



2025

NORTH VERNON

PARKS AND RECREATION

5-YEAR MASTER PLAN

DRAFT 02.28.2025
Adopted XX.XX.XXXX

Placeholder for Adoption Resolution.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PREPARED FOR:

North Vernon Parks and Recreation Department

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01

INTRODUCTION

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The North Vernon Parks and Recreation Department is committed to serving the leisure and recreational needs of the community through the development, maintenance, and programming of park facilities. The Department manages three parks and a trail, including Tripton Park, City Park, Mini Park, and Muscatatuck Trail, for a total of 83 acres of public parkland. In addition to offering a range of amenities, from sports courts to playgrounds, parks are home to many annual events, such as car shows, a Fourth of July celebration, and a farmers' market. Community members have strong connections to the parks system, which has enhanced quality of life in North Vernon for over 70 years, dating back to the acquisition and establishment of City Park. The Parks Department is supported by the North Vernon Parks Board, which meets monthly to discuss upcoming projects and programming. Meeting dates are posted on the City's website.



A mural wall at Tripton Park in North Vernon.
Image Source: HWC Engineering

By updating the Parks Master Plan, the City of North Vernon hopes to expand funding opportunities to support the preservation and development of park sites and facilities, engage community members in planning for the future of their local park system, educate the public about current park offerings, build robust public support for future improvements, and provide the Parks and Recreation Department with a clear vision for the future.

What is a Parks Master Plan?

A parks master plan is a written framework for future action in a given jurisdiction, such as a city, town, or county. The plan acts as a guide for sensible facility, program, and service development focused on parks and recreation. This parks plan has been developed in adherence with Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) guidelines. After the parks plan is approved by the IDNR, the City of North Vernon will be eligible for certain grants, such as the Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF).

Overview of Past Plan

This Parks Master Plan will replace the previous North Vernon Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2020-2024), providing an up-to-date guide for City leaders, staff, residents, and visitors. Since the previous plan was adopted, the North Vernon Parks and Recreation Board and staff have worked diligently to implement the plan’s recommendations.

The following tables (Table 1.1 – 1.3) provides an overview of the action items from the 2020-2024 Plan, the project status, and any notes pertaining to the project status.

Table 1.1: Short Term Priorities (0-5 Years)			
Park	Action Item	Status	Notes
City Park	Work towards implementing City Park Master Plan (Includes Renovation of Existing Restroom Facilities)	Complete	
System-wide	Develop a strategy around programming	In Progress	Executing agreement with Ohio Valley Sports.
System-wide	Develop a strategy around maintenance	In Progress	
System-wide	Perform a feasibility study for an indoor recreational facility	Complete	Legacy Sports Group completed a study as part of READI 2.0 planning. Was determined that City cannot afford a facility like this at this time.
System-wide	Develop a long-term strategic plan for funding	Complete	
System-wide	Asphalt surface all gravel parking	Incomplete	Continue to pursue.
System-wide	Develop a strategy around park shelters	Incomplete	Need to rephrase this action item to say “Develop a maintenance plan for park shelters.”
Mini Park	Develop a strategy and plan	Incomplete	Continue to pursue.
City Park	Apply top coat on asphalt for the quadplex	Incomplete	Continue to pursue.
City Park	Fencing/gating of the quadplex	Complete	Completed October 2024.

Table 1.2: Midrange Goals (5–10 Years)

Park	Action Item	Status	Notes
System-wide	Provide better sidewalks and crossings between Tripton Park and City Park	In Progress	Continue to pursue. Arvin property acquired.
System-wide	Add programming for more community events, adult sports leagues/tournaments, youth basketball and volleyball, non-athletic youth programs, and programs at the amphitheater at Tripton Park	In Progress	A few events were held at the amphitheater. Continue to pursue across the parks system.
System-wide	Increase program fees and shelter reservation fees for revenue generation	Incomplete	Not interested in pursuing at this time.
Tripton Park	Add a permanent roof to the amphitheater	Incomplete	Pursue as a long-term goal. Not a short-term or midrange priority.
Tripton Park	Expand the playground	Incomplete	Not a priority due to Quarry Adventure Park.
Tripton Park	Add trees	Complete	
City Park	Rework baseball/softball quadplex	Complete	Completed in October 2024.
City Park	Rework dugouts and fencing for Castetter Field	In Progress	

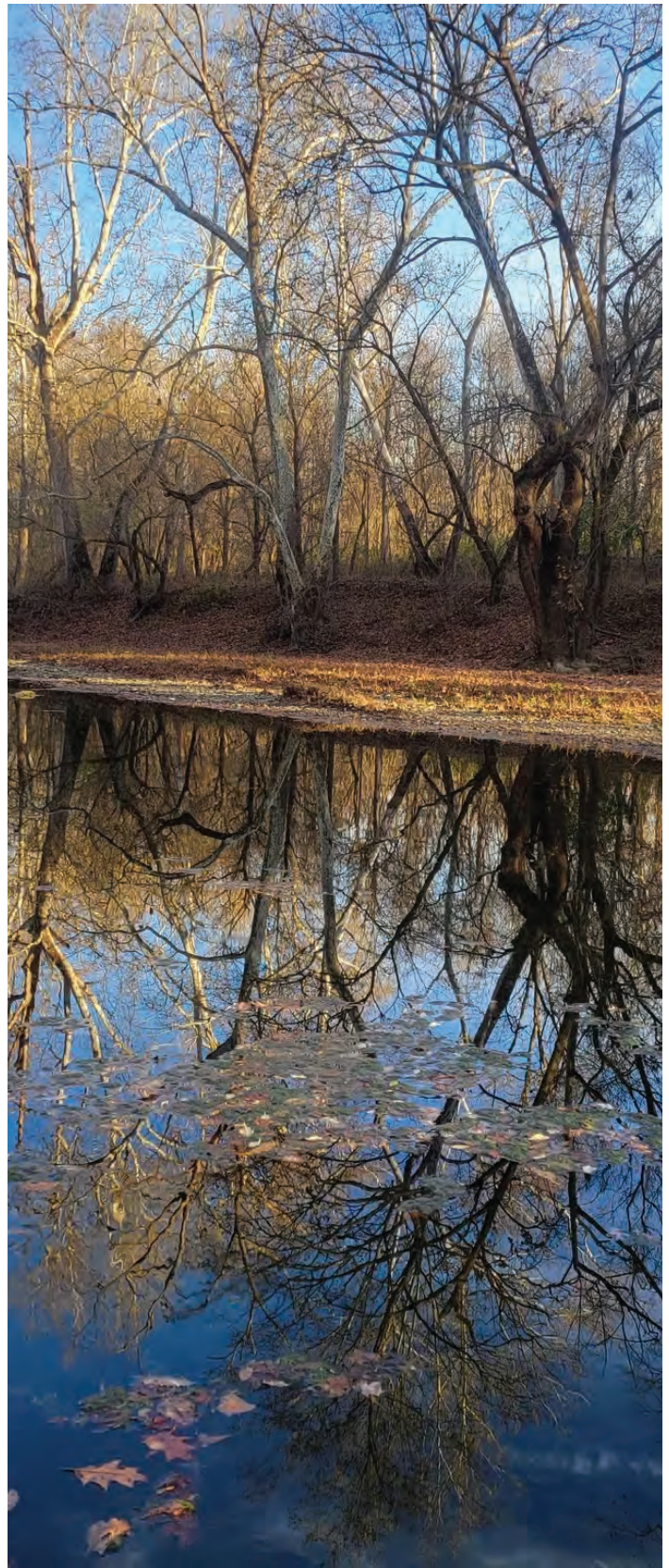
Table 1.3: Long Term Goals (10+ Years)

Park	Action Item	Status	Notes
System-wide	Connect trails throughout the region to City Park and Tripton Park	In Progress	Jennings County Active Transportation Plan completed. Specific trails projects identified.
System-wide	Establish a Parks Foundation	Incomplete	Instead partner with Jennings County Community Foundation.
System-wide	Team with City officials to implement City park user tax	Incomplete	Future implementation is being considered.
Muscatatuck Trail	Add lighting and increased surveillance	In Progress	Security cameras installed.

Definition of Planning Area

The study area for this plan is generally considered to be the corporate limits of the City of North Vernon. North Vernon is in central Jennings County, approximately 70 miles south of Indianapolis, north of Louisville, and west of Cincinnati. The City sits along the Muscatatuck River in a lush part of the state between Selmier State Forest and Muscatatuck Park. Notably, North Vernon is the largest incorporated community in the county. Jennings County, Bartholomew County, and Jackson County are all part of the South Central Indiana Talent Region, a collective which pursues funding opportunities for projects in North Vernon and neighboring communities. North Vernon is connected to the rest of the region and nearby metro areas via U.S. Highway 50, State Road 7, and State Road 3. The City is about 12 miles away from the nearest interstate – Interstate 65 in Seymour.

A map of the planning area is shown on the following page. Figure 1.1 provides an overview of the geographic layout of the community and its key features, including roadways, parks, and water bodies.



Trees reflect in the Muscatatuck River.
Image Source: Only In Your State

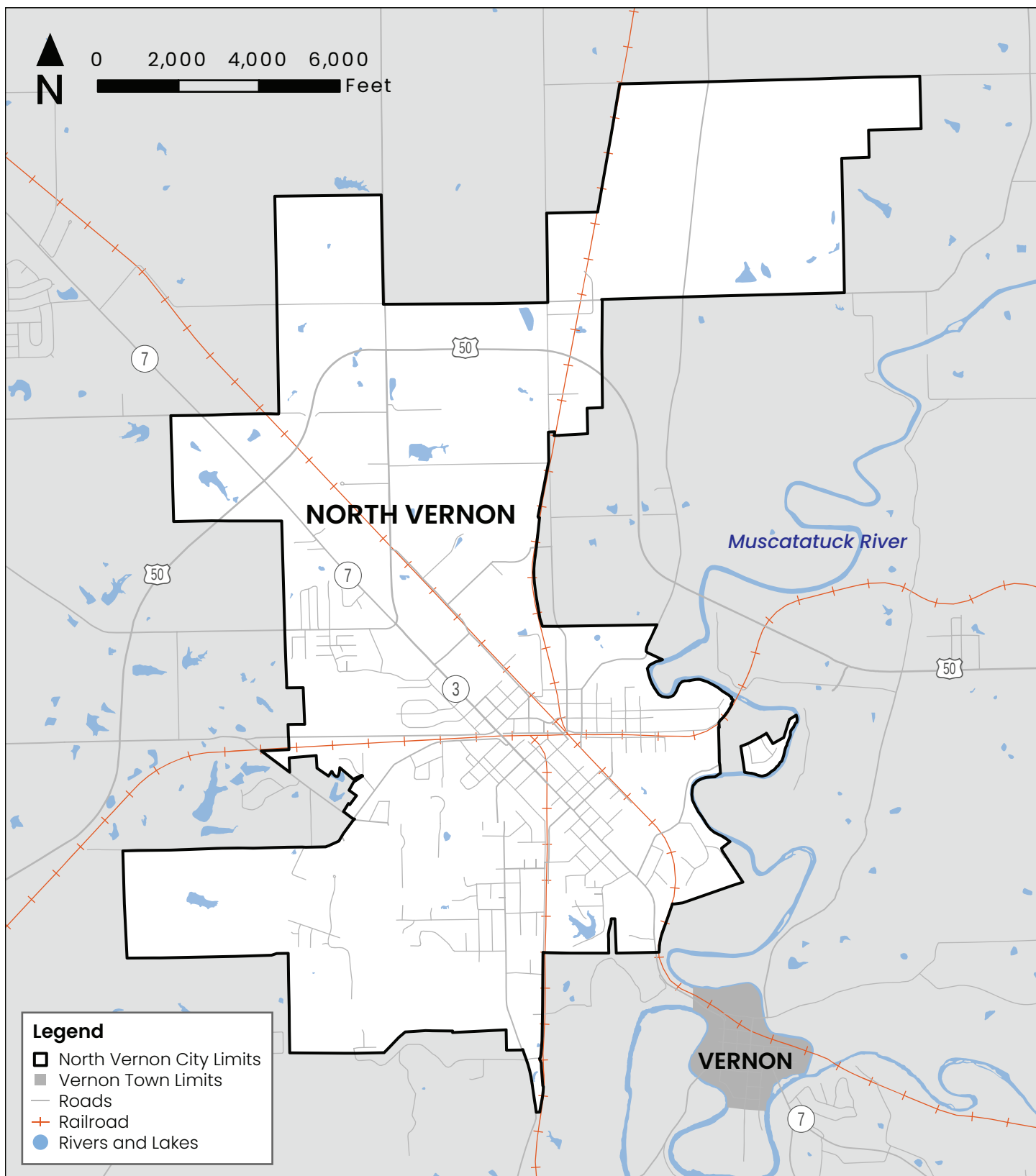


Figure 1.1: North Vernon City Limits

Source: HWC Engineering

Plan Process and Development

This plan was developed through a five-phase process which involved data collection and analysis, review of previous plans, community engagement, and stakeholder oversight. The results of the planning process informed and shaped the outcomes and recommendations presented in the plan. Built on a foundation of community engagement, and carefully refined based on public comment, this plan is intended to provide maximum benefit to residents and visitors alike.

The five phases of the planning process are summarized below.

Phase One:

Information Gathering

The first phase of the planning process involved facilitating an initial meeting with the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee consists of representatives from the city, parks department, and parks board, as well as other key community stakeholders. This first Steering Committee meeting was used to kick off the project, finalize the project schedule, and understand overarching goals and expectations for the plan. During this phase, the project team also conducted an inventory of the park system by visiting and mapping park and trail facilities in North Vernon.

Phase Two:

Public Participation

The second phase focused on gathering input from community members on the condition of park facilities, potential improvements, and desired amenities. The project team solicited input through a public workshop, staff interviews, and an online public opinion survey.

Phase Three:

Analysis

After carefully analyzing the information collected from these engagement opportunities, the project team presented key findings in Steering Committee Meeting #2. These key findings soon became the foundation for the plan's goals and objectives.

Phase Four:

Recommendations and Draft Plan

Building off the previous phases, the project team developed a draft Parks Master Plan document. This draft, which included recommendations for the parks system, was presented to the Steering Committee in Steering Committee Meeting #3. Following this meeting, the draft was revised by the project team, per feedback received, and released for public input. The draft was also submitted to IDNR for review and comment.

Phase Five:

Plan Review and Adoption

In the final phase of the planning process, the project team conducted a public presentation for the purpose of presenting the draft plan and inviting comments from members of the public. Upon receipt of final comments from the public, Steering Committee, and IDNR, the project team made necessary final revisions to the Parks Master Plan. The adoption draft was then distributed to and approved by the Parks Board.

Park Board Profile

The North Vernon Parks Board was established through Ordinance #991. The municipal Parks and Recreation Board consists of four members appointed by the mayor on the basis of their interest in and knowledge of parks and recreation.

The board oversees the management of the City's three parks: Tripton Park, City Park (which includes a quadplex baseball facility), and Mini Park/Muscatatuck Trailhead. During peak season, from April through August, meetings are held on the first and third Mondays of every month at 6pm at the North Vernon Parks and Recreation Office. During the off season, from September to March, meetings are held the third Monday of each month at the same time and location.

Park Board Members

President:

- Alex Kirchner

Members:

- Robin Haton
- Karl Knight
- Fonda Wilcher

Park Board Mission Statement

The North Vernon Parks and Recreation Board is working to develop an updated mission statement. The draft mission statement as of November 2024 is as follows:

“The North Vernon Parks and Recreation Board strives to enhance the quality of life for all residents and visitors by providing exceptional parks, recreational opportunities, and community spaces that inspire active, healthy, and inclusive experiences—All in North Vernon. We are dedicated to meeting the evolving needs of our community, fostering a vibrant environment where every individual can connect, play, and thrive.”

Budget

The Department is primarily funded through the collection of program and facility fees. These fees include youth soccer, youth softball, youth baseball, field rental for tournaments, as well as shelter house rental. Additionally, fees are collected for vendor rentals on July 4th, both non-profit and for-profit. In addition to these funds, the department may bring in a few hundred dollars every other year from a small fund with the Jennings County Community Foundation.

Below is a breakdown of the Parks and Recreation Department’s annual budget for the past three years, plus the approved 2025 budget. The annual budget includes the operating budget for the parks and pool, as well as park bond payments.

Year	Budget
2022	\$1,176,112.00
2023	\$1,226,140.00
2024	\$1,408,321.00
2025	\$1,376,225.00

Overview of Park Management

Day-to-day management and operations are administered by two full-time staff members: a park director and a program director. The North Vernon Parks and Recreation Department also employs 4-8 seasonal staff for maintenance, such as mowing. The North Vernon Aquatic Center is administered by a seasonal, full-time pool manager. An additional 25 seasonal, part-time staff provide services such as concessions and lifeguarding for the pool.

St. Anne’s Golf Course, a municipally-owned golf course in North Vernon, is managed by a separate department.

Volunteers

There is an opportunity to harness volunteers to assist with park maintenance and programming. Volunteers can help maintain trails, remove invasive species, facilitate festivals and events, and more. In other Indiana communities, parks departments partner with local organizations, such as the Boys and Girls Club, Lions Club, sororities and fraternities, school district, community foundation, and churches, to source volunteers. Some communities even have a park foundation or Friends of the Parks non-profit group to promote volunteerism, raise funds, and implement projects throughout the parks system.

Lease Agreements

The North Vernon Parks and Recreation Board has the following lease agreements with the following entities:

1. Jennings County Farmer’s Market (seasonal use of City Park shelter house).
2. Midwest Natural Gas (walking path to access adjacent property).
3. Ohio Valley Sports (travel tournaments at City Park baseball fields).





02

SUPPLY ANALYSIS

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The City of North Vernon's parks system has a long, rich history – a history which demonstrates the important role that parks play in the daily lives of residents. Whether watching a horse race, picnicking, rollerblading, playing on the playground, or enjoying a summertime concert, parks have been a place for recreation and community gathering in North Vernon through the decades.

Beginning in 1882, a fairground was established on the site of present-day City Park. For many years, the plot was used for county fair activities such as pageants, music bands and shows, square dancing, watermelon festivals, and horse racing.

By the early 1900s, a quarter-mile dirt track was developed for horse racing. A grandstand was erected at the finish line to accommodate crowds of visitors. Horse stables were also scattered throughout the park to provide shelter for hundreds of horses.

In 1954, the City of North Vernon acquired the land and named it the North Vernon City Park. In the decades since, the park has been periodically updated to meet the changing needs of residents. Today, the racetrack and grandstand are gone, but residents enjoy the park's playground, pool, sports courts, and fields.



The grandstand at City Park.
Image Source: North Vernon Parks and Recreation

In 1976, the parks system was expanded for the first time. The 1.6-acre Mini Park was established off Walnut Street, next to the North Vernon water tower. The facility was equipped with a basketball court, playground equipment, and a picnic facility, all of which remain features of the park today. In recent years, Mini Park became home to the Muscatatuck Trailhead, which connects bicyclists and pedestrians to downtown North Vernon and Muscatatuck Park via the multi-use Muscatatuck Trail.

When it opened to the public in 2019, Tripton Park became the newest park in North Vernon. Previously the site of the Muscatatuck County Club, the property along Vernon Street was purchased in 2018 and transformed into a modern city park. The park boasts a playground, outdoor amphitheater, outdoor exercise equipment, fishing, a boardwalk, disc golf, paved trails, and a welcome center with ADA accessible facilities. Tripton Park represents the bright future ahead for North Vernon's parks system, which strives to build on past successes and create innovative recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.



North Vernon's Walnut Street around 1900.
Image Source: INGenWeb

Park Inventory and Assessment

The City of North Vernon manages over 83 acres of parkland among the following three parks: Tripton Park, City Park, and Mini Park. Mini Park is also the location of the Muscatatuck Trailhead and Trail, which connects downtown North Vernon and Muscatatuck Park, a county-owned facility.

Tripton Park is considered a community park which serves people within a three-mile radius and promotes passive recreation. City Park is an active park and is also classified as a community park. Mini Park is classified as a mini park since this park is relatively small and serves fewer people than the other parks in the city. Throughout the three different parks, there are active and passive recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

Over the last several years, the City of North Vernon has prioritized improvements in quality of life, with several of these improvements focused within the parks system. Recent additions include the Aquatic Center at City Park, and the development of the brand-new Tripton Park. Amenities that draw visitors to the park include the newly turfed baseball fields, which are attracting regional tournaments, as well as a radio control (RC) racetrack at City Park. People who race RC cars travel from outside of North Vernon to this track for races and competitions. The amphitheater at Tripton Park also pulls in regional visitors for concerts and other productions.

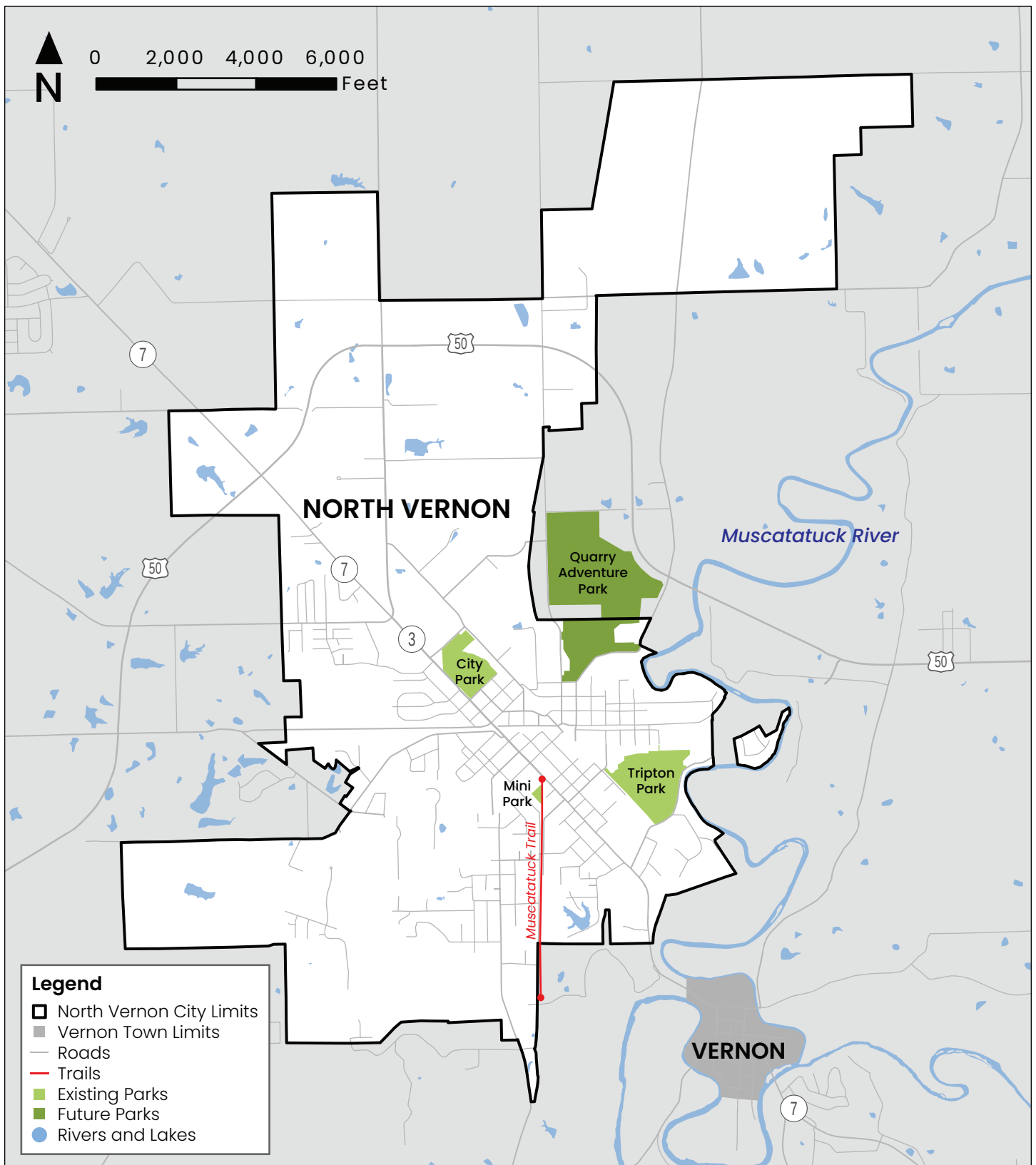
On-site evaluations of each park took place in August 2024. The following pages include a description of each site, programs offered, and the condition of park facilities. Figure 2.1 maps the location of each of these existing parks, as well as future parks in the North Vernon system. Figure 2.2 maps the location of other nearby recreational opportunities.



Mini Park offers a basketball court.
Image Source: HWC Engineering



The RC racetrack at City Park draws visitors from around the region.
Image Source: HWC Engineering



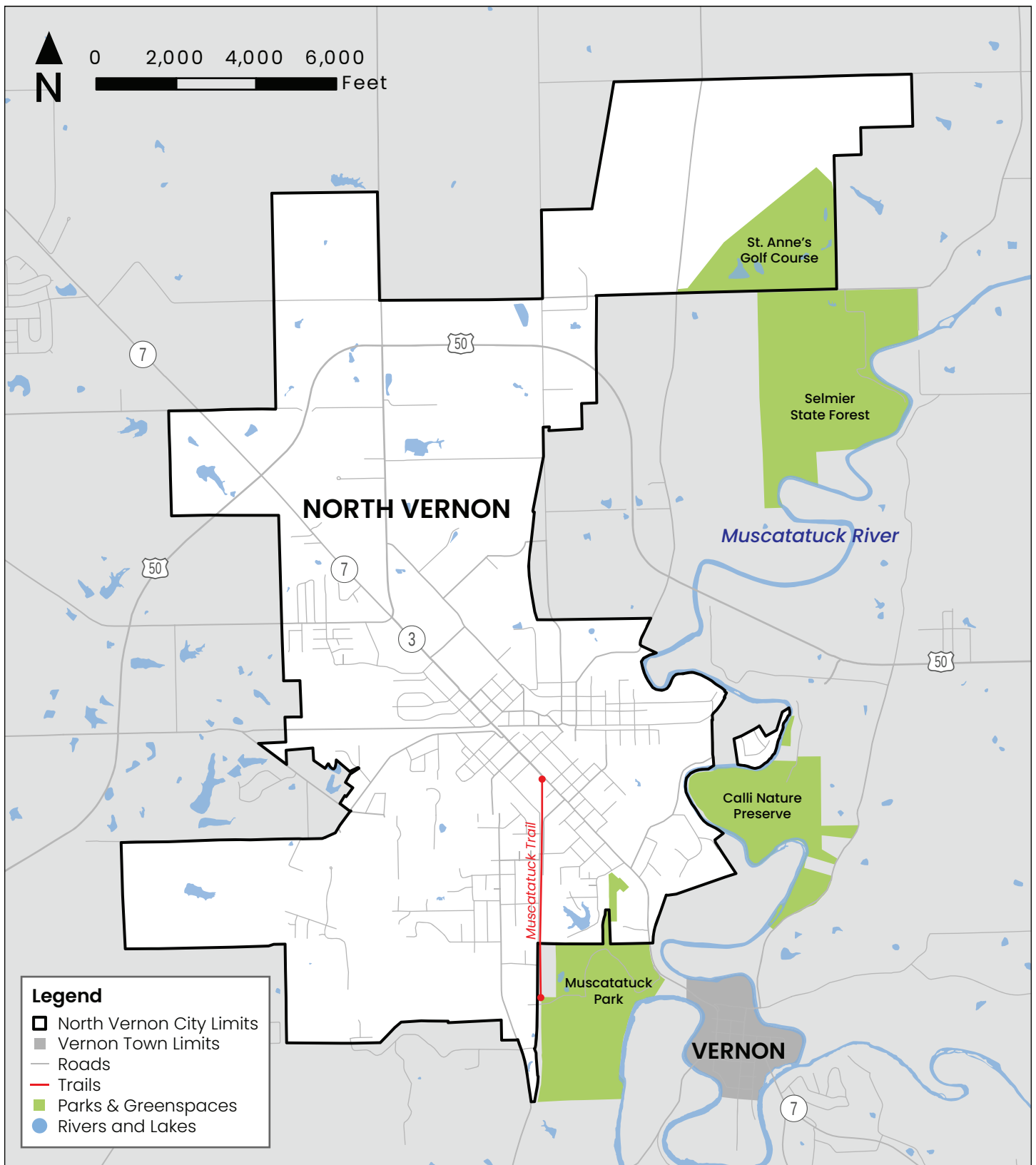


Figure 2.2: Other Recreational Opportunities

Source: HWC Engineering

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Tripton Park

502 S Madison Avenue

52.5 acres

Park Description

Tripton Park is the newest addition to the North Vernon Parks Department. Land for the park was purchased in 2018 from the former Muscatatuck Country Club. The park boasts a playground, outdoor fitness equipment, a pond with a boardwalk for fishing, a disc golf course, cornhole, bocce ball, an amphitheater and a stage, a small community room, bathrooms, picnic shelters, dog amenities, pollinator prairies, a natural area, and 2.3 miles of trails throughout the park. There is parking available off of Madison Avenue as well as Greensburg Street. It is bordered on the western edge by the City of Madison Port Authority Railroad and on the southern edge by the Muscatatuck River. There are many newly planted, young trees in the park. Because of this, the overall tree coverage is average but will increase as the trees mature.

Current Programs

There are many classes held at Tripton Park during the summer months, including yoga and disc golf classes. Additionally, the amphitheater at the park is home to live entertainment in the warm months of the year and attracts many visitors from around North Vernon, Jennings County, and beyond.

Park Condition

Overall, the facilities and grounds at Tripton Park are in good condition. Most of the park is ADA-accessible. All walking trails are flush and fully accessible throughout the park. The playground equipment and other site amenities are in good condition and maintained appropriately. The park's safety and security are well-maintained, with security cameras installed in various locations and lighting in all areas.



Tripton Park is the newest park in North Vernon.
Image Source: HWC Engineering



Figure 2.3: Tripton Park

Source: HWC Engineering

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City Park

604 N State Street

29 acres

Park Description

City Park is the most active park in the City of North Vernon, boasting 29 acres of active recreational space. It features a quadplex baseball facility, pickleball courts, horseshoe pits, softball fields, playgrounds, and a paved trail that surrounds the park. There are multiple parking areas that serve different areas of the park. The main parking area is located on the east side of the park off of Franklin Street. There is also parking close to the shelters, pickleball courts, and soccer fields. City Park is bordered on the north side by the National Guard military base and Summit Street, to the south by State Street, to the east by Franklin Street, and to the west by FDR Drive. Lighting throughout the park is scarce, especially near the soccer fields, pickleball courts, and RC track. Tree coverage in City Park is also scarce, except on the southern edge of the park along State Street.

Current Programs

This park is also home to park league softball, baseball and soccer. City Park hosts many community events and activities, such as little leagues, birthday parties, regional remote-control car races, and the Jennings County Farmers Market. Shelters can be rented out for private or public events. The City of North Vernon uses the park to host sports tournaments, and these attract visitors to the park from outside of the city.



City Park, the oldest park in North Vernon, offers an array of amenities, from baseball fields to trails.
Image Source: HWC Engineering

Park Condition

Overall, the facilities and grounds at City Park are in fair condition, but efforts are being made to improve the park. There are multiple ongoing construction projects, including turfing the baseball fields and installing new pickleball courts. Both projects involve substantial investment from local government. Areas of the park that still need improvement include the restroom facilities and basketball courts.

The safety and security of the park are also in fair condition. Security cameras are aging and in need of replacement. The site has some ADA accessible areas, including the newer Aquatic Center and newly installed sidewalks; nonetheless, many areas still need ADA accessibility improvements. This includes the playground areas, some shelters, the RC track, and some sports fields.

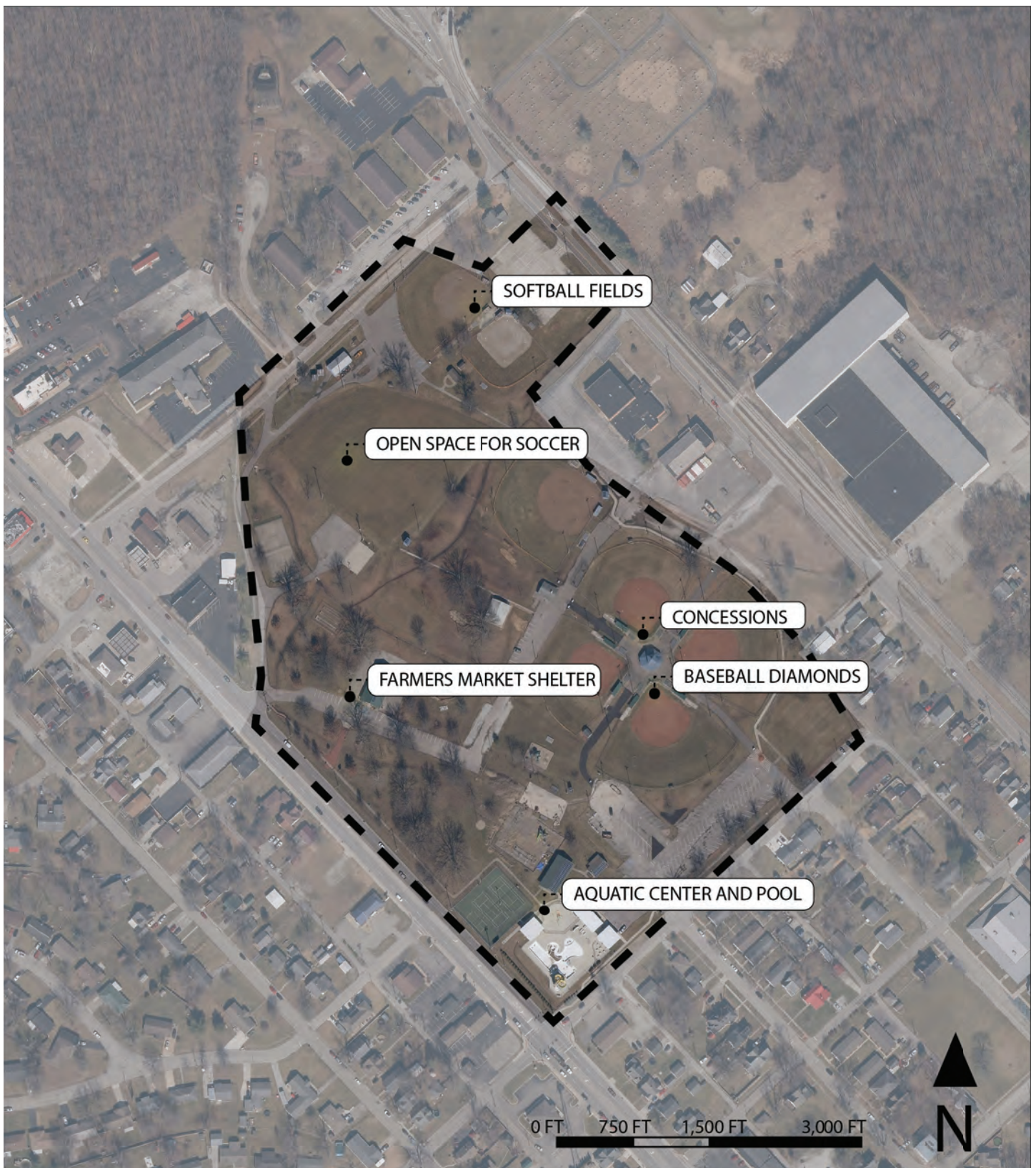


Figure 2.4: City Park

Source: HWC Engineering

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Mini Park / Muscatatuck Trailhead

44 S Gum Street

~1.5 acres

Park Description

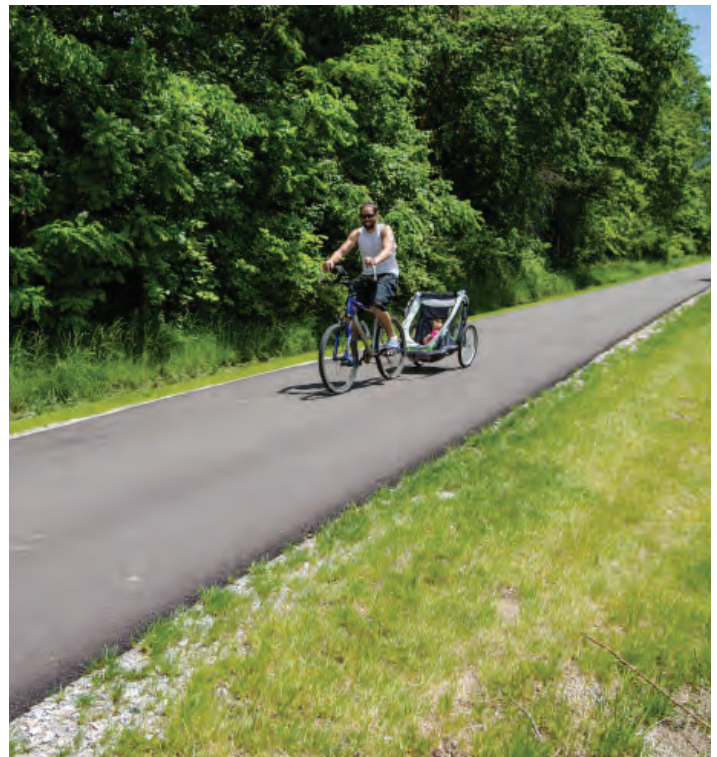
Mini Park is a small, quiet park in North Vernon which sits under the city's water tower. The park features an asphalt basketball court, open green space, benches, a swing set, a slide, and a trailhead to the Muscatatuck Trail on the southern corner of the park. The park has limited parking, with six spaces adjacent to the trailhead and a few unmarked spaces on the park's northern edge. Mini Park is in the middle of a residential neighborhood with houses surrounding the park on two of its three sides.

Park Condition

Overall, the facilities and grounds at Mini Park are in poor condition. The swings and slide are aging and need replacement. The basketball court needs resurfaced. Enhancements to accessibility and maintenance are needed to attract users. The site is not ADA accessible, since it lacks sidewalks, and infrastructure connecting the site to nearby neighborhoods is lacking. The swings, slides, and benches all sit on top of grass without any accessible surfaces. The basketball court is cracked, which could be a tripping hazard. However, the Muscatatuck Trail and its trailhead are both fully accessible and connect users to other locations around North Vernon. Safety and security could also be improved. For instance, there is a need for better lighting throughout the park to accommodate recreation in the morning and evening hours.



Swings at Muscatatuck Park.
Image Source: HWC Engineering



Mini Park is a trailhead for the Muscatatuck Trail.
Image Source: HWC Engineering

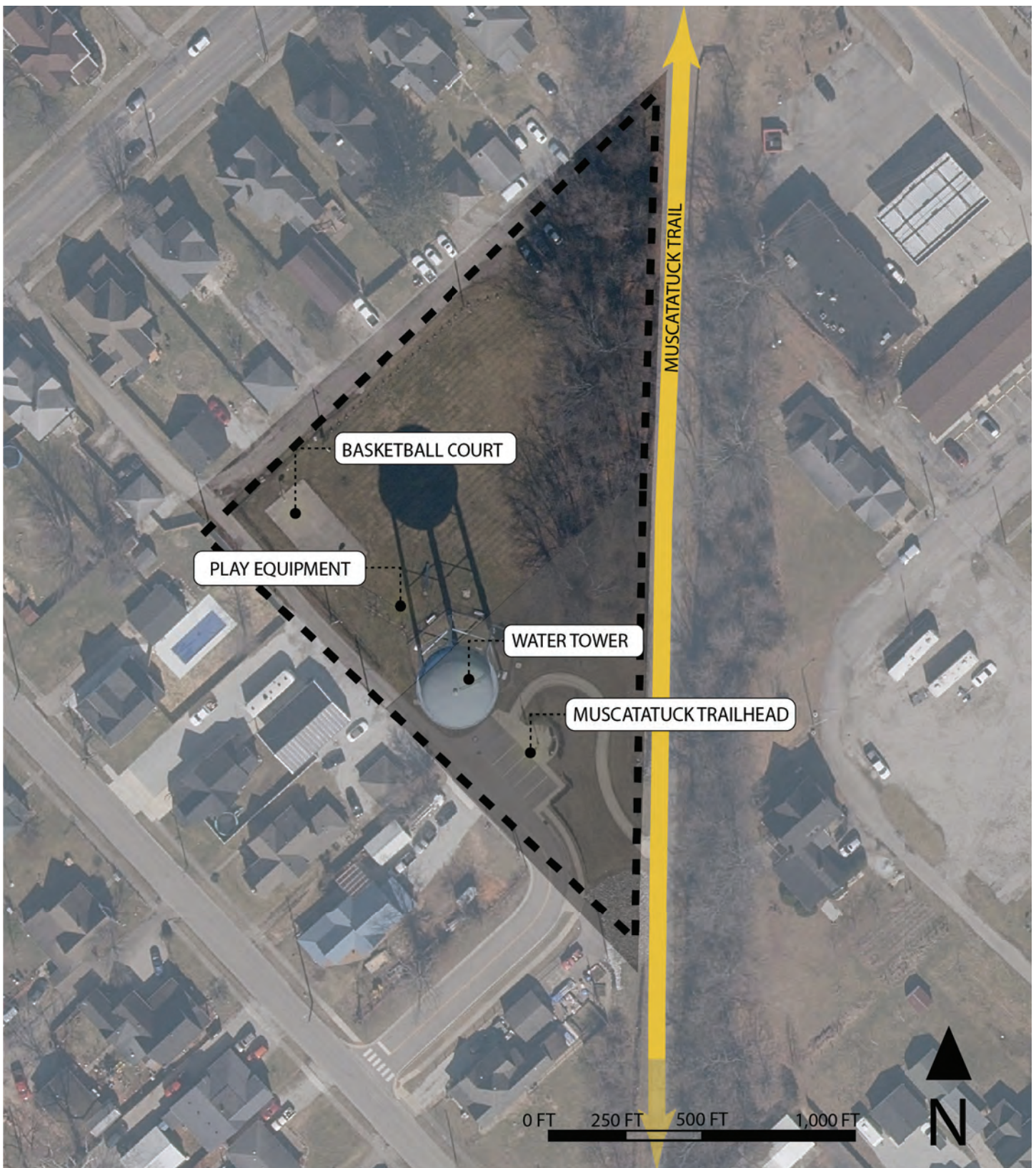


Figure 2.5: Mini Park and the Muscatatuck Trail

Source: HWC Engineering

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Summary Chart

The following chart summarizes the recreational facilities offered with North Vernon’s parks system:

Table 2.1: Summary Chart of the Parks System			
	Tripton Park	City Park	Mini Park
Acres	52.5	29	1.5
Amphitheater	X		
Baseball/Softball Fields		X	
Basketball Court		X	X
Bocce Ball	X		
Community Room	X		
Cornhole	X		
Disc Golf Course	X		
Fishing	X		
Food Concessions (Seasonal)		X	
Horseshoe Court		X	
Open Play Fields		X	X
Outdoor Exercise Pad	X		
Outdoor Fitness Equipment	X		
Pickleball Courts		X	
Picnic Shelters	X	X	
Picnic Tables	X	X	
Playground Facilities	X	X	X
RC Track		X	
Restrooms	X	X	
Swimming		X	
Trails	X	X	X



The municipally-owned St. Anne's Golf Course is another recreation destination in North Vernon.
Image Source: St. Anne's Golf Course Facebook

Other Recreational Opportunities

In addition to three parks, the City of North Vernon owns St. Anne's Golf Course. Situated just south of the North Vernon Municipal Airport, St. Anne's Golf Course is an 18-hole course located on 166 picturesque acres with rolling hills, mature trees, and beautiful water features. The property offers practice facilities, including a driving range and putting green, and a newly renovated clubhouse. Throughout the season, the golf course hosts member events, including recreational leagues, tournaments, and a junior golf program.

Private recreational opportunities in the North Vernon area include Iron Benders Fitness and Nutrition, Gastank MMA and Fitness, Anytime Fitness, and Deer Creek Campground.



A small waterfall in Muscatatuck Park.
Image Source: Muscatatuck Park Facebook

The City of North Vernon is located just north of Muscatatuck Park. Founded in 1921 as Indiana's fourth state park, the park features many relics from this era and before, including the 1850 William Read Home and ruins of a pioneer stone cutting mill. The park was signed back over to Jennings County in 1968 to be forever dedicated to recreation. Amenities include a campground, community building, picnic shelters, visitor center, and nearly 10 miles of trails through hardwood forests along the winding Muscatatuck River. Other nearby parks and preserves include Eco Lake Park, Calli Nature Preserve, the Crosley Fish and Wildlife Area, Selmier State Forest, and Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge.



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03

**FEATURES OF
PLANNING
AREA**

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The need for parks and recreation facilities, as well as the layout, design, and features of these facilities is highly influenced by social and economic factors within the community. For example, a community with a significant youth population may demand more playgrounds within its parks, compared to an area with a significant senior population, which may prefer more passive recreation opportunities, such as nature trails for birdwatching and hiking.

The development of parks and recreation sites is also influenced by their proximity to man-made, historical, and cultural features, which may be an asset for the park to leverage, or a reason to direct development elsewhere. Similarly, the natural features of the land itself can be a center point for development, whether a beautiful river or a preserved woodland, or a limitation to carefully consider due to inherent cost, safety, or technical barriers. For these reasons, it's important to consider existing conditions within the community, since these conditions will shape the plan's recommendations.

Social and Economic Factors

This demographic analysis examines key aspects of the population in the City of North Vernon. It offers an overview of population trends in relation to residents' demographics, employment and economy, housing conditions, and cultural characteristics. Understanding these trends helps highlight future needs and demands for North Vernon's parks and recreation system over the coming years.

Population

Population change is often a key indicator of a community's well-being. In the case of North Vernon, the city's population growth reflects ongoing efforts to enhance quality of life over the past two decades. Situated in Jennings County, Indiana, North Vernon makes up about one-quarter of the county's population. Between 2000 and 2020, the city grew by 640 residents, an increase of roughly 10%. According to the 2022 American Community Survey, North Vernon now has a population of 6,935 residents. Since 2012, the city's population has risen by 4.8%, or 319 people, outpacing the growth rates of both Jennings County and its county seat, Vernon.

North Vernon's population has become more diverse over the past decade. In 2012, 93.8% of North Vernon's residents identified as White, a figure that decreased to 90.9% by 2022. During this period, the Black population grew by 137 people, while the Latinx population increased by 335 people. In addition to becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, the city has also seen a rise in residents with disabilities. In 2012, 16.7% of the population had a disability related to hearing, vision, cognition, mobility, self-care, or independent living. By 2022, this percentage had grown to 22.1%.



Outdoor exercise equipment at Tripton Park provides fitness opportunities for adult residents.
Image Source: HWC Engineering

Over the last decade, North Vernon's population has aged slightly, from a median of 35.3 years in 2012 to 37.5 years in 2022. Despite this change, the city's population remains younger than the rest of Jennings County and the state of Indiana, which reported a median age of 38 years in 2022. This indicates that North Vernon has a fair number of young families with children.

The city is served by the Jennings County School District, along with other private schools in the area. As of 2022, 90.0% of the population holds at least a high school diploma, and 9.4% have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Additionally, 4.4% of North Vernon's residents have a graduate degree. In the last decade, the city has become more educated, with a 76% increase in the number of residents holding a high school diploma.

As diversity grows, so do the perspectives, needs, and backgrounds that must be considered in future planning. Parks play a vital role in supporting community well-being, and their ability to serve all residents is essential. Parks should be inclusive and accessible to people of all abilities, fostering equality. They also reflect a community's cultural diversity and should offer safe spaces for individuals of all identities to gather and celebrate. Additionally, parks should encourage a healthy social and physical lifestyle, enhancing the overall welfare of the city.

Population Trends

In recent years, North Vernon has experienced notable population growth. Based on growth trends from 2000 to 2022, North Vernon's population is projected to grow by an additional 706 people over the next decade.

The projected growth of 706 people by 2030 suggests that the parks system will need to adapt to accommodate the larger population. This likely means the city will need to develop an additional community or neighborhood park, or several parks, to serve the growing population. The increase in residents also highlights the need for expanded programming and services, such as exercise classes and community events, to meet the needs of the new population.



Tripton Park is the newest park in North Vernon. As the community grows, additional parkland is needed.
Image Source: HWC Engineering

Economy

A community's local economy influences how its residents utilize parks, and the types of amenities needed from park facilities and programs. In 2022, North Vernon had a median income of \$46,889, reflecting a nearly 35% increase since 2012. Despite this growth, 19.9% of the population lives below the poverty line, according to the American Community Survey. Furthermore, 55% of North Vernon residents live below the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employment (ALICE) threshold. This threshold captures households that are earning more than the federal poverty level, but not enough to afford the basics where they live.

Major employers in North Vernon include Lowe's Distribution Center, North Vernon Industry Corporation, Hilex Poly Co LLC, Jay C Food Store, Walmart Supercenter, Decatur Plastics Products, Martinrea International Inc, American Axle & Mfg Inc, Jennings County Schools, and Decatur Mold. Despite having strong anchor institutions, the City's unemployment rate in 2022 was 5.9%, the highest in the area.

Despite the challenges that North Vernon faces, the community's future is bright. Median household income is on the rise and the local economy has great potential to flourish thanks in large part to recent investments in quality of place. These investments, such as the development of Quarry Adventure Park, are likely to attract new families and bring additional tax revenue to the community. This aligns with a modern approach to economic development, which recommends investing in quality of place rather than relying solely on traditional business attraction mechanisms. Although business attraction, retention, and expansion remain staples of economic development, jobs are now following people more than people are following jobs. With continued investment in park maintenance and development, North Vernon is uniquely poised to capture growth in the region.

To ensure that investments do not burden low income residents, North Vernon has alternative mechanisms at its disposal. These mechanisms allow the City to take on increased operations and maintenance costs associated with park development.

First and foremost, the City of North Vernon is financially stable thanks in large part to its Redevelopment Commission (RDC). As of December 31st, 2024, North Vernon's total cash and investment numbers exceeded \$32 million, outpacing other Hoosier communities of the same size. The RDC has been, and continues to be, supportive of park improvements. The RDC committed over \$3 million for Tripton Park, and have committed over \$3 million for Quarry Adventure Park. The RDC, which is dependent on the assessed value of businesses, brings in nearly twice the property tax dollars as the City of North Vernon. Consequently, even if residential property taxes stagnant, park improvements may be funded by the RDC. Alternatively, improvements may be funded through a bond. In 2020, North Vernon received an A+ bond rating, allowing the City to borrow more money at lower interest rates.

Housing

There are approximately 3,113 housing units in the City of North Vernon, which indicates that 143 new units have been constructed in the last decade. According to the 2022 American Community Survey, only 5.6% of housing units in North Vernon are vacant, compared to 10.2% in Jennings County and 9.5% in Indiana. Although the community has low vacancies, which is generally a positive sign indicating low blight, the rental occupancy rate is high. Only 58.1%, slightly over half, of North Vernon residents own their home and 41.9% of residents rent. By comparison, the rental occupancy rate is just 29.9% at the state level and 19.0% in Jennings County. A high rental occupancy rate in North Vernon, combined with low vacancies, indicates that there is an insufficient amount of affordable housing in the community, making homeownership a challenge.

A balance between homeowners and renters is needed to support a thriving parks system for all to enjoy. Although rental units support a diversity of residents in terms of age, background, and socioeconomic status, homeowners are more likely to stay in the community for an extended period. This core of reliable residents is more likely to be invested in the future of their community, and often lends their time and money to the parks system through property taxes and volunteerism.

Man-made, Historical, and Cultural Features

Man-made Features

Transportation

Key thoroughfares in North Vernon include U.S. Highway 50, State Road 7, and State Road 3. These routes are frequently traveled by residents and visitors, connecting them to the rest of the county, region, and state. These major corridors connect North Vernon to Interstate 65 and Interstate 74, linking the city to Indianapolis, Louisville, and Cincinnati, each of which is approximately 70 miles away.

North Vernon does not have a public transit system; consequently, nearly 93% of workers in North Vernon commute by car, 5% work from home, and the remaining 2% walk or bike to work. To encourage more active lifestyles and connect residents to community amenities, including the park system, North Vernon and Jennings County have been working to expand the local trail network and enhance sidewalk connections.

According to Jennings County Parks and Recreation, Muscatatuck Park, located south of North Vernon, hosts nearly 10 miles of trail, taking visitors through picturesque woodlands and marshes. The Muscatatuck Trail, completed in late 2016, is a paved walkway connecting Muscatatuck Park to Mini Park and downtown

North Vernon. Future plans involve connecting the Muscatatuck Trail to Tripton Park, which already contains 2.3 miles of paved trail.

North Vernon does not currently have a connection to a regional trail system, and this plan suggests focusing on the local trails for the foreseeable future. Connections within the city to parks and other amenities should be prioritized.

The City is steadily working to repair and eliminate gaps in the sidewalk network based on findings from the 2018 Sidewalk Report. In the next few years, the City may consider updating this report to capture current sidewalk conditions, and to prioritize future improvements.



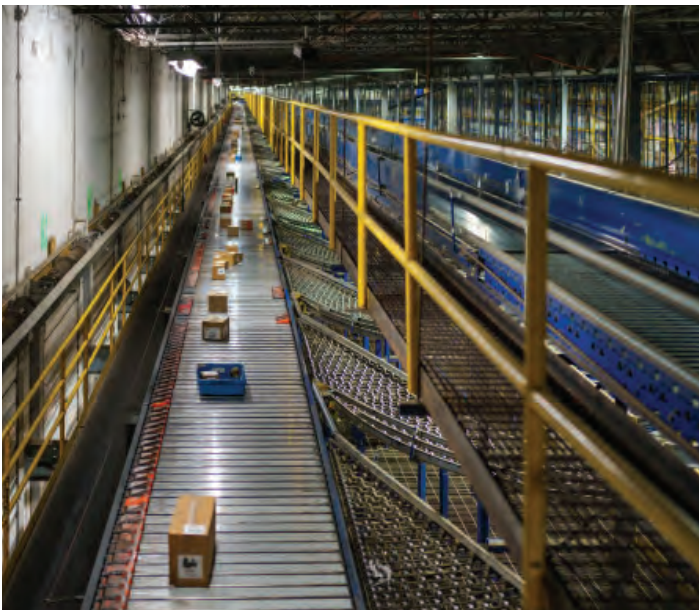
A paved trail in Tripton Park weaves by wildflowers.
Image Source: HWC Engineering

Industries and Employers

According to the 2022 American Community Survey, the largest industry in North Vernon is manufacturing, which employs 27.4% of the civilian employed population. Other significant industries include educational services, health care, and social assistance, which employs 22.6% of the population, and retail trade, which employs another 14.3%.

Top employers in the county include:

- Lowe's Distribution Center
- North Vernon Industry Corp (Iron foundry)
- Hilex Poly (Plastic bag manufacturer)
- Walmart Supercenter
- Jay C Food Store
- Decatur Plastic Products (Plastic manufacturer)
- Martinerea International Inc. (Automotive)
- American Axle & Manufacturing (Automotive)
- Jennings County High School
- Decatur Mold (Plastic manufacturer)



The Lowe's Distribution Center is one of North Vernon's largest employers.
Image Source: Lowe's Corporate

Schools

The City of North Vernon is served by the Jennings County School Corporation, a district committed to inspiring and empowering students to reach their full potential. The district consists of six elementary schools, a middle school, a high school, and an education center, which offers specialized career training services. North Vernon Elementary, Jennings County Middle School, and Jennings County High School are all located in the southwest corner of the city. The school grounds feature indoor learning spaces as well as outdoor recreation facilities, including a football stadium, tennis courts, baseball fields, and playgrounds. Nearby woodlands to the south have been donated to, and are now owned by, the city and the school corporation. These areas could be developed as passive recreation spaces in the future.

Currently, there are no agreements for joint use, maintenance, or bulk purchasing between the City of North Vernon and Jennings County School Corporation. To maximize efficiency, there is an opportunity to explore these types of agreements, as well as other potential collaborations. For example, a Joint Use Agreement would allow community members to use school play areas after hours, expanding access to recreation facilities for North Vernon residents.



North Vernon is served by the Jennings County School Corporation.
Image Source: JCMS Facebook

Historical and Cultural Features

The region's history is one in which two narratives intertwine – a narrative of coexistence with the natural world and a drive for innovation and interconnection. These narratives are demonstrated through pioneer life along the Muscatatuck River and development of the railroad through North Vernon, among other key events in the city's history. This legacy continues to this day as North Vernon positions itself as a destination for outdoor recreation and a member of the South Central Indiana Talent Region.

The history of North Vernon and Jennings County goes back to the early 1800s, and prior when the land was under the stewardship of Native American tribes, including the Shawandasse Tula (Shawnee), Myaamia (Miami), and Kaskaskia (Peoria). The county itself was established in 1817 and named after Jonathan Jennings, the first Governor of Indiana. Not long after, North Vernon and neighboring Vernon began to attract residents. In 1867, North Vernon was incorporated as a town. With the arrival of the railroad, the town quickly grew into a thriving transportation hub, transporting goods from Indianapolis, Louisville, Cincinnati, and beyond. Soon after, in 1876, the town was incorporated as a city. Over the years, North Vernon has transformed from a bustling, ever-changing railroad town into a safe, comfortable community with ample amenities and proximity to major cities via Interstate connections.

Parks have played a significant role in North Vernon's history. For example, City Park has served as a community hub for over one hundred years, entertaining the masses for decades with ever-changing amenities, from horse racing to baseball games. There are opportunities to celebrate this history through programming. Walking tours of North Vernon's historic districts could begin and end in local parks. In addition to sharing the exciting history of these important green spaces, parks serve as a good meet-up point for residents and visitors, offering restrooms, parking, and proximity to historic districts.

Historic Districts

- North Vernon Downtown Commercial Historic District
- State Street Historic District
- Walnut Street Historic District
- Couchman Historic District

Historic Features

- Annadale (Historic home)
- Historic Tunnel Mill (Pioneer grist mill)
- Carnegie Hall

Art Groups and Galleries

- Classic Stained Glass and Gift Gallery

Local Performing Arts

- Park Theatre Civic Centre



The Dove-Sharp & Rudicel Funeral Home in the State Street Historic District in North Vernon.
Image Source: Wikipedia

Festivals and Events

Throughout the year, North Vernon residents celebrate their culture in an array of festivals and events. Major events are listed below, along with the month they occur and their typical location within the community.

Although North Vernon offers a variety of festivals and events, only a few of these community gatherings take place in local parks. Moving forward, there is an opportunity to collaborate with local civic organizations to host events in the parks.

Table 3.1: Festivals and Events in North Vernon			
Name	Month	Location	Activities
NVPR Easter Egg Hunt	March	City Park	Egg Hunt, Easter Bunny Meet and Greet, Bicycle Giveaway
Jennings County Farmers Market	April – October	City Park	Seasonal Open Air Market
Free Fishing Day	July	Tripton Park	Fishing, Live Music, Bounce Houses, Face Painting, Food Trucks, Crafts
Have a Blast Cruise In	August	Downtown	Car Show
Sweet Street	October	Stellar Plaza	Trick-or-Treating
Christmas in the City	December	Downtown	Parade, Christmas Market, Food Trucks, Live Music, Santa Meet and Greet



Each year, bikes are given away at the North Vernon Parks and Recreation Department's Easter Egg Hunt.
Image Source: City of North Vernon Facebook



A little girl collects eggs at the North Vernon Parks and Recreation Department's Easter Egg Hunt.
Image Source: City of North Vernon Facebook



The Jennings County Farmers Market is held each year from April to October in City Park.
Image Source: Join Us in Jennings County



Families celebrate the holidays at Christmas in the City.
Image Source: City of North Vernon Facebook

Natural Resources

Wetland and Water Features

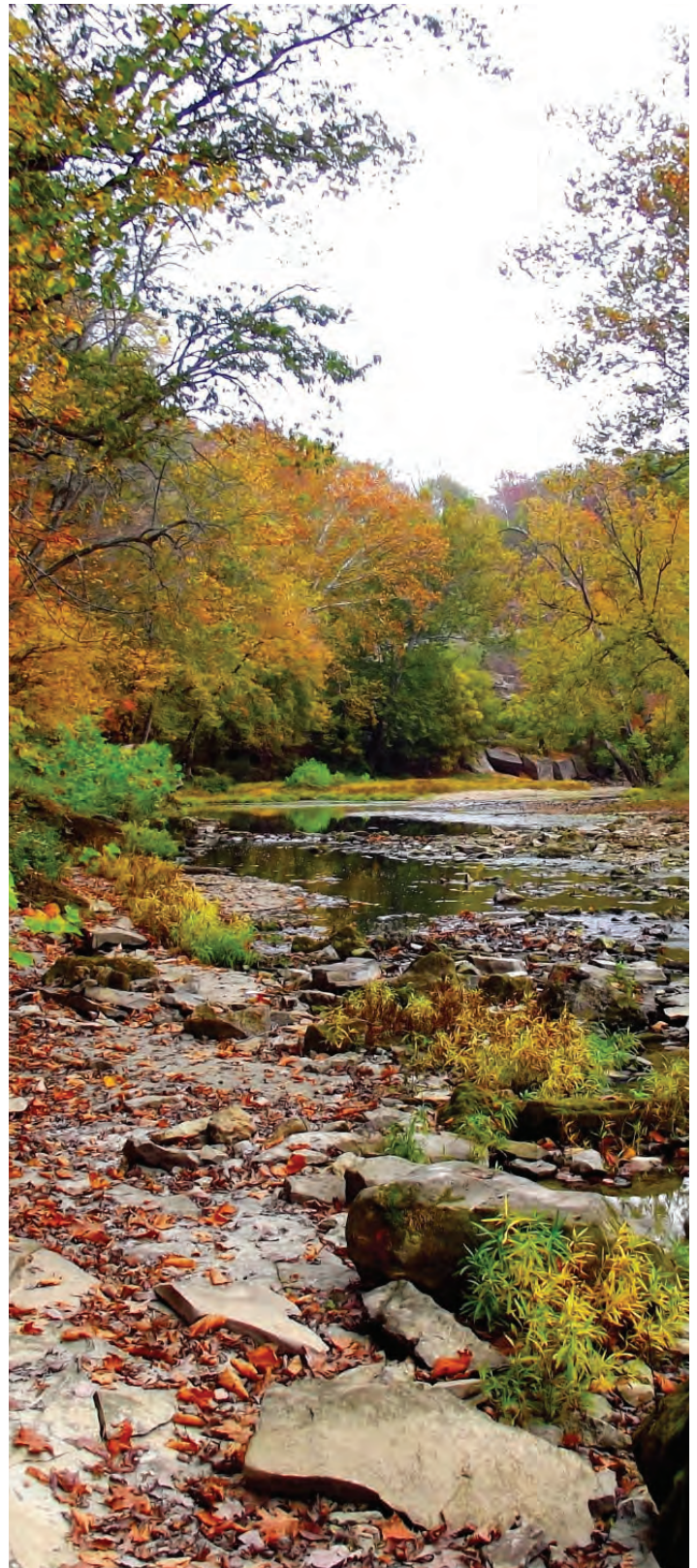
North Vernon's eastern boundary is largely delineated by the Muscatatuck River, a major tributary of the East Fork of the White River. Along its 53.7-mile winding path, the river provides drainage for over 1,000 square miles of largely rural land in southeastern Indiana. In the early 1800s, the river was used for navigation and eventually for grist and sawmills. Today, the river is a recreation destination which supports hiking, fishing, canoeing, and kayaking.

Other nearby water bodies include the nearby Indian Creek, Sixmile Creek, Sand Creek, Fish Creek, and Country Squire Lake.

There are very few wetlands in North Vernon since the city itself sits on higher ground than the surrounding area. Where wetlands do exist, they are found around the Muscatatuck River, creeks, and small ponds.

Outside of North Vernon, Jennings County has taken strides to preserve wetlands on their public lands. Extensive wetlands are preserved at the Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge. Wetlands have also been restored in the Crosley State Fish and Wildlife Area and Muscatatuck Park.

The 2023 Jennings County Active Transportation Plan proposes establishing a blueway along the Muscatatuck River on the eastern edge of North Vernon. The blueway would be accessible via a proposed launch site in the neighboring Vernon. Although this project will not directly involve the North Vernon Parks and Recreation Department, it is important for Department staff to keep up-to-date on project process and consider any future opportunities to develop an additional public access site within North Vernon.



A blueway has been proposed along the Muscatatuck River. Blueways are marked routes on a body of water for recreational use.
Image Source: Mossy Feet Books

Soils

The City of North Vernon’s soil composition is a result of its geology and hydrology. The following table outlines the three most common soil types in the city, as well as their suitability for various types of development. “Not limited” indicates that the soil has features that are favorable for the specified use. “Very limited” indicates that the soil has one or more features that are unfavorable for the specified use. These limitations would be difficult to overcome without major soil reclamation, special design, or expensive installation procedures. (*It is important to note that two of the soil types identified are not rated. Even so, these soil types are found primarily in developed parts of the city, suggesting that limitations are few, if any.)

Topography and Geological Features

According to the Indiana Geological and Water Survey at Indiana University, North Vernon is part of the Muscatatuck Regional Slope, a gentle sloping plain made of Devonian bedrock that has been dissected by streams. The gently undulating landscapes in the area take on bold relief where major streams cross them, as occurs along the Muscatatuck River. In fact, the City of North Vernon sits on a relatively flat area which rises approximately 100 feet above the Muscatatuck River and neighboring Vernon.

The underlying bedrock in the region is primarily composed of limestone, shale, and dolomite. These materials have been quarried for decades at sites like the Berry Materials Quarry, which opened in the early 1900s. Due to the limestone bedrock, Jennings County has numerous caves.

Most of these caves are relatively small, but nonetheless attract many cavers. The caves are particularly suited for beginners and youth groups, such as scouting groups.

Table 3.2: Soils in North Vernon			
Name	Acreage	Percent of Land	Suitability for Development
Cobbsfork silt loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes	1,053 acres	21.5%	Housing – Very Limited Camping – Very Limited Paths and Trails – Very Limited Playgrounds – Very Limited
Urban land-Cobbsfork-Avonburg complex, 0 to 2 percent slopes	1,012 acres	20.7%	Housing – Not Rated* Camping – Not Rated* Paths and Trails – Not Rated* Playgrounds – Not Rated*
Udorthents, loamy	622 acres	12.7%	Housing – Not Rated* Camping – Not Rated* Paths and Trails – Not Rated* Playgrounds – Not Rated*

Woodlands and Wildlife Habitat

Although most of North Vernon is developed, the city has a few remaining woodlands. These woodlands are concentrated in the south and east sides of town, near Muscatatuck Park, Calli Nature Preserve, and the old Berry Materials Quarry. The forests in North Vernon feature typical eastern hardwood species, including oak, maple, walnut, beech, and cherry trees. These woodlands provide excellent habitat for wildlife species, such as cotton tail rabbit, fox, gray squirrel, white tailed deer, turkey, bobwhite quail, raccoon, and waterfowl.

More extensive woodlands can be found nearby at Selmier State Forest, Crosley Fish and Wildlife Area, Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge, and Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge.



Over 200 trees, including 45 different species, were planted at Tripton Park.
Image Source: Tom J. Bechman for Farm Progress

In 2022, the North Vernon Parks and Recreation Department and the Jennings County Soil and Water Conservation District planted over 200 trees in Tripton Park. In addition to expanding North Vernon's urban forest, the project installed several acres of wildflower pollinator plantings in the park. To further support the City's native ecosystem, North Vernon could conduct a tree inventory and develop a tree management plan. Funding for these efforts is available through the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Division of Forestry's Community and Urban Forestry Program.

Once a Tree Management Plan is in place, an Urban Forestry Committee could be formed to administer the plan, ensuring that trees and shrubs along streets and other public areas are sufficiently cared for. A forester could be hired to maintain the urban tree canopy, or services could be contracted as needed. Urban forestry benefits the community by improving air and water quality, mitigating extreme heat, and contributing to community character.



Several acres of wildflower pollinator plantings were installed at Tripton Park to enhance native habitat.
Image Source: Tom J. Bechman for Farm Progress

Climate

Consistent with the South Central Indiana region, North Vernon experiences an invigorating climate characterized by distinct seasons, with cool and rainy springs, hot and humid summers, crisp falls, and cold winters. Year-round, temperatures remain moderate and extreme fluctuations are rare. Summer is the warmest time of year, with July and August being the hottest months. During the hot season from late May to late September, the average daily high temperature is above 76°F. During the cold season, from late November to late February, the average daily high temperature is below 47°F. The average date of the last freeze is April 26th, and the first freeze is October 14th. The climate supports summer-type recreational activities in the warmer months, from swimming to field games. In the winter, conditions are often too cold to accommodate these activities. Winters are also generally too short to justify development of outdoor winter activities, such as skiing and ice skating.

The weather in North Vernon is highly variable, changing every few days with the passage of weather fronts and their associated pressure zones. Frontal activity is greatest in the spring and least in the late summer and early fall. The month with the most rain is May, with an average rainfall of 4.4 inches. February has the least rain with an average of 2.2 inches. Snowfall varies by year, but there has been little accumulation in the last few decades. Most snow melts before another system hits the area. Large snows, blizzards, and ice storms have occurred in the past, although winters are usually mild. The wind tends to blow out of the Southwest, with winter winds typically coming from the Northwest. Tornadoes are uncommon, but damaging winds occur often.

Floods, tornadoes, severe storms, and earthquakes are among the natural hazard risks in Indiana. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), 26 disasters, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have been declared in Indiana since 2000. To minimize

the threat of disasters on lives and property, the City of North Vernon should continue to collaborate with Jennings County's Emergency Management Agency for disaster preparedness and response.

If parks are damaged in a natural disaster, funding may be available to assist with recovery. FEMA's Public Assistance Grant Program assists local governments in removing debris, as well as repairing, replacing, and restoring disaster-damaged public facilities. Additionally, the IDNR Division of Forestry's Natural Disaster Recovery Grant helps communities restore their urban tree canopy by planting replacement trees. The grant also provides support for other urban forestry management tools, including tree inventories, canopy assessments, management plans, and storm response plans.



After a severe storm, flooding can pose a risk to lives and property in North Vernon.
Image Source: The Republic News



DRAFT 02.28.2025



04

**ACCESSIBILITY
AND UNIVERSAL
DESIGN**

DRAFT 02.28.2025

With the addition of Tripton Park in 2019, the City of North Vernon demonstrated its commitment to universal design and accessibility within its park system. Accessibility is a key concern for the City of North Vernon, as most people will experience a temporary or permanent disability at some point in their lives. While mobility and physical impairments are among the most common types of disabilities, they can also include impairments related to vision, speech, hearing, learning, mental health, and cognitive function. The North Vernon Parks and Recreation Board recognizes the significant physical, psychological, and social benefits that public recreation programs and services offer to participants and continues to prioritize accessibility improvements across its parks and facilities.

Accessibility Self-Evaluation

In 2022, the City of North Vernon adopted an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan. As part of this project, a self-evaluation was completed, which included all parks in the North Vernon Park System. A copy of the ADA Transition Plan can be found on the North Vernon website at https://www.northvernon-in.gov/news_detail_T19_R88.php. The North Vernon Parks and Recreation Board should continue to implement the recommendations made in this plan to achieve compliance within the park system.

Designated ADA Coordinator

The designated ADA Coordinator for the City of North Vernon is the Clerk-Treasurer. The Clerk-Treasurer can be contacted by the following:

Name: Charlie Weber

Position: Clerk-Treasurer, City of North Vernon

Address: 143 East Walnut Street

North Vernon, Indiana 47265

Phone: 812.346.5907

Email: cweber@northvernon-in.gov



Tripton Park was designed with accessibility in mind.
Image Source: HWC Engineering

Park Accessibility

Tripton Park

As the newest addition to North Vernon's park system, Tripton Park was thoughtfully designed according to the principles of universal design. Most of the park is ADA-accessible. Gateways are wide with solid, paved surfaces. Walking trails and boardwalks are flush and accessible throughout the park. The playground and outdoor exercise area use accessible surfacing with no barriers to entry. There is ample space around play and exercise equipment to allow visitors enough room to navigate the area safely and with ease. Accessible restrooms are available year-round.

There are only a few areas with accessibility limitations at Tripton Park, including the disc golf course, bocce ball courts, and corn hole courts. These areas require players to leave paved walkways and traverse through grass to reach the equipment. One hole on the disc golf course features a narrow wooden bridge that may be difficult for some visitors to navigate.

City Park

Built over seventy years ago, this is North Vernon's oldest park. Significant improvements have been made to enhance accessibility, but challenges remain. ADA accessible areas include the newer Aquatic Center and newly installed sidewalks; nonetheless, many areas need to be retrofitted to meet ADA standards.

The restroom facilities in City Park have accessibility issues, including stall dimensions, towel/dryer heights, urinal heights, and counter/sink heights that are not yet in compliance. The modifications that are needed to make these amenities compliant will be completed as the restroom facilities are updated and will be completed using funds from the park budget.

As new or updated amenities are being installed at City Park, the Parks Department is adding or replacing sidewalks and walking paths to be ADA compliant. Additionally, as playground equipment is being replaced, accessible equipment and firm surfaces are being selected and installed.



Accessible play equipment at Tripton Park.
Image Source: HWC Engineering



Accessible exercise equipment at Tripton Park.
Image Source: HWC Engineering

Mini Park / Muscatatuck Trailhead

Mini Park is not ADA accessible. The park has no walkways, and infrastructure connecting the site to nearby neighborhoods is lacking. The swings, slide, and benches sit on top of grass without any accessible surfaces. The basketball court, only accessible by traversing through grass, is aged and the concrete surface is cracked. As the Parks Department and Board move forward with this Park Plan update, the intention is to remove and replace these amenities. Funding to remove the aged and inaccessible amenities will likely come from a combination of the Park Board Budget and additional City funds.

The Muscatatuck Trailhead, on the other hand, is an ADA accessible addition to the site. The trailhead features an accessible parking space and a ramp connecting the parking area to the Muscatatuck Trail. The ramp is paved and gently sloping. The trail itself is also well-paved and accessible.



A ramp at the Muscatatuck Trailhead connects the paved trail to an accessible parking space.
Image Source: HWC Engineering

Public Notice of ADA Requirements

The City of North Vernon, including the Parks and Recreation Board, hosts meetings monthly and those meetings are open to the public. Any meetings that are open to the public are published on the City of North Vernon website's main page. All City of North Vernon public meetings are held in locations accessible to individuals with disabilities. Upon request, translators can be provided free of charge to those individuals with limited English proficiency. Auxiliary aids are also available upon request. Requests must be made within forty-eight (48) hours in advance. This information is published on the City's website.

The City of North Vernon and the Parks and Recreation Board does a good job of communicating the available amenities and programs within the parks system on the City's website and social media. However, it is recommended that more information is provided to the public on the website and through social media, specifically about the accessible facilities, amenities, programs, and services in the park that are available.

Grievance Procedures

Grievance procedures have been established by the City of North Vernon to be used by anyone who wishes to file a complaint alleging discrimination on the basis of disability in the provisions of services, activities, programs, or benefits provided by the City of North Vernon. The complaint should be in writing and contain information about the alleged discrimination such as name, address, phone number of the complainant and location, date, and description of the problem. Detailed information about the full grievance procedures can be found on the City's website or by visiting this link:

<https://cms7files.revize.com/northvernon/ADA%20Transition%20Plan-North%20Vernon-Draft.pdf>

A grievance concerning the accessibility of the North Vernon Parks System's services, programs or activities should be addressed to Charlie Weber, Clerk-Treasurer of the City of North Vernon.



DRAFT 02.28.2025



05

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

DRAFT 02.28.2025

Parks have the potential to profoundly enhance quality of life in a community, especially when developed with careful consideration for the needs and desires of residents. To maximize the benefits of parks in North Vernon, this plan sought to gather feedback from community members on strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of the local parks system. Members of the public were invited to share their thoughts in a public engagement survey and public workshop. Findings from these engagement opportunities were analyzed and incorporated into the plan's recommendations.

Public Engagement Survey

The project team designed an online survey to solicit feedback from community leaders, residents, business owners, and visitors on access, amenities, and programming within North Vernon's parks and recreation system. The survey, available from August 20th to September 23rd, 2024, garnered over 322 responses, and collected both general impressions of the parks system, as well as specific information about needed improvements. The following section summarizes the key findings from the survey.

Park Access

- Over half of respondents travel over a mile to get to a North Vernon park.
- Most respondents drive to North Vernon parks.
- People also walk, bike, and use golf carts to access North Vernon parks.
- Over half of respondents visit a North Vernon park at least once a week.

Park System

- City Park is the most visited park.
- People use the parks most for walking/jogging, playgrounds, and playing sports.
- Outdated facilities and lack of programming keep people from using park facilities more often.
- Respondents want an indoor recreational facility, additional trails, and events for the community and youth.



City Park is the most visited park in North Vernon.
Image Source: HWC Engineering

City Park

- City Park is a space for active recreation.
- Survey respondents consider the play equipment, sports facilities, walking paths, and the aquatic center to be in good/excellent condition.
- Respondents indicated the dog amenities and parking are in poor condition.
- There is a desire for better restroom facilities, sports programs, more maintenance of park facilities, and signage throughout the park.
- Ideas to add to the park include a skate park, dog park, and an indoor recreational facility.

Tripton Park

- The survey respondents indicated that Tripton Park is in the best condition of all of the parks.
- These amenities were rated as good/excellent condition: walking paths, play equipment, natural space, park maintenance, the amphitheater, outdoor games, fitness equipment, shelters, and restrooms.
- Respondents indicated the park needs additional restroom facilities, parking, dog amenities, and an expanded playground.

Mini Park / Muscatatuck Trailhead

- Most of the survey respondents indicated they had never been to or heard of Mini Park. Of the 42 comments received about Mini Park, 30 indicate that respondents were unaware of the park's existence.
- Respondents said that play equipment, maintenance of the park, and sports equipment are in poor condition.
- The consensus was that the park needs upgraded sports and play facilities.



Residents were largely unfamiliar with Mini Park.
Image Source: HWC Engineering



Residents noted that play equipment in Mini Park, like the slide pictured above, are in poor condition.
Image Source: HWC Engineering

Public Workshop

The project team facilitated a public workshop on September 11th, 2024 at 6:00pm at the Jennings County Public Library. This workshop was designed to introduce community members to the planning process and provide a platform for the public to share their dreams for parks in North Vernon. Six community members attended the workshop. The Mayor was also in attendance, as was the Parks Director. A discussion unfolded in which participants helped identify assets, challenges, and opportunities for the parks systems and individual park sites. The following section summarizes the key findings from this discussion.

Park System

- The walking and biking trails are beloved and well-used.
- The city is missing a regional attraction to draw tourists from around the region. Proposed ideas include a pumpkin patch/crop-picking experience, more sports tournaments, a canoe or bike shop, and diverse lodging experiences such as an RV park.
- The PlacerAI data has been helpful for the city to understand commuting patterns of people who attend events at the parks.
- The parks system could expand its programming. Suggested offerings include cooking classes and community gardens.
- Parking is perceived as an issue during events.

City Park

- City Park is a space for active recreation.
- Parking at City Park is an issue as more events such as sporting events and the Farmers Market are expanding in attendance.
- The National Guard building on the northeast side of the park could be acquired and used as an indoor recreation space and/or maintenance and storage.

Tripton Park

- Tripton Park is a space for passive recreation, with a few spaces for active recreation.
- More trail and sidewalk access is desired at Tripton Park.
- There was discussion about connecting the park to the Muscatatuck River, but this requires collaboration with the Calli Park Nature Preserve.

Mini Park / Muscatatuck Trailhead

- Mini Park is a neighborhood park / trailhead.
- Upgraded playground equipment at this location could take some of the burden of playground use off City Park and Tripton Park.
- Small events could be programmed here, like a block party.

Public Presentation of the Plan

Add description after presentation.



The set up for the public workshop in North Vernon.
Image Source: HWC Engineering



Participants attend the public workshop.
Image Source: HWC Engineering



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06

NEEDS ANALYSIS

DRAFT 02.28.2025

This chapter identifies parks and recreation needs by comparing industry standards to North Vernon's current park system. This approach closely aligns with the Level of Service (LOS) Standards for Parks and Open Space model of analysis. Developed by the National Recreation and Park Association, the LOS model encourages communities to review industry-recognized parks and recreation benchmarks to help establish a baseline for services and facilities. This information is compared to the existing programs and facilities provided by North Vernon Parks and Recreation to identify strengths and weaknesses in the system. This analysis is further influenced by public input gathered from the Parks Board and community members, as described in Chapter 5 Public Participation.

Since this needs assessment was conducted for the North Vernon Parks and Recreation Department, comparisons focus on the population of North Vernon and are largely limited by the physical boundary of the plan area as defined by the city limits. Nonetheless, the North Vernon Parks and Recreation Department acknowledges that the community extends beyond this physical boundary. In fact, the Parks Department welcomes Jennings County residents to the parks and encourages participation in programs and events. While the following pages offer comparisons using North Vernon's population of roughly 7,000 residents, the potential reach of parks and recreation could be an additional population of 20,000+ within Jennings County.

Current Trends

SCORP as a City Comparison

The 2021-2025 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is a helpful tool which quantifies and analyzes Indiana's outdoor recreation resources with the intent of aiding local, regional, and state-level decision making. The Department of Natural Resources, Division of Outdoor Recreation, updates the SCORP every five years. One of the SCORP's most helpful features is its Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey, which identifies state recreational trends. The most recent survey was conducted from April 2017 to April 2018 at county fairs, libraries, and other public locations throughout the state. The survey generated 6,276 responses.

Trends

From the Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey results, the top three reasons respondents chose to participate in outdoor recreation were:

1. To be with family and friends (38%)
2. Physical health (37%)
3. Mental health (34%)

The top five outdoor recreation activities that respondents participated in more than once per week include:

1. Walking/hiking/jogging/running
2. Relaxation/spiritual renewal
3. Gardening/landscaping
4. Bird/wildlife watching
5. Health-related activities (exercise, yoga, tai chi, pilates, etc.)

The top ten “favorite” outdoor recreation activities described by respondents were:

1. Walking, running, jogging
2. Camping/RV camping
3. Hiking/backpacking
4. Fishing
5. Boating, waterboarding, sailing, tubing, jet skiing, water skiing
6. Picnicking, barbecuing/cookout
7. Gardening, landscaping, yard work, mowing
8. Swimming, snorkeling, diving, scuba, splash pad
9. Bicycling
10. Golf

Local trends are consistent with state trends. As observed in the Public Engagement Survey in Chapter 4 Public Participation, over half of North Vernon’s residents visit a city park at least once a week. Parks are valued by community members as public spaces to relax, exercise, and socialize. Common activities in North Vernon parks include walking/jogging, playing on playground equipment, and participating in group sports.

Level of Service Guidelines

Indiana’s SCORP Level of Service (LOS) Guidelines recommend twenty acres of public recreation area per every 1,000 residents within a given local jurisdiction, such as a county, township, city, or town. Public recreation areas can be owned publicly by these entities, or privately, so long as they are open for public use. SCORP excludes all schools as many schools do not allow public access to their outdoor facilities.

North Vernon does not currently meet the acreage recommendation outlined by SCORP. Based on the SCORP recommendation of 20 acres per 1,000 people, North Vernon should be providing approximately 138.7 acres of public recreation area for a population of 6,935 (2022

American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates) but instead only provides 83 acres. This leaves a deficiency of 55.7 acres.

Although SCORP recommendations show a deficit in public recreation acreage for North Vernon, the city has already taken great strides to expand parkland. With the establishment of Tripton Park in 2019, North Vernon more than doubled parkland in the city, adding 52.5 acres to the park system. In the coming years, North Vernon will begin construction on Quarry Adventure Park. Partially funded by a \$2.2 million Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI) grant from the state, Quarry Adventure Park will be an adaptive reuse of a former stone quarry. The 160-acre park will offer a campground, playground, trails, and other facilities.



Trails, like the Muscatatuck Trail, facilitate walking, running, and jogging, which the SCORP identified as a favorite outdoor recreation activity for Hoosiers.

Image Source: HWC Engineering

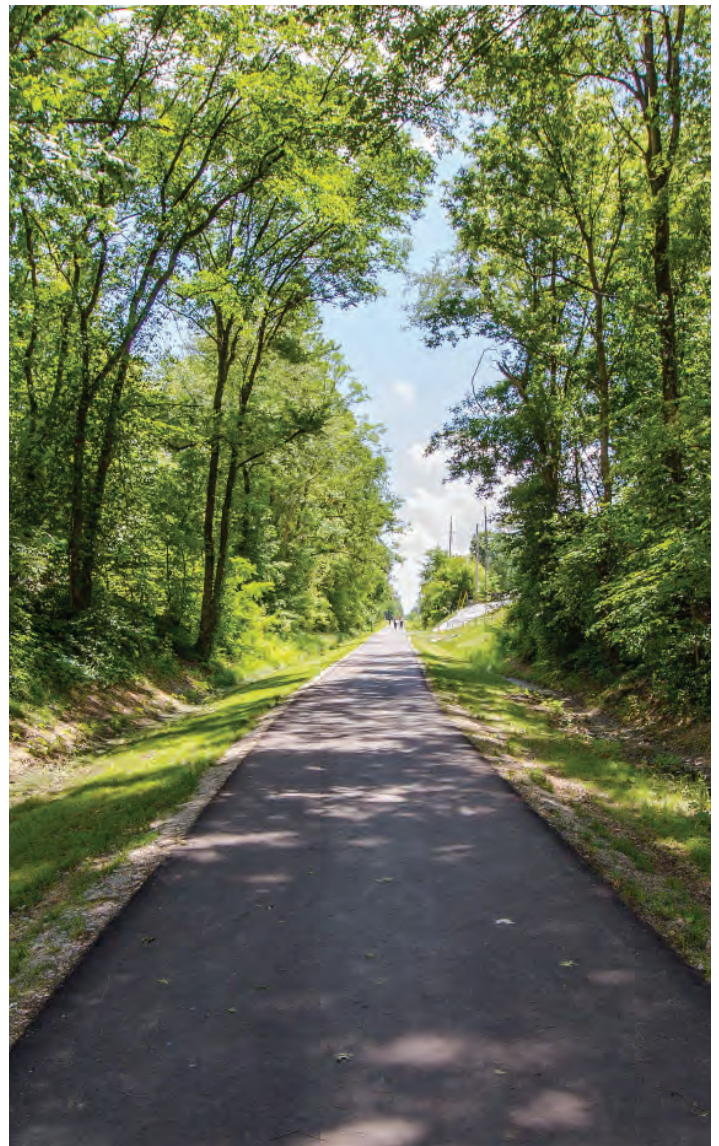
Trails

Year after year, the Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey identifies walking, jogging, and running as the most popular outdoor recreation activities for Hoosiers. It is no surprise that these activities come out on top, thanks in large part to their affordability and accessibility. To ensure adequate infrastructure exists to support these activities, the state dedicates a chapter of the *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* (SCORP) to the *Indiana Trails Plan*. The 2021 Indiana Trails Plan indicates that current trails across the state are failing to meet Hoosier's needs, and demand is growing.

The *Indiana Trails Plan* also references work by the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) to promote active transportation. In 2018, INDOT developed *Moving Forward an Active Indiana: Walking and Bicycling in the Hoosier State*, the state's first active transportation plan. This plan included an Active Transportation Survey, which generated 2,500 responses from Hoosiers about active transportation infrastructure, including trails and policies regarding them. Below is a summary of those findings:

- 87% of respondents said they would use a paved recreational trail.
- Asked what keeps them from walking and cycling more often, respondents expressed concern about bicyclist/pedestrian safety in traffic and around vehicles (41%).
- Asked what they thought would encourage people to bike more often, 82% agreed that more bicycle paths and trails would do so; 63% also answered that way about "more separation between bikes and cars."
- Additionally, respondents said more trails and paths, along with improved sidewalks, would get Hoosiers walking more often.

In 2023, North Vernon collaborated with Jennings County and the Town of Vernon to develop a county-wide active transportation plan. This plan aims to tie together the three jurisdictions with a cohesive active transportation network that includes bicycle, pedestrian, and water trails. Currently, North Vernon has just 4.1 miles of trails in its trail system. The active transportation plan proposes several miles of additional connections, each of which is designed to connect residents to destinations within North Vernon and its neighboring communities.



The Muscatatuck Trail connects North Vernon's parks system to Jennings County's park system.
Image Source: HWC Engineering

NRPA as a City Comparison

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) is a non-profit advocacy organization dedicated to building vibrant communities through the advancement of public parks, recreation, and conservation. The NRPA provides parks and recreation professionals with up-to-date information and guidance as they seek to improve recreation facilities and programs. The reports reviewed for this plan include the *2024 NRPA Engagement with Parks Report* and the *2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review*.

Engagement with Parks Report

Since 2016, the NRPA has conducted an annual survey to understand how people connect with parks and recreation across the country. These survey results form the basis of NRPA's annual *Engagement with Parks Report*.

According to this report, the top four reasons why residents visit parks are to:

1. Be with friends and family (58%)
2. Exercise or be physically fit (52%)
3. Take a break from day-to-day stresses (52%)
4. Be closer to nature (49%)

The top uses for parks and recreation, according to the annual survey, were:

1. Visiting a local park, playground, dog park, or other local open space (76%)
2. Hiking, biking, or walking on a trail (53%)
3. Playing sports with family, friends, or neighbors (33%)
4. Visiting a local swimming pool or aquatic center (31%)
5. Visiting a local recreation or senior center (23%)
6. Taking part in classes, lessons, or activities at a local recreation center (17%)

7. Participating in an organized sports league (14%)
8. Children participating in an out-of-school time program (12%)

There is significant alignment between NRPA's survey findings, results from the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), and feedback from North Vernon residents. Walking, running, and jogging emerge as the most popular activities, and patrons visit parks to enjoy amenities, including playgrounds, pools, sports facilities, and natural spaces, with friends and family.

Agency Performance Review

The *2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review* provides a comprehensive collection of parks and recreation-related benchmarks for municipal park planning. The *Agency Performance Review* is informed by the NRPA Park Metrics survey tool, which allows parks and recreation agencies nationwide to self-report data on their annual performance. For the *2024 Agency Performance Review*, data was collected from nearly 1,000 parks and recreation agencies. Once collected, data is compiled and analyzed to provide information on the performance of the "typical" agency serving a given population. Key benchmarks and insights are identified in the following sections. These benchmarks are then compared to the current park system in North Vernon.

The benchmarks identified in this section are for jurisdictions serving fewer than 20,000 residents. This is the smallest population for which the NRPA provides benchmarks. Since this baseline is over twice the size of North Vernon's current population, the project team has exercised discretion when determining which benchmarks are accurate comparisons for North Vernon Parks and Recreation.

Park System Size

For agencies serving jurisdictions less than 20,000 in population, there is one park for every 1,172 residents. This would equate to about 6 parks for the population of North Vernon at 6,935 (2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates). North Vernon currently has four parks in its system, but another is planned. The city also borders two parks managed by other entities: Muscatatuck Park and the Calli Nature Preserve. The number of parks is not the most accurate form of measurement, but rather the acreage of parkland in relation to the community's population size.

Parks and recreation agencies serving jurisdictions with fewer than 20,000 residents manage 12.6 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. This equates to about 87.4 acres of parkland for North Vernon. Currently, the city provides 83 acres. This indicates a small deficit of only 4.4 acres compared to the typical jurisdiction.

Park System Trail Network

As identified in the *2024 Engagement with Parks Report* and *2021-2025 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan*, trails are a popular amenity for walking, running, jogging, and biking. Communities acknowledge this. To meet the demand of residents, the typical agency serving fewer than 20,000 residents manages 4.5 miles of trails.

Currently, North Vernon manages 4.1 miles of trails, indicating a small deficit of 0.3 miles compared to the NRPA benchmark. The *2023 Jennings County Active Transportation Plan*, of which North Vernon was a key partner, outlines projects that will close this gap. These projects will not only increase trail mileage within the trail system, but they will also forge important connections to local amenities, including parks, schools, libraries, and downtown businesses. By 2030, North Vernon may even strive for 9.2 miles of trails, which represents the upper quartile for a jurisdiction of less than 20,000 residents.

Outdoor and Indoor Park Facilities

The *2024 Performance Review* also offers insight into facilities offered by other parks and recreation agencies and provides facilities to persons ratios. These benchmarks help determine surpluses and deficiencies. The table on the following page identifies target parkland and facility inventories in North Vernon for 2025 and 2030. Targets for 2025 are based on a population estimate of 6,935 from the 2022 American Community Survey. Targets for 2030 are based on a population projection for North Vernon which indicates a population increase of 706 people over the next five years. These targets use the same set of benchmarks from the *2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review*.

These target inventories are strictly based on NRPA data, population estimates, and population projections. There is no "one size fits all" approach to parks planning, and the following analysis only intends to establish a baseline understanding of how North Vernon compares to other jurisdictions of a similar size.



North Vernon offers a variety of outdoor facilities, including the City Park Pool and Splash Zone.
Image Source: HWC Engineering

Table 6.1: NRPA Current Amenities and Target Ratios in Relation to North Vernon

Amenity	NRPA Target Ratio (1)	Current Inventory	Current Ratio	Target Inventory 2025 (2)	Target Inventory 2030 (3)	2025 Surplus/Deficit	2030 Surplus/Deficit
Park System Size							
Acres of Park Land	12.6 acres per 1,000 residents	83 acres	1.0	87.4 acres	96.3 acres	-4.4 acres	-13.3 acres
Miles of Trails	4.5 miles for less than 20,000 residents	4.1 miles	0.9	4.5 miles	9.2 miles	-0.4 miles	-5.1 miles
Outdoor Facilities							
Playgrounds	1 facility per 1,990 residents	4.0 facilities	1.1	3.5 facilities	3.8 facilities	0.5 facilities	0.2 facilities
Tot Lots	1 facility per 5,323 residents	1.0 facilities	0.8	1.3 facilities	1.4 facilities	-0.3 facilities	-0.4 facilities
Basketball Courts	1 facility per 4,366 residents	3.0 facilities	1.9	1.6 facilities	1.8 facilities	1.4 facilities	1.2 facilities
Tennis Courts	1 facility per 3,074 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	2.3 facilities	2.5 facilities	-2.3 facilities	-2.5 facilities
Pickleball Courts	1 facility per 3,390 residents	6.0 facilities	2.9	2.0 facilities	2.3 facilities	4.0 facilities	3.7 facilities
Multi-use Courts	1 facility per 5,248 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	1.3 facilities	1.5 facilities	-1.3 facilities	-1.5 facilities
Diamond Fields	1 facility per 1,833 residents	7.0 facilities	1.9	3.8 facilities	4.2 facilities	3.2 facilities	2.8 facilities
Rectangular Fields	1 facility per 2,493 residents	1.0 facilities	0.4	2.8 facilities	3.1 facilities	-1.8 facilities	-2.1 facilities
Synthetic Rectangular Fields	1 facility per 11,284 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	0.6 facilities	0.7 facilities	-0.6 facilities	-0.7 facilities
Swimming Pools	1 facility per 9,500 residents	1.0 facilities	1.4	0.7 facilities	0.8 facilities	0.3 facilities	0.2 facilities
Splash Pads	1 facility per 12,756 residents	1.0 facilities	1.8	0.5 facilities	0.6 facilities	0.5 facilities	0.4 facilities
Ice Rinks	1 facility per 8,015 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	0.9 facilities	1.0 facilities	-0.9 facilities	-1.0 facilities
Community Gardens	1 facility per 8,800 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	0.8 facilities	0.9 facilities	-0.8 facilities	-0.9 facilities
Skate Parks	1 facility for 11,284 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	0.6 facilities	0.7 facilities	-0.6 facilities	-0.7 facilities

**Table 6.1: NRPA Current Amenities and Target Ratios in Relation to North Vernon
(Continued)**

Amenity	NRPA Target Ratio (1)	Current Inventory	Current Ratio	Target Inventory 2025 (2)	Target Inventory 2030 (3)	2025 Surplus/Deficit	2030 Surplus/Deficit
Dog Parks	1 facility per 10,327 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	0.7 facilities	0.7 facilities	-0.7 facilities	-0.7 facilities
Exercise Stations	1 facility per 8,233 residents	1.0 facilities	1.2	0.8 facilities	0.9 facilities	0.2 facilities	0.1 facilities
18-hole Golf Courses	1 facility per 9,626 residents	1.0 facilities	1.4	0.7 facilities	0.8 facilities	0.3 facilities	0.2 facilities
Indoor Facilities							
Recreation Centers	1 facility per 9,685 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	0.7 facilities	0.8 facilities	-0.7 facilities	-0.8 facilities
Community Centers	1 facility per 8,908 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	0.8 facilities	0.9 facilities	-0.8 facilities	-0.9 facilities
Senior Centers	1 facility per 14,286 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	0.5 facilities	0.5 facilities	-0.5 facilities	-0.5 facilities
Teen Centers	1 facility per 14,797 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	0.5 facilities	0.5 facilities	-0.5 facilities	-0.5 facilities
Nature Centers	1 facility per 9,430 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	0.7 facilities	0.8 facilities	-0.7 facilities	-0.8 facilities
Aquatic Centers	1 facility per 12,618 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	0.5 facilities	0.6 facilities	-0.5 facilities	-0.6 facilities
Ice Rinks	1 facility per 8,004 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	0.9 facilities	1.0 facilities	-0.9 facilities	-1.0 facilities
Performance Amphitheater	1 facility per 12,769 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	0.5 facilities	0.6 facilities	-0.5 facilities	-0.6 facilities
Stadiums	1 facility per 10,633 residents	0.0 facilities	0.0	0.7 facilities	0.7 facilities	-0.7 facilities	-0.7 facilities

(1) Target ratio standards are from the 2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review for agencies serving less than 20,000 residents. Population for one facility per XXX residents.

(2) Target inventory for 2025 is calculated by dividing the current estimated population of 6,935 by the target ratio. Population data sourced from the 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

(3) Target inventory for 2030 is calculated by dividing the population projection of 7,641 by the target ratio. Population projection data from ESRI.

TPL as a City Comparison

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a charitable organization that works to create parks and protect land for current and future generations to enjoy, ensuring that communities remain healthy, livable places. The TPL's Center for City Park Excellence supports this mission by providing park professionals and planners with data on the realities of parks and recreation systems. The 2024 City Park Facts and ParkScore generated by TPL analyzes and evaluates how cities are meeting the need for parks and recreation.

According to this evaluation, the overall median of parkland per 1,000 residents is 13.3 acres. In addition to acreage, walkability is an important characteristic for urban parks. The median percentage of population within walking distance (1/2-mile radius) to a publicly owned park is 74%. The 2024 City Park Facts also provides insight on balancing natural and built park environments. The average percentage of designed parkland is 57% and the average percentage of parkland that is natural is 43%. Designed lands are parklands that have been created, constructed, planted, or managed primarily for human use. This includes playgrounds, neighborhood parks, mini-parks, picnic meadows, sports fields, municipal golf courses, and municipal cemeteries. Natural lands are either pristine or reclaimed areas that are open to the public and left largely undisturbed and managed for their conservation and ecological value. North Vernon's parkland all falls into the 'designed' classification, although the city borders several natural parks, including Muscatatuck Park and the Calli Nature Preserve.

Based on the TPL standard of 13.3 acres per 1,000 residents, North Vernon should have roughly 92.2 acres of parkland. This benchmark is higher than the NRPA's standard of 12.6 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, but lower than the SCORP's recommendation of 20 acres per 1,000 people. As previously noted, North Vernon is at a deficit compared to these benchmarks. The city's park system offers 83 acres of parkland, 9.2 acres less than the TPL standard. The city acknowledges this deficiency and is actively working to resolve it. Already, development is underway for the new Quarry Adventure Park, which will add 160-acres of parkland to the city.

TPL also reviews data to provide a walkability score. According to the TPL's ParkServe database, 54% of North Vernon residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park. This falls below the target of 74% of residents within a 10-minute or half-mile walk. North Vernon's walkability is illustrated in Figure 6.1, which maps 10-minute walk service areas, as well as priority areas for new parks.

It should be noted that the TPL ParkServe only takes into consideration proximity to a space designated as a park and does not consider the size of parks or amenities offered in parks. For example, Mini Park is depicted as serving 1,046 residents in and around downtown North Vernon, while Tripton Park is only shown to serve 783 residents. In reality, Mini Park's limited acreage and amenities likely serve a much smaller group of residents in the immediate neighborhood. Tripton Park, on the other hand, likely serves a larger area and has the potential to serve an even greater quantity of residents once trail connections are developed.

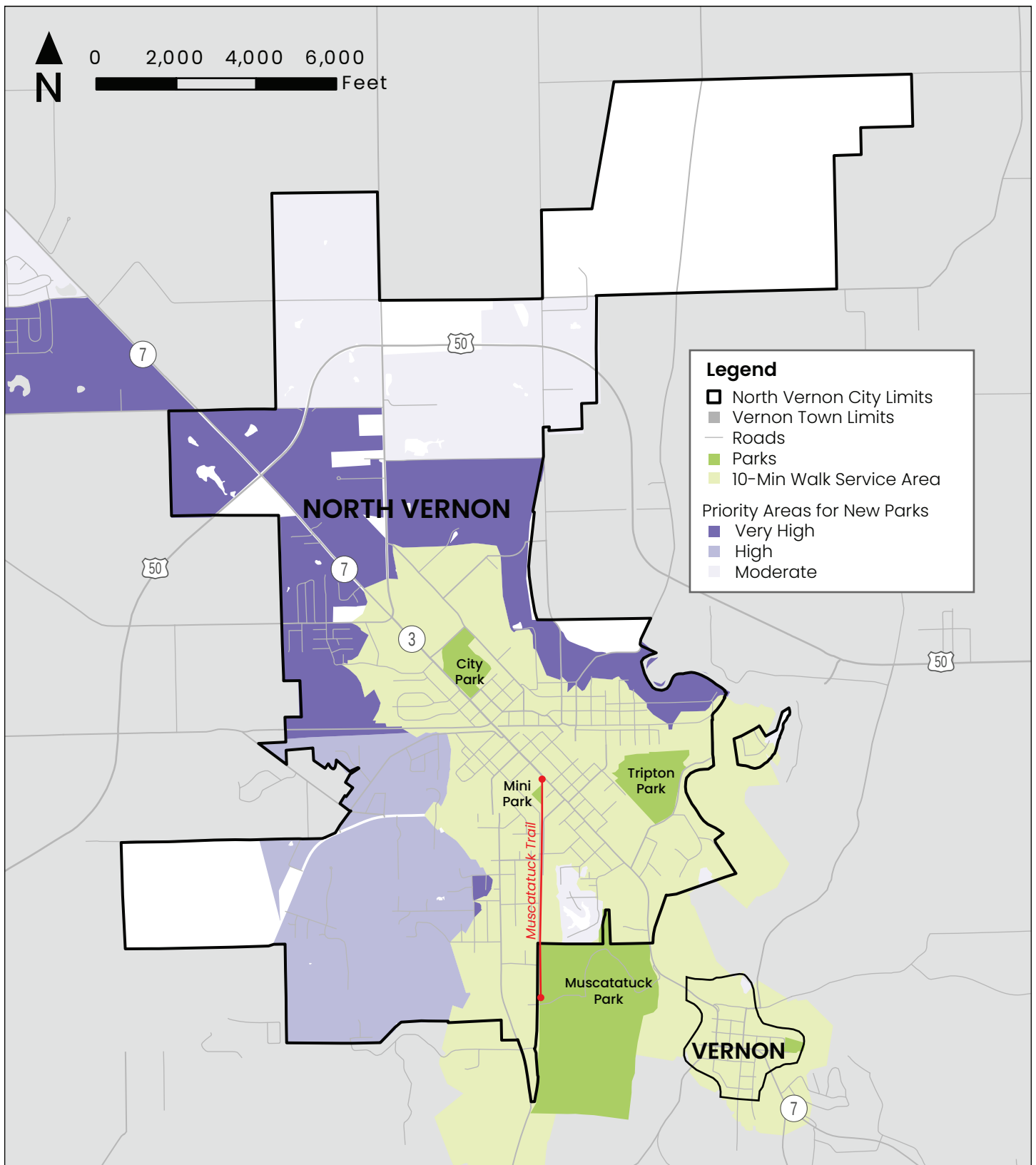


Figure 6.1: Walkability and Level of Service

Map Source: HWC Engineering, Layer Source: Trust for Public Land

Operating Expenditures & Full-Time Staff

In addition to providing guidance on park size, trail systems, and facilities, the *2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review* sets benchmarks for operating expenditures and staffing. Regarding operating expenditures, the NRPA provides information on annual operating expenditures, operating expenditures per capita, operating expenditures per acre of park and non-park sites, and operating expenditures by the amount of parkland managed. These statistics provide a basis of comparison for communities to determine how much to invest in their parks and recreation system. The following statistics are for jurisdictions serving less than 20,000 in population:

- **Annual operating expenditures** range from \$707,145 (lower quartile) to \$3,004,473 (upper quartile) with a median of \$1,451,763. North Vernon falls right around the median with a 2024 budget of \$1,408,321 and an approved 2025 budget of \$1,376,225. Although the budget figures for North Vernon include both the operating budget and park bond payments, this measure indicates that North Vernon is investing sufficiently in its parks.
- **Operating expenditures per capita** range from \$74.22 (lower quartile) to \$263.21 (upper quartile) with a median of \$135.53. North Vernon, with a population of 6,935 (according to 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates), operated on a budget of about \$203 per person in 2024. The city approved a budget of approximately \$198 per person for 2025. These values provide a more direct comparison, demonstrating that North Vernon is consistently spending an amount that is not only typical, but generous, on parks and recreation facilities within the community.
- **Operating expenditures per acre** of park and non-park site ranges from \$3,856 (lower quartile) to \$27,711 (upper quartile) with a median of \$9,777.

North Vernon currently has 83 acres of parkland, which equates to \$16,968 per acre in 2024 and \$16,581 per acre in 2025. Here, North Vernon surpasses the benchmark. However, once Quarry Adventure Park comes online, North Vernon's total park acreage will be approximately 243 acres. In 2025, expenditures will level out to \$5,664 per acre, which is below the median but above the lower quartile.

Data on agency staffing is also provided in the *Performance Review*. The typical parks and recreation agency has 8.9 Full-Time Equivalents (FTE) on staff per 10,000 residents. A city the size of North Vernon with a population of 6,935 (according to 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates) should have at least 6 or 7 FTE. Currently, the North Vernon Parks Department is operated by two year-round, full-time employees – a park director and program director – and a seasonal, full-time pool manager. Additional staff are hired as needed for seasonal positions, including maintenance, lifeguarding, and concessions. In any given year, the sum of these positions equates to 8.7 FTE, although this level of staffing isn't guaranteed. While North Vernon exceeds the NRPA's benchmark, there remains an opportunity to recruit an additional, non-seasonal staff member for more consistent service throughout the year.

What do these budget and staffing numbers mean for North Vernon Parks and Recreation? The parks budget is typical for a community of North Vernon's size. In fact, North Vernon exceeds all the budget benchmarks provided by the NRPA. That said, as the City of North Vernon adds Quarry Adventure Park to its inventory, incremental budget growth on an annual basis should be encouraged to accommodate maintenance and redevelopment of park facilities, as well as expanded programming. Throughout this planning process, the need to restructure the Parks and Recreation Department and hire a maintenance director have been a priority. Budget adjustments should accommodate the salaries of any new hires.

Capital Expenditures

Current Programming Trends

According to the *2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review*, parks and recreation agencies across the country offer a wide variety of programs to their community members. Whatever form these programs take, from events to clubs, by providing affordable programming in safe, accessible public spaces, agencies enable their community members to interact with one another, encouraging socialization and connection.

The *2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review* identified popular programming activities offered by parks and recreation agencies, which included the following:

- Themed special events (offered 89% of agencies)
- Social recreation events (88%)
- Team sports (86%)
- Fitness enhancement classes (82%)
- Health and wellness education (80%)
- Individual sports (76%)
- Racquet sports (73%)
- Safety training (70%)
- Aquatics (68%)
- Natural and cultural history activities (66%)
- Cultural crafts (63%)
- Visual arts (63%)
- Trips and tours (62%)
- Performing arts (62%)
- Martial arts (56%)
- Running/cycling races (53%)
- Golf (49%)
- Esports/Egaming (26%)

North Vernon is constantly striving to improve its program offerings. Out of the top five most popular programming activities identified in the *Performance Review*, North Vernon offers programs and events that align with the following three categories:

- Themed special events (89%) – These are reflected in annual events such as the Easter Egg Hunt, Sweet Street, and Christmas in the City, to name a few.
- Social recreation events (88%) – This includes multiple sessions of the Disc Golf Clinic and free swim lessons (co-hosted with the Jennings County Swim Club), and the annual Free Fishing Day at Tripton Park.
- Team sports (86%) – Recreation leagues are available for soccer, youth baseball, and girls softball at City Park.

Two of the top activities not as strongly represented as part of the North Vernon parks programming includes fitness enhancement classes and health and wellness education. Although there is an outdoor exercise pad at Tripton Park, the Parks Department does not provide any fitness programs for residents. Consequently, there is an untapped opportunity to offer guided workouts and mindfulness meditations on this site. In a similar vein, the Community Wellness Coordinator with Purdue Extension Jennings County hosts county-wide Summer Walks on Tuesday/Thursday evenings and Saturday mornings. These walking socials currently fall under social recreation events, but booths could be set up in well-traveled areas to educate residents about various health and wellness issues, from nutrition to self-care practices. If North Vernon had a community center or community garden, it would open the door to additional education opportunities, including cooking lessons and garden seminars.

Agencies with less than 20,000 residents typically offered the following programs targeted specifically towards children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities:

- Summer camps (83%)
- Specific senior programs (78%)
- Specific teen programs (67%)
- Programs for people with disabilities (66%)
- STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) programs (57%)
- After-school programs (52%)
- Preschool (34%)
- Before-school programs (19%)
- Full-day care (7%)

In North Vernon's public engagement survey, participant demographics indicated a need for programming designed for children and people with disabilities. Approximately 63% of households surveyed included children, and approximately 12% included members with a disability. When asked what programming residents would like to see in the future, 48% requested more youth programs, such as arts, crafts, adventure, and summer camps. By comparison, only 29% of respondents called for more adult programming, although 41% were interested in adult sports and 30% wanted to see adult fitness classes in North Vernon.



North Vernon offers a variety of themed special events, including the annual Christmas in the City.
Image Source: North Vernon Facebook



Community members enjoy North Vernon's annual Easter Egg Hunt.
Image Source: North Vernon Facebook

Key Takeaways

Park Acreage

North Vernon is behind national benchmarks for acreage of parkland but is quickly catching up. The development of Tripton Park in 2019 more than doubled the parkland in the city, adding 52.5 acres to the park system. Per NRPA standards, the city needs to provide an additional 4.4 acres of parkland to meet the requirements of the current population. TLP recommends an additional 9.2 acres to align with its established benchmark. In the coming years, the development of the 160-acre Quarry Adventure Park will more than satisfy the city's need for acreage. This will leave the North Vernon Parks Department to focus on improvements to existing sites, including City Park and Mini Park. In the future, these parks could be retrofitted with a skate park, dog park, or updated sports and play facilities.

Park Facilities

The NRPA analysis noted deficiencies in outdoor facilities, including athletic courts (tennis and multi-use courts), athletic fields (rectangular fields), ice rinks, community gardens, dog parks, skate parks, and splash pads. Adding just one of the last five of these amenities would bring North Vernon in alignment with the nation's typical park agency. Deficiencies in indoor facilities included recreation centers, community centers, teen centers, senior centers, stadiums, and nature centers. North Vernon should consider acquiring an indoor facility in the future to help facilitate programming. An indoor space with a community room can be quite versatile and could be used for everything from summer camps to interpretive nature programs to private events, like weddings and reunions.

Greenways & Trails

North Vernon very nearly meets the NRPA benchmark of 4.5 miles of trails for an agency serving up to 20,000 residents. The city currently manages 4.1 miles of trails, indicating a small deficit of 0.3 miles. Once projects identified in the 2023 Jennings County Active Transportation Plan are completed, the city will easily close this gap. Planned trail projects in the coming years will help connect key destinations in North Vernon, Vernon, and the rest of Jennings County, allowing residents and visitors to easily travel between parks, schools, libraries, and businesses. Trail projects that the North Vernon Parks Department is responsible for are identified in this plan.

Programming

North Vernon should continue to diversify its park programming to better meet the needs of residents. Based on analysis from the 2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review, there is an opportunity to introduce fitness enhancement classes and health and wellness education. Additionally, the public input survey of North Vernon residents identified interest in more community events (selected by 70% of respondents), amphitheater or entertainment events (58.1%), youth programs (48.1%), swim lessons and aquatic programs (41.3%), and adult sports (40.7%). North Vernon's demographic makeup also highlights a need for programming directed towards children and people with disabilities.

Operating Budget & Staffing

The budget for North Vernon Parks and Recreation is typical for a community of its size, whether comparing annual operating expenditures, operating expenditures per capita, or operating expenditures per acre of park and non-park sites. This healthy budget allows North Vernon to maintain adequate staffing levels; consequently, North Vernon exceeds the NRPA's staffing benchmark. The Parks Department employs approximately 8.7 FTEs per year, although most staff are seasonal. To ensure more consistent service throughout the year, North Vernon may consider restructuring the Parks Department and adding another full-time staff member, such as a maintenance director. Furthermore, as the Parks Department continues to grow, with additional park acreage, amenities, and programming, the operating budget and staffing levels should be evaluated to ensure that the needs of residents are being met.



DRAFT 02.28.2025

The background of the slide is a photograph of a park. A paved path leads from the bottom left towards the center. To the right of the path is a large, mature tree with a thick trunk and a full canopy of green leaves. The ground is covered in green grass. In the distance, there are more trees and a small building with a red roof. The sky is blue with some light clouds.

07

**PRIORITIES AND
ACTION PLAN**

DRAFT 02.28.2025

The recommendations for this plan are divided into two categories: system-wide and park-specific improvements. System-wide recommendations encompass improvements related to the whole park system, and how individual recreation spaces work together. Park-specific recommendations take a closer look at the proposed improvements to amenities and facilities at each park site. These proposed improvements are intended to build upon the current successes of North Vernon Parks and Recreation, providing residents with opportunities for enriching, outdoor recreation experiences.

The chapter begins with system-wide goals, organized into three categories:

- Streamline Board and Department Operations
- Cultivate a Cohesive and Connected Park System
- Expand Park Offerings

Park-specific improvement projects encompass the following categories:

- Boost connectivity and accessibility
- Improve park facilities
- Invest in further programming and events

The project team recognizes that not all recommendations are implementable within

the five-year timespan of this plan. However, it is critical to note desired improvements and to track their progress across plan updates to ensure they remain in consideration. The completion of these recommendations is ultimately the responsibility of the parks board and parks department. That said, recommendations benefit the greater community, and other civic entities should support and advance plan recommendations whenever possible.

Items in **bold** are part of the top 15 recommendations for the parks plan. These recommendations, considered of utmost importance for North Vernon Parks and Recreation, are summarized in the Action Table. Recommendations were selected based on their impact on the park system, whether through improved facilities, expanded programming, greater capacity and effectiveness, or a commitment to implement projects identified in previous plans, but not yet completed.

Recommendations

Streamline Board and Department Operations

1. Revise North Vernon's parks ordinance.
 - Restructure the Parks Board to include an odd number of board members, preventing issues from stalling due to a tied vote.
2. Restructure the North Vernon Parks Department.
 - **Revise the Parks Director position as an administrative role which oversees operations with the support of a Maintenance Director, Program Director, and Pool Director.**
 - **Develop a job description with defined roles and responsibilities for a Maintenance Director. Hire a qualified staff member for this position.**
3. Simplify departmental operations through public-private partnerships.
 - Continue to maintain a positive relationship with Ohio Valley Sports for programming of the baseball fields at City Park.
 - Evaluate the costs/benefits of operating concession stands within the park system in-house versus leasing to an outside organization. If leasing concession stands, an external organization would be selected to run the stands, providing top-quality service, and return a share of the profits to the Parks Department.

Cultivate a Cohesive and Connected Park System

1. Promote North Vernon parks as part of a unified park system.
 - **Establish a clear logo and brand for North Vernon Parks and Recreation.**
 - **Install information kiosks in city parks. Kiosks should include a map of the entire North Vernon park system to increase awareness of local park offerings. Kiosks may also advertise upcoming events and programs.**
 - Consider incorporating St. Anne's Golf Course into North Vernon's park system, ensuring that all municipally-owned, public recreation amenities fall under Parks Department management.
2. Pursue trail projects identified in the 2023 Jennings County Active Transportation Plan.
 - **Develop the Madison Avenue Greenway to connect Tripton Park to downtown North Vernon.**
 - Pursue the US 50 Sidewalk Connector to connect the Jennings County School Corporation Campus to downtown North Vernon, providing an indirect connection to the city's parks.
 - Complete the North Vernon segment of the Jennings/Bartholomew County Greenway to connect North Vernon's parks to a broader, regional recreation system.
 - Pursue the City Park Sidewalk project to connect City Park to the proposed Jennings/Bartholomew County Greenway.
3. Continue to implement recommendations outlined in North Vernon's 2022 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan for Public Facilities.

Enhance Park Offerings

1. Increase the availability of parkland in North Vernon, ranging from regional recreation destinations to neighborhood greenspaces.
 - **Continue to develop Quarry Adventure Park as a new park within North Vernon's park system.**
 - **Amend the Subdivision Control Ordinance (SCO) to require the development of a small community park or greenspace in new subdivisions outside of a half-mile radius from existing city parks.**
2. Consider opportunities to develop new facilities within the North Vernon park system.
 - Acquire the National Guard building at City Park and renovate the space for use as a community center or gym.
3. Diversify park programming to better meet the needs of residents.
 - **Add programming, such as more community events, adult sports leagues/tournaments, adult fitness programs, non-athletic youth programs, and performances at the Tripton Park amphitheater.**
4. Update and maintain existing facilities to keep up with natural wear and tear, and pressures from increased usage as North Vernon's population grows.
 - Develop a maintenance plan for park shelters.
 - Install an asphalt surface over all gravel parking.
5. Protect and preserve North Vernon's urban forest as a community asset.
 - Develop a Tree Inventory and Management Plan.

Tripton Park

Recommendations Support the Expansion of Programming at the Park

As North Vernon's newest park, recommendations for Tripton Park focus on connectivity and programming, rather than facility improvements. Regarding connectivity, there are no sidewalks connecting residents and visitors to Tripton Park; consequently, a greenway has been proposed for Madison Avenue. The greenway would provide a safe, convenient connection between downtown North Vernon and Tripton Park. Recommendations also include expanding the programming at Tripton Park. Two of the park's amenities, the amphitheater and the outdoor exercise pad, are seldom used. Regularly scheduled programming would help activate these spaces.

Boost Connectivity and Accessibility

- Connect Tripton Park to downtown North Vernon via the Madison Avenue Greenway. Use the Arvin site to make this connection.

Improve Park Facilities

- Add a permanent roof to the amphitheater at Tripton Park.

Invest in Further Programming and Events

- Expand programming at the amphitheater.
- Pursue the opportunity to offer fitness classes at the outdoor exercise pad.

City Park

Recommendations Make the Park a More Desirable Destination

As North Vernon's oldest and largest park, recommendations for City Park are extensive, but can be completed over the course of the next five years (and beyond, if necessary). Recommendations are intended to elevate the park experience for residents and visitors. City Park's offerings should be of a consistent quality with other facilities in the park system, such as Tripton Park. City Park has a lot of potential; consequently, strategic improvements to boost connectivity, renovate park facilities, and expand programming could go a long way. Since the contract with Ohio Valley Sports was signed, City Park has seen an increase in visitation, especially on weekends for regional tournaments. There is an opportunity to leverage increased visitation, marketing City Park a regional destination in South Central Indiana.

Boost Connectivity and Accessibility

- **Install ADA-accessible pathways and curb ramps to connect amenities within City Park.**
- Install information kiosks at park entrances. Kiosks may include a map highlighting available facilities and a bulletin board to advertise upcoming opportunities, from seasonal events to sports leagues.
- **Reconfigure parking lots at City Park to maximize the number of available spaces.**
- Evaluate side street parking in adjacent neighborhoods. Install signage to indicate where visitors can park, and where parking is not allowed.
- Partner with businesses adjacent to City Park to allow parking on weekends in unused lots.

Improve Park Facilities

- **Partner with club members at the North Vernon Park Speedway to enhance or create a new facility for the outdoor RC racetrack. Invest in the racetrack as a high-quality, regional amenity, connected to other park facilities via accessible pathways.**
- Apply topcoat on asphalt for the quadplex at City Park.
- Rework infields, dugouts, and fencing for Castetter Field.
- Continue transitioning playgrounds into fully accessible spaces. Replace surfacing and remove barriers to access play equipment.

Invest in Further Programming and Events

- Offer youth and adult pickleball leagues to program the new courts at City Park.

Mini Park / Muscatatuck Trailhead

Recommendations Give the Park a Defined Purpose

Mini Park has largely stayed the same since its development in 1976. Tucked behind the North Vernon water tower along the Muscatatuck Trail, the park features an asphalt basketball court, open greenspace, benches, swing set, and slide. Several of these amenities are aging and need to be replaced. The site is not ADA accessible since there are no pathways within the park, nor any sidewalks connecting the park to nearby neighborhoods. Consequently, when asked about Mini Park, most survey respondents indicated that they had never been to the park, let alone heard of it. There is a desperate need to redefine Mini Park as a small, but charming community asset.

Based on the Needs Analysis conducted for North Vernon and discussions with the Steering Committee, Mini Park should be revived as a small but inviting neighborhood park. Mini Park's revival will include replacing the current play equipment with an accessible playground. Pathways and landscaping may also be installed to improve accessibility and aesthetics. Additional recommendations for Mini Park are listed below.

Boost Connectivity and Accessibility

- Remove the rusted wire fence surrounding Mini Park.
- Remove the barbed wire fence surrounding the water tower. If security is an issue, consider replacing it with a wooden security fence. Install warning signage about the hazards of climbing the water tower.
- **Install a welcome sign at Mini Park.**
- **Add wayfinding signage along the Muscatatuck Trail and at the trailhead parking lot to direct visitors to Mini Park.**
- Extend ADA-compliant sidewalks and curb ramps on the neighborhood streets surrounding Mini Park to increase accessibility.
- Install paved pathways connecting the parking lot, sidewalks, and amenities within Mini Park.
- Add lighting along Muscatatuck Trail.

Improve Park Facilities

- **Replace the aging swing set and slide with accessible play equipment.**
- Install all new play equipment on accessible surfaces.
- **Resurface the aging basketball court and replace the hoops.**
- Install a shelter with picnic tables at the park.
- Trim the trees overhanging the open space at the edge of the park.
- Install native plantings to landscape the park.

Invest in Further Programming and Events

- Celebrate the reopening of Mini Park with a neighborhood block party.

Action Table for Top 15 Recommendations

The table below summarizes the 15 most critical recommendations for the parks plan. Recommendations are organized by priority (short-, medium-, and long-term). The table indicates whether a recommendation is system-wide, or if it focuses on a particular park within North Vernon. Project partners, estimated costs, and potential funding sources are included for each recommendation.

It is important to note that numerous complexities exist regarding the eventual construction of these improvements. It must be emphasized that the estimated costs presented here are strictly approximate, and only through detailed field analysis will a true project budget be correctly calculated. If Federal or State monies are used for development, project costs are also likely to increase due to additional review and reporting responsibilities.

Table 7.1: Short-Term Priorities (2025 to 2026)				
Park	Action	Partners	Cost	Potential Funding
System-wide	Revise the Parks Director position as an administrative role which oversees operations with the support of a Maintenance Director, Program Director, and Pool Director.	Mayor, City Council	Staff Labor	In-House
System-wide	Develop a job description with defined roles and responsibilities for a Maintenance Director. Hire a qualified staff member for this position.	Mayor, City Council	Salary + Benefits	Local Funding / Operating Budget
System-wide	Establish a clear logo and brand for North Vernon Parks and Recreation.	Mayor, City Council, Parks Department	\$1,000 - \$10,000	Local Funding / Operating Budget
System-wide	Continue to develop Quarry Adventure Park as a new park within North Vernon's park system.	Mayor, Parks Department	Staff Labor	Local Funding / READI 1.0
System-wide	Amend the Subdivision Control Ordinance (SCO) to require the development of a small community park or greenspace in new subdivisions outside of a half-mile radius from existing city parks.	Mayor, Plan Commission, City Council	Staff Labor	In-House

Table 7.1: Short-Term Priorities (2025 to 2026)
(Continued)

Park	Action	Partners	Cost	Potential Funding
City Park	Reconfigure parking lots at City Park to maximize the number of available spaces.	Parks Department, Street Department	\$200,000	Local Funding / Operating Budget
Mini Park / Muscatatuck Trailhead	Replace the aging swing set and slide with accessible play equipment.	Mayor, City Council, Parks Department	\$200,000	Local Funding / Operating Budget
Mini Park / Muscatatuck Trailhead	Resurface the aging basketball court and replace the hoops.	Mayor, City Council, Parks Department	\$30,000	Local Funding / Operating Budget

Table 7.2: Medium-Term Priorities (2027 to 2028)

Park	Action	Partners	Cost	Potential Funding
System-wide	Install information kiosks in city parks. Kiosks should include a map of the entire North Vernon park system to increase awareness of local park offerings. Kiosks may also advertise upcoming events and programs.	Mayor, City Council, Parks Department	\$10,000 per park	Local Funding / Operating Budget
System-wide	Add programming, such as more community events, adult sports leagues/tournaments, adult fitness programs, non-athletic youth programs, and performances at the Tripton Park amphitheater.	Parks Department, North Vernon Main Street, Jennings County Community Foundation, Purdue Extension Jennings County	Variable	Local Funding / Operating Budget

Table 7.2: Medium-Term Priorities (2027 to 2028)
(Continued)

Park	Action	Partners	Cost	Potential Funding
City Park	Partner with club members at the North Vernon Park Speedway to enhance or create a new facility for the outdoor RC racetrack. Invest in the racetrack as a high-quality, regional amenity, connected to other park facilities via accessible pathways.	Parks Department, North Vernon Park Speedway	Variable	Local Funding / Operating Budget
Mini Park / Muscatatuck Trailhead	Install a welcome sign at Mini Park.	Parks Department	\$10,000	Local Funding / Operating Budget

Table 7.3: Long-Term Priorities (2029 to 2030)

Park	Action	Partners	Cost	Potential Funding
System-wide	Develop the Madison Avenue Greenway to connect Tripton Park to downtown North Vernon.	Mayor, City Council, Parks Department, Street Department	\$260,000	Indiana Trails Program; Local Funding / Operating Budget
City Park	Install ADA-accessible pathways and curb ramps to connect amenities within City Park.	ADA Coordinator, Parks Department	\$225,000	Local Funding / Operating Budget
Mini Park / Muscatatuck Trailhead	Add wayfinding signage along the Muscatatuck Trail and at the trailhead parking lot to direct visitors to Mini Park.	Mayor, City Council, Parks Department	\$15,000	Local Funding / Operating Budget



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08

**POTENTIAL
FUNDING
SOURCES**

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Potential Funding Sources

IDNR, Division of Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

The following grants are administered by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Outdoor Recreation. These grants are available to municipalities with a legally established park board, and it is strongly recommended to have an approved five-year master plan on file with IDNR-DOR. The availability of these grants may change from year to year.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is a matching grant program which provides funding for 50 percent of the cost for acquisition and/or development of outdoor recreation sites and facilities. Only park boards with an approved five-year master plan are eligible to apply. Applicants may request amounts ranging from \$250,000 to \$1 million. Projects eligible for LWCF include acquiring parks or natural areas, trails, picnic areas, sports facilities, playgrounds, water-oriented facilities, nature centers, campgrounds, amphitheaters, and roads, restrooms, and utilities to support parks.

Indiana Trails Program

The Indiana Trails Program (ITP) is a grant program to support the development of trails throughout the state. The program uses state funds to help connect Hoosiers to outdoor recreation opportunities and natural environments without needing to rely on the use of a vehicle. The ITP will provide a maximum of 80% reimbursement for eligible projects, up to the maximum grant award amount. All units of government and certain 501(c)(3) not-for-profit agencies are eligible to apply. Applicants may request amounts ranging from \$100,000 to \$400,000.

Projects eligible for ITP funds include construction of trails, development of trailheads or other support amenities, construction of bridges, boardwalks, and crossings, and acquisition of easement or property for trails.

DNR Shooting Range Program

The Department of Natural Resources Shooting Range Program is a grant program for the development of rifle, handgun, shotgun, and archery facilities. All units of government and agencies incorporated as 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporations that are open to the public at least 20 hours per month are eligible. The intent of the program is to provide additional public recreational shooting opportunities and to train hunter education students. Eligible projects include the development of backstops, target holders, field courses, classrooms, sanitary facilities, and accessible pathways. Land acquisition is not eligible for reimbursement under the program.

Next Level Trails

NextLevelTrails (NLT), a state-funded infrastructure program, is designed to incentivize collaborative efforts to accelerate trail connections. There is currently no NLT funding, and a fifth grant round will depend on future funding. Eligible applicants include local units of government or 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organizations. Applicants must own (or acquire) the trail corridor, manage and maintain the trail once developed, and oversee trail construction through completion. All non-motorized trail types are eligible, but preference is given to multi-use trail types. All grant requests require a minimum 20% match. Locally significant projects may seek \$200,000 to \$2 million. Regionally significant projects may seek \$250,000 to \$5 million per applicant. Projects that connect multiple communities, schools, parks, neighborhoods, commercial centers, local attractions, and existing trails are preferred, along with projects that maximize partnerships.

IDNR, Division of Forestry Opportunities

The following grants are administered by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry as part of their Community & Urban Forestry Program. All grants require a 1:1 match, and funds are distributed on a reimbursement basis. To be eligible for a grant, applicants must be a municipality, 501(c)(3) not-for-profit agency, school, place of worship, or higher education institution.

Community & Urban Forestry Assistance Grant

The Community & Urban Forestry Assistance (CUFA) Grant seeks to invest in the long-term growth and development of community forestry programs in Indiana. Applicants may request funding ranging from \$1,000 to \$25,000. Eligible projects include tree inventories or assessments, management plans, response plans, education and training, tree plantings, and other related activities to support urban forestry.

State Urban Forest Resilience Funding Grant

The State Urban Forest Resilience (SUFR) Grant seeks to restore and improve urban forests due to catastrophic losses from the Emerald Ash Borer while building resiliency through tree diversity and the protection of existing trees. Eligible applicants must have a fully updated (5 years or less) tree inventory. Applicants may request funding ranging from \$5,000 to \$50,000. Funds from this grant are to be used for management and reforestation that includes tree planting, tree removals, and treatments of threatened trees. All project aspects must take place on public property, and all projects must include tree planting.

Natural Disaster Recovery Grant

The Natural Disaster Recovery (NDR) Grant seeks to assist in the recovery of a community's urban tree canopy following the result of a natural disaster through the planting of replacement trees optionally paired with one or more of the following urban management tools: a community tree inventory or canopy assessment and a management plan or storm response plan. Eligible applicants may request funding ranging from \$1,000 to \$20,000. All projects must include tree planting.

Other Funding Opportunities

The following funding sources and grants are not administered by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. Included are grants available from local and national foundations, businesses, and organizations. This list is not all-inclusive, and the availability, criteria, and deadlines may change from year to year.

Jennings County Community Foundation

The Jennings County Community Foundation awards Community Impact Grants through an open, competitive process that addresses the community's ever-changing needs. Applications may be submitted on an ongoing basis but will only be reviewed by the Grants Committee and the Board of Directors in June and December each year. Project preferences and funding amounts may vary from year to year.

Greenways Foundation

The Greenways Foundation Grant Fund, made possible by the “I Support Trails” specialty license plate, supports greenways and trails designed for multi-use, walking and running, cycling, and horseback riding. The fund also supports projects for paddling on Indiana’s blueways. Existing 501(c)(3) organizations and local governments are eligible to apply for up to \$10,000 for their trail-related project. Applicants must have raised 50% of funding needed for project completion, be dedicated to the development, improvement, maintenance, accessibility, or sustainability of one or more trails, and be willing to complete the project within 12 months of receiving an award.

Walmart Spark Good Local Grants

Walmart gives back to the communities it serves through its Spark Good Local Grants program. The program awards grants ranging from \$250 to \$5,000 through each of the company’s facilities (Walmart Stores, Sam’s Clubs, and Logistics Facilities). Government entities, 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organizations, schools, and faith-based organizations are all eligible to apply for a Spark Good Local Grant. Past projects have focused on creating opportunity, advancing sustainability, and strengthening community. Facility managers review applications and select projects based on alignment with Walmart’s mission, trust building, and project effectiveness.

Lowe’s Hometowns

Each year, Lowe’s selects 100 large-scale community projects, chosen from consumer nominations, to be completed in partnership with local nonprofits, Lowe’s store associates, and community volunteers. The program is open to legal residents of the fifty United States and the District of Columbia, who are at least twenty-one years of age at the time of nomination. Projects must fall into the following categories: Community Centers/Services, Safe Affordable Housing, First Responder Facilities, Community Revitalization (including parks and gardens), and Skilled Trades Education Initiatives.

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The background of the slide is a photograph of an outdoor sports facility. In the foreground, there are metal bleachers with reddish-brown seats. Behind the bleachers is a chain-link fence. In the distance, there are trees, a clear blue sky with some white clouds, and a building with a blue roof. A large, semi-transparent dark blue circle is overlaid in the center of the image, containing the text.

09

**PLAN
EVALUATION
AND UPDATES**

DRAFT 02.28.2025

Keeping the Plan Current

On a yearly basis, it is recommended that the Parks and Recreation Board review and evaluate progress that has been made on the Parks and Recreation Plan. This is necessary to help the Parks and Recreation Board maintain the ability to provide quality services and facilities. A periodic review of the master plan and the consideration of continual public input will help determine where to focus efforts and help to determine future projects.

This Parks and Recreation Plan prepared for the City of North Vernon Parks and Recreation Board is current for the years 2025–2029. To remain eligible for grants through IDNR, DOR after 2029, the Parks Board must prepare an update and submit a draft to IDNR, DOR by November 15th, 2029 and a final draft by April 15th, 2030.

Sometimes, there are unforeseen circumstances that may change the priorities of the five-year planning period. If this happens, a plan amendment may be submitted to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Outdoor Recreation (IDNR, DOR). Formal amendments to the plan are only required if they involve projects proposed in grant applications requiring a five-year plan. These amendments must be approved in writing by IDNR, DOR planning staff. Plan amendments will not extend the five-year eligibility of the master plan. Plan amendments submitted to IDNR, DOR for the purpose of adding or modifying a community's future grant project must be submitted and approved by IDNR, DOR staff prior to the grant program's application deadline. To amend the master plan, the following items must be submitted to IDNR, DOR:

1. A brief explanation of the reason(s) for the amendment.
2. Documentation of the public input which went into the amendment process.
3. The new plan pages, containing any changes or additions.
4. A resolution passed by the parks board adopting the plan as amended. This will make the revised plan an official document of the parks and recreation board.

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