilities.

How we locate, design and manage outdoor recreation facilities can affect the real or perceived safety of those areas. Improved enforcement, responses to vandalism, security lighting, education, community support and funding all help address both the reality and perception of safety.
DEMographic TRENDS
Examining La Crescent’s population is important in determining future park and recreation needs. In many communities throughout the United States, changes in population are having profound influences on park and recreation facilities. Most of these changes are being driven by a much older or more culturally diverse group of residents.

Although population changes are occurring in La Crescent, the City has not yet seen the magnitude of change that many communities have experienced nor is the City likely to see large scale changes in the next decade. Being aware of national trends, however, will help La Crescent prepare for the more gradual change in population that is likely to occur.

INCREASINGLY DIVERSE
The United States is the only major industrial economy with an expanding population that is fueled primarily by immigrants. Along with increased racial and ethnic diversity, trends are showing an increased desire for multi-age interactions and exchanges.

In 1990, 99% of La Crescent’s population was white. By 2010, the white population had shrunk to 96% of the total. Looking more closely at the numbers reveals that La Crescent echo’s national trends, just at a lower growth rate. From 2000 to 2010, La Crescent’s white population dropped by 1.64%. During this same time period, however, the non-white population changed in the following ways:

- The Black or African American population was up 66.7%
- The Asian population was up almost 14%
- Individuals listing themselves as Two or More Races was up 50%
- The Hispanic or Latino population was up 144%.
REDEFINING FAMILY

In many communities, the traditional family with two parents with kids occupies a minority of households. Nationally, it is estimated that only 12% of new households over the next twenty years will have children.

La Crescent’s growth over the last ten years and its likely growth over the next decade runs counter to the national trends. Between 2000 and 2010, the City’s population up to age 19 grew at a significant rate. In 2000, this segment of the City’s population comprised 29% of the total. By 2010, this segment of the population comprised almost 34% of the total. The growth of the parent cohort, those people from 25 to 34 years of age, grew by 33% over the same time period. Interestingly, the growth in the younger segment of the population was balanced by declines in older population segments. In 2000, La Crescent residents aged 55 and over comprised 24% of the population. By 2010, this segment of the population shrank to 16% of the total population.

Local population trends in La Crescent will continue to create a strong interest in traditional recreation activities. Local programs in soccer, softball, hockey, etc. will remain strong.

AGING ACTIVELY

The aging of the population will continue to impact La Crescent even though the percentage of older individuals dropped over the past 10 years. Books like “70 is the New 40” illustrate an ongoing trend of seniors that are far more active than their predecessors. Many members of the aging population seek changes in lifestyle to reflect their lack of child-care responsibilities and often expanded recreation, education, and cultural interests. As baby boomers reach retirement age, they are aging more actively. The word “active” refers to continued participation in social, cultural, spiritual, and community affairs, not just the ability to be physically active. Accordingly, the full spectrum of La Crescent’s park needs will need to consider an environment that fosters participation in civic affairs and social and cultural enrichment. Institutions like the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and Viterbo University provide educational and cultural events and activities that are conveniently accessible to La Crescent’s population.

La Crescent’s park system should continue to accommodate life-long sports and activities. Tennis, golf, cross county skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, biking are all activities that are enjoyed by a wide range of ages.
ENVIRONMENTAL TRENDS
Changes in our physical environment such as climate, wildlife, plant life, etc. affect our day-to-day and long-term recreation habits and opportunities. These habits are tied directly to our health and well being. Environmental trends that have and will likely continue to affect change include:

CHANGING CLIMATE
While the causes of climate change remains somewhat controversial, there is a general understanding that global warming and other climate changes are occurring. Warmer winters and variable precipitation rates over the past decade have had a negative impact on outdoor winter sports like ice skating, snowshoeing, and cross country skiing. Climate is also changing people's interest in environmental sustainability and energy efficiency. Rising energy costs will put greater emphasis on local recreational options and will increase the demand for trail and bikeway connections. Wise use of water, energy, and natural resources are guiding decision making and supporting community sustainability.

2009 tied for the second warmest year worldwide, but over the southern hemisphere, it was the warmest year observed since 1880. NASA reports that the decade from 2000 to 2009 was the warmest ever recorded for the planet. Their research suggests that CO2 emissions will need to be reduced dramatically. Society is becoming more environmentally conscious and is seeking urban areas that offer mass transit, denser living, green development, walkable neighborhoods where they can live more sustainably.

Although La Crescent can't necessarily be considered an urban city, green development and walkable neighborhoods certainly are interests of the community. Consistent with sustainable practices, residents want a bicycle and pedestrian network that is safe, easy to use and understandable for all types of users. Bike routes, trails, bike lanes, and complete streets will be important tools for building a sustainable network for walking and biking throughout La Crescent.
INTEREST IN NATURE

Increased sensitivity to ecological issues and the benefits of a healthy ecosystem have people demanding more natural experiences from parks and recreation. There is increased interest and opportunities to engage local residents and groups in environmental stewardship activities such as removal of invasive species. In addition, people desire more educational and/or interpretive programs, are seeing a better balance of environment and recreation, and have a heightened interest in aesthetic and gardens.

According to Minnesota’s SCORP, outdoor recreation is “very important” in the lives of 57% of the state residents. Another 25% think that it is “moderately important”. If 82% of the population thinks that outdoor recreation is important, what stands in the way of higher actual participation rates? In surveys conducted as part of the SCORP update, four factors were cited:

- Time – People simply don’t have enough leisure time to take part in the outdoor activities as often as they want. Lack of time was the most often cited reason for respondents’ limiting outdoor recreation.
- Outdoor Pests – Not wanting to fight off mosquitoes, black flies and other pests was the second most frequent reason cited for poor participation.
- Cost and Effort – Statewide, recreation activities for many residents involve expenses, travel and preparation. Most Minnesota residents can’t just walk out the door and take part in recreational activities. La Crescent is fortunate that a wide array of outdoor recreational opportunities lies within close proximity to all community residents.
- Lack of a Companion – People take part in activities outdoors as a way to share experiences. For those living alone, lack of companions is a major constraint to participation in outdoor recreation activities.
FOUR SEASON RECREATION

Lying in the upper Midwest, La Crescent needs to offer recreation activities for the full range of seasons. Four-season recreation requires a broader range of facilities and experiences and presents additional challenges for maintenance and operations. Creating ice skating rinks, grooming trails for cross country skiing, plowing trails for winter use, holding events, providing indoor recreation space such as gyms and ice arenas are all part of a balanced winter recreation system.
ECONOMIC TRENDS
Economic conditions change over time and impact the City's ability to provide park and recreation facilities and services. The ability of the City to meet the park needs of local residents is influenced by local and regional economic trends. Some of these trends that may affect change in La Crescent include:

Fiscally Challenged
Reduced revenue from the State of Minnesota to local governments and schools, rising health care costs, anti-tax sentiments, increasing fuel and material costs, are reducing the resources available for park and recreation improvements and upkeep. There is an increased need for partnerships, volunteers, creative funding sources and a renewed focus on quality over quantity.

EXPERIENCE ECONOMY
Studies show that people receive more enduring pleasure and satisfaction from investing in quality experiences than material possessions; and recent trends show, even during a recession, people still seek quality experiences while cutting back on other necessities. This will put a new focus on the importance of positive experiences in public spaces and parks as a driving force for the draw of tourists and for the satisfaction of residents alike. With its wealth of parks, trails and recreation places La Crescent is well positioned to take advantage of this emphasis on experience if the parks and places are safe, well maintained and attractive.

Parks can also serve as incentives to attract new residents. Along with quality schools, a diverse housing supply and employment opportunities, parks can help attract new residents and encourage new community growth.
CRAVING CULTURE AND THE OUTDOORS
Living in Minnesota where 57,000 jobs are related to the outdoor recreation economy, it is hard to overlook the important role played by our interactions with nature and the environment. Cultural tourism is the fastest growing form of tourism and visitors tend to spend more and stay longer than other tourists. Also, as the trend for outdoor recreation increases, La Crescent should be prepared to offer recreation and interpretation opportunities that balance sensitivity to the ecological world while capitalizing on adventure sporting opportunities. The bluff areas that surround La Crescent offer great potential as both ecological/geological attractions and as locations for adventure sports activities. The city's location on the Mississippi River opens up cultural tourism opportunities.

HEALTH CARE COSTS AND SEDENTARY LIVES
One of the biggest challenges facing our country and region is health care and rising health care costs. We can provide excellent care, but the lack of activity in most American's lives more than offsets our health care technology. The result is the most expensive health care in the world with only middle of the road results in terms of personal health, longevity and infant mortality. It is time that we acknowledge that parks, recreation, trails and active lives are a key to our personal and community health. La Crescent strongly advocates active living and can further create a healthy community, through expanded bicycle and walking connections, use of complete streets, promotion of active lifestyles and physical activity and commitment to creating a design of walkable community.
CHAPTER 3

PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES
The La Crescent Park and Recreation Plan is guided by a set of principles and objectives. The principles used in the plan are drawn from those endorsed by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). They include: public parks, health and wellness, environmental stewardship, children and nature, and transportation and livable communities. Collectively, the principles and objectives are meant to serve as a guide to the content of this plan as well as serve as a checklist to help La Crescent become an even healthier, more connected community.

PRINCIPAL #1 - PUBLIC PARKS
Providing park and recreation opportunities is an essential public service of the City of La Crescent.

OBJECTIVES:
1.1 Develop a park system and open space plan which compliments the development pattern of the City of La Crescent.

1.2 Provide a balanced park system which includes neighborhood parks, community parks, special use facilities and schools, all interconnected by a trail network.

1.3 Encourage citizen participation in the planning and development of park and open space facilities.

1.4 Operate and maintain park facilities and programs in a fiscally responsible manner utilizing all potential funding sources for park operations, maintenance, acquisition, and facility development.

1.5 Continue to seek assistance from community groups in the planning and development of parks and recreation areas.

1.6 Encourage a cooperative effort between the La Crescent-Hokah School District and the City in the acquisition, development and usage of recreational facilities.
1.7 Provide convenient recreation opportunities within neighborhood areas by providing neighborhood park facilities and improving access to existing facilities where necessary.

1.8 Provide a blend of active and passive parks and open spaces.

1.9 Create a network of interconnected, multipurpose non-motorized trails for walking, hiking, cycling, and to promote connectivity between parks, neighborhoods and public amenities.

1.10 Ensure adequate funding for ongoing maintenance and rehabilitation of existing parks and recreation facilities.

1.11 Ensure that upgrades to park and recreation facilities promote efficient and cost-effective maintenance practices.

1.12 Provide a wide range of year-round recreational opportunities.

1.13 Install secure bicycle parking at all commercial and institutional facilities.

1.14 Periodically evaluate existing recreation programs including an assessment of attendance and customer satisfaction.

1.15 Enhance access to the Mississippi River for both active and passive recreational opportunities.

**PRINCIPAL #2 - HEALTH AND WELLNESS FOR ALL PEOPLE OF ALL ABILITIES**

Providing active recreation opportunities is critical to the health and wellness of each La Crescent resident and the community as a whole.

**OBJECTIVES:**

2.1 Provide park and open space facilities that emphasize accessibility.

2.2 Trail planning and design should take into account the needs of seniors and those with disabilities, particularly in areas near senior housing and special needs housing.

2.3 Continue to improve and upgrade the La Crescent park system to keep pace with the changing needs of the community.

2.4 Provide recreation facilities and programs that are available to all residents, including people of all ages, abilities, ethnic backgrounds, and income levels.

2.5 Encourage the establishment of community gardens in suitable parks sites and other publicly owned land.
PRINCIPAL #3 - ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY

Parks and outdoor recreation lands are an essential green infrastructure element of the City of La Crescent. Parks and public recreation lands are carbon-reducing landscapes that help clean the air and water, recharge aquifers, and reduce stormwater runoff.

3.1 Protect the scenic beauty and natural resources in La Crescent by creating a system of parks, open spaces and trails that respect natural terrain, preserve native vegetation, and take advantage of views.

3.2 Provide open space areas that assist in the conservation and protection of ecologically sensitive areas.

3.3 Coordinate local efforts with other public agencies and private partners to protect valuable natural resources and sensitive lands through donations, procurement of easements, acquisitions, and purchase of development rights and make such lands available for passive recreation where appropriate.

3.4 Manage vegetation in natural areas by removing and controlling non-native invasive species and maintaining native plant species.

3.5 Increase understanding and appreciation of the cultural, natural and historical resources of the community and the area through expansion of the walking tour programs and interpretive signage.

PRINCIPAL #4 - CHILDREN AND NATURE

Improving children's access to parks and nature is priority of the City of La Crescent. Public parks and recreation are vital to the effort to provide safe, healthy ways to explore nature and enhance environmental education.

4.1 Trail and sidewalk planning should take into account the specific needs of children, particularly in areas near parks and schools.

4.2 Continue to coordinate efforts with La Crescent-Hokah Schools and Church of the Crucifixion to develop and implement safe walking routes, access to school bus stops, and pedestrian connections to and through school properties.

4.3 Collaborate with local service clubs to provide clinics to teach safe cycling to school age children.
PRINCIPAL #5 - TRANSPORTATION AND LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

La Crescent places a high priority on encouraging walking, biking, and the development of alternative transportation networks that will create a more livable and healthy community.

5.1 Design residential, commercial and industrial developments that include connections, both pedestrian, bike and vehicular, to adjoining developments to promote health and reduce personal automobile trips.

5.2 Promote livability by making transportation decisions based upon prioritizing the needs of people: 1) design transportation improvements that protect and serve pedestrians, 2) consider the needs of those who use public transportation and non-motorized transportation, and 3) consider the needs of automobile users.

5.3 Adopt a complete streets policy that encourages the City and the County to consider all users needed when reconstructing existing roadways or constructing new roads.

5.4 Link pedestrian and bike trails to open space features, to local community parks and to trail systems of adjacent jurisdictions.

5.5 Provide pedestrian and bicycle linkages between major points of interest where features such as major roadways and topography act as barriers to prevent safe and convenient connectivity.

5.6 Key intersections should include well-marked or textured crosswalks, central pedestrian refuges, curb extensions, pedestrian and bicyclist signal articulators, signs or other devices to improve safety.
John S. Harris Park
PARKS AND OPEN SPACE
La Crescent’s residents have convenient access to a park and open space system that within the City limits, includes city parks, school district facilities and on a limited basis, private facilities. Every home in La Crescent is within one half mile or less of a local park developed for active recreation. La Crescent parks are shown on Exhibit 4-1. Outside of La Crescent, residents also have access to other facilities in both Minnesota and Wisconsin.

The focus of this plan is on park and open space facilities that lie within the community with an emphasis on those actually owned and operated by the City. The 1994 Comprehensive Park and Recreation Plan featured a classification system for existing parks. This plan departs from that approach. In a community the size of La Crescent, parks tend to serve many purposes and many different types of users diminishing the need to categorize facilities.

The following is an overview of each of the major park and open space facilities that currently serve La Crescent residents.

ABNET FIELD
Abnet Field is an 8 acre recreation area that is located on property owned by the La Crescent-Hokah School District. The park includes the following facilities:

- Indoor hockey rink
- Off street parking
- Transit stop/park and ride
- Ball diamonds (2)
- Picnic shelter
- Play area
- Open field

OBSERVATIONS
Abnet Field is fully developed and all facilities are in good condition. The park will continue as a joint operation of the City and the school district.

Note: In addition to Abnet Field, other school district facilities provide recreation opportunities for La Crescent residents. Approximately 22 acres of land on two sites, both of which are part of the high school campus contain a football field, ball diamonds, soccer fields, basketball, and parking. Additionally, the La Crescent Elementary School site has backstops and a play area. Many of the school facilities are accessible during non-school hours for use by the community.

La Crescent Community Center provides indoor ice and it also serves as the location of the Boys and Girls Club as well as Active Living La Crescent’s bike repair facility.
FRANK J. KISTLER MEMORIAL PARK
Kistler Park is one of La Crescent's most intensively used parks. The swimming pool has long been a significant attraction and will be even more so when the newly expanded pool opens in the summer of 2012. The park which is only 5 acres in size includes:

- Swimming pool/aquatics park
- Off street parking
- Extensive playground area
- Sand volleyball
- Entrance gardens

OBSERVATIONS
Most of the Kistler Park site is fully developed. Expansion of the swimming pool and associated parking removed much of the park's available green space. Assuming that the pool will attract a significant number of users, on-site parking may be inadequate to meet demand. Parking is available on surrounding streets and the location of the park is conducive to attracting users who may walk or bike to the park. With the reconstruction of the pool, the facilities in Frank J. Kistler Memorial Park are in excellent condition.

The pedestrian crossing at Spruce Drive and 7th Street South is an ongoing safety concern. Pedestrian traffic crossing 7th Street South is expected to increase given the popularity of the new swimming pool in Frank J. Kistler Memorial Park.
OLD HICKORY PARK
Old Hickory Park is one of La Crescent’s newer parks. The 18 acre site is located in the northern part of the community. The park lies within a ring of local streets, all of which generally have houses that face the park. Since the park is at a lower elevation than most of its surroundings, it is very visible from the street and from the adjacent residences.

Old Hickory Park contains the following facilities:

- Picnic shelter/restrooms
- Off street parking
- Playground area
- Ball field
- Soccer fields
- Basketball court (full court)
- Retention pond

OBSERVATIONS
Since 2004, La Crescent has been continually developing Old Hickory Park. All of the park’s facilities are relatively new and in excellent condition. When viewed on the aerial photo, the large turf areas of the park are readily apparent. Most of the open turf area accommodates organized soccer. Very little space in the park is continually available for casual park use.

Despite the fact that the surrounding residences keep “eyes on the park,” after hours use and potential vandalism remain as concerns. The shelter is an attractive place for gatherings even during the nighttime hours. Continued observation of the park by area residents and by the La Crescent Police Department will be needed to ensure that the park is used appropriately.

The drainage pond at the south end of the park is needed as part of the overall drainage system in the area but it is not aesthetically pleasing. The drainage area is used in the winter for sledding activities. The park also features a one-mile loop sidewalk around the park’s perimeter and an adjacent trail access to Eagles Bluff Park.
VALLEY SOUTH PARK
Valley South Park is a small park on La Crescent’s south side encompassing only 1.2 acres land. Despite its small size, it is an important part of La Crescent’s park system not only because of the surrounding residential neighborhood that it serves but also because it contains a sledding hill used by residents from other parts of the community.

The park contains the following facilities:

- Playground area
- Open field
- Sledding hill

OBSERVATIONS
The facilities at Valley South Park are in good condition. Given the constrained size of the park, no changes in use are envisioned in the future.
VOLLENWEILDER PARK
Vollenweilder Park is in the west-central portion of the City. The park is heavily wooded and the terrain makes it suitable for passive uses including trails but not for active use.

OBSERVATIONS
Vollenweilder Park lies within two existing residential neighborhoods and is accessible from a trail that begins in Vetch Park, immediately to the south.
VETSCHE PARK
Vetsch Park lies immediately south of Vollenweider Park. An existing parking lot at the La Crescent Water Treatment facility provides off-street parking for park users. The park contains a mix of mulch and mowed trails that meander up to an observation point.

OBSERVATIONS
Because of the terrain, Vetsch Park will continue as a passive element of La Crescent’s park system. Deed restrictions and a conservation easement limit the use of Vetsch Park to trails and other passive activities.
VETERANS PARK
Veterans Park is an 8 acre facility that has hosted gatherings and sporting events in La Crescent for decades. It includes the following facilities:

- Picnic shelters
- Play area
- Off street parking
- Softball field
- Skate park
- Open field

OBSERVATIONS
Veterans Park is encumbered by a number of challenges including poor visibility and access, the need to accommodate area storm drainage, and outdated facilities. It is the only park in the La Crescent system that needs to be completely reprogrammed and improved. The park currently contains a city owned single-family residence that has been occupied until recently. Given the condition of the house and the fact that it is currently vacant, it could be demolished or moved off-site to allow more space for the reconfiguration of the park. The well house in the center of the park is actively used and will need to remain along with driveway or other suitable access.
JOHN S. HARRIS PARK
Harris Park is an irregularly shaped parcel directly abutting Elm Street (County Road 26). The linear form of its 2+ acres makes it challenging for any significant active uses. Limited parking is available along Elm Street. Existing facilities include:

- Play area
- Open field occasionally used as a small soccer field.

OBSERVATIONS
Harris Park serves more as a buffer between several residences and Elm Street than it does as an active City park. Its primary users come from the surrounding neighborhood and it is frequently used by area in-home daycare providers. The existing playground equipment in the park is outdated and in need of replacement.
EAGLES BLUFF PARK

Eagles Bluff Park is La Crescent's largest City park totalling 113 acres. As the name implies, the park sits on top of a prominent bluff providing 360 degree views of the area around La Crescent including the Mississippi River. Access to Eagles Bluff Park is marked by signs but still somewhat obscure. Entry points are at two locations that lie within neighborhoods of single-family homes. Eagles Bluff Park contains a trail network and observation area that has been constructed by volunteer labor.

Observations

Eagles Bluff Park is a very unique facility. Due to steep terrain, the park will never be fully accessible to individuals with mobility challenges. It does, however, provide hiking opportunities that are not commonly found in most community parks. Trails in the park can be used seasonally for both hiking and cross country skiing. Deed restrictions and a conservation easement limit the use of Eagles Bluff Park to trails and passive recreation.
NORTH END PARK (CURRENTLY UNNAMED)

The City received title more than 10 acres of land on the north end as part of a residential subdivision. As part of a former apple orchard, the property consists almost completely of steep slopes. Use of the park for anything other than open space will be challenging.
TRAILS AND SIDEWALKS
Exhibit 4-1 shows the locations of existing trails and sidewalks in La Crescent. The only existing multi-use local trail is along Elm Street. Elm Street includes an on-road trail that forms a spine through the center of the community. On the west side of the street, a marked bike lane exists between the parking area and the active roadway lane. On the east side of the road, the bike lane exists between the curb and the active roadway lane. Residents have commented favorably about the bike lane but expressed reservations about the use of the lane on the west side of the road, particularly by children, due to a feeling of being "exposed" to moving traffic.
La Crescent has an extensive network of existing sidewalks but as Exhibit 4-2 shows, significant gaps exist in some neighborhood areas. La Crescent is continually seeking to expand the sidewalk system. A Safe Routes to School grant was used to improve sidewalk connections in the southern part of town.
CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS - EXISTING PARKS
INTRODUCTION
Over the next ten to twenty years, park improvements and expansions will be needed to serve both La Crescent’s expanding population and ever the changing needs of park users. This section of the plan identifies recommended improvements to existing parks. No changes are anticipated for Vetsch Park and Vollanwelder Park except for the potential expansion of trails. Similarly, no significant changes are proposed for either Valley South Park or John S. Harris Park. In Harris Park, the existing play equipment should be replaced as it becomes older and outdated. Due to the park’s light usage, new play equipment should be similar in size and scale that which exists in the park today.

Additional system-wide recommendations and recommendations for new park facilities are found in the Implementation chapter.

ABNET FIELD
RECOMMENDATIONS
Abnet Field should continue as a joint use facility shared by the City and the School District. An ice skating area or outdoor hockey rink should be added at the southeast corner of the park to replace the skating area that will be lost in Kistler Park due to the tennis court construction. No change in the existing ball field area is anticipated.

Abnet Field is also the home of the La Crescent Community Arena. The arena contains a sheet of indoor ice that accommodates hockey, figure skating, parties, broom ball and a lobby area with sufficient capacity to accommodate community meetings of up to 50 people. The arena is also home to the Boys and Girls Club as well as the bike repair facility currently operated by Active Living La Crescent.

Over the past several years, the arena has had a negative cash flow and during the summer of 2012, the facility was closed for ice skating due to sagging demand. The City will need to continually monitor the usage of the arena and may need to be open to considering future changes that would boost revenue or to the possible conversion of the facility to some other use that would alleviate the financial problems.
FRANK J. KISTLER MEMORIAL PARK

RECOMMENDATIONS

Kistler Park will remain a focal point of La Crescent’s park system. The convenient location of the park and attractions like the new swimming pool and an extensive playground area ensures that the park will remain extremely popular with La Crescent residents and visitors.

Kistler Park was the former location of La Crescent’s public tennis courts. The bond referendum for the reconstruction of the swimming pool included funds to build new tennis courts and the community has secured additional funding and design assistance from the United States Tennis Association. As a result, three new tennis courts will be constructed in Kistler Park in the northwest corner of the site. When these improvements are complete, Kistler Park will be fully developed.

Reconstruction of the swimming pool elevates the “feel” of Kistler Park and the soon to be constructed tennis courts will further the level of quality in the park. The play area, tennis courts, pool and associated parking are all top notch facilities. The city should continue to add landscaping in the interior portions of the park as well as around the edges to help soften the environment of the park and to enhance the visual attractiveness of the area.

The City will need to continue to monitor pedestrian and bike safety around the park. A neighborhood connection should be added off of the cul-de-sac bubble on 6th Street South. Further improvements may be needed to ensure safe pedestrian crossings at South Hill Street and along 7th Street South. La Crescent should instigate conversations with Houston County about potential measures to enhance pedestrian safety along County Road 6 including but not limited to establishing a four-way stop at the swimming pool drive entrance.
OLD HICKORY PARK

RECOMMENDATIONS

Being one of La Crescent's newest parks and also being almost fully developed, few changes are recommended for Old Hickory Park. The south end of the park contains a storm water basin that only holds water after significant rain events.

Although the area is mowed turf, the pronounced depression is less attractive than the balance of the park. Consideration should be given to treating the stormwater retention area as a rainwater garden area by adding appropriate plants. Establishing a rainwater garden in all or a portion of the depression area could create visual interest and reduce the amount of mowed turf thereby reducing maintenance time and cost.

At the present time, the basketball court in Old Hickory Park lies within a large turf area. User convenience could be enhanced by adding a sidewalk connecting the basketball court to the park shelter and the sidewalk along Red Apple Drive. It is also recommended that the existing gravel parking lot serving the shelter and playground area be paved. Since the turf areas of the park are used intensively for soccer and softball, installation of an irrigation system in the park would help maintain high quality turf.
VETERANS PARK

RECOMMENDATIONS

Veterans Park has a number of existing challenges. Although being an Important part of La Crescent's overall park system, it is hidden behind commercial uses along the Highway 14/61 frontage road. The park also contains outdated picnic shelters, play equipment and skateboarding ramps. Given abutting property ownership, it is extremely difficult to improve access to or the visibility of the park. It is possible, however, to create new park with unique and compelling facilities that will attract more residents and visitors.

Improvement of Veterans Park requires total reconstruction of the park. Although a major undertaking, improvements can be phased over time as funding resources become available. The existing vacant city owned single-family home within the park should be removed to create space for added park facilities. Recommended park improvements include:

New Soccer Field – Locating a new soccer field in La Crescent is difficult given the scarcity of flat parcels in the community. Removal of the existing house creates an area that can accommodate a full sized soccer field. No other site either within the current park system or in land likely to be acquired for park use in the next five to ten years has the ability to accommodate a full sized soccer field.

New Park Pavilions – Three new structures are proposed for the park. An open air shelter adjacent to the soccer field would provide a small shaded area for observation of games and a focal point for pre and post-game activities. A new picnic pavilion is shown adjacent to a new tot lot and playground area. A building is also shown to support the amphitheater/band shell that is further described below.

Skate Park – The concept plan for the reconstruction of Veterans Park does not include a skate park. When the existing skate park in Veterans Park is removed, an alternative location in the community should be explored.

Amphitheater/band shell – The topography of Veterans Park can accommodate a small community amphitheater and band shell. The facility, which would be unique to La Crescent, could accommodate a number of community music, theatrical and community events. It could be the focal point for Veterans Day celebrations and it could include an adjacent memorial walk with added monuments for veteran recognition. The building supporting the amphitheater/band shell could contain restrooms.

Playground Area – The playground area could contain equipment suitable for use by children of a wide range of ages and varying physical abilities.

Pedestrian/Bike Circulation – New trails and walkways throughout the park could enhance connectivity within and external to the park. A new trail on the north side of the park can connect to the trails in Eagles Bluff Park. A new bridge over the stormwater swale on the south edge of the park could enhance the connection to homes along and adjacent to Walnut Place. Where possible, trails should also be groomed and used in the winter months for cross-country skiing.

Other Uses – The tennis court construction at Frank J. Kistler Memorial Park will displace the existing sand volleyball courts. New courts should be constructed in Veterans Park. Additionally, Veterans Park has sufficient spaced to accommodate other uses. The City has received resident interest in allocating an area for a cricket pitch.

Landscaping – Added tree and shrub plantings throughout the park would improve the park's appearance and provide shade for park users. Naturalized plantings along the stormwater treatment area would also enhance the appearance of the area.
EAGLES BLUFF PARK

RECOMMENDATIONS

Eagles Bluff Park is another of La Crescent's truly unique recreation areas. Trails meandering up the slope of the bluff provide challenging hiking and river observation opportunities. Due to deed restrictions and conservation easements, this area will always remain largely passive open space.

Minor improvements are proposed for the park. First, efforts should continue to improve trails throughout the property. Entrance areas along Red Apple Drive and McIntosh Road could be highlighted by added landscaping and a trail sign identifying the location, length, and required physical ability level of specific trail segments. Additionally, a trail should be constructed between Eagles Bluff Park and Veterans Park. Cross country ski trails should be established and maintained in the Eagles Bluff Park.

Picnic areas and scenic overlooks should be established in the upper reaches of the park.

NORTH END PARK

RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to extreme slope, the City owned park on the north end of the community is not proposed for significant development. It will remain as part of the community's public open space. Possibly in conjunction with adjoining property, the park could include walking trails, mountain biking trails and/or bike bump trails in the future. Establishing such trails would likely require obtaining easements over adjoining properties.
CHAPTER 6

IMPLEMENTATION
INTRODUCTION
Implementation of the ideas expressed in this plan is vital to continuing La Crescent’s rich legacy of local parks. Without a focus on implementation, the community risks the loss of key elements of the overall park system which is an important community amenity.

As La Crescent seeks to achieve its future vision for parks, the overall effort is guided by the following principles:

- **Effective Use of Limited Resources** – There will be a finite amount of funding to improve parks over the next ten to twenty years. Operating with limited resources requires a clear understanding of the tools available to protect and acquire land and to finance park and trail improvements.

- **Strategic Investments** – Every park improvement or new trail link that is accomplished enhances the overall park system and benefits different users. A thorough evaluation of each potential project before investment ensures that limited funds will be used to undertake the most important improvements to the park system.

- **Opportunities** – Even with careful planning, La Crescent cannot control all aspects of implementation. The ability to acquire an important parcel or take advantage of a timely funding source may occur at any time. The City will need to remain flexible to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves.

- **Collaboration** – La Crescent shares implementation of the park system with other parties. The La Crescent – Hokah School District is a significant partner. Property owners may also desire to preserve natural resources by donating property to the City or other entities such as the Land Trust. Drawing on funding from other partners expands the capacity of La Crescent’s financial resources.

GENERAL IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
Within the next year, La Crescent will be updating its Comprehensive Plan. When the update occurs, this Park and Recreation Plan should be incorporated into the document.

PARK DEDICATION
Park dedication is an important tool for implementing the Park and Recreation Plan. In more robust economic times, fees from development are a significant resource in acquiring and developing local parks. Park dedication enables La Crescent to acquire land or fees in lieu of land to provide park and trail improvements. The future use of park dedication should be guided by these principles:

- Ensure that the dedication ordinance outcomes are in direct alignment with the recommendations found within this Plan. The link between land or fees required and the Plan needs to be clear and defendable. The Plan helps establish that link.

- In the event that land is accepted as a dedication, the City should only accept land if the property to be acquired fills a need clearly identified in the Plan and is developable for park purposes.

- Monies received from payments in lieu of land should be used to acquire land and/or to develop park and trail amenities needed to implement the recommendations in this Plan.

SPECIFIC PLAN INITIATIVES
Beyond the general recommendations noted above, the La Crescent Park and Recreation Plan contains a number of specific initiatives that are intended to strengthen the overall park system. These initiatives are listed as follows:
IMPROVE ACCESS TO THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

The Mississippi River is La Crescent's greatest natural asset. The river is responsible for La Crescent's dramatic natural setting and it provides an unparalleled water based amenity. Despite being a riverfront community, access to the river for the general public is limited. Large floodplain areas, the Shore Acres neighborhood, and industrial uses east of Highway 14/61 are obstacles to direct river access. Over time, access both visual and physical access to the river needs to be improved.

In the short-term, La Crescent has an opportunity to provide access to Blue Lake at property owned by the City off of South Chestnut Street. This access point is further discussed in the Front Door Initiative. Longer term, redevelopment of the Twilite area which is a small peninsula of land located on Highway 61 will present another opportunity to create a direct access. The access in this area could be constructed in conjunction with a small public plaza with seating, interpretive signage and a river overlook. Depending on future development plans, a restaurant with outdoor dining space could locate adjacent to the public access increasing the public's exposure to the river.
ENHANCE LA CRESCENT’S FRONT DOOR

La Crescent’s primary “front door” is Highway 61 and specifically, the intersection of Highway 61 and 3rd Street South. Exhibit 6-1 identifies four features which enhance the sense of arrival to the community and they expand the range of recreational opportunities available to La Crescent residents and visitors.
ENTRY PLAZA

Over the past several years, La Crescent has worked corroboratively with the Minnesota Department of Transportation to add landscaping features along the northwest side of the intersection of Highway 61 and 3rd Street South. The northwest corner of this intersection has sufficient land to add a small welcoming plaza that is both a visual enhancement and a functional space. Benches in the area along Walnut Street provide some existing seating.

Exhibit 6-2 contains a concept plan for entry plaza improvements. Since this corner sees significant bike traffic moving between La Crescent and La Crosse, it can serve as a rest stop and orientation area for both bikers and pedestrians. Accordingly, the plaza plan calls for an information kiosk, small shelter, seating, landscaping improvements and a water feature. The information kiosk could highlight area bike trails as well as downtown businesses, local La Crescent parks, and other points of interest.
**BLUE LAKE ACCESS**

City owned property adjacent to the County's recycling center on South Chestnut Street should be developed as a small park and public access. Consistent with the concept plan shown on Exhibit 6-3, a small off-street parking lot can be constructed with a walkway leading to a canoe/kayak launch area and a fishing pier. A small shelter would provide shade as well as information about Blue Lake and area points of interest.

**DOG PARK**

La Crescent residents have expressed interest in having a local dog park. Sufficient land exists adjacent to the La Crescent Animal Rescue building on South Chestnut Street for construction of a dog park. Establishing a dog park will involve a number of steps including establishing a core group of community volunteers to help facilitate the process, identifying funding sources, designing and constructing the park, and establishing appropriate rules and regulations. Properly designed and operated, the La Crescent dog park can become another community gathering space that not only serves the local dog population but their human counterparts as well.

**PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE**

Highway 61 is a formidable barrier that separates most of La Crescent from the river and properties east of the roadway. Pedestrian and bicycle connectivity could be greatly enhanced by the construction of a new pedestrian/bike bridge over Highway 61 near 1st Street North. A bridge in this general location could create a safe and convenient link between downtown La Crescent and properties west of the highway with the east side and major regional trail connections.

**CREATE A MORE CONNECTED TRAIL SYSTEM**

La Crescent is a key hub for trails that will eventually link trails in southeast Minnesota with trails in southwest Wisconsin and well beyond. Exhibit 6-3 identifies the plan for local and regional trails. At the present time, Elm Street exists as a major north/south trail spine connecting the community parallel to Highway 61. Most other bike routes follow local roads with relatively low traffic volumes. The City in cooperation with Active Living La Crescent, the Houston County Trails Committee, the La Crosse Area Planning Committee and others are working to expand the local and regional trail system. The Wagon Wheel Trail and the Mississippi River Trail are two key regional and national trail segments that are currently under various stages of planning and development.

Concentrations of higher density housing are identified in Exhibit 6-3. Generally, existing and proposed trails and sidewalks are in close proximity to these areas. Given the concentrations of population in these neighborhoods, as future funds become available, the addition of sidewalks and trails near these areas should be a high priority.
WAGON WHEEL TRAIL

The Wagon Wheel trail is a key trail segment in eastern La Crescent that will eventually be a key link to the Root River Trail. The Root River Trail currently is a 42 mile route that terminates in the City of Houston, approximately 18 miles from La Crescent. Efforts are underway to identify a route and construct a Houston to La Crescent trail. When that occurs, riders can access the Root River State Trail in Fountain or the Harmony-Preston Valley State Trail in Harmony and ride to La Crescent, move on to La Crosse and access trails to other points of interest in southwest Wisconsin.

The initial phase of the Wagon Wheel Trail has received state and federal funding. Phase one will connect Shore Acres Road to the intersection of Sycamore and Main Street. This segment which traverses an expansive floodplain area passes City owned property that now houses a brush drop-off site and open storage by a private truss manufacturer. The truss manufacturer has use of the property on a lease basis. In the future, both this property and the brush drop-off site have the potential to be converted into a park. A park in this location could include camp sites and other amenities appealing to riders using local and regional trails.

The second phase of the Wagon Wheel trail will connect from Shore Acres Road to the West Channel Bridge. The final phase of the project will provide a grade separated connection from the north side of Highway 61 to the south side.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER TRAIL (MRT)

The Mississippi River Trail is one of the most significant bike- ways in the country. It follows a route along the river from Lake Itasca to the Gulf of Mexico passing directly through La Crescent. Much of the MRT route is on roadway shoulders and low volume roads. It maintains a close proximity to the river. Within the State of Minnesota alone, the trail meanders for almost 800 miles connecting 13 state parks and 70 cities.

La Crescent should continue to actively support the Mississippi River Trail. It is an important trail link for La Crescent residents and it can serve as a source of local commerce serving the needs of trail riders passing through town. La Crescent offers a unique option for trail riders to challenge themselves by deviating from the MRT to ride along the Apple Blossom Scenic Byway. The Apple Blossom Scenic Byway travels along Highway 29 for a total distance of almost 17 miles. Riders along the route can experience a climb of approximately 630 feet and panoramic views of the Mississippi River valley.

Silent Sports

Silent sports include running, cycling, paddling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and others. Many of La Crescent parks accommodate these uses. The City has the potential to provide designated areas for paddling activities including both canoeing and kayaking. A canoe launch is included as part of the plan on Blue Lake and the City should also pursue launching points on the creek near the Kistler Trailer Park.
ACQUIRE PARKS AS LA CRESCENT EXPANDS ITS BOUNDARIES

Historically, La Crescent has added population as areas adjacent to the community have been annexed and developed. The next logical extension of La Crescent’s boundaries is toward the southwest into the Crescent Valley area along County Road 6. This area is currently the home of a small park maintained by the township. Property adjacent to the township park has the potential to be a new community park serving La Crescent and the surrounding area. The site has sufficient size and appropriate topography for large field areas accommodating soccer, baseball and softball. As development extends into this area, La Crescent should work with land owners and developers to acquire sufficient land for a new neighborhood/community park. Exhibit 6-4 shows the general location of the future park site.

DEVELOP SPECIAL USE FACILITIES

As needs arise in the future, La Crescent should continue to develop special use facilities that although, not technically parks, provide recreation and community gathering opportunities. An example of such a facility is the community garden that exists in the northern part of town. The City should continue to work with property owners and non-profit entities such as churches to provide community garden sites in locations that are particularly convenient to La Crescent residents who lack sufficient property for backyard gardens.

CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE ESTABLISHED PARKS

The Recommended Actions chapter of this plan identifies recommendations to further develop and improve existing local parks. The City should continue its efforts to fully develop the La Crescent park system in a manner that meets local needs and does so with high quality facilities.