

# **Parks, Trails, Open Space, and Recreation Policy Analysis**

## **For the Cities of Long Prairie, Little Falls, Walker, Brainerd, and Wadena**

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Region Five Photos at <http://s1184.photobucket.com/home/mnregionfive>

Prepared for the  
**Central Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Project**

December 19, 2011

## Introduction

The following document analyzes Long Prairie, Little Falls, Walker, Brainerd, and Wadena city policies relating to parks, trails, open space, and recreation. This document is one piece of a larger analysis that addresses the five cities' policies regarding topics of land use, transportation, housing, economic development, parks, trails, open space, and recreation, water and natural resources, intergovernmental coordination, and healthcare. To ensure clarity, each topic is analyzed separately in its own document. Research and analysis was undertaken to provide the Region Five Development Consortium with a clearer understanding of how current policies relate and differ from each other across the cities. The following analysis will be helpful for workgroups to develop regional policies and recommendations, which will be adopted by the full consortium to guide the future growth and development of Region Five in a sustainable manner.

## Methodology

The following policies were taken from the most recent comprehensive plans from the cities of Long Prairie, Little Falls, Walker, Brainerd, and Wadena. This document addresses the similarities, differences, and potential conflicts between city policies regarding parks, trails, open space, and recreation. Due to the uniqueness of each plan, not all cities addressed similar issues around the topic at hand. For this reason, policies were only included if at least two of the five cities addressed the issue. Additionally, each city's policies are written at a different level of specificity making it difficult to compare/contrast a detailed policy with a vague policy. For the purpose of this analysis, policies were considered similar to each other even when they differ on the level of detail.

For this analysis, sub-topics were created to guide the reader throughout the document. For example, this document contains sub-topics of private parks, parks along/near the river, recreational funding, and so forth. Under each sub-topic, similarities, differences, and conflicts between city policies on an issue were analyzed and grouped into categories. Categories are listed as follows: Very Similar, Similar, Somewhat Similar, Unique/Potentially Conflicting, and Unique. Policies in the Very Similar category are ones that relate to each other at a clear level of specificity; policies under the Similar category are ones that relate in vision but not in detail; policies under the Somewhat Similar category relate to each other more similarly than uniquely; policies under Unique/Potentially Conflicting category are in potential disagreement with other policies pertaining to the same issue; and policies that are considered unique have some relationship to the issue at hand but are not similar to each other. Due to policies relating to more than one sub-topic, it is possible that the same policy will be included across sub-topics and categories. It is also possible that not all categories were used in this document, depending on how city policies relate to each other.

To make it clear to understand, each policy has been assigned a color that corresponds with a city. The county color code can be seen in the footer of each page. Additionally, text that is bolded and highlighted signifies the relationship between policies under a category. Furthermore, a sources list is included below in this methodology section to provide readers with links to each county's most updated comprehensive plan.

## Sources

### 1) Long Prairie 1999 Comprehensive Plan:

<https://r5dcscrp.basecamphq.com/projects/7032816/file/100569548/Long%20Prairie%20Comprehensive%20Plan.pdf>

### 2) Little Falls Comprehensive Plan 2006-2020

<https://r5dcscrp.basecamphq.com/projects/7032816/file/101701381/Little%20Falls%20Comp%20Plan0001.pdf>

### 3) Walker Comprehensive Plan (adopted 2010)

[http://www.communitygrowth.com/\\_asset/ldkjz5/Walker-Plan\\_Final\\_050310.pdf](http://www.communitygrowth.com/_asset/ldkjz5/Walker-Plan_Final_050310.pdf)

### 4) Brainerd Comprehensive Plan (adopted 2004)

<http://www.ci.brainerd.mn.us/planning/docs/compplan.pdf>

### 5) City of Wadena Comprehensive Plan (adopted 1986)

<https://r5dcscrp.basecamphq.com/projects/7032816/file/101701382/Wadena%20Comp%20Plan.pdf>

## Findings

### I. Providing, Maintaining, and Improving Parks/Open Space

Each city addresses the above topic in their respective plans. Both Long Prairie and Brainerd have very similar policies seeking to provide and maintain an adequate/appropriate number of parks, open spaces, or recreational facilities. Additionally, Long Prairie seeks to maintain adequate active and passive open space. A second similar Long Prairie policy focuses on maintaining and upgrading existing park facilities. Little Falls and Wadena also include policies relating maintenance and enhancement of parks and natural amenities.

Long Prairie and Brainerd both include very similar policies relating to the sub-topic of Recreation and Livability, as both seek to maximize their potential as a center for recreation while maintaining and enhancing livability. The city of Walker includes a somewhat similar policy in its comprehensive plan, seeking to use the city's squares and parks to enhance the quality of life for its residents.

Four of the communities also addressed the topic of development and expansion in their comprehensive plans. Little Falls and Wadena included similar policies regarding expansion of the park system. Both policies address the topic by seeking to expand the park system, focusing on the neighborhood and community levels. Little Falls includes a second policy relating to the topic which seeks to expand and enhance the parks, trails and open space system.

## **II. Parks, Trails, Open Space, and Recreation System Needs**

Three comprehensive plans included policies relating to the needs of the parks, trails, open space, and recreation systems. Long Prairie includes two policies which seek to provide an adequate or appropriate number of parks or recreational facilities in order to meet the needs of all residents or the community as a whole. Brainerd's policy is similar, however it mentions specifically meeting the future needs of the community. Wadena's policy is similar to the others, but specifically mentions meeting the needs of both present and future residents.

Long Prairie includes a third, unique policy relating to the system needs, stating that the city should ensure that there are an adequate number of neighborhood parks to meet the needs of all residential neighborhoods, particularly in growth areas. This policy is unique, as it focuses on neighborhoods and growth areas, not the community as a whole.

## **III. Private Parks**

The topic of private parks is uniquely addressed by both Long Prairie and Brainerd. Long Prairie's policy focuses more on funding, stating that the city should encourage the private industry's support in recreational programming and funding. Brainerd's policy mentions private parks (along with public parks) as a way to preserve valuable water resources. The policies relate to the topic, but the goals are highly unique.

## **IV. Parks Along/Near the River**

Long Prairie, Little Falls, and Brainerd include policies referencing the expansion of parks along or near the rivers within the community. Long Prairie and Little Falls' policies are similar as they seek to promote parks, trails, and open space near the river as a way to preserve and protect the river. Brainerd's policy is similar, as it seeks to strongly support the expansion of parks near the

Mississippi River. Long Prairie is the only plan to incorporate a policy relating to converting floodplains to open space areas, therefore this policy was classified as unique.

## **V. Recreational Funding**

Long Prairie, Little Falls, and Brainerd incorporate unique policies relating to recreational funding. Long Prairie wants to encourage support from the private industry in recreational funding. Little Falls' aims to share the costs of the parks system with other public agencies. Finally, Brainerd's policy is more unique and detailed, as it will require all park dedication in cash for new development and use funding to develop parks "based on the reasonable standards of the proportional use and enjoyment of such park facilities by the residents or employees of the new development."

## **VI. Equal Recreational Opportunities**

Both Long Prairie and Little Falls make somewhat similar references to providing a parks and open space system that meet the needs of all residents, regardless of age, or in the case of Long Prairie's policy, socio-economic status.

## **VII. Trail Systems**

All communities, with the exception of Wadena, include somewhat similar terminology in policies seeking to provide and maintain a trail system, though the motivations for doing so vary slightly. Long Prairie seeks to develop a trail system, later including a specific policy which seeks to integrate this system with park facilities. Little Falls wants to provide a trail system to provide alternative access routes between uses and areas and to serve as development breaks. Walker seeks to develop human scale connections to the city's squares and green spaces to make these areas more accessible and meaningful for the people. Brainerd looks at improving the greenway and trail connections between existing and future community parks.

## **VIII. Parks/Open Space Master Plans**

Long Prairie and Brainerd mention the need to develop a parks or open space master plan. Long Prairie seeks to evaluate the need to develop and implement this plan, while Brainerd's policy is more direct, seeking to create and maintain a master plan, including park location, function, equipment, etc. Brainerd incorporates a unique policy which states that the community will only accept park dedication when it is consistent with this plan. Additionally, Wadena wants to evaluate current zoning and adopt a policy that will preserve more land for open space.

## **IX. Parks/Open Spaces and Property Values**

Little Falls and Walker address the topic of how parks and open spaces will affect property values. Little Falls seeks to preserve and protect housing values by planning for adequate parks, trails, and open space. Walker includes a somewhat similar policy seeking to enhance greens, squares, and parks in a way that provides long-term financial return to property owners. None of the other plans reference the impact of the parks system on property values.

## **X. Open Space**

Four of the communities address the topic of open space. Long Prairie, Brainerd, and Wadena include similar policies which seek to provide and maintain adequate open space. Policies become more specific in the second sub-topic of Open Space to Protect Natural Resources. Little Falls and Brainerd use somewhat similar terminology in policies which seek to protect, enhance, or preserve natural resources through open space. Brainerd's policy is more specific, referencing only water resources.

Long Prairie and Little Falls also include unique open space policies relating to the protection of natural resources. Long Prairie's policy of converting floodplains to passive open spaces is repeated, as it seeks to use these spaces to preserve natural features and provide exposure to environmentally sensitive areas. Little Falls includes the only policy which references the preservation of natural vegetation and wildlife in open spaces. Finally, Little Falls also will encourage joint use of open space for recreation as well as preservation of natural and visual amenities.

## **XI. Intergovernmental Coordination**

The topic of intergovernmental coordination is dominated primarily by policies from Long Prairie and Little Falls. All policies were categorized as unique. The topic of coordination with schools is addressed somewhat extensively in the Little Falls plan, as the community will coordinate and cooperate with the park-school concept when a neighborhood school is needed, promote links between neighborhoods, schools, and parks, and promote linking public school sites with parks and open space. Long Prairie's coordination with schools refers to a specific policy which seeks to promote a year-round indoor recreational facility in conjunction with the Long Prairie-Grey Eagle School District.

Long Prairie includes policies which mention working with state and county officials to develop a regional trail, as well as working with the Park Board to ensure there is a balance of active and passive park areas. Little Falls' intergovernmental coordination is addressed through a policy which seeks to share facilities and costs with other public agencies. Brainerd also includes a unique policy which states that the community will work with the county to better utilize the Crow Wing County Fair Grounds.

# Policy Analysis

## I. Providing, Maintaining, and Improving Parks/Open Space

### A. Providing, Maintaining, and Enhancing Parks/Open Space

#### 1. Very Similar

- a) **Provide and maintain an appropriate number of recreational facilities** that meet the needs of all community residents, regardless of age or socio-economic status
- b) **Provide and maintain adequate community parks and open space** to meet the future needs of the community.
- c) **Maintain adequate active and passive open space** to meet the needs of the community

#### 2. Similar to Above (IA1)

- a) **Maintain and upgrade existing park facilities**
- b) **Provide a system of active and passive recreation** for all age groups consisting of: mini-parks, neighborhood parks, playfields, community parks, community center-water park, special purpose parks, preservation/ conservation/ environmental corridors, trails
- c) **To maintain the high quality and level of parks and recreation**

#### 3. Somewhat Similar to Above (IA1)

- a) Protect and **enhance the natural amenities of Little Falls including the** bluffs, wetlands, Mississippi River, Little Elk River, Swan River, Pike Creek, streams, **parks and open spaces**

### B. Recreation and Livability

#### 1. Very Similar

- a) **Maximize the potential of the community of Long Prairie as a thriving center for** business and **recreation, while maintaining and enhancing its livability**

- b) **Maximize Brainerd's potential as a thriving center for business, health care, industry, education and recreation, while maintaining and enhancing its livability**

**2. Somewhat Similar to Above (IB1)**

- a) **Use the city's squares, greens and parks to enhance the quality of life for Walker area residents and business owners**

**C. Development/Expansion of Parks and Recreational Facilities**

**1. Similar**

- a) **Provide additional neighborhood and community park facilities as the community expands**
- b) **To provide for the continued development of park and recreational facilities on a neighborhood and community level** to serve the needs of the present and future residents

**2. Similar to Above (IC1)**

- a) **Expand and enhance the park, trails and open space system** and construct a new Community Center-Water Park by 2007

## **II. Parks, Trails, Open Space, and Recreation System Needs**

**A. Parks, Trails, Open Space, and Recreation System Needs**

**1. Similar**

- a) **Provide and maintain an appropriate number of recreational facilities that meet the needs of all community residents**, regardless of age or socio-economic status
- b) **Maintain adequate active and passive open space to meet the needs of the community**
- c) **Provide and maintain adequate community parks and open space to meet the future needs of the community.**

**2. Similar to Above (IIA1)**



- a) To provide for the continued development of park and recreational facilities on a neighborhood and community level to serve the needs of the present and future residents

### 3. Unique

- a) Ensure that there are adequate neighborhood park facilities to meet the needs of all residential neighborhoods, particularly in growth areas

## III. Private Parks

### A. Private Parks

#### 1. Unique

- a) Encourage private industry's help in providing recreational programming and funding
- b) Prioritize valuable water resources -- streams, lakes, and wetlands -- native prairie remnants and woodlands for preservation in public and private parks and open space

## IV. Parks Along/Near the River

### A. Parks Along/Near the River

#### 1. Similar

- a) Protect and promote the Long Prairie River while enhancing areas for recreational purposes
- b) Preserve, protect and enhance the Mississippi River and adjacent lands for year-round recreational activities and for the scenic vistas it provides. (Uses could include picnicking, camping, fishing, boating/canoeing, landing facilities, jogging, biking, nature observation/interpreting and scenic viewing.)

#### 2. Similar to Above (IVA1)

- a) Strongly support the expansion of parks, trails, and open space along the Mississippi River and Gilbert Lake

#### 3. Unique

- a) **Convert floodplain areas to passive open space areas suitable for walking and biking trails, preserving natural features, and provide exposure to Long Prairie's sensitive environmental areas**

## V. Recreational Funding

### A. Recreational Funding

#### 1. Unique

- a) **Encourage private industry's help in providing recreational programming and funding**
- b) **Consider sharing facilities and costs for the park and open space system and programs with other public agencies**
- c) **Require park dedication in cash for all new development and utilize the funding to develop parks based on reasonable standards of the proportional use and enjoyment of such park facilities by the residents or employees of the new development.**

## VI. Equal Recreational Opportunities

### A. Equal Recreational Opportunities for All

#### 1. Somewhat Similar

- a) **Provide and maintain an appropriate number of recreational facilities that meet the needs of all community residents, regardless of age or socio-economic status**
- b) **Provide a system of active and passive recreation for all age groups** consisting of: mini-parks, neighborhood parks, playfields, community parks, community center-water park, special purpose parks, preservation/ conservation/ environmental corridors, trails

## VII. Trail Systems

### A. Trails Systems

#### 1. Somewhat Similar

- a) Work with state and Todd County officials to **develop, maintain, and promote a regional trail**
  - i. **Develop a hiking/biking and/or a nature path throughout the community which is integrated with park facilities**
- b) **Construct and maintain trails and open space links throughout the community to provide alternative access routes between uses and areas, to provide space for walking, biking and jogging and to serve as development breaks**
- c) **Develop human-scale connections to the city's squares, greens and parks to better define those spaces making them more accessible and meaningful to people in Walker**
- d) **Improve greenway and trail connections between existing and future community parks and provide trail connections** to the Spur Line and Paul Bunyan Trail

## VIII. Parks/Open Space Master Plans

### A. Creating and Using a Parks/Open Space Master Plan

#### 1. Somewhat Similar

- a) **Ensure that there is a balance of active and passive park areas to serve the community by** working with the Park Board and **evaluating the need to develop and implement a Parks and Open Space Master Plan**
- b) **Create and maintain a parks master plan** that includes park location, function, park equipment, trail system, and future park and trail expansion

#### 2. Unique

- a) **Accept parkland dedication only when it is consistent with the parks master plan** and the city's development and environmental mitigation plans. Focus development efforts on area-wide community parks serving larger populations and not localized neighborhood tot-lots.
- b) **The City will evaluate current zoning and adopt a policy that will preserve more land for open space and recreational use**

## IX. Parks/Open Spaces and Property Values

## A. Parks/Open Spaces and Property Values

### 1. Somewhat Similar

- a) **Preserve and protect the housing values and improve neighborhoods by planning for adequate park, trails and open space**
- b) **Retain the city's squares, greens and parks and enhance them in a way that provides a long-term financial return to property owners** throughout the city

## X. Open Space

### A. Maintaining Adequate Open Space

#### 1. Similar

- a) **Maintain adequate active and passive open space to meet the needs of the community**
- b) **Provide and maintain adequate community parks and open space to meet the future needs of the community**
- c) **To encourage the provision of adequate undeveloped open spaces within the City limits**

### B. Open Space to Protect Natural Resources

#### 1. Somewhat Similar

- a) **Protect and enhance the natural amenities of Little Falls including** the bluffs, wetlands, Mississippi River, Little Elk River, Swan River, Pike Creek, streams, parks and **open spaces**
- b) **Prioritize valuable water resources** -- streams, lakes, and wetlands – native prairie remnants and woodlands **for preservation in public and private** parks and **open space**

#### 2. Unique

- a) **Convert floodplain areas to passive open space areas suitable for walking and biking trails, preserving natural features, and provide exposure to Long Prairie's sensitive environmental areas**

- b) **Encourage the retention of the natural vegetation and wildlife in park and open space areas**
- c) **Encourage joint use of park and open space for recreation, preservation of natural and visual amenities**

## **XI. Intergovernmental Coordination**

### **A. Coordination with Schools**

#### **1. Unique**

- a) **Promote, in conjunction with the Long Prairie-Grey Eagle School District, a year-round indoor community recreational facility for all area residents**
- b) **Coordination and cooperation associated with the park-school concept when a neighborhood school is needed**
- c) **Promote establishment of links between neighborhoods, schools and parks**
- d) **Promote linking public school sites with the public park and open space system**

### **B. Coordination with Other Agencies**

#### **1. Unique**

- a) **Work with state and Todd County officials to develop, maintain, and promote a regional trail**
- b) **Ensure that there is a balance of active and passive park areas to serve the community by working with the Park Board and evaluating the need to develop and implement a Parks and Open Space Master Plan**
- c) **Consider sharing facilities and costs for the park and open space system and programs with other public agencies**
- d) **Continue to work with the County to better utilize the Crow Wing County Fair Grounds**