

3.4 PARKS AND RECREATION ELEMENT

Background

Parks and open spaces for public recreational opportunities are key to quality of life in any community. Through the comprehensive planning process, Bowling Green and Warren County have recognized the importance of protecting that asset for quality of life, future economic development and continued prosperity.

Warren County is primarily served by two park systems: the City of Bowling Green system and the Warren County system. In addition, the City of Woodburn, the City of Oakland, and the City of Plum Springs each have a park; the school district provides a number of recreational facilities that serve as parks; the state of Kentucky manages the Shanty Hollow Lake and the Chaney Lake State Nature Preserve; and numerous recreational facilities are provided privately (e.g. Beech Bend amusement park, drag and race strips, and campground).

In all, Bowling Green’s park system consists of 27 facilities. Excluding three golf courses totaling approximately 250 acres, the City’s system is about 515 acres. The City also owns and operates a variety of specialty facilities (some as part of other parks) – such as Fountain and Circus Square Parks, a water park, a skate park, dog park, several recreation centers, and several cemeteries – and a community gardens program.

Overall, Bowling Green is meeting the minimum standards suggested by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), and has nearly enough acreage already to maintain that standard with the anticipated 2030 population. However, while strong in providing community parks, the City provides far less in neighborhood parks or mini parks.

Regulations require that developers of single-family subdivisions of at least 10 lots of less than one acre provide at least 6.5 percent of the total land area as open space. Dedication can be considered once the subdivision is 50 percent developed.

Quick Facts 2009:

- **Bowling Green park system:**
 - 27 park facilities totaling approximately 515 acres, plus three golf course totaling 250 acres.
 - Specialty facilities: disc golf (8 facilities); golf courses (3); dog park (1); recreation centers (3); water park (1); skate park (1); historic sites (7).
- **Warren County park system:**
 - 15 park facilities totaling approximately 520 acres.
 - Specialty facilities: aquatics center (1); boat ramps (4).
- **Greenways/Blueways:** The Greenbelt (Greenways) System Master Plan is a joint effort of Warren County and Bowling Green. When fully implemented, it will include over 460 miles of pedestrian walks, bike routes, scenic drives and multi-use off road trails, connecting every part of the community.
- **Other facilities:**
 - Municipal parks: Oakland, Plum Springs, Woodburn.
 - State-owned parks: Shanty Hollow Lake, Chaney Lake State Nature Preserve
 - Privately or non-profit managed facilities: Lost River Cave & Valley; Aviation Heritage Park; Beech Bend Park; Bowling Green Country Club; Indian Hills Country Club; The Trace at Bay’s Fork; etc.



Bowling Green is strong in providing community parks; however, under NRPA’s recommended standard, there is an undersupply of neighborhood and mini parks.

Warren County’s park system includes approximately 520 acres in 16 facilities, and includes several water access points. The Warren County Parks and Recreation Master Plan (1998) recommends development of three large community parks to serve growing areas in the northern, eastern and southern parts of the County. However, lack of state funds and the economic downturn mean that development of new parks is not likely in the foreseeable future.



The Warren County park system includes a number of boat ramps.

In 1999 Bowling Green and Warren County developed the Greenbelt System Master Plan. Intended to be built in six phases over a 30 year period, the Greenbelt System is intended to consist of a combined 464 miles of pedestrian walks, bike routes, scenic drives and multi-use off road trails. The “Inner Loop” is formed by several roadways around Bowling Green and connects several of the City’s major parks and other destinations.

A whitewater course on the Barren River at Mitch McConnell Park in Downtown Bowling Green is currently being planned. Preliminary concepts show a 1,200 foot course, and would be connected via the Greenbelt system to a countywide network of walking and biking pathways, trailheads and river access points.

As new development occurs the governments of Warren County must take steps to adopt a management philosophy which supports the expansion and maintenance of a parks and open space network and seek ways to ensure that the associated costs are borne equitably. This element

includes policies and actions to provide excellent recreational facilities for citizens to enjoy the region’s natural resources and maintain a healthy life-style.



A 1,200-foot whitewater course is planned on the Barren River at Mitch McConnell Park.

PARKS AND RECREATION GOAL

Provide all residents and visitors of Warren County with quality parks and recreational facilities and services.

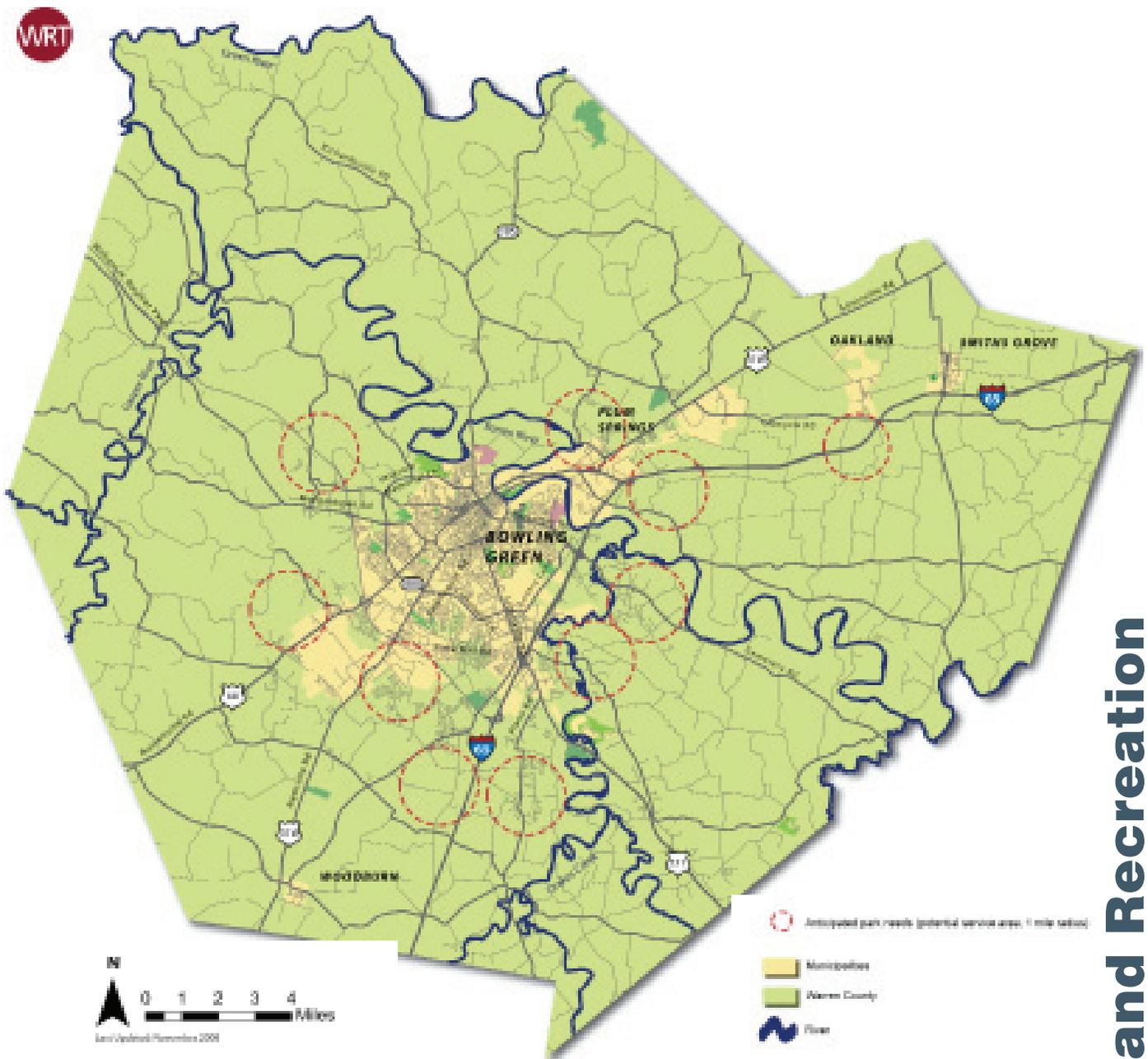
OBJECTIVES / ACTIONS

Objective PR-1 Provide parks and recreational facilities and programs appropriate to accommodate Warren County’s future population.

- Action PR-1.1 Increase the array recreational facilities to meet the lifestyle needs of an urban population and to function effectively as a regional city, including an expanded open space system of parks, greenways and preserves.
- Action PR-1.2 Prepare and regularly update strategic City and County master plans for open space and recreation to coordinate and prioritize the expansion, maintenance and replacement of recreational facilities—including parks, community centers, schools, libraries, etc.
- Action PR-1.3 Use City and County master plans in conjunction with the Future Land Use Map to identify general locations for future park sites (see Figure PR-1) taking into account projected needs for number, extent and type of facilities.
- Action PR-1.4 Focus any future/potential land acquisition efforts for parkland on areas where development pressure threatens resources (specify what kind of resources) or may inhibit the creation of needed parks, as identified in the City’s and County’s master plans.
- Action PR-1.5 Pursue opportunities to combine park areas with schools or other appropriate public facilities to control taxpayer costs.

Context:

Sharing of land by different types of public facilities, particularly parks sharing land and facilities with such uses as schools, community centers libraries and fire stations, is a strategy used in many areas across the country to hold down costs for both land acquisition and, to some extent, operations. Often co-location can result in service improvements, as well. Examples of communities with successful co-location policies include Durham, North Carolina, San Jose, California, Lake County, Florida and Wheat Ridge, Colorado.



PR-1: Anticipated Parks Needs (service area gaps) based on Future Land Use pattern and projected population.

Parks and Recreation

Action PR-1.6 Establish (Warren County/Bowling Green jointly or separately) a minimum level of service standard for parks and recreation facilities.

Context:

A level of service (LOS) describes the adequacy of public services/facilities provided within a community and can be applied community-wide or on the basis of smaller sub-areas. In the case of parks and recreation facilities, LOS is typically measured in terms of acres of parkland per 1,000 population (or acres of a specific type of parkland, such as neighborhood parks per 1,000 population) or sometimes the number of ballfields, boat ramps, etc. per 1,000 population. Once the community sets a desirable LOS standard, there are different ways it may be used, such as projecting future facility needs, measuring performance and/or as a basis for exactions.

Action PR-1.7 As necessary, review and enhance standards for new residential developments to ensure:

- Connectivity of open spaces to the County’s greenways system.
- Protection of stream corridors and floodplains.
- Protection and enhancement of tree canopy.

Action PR-1.8 Adopt conservation/cluster subdivision design provisions to encourage the protection of open space, farmland, and rural character, making this approach an attractive alternative to conventional development in the AG zoning district.

Context:

Conservation Development is a technique which allows property owners to assign all their development rights to just a portion of their property, leaving the remainder protected in a conservation easement. (See Actions LU-1.1.1 and LU-2.6.1)

Action PR-1.9 Prepare, implement, and periodically update a plan to identify, preserve and track environmentally sensitive lands, including, but not limited to: wildlife habitats, wetlands, marsh lands and flood plains associated with both streams and sinkholes. The plan shall establish measures for protection, conservation, mitigation, or restoration as may apply, and shall make provisions for an informational program to familiarize the public as to the economic and other benefits associated with such a program.

Sidebar: Action PR-1.9. Conservation Development

Benefits:

- Same number of lots as conventional subdivision (or more) on smaller land area
- Preserves and integrates open space
- Protects water quality
- Preserves viewsheds and valuable natural resources
- Provides opportunities for more efficient (natural) drainage system

Cost Implications:

- Reduces site grading and infrastructure costs
- Reduces engineering costs
- Improves marketability (permanent open space, “golf course subdivision without the golf course”)
- May reduce regulatory burden
- May reduce tax burden



Conservation Development offers property owners the ability to assign the overall site’s development rights to a portion of their property, thereby allowing the rest to remain as protected in a conservation easement.



All developments shall preserve a minimum of 6.5% of the gross area as usable open space and stormwater drainage areas not counted towards to requirement unless they are unfenced, are usable (mowable slopes) and have recreational value.

Objective PR-2 ***Seek equitable ways to distribute the cost of open space and recreational facilities necessary to serve new development between the private and public sectors.***

Action PR-2.1 Revise current open space requirements to incorporate the following provisions:

- All developments shall reserve a minimum of 6.5% of gross site area as usable open space (excluding fenced storm drainage and other site areas that are not accessible).
- The location and configuration is subject to review and site plan approval.
- At the mutual discretion of project owner and City/County, some or all of the reserved open space may be dedicated for public park use.
- At the mutual agreement of project owner and City/County, the open space requirement may be reduced or waived upon payment of a fee representing the value of the required open space, to be used for off-site public open space or parkland acquisition and development.

Action PR-2.2 Adopt regulations incorporating options for the ownership and management of parks required to be constructed by planned developments, taking into account the County’s or City’s present and anticipated resources and capacity to take over those parks at the time of dedication (See also Action LU-2.1.1). Following are three basic options:

- The park remains under the ownership and management of a property owners association or similar entity in perpetuity, managed in accordance with County or City requirements;
- The park is dedicated to the County or City for ownership and management at the conclusion of development; or,
- A “stepped” process, whereby the park is initially owned and managed by a property owners association or similar entity, then dedicated to the County or City for ownership and management at a specified later time.

Objective PR-3 ***Continue to implement the Greenbelt System Master Plan and other programs that support bicycle and pedestrian recreation and mobility.***



Build on the framework established in the Greenbelt System Master Plan to develop an interconnected network of safe bicycling ways, including on trails, roadways and in parks and other open spaces.



Provide and encourage appropriate levels of public access and amenities along the County's blueways

Parks and Recreation

Action PR-3.1 Consider the use of open space easements or land dedication upon development or redevelopment of a parcel, when such easement or dedication would help extend greenways or trails consistent with the Greenbelt System Master Plan.

Action PR-3.2 Support the continued implementation and periodic updating of the Greenbelt System Master Plan, with the goal of achieving a comprehensive network of greenways throughout Bowling Green and Warren County.

Action PR-3.3 Encourage and coordinate with the KYTC and the MPO to ensure that bicycle and pedestrian ways are established in conjunction with the construction, reconstruction or other change of any state transportation facility, with special emphasis on those projects that are located in urban areas.

Context:

Major transportation infrastructure projects, such as new roads, widening and reconstructions, represent golden opportunities to incorporate infrastructure to support pedestrian and bicycle mobility – as well as make strides in completing the greenway network – at a much lower cost than separate retrofitting projects. Thus, it is essential to make sure these opportunities are seized when available.

Action PR-3.4 Take steps to incorporate scenic areas along the major surface streams of Warren County into a system of protected open space, scenic trails and parks.

Action PR-3.5 Incorporate the park, trail and greenway system into the community's future economic development efforts, and consider economic development when planning and prioritizing future extensions of the park, trail and greenway system.

Objective PR-4 *Make Bowling Green and Warren County a premier community for bicycling.*

Action PR-4.1 Explore ways to build upon the framework established in the Greenbelt System Master Plan to develop an ever-more interconnected network of safe bicycling ways, including on trails, roadways and in parks and other open spaces.

Context:

The City of Bowling Green passed a resolution to explore applying for designation as a Bicycle Friendly Community. The Bicycle Friendly Community program is an awards program administered by the League of American Bicyclists to recognize communities that actively support bicycling.

Achieving designation as a Bicycle Friendly Community will require focus and commitment on the part of the community. Applicants are judged in five areas: engineering (e.g. plans, accommodation of bicycles on roads and existing bicycle facilities); education (e.g. safety courses and information available); encouragement (e.g. the existence of biking clubs, Bike to Work events, etc.); enforcement (e.g. enforcement of traffic laws and bike safety regulations); and evaluation and planning (e.g. crash and fatality statistics, plans to improve these numbers, plans for facilities improvements, etc.).

- Action PR-4.2 Encourage the provision of bicycling accommodations as unique transportation links between the County’s numerous historic, cultural, educational, scenic, and recreational destinations to support tourism activities.

Context:

Initiatives to support the implementation of this action may include: encouraging commercial operators to establish regular bicycle tours of Bowling Green’s historic neighborhoods and districts, in coordination with historic preservation groups and neighborhood associations; working with the lodging industry to accommodate bicycles, bicyclists, and bicycle-related activities at local hotels, cabins, camping sites, etc.; coordinate with the Chamber of Commerce and tourism entities to identify and market bicycle-related opportunities that encourage residents and visitors to access state and regional parks, Western Kentucky University, downtown Bowling Green and its cultural attractions, etc.

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- Objective PR-5** *Promote a diversity of recreational water-based activities and programs as well as waterfront uses that are appropriate to and compatible with the environment, character, and long-term sustainability of the County’s blueways.*

Context:

Blueway designation typically applies to those rivers and streams, or segments thereof, that can successfully support canoeing, kayaking and boating. Warren County is blessed with many significant water resources—including the Green River tributaries Barren and Gasper Rivers, Drake’s and Jennings Creek, (as well as the famous Lost River Cave)—which provide myriad recreational, economic, and health opportunities, as well as ecological, and scenic/aesthetic value. Water-based trails can be designed with features and facilities that make their use more enjoyable for residents, such as paths, kiosks, signage, seating, and restrooms. In planning for blueways facilities, the managing entity must make sure that blueways users do not degrade stream banks or shoreline habitats, and that runoff and erosion are minimized.

- Action PR-5.1 Coordinate the designation of blueways with the County’s Greenways Commission to help connect blueway resources and facilities to the pedestrian and bicycle system, as well as with destinations around the County.

- Action PR-5.2 Provide and encourage appropriate levels of public access and amenities along the County’s blueways, where feasible.

- Action PR-5.3 Continue to pursue the development of riverside walkways and bicycle paths avoiding conflict with natural habitat.

- Action PR-5.4 Continue to support the development of a whitewater course on the Barren River.