

04

PARKS & RECREATION

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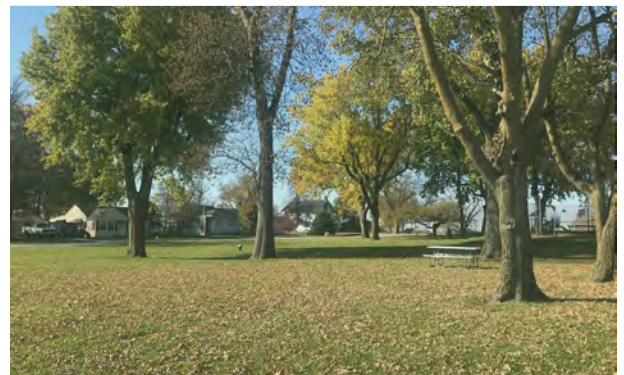
INTRODUCTION

Parks, trails, open space, and recreation programming can provide communities with many benefits. Having these resources available to the community can promote public health, has been proven to reduce crime, and contributes to creating socially active communities.

The City of Elkhart should seek to preserve, protect, maintain, improve, and enhance its natural resources, parkland, and recreational opportunities for current and future generations. The park system is an essential part of the quality of life in Elkhart, and is an integral part of developing a healthy community.

The goal is to create systems of parks and trails that allow for connectivity throughout the community and to destinations outside of the city. This section will provide details about the park system within Elkhart, and how improvements can be made to meet the current and future needs of the community.

This section of the Comprehensive Plan analyzes the existing conditions of Elkhart's parks and recreation amenities and outlines goals, objectives, and strategies for preserving, protection, restoring, and enhancing Elkhart's natural and recreation resources.



Natural Resources Goals, Objectives & Strategies

Clean water, air, and the conservation of native plants and animals are key principles of environmental integrity. In order for the City of Elkhart to continue to maintain and provide quality resources and recreation amenities, the following goals have been developed.



NATURAL RESOURCES GOAL 1: Conserve and restore open spaces and natural resources to increase resilience, adaptability, and biological integrity.



NATURAL RESOURCES GOAL 2: Foster air quality and water quality improvement through continuing education and incentive programs to ensure the preservation of natural resources, sustain community health and meet the long-term needs of the community.

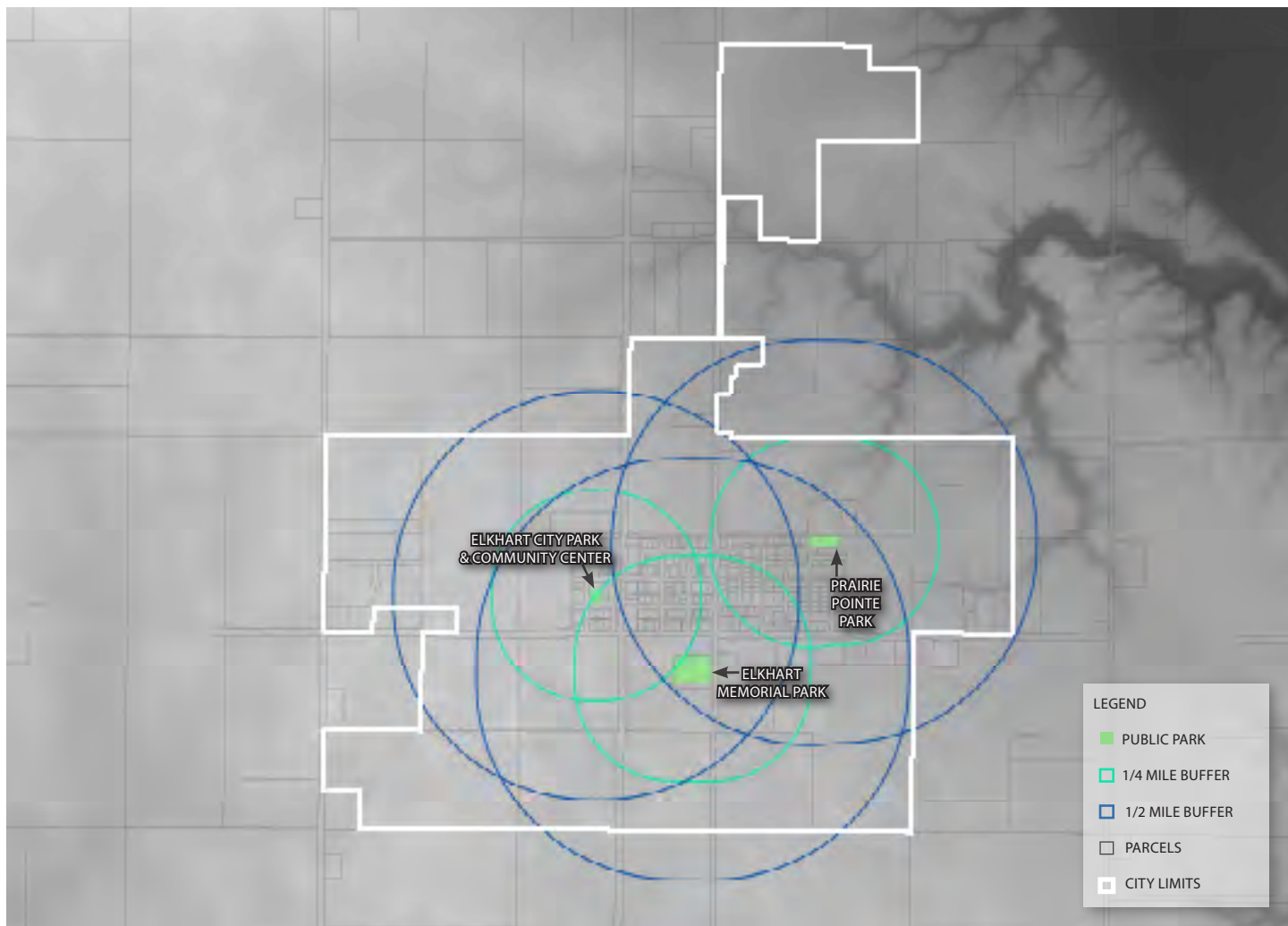


NATURAL RESOURCES GOAL 3: Encourage sustainable practices in locating, designing, constructing, and maintaining development in the community.



NATURAL RESOURCES GOAL 4: Maintain, improve, and expand recreational features (parks, trails, and open space) and their services for current and future use.

Elkhart Parks and Recreation



Source: Polk County, ESRI Basemap

The above map highlights the three existing recreation areas in Elkhart:

- Elkhart City Park and Community Center
- Elkhart Memorial Park
- Prairie Pointe Park

Each of these parks are shown with a 1/4 mile and 1/2 mile buffer around them to indicate their level of walkability. In general, a 1/4 mile buffer relates to approximately a 5 minute walk, and a 1/2 mile relates to an approximate 10 minute walk. As Elkhart grows as a community, this should be kept in mind to provide community members with a park within walking distance of their home.

Elkhart City Park and Community Center

City Park is located on the west side of Elkhart and features playground equipment, a community center, and views of the city water tower. Amenities that currently exist at the park include the playground, basketball courts, picnic tables, grills, benches, and parking. The site also encompasses Elkhart's water tower and community center. The available open space at City Park holds the potential for outdoor concerts, public art, community gardens, water features, and additional amenities/beautification opportunities.

Elkhart Memorial Park

The ball fields on the southern edge of town at S. Grant Ave and NE 126th Ave hosts softball games, little league games, and can be used as softball fields. The fields along with the concession stands are maintained by the Elkhart Memorial Park Board. As mentioned above, it is recommended that additional athletic field space be added to Prairie Pointe Park. Other options can include purchasing land in the northwest portion of the community where additional ball fields exist that are not owned by the City.

Prairie Pointe Park

The eastern side of Elkhart is served by Prairie Point Park, which has well-maintained play equipment and the potential for expansion. In 2014, a three phase plan was put in place to expand the space into a ‘community park.’ According to The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), ‘community parks’ are “diverse and can also act as a place for preserving natural resources.” The NRPA guidelines state that “for every 1,000 people there should be five to eight acres of parkland.” The three phase plan aspires to expand to the northeast, include water conservation features, basketball and volleyball courts amongst other amenities. As indicated by the NRPA, it is important to make and maintain park accommodations for all ages; focusing on the community as a whole as Elkhart continues to grow.

In 2018 the City expressed a desire for a more comprehensive Park Master Plan for Prairie Pointe Park. This would encompass parcels adjacent to the park for planned expansion. Key elements to be incorporated include: baseball field, naturescape, permanent bags courts, recreation paths, additional parking, stormwater management elements, and potential soccer fields. As part of the planning process the design team met with members of the City Council, Parks and Recreation Board, and community to gain an understanding of needs and desires for the park. Based upon input gathered, two conceptual plans were developed and reviewed. Guidance from the Parks and Recreation Board provided insight to develop a preferred park plan concept that could be utilized for pursuing funding, developing grant applications, and marketing/promoting improvements to the park.



2018 Prairie Pointe Park Conceptual Master Plan



Natural Resources

The abundance and health of an area's natural resources are imperative to the well-being of a community. This section focuses on protecting, preserving, restoring, and enhancing Elkhart's natural resources and environmentally sensitive areas.

KEY COMPONENTS

To fulfill Elkhart's future park, recreation, and natural resource needs, the following have been identified and recommended as key planning components:

- Improve ecosystem diversity, including native plant community restoration
- Incorporating 'naturalized' areas and enhancing the ecological resources within parks and recreation amenities
- Promoting inclusive play and improved accessibility
- Expanding the diversity of park users, including age, ethnicity, social class, and/or ability
- Enhancing the park programming, shared uses, and public/private opportunities
- Reducing long-term input and maintenance costs
- Creating opportunities for incorporating art, culture, and community identity
- Planning for and developing improved connectivity throughout the community

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

There are a number of environmental factors that put stresses on natural resources in parks. These can include invasive species, tree diseases, soil and water pollution, and impacts relating to climate change. The spread of the emerald ash borer, for example, has already caused the loss of many trees in central Iowa and continues to raise concern.

The maintenance practices used in these areas can have significant impacts on the local ecosystem. In order to lessen the burden on our rivers and streams, improve wildlife habitat, and protect plant species, it remains important to identify opportunities to improve water quality, protect environmentally sensitive areas, and increase native vegetation.





Natural Resources

ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS

The City of Elkhart should recognize environmentally sensitive areas and commit to the preservation of natural resources in the community. Giving care to the topics below will help Elkhart to build a healthier community and environment for its residents.

Moderate Slopes

Although moderate slopes (5-13%) are relatively common, these areas are prone to erosion and pose challenges for establishing vegetation. Special attention should be given in these areas to prevent extensive erosion.

Streams

Water ways and water bodies are also delicate and should be primarily avoided when considering development. This also includes small or seasonal streams.

Hydric Soils

Soils that are classified as hydric are regularly saturated, flooded, or ponded for long periods develop anaerobic conditions that pose issues for development and crop production. If development does occur in these areas, care should be given to prevent future groundwater issues.

Wetlands

Wetlands are also sensitive ecosystems that should be considered for conservations. Wetlands can support a large diversity of plants species and wildlife and may be legally protected.

Floodplains

For the protection of Elkhart residents and businesses, development should remain clear of floodplains. Soils in these areas are fertile, low-lying and may remain saturated for long periods of time after rain events.

Forested Areas

Forested areas provide the community with an ecological balance and serve as wildlife habitat. Development in these areas must be carefully considered. The northeast corner of the community encompasses dense vegetation that should be handled carefully.





Natural Resources

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

To continue to protect Elkhart's natural resources, Best Management Practices (BMPs) are recommended and include a range of water and pollution control measures to prevent pollutants from entering nearby waterways. Key to the success of these practices is to incorporate a holistic approach. This allows for situation-specific sets of practices that can work in combination with one another to provide highly effective results.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Run-off is generated from many sources and is impacted by the behaviors and activities of individuals, households, and the public. Common behaviors to be aware of include: littering, disposing of trash and recyclables, applying lawn-chemicals, washing cars, changing motor-oil, and disposing of paint and household chemicals. Through education positive change can begin at the individual level.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Encouraging public participation, partnerships, and combining the efforts of groups in the community allows the community to work together and toward the same goals. This creates opportunities for direct action, volunteer and educational programs such as tree planting days, environmental monitoring programs, storm drain marking and evaluation, and clean-up programs.

POLLUTION DETECTION AND ELIMINATION

Any discharge into the storm sewer that is not entirely composed of stormwater should be identified and eliminated. To address this, a program to include a storm sewer system map, ordinance prohibiting illicit discharges, and education program on hazards associated with illicit discharges should be in place.

CONSTRUCTION

Uncontrolled run-off from construction sites can significantly impact the natural environment. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provide excellent resources on incorporating BMPs into construction sites disturbing one or more acres.

POST CONSTRUCTION

As areas are developed, the amount of paved surfaces increases the volume of stormwater run-off and pollutants entering nearby water bodies. The best way to mitigate the impacts from new development is to use practices that treat, store, and filtrate stormwater run-off on-site before it impacts bodies of water downstream. Addressing post-construction measures should focus on green infrastructure and smart growth resources including:

[Stormwater Manager's Resource Center](#).

POLLUTION PREVENTION/GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

Preventing pollutants from entering waterways is far more cost-effective than restoring them after they have been polluted. Therefore, programs and efforts should be made to prevent pollution before it happens. Examples of BMPs and green infrastructure to consider include, but are not limited to: bioswales, rainwater detention ponds, household water catchments, green roofs, and permeable pavers.



Natural Resource Mapping

Wetlands Map:

The wetlands map shows areas that are known wetlands in the surrounding area around Elkhart. Most shown on the map can be classified as emergent fresh water wetlands or freshwater forested/shrub wetlands.

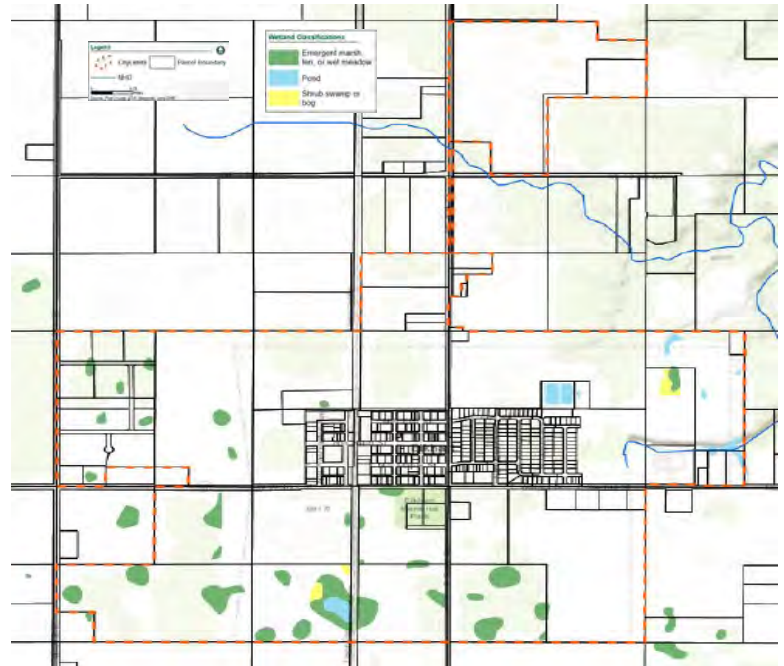
Watershed Map:

The watershed district map shows the districts or different areas that water will drain into (specifically what river this water will drain into). Portions of Elkhart are included in the Coan Creek - South Skunk River, Upper Four-mile Creek and middle Four-mile Creek watersheds.

Floodplain Map:

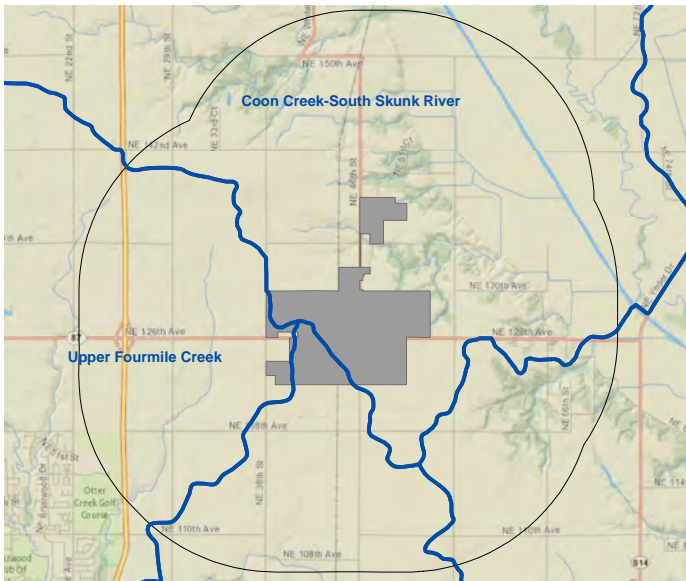
The floodplain map shows areas that are designated as areas that are prone to flooding, developing on such land is challenging and costly. The community of Elkhart is located in a Zone X - in accordance with FIRM map panel 190229, effective 2/1/2019.

WETLANDS



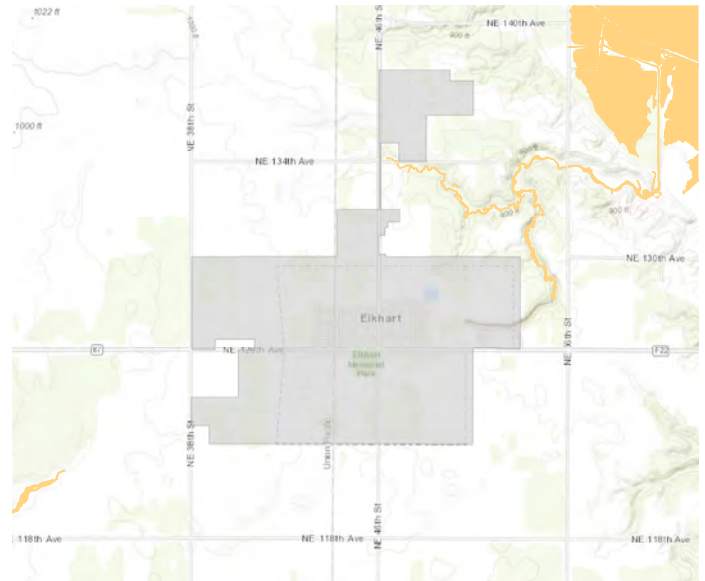
Source: ESRI Basemap, IA DNR

WATERSHED DISTRICT



Source: ESRI Basemap, IA DNR

FLOODPLAIN



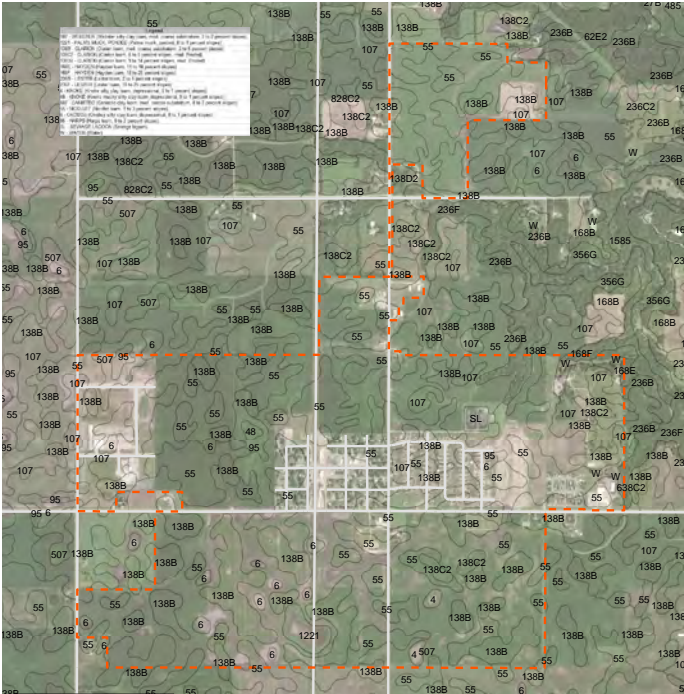
Source: Polk County, ESRI Basemap, FEMA

These maps illustrate Elkhart's wetlands, watershed districts, and floodplain.



Natural Resource Mapping

SOILS



Source: Polk County, ESRI Basemap, NRCS

SLOPE/TOPOGRAPHY

