

Northern Cedar Falls Park and Maintenance Plan – Fall 2011

Executive Summary

The parkland and open space development in the Northern Cedar Falls community is important to the entire Cedar Falls region. For years, it has been a destination for recreation; the creation of a network of ponds and lakes through the abandonment of several quarries as well as interstate substitution projects in the 1980s has only increased recreation opportunities in the area. Opportunities for recreation include fishing, boating, running, biking, and disc golf.

In 2008, however, a substantial flood event displaced many residents and businesses while threatening the livelihood of the area as a destination for recreation. The flood had many detrimental economic and social impacts. Economically, businesses were closed or permanently relocated, investor confidence in the area declined, and private and public resources were directed toward rebuilding and/or relocating. Socially, longtime residents lost homes and/or property as well as important connections to neighbors and friends and to the places where they've lived and worked for years or decades. If positive impacts can be identified, they would be closely tied to community pride and selfless support for individuals and the community.

Community pride is becoming apparent in the overwhelming support of the buyout programs and subsequent planning effort that is integral to the success of developing newly-acquired public land. The new public space provides opportunities not only for additional recreation space, but also for the creation of outdoor public gathering and performing spaces that will reinforce visitor interest in the Northern Cedar Falls area. These opportunities are exciting, but it's important that the City of Cedar Falls also continue to invest in its existing destination parks – Island Park, Tourist Park, Big Woods Lake, Gateway Park, and Black Hawk Park.

Important as a recreation destination, the Northern Cedar Falls area is also home to approximately 2,000 of 38,000 Cedar Falls residents. After adding current buyout properties to the overall total, these residents have direct access to over 60% of the open space in Cedar Falls north of the Cedar River. This ratio of population to open space creates an ideal situation for direct pedestrian access to open space. By contrast, 36,000 residents live south of the Cedar River and have access to 40% of the open space in Cedar Falls.

Process

The City of Cedar Falls has been preparing and planning for the implementation of public improvement projects for the buyout areas for several years. The City contracted Confluence, a landscape architecture firm in Iowa City, to assist in this parkland study which will be an important guide as Cedar Falls continues planning efforts in the Northern Cedar Falls area. The study was intended to provide the basis for development of trails, parks and gathering spaces, community spaces, and other recreation opportunities.

Several goals were set by City staff to help direct the desired outcome of the study:

- Create a unifying plan to guide development of the buyout areas, while meeting all FEMA restrictions regarding appropriate usage
- Reassess currently maintained parkland and natural areas as well as newly acquired buyout property to reduce the amount of resources needed to maintain public property within the study area limits – designate suitable locations for less maintenance-intensive natural areas including prairie grasslands, woodlands and reforestation, wetlands and surface water, etc.
- Designate suitable areas for future neighborhood park space and playgrounds with special attention to population distribution and projections – regional parks are heavily saturated in the area and should not be expanded upon except to continue expanding the recreation network as shown on the masterplan
- Expand the current recreation network to increase recreation opportunities for residents and visitors
- Assess current transportation corridors with special attention to pedestrian connectivity between parks and open spaces; incorporate previous study by Bonestroo – **North Cedar and Center Street: Framework Plan**
- New land uses should include (but are not limited to) disc golf, BMX trails, adult and youth ballparks, community gardens and orchards, additional water features, new cross country trails, kayak launch areas, larger open woodlands, open space for the annual Sturgis celebration, and neighborhood parks with shelters and play structures

The planning process for this study provided several opportunities for public involvement to allow residents a chance to contribute insight and ideas. After a kickoff meeting with City staff and important stakeholders, Confluence drafted a parks and recreation concept for the study area that incorporated the goals set forth by the city. The plan was presented

in an open house to allow residents and the general public to respond and provide feedback. The masterplan was revised according to comments from the public and resubmitted to the City of Cedar Falls. Upon final approval of the plan, preliminary costs and phasing for public improvement projects will be developed.

Results

The Northern Cedar Falls Park and Maintenance Plan addresses the goals established by the City of Cedar Falls and has incorporated important contributions from residents. In general, the plan provides miles of additional hard surface, mown, and water trails. Water trails and hard surface trails connect seven kayak launch sites as well as three remote camp sites. Hard surface trails also connect new parks and public gathering spaces such as ballparks, dog parks, community gardens and orchards, and naturalized woodlands and prairie grasslands.

The masterplan calls for approximately 31.5 miles of new recreational trails, including the following trail types:

- *Hard surface – 8.2 miles*
- *Mown – 1.8 miles*
- *Cross country – 2.8 miles*
- *Water – 18.7 miles*

Maintenance

Maintenance challenges have been addressed by incorporating naturalized areas throughout the study area. Once successfully established, woodlands and prairie grasslands require comparatively less maintenance than mown and manicured vacant lots. Woodlands and grasslands, while requiring less maintenance also provide important recreation opportunities for residents and visitors. Almost two miles of mown trails through prairie grasslands, as included in the masterplan, would require less maintenance by decreasing the amount of hard surface trails to be maintained.

The City of Cedar Falls should seek new ways to reduce maintenance while continuing to use these approved practices:

- *Native prairie and grasslands*
- *Reforestation*
- *Naturalization*
- *Private leasing of lots*
- *Establishment of additional surface water as future mining activities occur*

Public Recreation and Gathering Space

Important gathering spaces have been located near the Cedar River. These gathering spaces include a potential expansion of the Sturgis Falls Celebration open space adjacent to Gateway Park, kayak launch locations, and remote campsites. Opportunities for economic and social healing will be catalyzed through these new spaces by bringing residents and visitors closer to the river and the Northern Cedar Falls area. Other planned gathering spaces are connected to this area via recreational trails and vehicular access drives; the gathering spaces include ballparks, dog parks, and community orchards and gardens.

New hard surface trails along Center Street connect the majority of Northern Cedar Falls residents to the largest portions of public open space provided by the masterplan. Closer to the residential neighborhoods and North Cedar Elementary School, smaller parks and open space have been carved out of the buyout properties to make playgrounds and other play spaces more accessible to the greatest portion of children in the Northern Cedar Falls area. East of Center Street and directly south of North Cedar Elementary School lies 15 acres of open green space. As a National Wetlands Inventory site, this area should be protected and remain a passive open space.

Recent census data shows that the highest population of school children is west of Center Street. It is important that any new

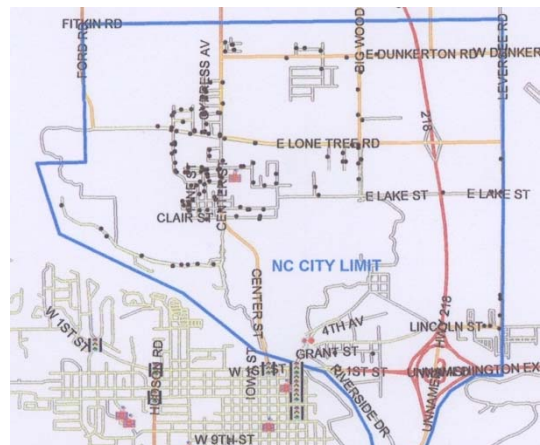


Figure 1
Distribution of school children in the Northern Cedar Falls area is shown below. Each dot represents one household with one or more school children.

neighborhood park space in the Northern Cedar Falls area should be located west of Center Street to serve the higher population in the area. Nazarene First Church and Cedar Falls Utilities own abutting parcels totaling approximately 8.3 acres of open space in this area. Both entities have expressed interest in converting portions of the land to park space for use by the surrounding neighborhood. This park space would serve residents and children west of Center Street, which is a heavily-travelled connection across the Cedar River to the rest of Cedar Falls. Providing for open space on both sides of this major transportation corridor creates a safer environment for pedestrians by limiting the total number of crossings.

Access to this potential neighborhood park on the west side of Center Street has not been finalized as a part of this study. The north access to the park is more practical and can potentially be constructed along the Cedar Falls Utilities property, but the south access to the park is less certain. The easement to the south does not directly connect to the potential park space. In order to complete the connection, an agreement needs to be reached between the City of Cedar Falls and adjacent private property owners.

Implementation

Capital investment in the area should relate to current and future population projections rather than availability of open space. A key factor in the implementation of this masterplan will be current and projected population trends; in the past 10 years the population in the Northern Cedar Falls area has declined from 2,577 to 1,975. As discussed in a memorandum from Bonestroo to the City of Cedar Falls, the projected trend in population of the Northern Cedar Falls region is expected to continue to decline through 2020. Only after 2020, is the area projected to grow again.

Population and Household Growth Trends 1990-2020

	1990	2000	Estimate 2010	Projection		Change										
				2020	2030	Numeric				Percentage						
						90-00	00-10	10-20	20-30	90-00	00-10	10-20	20-30			
Population																
North Cedar	3,137	2,530	2,357	2,316	2,541	-607	-173	-41	225	-19.3%	-6.8%	-1.7%	9.7%			
City of Cedar Falls	34,298	36,145	39,008	43,478	46,539	1,847	2,863	4,470	3,061	5.4%	7.9%	11.5%	7.0%			
Black Hawk County	123,798	128,012	128,968	132,638	136,837	4,214	956	3,670	4,199	3.4%	0.7%	2.8%	3.2%			
Iowa	2,776,755	2,926,324	3,035,320	3,181,470	3,360,400	149,569	108,996	146,150	178,930	5.4%	3.7%	4.8%	5.6%			
Households																
North Cedar	1,221	1,032	974	961	1,050	-189	-58	-13	89	-15.5%	-5.6%	-1.3%	9.3%			
City of Cedar Falls	11,689	12,833	14,037	16,000	17,220	1,144	1,204	1,963	1,220	9.8%	9.4%	14.0%	7.6%			
Black Hawk County	46,932	49,683	54,188	56,683	58,229	2,751	4,505	2,495	1,546	5.9%	9.1%	4.6%	2.7%			
Iowa	1,064,325	1,149,276	1,237,740	1,322,720	1,388,490	84,951	88,464	84,980	65,770	8.0%	7.7%	6.9%	5.0%			

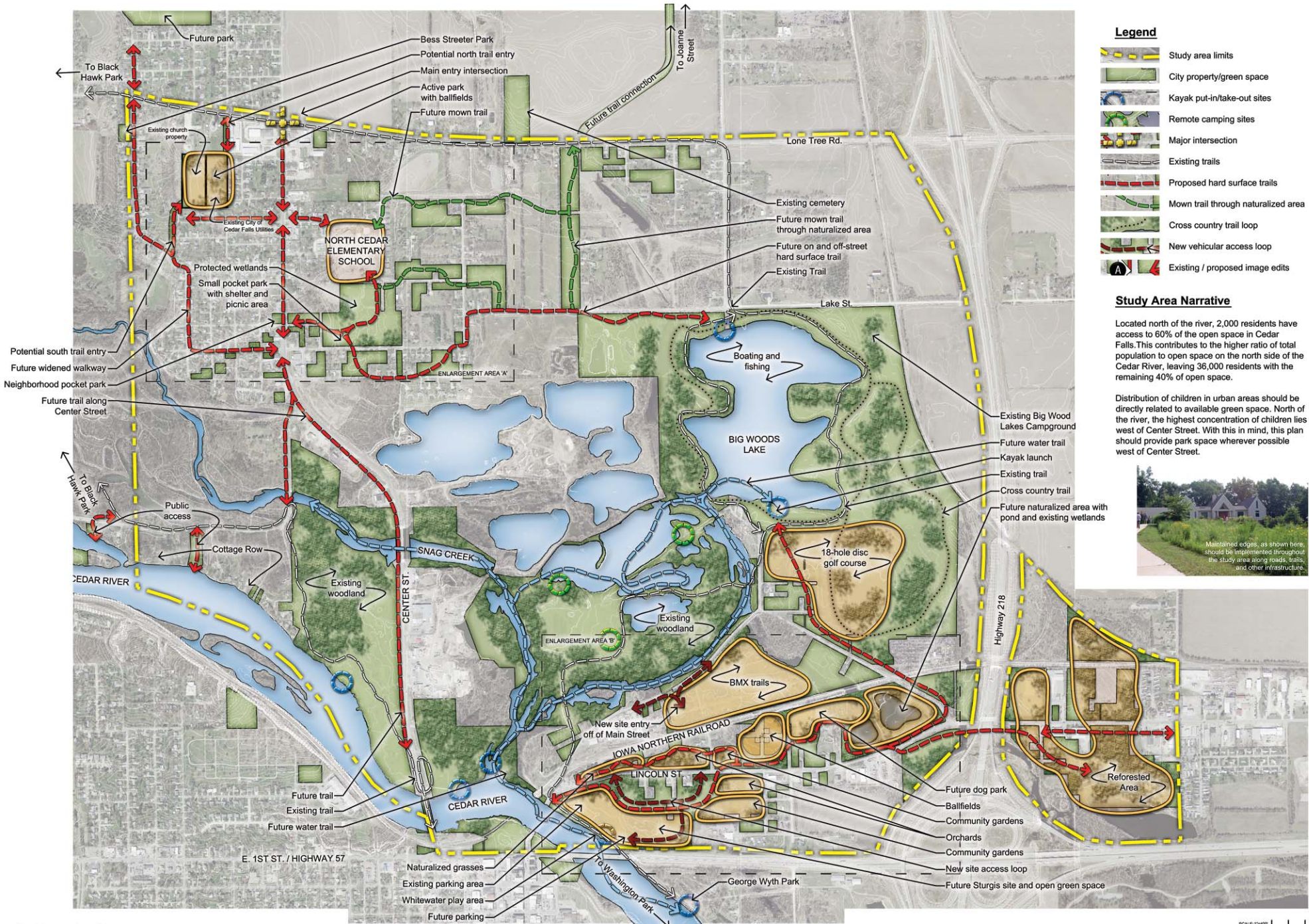
Figure 2
Population and household growth trends were prepared for City of Cedar Falls by Bonestroo.

Funding sources will also affect how the masterplan is implemented. Public funding, private gifts and grant sources will all be necessary to implement improvement projects proposed by this masterplan. These improvements may compete with other projects in Cedar Falls for funding and, therefore, improvements will occur over a period of several years, and it could take up to a decade before some improvements are realized. For this reason, the plan may transform as social and economic needs change over time for Northern Cedar Falls residents and the greater Cedar Falls community.

Conclusion

Overall, the masterplan will provide guidance for the City of Cedar Falls as they move forward with managing and developing its buyout properties. The plan will also ensure a contiguous trail and park system while reinforcing the strength of economic and social conditions in the Northern Cedar Falls area for years to come.

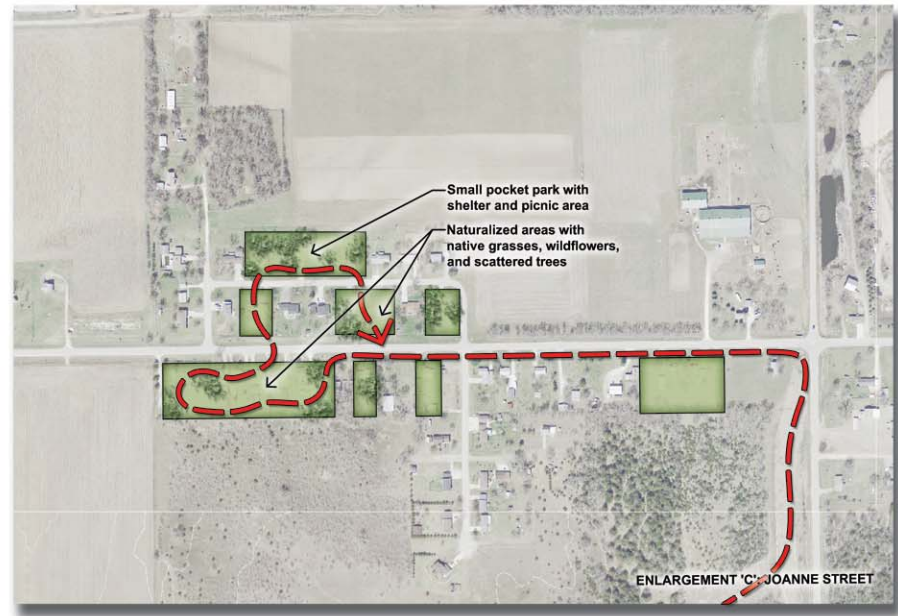
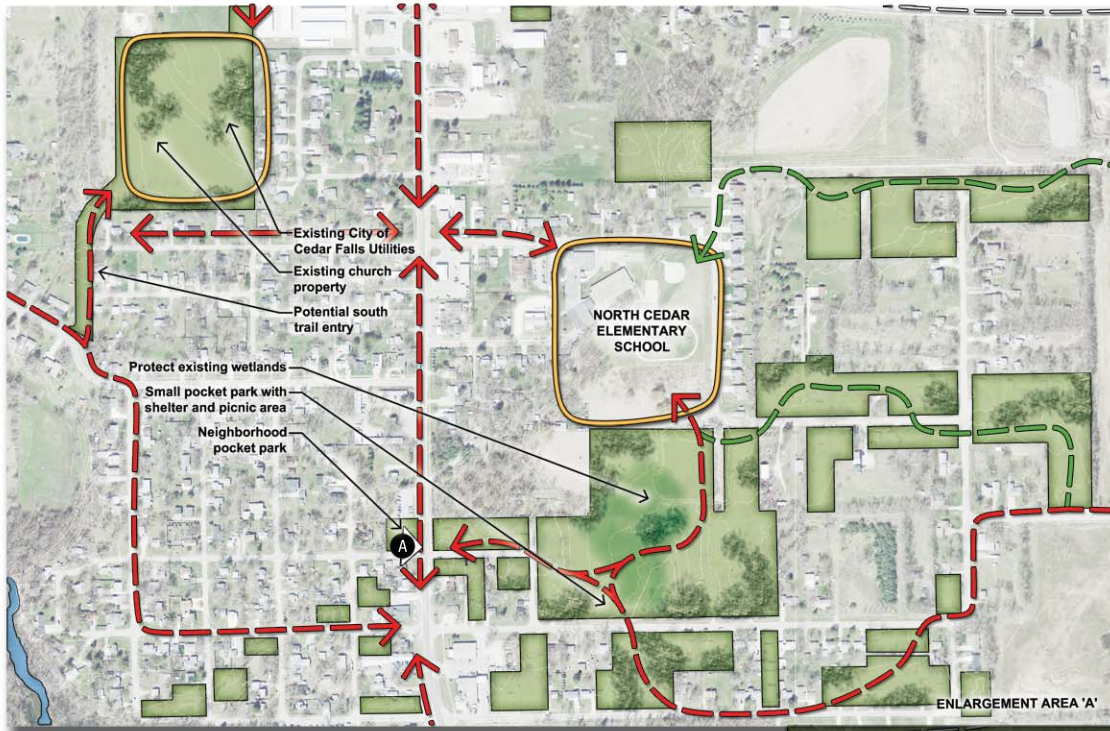
The illustrations that will be used to guide the implementation of the masterplan are attached to this document. An overall illustration shows the Northern Cedar Falls area and its relationship to the surrounding region. Detailed enlargements show how the smaller park spaces work together within the overall site. Image edits and a section study are also attached to help visualize the improvements in the masterplan.



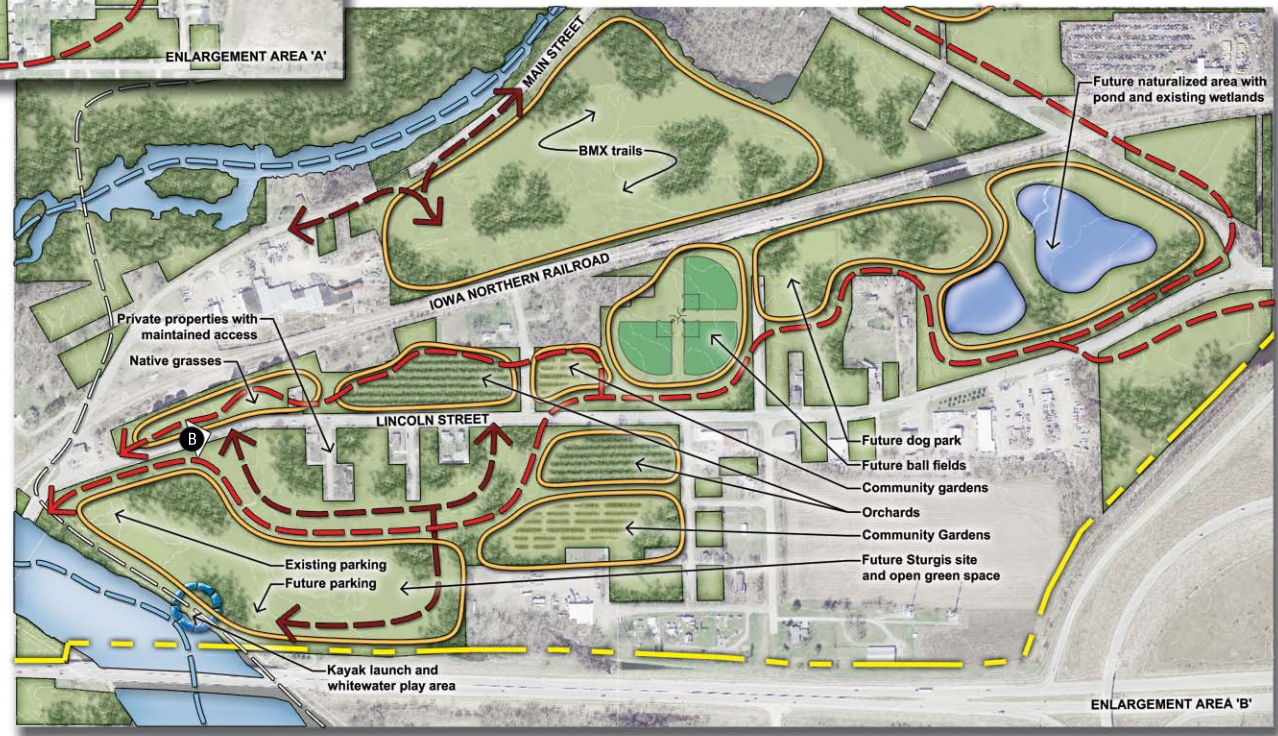
Site Masterplan Concept
North Cedar Falls Park and Maintenance Plan

Cedar Falls, Iowa

SCALE: 1"=400'



- Legend**
- Study area limits
 - City property/green space
 - Kayak put-in/take-out sites
 - Remote camping sites
 - Major intersection
 - Existing trails
 - Proposed hard surface trails
 - Mown trail through naturalized area
 - Cross country trail loop
 - New vehicular access loop
 - Existing / proposed image edits



Masterplan Concept Enlargements
Northern Cedar Falls Park and Maintenance Plan



Image Edit A - Intersection of Center Street and Cedar Street

The image to the left ("Image Edit A - Existing") shows the existing conditions of the intersection of Center Street and Cedar Street. Existing conditions include vacant buildings, numerous utility poles, and limited pedestrian circulation opportunities.

This masterplan proposes a new neighborhood pocket park to serve the higher population density west of Center Street. As shown in "Image Edit A - Proposed," a trail is proposed to connect the pocket park to the open green space south of North Cedar Elementary School as well as the greater park network proposed by the master plan. This expanded connectivity will connect neighborhoods in the Northern Cedar Falls area with parks, schools, and water bodies.

Another important connection proposed by the master plan is a north-south trail to connect existing trails from the Cedar River along Center Street to Lone Tree Road. This connection will provide a major trail segment for Northern Cedar Falls residents to access the river.

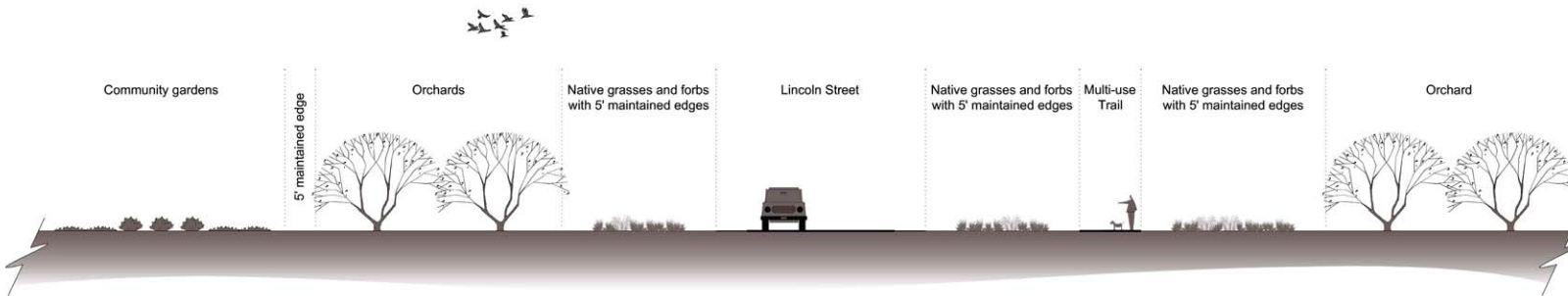


Image Edit B - Lincoln Street Corridor

The image above and to the right ("Image Edit B - Existing") shows the existing conditions of the Lincoln Street corridor looking to the east. Existing conditions show vacated properties, overhead utility lines, and limited pedestrian circulation opportunities.

Lincoln Street is a major access to significant parkland and open space improvements in this master plan proposal. As a major access to an important area of the Northern Cedar Falls community, Lincoln Street can be improved by introducing native grasses and forbs, orchards and nurseries, and community gardens while removing overhead utility lines.

Also proposed for this corridor are ballfields, dog parks, restored woodlands, ponds/wetlands, cross country trails, BMX trails, water trails, disc golf and event spaces. The amount of space may allow for other uses as the master plan is implemented over time.



Lincoln Street Cross Section

In order to understand the relationships between the elements proposed by the master plan, this representative cross section puts several land-uses together to compare and contrast characteristics of each zone.

Orchards, community gardens, and recreation are the major land-uses in this area of Lincoln Street. As shown in this cross section, areas with native grass and forb plantings could have a five foot mown edge to create a manicured appearance.

