



## CHAPTER 11

# PARKS, GREENWAYS & NATURAL RESOURCES

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Parks, greenways, and natural resources play a major role in enhancing Springfield's quality of place. They create places that attract residents, investment, healthy lifestyles, and economic vitality. Through the preservation, protection, and enhancement of parks, water resources, the urban tree canopy, and other natural assets, Springfield can further establish itself as a lush, attractive community that is committed to environmental stewardship. This includes protection of native plant and wildlife habitats, improved water quality, and enhanced outdoor recreation opportunities and public gathering spaces. Ensuring equitable and safe access to parks, trails, and recreational amenities through a collaborative effort will be key to increasing quality of life for all residents. By leveraging its local natural resources and strengthening its connection to the Ozarks, Springfield will become a major outdoor destination in the nation and leader in fostering a healthy, environmentally integrated community.

*Look for these icons identifying theme-related strategies!*

COMMUNITY PHYSICAL IMAGE



ARTS, CULTURE & HISTORIC PRESERVATION



HEALTH & WELL-BEING



## GOAL 1: Establish a comprehensive trails network to enhance physical connections between Springfield's neighborhoods, natural areas, and key destinations.

### Forward SGF Top 10 CONNECTING TO NATURE



A key initiative of *Forward SGF* is to better connect residents with nature and recreational opportunities. Springfield's most significant natural areas, community parks, sports complexes, recreational facilities, and community and educational centers that draw residents and regional visitors should continue to be maintained and enhanced. Connections among destination amenities should be prioritized through a comprehensive trail network. Opportunities abound to promote the City's unified brand through signage, wayfinding, amenities, and landscaping with native plants. Highlighting natural landscape features prevalent in the local area, such as cliffs and boulders native field stone, caves, karst topography, streams and waterways, trees, and wildlife habitat areas, can create interesting and memorable landmarks that serve as navigation guides within the park system. By increasing connections to the natural environment, Springfield residents can lead healthier lifestyles and enjoy enhanced quality of place.

## 1.1 LEVERAGE AND ENHANCE OUR TRAIL SYSTEM

HEALTH & WELL-BEING



**Continue to expand Springfield's trail system by closing gaps and creating new trail alignments to increase access, resulting in a well-connected, comprehensive trail system.**

The City of Springfield, Park Board, Ozark Greenways, and Ozarks Transportation Organization, and other partners including private developers should continue to work together to improve trail connectivity through public private partnerships. Existing trail plans should be integrated and streamlined to provide for a focused regional approach for the development of a variety of trails as follows: paved, natural surface, rail-trails, gravel, and water trails. This effort could lead to one of the most robust and diverse trail systems in the country. Older existing parks should be enhanced through the addition of small loop trails around the perimeters, increasing the utility of these facilities while helping to increase sightlines and deter crime. In the long term, efforts should be made to connect Springfield's trail networks with regionwide efforts across southwest Missouri and even tying into northwest Arkansas, driving a wider campaign for outdoor lifestyles and ecotourism.

The City should continue to have the Springfield-Greene County Park Board and Ozark Greenways review all plats submittals for potential easement requirements. Greenway trails should have a minimum 30-foot easement. Neighborhoods adjacent to trails should have a minimum 15-foot easement for a trail connector.

### TRAIL BRANDING

As connections are formed, the City has another opportunity to apply its cohesive brand to new linkages, folding new trails seamlessly into the existing system. The branding strategy should incorporate the concept that trails are for "live, work, and play"—not just recreation, but for active transportation around the City. Improved wayfinding signage can help people begin to understand how to incorporate active transportation into their daily lives, commuting to work and to other daily errands and activities. Visual cues, such as walking and bicycle icons, should be employed throughout the system to teach residents about options for active commutes. Trailheads should serve as entry points to the overarching green space network, featuring amenities like water fountains, bathrooms, bike repair stations, maps, and more. These amenities can be codified in trail design guidelines that drive the look and feel of signage, trailheads, and other features.

### PRIORITIZING INVESTMENT BASED ON TRAIL USAGE

Usage of the system should be tracked through low-impact counters that can be installed at key locations. These should be programmed to monitor the frequency and type of use. From this data, an annual trail use profile and a heat map should be generated to help the City understand where the heaviest used trails are and prioritize maintenance and investment. One example of investment based on usage are the OZ Trails in Northwest Arkansas.

### CHADWICK FLYER GREENWAY TRAIL

The City of Springfield is currently in the process of working with Ozark Greenways, Springfield-Greene County Park Board, City Utilities, and the Ozarks Transportation Organization to construct the Chadwick Flyer Greenway Trail. This rail-to-trail conversion project is planned to stretch from downtown Springfield to the City of Ozark, providing a key connection on the east side of Lake Springfield past the James River Freeway. This is a regional opportunity and a potential economic driver for the City. For it to occur, (1) BNSF Railway would first need to dispose of the railroad tracks, (2) the City, Parks Board, and/or Ozark Greenways would need to claim the railroad right-of-way, and (3) the trail would need to be constructed. An engineering study of the old rail bridge over the James River just north of the Veteran's Cemetery may also be needed. Current regional efforts are focused on the trail segments between Sunshine Street in Springfield to the Ozark Community Center in Ozark. Greene County partners are currently focused on the segment from Sunshine Street to the county line. Within the next two years, the trail portion from Kissick Avenue to the county line will be under construction and the donation of the BNSF rail line from Sunshine Street to Kissick Avenue to the City of Springfield should be complete. For additional discussion of this project, see the Lake Springfield Subarea Framework.

### OZ TRAILS

#### Northwest Arkansas

Since 2007, the Walton Family Foundation, has contributed \$74 million to support the construction of 163 miles of natural-surface trails and paved paths in Northwest Arkansas. The foundation commissioned several studies to gauge the impact of their investment and found that the economic impact of bicycling in the greater Bentonville region was \$137 million in 2017 alone. Between 2017 and 2018, mountain bike tourists visited Northwest Arkansas at a rate similar to rival destinations like Oregon and British Columbia. Residents' cycling rates also rose above the national average, with 27% of locals riding bikes six or more days over the last year. This increased bike activity was reported to have contributed to about \$86 million in annual health benefits in 2017.

This impactful undertaking to expand Northwest Arkansas' trail system could not have been done without community partnerships. In addition to Walton Family Foundation, this includes the local nonprofit organization, NWA Trailblazers, which helps build and maintain the trail network, as well as OZ Trails, which helps showcase the development of the trail network to grow the local rider base and attract visitors across the region.

### IMPACTS OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic affected numerous facets of daily life for residents across the U.S. and made apparent the importance of a vital local parks and recreation system in communities. The NRPA found that 83% of U.S. adults turned to exercise to maintain their mental and physical health, and to do that, they turned to the resources that already existed in their local communities. According to the 2021 Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the Park Board found outdoor parks and trail use was two to three times normal, and golf course use was up 20 to 25%. This accentuates the importance of parks, greenways, and natural areas for community well-being and quality of life.

## 1.2 INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY AND SAFETY EQUITABLY

HEALTH & WELL-BEING



**Equitably increase the accessibility and safety of sidewalks, trails, transit, and bike infrastructure to better connect neighborhoods, parks, natural areas, and other key destinations.**

Research has found ties between income inequality, access to green spaces, and life expectancy. In rural areas where green space abounds, those at the high and low ends of the income spectrum have a similar life expectancy. In urban areas, however, the gap widens significantly. According to a 2016 study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, men with the lowest incomes are expected to live 14.6 years less than those with the highest incomes, and the difference is 10.1 years for women.

Creating accessible spaces open to all, as well as improving multimodal connectivity and safety between parks, natural areas, neighborhoods, and other key community destinations will help level the playing field and increase overall community health. Providing access to green spaces such as parks and natural areas supports the mental health of residents by enhancing opportunities for social interaction, strengthening the social fabric of neighborhoods, and helping to reduce stress, which are important predictors of well-being. The School-Park concept is a notable example of creating destination areas worth making connections to that also enhance neighborhood vitality.

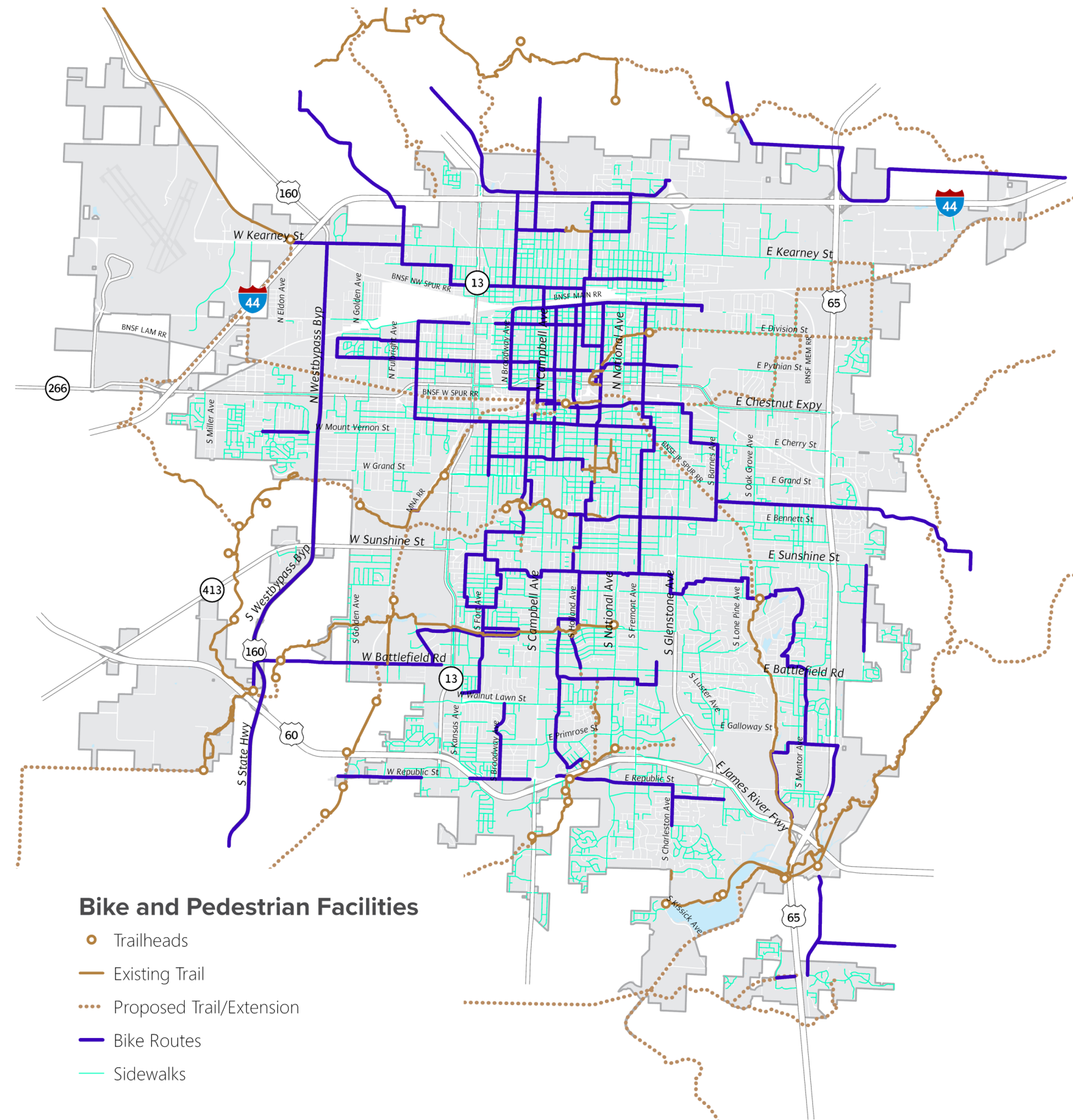
## COMPLETE STREETS POLICY

Complete Streets are designed and operated to prioritize safety, comfort, and access for all people who use the street, especially those whose needs have not been met historically through a traditional transportation approach. Complete Streets are designed to balance safety and convenience for all road users in the entire right-of-way. The City has a Complete Streets policy, adopted in 2014, that should continue to be reviewed and implemented to ensure multimodal accessibility and safety.

This policy and other similar tools can be used to negotiate for amenities to be added when new developments are in the planning phase, leveraging private funding for public benefit. Elements to accommodate all users and preserve the environment should be considered best practices.

Additional discussion regarding Complete Streets and examples of how components of complete streets can be incorporated in improvement plans can be found in **Chapter 9: Transportation and Mobility.**

Example Complete Street Cross Section



### Bike and Pedestrian Facilities

- Trailheads
- Existing Trail
- ⋯ Proposed Trail/Extension
- Bike Routes
- Sidewalks

Forward SGF Top 10  
**UN GAP THE MAP**



The City and Park Board should continue to work with Ozark Greenways to champion the “UnGapTheMap” campaign. This key initiative is underway to raise money to close gaps in the trail system, creating a comprehensive, highly connected system of trails across Springfield. The planned system contains over 140 miles of trails, building on the 77 miles already existing in the City. It aims to connect residents to nature, improve public health, and create connections to community destinations.

### FILLING IN NETWORK GAPS

The City of Springfield prioritizes sidewalks for safety and health benefits, making an ongoing effort to install new sidewalks in areas of the City where they are missing. Many large gaps in the sidewalk system exist in older areas where sidewalks were not required when they were originally developed. Requests for sidewalks are considered and tracked by the Public Works department, and priority is given to areas within half a mile of an elementary school or those lacking a sidewalk on either side of the road. The City’s Public Works department has an online form where requests can be submitted.

Aside from the user-generated requests, the City should study the existing sidewalk and trails map and actively prioritize multimodal capital improvements in those areas. A holistic look should be taken at these connections as part of the effort to combine regional trail efforts, incorporating the guidance laid out in the Greenway Trail Plan for 2040 as well as the Trails, Pathways, and Greenways Plan in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Low-cost projects, such as restriping surface streets to accommodate bike lanes, could be beneficial to link parks and greenways as part of a holistic green space network. Partnerships should be sought to fund higher-cost projects. To increase equity in trail and sidewalk access, this analysis should be combined with demographic statistics of the City. Further prioritization should be given to areas of lower-income residents.

### Accessibility and Safety Considerations

Safety considerations should include better lighting, enhanced signage, wider trails and sidewalks (10 to 12 feet) where possible, enhanced lane definition, and improved sight lines. The City should incorporate CPTED principles as described in **Strategy 4.7: Leverage Natural Features for Public Spaces** in this chapter and consider expanding Park Ranger patrols (part of the Park Board) as staffing allows to add a layer of safety. Grade-separated crossings should be used whenever possible depending on existing conditions and anticipated costs. Americans with Disability Act (ADA) improvements should be made to ensure everyone can use sidewalks easily.

When considering water crossings, bridges above flood elevations should be prioritized. Existing low water crossings should be eliminated, and new low water crossings should not be built as they become barriers in winter and high-water runoff times.

## 1.3 IMPROVE WAYFINDING

**Improve wayfinding to direct residents and visitors to Springfield’s key parks, trails, recreational facilities, and natural areas.**

Signage improvements and wayfinding should be incorporated into City parks in partnership with the Park Board following recommendations from the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. In addition, the City should consider additional strategic locations for wayfinding outside of parks to direct users to key trail connections and community destinations. The unified brand for the City should include clear, informative signage. Signage should be welcoming and informational, guiding residents and visitors alike to different amenities. The City should work with design experts to ensure the signs are not overcomplicated. For example, signs could be color-coded based on the primary use of the trail. Symbols should be simple, yet effective, so users can get relevant information at a glance. Unified sign design across the City should consistently and clearly identify entries to parks, trails, and open spaces, and help users locate themselves within the greater trails and open space system.

## 1.4 INCREASE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

**Pursue community engagement and education opportunities to gain support for safe infrastructure for active modes of transportation and trail system enhancements.**

An educational campaign done in partnership between the City’s Department of Public Information and Civic Engagement and Ozark Greenways should be undertaken to show residents the potential of a “finished” cohesive trail system and the benefits to quality of life and health in a community. Example cities of a similar size with extensive trails and open space inventories include Fort Collins, CO, and Eugene, OR, which would be good to showcase in this campaign. An economic return component should be researched, showing synergy between active transportation routes and the businesses that lie along them.

The campaign should also have a safety focus, showing how removing barriers to active transportation can encourage greater use. The existing SGF Yields awareness campaign should be reinvigorated to educate residents to be more pedestrian friendly. A component should be added about trail etiquette and sidewalk safety. Ozark Greenways’ and SGF Yields education and advocacy efforts could be further integrated to increase consistent messaging to the community. “Bike, Walk and Wheel Week” is a specific program opportunity that could be further supported by the City and Park Board.

The City should pursue a traffic study to collect data for this campaign—demonstrating how different scenarios for road transformations could help residents understand the active transportation network. Explaining road diets and traffic calming strategies to residents could help ease potential reluctance to these changes. The Missouri chapter of the American Planning Association has a lending library of traffic calming demonstration materials that could be used to test practices on a trial basis. The City should also study the feasibility of creating separate paths/trails as opposed to sidewalks parallel to existing roads.

## 1.5 PERFORM A TRAIL INVENTORY

**Perform a detailed trail inventory to assist in the development of a trail maintenance plan.**

This inventory should address existing pavement type, condition, and width of each trail, along with dangerous low-water crossings, ADA accessibility issues, trailhead locations, neighborhood connectors, and amenities such as lighting, seating, restrooms, and more. This inventory will build off the Parks and Recreation Master Plan published in 2021 with additional detail to help the City and Park Board prioritize maintenance and identify gaps in amenities.

## GOAL 2: Equitably integrate quality public spaces throughout the City.

### 2.1 COHESIVE PLANNING VISION AND INVESTMENT

**Invest in and implement a cohesive planning vision to ensure quality parks, greenways, and open spaces for the long term.**

The City of Springfield has an impressive legacy of planning. Its plans are community driven with a foundation in resident input. The City should build and capitalize on that legacy by continuing to invest in quality long-term planning for parks, greenways, and open space. The City should coordinate with the Springfield-Greene County Park Board to implement the recently adopted Springfield-Greene County 2021 Parks and Recreation Master Plan, as well as the Greenway Trail Plan for 2040 and other relevant plans.

### COMBINING PLANNING EFFORTS

Partnerships and collaborative discussion should be initiated among the various groups completing planning work. A trail-specific master plan for the region was listed as a goal in Vision 20/20. Existing plans include Ozarks Transportation Organization's Regional Trail Study, Trail Spring's Dirt 66 Project, and Miller Park at Fellows Lake Master Plan. Combining efforts and taking a comprehensive look at all ideas and efforts is essential to providing a clear, prioritized path forward and capturing implementable ideas from all the work done to this point. A central repository with links to all current planning efforts should be created on the City's website.

### RELIABLE FUNDING STREAMS

As identified in the 2021 Parks and Recreation Master Plan, there is an urgent need to secure reliable funding streams to continue to maintain, support, and reinvest in the Springfield-Greene County park system. The City should pursue dedicated, long-term fundraising sources to increase revenue for parks, greenways, and open space improvements. A public education campaign around a potential Parks Tax, ways to donate, or other fundraising efforts, can also help rally support around parks and recreation in the City and get residents directly involved in investing in their park system. Emphasis should be placed on the value of parks, trails, and open space to the community, complementing quality commercial areas, public areas, and neighborhoods by providing mental and physical health benefits as well as meaningful connections to public spaces for residents and visitors. (For further discussion of funding opportunities, see Goal 5 of this chapter.)

### 2.2 REIMAGINE AND MAINTAIN WHAT WE HAVE

**Maintain and enhance Springfield's existing facilities to preserve their quality.**

The Springfield-Greene County Park Board is one of very few agencies to achieve the National Recreation and Park Association's Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) accreditation. Agencies that achieve this coveted label have demonstrated quality of operation, management, and service to the community. Proper maintenance is critical to uphold the quality of the City's facilities and services and should be made a priority. Planning actions and strategies identified by City-sponsored plans should consider short- and long-term maintenance costs and efforts. By making an appropriate investment now, the City will better preserve its resources while preventing more costly, larger projects when facilities are allowed to fail. In line with the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the City should ensure park and recreational facilities are

upgraded equitably across the City based on need rather than location.

As presented in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the Park Board generates lower revenues compared to peer agencies and thus spends a higher percentage on operating expenses. The City should continue its countywide sales tax specific to parks, greenways, and trail projects and consider increasing it in the future. In addition, partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, health providers, and other City agencies could help close the funding and personnel gaps. Public-private partnerships should be explored to open up opportunities for funding and labor currently outside the City's reach.

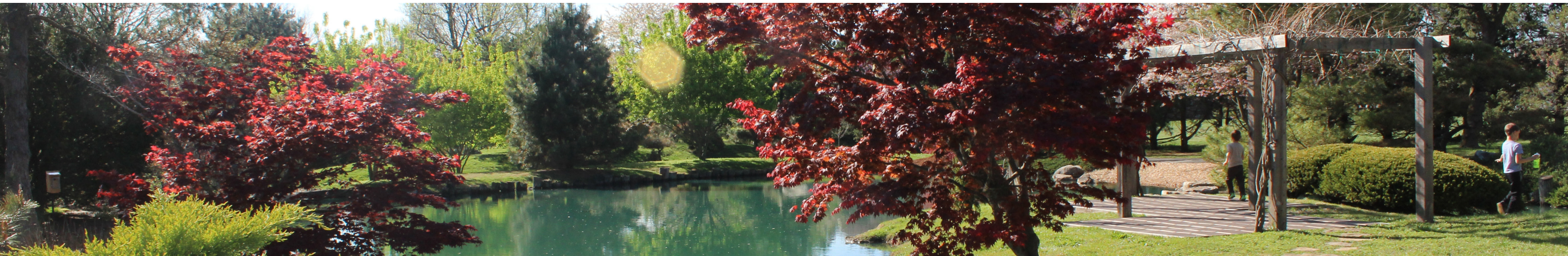
### MAXIMIZING FACILITY USAGE

As improvements are made, it is important to consider the flexibility of existing spaces to maximize use of facilities for activities and programs across user groups. The City should work with the Springfield-Greene County Park Board to reassess the utilization rates of existing parks and amenities and remove underutilized park space to better allocate its park

funding. Underutilized facilities should be repurposed to fit community needs and desires, or decommissioned and allowed to return to a more natural condition. Also, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles should be incorporated during all park planning or renovation projects to ensure spaces are safe places for community members to gather (see **Strategy 4.7: Leverage Natural Features for Public Spaces** for more details).

### CREATE AND IMPLEMENT LAND MANAGEMENT PLANS

Green space can include both formal and informal places in an urban landscape. There is an opportunity to better preserve natural resources by defining the types of spaces across the City and codifying the look and feel of these different spaces in a land management plan with design guidelines and native species lists. Informal open space that keeps a natural look and feel can provide residents with the intrinsic benefits of outdoor space while fostering biodiversity, soil health, water retention, and lower carbon emissions.



## 2.3 EVALUATE AND ENHANCE PARK SERVICE AREAS

HEALTH & WELL-BEING



**Working with the Springfield-Greene County Park Board, invest in park facilities in areas currently underserved by the parks system.**

Building off the parkland distribution analysis undertaken as part of the *Forward SGF* process and the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the City and Park Board should identify opportunities to develop new parks and fill service gaps within the existing parks system. This will help ensure all residents are within walking distance of a park. Equitable distribution of high-quality outdoor amenities will create opportunities for all residents to lead healthier lifestyles, even those that have been historically underserved by the parks system. Along with traditional parks, concepts such as linear parks, bike parks, dog parks, community gardens, urban agriculture areas, green space areas, and interpretive opportunities should be explored where feasible.

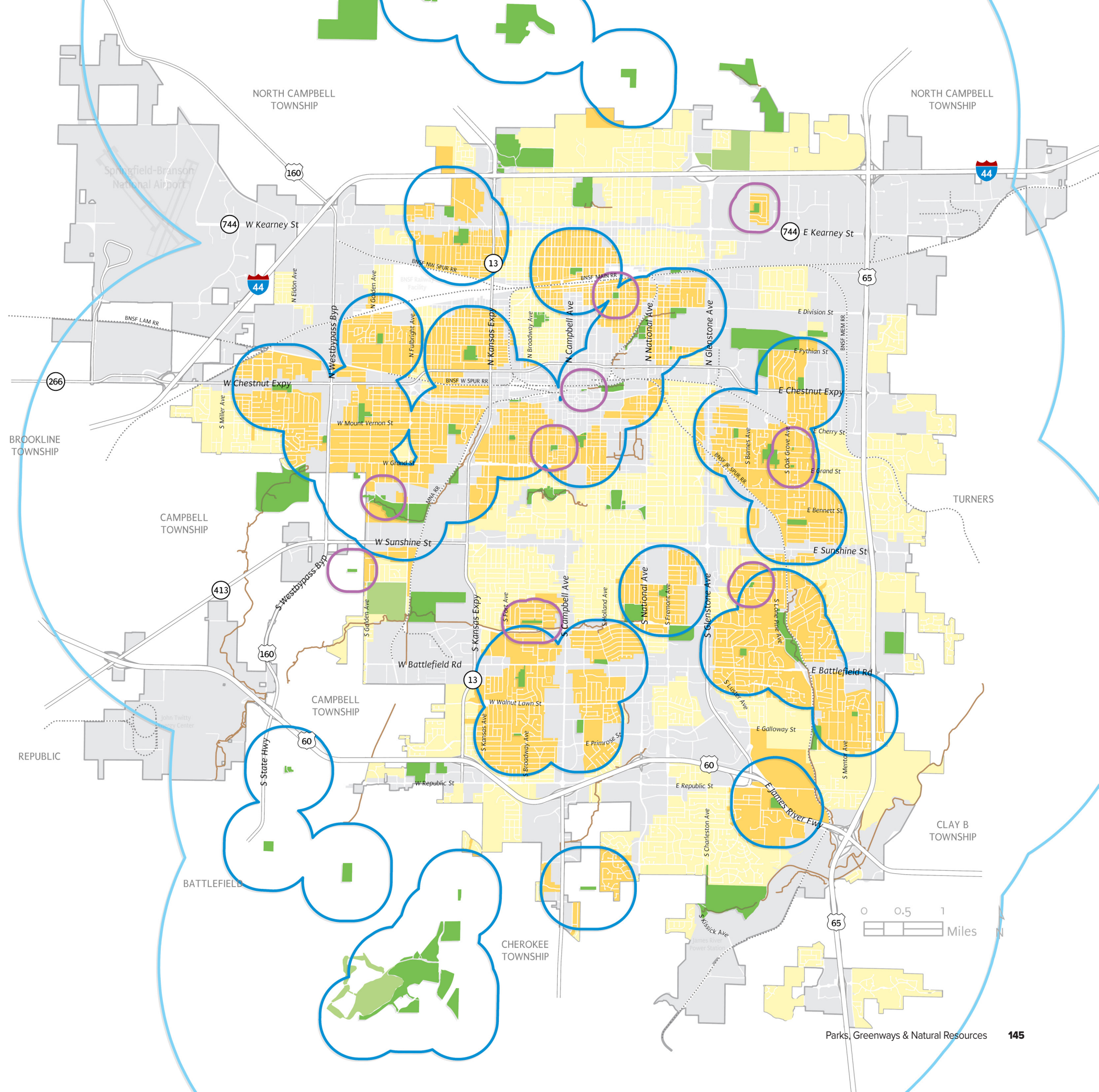
When assessing areas to convert to parkland to fill gaps, public interest is paramount. Neighborhood engagement can be the most important piece to creating lasting facilities that will not fall into disrepair or be abandoned. The City should work with residents to create facilities they desire, fostering a sense of ownership and stewardship. Environmental and cultural assessments should be undertaken on sites that might require cleanup or contain potential artifacts.

The following map shows the current distribution of parks and community recreation facilities as defined by National Recreation Parks Association (NRPA) guidelines and metrics introduced in Vision 20/20. The Springfield-Greene County Park Board manages less parkland than other peer agencies, but it has a higher proportion of programmed space, according to findings from the Parks and Recreation Master Plan published in 2021.

### Parks Coverage

- 3 Mile Parks Service Areas
- 0.5 Mile Parks Service Areas
- 0.25 Mile Parks Service Areas
- Parks
- Golf Course
- Trails

- Residential Placetypes Within 0.25 or 0.5 Park Service Area
- Residential Placetype Outside 0.25 and 0.5 Park Service Area





The following should be considered for developing park facilities in coordination with the Springfield-Greene County Park Board:

- Purchase or secure a conservation easement on vacant or underutilized properties for reuse as pocket parks or green spaces for public use. This should be done in coordination with the Springfield Land Bank proposed in Goal 3 of **Chapter 7: Housing and Neighborhoods**. A citywide analysis should identify the best uses of the available land (e.g., public park, wildlife habitat, stormwater management, or others) and propose areas that could be either sold or purchased to best meet the City's needs.
- Identify vacant or seldom used rights-of-way for conversion to linear parks or greenways.
- Identify opportunities to expand the Schools and Parks Are Reaching Communities (SPARC) program. As part of this partnership with Springfield Public Schools, the Park Board oversees 22 School Park sites (as of 2022) where its staff provide sports programs, before and after school care, clubs throughout the school year, and childcare on days when schools are closed due to snow or holidays. The SPARC program allows for additional park growth with little expense to the City while providing equity and availability throughout the community.

- Identify partner organizations, businesses, and institutions that can convert underutilized open space areas on their property into programmed park space.
- Refer to existing water plans (stormwater master plan, watershed management plan, public utility plan, and more) to identify places that are critical for the protection of the drinking water supply, water quality, flood prevention, aquatic wildlife habitat, and community resiliency. These places should be evaluated for use as parks when they become available for purchase.
- Acquire land in central Springfield to create additional mini and neighborhood park types to provide access to park space for residents in the underserved residential area.
- Target additional mini and neighborhood parks in the south and southeast portions of Springfield, as well as Metropolitan and Urban Community Parks to service the residential neighborhoods east of U.S. Route 65.
- Acquire properties where the urban heat island effect could be most effectively diminished through the use of tree plantings and the addition of micro-forests in pocket parks.

- Undertake future study and evaluation of park properties to identify opportunities for new investment around activity spines, trailheads, and places where parks and trails intersect with existing or emerging neighborhood nodes. Trailside and parkside redevelopment and other activity node planning would be intended to create Quality Places in the City.
  - Conduct a wildlife inventory to identify species that live or migrate through the city. Using that information could identify critical locations within the city for travel corridors, breeding grounds, and habitat nodes. These areas should be added to the park system as nature parks when the land becomes available to purchase.
- Maintenance funding will be critical to consider with any expansion of parkland within City limits. Additional partnerships similar to those with the Springfield Public School District should be pursued wherever possible. It will be critical for the City and the Springfield-Greene County Park Board to continue to assess the park inventory to determine where funds should be best spent.

## 2.4 ENSURE A CONNECTION TO NATURE IN NEW DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT

HEALTH & WELL-BEING 

**The City should ensure new development and redevelopment respects the natural environment and provides usable and accessible quality open space areas.**

Preserving passive open spaces, such as the City's urban forest, provides benefits to wildlife and biodiversity as well as to City residents. Maximizing green spaces by focusing on soil health, native plants, biodiversity, and water absorption can help reduce the City's heat island effect, as well as ensuring clean air and water. Significant natural landscape features such as streams, wetlands, and trees should be preserved and enhanced within site designs. Developers creating new facilities and reconfiguring existing sites can provide access to existing recreational amenities and natural areas, along with further opportunities for passive open space.

### DEVELOPER-DRIVEN PARK CREATION

The City's Subdivision Regulations presently do not require developers to dedicate land to parks. The City should consider requiring a minimum amount of programmed parkland to be dedicated based on the projected number of residents to occupy the subdivision, or a fee-in-lieu. This will help ensure the creation of parks with new neighborhood growth within an adopted framework of parks needs in the community.

### NATURAL, RECREATION, AND PARK AMENITIES MENU

To ensure that the park sites within new subdivisions adequately serve the recreation needs of neighborhood residents, the City should consider establishing a menu of park and open space activation items for the developer to choose from. A menu of items would also ensure a base level of park, trail, and open space activation items while providing developers with the flexibility needed to customize parks and open space for their target market. This type of menu can be integrated into the City's Code of Ordinances to help guide desired park and open space development in new subdivisions.

### MAXIMIZE ECOSYSTEM BENEFIT OF GREEN SPACE

The City has lost most of its contiguous woodlands, prairies, wetlands, and riparian areas to development over the last 100 years. A coordinated effort to restore these ecosystems should be a priority to enhance natural systems in the City. Efforts should be undertaken to maintain contiguous wildlife habitat wherever possible. Before approval, any new development should be cross-checked against existing master plans to see if any of the land within the development has been identified as important for hazard mitigation/resiliency, stormwater management, drinking water supply, trail connectivity, or other priority uses.

**GOAL 3: Promote sports, recreation, and ecotourism through branding and facility upgrades to establish Springfield as a gateway into the Ozarks, while boosting the local economy.**

**SPRINGFIELD'S AMENITIES**

Springfield's unique natural amenities, public parks, recreational facilities, and trails should be leveraged to boost the City's economy and tourism. The City's numerous amenities such as the zoo, the ice park, the farm park, botanical gardens, skate park, natural resource areas, sports facilities, and more present a system boasting great variety that is used by an enthusiastic resident base. A unified brand highlighting the City's proximity to beautiful outdoor amenities can promote Springfield as the starting point for experiencing the region's natural attractions and landmarks. By reinvesting in the City's existing parks, trails, and natural areas, creating new cutting-edge facilities, and marketing these assets, Springfield can provide a robust variety of recreational and educational opportunities that attract both residents and visitors from across the Midwest and drive tourism in Springfield's economy.

**3.1 CREATE A UNIFIED BRAND**

**Develop a unified brand that establishes Springfield as a destination, leveraging the community's recreational amenities and proximity to regional natural assets.**

The Ozarks features geographical, geological, and ecological assets unlike anywhere else in the country. This unique mix should be at the forefront of a cohesive, citywide branding campaign to draw people to Springfield. This branding effort should be spread among different City entities to collectively promote Springfield's assets and guide residents and visitors to them. It should also help foster pride of place for residents and encourage them to invest in the unique opportunities available in their city. The City should partner with the Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce to help publicize and popularize the brand. Ways the private sector can help expand visitors' experience in Springfield should also be explored.

As part of *Forward SGF* engagement, the phrase "Basecamp of the Ozarks" was frequently cited by community members as a potential tagline for future branding efforts.

The recreation and ecotourism opportunities located in and around Springfield will be at the forefront of this branding effort. The Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau produces a 140-page, full-color, area guide, map and business directory, this effort is instrumental in promoting the city and should continue to be expanded, posted on local websites, and updated regularly to steer visitors to amenities in the City and within easy driving distance.

Specific groups of visitors to target include those who travel to Springfield for sports events or conferences. Targeted materials can help visitors realize what other amenities the region offers and help them decide to make a weekend of it to explore trails and other opportunities.

**3.2 SUPPORT OUR TEAMS**

**Support local sports by celebrating Springfield's teams and enhancing their facilities.**

The City aims to host an average of 50 events and tournaments annually. This is only sustainable if additional long-term reinvestment is made in sports facility infrastructure. The City is poised to receive \$40 Million to improve area sports facilities in the coming years and the recently acquired the Fieldhouse Sportscenter, a four court basketball and volleyball facility, with the ability to expand and increase sports tourism opportunities. Other notable Springfield sports facilities include Cooper Sports Complex, a top youth sports complex and a top public tennis facility in the Midwest, along with being home to the Springfield Lasers Tennis franchise. Investing in traditional sports should be balanced with encouraging emerging sports, such as facilities that can accommodate mountain biking, pickleball, lacrosse, disc golf, rock climbing, and more.

**VALUE OF SPORTS TOURISM**

Awareness should be spread about the direct value of sports tourism related to the regional, state, and national league sports teams that come to Springfield, including the National Christian Homeschool Basketball Championships and various state and college tournaments that use Park Board venues. In 2021, the revenue from sports tourism was conservatively estimated at \$8.8 million annually, creating 56,964 room nights, 6% of all occupied rooms per year.

**SPORTS TOURISM STUDY**

The Greater Springfield Area Sports Commission contracted a Sports Tourism Study. The City, Park Board, and Greene County should work with regional partners to implement the top four recommendations from that study:

- Create an anchor facility such as an indoor sports complex.
- Install turf for Lake Country Soccer Complex.
- Install turf for baseball and softball complexes and construct additional baseball-specific facilities if it is determined to be a priority sport.
- Rebuild and improve the BMX track in partnership with other biking initiatives.

Partnerships should be sought with Springfield Public Schools and the local universities toward a shared sports program goal. This is an advantageous partnership that could allow all entities to reduce costs.







## COSMO PARK

Columbia, MO

Columbia, MO budgets for parks maintenance and small renovation projects annually—in fiscal year (FY) 2021, \$115,000 was set aside. The City funds many of its parks capital improvement projects through its park sales tax, which was initially approved in 2000 and can only be used for local parks. The current park sales tax rate in Columbia is ¼ of 1%. Half of that is a permanent tax, which generates about \$3 million per year. The other half is renewable, with a sunset—it was last renewed in November 2021 by a resounding voter majority and is now set to expire in March 2032. The permanent portion of the tax is used to fund parks department operations and to pay off long-term debt from land purchases. The renewable portion is the main funding source for parks-related capital projects.

Cosmo Park is the largest park in Columbia, hosting a myriad of local, regional, and state sporting events each year. Its 533 acres, located on the northwest side of the city and built on the site of a former municipal airport, comprise a skate park, dog parks, multiple fitness trails, lighted sports fields (including 19 soccer fields, six baseball/softball fields, four tee-ball fields, and more), fishing lakes, playgrounds, a golf course, and more, serving as a place for the community to come together in many different ways. Developing this resource has taken place largely over the past 15 years, with the first fields being built in 2005.

## 3.3 BUILD ON SPRINGFIELD'S RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Expand on the variety of recreation types offered in or near Springfield as a regional draw for tourism.**

Formalizing connections among Springfield's assets can create a more "finished" or complete system that becomes a regional draw for endurance athletes or everyday commuters. Creating connections between places like Hammons Field and Jordan Valley Creek provide these opportunities, as well as a planned paved trail system connecting Fellows Lake, the Dirt 66 trail system, Jordan Creek, the James River, Lake Springfield, and other landmarks. The City should continue to foster the mutually beneficial relationship with City Utilities, which leases land for Lake Springfield Park, Valley Water Mill Park, and Dan Kinney Park, providing public buffer lands for enhanced recreational use and trail connections. The City can also capitalize on and market collective recreational experiences by creating events where people could attend sporting events, socialize, and participate in recreational activities in one place.

## SPORTING OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities should be sought to expand sporting opportunities into Springfield's parks and recreation system. Examples include archery, esports, pickleball, water sports, BMX cycling, and mountain biking. Mountain Biking is rapidly growing, and many residents, of all ages, desire to see more natural surface trails added into the trail system both in and outside of city limits. The City, Park Board, and Ozark Greenways should continue to foster relationships with the National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA), Springfield Youth Cycling Club (SYCC), TrailSpring, and Missouri Off-Road Cyclists (MORC) when pursuing opportunities to expand mountain biking for residents and visitors alike. The SYCC is the largest team in the state and took home the 2021 state championship. Additional areas for expansion include natural playgrounds, adventure parks with innovative features to replace outdated equipment, and bike parks and pump tracks for riders of all ages to build skills.

## TRANSFORM THE QUARRY

The Conco Companies Quarry, located in southeast Springfield at Republic Road and Luster Avenue, presents a unique large-scale redevelopment opportunity. Approximately one square mile in size, the site has been actively used to mine limestone gravel for concrete and other uses. Its perimeter features tall cliffs with portions of the site lying 100 feet below the surrounding grade.

When the Quarry retires, which is expected to occur in the next 20 to 30 years, the City should look into incremental ways to encourage high quality development, potentially with a recreational element that builds on the one-of-a-kind character of the site. With the expansion of Sequiota Park and the development of the Chadwick Flyer Greenway, possibilities for this property abound.

The Southeast Springfield Development Study completed in 2001 considered dense and mixed-use urban development, including park space and water features due to its size, low grade, integrity, location, and access. The City should update this study to reassess the most feasible future uses for the site, taking into consideration recent surrounding development, such as the Galloway Creek mixed-use development along Lone Pine Avenue. This planning effort should build on the Our Galloway project recommendations around increasing public safety, protecting the natural environment, enhancing the image of the area, and more. Creative uses that generate activity and support regional recreation and tourism should also be considered, such as an adventure park integrated into park and water features. It should be noted that substantial road improvements would need to take place to support intensive redevelopment of the site.

## 3.4 ORGANIZE ENTICING EVENTS

**Organize and promote events and festivals to draw visitors and residents of all backgrounds to Springfield to celebrate the City.**

Community events and festivals provide great opportunities for Springfield's residents to gather and socialize, celebrate local culture, and expand the City's tourism. The City should continue to organize and promote events, including the pursuit of the following:

- Establish a City event planner under the Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement, who is charged with organizing Springfield events and festivals for all age groups, in partnership with the Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, Downtown Springfield Association, Commercial Street, private organizers and other partners. Examples of event types include arts and crafts, families and children, music, and beer festivals
- Host events and festivals geared towards attracting and retaining the younger population, including high schoolers, university students and young professionals, such as VisionCon, which is in the works.
- Build on the Community Image Fund supported by revenue raised from special events.
- Work with neighborhood associations and the local business, social and nonprofit sectors to host and/or promote festivals to celebrate Springfield's unique culture and identity (current examples include Culture Fest, Route 66 Festival).

## GOAL 4: Ensure sustainable growth and environmental stewardship by conserving the City's natural resources, while fostering a sense of community responsibility and pride through education and immersive experiences.

### 4.1 INCREASE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND PROTECTIONS

HEALTH & WELL-BEING



**Continue to protect wildlife habitats and natural resources through property acquisition, conservation efforts, and ecological restoration.**

The City of Springfield is part of the natural landscape of the Ozarks creating an "urban ecosystem" that contains not only natural resources and systems, but also human adaptations to them, such as street trees and stormwater infrastructure. The City should protect, preserve, and enhance natural areas and open spaces that are of local, regional, and statewide significance; ensure long-term stewardship of these areas; and improve the community's access to and interaction with these areas.

Many area groups are committed to environmental stewardship, and strong partnerships are already in place across Springfield. The City works closely with the Watershed Committee of the Ozarks, Ozark Greenways, the James River Basin Partnership, Missouri Department of Conservation, Master Naturalists, University Extension, Friends of the Garden, and the Springfield Greene County Health Department on such issues and should continue to build and grow its relationships.

The first part of conserving the City's resources is identifying what it owns. The City should inventory public open spaces to identify portions of parks and trail corridors to be managed as wildlife habitats for specific species, riparian corridors for water quality and aquatic health, areas that support pollinators, such as monarch butterflies, or natural areas (prairie or woodland). These areas would be subject to management plans to guide long-term maintenance and protection.

#### WILDLIFE PROTECTION ORDINANCE

The City should consider adopting a wildlife protection ordinance that restricts public entry into targeted wildlife habitats during breeding times, being as specific possible about areas that should be restricted and the species that need to be protected. The City should also coordinate with naturalists working at the Springfield Conservation Nature Center, the Missouri Wildlife Rescue Center, and the Missouri Department of Conservation for potential areas and species for which this effort would be beneficial.

This same goal could also be accomplished via a wildlife habitat overlay district added to the City's code. The goal of a wildlife habitat overlay district is to reduce habitat fragmentation from the subdivision of land and/or development. If used to guide the layout of new residential subdivisions, it can determine where the open space should be, often linking unfragmented blocks of forest and connecting overland corridors. Overlay zoning is useful in enabling a city to impose additional standards on specific resources without amending the base zoning ordinance defining uses or allowed densities.

This approach is useful in protecting landscape elements that cross base district lines and can be the most useful too in protecting long-term habitat connectivity.

#### STREAM BUFFERING

Stream buffers are vegetated areas along and adjacent to streams where clearing, grading, filling, and other development activities are limited or prohibited. The City should build on its extensive stream buffer requirements to improve the health of the buffers and look for expansion areas. Protecting riparian, or streamside, areas improves water quality by filtering stormwater pollutants, protects riverbanks from erosion, cools the water temperature, and provides food and habitat for wildlife and aquatic life. Improved wetlands can also enhance recreational areas. Interpretive signs and increased access could help better connect residents and visitors with streams. The Wilson's Creek Riparian Project is an ongoing effort to implement a conservation easement along the City of Springfield-owned property in hopes of restoring the natural state of Wilson's Creek (see adjacent callout for more information).

#### STORMWATER ACQUISITION PROGRAM

The Stormwater Acquisition Program should be implemented and expanded on to monitor flood-prone zones and mark areas for future development as green space. The City has partnered with the Park Board and Ozark Greenways to create many of the City's most beloved greenway trails through this mechanism. Stormwater bond issue funds allocated for this program are used to make voluntary acquisitions of flood prone properties as well as undeveloped areas in floodplain and sinkhole areas and along stream corridors. Since 1993, over \$12 million has been utilized for these property acquisitions.

### EROSION PROTECTION AND SEDIMENT CONTROL

Erosion is of particular interest due to the karst geology of the region, meaning the bedrock is full of cracks, fractures, and holes that have been dissolved over time. The City should consult the Missouri soil survey produced by the National Cooperative Soil Survey, part of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, that would provide best management practices to inform efforts to manage soil sustainability and protect water quality. The City should strive to keep its erosion and sediment control manual, flood control and water quality protection manual, and design standards for public improvements up to date.

#### PROTECT AGAINST INVASIVE SPECIES

Invasive species threaten the health of native populations by out-competing or preying on native species. Protecting our ecosystem against the impacts of invasive species will require a coordinated effort between multiple agencies and organizations. Beyond protection from invasive species, mitigating the impact of existing invasive species is a critical component of ecosystem stewardship that will allow native species to thrive. The Missouri Department of Conservation's posted information on invasive and nuisance species should be referenced to reinforce City efforts.

### 4.2 PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

HEALTH & WELL-BEING



**Promote sustainable growth by incentivizing private developers to use environmentally sensitive development strategies.**

The City should continue to offer incentives for projects that achieve Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver or higher designation for buildings and consider expansion of incentives for green infrastructure and low impact design (LID). Other systems include the Institute for Sustainable Infrastructure (ISI)'s Envision framework for infrastructure and Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI)'s SITES rating system for landscapes.

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources Division of Energy provides information on its website about funding opportunities and incentives that may be used as a resource. In addition to incentives, the City should consider adding more stringent requirements for green infrastructure, stormwater management, tree plantings, and other environmental best practices. Developments should be encouraged to incorporate green roofs, particularly in multifamily residential, commercial, or civic uses. For further discussion of sustainable development practices and infrastructure, see Goal 2 of **Chapter 10: Infrastructure and Community Facilities**.

### WILSON'S CREEK RIPARIAN PROJECT

Springfield, Missouri

The Wilson's Creek Riparian Project is an ongoing effort to implement a conservation easement along City of Springfield-owned property in hopes of restoring the natural state of Wilson's Creek. Restoring plants along a creek stabilizes soil, prevents erosion, filters pollutants, and slows stormwater flows, contributing to the overall health of the riparian corridor. This project is a partnership among the City of Springfield, the James River Basin Partnership, Ozark Greenways, and private landowners. The Wilson's Creek watershed is approximately 80 square miles, draining the central and western edges of the City and joining with the James River south of the City in Christian County.

The focus of the City's restoration project is a 2-mile section of stream bank above and adjacent to the Southwest Clean Water Treatment Plant. Volunteers are frequently engaged to help with tree-planting efforts. After one year of growth, the City website reports that the plant survival rate is higher than expected, and the eroded portion of the creek bed shows signs of new plant life. A successful restoration project can bring environmental, economic, and social benefits to the City and the entire region.

## TRANSFORMATIVE WATERSHED PROTECTION STRATEGIES

The City of Springfield and its regional partners should continue its strong history of participating in resourceful and collaborative programs to preserve and protect water quality within the greater James River and Sac River basins. Protecting healthy watersheds and riparian areas, while actively restoring downgraded areas, can assist in realizing and improving these natural systems' economic and ecological benefits to the region. The City of Springfield should work to connect citizens with local water resources. It should also actively pursue the incorporation of sustainable development strategies into future code revisions and program development. This includes the following restoration and protection strategies:

- **Conservation Easements** are an effective tool to encourage healthy riparian areas and ensure the positive impacts can bear fruit for generations. In addition, conservation easements can allow for trail connections, recreation access, and protect against clear cutting of trees.

- **Buy-Restore-Protect-Sell (BRPS)** is an emerging strategy to further the protection of riparian areas through easements. With this strategy, important parcels for sale can be purchased (buy), restoration work (restore) and easements initiated (protect), and then sold back into the market (sell). The sale of properties with easements helps recoup the cost of conservation and avoids maintenance costs associated with long-term property ownership.
- **Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)** is an incentive-based program that allows landowners to sell development rights from their land to a developer or other interested party who then can use these rights to increase the density of development at another designated location. While the seller of development rights still owns the land and can continue using it, an easement is placed on the property that prevents further development.
- Like TDR, **Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)** allows a landowner to sell development rights to a public agency, land trust, or government to permanently protect sensitive areas.

TDR, PDR, cluster developments, conservation subdivisions, and other zoning and land development strategies are available and should be encouraged to help support sustainable growth while protecting vulnerable and environmentally sensitive areas.

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The Park Board and the City have been good stewards of historic properties within the park system whereas the community as a whole has struggled at times. A great example is saving and moving Timmons Temple into historic Silver Springs Park, as well as efforts to preserve and enhance Doling Park, Sequiota Park, Phelps Grove Park, and Fassnight Park. The City should continue to work with the Park Board to maintain existing historic properties within the park system and identify new historic assets as the system expands.

## NATIVE PLANT SPECIES AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

To increase biodiversity in the City, development regulations should allow native plant species in all maintained landscapes including those in residential, commercial, and industrial zones. Turf grass should no longer be given priority as a groundcover. Instead, the focus should be on appropriately maintained landscaping that is free of nuisance weeds and invasive plants. Height standards for native species could also be relaxed as long as the plants are appropriately maintained. More stringent tree planting and preservation and green infrastructure requirements should be added to the City's zoning code and subdivision regulations. The City can enlist assistance from neighborhood associations and the homebuilders association to evaluate changes to regulations. A neighborhood should be chosen to serve as a pilot area for larger-scale green infrastructure improvements.

## PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE DARK SKY

Community input of *Forward SGF* stressed that Springfield's proximity to the great outdoors and abundant, healthful natural resources and open spaces was the most important community asset. The prominence of nature over the built environment should extend beyond daytime view-sheds. The lighting of individual developments cumulatively impacts the ability to see dark and starry night skies. The City should consider assimilating principles proposed by the International Dark Sky Association:

- All light should have a clear purpose.
- Light should be directed only to where needed.
- Light should be no brighter than necessary.
- Light should be used only when it is useful.
- Use warmer color lights where possible.

By applying these principles, properly designed electric lighting at night can be beautiful, healthy, and functional. Incorporating these principles will also save energy and money, reduce light pollution, and minimize wildlife disruption. The City should consider adopting a Dark Skies ordinance similar to Ozark, MO, and collaborate to make Dark Skies a regional effort to minimize light pollution and reconnect with the night. Goals could include achieving a low score on the Bortle Dark Sky Scale or achieving certification as an international dark sky community.

## 4.3 BECOME A LEADER IN SUSTAINABILITY IN SOUTHWEST MISSOURI

HEALTH & WELL-BEING 

### Implement a new program to reduce Springfield's carbon footprint and heat island effect.

There is a major opportunity to put Springfield on the map across the region as a leader in sustainability. The heart of this campaign should focus on education about the benefits of offsetting the City's carbon footprint or the amount of fossil fuels being consumed and reducing heat islands or areas of urban development that experience higher temperatures than outlying areas. Heat islands are detrimental to health because they create more air pollution, higher daytime temperatures, and greater discomfort due to those conditions. As low utility rates in the City may cause renewable energy improvements to appear to have a low return on investment, special attention should be paid to messaging on energy resilience and "future-proofing" Springfield. Showing residents how their actions can impact the environment could also be effective.

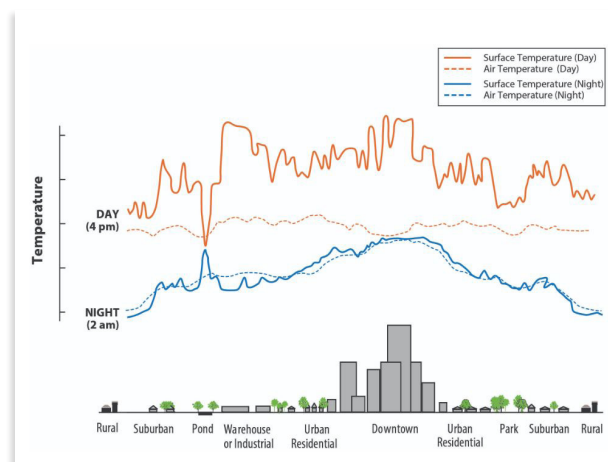
A plan to reduce the City's carbon footprint should be developed, utilizing the City's inventory of tree canopy and urban forests, addressing areas where new plantings and increased green infrastructure would be most beneficial (see **Strategy 4.2: Promote Sustainable Development** and **Strategy 4.6: Preserve and Enhance the Urban Forest** for more information on green infrastructure and tree preservation, respectively). Additionally, ways that the City can address carbon sequestration, through activities like increased composting should be considered.

## INVEST IN SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

To satisfy the commonly held definition of sustainability, Springfield should adopt systematic, thoughtful, and creative approaches to utilizing the City's environmental, human, and economic resources to meet the needs of future and current residents. A dedicated effort should be undertaken to create a comprehensive, community-driven sustainability plan. (See Goal 2 of **Chapter 10: Infrastructure and Community Facilities** for more information.)

## EXPAND EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS

The City should spread awareness of the Springfield Tree Registry and other resources available on the City website about tree care and opportunities to get new tax-exempt trees through the NeighborWoods program. Existing sustainability efforts should be built on to highlight what the City is working on, such as tree planting, compost and biosolid utilization, building envelope improvements at City facilities, and lowering greenhouse gases at the treatment plants and landfill.



Source: United States Environmental Protection Agency (epa.gov/heatislands)

## 4.4 LEVERAGE WATER RESOURCES FOR RECREATION

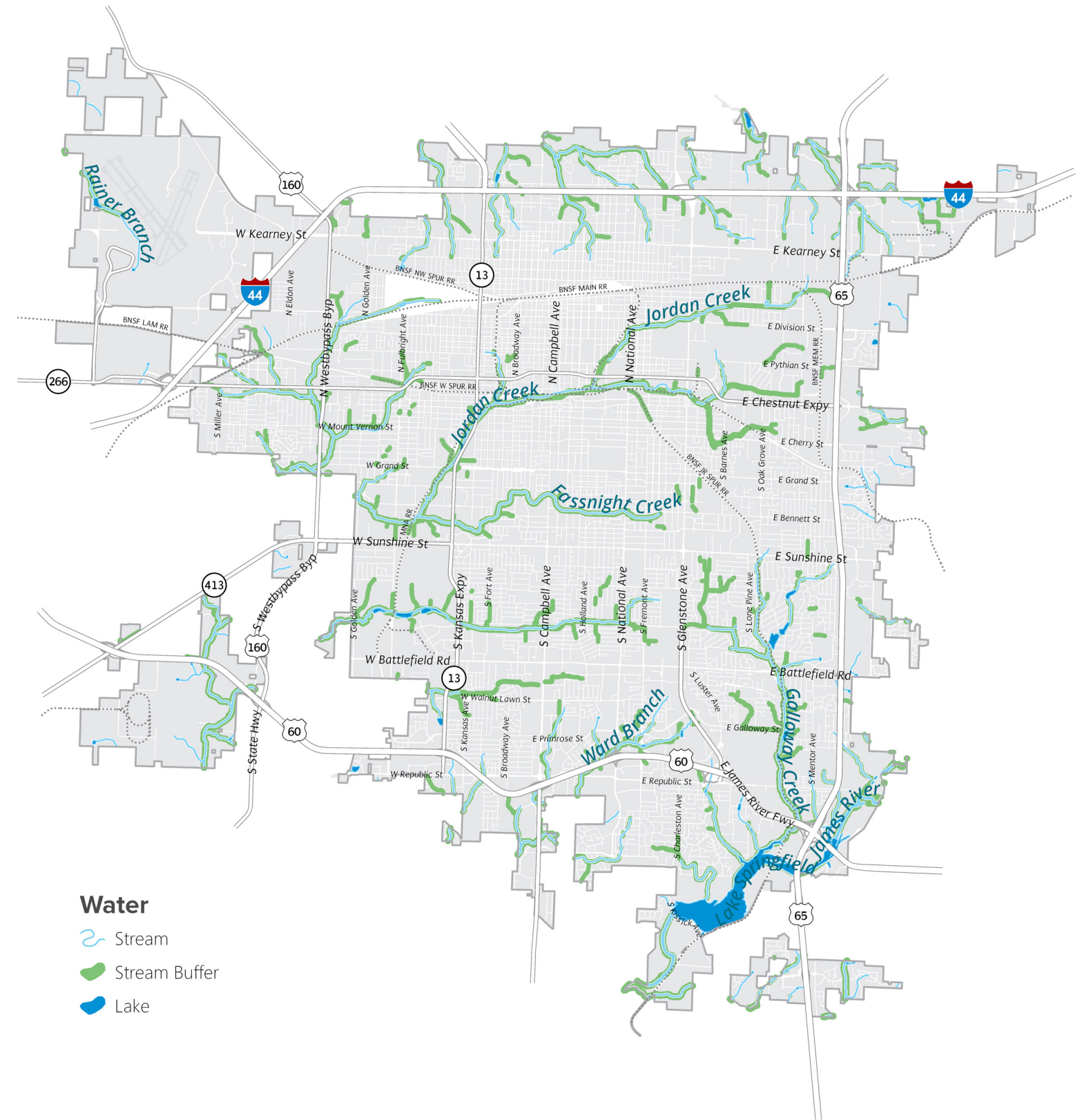
Leverage the City's water resources, including the James River Corridor and Jordan Creek, for clean drinking water, recreation, wildlife, and beauty.

The James River, Fellows Lake, and Lake Springfield are some of Springfield's most substantial water assets, providing opportunities as unique gathering places for the community. Building off *Forward SGF's* Lake Springfield Subarea Framework, the City should work to create a cohesive master plan for Lake Springfield and the riverfront, including gathering spaces, recreation, outdoor concerts, and other social experiences.

The river should serve as a visual gateway to the City that is highly accessible to a diverse swath of the population and visitors. Opportunities to repurpose the power plant into an innovative recreational center should be studied. (See the Lake Springfield Subarea Framework in **Chapter 6: Growth Areas and Annexation** for more information.)

Other area water resources that should be enhanced include the Little Sac River, Fellows Lake, and McDaniel Lake. These can also become key natural attractions with water recreation opportunities and public gathering places. Fishing, kayaking, boating, and sailing are some examples of supported activities.

Fellows Lake, though not within City limits, provides a northside recreational anchor for the community. Partnerships between City Utilities, Ozark Greenways, Dirt 66, and the Watershed Committee should be expanded to fund such projects. The City should catalog places to improve waterway access, naturalize engineered waterways and add more "blue" infrastructure within the blue environment. Jordan Creek should be upheld as a primary location for urban connection between the natural and built environments for recreation activities. Riparian corridors are also ideal locations for additional trail connections.



## 4.5 IDENTIFY RESILIENCE STRATEGIES

Leverage the Springfield-Greene County Office of Emergency Management Long-Term Recovery Plan and create a public education campaign about resilience and recovery.

To create a more resilient city, it is critical to understand the risks that could affect its people, facilities, and infrastructure. The Springfield-Greene County Office of Emergency Management has published and updated a Long-Term Recovery Plan to ensure that Springfield and Greene County can recover from natural, technological, and human-caused disasters.

One interesting new tool for measuring risk and resilience created by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the National Risk Index (NRI). The NRI ranks census tracts across the United States according to how susceptible they are to natural hazards. It is intended to provide a holistic view of risks by considering numerous factors. Risk is defined as the potential for negative impacts caused by these hazards and is calculated using three components:

- Expected annual loss, or the predicted dollar loss from building value, population, and/or agriculture exposure.
- Social vulnerability, or the susceptibility of social groups to the adverse impacts of natural hazards, including disproportionate death, injury, loss, or disruption of livelihood.

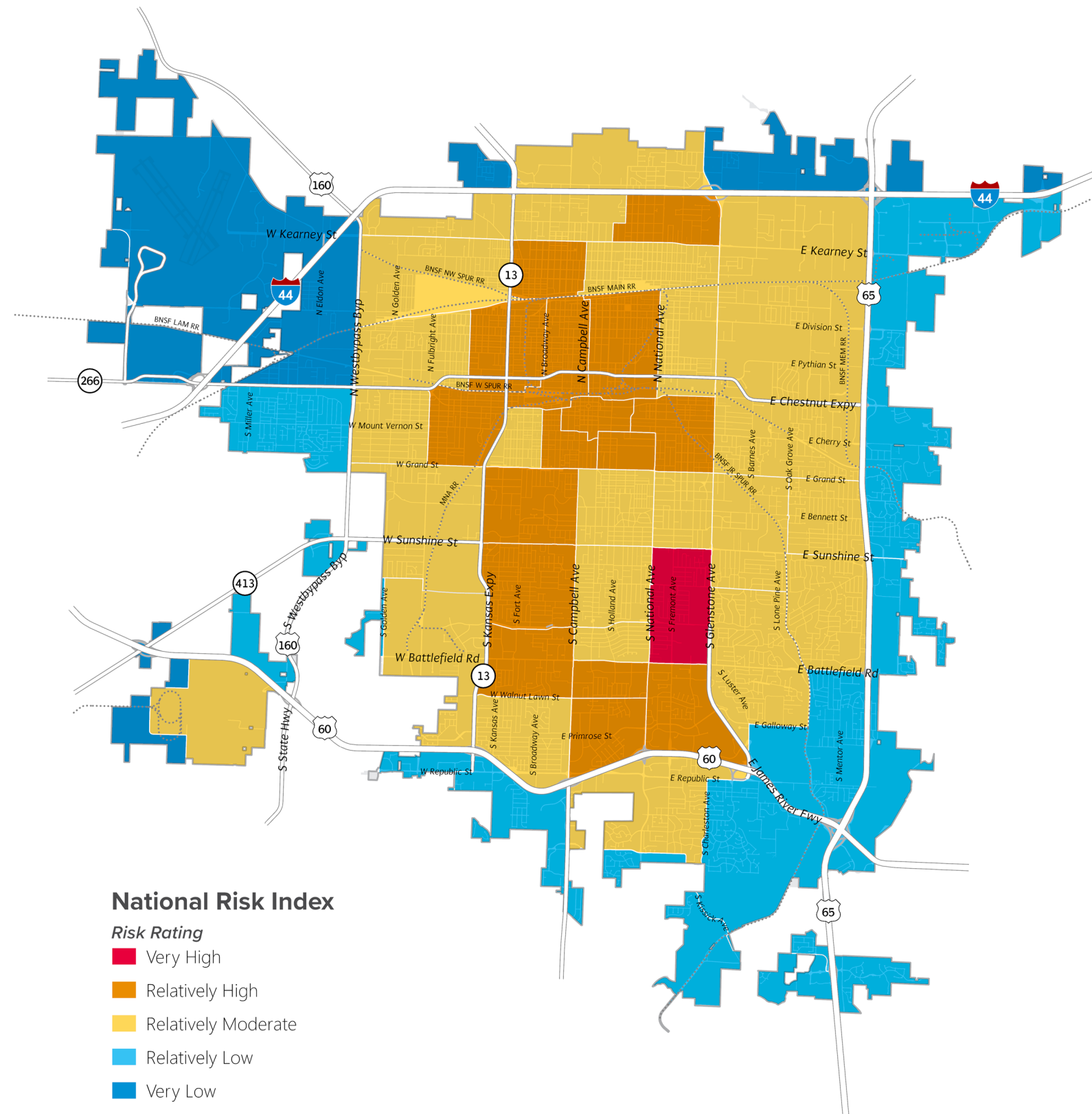
- Community resilience, or the ability of a community to prepare for anticipated natural hazards, adapt to changing conditions, and withstand and recover rapidly from disruptions.

The index covers 18 hazards, determined by reviewing all 50 state hazard mitigation plans for the most frequently listed hazards. The ones that are most relevant to Springfield are ice storm, heat wave, lightning, strong wind, tornado, and winter weather. Most census tracts within the Springfield area are rated moderately for these risks, but several in central Springfield rise to the “relatively high” risk level for all three components of the index. One tract in the southeast part of the City ranks very high overall, falling in the 97th percentile nationwide for risk.

### SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

- Continue to foster strong relationships with neighborhood groups to build upon social resiliency. The City’s successful Neighborhood Works program provides partnership opportunities and helps deter crime through a greater sense of ownership.
- Research the populations most vulnerable to the hazards that occur in Springfield (ice storm, heat wave, lightning, strong wind, tornado, and winter weather) and prioritize services to help those populations (i.e., encourage faster sidewalk clearing in parts of town where more people lack vehicles and need to walk to work or school).
- Manage the urban forest for resiliency through selective tree trimming to protect overhead utility lines from falling branches.

- Locate trails in riparian corridors but out of the floodplain to reduce the need for maintenance after floods.
- Encourage use of the Envision framework for proposed public and private projects to study the resilience and sustainability of the proposals.
- Research areas of greatest vulnerability to floods and target those areas for stream buffers and constructed wetlands.
- Prioritize critical routes used by first responders to be cleared of downed trees and other debris immediately following a severe storm.
- Enable the public to utilize local streams and waterways to cool off during hot days as part of the activation and programming process for these natural resources.
- Consider deploying mobile cooling stations or waiving fees at public pools when the heat index reaches dangerous levels.
- Encourage City Utilities to pursue other sources of renewable energy to complement its large solar project, which also features native pollinator plants between the panels.
- Capitalize on planning efforts such as the Regional Homeland Security Oversight Committee (RHSOC), administered by Southwest Missouri Council of Governments, to continue to allocate equipment to respond to manmade threats such as chemical spills, pollution runoff, underground gas leaks, and more.



## 4.6 PRESERVE AND ENHANCE THE URBAN FOREST

COMMUNITY PHYSICAL IMAGE



HEALTH & WELL-BEING



**Preserve and grow the urban forest to reduce the urban heat island, protect air and water quality, benefit health and well-being, and beautify the city.**

An urban forest provides numerous advantages for a community, including improving its character, cleaning the air, and cooling heat islands. A more complete tree canopy may also increase property values due to its direct positive effect on improving neighborhood character and desirability. Healthy, mature trees add an average of 10% to a property's value, according to data compiled by Springfield's Tree City USA Advisory Committee. To continue to promote tree canopy restoration and enhancement the City should pursue the following recommendations:

- Request an Urban Tree Canopy assessment from the U.S. Forest Service.
- Increase the requirement for plantings in new commercial developments.
- Work across departmental lines to garner expertise of the City's Arborist to assist in the review, inspection, and strict enforcement of landscaping and tree preservation related to the development code.

- Develop public service announcements and other promotional mediums to reach local businesses, neighborhoods, and the community at large to advocate for reforestation, tree preservation, and promotion of programs and resources. Provide greater visibility to the programs that are already in place.
- Communicate and work with Greene County and Christian County to coordinate on the development of codes that relate to landscaping, tree preservation, and enforcement to create a seamless urban community when possible and practical. Prioritize standardizing right of way (ROW) width to allow more street trees to be planted.
- Reinvigorate the Tree City USA program, which includes a tree registry for significant City trees. Nomination fees go toward the Tree City USA Citizen Advisory Committee to support its efforts.
- Encourage and require street tree plantings along primary corridors, especially downtown streetscapes, from an approved species list. Along with beautifying streets and enhancing the user experience, which could provide economic benefits, using species native to the local area could provide opportunities for education and foster regional pride.
- Consider updates to the subdivision regulations requiring trees to be planted per dwelling units for new single-family and two-family developments.
- Expand programs like the NeighborWoods Tree Planting program to reach beyond public properties or outside of the right-of-way, where trees are vulnerable to damage and removal from conflicts with infrastructure expansion and maintenance projects.

## TREE PRESERVATION ORDINANCE

Upon adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, the City should prepare amendments to the Land Development Code's Zoning Regulations (Article III) to address clear cutting, tree protection and preservation, and reforestation. For example, in the case that tree stands need to be removed, they should be replaced at a 2:1 ratio of acreage. Currently, the tree preservation ordinance is in draft form from the Tree City USA Advisory Committee.

Such an ordinance should encompass all measures taken to protect existing trees from damage or loss during or after project construction. A tree protection zone is an area surrounding the base of a tree within which neither construction activity nor physical development is permitted. These zones protect the branches and trunks of trees as well as the underground root system. The tree root zone is the area of a tree in which the majority of its roots lie. Often 95% of roots are found in the upper 12 to 18 inches of soil. A tree protection ordinance helps to ensure that the soil above tree roots does not become impacted.

Care should be taken to balance preservation with flexibility in any tree preservation ordinance so as not to make it too restrictive to development. Preservation of trees of a certain size or significance should be prioritized over retaining trees that could be moved to another site or replaced through a fee-in-lieu arrangement.

## FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

The City should prioritize funding an overarching Forest Management Plan. The plan could help identify hazards (natural disasters, invasive pests, and diseases), best practices for tree health (planting guidance, soil information, and upkeep), priority locations for additional tree plantings, best practices for soil health and tree regeneration, and a plant guide highlighting native species. Guidance from this plan could be applied at the neighborhood park level. The Tree City USA Advisory Committee and the NeighborWoods Program should be engaged, which is a partnership among the City, Tree City USA, and City Utilities, to track and plant trees to grow the urban forest, in planning for preservation of significant trees and on future key areas to include new trees. (See **Chapter 10: Infrastructure and Community Facilities** for more information about green infrastructure.)

## 4.7 LEVERAGE NATURAL FEATURES FOR PUBLIC SPACES

COMMUNITY PHYSICAL IMAGE



**Seek opportunities to transform key natural features into attractive public spaces that support community engagement and socializing.**

Providing public spaces within a community is key for promoting socialization, gathering, and activities that reinforce sense of community. This is a critical concept outlined in the Downtown Plan that should be applied across Springfield. Significant natural features should be targeted for placemaking initiatives that highlight the beauty of the Ozarks, such as Joe Creighton Access, Lake Springfield, Lost Hill, and Fellows Lake, along with underutilized riparian corridors that could be used for trail access. Amenities that foster social interactions, such as outdoor seating areas, festival spaces, pavilions, and amphitheaters should be considered. The community should be engaged in the design process to prioritize desired amenities and select cultural and artistic features to integrate.

## STRATEGIC PLACEMAKING

Engage the Quality of Place group to identify key areas to enhance. A public outreach component should be initiated to increase community buy-in. An example is the Renew Jordan Creek initiative, which is focused on placemaking and use of natural features to improve a natural resource.

## DESIGN FOR SAFETY

Implement CPTED practices to create safer public spaces. This multidisciplinary approach combines design guidelines, social programming, and proper management to produce better community cohesion and positive outcomes. Using principles of fostering social cohesion, creating connectivity, mixing land uses where possible, and creating a community culture around public spaces can help residents feel more invested and connected to the spaces they inhabit. Park, trail, and public space designers should consult the published standards and guidebooks on this practice.

## **GOAL 5: Seek out new opportunities for funding and partnerships to improve and invest in the City's parks, recreational facilities, trails, greenways, and open space.**

### **5.1 ESTABLISH INNOVATIVE, SUSTAINABLE FUNDING STRATEGIES**

HEALTH & WELL-BEING



#### **Establish innovative and diversified funding strategies to secure resources needed for park, trail, and natural resource improvements.**

Funding is necessary to create the improvements residents want in their communities and to preserve the momentum and energy of innovative planning processes. The current system is not sustainable without additional funding streams. Since the last Park Sales Tax ended in 2011, Springfield has not had a source of income for capital improvements and maintenance. Analysis presented in the 2021 Parks and Recreation Master Plan shows that Springfield-Greene County Park Board includes far less for parks and recreation capital projects than comparable agencies. It is also receiving less revenue than other peer agencies.

Springfield should be creative in seeking funding for its park, greenway, and natural resource improvements, such as the following:

- Create a Percentage for the Parks Program that is tied to development that could generate funds from a percentage of construction fees.
  - Establish a Capital Improvement Tax that could help maintain and improve parks and trails as a guaranteed source of income. The City should first generate a public survey to assess priorities, gain support, and begin to lay the foundation for a sense of ownership over the initiatives that the tax could help fund.
  - Implement limited paid parking for certain facilities or events—a tactic successfully used to help fund Great Rivers Greenway projects in St. Louis.
  - Collect proceeds from alcohol sales on City-owned green spaces near commercial areas.
  - Use a portion of fees paid for events and privately contracted programming at City amenities to pay for park and trail improvement, maintenance, and expansion. A notable example is Chicago's Park District, which includes Soldier Field. Large amounts of revenue are raised through events at the venue without raising City taxes.
- Capitalize on the growing microbrewery culture by tying it to outdoor recreation and helping foster economic development. Other cities could provide useful examples, like Boston, which staged pop-up breweries during summer 2020 along parks and riverfront areas to draw in activity and revenue to those areas.
  - Continue enhancing relationships with nonprofit agencies, such as Ozark Greenways, Watershed Committee of the Ozarks, and James River Basin Partnership to tap into additional funding opportunities.
  - Study examples of other cities that have allocated a larger portion of transportation funding on trails instead of road improvements to help promote walking and biking.
  - Explore creative taxes, such as the sugary beverage tax in Berkeley, CA, and Philadelphia, PA that are used to improve public health while funding financially constrained yet popular facilities and programs. Community support for such a tax would need to be assessed first, providing clear direction on what kind of resident-desired parks and programs it would fund.

#### **OUTREACH CAMPAIGN**

An outreach campaign should be developed to alert community members of opportunities to give back and invest in the City's natural environment. This would also provide a sense of ownership by involving residents in fundraising, planning, and additional outreach about improvements. An educational component to the outreach campaign could feature expert speakers who could demonstrate why investing in infrastructure is key to healthy living.

#### **FUNDING CHAMPION**

A funding champion on City staff could do research and write grant applications for a variety of City departments, including parks. This person could also track philanthropic gifts and create a tracking system for planned giving and estate contributions. This position should oversee the identification of new ideas for fundraising and tracking existing opportunities, including:

- Missouri Department of Conservation funds for managed open space land containing wildlife habitats
- Community Foundation of the Ozarks grants available for priority locations and goals
- Ozarks Transportation Organization funding opportunities for active transportation projects
- Innovative ways to reuse vacant lots and revolving funds to support urban agriculture
- A formal fundraising strategy to reach out to benefactors who could give via estate planning, foundations, challenge grants, and other mechanisms to leverage private funding into public recreation

#### **REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Underutilized areas adjacent to parks, greenways, and trails should be identified and tracked to maximize use of these areas and target them for redevelopment. Emulate trailside and parkside development in other areas of the country, such as in downtown Boulder, CO, that blends housing, entertainment, educational, and active recreational spaces to create desirable amenities. Combining efforts with other developments can provide funding, reduce maintenance costs, and bring new user groups. Target modern amenities such as bike parks, dog parks, live music options, and public Wi-Fi.

## 5.2 DEVELOP AND SUPPORT ALLIANCES

HEALTH & WELL-BEING



ARTS, CULTURE & HISTORIC PRESERVATION



**Continue to work with the Springfield-Greene County Park Board to establish strong partnerships across the City that will grow its parks, trails, and recreational opportunities.**

The strong collaborative relationship between the City and the Park Board should continue to be fostered, both for strengthening existing efforts and for pursuing new ones. The City needs help on initiatives that fall outside its jurisdictional reach or funding ability, and the Park Board and outside partners can be instrumental in helping these goals become reality. The Park Board currently works with nearly 300 different groups and organizations with common goals for bettering parks and recreational opportunities across the City.

### ADDITIONAL PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Public-private partnerships can help gain funding, human effort, and fresh ideas. Private sector companies could provide equipment rentals, maintenance, volunteer workers, and other services. Companies that own large open spaces could open their facilities to public use for events.

The successful partnership between Springfield Public Schools and the Park Board could be emulated with local universities to further involve school-age and youth populations in volunteer work, camps, and other programs. Partnerships should also be sought with the Springfield-Greene County Health Department and other health partners to tie in the benefits of outdoor lifestyle to mental and physical health. Springfield should follow the Missouri Department of Conservation and Missouri Department of Natural Resources and upload its trail resources to the nonprofit Park Rx America database. Local doctors can then prescribe time at specific parks to patients to ease the strains of chronic disease, increase health and happiness, and foster environmental stewardship.

Key data points should be researched to highlight these benefits. For example, according to one study that created a cost-benefit analysis for bike and pedestrian trails in Lincoln, NE, every dollar spent on trails for physical activity saves nearly three dollars in direct health care costs. A good example of a successful partnership is The Great Rivers Greenway's Tax District in the St. Louis region of Missouri (see adjacent callout for more information).

Other types of partners to approach include allied organizations, friends groups, sports teams, private companies, individual donors, and volunteer organizations. These partnerships can be beneficial in that they may have outlined funding sources and/or grants, or have staff available to help out with labor on projects.

### INTEGRATING THE ARTS IN PARKS

The City should also work with the local arts community to enhance Springfield's parks, trails, and open spaces with public art and cultural opportunities.

- Partner with Sculpture Walk Springfield and Springfield Regional Arts Council to integrate more public art in outdoor settings and create unique places for residents and visitors to spend time.
- Spearhead collaboration between the local arts and culture community and the Park Board to create interactive community events that bring the arts and outdoors together.
- Work with the local arts community, including the Springfield Art Museum, to create inviting programming that will draw residents and visitors alike.
- Work with the Springfield Art Museum on stormwater improvements, trail connections, and master plan improvements.
- Continue to support Springfield Sculpture Walk, an initiative to create "a museum without walls with access to all," and places public art in public spaces downtown for people to enjoy on their own schedule. They also offer docent-guided walking tours and tours on the Trolley Bike. Several of the sculptures are placed along the Jordan Creek Greenway Trail; other opportunities to place art along urban trails and in parks should be explored.
- Continue to expand connections with civic organizations as interest develops, such as local Rotary Clubs, which have played a big role with arts and other parks improvements.
- Continue to partner with Ozark Greenways to integrate public murals, sculpture, and interactive kiosks with the trail system.

### THE GREAT RIVERS GREENWAY'S TAX DISTRICT

The Great Rivers Greenway organization is a publicly funded entity formed in 2000 that oversees the planning and execution of a network of trails throughout the St. Louis region. It is overseen by a board of directors with appointees from St. Louis City, St. Louis County, and St. Charles County. The organization oversees a set of sales taxes levied in these geographic areas specifically to support parks and greenways. The organization helps with training, organizing volunteer workdays, and providing support to greenway users throughout the 128-mile network. It publishes collaborative regional plans every five years, as well as annual reports on how it uses taxpayer money.

Through robust partnerships and bold planning, Great Rivers Greenway is working to fulfill its mission—making the St. Louis region a more vibrant place to live, work, and play, by developing a network of greenways. Its vision is to complete a 600-mile trail network in the region it calls "The River Ring," which would be made up of 45 greenways. Nearly all of them require coordination with multiple jurisdictions and to purchase or acquire use of land from multiple landowners. The organization also has partners with access to federal matching funds, such as Bike St. Louis, which creates signage, lanes, and bike paths throughout St. Louis, receiving funding indirectly from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

