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Comprehensive
Plan

Parks & Recreation



City of
Marion

www.marionnc.org

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A blurred background image of a forest path with sunlight filtering through the trees.

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE



The purpose of the City of Marion Parks and Recreation Plan is to provide a strategic framework for the development, maintenance, and enhancement of parks, trails, and recreational facilities within the community. This plan serves as a guide for decision-making and investment in recreational infrastructure, ensuring that current and future generations have access to high-quality outdoor spaces and programs that promote health, well-being, and community engagement.

A critical component of this plan is its alignment with the goals and objectives of the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation. Ensuring consistency with state priorities allows the City of Marion to remain eligible and competitive in securing grant funding to support the development and sustainability of parks and recreation facilities.

These funds are essential for maintaining and expanding recreational opportunities without placing an undue financial burden on local taxpayers.

Additionally, this plan will be reviewed and updated every five years to reflect changes in community needs, demographic shifts, environmental considerations, and emerging recreational trends. Regular updates ensure that Marion's parks and recreation system continues to evolve, meeting the needs of residents while preserving the natural beauty and cultural heritage that define the City. This proactive approach allows the City to adapt to new challenges, incorporate innovative solutions, and sustain a thriving parks and recreation network that enhances the quality of life for all residents.

COMMUNITY VISION



The community envisions a vibrant and inclusive parks and recreation system that enhances the well-being of all residents and visitors while preserving the city's natural beauty. This vision is built upon expanding and improving recreational opportunities, ensuring accessibility, and fostering community engagement through high-quality facilities and programs.

A key component of this vision is the expansion of the city's greenway and trail network, creating safe and connected pathways for walking, running, and cycling. These improvements will encourage active lifestyles and provide alternative transportation routes that link neighborhoods, parks, and key community destinations.

Safety and accessibility are central to this vision. Residents support the enhancement of existing parks by installing additional lighting, restrooms, and other security

features to ensure that public spaces remain welcoming and secure for families, individuals, and community groups.

In response to evolving recreational interests, the City is committed to addressing recreational deficiencies and adding new facilities, such as a dog park and skate park that help to diversify the range of activities available to residents. Furthermore, there is a desire to improve existing parks by incorporating new recreational equipment and courts, such as disc golf, bocce ball, and other amenities that encourage social interaction and active play.

By following this vision, Marion will continue to develop and maintain a parks and recreation system that meets the needs of its growing community while preserving its scenic landscape, fostering inclusivity, and enhancing the overall quality of life for generations to come.



RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING PLANS



Ensuring consistency between the City of Marion's Parks and Recreation Plan and other key planning documents is essential for coordinated growth, sustainability, and long-term resilience. This plan aligns with the City's 20-year Comprehensive Plan, the Peavine Rail Trail Plan, the North Main Street Fonta Flora State Trail Plan, and other strategic initiatives that guide public investment in parks and recreational facilities.

The City's 20-Year Comprehensive Plan serves as a long-term blueprint for sustainable growth and development, emphasizing the need for accessible and high-quality recreational spaces. By integrating

the objectives of this plan, the Parks and Recreation Plan, ensure that public spaces continue to evolve in response to population growth and changing community needs.

The Peavine Rail Trail Plan outlines the vision for converting an abandoned rail corridor into a multi-use trail, providing expanded opportunities for walking, running, and cycling. This initiative supports connectivity between neighborhoods, schools, businesses, and parks, promoting active transportation and outdoor recreation.

The North Main Street Fonta Flora State Trail Plan is part of a broader regional



INTRODUCTION



effort to establish a scenic, multi-use trail connecting Marion to the Fonta Flora Trail system. This trail expansion enhances recreational access while supporting tourism, economic development, and environmental stewardship.

The Destination McDowell Plan highlights the importance of tourism in the region and the role outdoor recreation plays in attracting visitors to Marion.

Outdoor activities such as hiking, backpacking, and rural sightseeing are among the most popular attractions among both residents and visitors, reinforcing the need for well-maintained parks, trails, and recreational amenities. The economic impact of visitors is significant, as overnight guests spend an average of six times more than day visitors, benefiting local businesses, accommodations, and restaurants. By aligning the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan with the Destination McDowell Plan, Marion can continue to leverage its natural assets to

enhance tourism, support local economic growth, and provide high-quality outdoor experiences that encourage repeat visitation while improving the quality of life for residents.

Additionally, other local and regional plans incorporate specific recommendations for park and recreation improvements, emphasizing infrastructure investments, environmental sustainability, and enhanced public access. By aligning with these plans, the City ensures continuity in its efforts to provide high-quality recreational facilities while securing funding opportunities and strengthening long-term resilience against environmental challenges.

This coordinated approach ensures that Marion's parks, trails, and recreational facilities remain a valued and sustainable resource for the community, supporting quality of life, economic vitality, and environmental preservation for years to come.

PLANNING PROCESS

The development of the Plan followed a structured and inclusive planning process designed to ensure that the plan reflects the needs, desires, and priorities of the community. Public engagement played a critical role in shaping the recommendations within this Plan, ensuring that investments in parks and recreation facilities align with the expectations of residents.

The planning process was conducted in multiple phases to ensure a thorough assessment and integration of community input. The key phases included:



Community Assessment

A review of existing parks, recreational facilities, programs, and services was conducted to understand the current state of recreation in Marion. This included evaluating facility conditions, program offerings, and park usage trends.



Stakeholder Identification

Key stakeholders, including city officials, McDowell County representatives, local business owners, community organizations, and residents, were identified to ensure broad representation in the planning process.



Public Outreach and Data Collection

A multi-faceted approach was used to engage residents and gather meaningful input.



Data Analysis and Needs Assessment

Survey responses and feedback from the community input meeting were analyzed to identify trends, common themes, and key priorities for future parks and recreation development.

INTRODUCTION



Draft Plan Development and Public Review

Based on community feedback, a draft Parks and Recreation Plan was developed, outlining strategic recommendations and proposed improvements. The draft plan was presented to the community for additional feedback to ensure it accurately reflected the desires of Marion's residents.



Public Presentation and Review

The draft plan was presented to the community for additional feedback to ensure it accurately reflected the desires of Marion's residents.



Final Plan Adoption and Implementation

Following public review, the final plan was adopted with a commitment to ongoing evaluation to ensure it remains aligned with community needs and priorities.



ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY

The City of Marion recognizes that community engagement is an ongoing process. As part of the plan's implementation, the City is committed to:

- *Conducting regular community meetings to receive feedback on park improvements and recreation programs.*
- *Utilizing surveys and digital platforms to track evolving community needs.*
- *Reviewing and updating the Parks and Recreation Plan every five years to ensure it remains relevant and effective.*

By fostering an open and transparent planning process, the City of Marion ensures that its parks and recreation system continues to be shaped by those who use and benefit from it the most—its residents. This community-driven approach will guide the City's efforts to provide high-quality recreational opportunities and maintain a thriving parks and recreation system for years to come.





COMMUNITY
PROFILE



GEOGRAPHIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

Marion, North Carolina, is a picturesque city located at the base of Mount Ida and along the Catawba River, nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. This unique geographical setting provides residents and visitors with breathtaking mountain views, lush forests, and abundant waterways, making it an ideal destination for outdoor recreation. The city's mild climate and gently rolling topography allow for year-round outdoor activities, including hiking, cycling, paddling, and nature exploration.



The natural environment plays a central role in Marion's identity, attracting outdoor enthusiasts who seek adventure, relaxation, and an escape into nature. The city's proximity to Pisgah National Forest, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and other natural attractions further enhances its reputation as a gateway to outdoor recreation. The surrounding forests, rivers, and open spaces provide ample opportunities for passive and active recreation, ranging from scenic picnicking areas to adrenaline-fueled mountain biking trails.

However, Marion's location near major waterways also presents environmental challenges, particularly regarding flooding and stormwater management. As the city continues to grow, it is essential to implement resilient park and recreation planning strategies that

mitigate flood risks while enhancing the community's access to green spaces. Key environmental factors to consider in the planning process include:

Flood-Resilient Park Design – Ensuring parks and recreation facilities are designed with permeable surfaces, flood-resistant structures, and proper drainage systems to withstand extreme weather events.

Preservation of Natural Landscapes – Protecting wetlands, riparian buffers, and native vegetation to maintain ecological balance and reduce erosion.

Sustainable Development Practices – Incorporating environmentally friendly infrastructure such as greenways, bioswales, and native plant landscaping to enhance resilience and sustainability.



By balancing recreation with conservation, the City of Marion can continue to offer high-quality outdoor experiences while safeguarding its natural assets and reduce costly maintenance expenditures. Thoughtful planning will ensure that parks and green spaces remain accessible, enjoyable, and resilient for generations to come.



POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Marion, North Carolina, is a growing community with a diverse population that reflects both its deep historical roots and its evolving role as a regional hub for recreation and tourism. With a population of approximately 7,800 residents, Marion serves as the county seat of McDowell County and attracts visitors and new residents alike due to its scenic location, affordability, and access to outdoor recreation opportunities.

The city's demographic profile shows a balanced mix of age groups, with a notable portion of the population consisting of families, retirees, and young professionals. Marion has seen steady population growth in recent years, driven in part by an increasing number of seasonal and part-time residents who are drawn to the area's natural beauty, small-town charm, and proximity to larger urban centers such as Asheville and Charlotte.





Marion's population is characterized by a moderate median household income and a cost of living that remains relatively low compared to larger metropolitan areas. While some residents face economic challenges, ongoing revitalization efforts and economic development initiatives continue to strengthen the local economy and enhance the quality of life for all citizens.

The city's rich cultural and ethnic diversity contributes to a vibrant community atmosphere, with annual festivals, local businesses, and public spaces reflecting a blend of long-standing traditions and new influences. The combination of permanent and seasonal populations, coupled with increasing interest in outdoor recreation, underscores the importance of maintaining and expanding parks and recreational amenities to meet the needs of residents and visitors alike.

As Marion continues to grow, thoughtful planning and investment in recreational infrastructure will be essential to support the evolving demographic landscape, ensuring equitable access to parks, trails, and community spaces for all residents.

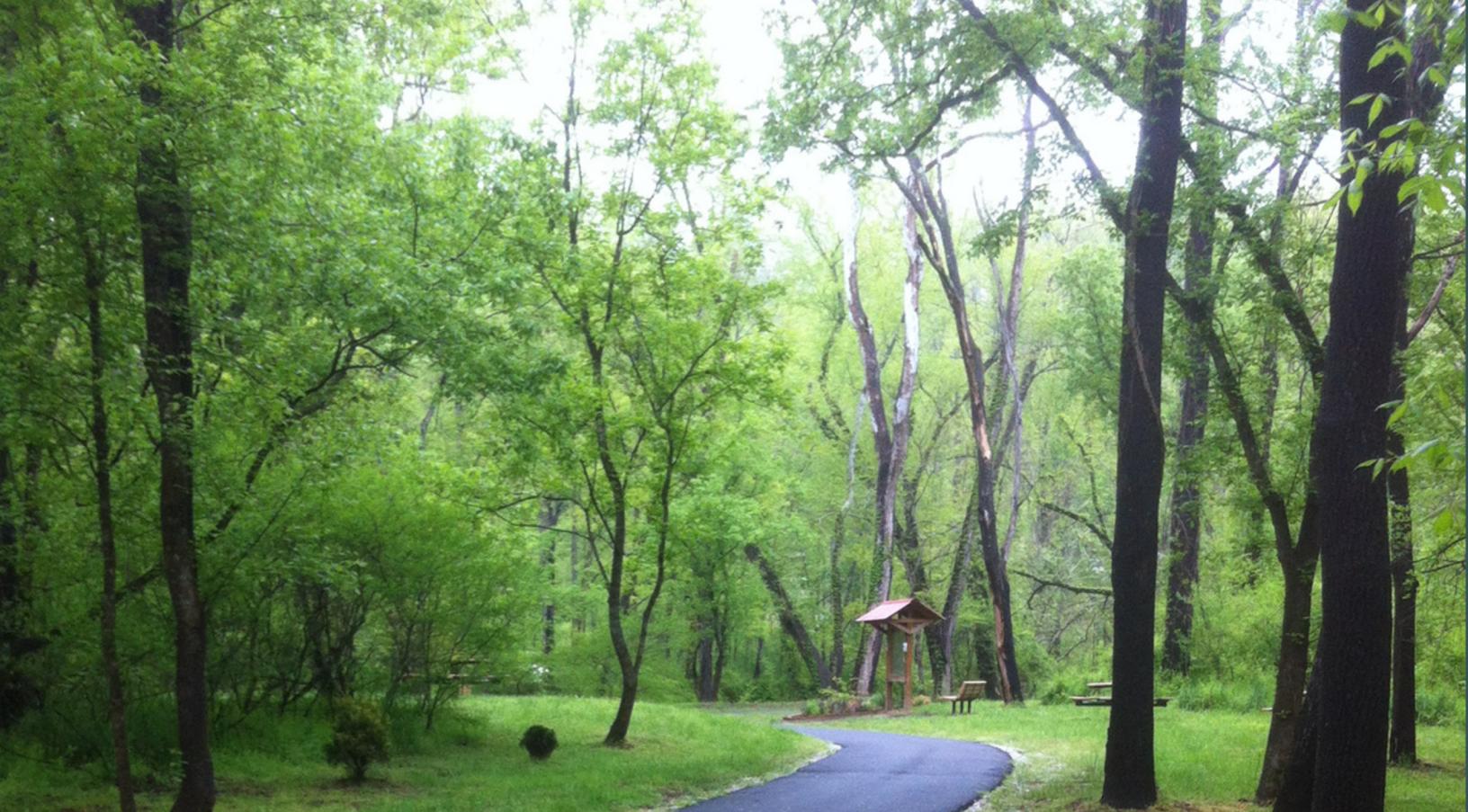


GROWTH TRENDS AND FUTURE PROJECTIONS

Marion, North Carolina, has experienced steady growth in recent years, reflecting its appeal as a desirable place to live, work, and play. The city's population has been gradually increasing, driven by its scenic beauty, affordability, and access to outdoor recreation. As economic revitalization continues, Marion is attracting new residents, including young professionals, retirees, and seasonal visitors, all contributing to a dynamic and evolving community.

Future projections suggest that Marion will continue to grow in population and economic activity, particularly as regional investments in infrastructure, tourism, and outdoor recreation expand. The rise of remote work opportunities and the increasing preference for smaller, nature-rich communities have positioned Marion as an attractive alternative to larger urban centers. This growth presents both opportunities and challenges for parks and recreation planning.





To accommodate a growing population and increased visitor activity, Marion must strategically invest in expanding and enhancing its parks, greenways, and recreational facilities. Increased demand for outdoor spaces, hiking trails, and water-based recreation along the Catawba River requires thoughtful planning to balance conservation with accessibility. Additionally, as the city continues to grow, ensuring the sustainability and resilience of public spaces will be a priority, particularly in addressing flooding concerns and the need for long-term infrastructure investments.

By proactively planning for growth, Marion can enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors alike while preserving its natural assets. The City's commitment to expanding recreational opportunities, strengthening environmental sustainability, and fostering community engagement will be key to maintaining Marion's reputation as a vibrant, thriving destination for outdoor enthusiasts and families.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS



The socioeconomic landscape of Marion plays a significant role in shaping the accessibility and inclusivity of parks and recreation services. As a historically industrial town that has transitioned toward a more tourism- and service-based economy, Marion's economic diversity presents both challenges and opportunities in recreational planning.

A key consideration is the city's moderate median household income, which requires parks and recreation programs to be affordable and accessible to all residents. Ensuring that public recreational opportunities remain cost-effective and well-maintained is crucial in serving both long-term residents and newer populations moving to the area.

Additionally, Marion's aging population and growing number of retirees necessitate a focus on passive recreational opportunities, such as walking trails, greenways, and scenic parks that provide spaces for relaxation and socialization. At the same time, the city's younger families and increasing number of seasonal visitors emphasize the need for diverse recreational programming, including youth sports, playground enhancements, and active recreation spaces.

Transportation and accessibility also play a role in the equitable distribution of recreational amenities. Many residents rely on walking and biking to access parks, making safe and connected pedestrian pathways a priority. The city must continue to invest in infrastructure that supports multimodal access to recreational spaces.



It is also essential to ensure that multilingual communication strategies are in place so that individuals with limited English proficiency can safely navigate facilities, participate in programs, and understand signage and emergency information. Providing materials, signage, and outreach efforts in multiple languages—particularly Spanish—helps promote equity, inclusion, and access for all residents, fostering a safer and more welcoming environment.

By addressing these socioeconomic considerations, Marion can ensure that its parks and recreation system remains inclusive, resilient, and capable of serving the needs of all community members, regardless of economic status, age, or mobility. Thoughtful planning will help bridge economic disparities and create opportunities for recreation that enhance the well-being and quality of life for all.





EXISTING
PARKS AND
RECREATION
FACILITIES

EXISTING PARKS & RECREATIONAL FACILITIES



The City of Marion boasts a diverse and growing network of parks and recreational facilities designed to serve residents and visitors alike. With an emphasis on accessibility, inclusivity, and natural preservation, Marion's parks provide spaces for active recreation, passive enjoyment, and community engagement. As the city continues to experience growth, these facilities remain a crucial element of the community's quality of life and economic development.

Marion's park system includes a mix of large community parks, neighborhood

parks, and specialized recreation areas. Each park offers a unique set of amenities designed to serve different user groups, from families and children to outdoor enthusiasts and tourists. Facilities include playgrounds, picnic shelters, river access points, walking trails, and multi-use courts. The city has also prioritized the need for expanding recreational offerings by incorporating amenities such as a dog park, skate park, bocce ball, and extending trails to ensure that a wide range of users can enjoy the facilities.



MARION COMMUNITY BUILDING PARK



Located in downtown Marion on 2.5 acres, Marion Community Building Park serves as a central gathering space for residents of all ages. Despite its compact size, the park offers a wide range of amenities, including basketball and tennis courts, picnic shelters and tables, a large playground, a recreation building, and a splash pad. Restrooms and parking are available, making it a convenient and well-used community hub. Sixty-one (61%) of respondents reported frequent use of this park, making it one of the most popular in the city. The park was renovated in 2018 with a budgeted amount of \$270,000. Local civic groups and individuals actively participated in fundraising efforts to improve accessibility.

The park received a \$59,000 from the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Grant (PARTF) NC Connect Grant for \$160,000, and \$51,000 in local match to upgrade the facility with new accessible playground equipment, surfacing, and enhanced accessibility and ADA parking. The park is open seven days a week on a first-come, first-served basis, this park continues to be one of Marion's most popular recreational sites.

WEST MARION NEIGHBORHOOD PARK

Established in 2001 on 2.2 acres, this park is located on Ridley Street in the West Marion neighborhood on land donated by Addie's Chapel United Methodist Church. It offers a walking trail, picnic shelter and tables, a basketball court, and playground equipment. The park is available for use during daylight hours and serves as a vital recreational space for neighborhood residents. Thirty-seven (37%) of respondents reported moderate usage, mainly for walking, basketball, and small gatherings, and 33% expressed a need for trail resurfacing and additional shaded areas to improve comfort.



CROSS MILL NEIGHBORHOOD PARK



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EASTFIELD NEIGHBORHOOD PARK

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CLINCHFIELD NEIGHBORHOOD PARK



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MT IDA WILDERNESS AREA

The City acquired 36 acres on the top of Mt. Ida in 2007, using State and Federal grant funds.

Construction of an access road, picnic shelter and trail was completed in 2016. The public can enjoy picturesque views of Shortoff Mountain from the picnic shelter.

The natural-surface hiking trail is considered moderate to strenuous with a moderate grade that wraps around to the top of the mountain. The trail terminates at the top of Mount Ida and overlooks downtown Marion.

The Mount Ida Wilderness Area is open to the public during daylight hours, except during periods of inclement weather, when the facility may be temporarily closed to prevent damage to the access road.



TRAILS AND GREENWAYS

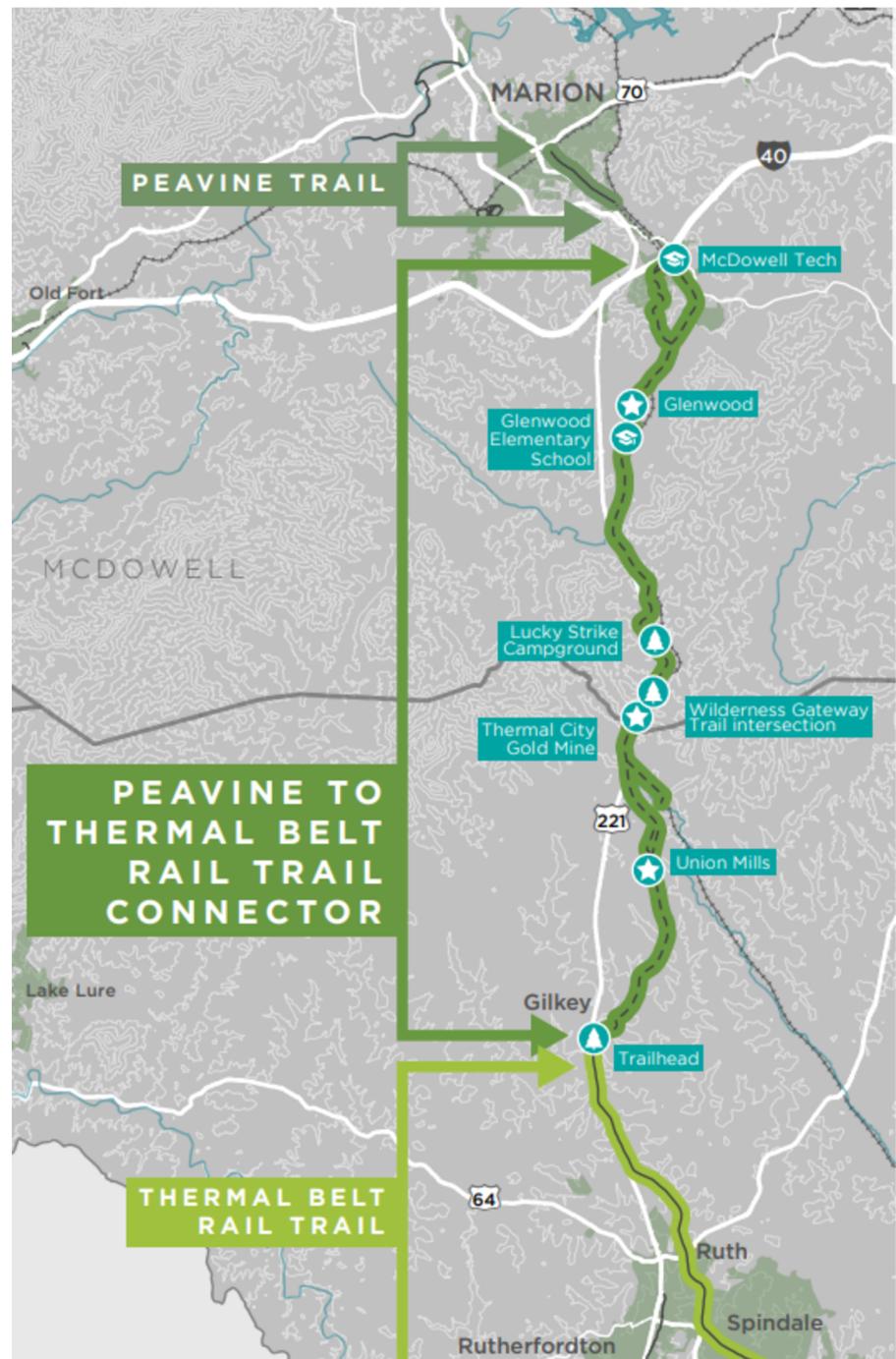


PEAVINE RAIL TRAIL

The Peavine Rail Trail follows the path of a former railway corridor, stretching through East Marion and linking key recreational and historical areas. As a multi-use trail, it provides a paved, well-maintained route ideal for walking, jogging, and biking. The trail is particularly valued for its ease of access, gentle grade, and historical significance, making it a popular choice for families, casual walkers, and fitness enthusiasts.

A unique and significant feature of the Peavine Rail Trail is its connection to Morehead Cemetery, one of the most historic African American burial sites in McDowell County. This sacred place of remembrance serves as the final resting place for many African Americans, including individuals who endured enslavement and their descendants. The cemetery stands as a powerful testament to the resilience and contributions of the African American community in Marion's history.

The proximity of the Peavine Rail Trail to Morehead Cemetery offers an opportunity for educational and interpretive enhancements, allowing visitors to learn about the African American heritage of the region. Future trail improvements may include historical markers, wayfinding signage, and guided walking tours that provide insight into the lives of those buried there, ensuring that their legacies remain honored and preserved for future generations.

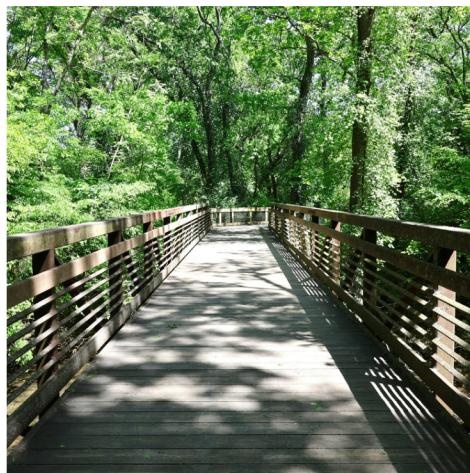


EXISTING PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

As part of Marion's broader trail expansion efforts, the Peavine Rail Trail is planned to connect with the Thermal Belt Rail Trail in Rutherfordton, creating an extensive regional trail network. The Thermal Belt Rail Trail spans 13.5 miles through Rutherford County, linking communities such as Forest City, Spindale, Rutherfordton, and Gilkey. Once the Peavine Rail Trail extension is complete, it will provide a continuous route for cyclists, pedestrians, and outdoor enthusiasts to travel between McDowell and Rutherford counties, further expanding recreation and alternative transportation options.



The extension of the Peavine Rail Trail will boost eco-tourism, enhance outdoor recreation, and increase regional connectivity, positioning Marion as a key hub in Western North Carolina's growing trail system. This future linkage will not only provide health and wellness benefits to residents but also contribute to economic development by attracting visitors, supporting local businesses, and fostering outdoor-oriented tourism in Marion and surrounding communities.



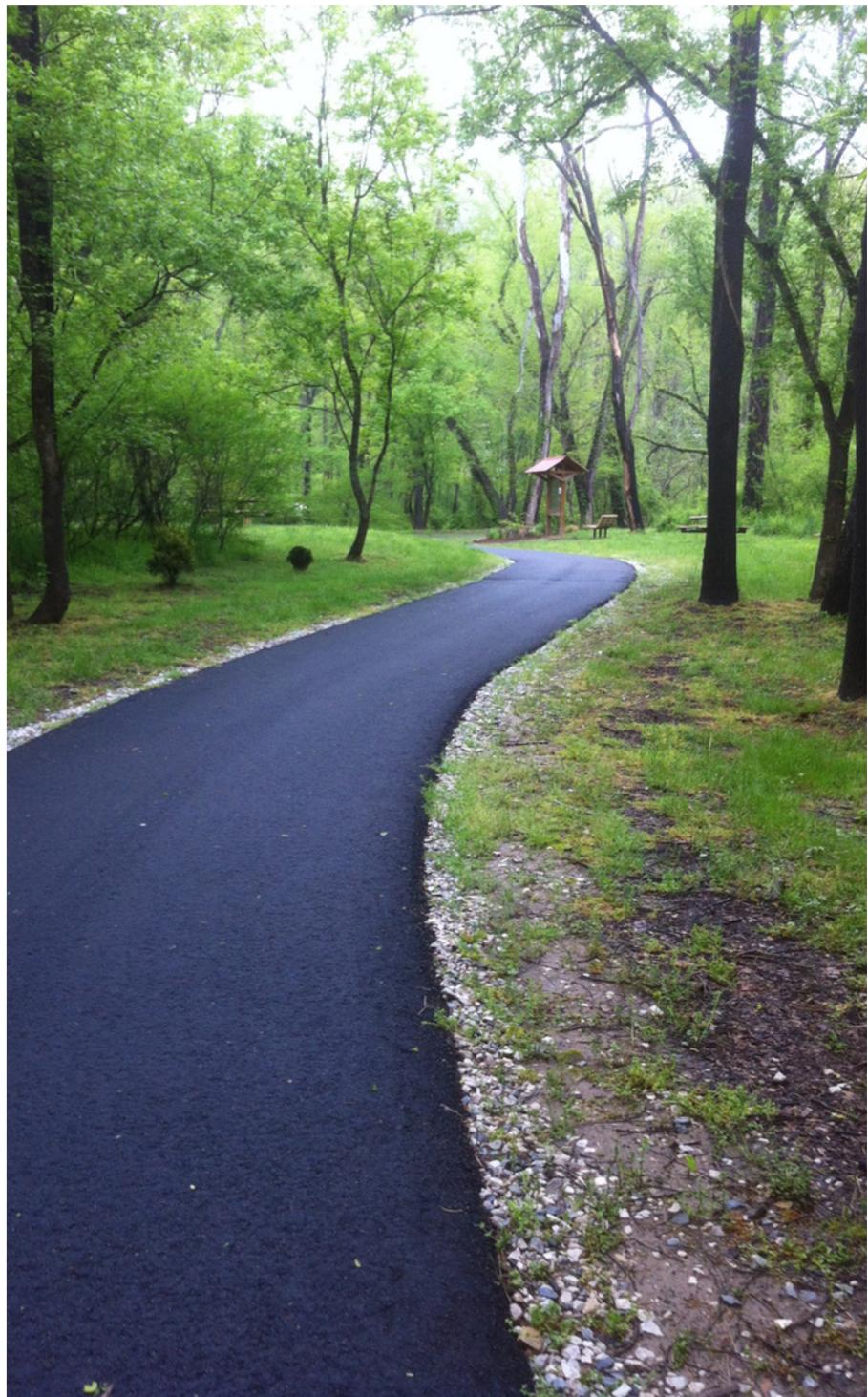
JOSEPH McDOWELL HISTORIC CATAWBA RIVER GREENWAY

The Joseph McDowell Historic Catawba River Greenway is one of Marion's premier outdoor destinations, offering a unique blend of recreational opportunities, historical interpretation, and environmental conservation. Following the scenic Catawba River, this greenway provides a tranquil and picturesque setting for walking, running, birdwatching, and community gatherings.

The Greenway is rich in history, tracing the lands once inhabited by early settlers and key figures in North Carolina's Revolutionary War history. One of the most significant historical connections along the greenway is to the Carson and McDowell Cemetery at Little Road Hill, where some of Marion's founding families are buried.

The Carson and McDowell families played an instrumental role in the development of Marion and McDowell County, with Joseph McDowell being a notable Revolutionary War leader. The cemetery at Little Road Hill serves as a lasting tribute to these early settlers, and future interpretive enhancements along the greenway will help visitors learn about their contributions to North Carolina's history and heritage.

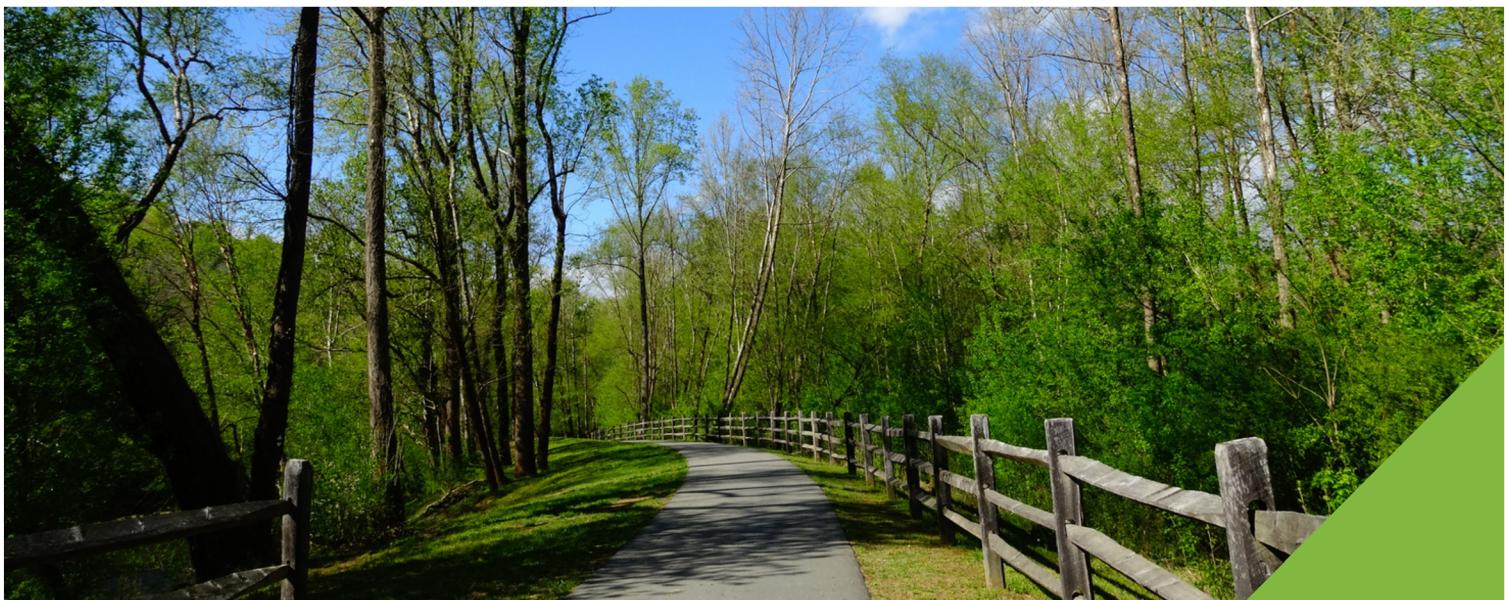
The Joseph McDowell Historic Catawba River Greenway is also part of the Fonta Flora State Trail, a statewide greenway project connecting Morganton to Asheville. Once completed, the Fonta Flora Trail will provide a continuous route linking parks, forests, and waterways across Western North Carolina.



EXISTING PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

The Greenway is also a designated site on the North Carolina Birding Trail, attracting birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts who come to observe native and migratory species. The Catawba River corridor provides an ideal habitat for diverse bird populations, including blue herons, bald eagles, and woodpeckers.

Additionally, the greenway is a recognized section of the North Carolina Snorkel Trail, offering prime locations for viewing freshwater ecosystems. The Catawba River's clean waters provide a habitat for unique fish, amphibians, and aquatic plants, making the area an ideal destination for underwater exploration and ecological education.



The Joseph McDowell Greenway is one of the most popular fishing spots in McDowell County, with multiple river access points for anglers. The Catawba River supports healthy fish populations attracting local and visiting fishermen throughout the year.

In addition to outdoor recreation, the greenway features a scenic amphitheater that serves as a cultural gathering space for concerts, storytelling, and community events. The amphitheater can host seasonal performances, live music, and educational programs, making it a valued venue for arts and cultural enrichment in Marion.



FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Downtown Marion has established itself as a vibrant hub for community gatherings, outdoor recreation, and cultural celebrations, attracting thousands of visitors throughout the year. The city's historic downtown district transforms into a lively festival space for events that bring together residents, tourists, and local businesses to celebrate Marion's heritage, traditions, and outdoor lifestyle. These events offer a unique blend of recreation, entertainment, and economic opportunity, reinforcing Marion's reputation as a thriving destination for family-friendly activities and regional tourism.

The annual WNC Bigfoot Festival is one of Marion's most famous events, drawing tens of thousands of visitors from across the country. As one of the largest Bigfoot-themed festivals in the U.S., it features guest speakers, live music, cryptid-themed games, artisan markets, and outdoor excursions into the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains. The festival's popularity boosts local businesses, increases hotel stays, and introduces visitors to Marion's outdoor recreation assets, such as the Peavine Rail Trail and Joseph McDowell Historical Catawba River Greenway. Beyond Bigfoot, the city also hosts the Mountain Glory Festival, the Liver Mush Festival, the July 4th Celebration, and seasonal events like the Marion Christmas Parade and New Year's Eve Celebration that features a unique Golden Nugget Drop which celebrates the city's history as a mining town. All of these events contribute to the city's strong recreational and economic foundation.

These festivals not only provide low-cost, accessible entertainment but also strengthen the local economy, promote community engagement, and highlight Marion's outdoor amenities. Vendors, artists, and small businesses benefit from increased foot traffic, while visitors often extend their stay to explore Marion's parks, trails, and historic sites. By continuing to support and expand these signature events, Marion will further establish itself as a premier small-town destination for outdoor recreation, cultural heritage, and year-round tourism. The city's investment in public spaces, event infrastructure, and connectivity to parks and greenways will ensure that its downtown remains a thriving center for recreation, commerce, and community spirit for generations to come.



OTHER PARKS & RECREATIONAL FACILITIES



COUNTY FACILITIES

Beyond city-managed parks, Marion benefits from its proximity to McDowell County's recreational assets and regional outdoor destinations. The county operates larger-scale facilities such as sports complexes, community centers, and river access points that complement the city's offerings. Additionally, nearby Pisgah National Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway provide extensive opportunities for hiking, camping, and nature exploration, further enhancing Marion's appeal as a recreation hub.

SCHOOL & PRIVATE FACILITIES

Partnerships with local schools and private entities also contribute to the recreational landscape in Marion. School facilities, including athletic fields, gymnasiums, and playgrounds, are utilized for both student and community recreation. Private fitness centers, golf courses, and outdoor adventure providers supplement public offerings, giving residents and visitors a well-rounded selection of activities.





NEEDS
ASSESSMENT &
PUBLIC
FEEDBACK

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



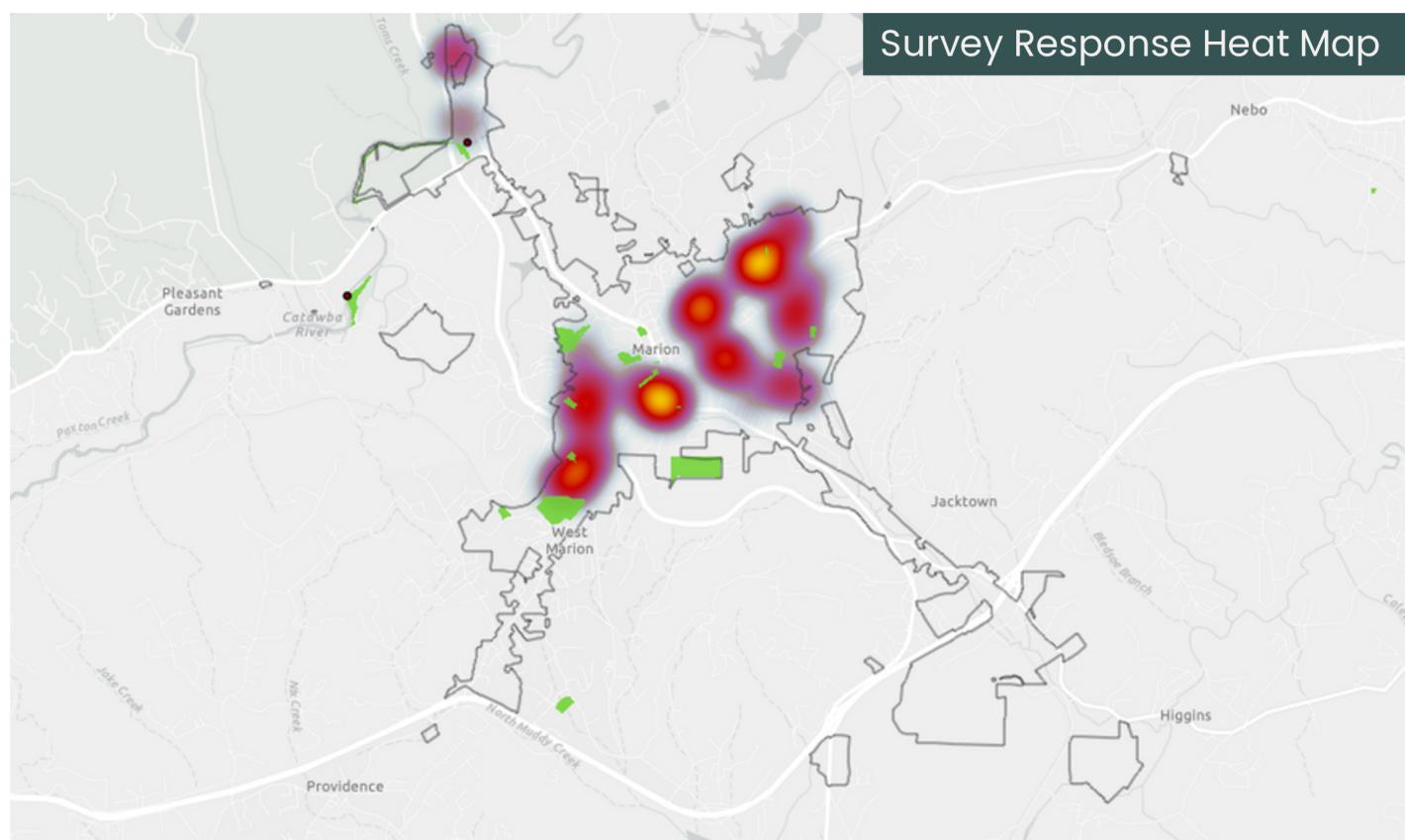
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE PARKS AND RECREATION PLANNING PROCESS.

Public participation is a cornerstone of successful parks and recreation planning, ensuring that investments reflect the real needs and desires of the community. The City of Marion recognizes the importance of an inclusive and transparent planning process and took intentional steps to engage residents, business owners, and stakeholders. By incorporating door-to-door canvassing, social media outreach, bilingual engagement, and a community input meeting, the City sought to reach as many people as possible to gather meaningful feedback that would shape the future of Marion's parks and recreation system.

To maximize public input, the City deployed a community-wide survey that was distributed online, in print, and through direct outreach in neighborhoods. City staff canvassed neighborhoods door-to-door to ensure residents who might not have internet access or time to seek out the survey could still have their voices heard. The survey was also shared via social media platforms, water bills, and at public facilities such as parks, recreation centers, and the public library. Recognizing the diversity within Marion, bilingual outreach efforts were incorporated to ensure that non-English-speaking residents could participate. Additionally, the City hosted an in-person community meeting where stakeholders and residents could discuss their priorities, concerns, and aspirations for Marion's parks and recreation facilities.



The survey received 107 responses, representing a cross-section of the Marion community. Responses were distributed across several neighborhoods, with the highest participation from East Marion, followed by West Marion, Cross Mill, and Clinchfield. Other neighborhoods, including Downtown, Glenwood, and Pleasant Gardens, also provided valuable input. Additionally, responses were collected from residents living further outside city limits who regularly use Marion's parks and trails. This broad community input highlighted key areas of need, including better park lighting, improved trails, additional restrooms, and expanded recreational offerings such as a dog park and skate park.



Through this extensive engagement process, the City of Marion ensured that its Parks and Recreation Plan is truly community-driven, inclusive, and representative of all residents. The valuable feedback gathered has provided clear priorities for future improvements, ensuring that parks, greenways, and recreational facilities continue to enhance the quality of life for both residents and visitors. Moving forward, the City is committed to maintaining ongoing dialogue with the community, using surveys, public meetings, and digital engagement to adapt the plan as Marion grows and evolves.

FUTURE NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

RANKED BY COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

Based on the community survey, the following future needs and priorities have been ranked in order of importance:



- 1. Additional Restroom Facilities** (58 mentions)
 - High demand for more restrooms at parks and along trails to enhance visitor comfort.
- 2. Improved Lighting** (44 mentions)
 - Increased lighting is needed for safety in parks and along trails, particularly in high-traffic areas.
- 3. Improved Path Surfaces** (42 mentions)
 - Upgrading trail and walkway surfaces to enhance accessibility and reduce maintenance issues.
- 4. Additional Signage for Wayfinding and Information** (34 mentions)
 - Better signage is needed to help park users navigate trails, parks, and recreational spaces.
- 5. Emergency Communications** (34 mentions)
 - Implementation of emergency call stations and safety measures to improve security.
- 6. Vegetation Maintenance or Landscaping** (33 mentions)
 - Increased focus on maintaining vegetation and managing overgrowth to keep parks attractive and functional.
- 7. Landscaping and Beautification** (33 mentions)
 - Enhancing aesthetics through tree planting, flower beds, and other beautification projects.
- 8. Water Fountains** (30 mentions)
 - Installing additional water fountains and hydration stations for convenience, especially along trails.
- 9. More Seating Areas** (30 mentions)
 - Adding benches and picnic shelters to make parks more accessible for all age groups.
- 10. Enhanced Parking Areas** (27 mentions)
 - Expanding or improving parking facilities at major park locations to accommodate visitors.
- 11. New or Upgraded Equipment** (21 mentions)
 - Updating or adding playgrounds, dog park, and other recreational facilities to better serve community needs.
- 12. Additional Meeting or Gathering Space** (12 mentions)
 - Creating spaces for community events, gatherings, and outdoor programming.
- 13. Traffic Control or Safety Features** (6 mentions)
 - Implementing traffic-calming measures such as speed bumps and crosswalks near parks and trails.

GAP ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS

ADDRESSING COMMUNITY NEEDS & FACILITY LIMITATIONS



The gap analysis evaluates the differences between existing parks and recreation facilities in Marion and the needs identified in the community survey. This analysis highlights deficiencies, opportunities for improvement, and priorities for future investments to ensure a well-rounded and accessible parks and recreation system.

Accessibility and Amenities Deficiencies

Identified Need: The community survey emphasized a strong demand for additional restroom facilities, seating areas, picnic shelters, and parking improvements.

Current Gap: Many parks lack sufficient restrooms and seating areas, making longer visits less comfortable for families and seniors.

Recommendation: Prioritize the addition of restroom facilities, increase seating and shaded picnic areas, and improve parking accessibility.

Address Safety and Security Concerns

Identified Need: Residents expressed concerns over insufficient lighting, emergency communication systems, and wayfinding signage at parks and along trails.

Current Gap: Some parks and trails lack adequate lighting, clear directional signage, and emergency call stations.

Recommendation: Upgrade lighting infrastructure, install wayfinding signage, and incorporate emergency communication systems in high-traffic and remote areas.

More Diverse Recreational Offerings

Identified Need: The survey indicated a demand for more varied recreational facilities, including a dog park, skate park, and expanded playgrounds.

Current Gap: While Marion has well-used parks, options for skating, disc golf, and dog-friendly areas are limited.

Recommendation: Develop new recreational spaces, such as a dog park and skate park, and expand park and playground amenities with multi-generational equipment (bocce ball, pickleball, and expanded basketball courts) and add toddler-friendly and sensory play areas unique to each park playground area.

Trails and Greenways Connectivity Issues

Identified Need: Residents want better trail surfaces, enhanced trail connectivity, and improved safety features.

Current Gap: Some trails have uneven surfaces, limited accessibility, and lack safe crossings between parks and neighborhoods.

Recommendation: Improve trail surfaces, expand connectivity between parks and neighborhoods, and implement safe pedestrian crossings to encourage non-motorized transportation.

Need for Beautification and Sustainability Initiatives

Identified Need: Survey responses highlighted interest in beautification projects, landscaping, and sustainable park features.

Current Gap: Some parks require enhanced landscaping, tree plantings, and stormwater management solutions.

Recommendation: Invest in native landscaping, tree planting programs, rain gardens, and green infrastructure to mitigate flooding and enhance environmental sustainability.

Water Access and Facility Enhancements

Identified Need: Increased water fountains, hydration stations, and riverfront access improvements were requested.

Current Gap: Few parks have easily accessible water fountains, and riverfront recreational opportunities remain underdeveloped.

Recommendation: Install hydration stations at key parks and trailheads, and explore enhancements to riverfront access for passive and active recreation.

This gap analysis highlights critical areas for improvement in Marion's parks and recreation system, aligning community needs with facility development. By addressing these gaps, the City can enhance accessibility, safety, recreation diversity, environmental sustainability, and trail connectivity to create a more inclusive and engaging parks network for all residents and visitors.



ESTIMATED COSTS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

ADDRESSING COMMUNITY NEEDS & FACILITY LIMITATIONS

Implementing the recommended enhancements to Marion's parks and recreation facilities involves both initial capital investments and ongoing maintenance commitments. Below is an overview of estimated costs and staffing considerations for each recommendation:

1. Improve Accessibility and Amenities

- Restroom Facilities: Constructing new restrooms: ~\$250,000 per unit; Renovating existing restrooms: ~\$5,000 per unit.
- Seating Areas and Picnic Shelters: Installation costs and maintenance repairs range from \$2,500 to \$25,000 (varies on size and materials).
- Parking Facilities: Paving new or existing parking lots: ~\$100,000.

2. Enhance Safety and Security

- Lighting: Installing security lighting for parks and trails: ~\$50,000.
- Emergency Systems and Signage: Wayfinding signage and emergency call stations: ~\$1,500 per station (electrical not evaluated)

3. Expand Recreational Offerings

- Dog Park: Estimated cost depends on fencing, amenities, and size. ~ \$30,000-\$60,000
- Skate Park: Costs vary depending on size and complexity. ~ \$250,000-\$500,000
- Playgrounds: Safety and equipment surface improvements: ~\$350,000 (multiple parks).
- Sports Courts: Varies based on materials and design.

4. Invest in Trails and Greenways

- Natural Path Surfaces: New walking trails: ~\$80,000.
- Connectivity Enhancements: Peavine Trestles and smaller connectivity projects~ \$1,000,000
- Vegetation Maintenance and Signage: Routine upkeep: ~\$20,000.

5. Promote Sustainability and Beautification

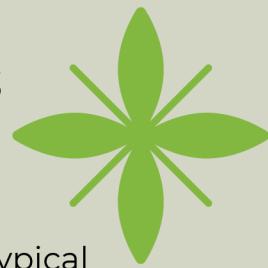
- Green Infrastructure: West Marion Park and Peavine Rail Trail stormwater management improvements: ~\$220,000.
- Tree Plantings: Costs vary depending on tree count and size.
- Community-Led Beautification Projects: Variable cost based on project scope.

6. Increase Water Access and Facilities

- Water Fountains: Costs depend on design and installation requirements.
- Riverfront Improvements: Cost varies based on project size and complexity.

MAINTENANCE AND STAFFING CONSIDERATIONS

ADDRESSING COMMUNITY NEEDS & FACILITY LIMITATIONS



According to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), the typical park and recreation agency employs 8.3 full-time equivalents (FTEs) per 10,000 residents. For Marion, with a population of approximately 7,800, this equates to approximately 6.5 FTEs dedicated to park maintenance and operations.

The City of Marion does not have a dedicated Parks and Recreation Department. All routine maintenance and emergency repairs are conducted by the Public Works Streets Department. Implementing projects that expand parks and recreation facilities will increase the demand for additional staffing in order to maintain the current level of service. Staffing needs should be given consideration prior to the approval of each new project or program, including festivals and events.

Example:

Annual maintenance of trails: ~\$4,000 to \$8,000 per mile, depending on trail type.

New park facilities will require additional personnel or contract services to handle routine maintenance, safety inspections, and landscaping. Assessing current staffing levels and potentially increasing personnel or reallocating responsibilities will be essential to maintain both existing and new facilities effectively.

These cost estimates provide a baseline, and further detailed assessments will be necessary to refine them as planning progresses to design and engineering and project implementation.





GOALS AND
OBJECTIVES FOR
PLAN
IMPLEMENTATION



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Based on the data collected from the community survey, public engagement, and facility gap analysis, the following goals and objectives are outlined to ensure the successful implementation of the City of Marion Parks and Recreation Plan. These priorities aim to address the community's needs while ensuring sustainable growth and effective management of the parks and recreation system.

Enhance Existing Parks and Recreation Facilities.

Improve the safety, functionality, and overall visitor experience of Marion's existing parks to meet the growing needs of residents and visitors.

Objectives:

1. Upgrade and expand restroom facilities in high-traffic parks and along trails.
2. Install new and improved lighting to enhance security in parks and green spaces.
3. Increase seating areas, picnic shelters, and shade structures to provide more comfortable spaces for visitors.
4. Implement a routine maintenance and beautification program for landscaping, trash collection, and trail upkeep.
5. Improve signage and wayfinding systems in all parks to assist visitors and enhance the usability of park amenities.
6. Allocate funding to update playground equipment with new features, including multi-generational equipment, toddler- and sensory-friendly options.
7. Conduct annual facility condition assessments to ensure parks remain safe and well-maintained.
8. Secure additional staff or maintenance personnel to support park upkeep and manage new improvements.



Expand Recreational Programs and Community Events.

Increase the variety and accessibility of recreational programs and events that serve all age groups and interests.

Objectives:

1. Incorporate recreational activity into seasonal community events, such as outdoor movie nights, nature workshops, and expanded cultural festivals.
2. Partner with local businesses, schools, and organizations to offer diverse recreation programs and sponsorship opportunities.
3. Expand access to bilingual programming to serve non-English-speaking residents.
4. Introduce adaptive recreation opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
5. Develop an online registration system to streamline participation in community programs and events.
6. Increase volunteer opportunities for park maintenance, event coordination, and community engagement and programming.

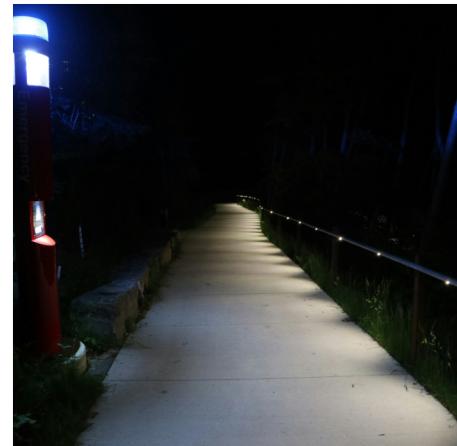
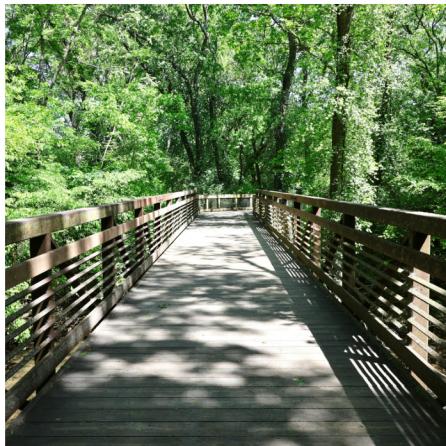


Improve Connectivity through Trails and Greenways.

Expand and maintain a well-connected network of trails and greenways that promote active transportation and outdoor recreation.

Objectives:

1. Improve trail surfaces and accessibility to accommodate walkers, runners, and cyclists of all abilities.
2. Expand greenway connections to link parks, schools, neighborhoods, and commercial areas.
3. Install wayfinding signage along trails to improve navigation and highlight key destinations.
4. Add emergency call stations and lighting along trails to enhance safety.
5. Develop trail extension projects to connect with regional trail networks such as the Fonta Flora State Trail.
6. Implement a trail maintenance plan, including regular vegetation clearing and erosion control measures.
7. Increase bike racks, rest areas, and hydration stations along trails for user convenience.

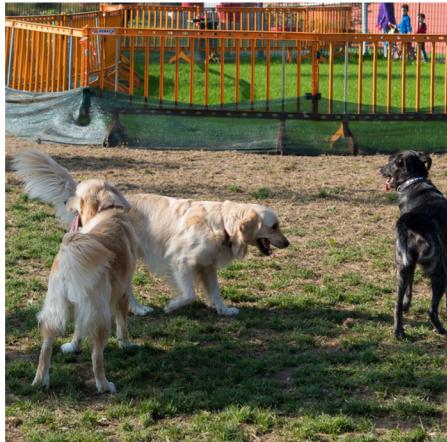


Develop New Parks and Open Spaces.

Expand Marion's park system by acquiring and developing new recreational spaces to meet growing community demand.

Objectives:

1. Construct a dog park to provide a safe and engaging space for pet owners.
2. Develop a skate park to serve youth and active recreation enthusiasts.
3. Incorporate community gardens and urban green spaces in park development projects.
4. Ensure that all new parks integrate flood-resilient design and environmentally friendly materials.
5. Explore opportunities for public-private partnerships to fund new park developments.
6. Update the capital improvement plan for park expansion and enhancement projects.



Strengthen Environmental Sustainability and Resilience of Park Facilities.

Implement sustainable practices that enhance the environmental health and resilience of Marion's parks and recreation system.

Objectives:

1. Incorporate green infrastructure, such as rain gardens, native plants, bioswales, and permeable pavements, to mitigate stormwater runoff.
2. Expand tree planting initiatives to improve air quality, provide shade, and reduce erosion.
3. Protect and restore natural habitats and riparian areas along the Catawba River, Young's Fork, and other waterways.
4. Develop eco-friendly park design standards, including the use of sustainable materials and native landscaping.
5. Encourage waste reduction and recycling programs in all parks.
6. Integrate solar-powered lighting and energy-efficient facilities into new and existing park developments.
7. Implement an educational outreach program to promote environmental stewardship among park visitors.



Promote Accessibility and Inclusivity.

Ensure that all residents, regardless of age, ability, language, or income level, have equitable access to high-quality parks and recreation facilities.

Objectives:

1. Upgrade existing playgrounds and recreational equipment to meet ADA accessibility standards when equipment is replaced.
2. Ensure all new trails and facilities incorporate universal design principles for accessibility.
3. Expand bilingual signage and outreach to engage non-English-speaking residents.
4. Identify low-cost and free recreation programming to ensure financial barriers do not limit physical activity.
5. Improve trails, greenways, and pedestrian pathways leading to parks.
6. Increase community engagement initiatives to continually assess and address accessibility needs.



These goals and objectives provide a strategic roadmap for implementing the City of Marion's Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan, ensuring that parks and recreational opportunities evolve to meet the needs of the growing community. By enhancing facilities, expanding programming, improving connectivity, developing new park facilities, strengthening environmental resilience, and promoting accessibility, Marion can create a more vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable parks system that benefits residents and visitors for generations to come.



MAINTENANCE AND
OPERATIONS
RECOMMENDATIONS

MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS



A well-maintained parks and recreation system is essential for ensuring safety, functionality, and long-term sustainability. The City of Marion's maintenance and operations goals and strategies are based on current practices carried out by the Public Works Department and strategies to support the ongoing maintenance and operations of city parks, trails, and recreational facilities while optimizing available resources. This section prioritizes preventative maintenance, efficient staffing, asset management, and security enhancements to keep parks accessible and enjoyable for residents and visitors.

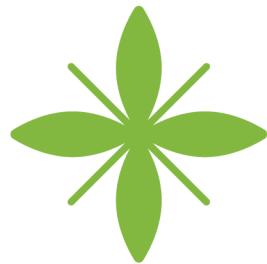
Maintenance Standards and Best Practices.

Establish consistent maintenance standards to enhance the longevity and safety of parks and recreational assets.

Strategies:

1. **Routine Inspections:** Implement a monthly and seasonal inspection schedule to assess playground equipment, walking trails, restrooms, lighting, and shelters.
2. **Preventative Maintenance:** Regularly service restrooms, water fountains, and lighting systems to avoid costly repairs.
3. **Landscaping and Groundskeeping:**
 - Maintain grass, trees, and landscaping to prevent overgrowth and invasive species.
 - Use native plants and drought-resistant landscaping to reduce water usage.
4. **Stormwater and Drainage Management:** Ensure drainage systems remain clear to prevent flooding and erosion in parks and along trails.
5. **Waste and Recycling Management:** Expand recycling options and increase trash collection frequency in high-traffic areas.
6. **Playground and Sports Facility Maintenance:** Conduct quarterly inspections to ensure that play equipment, courts, and fields remain safe and accessible.





Staffing and Volunteer Engagement.

Strengthen park maintenance operations through a combination of trained staff and community volunteerism.

Staffing Strategies:

- 1. Evaluate and Increase Staffing Levels:** Assess the need for additional full-time or seasonal employees to manage new and existing parks efficiently.
- 2. Partnerships with Local Organizations:** Collaborate with schools, civic groups, and environmental organizations to assist with park beautification efforts.

Volunteer Engagement:

- 1. Adopt-a-Park Program:** Encourage local groups and businesses to adopt parks or trails for ongoing maintenance efforts.
- 2. Community Work Days:** Organize bi-annual park cleanup events where residents can participate in maintenance projects such as landscaping, painting, and litter removal.
- 3. Internship and Youth Programs:** Develop seasonal programs that allow students and young adults to gain experience in park maintenance and environmental conservation.





Long-Term Asset Management Strategies.

Implement proactive strategies to extend the lifespan of parks and recreation facilities while minimizing unexpected costs.

Strategies:

- 1. Capital Improvement Planning:** Maintain 5- to 10-year plan for facility upgrades, repairs, and expansions.
- 2. Data-Driven Asset Tracking:** Use a work order system to track the condition of park amenities and schedule repairs.
- 3. Sustainable Maintenance Funding:** Identify opportunities for grants, sponsorships, and public-private partnerships to fund long-term asset management.
- 4. Lifecycle Cost Analysis:** Conduct regular assessments to determine when to repair vs. replace park infrastructure.
- 5. Sustainability Measures:** Implement eco-friendly maintenance practices, such as using solar-powered lighting and energy-efficient irrigation systems.





Safety and Security Enhancements.

Improve safety and security in all parks and recreation facilities to ensure a welcoming and secure environment for all users.

Strategies:

- 1. Lighting Enhancements:** Install energy-efficient LED lighting in high-traffic areas, including parking lots, trails, and playgrounds.
- 2. Emergency Call Stations:** Install 911 emergency call boxes along trails and in large park areas.
- 3. Surveillance and Monitoring:** Evaluate the feasibility of security cameras in high-use areas to deter vandalism and ensure public safety.
- 4. Park Ranger or Safety Patrols:** Consider partnerships with community groups to enhance visibility in parks.
- 5. Clear Signage and Wayfinding:** Provide emergency contact information and clear directional signage at all park entrances and along trails.
- 6. Partnerships with Law Enforcement and Emergency Management:**
Work with local police and fire departments and emergency management to establish emergency response plans for all parks.



ANNUAL MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS SCHEDULE

This recommended annual maintenance schedule ensures Marion's parks remain safe, clean, and well-maintained throughout the year.

Spring (March – May)

- Inspect and repair playground equipment.
- Begin seasonal landscaping (mulching, planting, tree pruning).
- Conduct trail inspections and repair surfaces.
- Open water fountains and splash pads (seasonal start-up).
- Install wayfinding and safety signage as needed.

Summer (June – August)

- Increase trash collection and restroom cleaning in high-traffic areas.
- Maintain courts for summer recreational.
- Continue tree trimming and invasive species removal.
- Conduct mid-year lighting and security system checks.
- Inspect and maintain irrigation systems for parks and gardens.

Fall (September – November)

- Inspect and repair picnic shelters and seating areas.
- Begin seasonal tree planting and beautification projects.
- Close seasonal water features (splash pads, fountains).
- Conduct end-of-season sports facility maintenance.
- Inspect storm drainage and erosion control systems before winter.

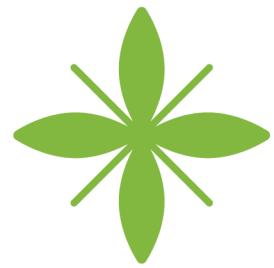
Winter (December – February)

- Perform facility repairs and restroom renovations as needed.
- Review and update the maintenance schedule and CIP.
- Apply for grants and funding for upcoming improvements.
- Conduct staff and volunteer training programs.



FUNDING AND
IMPLEMENTATION
STRATEGY

GRANTS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND SPONSORSHIPS



Developing a robust funding strategy is essential for the successful implementation of Marion's Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan. This strategy should encompass a diverse array of funding sources, including public and private grants, partnerships, and sponsorships, to ensure financial sustainability and community support. Below is an overview of potential funding opportunities:

Public Grants

- **North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF):** Established in 1994, PARTF provides matching grants to local governments for acquiring land and developing or renovating parks and recreational facilities. Grants can cover up to 50% of project costs, with a maximum award of \$500,000. Applications are typically due by May 1 annually.
- **North Carolina Land and Water Fund (NCLWF):** This fund supports projects that enhance or restore the state's land and water resources, including the development of parks and recreational trails. Local governments can apply for grants, which often require matching funds. Application deadlines and match requirements vary annually.
- **Recreational Trails Program (RTP):** A federal program administered by the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation, RTP provides grants for motorized and non-motorized trail projects. Eligible projects include trail construction, maintenance, and educational programs. Grants require a 20% non-federal match, though this may vary based on county tier rankings.
- **Great Trails State Program:** This program offers grants to support the planning, design, and construction of trail networks that connect communities across North Carolina. Matching fund requirements depend on the county's tier ranking, with applications typically due in early September.
- **Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) Program:** A federal grant initiative that provides matching grants to urban communities for the development of new outdoor recreation spaces or the renovation of existing parks, particularly in underserved areas.

Private Grants and Foundations.

- **National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA):** NRPA periodically offers competitive grants for park and recreation agencies. These grants focus on various initiatives, including health and wellness programs, conservation efforts, and social equity projects.
- **City Parks Alliance:** Equitable Park Funding Hub: This resource provides information on various funding sources aimed at supporting parks and recreation projects in low-income communities and communities of color. It highlights partnerships required for successful funding.
- **Local and Regional Foundations:** Foundations such as the Walton Family Foundation have been known to fund significant community projects, including trail development. Researching and connecting with local foundations can uncover additional funding opportunities.

Partnerships and Sponsorships

- **Corporate Sponsorships:** Engage local businesses in sponsorship opportunities for park amenities, events, or programs. Companies often seek to support community initiatives that align with their corporate social responsibility goals.
- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Collaborate with private entities to develop or enhance recreational facilities. PPPs can leverage private investment for public benefit, reducing the financial burden on the municipality.
- **Community Fundraising and Volunteerism:** Mobilize community members through fundraising campaigns, "adopt-a-park" programs, and volunteer-led maintenance efforts. This not only raises funds but also fosters community ownership and pride in local parks.

By strategically pursuing these funding avenues and fostering collaborative partnerships, Marion can effectively implement its Parks and Recreation Plan, ensuring the development of vibrant, accessible, and sustainable recreational spaces for all community members.



A blurred background image of a paved path leading through a dense forest of tall evergreen trees. The path is light-colored and appears to be made of asphalt or concrete, with some fallen leaves scattered on it. The trees are dark green and have a slightly out-of-focus appearance, creating a sense of depth and natural beauty.

FIVE-YEAR CIP SCHEDULE

FIVE-YEAR CIP SCHEDULE FOR PARK IMPROVEMENTS AND PROJECTS



This five-year implementation schedule outlines the phased approach to park upgrades, new facility development, and trail expansion to ensure sustainable growth and efficient resource allocation based on community feedback.

Year	Project	Key Actions	Estimated Cost	Funding Source
Year 1 (2025-2026)	Safety & Lighting Enhancements	Install LED lighting in parks and trails, emergency call stations.	\$100,000	Safety Grants
	Greenway Expansion	Extend Peavine Rail Trail to Jacktown Road	\$850,000	State & Federal Grants
	Playground Modernization	Replace outdated playground equipment in neighborhood parks with ADA-accessible and inclusive equipment.	\$50,000	General Fund (CIP)
	Festival & Events	Construct outdoor stage	\$15,000	General Fund (CIP)
	Resilient Design & Maintenance Improvements	Drainage Improvements West Marion and Cross Mill Parks	\$150,000	General Fund (CIP)
Year 2 (2026-2027)	New Recreational Facilities	Construct dog park & add new sports courts (bocce ball, pickleball).	\$250,000	Public-Private Partnership
	Landscaping & Beautification	Implement tree planting, native vegetation, and rain gardens in parks.	\$50,000	Sustainability Grants
	Trail & Connectivity Enhancements	Improve surface quality and signage along Catawba River Greenway.	\$75,000	General Fund
Year 3 (2027-2028)	New Skate Park Development	Design and construct a skateboarding and BMX facility.	\$300,000	Grants Private Sponsorships
	Playground Modernization	Replace outdated playground equipment in neighborhood parks with ADA-accessible and inclusive equipment.	\$50,000	General Fund (CIP)
	Expand Riverfront Access	Improve fishing and snorkeling access at Catawba River.	\$50,000	State Outdoor Recreation Grants/Public-Private Partnerships
Year 4 (2028)	Community Garden Program	Establish community gardens in underserved neighborhoods.	\$50,000	Community Grants, Donations
	Trail Expansions	Improve pedestrian and bike pathways linking parks and neighborhoods.	\$150,000	Regional Transportation Grants
Year 5 (2029-2030)	Parking & Accessibility Improvements	Improve parking, add accessible pathways in all major parks.	\$200,000	General Fund
	Playground Modernization	Replace outdated playground equipment in neighborhood	\$50,000	General Fund (CIP)
	Restroom Facility Upgrades	Renovate existing restrooms, install new restrooms in high-traffic parks.	\$250,000	Grants, CIP, General Fund



PLAN
EVALUTATION

PERFORMANCE METRICS AND PLAN EVALUATION

To ensure the successful implementation of the City of Marion Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan, a structured performance evaluation process is essential. This section outlines recommended key performance indicators (KPIs), an annual review process, mechanisms for continuous community feedback, and reporting requirements to maintain transparency, accountability, and adaptability in parks and recreation management.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Establish measurable benchmarks to evaluate the success of park improvements, program effectiveness, and operational efficiency. The following is a list of examples of KPIs that can be incorporated into the evaluation process.

KPIs for Parks and Facilities:

Maintenance Response Time: Measure the time taken to address reported maintenance issues.

Park Equipment Condition Ratings: Assess playgrounds, picnic shelters, courts, and athletic fields for wear and tear.

Trail Safety and Accessibility Improvements: Monitor the number of ADA-compliant upgrades and safety enhancements made over time.

KPIs for Recreation Programs and Community Engagement:

Program Participation Rates: Evaluate attendance levels in recreational programs, festivals, and events.

Community Satisfaction Scores: Conduct annual surveys to gauge public satisfaction with park amenities.

Volunteer and Community Engagement Levels: Track participation in volunteer clean-ups and park adoption programs.

KPIs for Financial and Environmental Sustainability:

Grant and Funding Acquisition Success: Monitor funds secured from state, federal, and private grants.

Environmental Impact Measures: Measure tree planting efforts, stormwater management effectiveness, and sustainable landscaping initiatives.

ANNUAL REVIEW PROCESS

Conduct an annual review of parks and recreation operations to ensure alignment with goals, objectives, strategies and community priorities and make changes as necessary to ensure the Plan is implemented effectively.

Annual Review Steps:

Step One: Facility and Asset Condition Assessment. Inspect all parks, trails, and recreational facilities for needed repairs and upgrades.

Step Two: Program Performance Evaluation. Review participation levels, effectiveness, and community feedback on recreation programs.

Step Three: Budget and Funding Review. Assess financial performance, funding allocations, and grant opportunities secured.

Step Four: Safety and Security Audit. Evaluate the effectiveness of lighting, emergency response measures, and public safety protocols.

Step Five: Sustainability and Environmental Impact Review. Measure the effectiveness of conservation and stormwater management initiatives.

Step Six: Comparison to Performance Metrics. Analyze year-over-year progress on key indicators (KPIs) and identify areas for improvement.

Step Seven: Public Presentation of Findings. Share results with the community and city leadership to ensure transparency and accountability.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK AND ADAPTIVE PLANNING

Implement a responsive and flexible planning process that incorporates continuous community input and adapts to evolving needs.

Strategies for Gathering Community Feedback.

Annual Parks and Recreation Survey: Conduct public surveys to gather insights on satisfaction, areas for improvement, and new recreational interests.

Digital and Social Media Engagement: Use online platforms to collect public input, promote engagement, and share updates on park projects.

Direct Feedback from Program Participants: Gather feedback from users of recreation programs, festivals, and special events.

Stakeholder Advisory Committees: Maintain regular meetings with key stakeholders, including local businesses, schools, environmental groups, and civic organizations.

Adaptive Planning Process.

Prioritization of Emerging Needs: Adjust project timelines based on shifting community preferences and urgent maintenance concerns.

Flexible Budgeting: Allocate funds dynamically based on annual assessment outcomes and new grant opportunities.

Pilot Programs for New Initiatives: Test new programs, events, and festivals before full implementation to evaluate effectiveness and community interest.

REPORTING

Maintain transparency in parks and recreation management by providing regular updates to city officials, stakeholders, and residents.

Reporting Structure:

Annual Report: Provide update to the City Council and other stakeholders, including progress on park improvements and recreation programs.

Publicly Available Project Updates: Maintain a dashboard on the city website with real-time progress on park projects and funding allocations.

Grant Compliance and Reporting: Submit required documentation to state and federal agencies to maintain eligibility for future grants.

By implementing key performance indicators, an annual review process, continuous community engagement, and transparent reporting, the City of Marion ensures that its Parks and Recreation Plan remains a dynamic and effective roadmap for enhancing community well-being. This structured evaluation process will help secure funding, optimize resources, and keep public spaces safe, sustainable, and engaging for future generations.

The success of this plan depends on continued collaboration between city leaders, residents, local organizations, and funding partners. By leveraging state and federal grants, corporate sponsorships, and public-private partnerships, the City can maximize resources and ensure long-term sustainability for its parks and recreation system. Regular evaluation, adaptive planning, and transparency will be key in maintaining momentum and ensuring that Marion's parks evolve to meet the needs of a growing and diverse community.

As Marion looks toward the future, its parks and recreation system will play a critical role in fostering community engagement, promoting public health, supporting economic growth, and preserving natural resources.

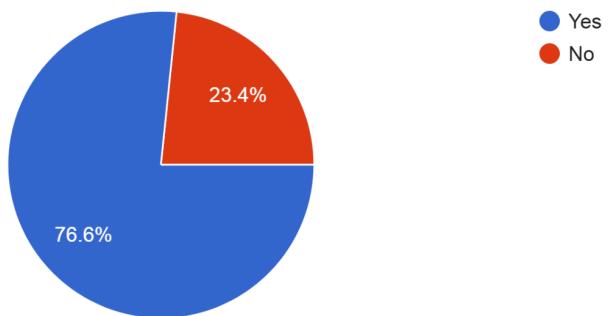


APPENDIX A
COMMUNITY
SURVEY RESULTS

2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

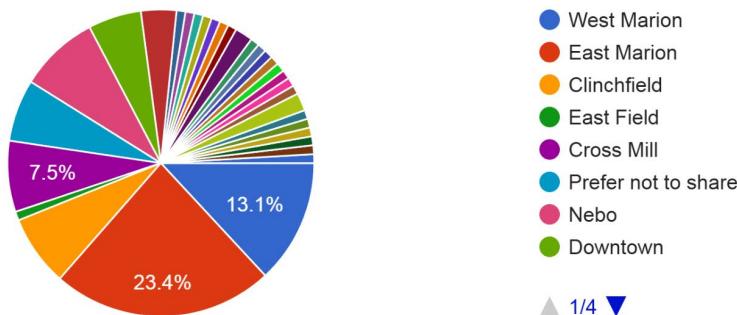
Are you currently a resident of the City of Marion?

107 responses

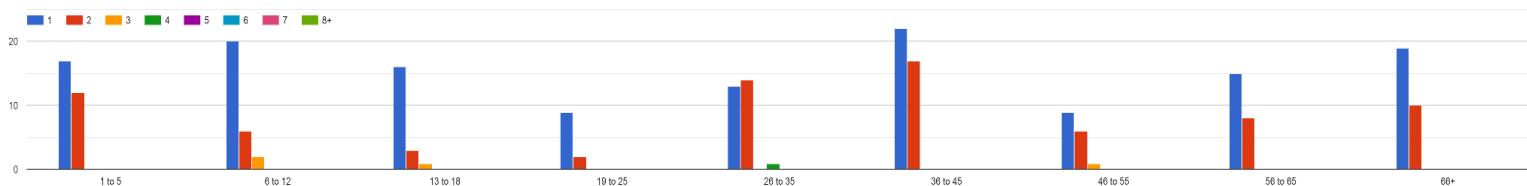


Which City of Marion neighborhood do you live in?

107 responses



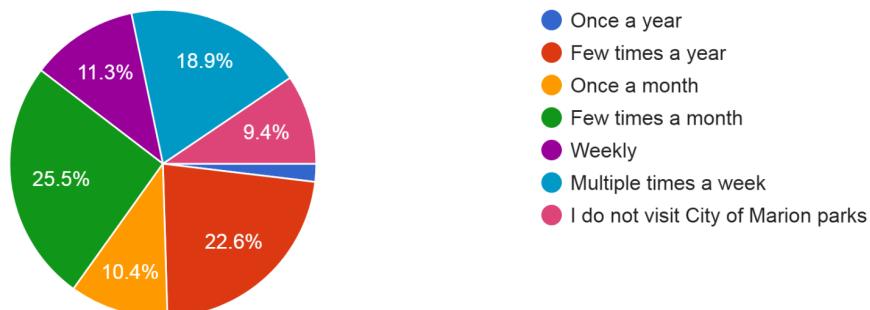
How many people in your household, including yourself, are in the following age ranges?



2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

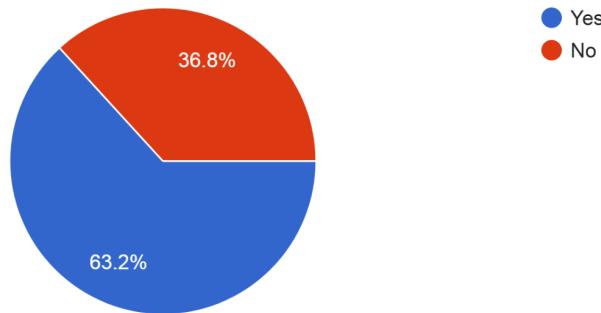
How often do members of your household visit City of Marion parks?

106 responses



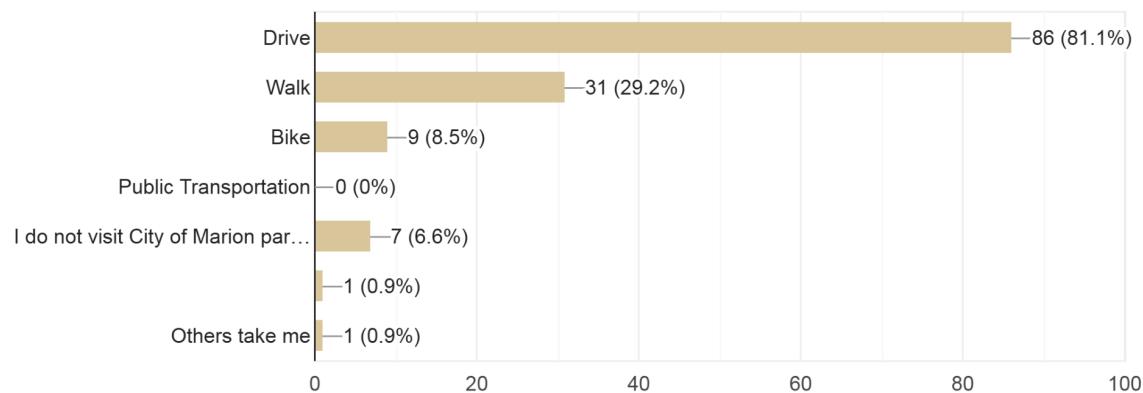
Do you live within a half-mile of a City of Marion park or trail?

106 responses



How do you travel to a City of Marion park or trail? (choose all that apply)

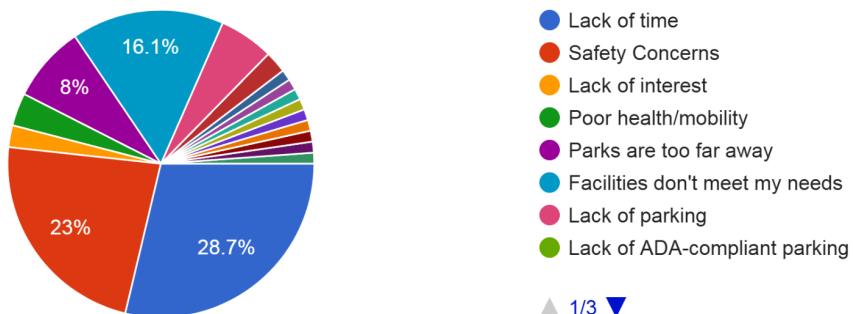
106 responses



2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

What most prevents you from using City of Marion parks or trails?

87 responses



▲ 1/3 ▼

Is there a park or trail that you would like to have that doesn't currently exist in the City of Marion or McDowell County? (50 words or less) 66 responses

- No
- Dog park
- Our family would love a park with green space, a trail, and a park. The Creekside park was our favorite spot until it closed.
- Connector from downtown to 5 lane.
- Skate park
- It would be nice to have a big park my kids get bored with the small playground. Also a bigger water play area that kids and adults can enjoy.
- Flat, circular trail that is safe for kids to ride bikes and other equipment; and Frisbee golf.
- Bike lanes on city streets/roads
- Yes, a park like the one in Morganton near the disc golf course
- Complete Peavine Trail
- Updated Dog Park, Actual Hiking Trails, Botanical Garden, any of these
- Ice skating like Forest City, and Bocce Ball
- A trail that is Mom of multiples friendlier and safer
- Something for preteen/teens would be great.
- I think Marion needs something for the older children and teens to enjoy. A skate park or a park with a playground with more advanced features would be ideal.
- I'd love a dog park or a nice green space - quite space with benches trees and plants etc. Maybe water feature like fountain.

2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

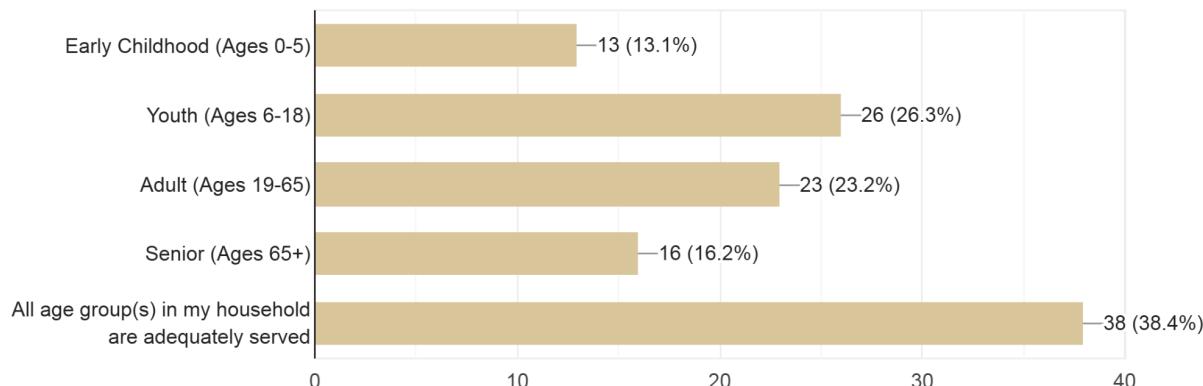
- Safe, monitored dog parks, more walking trails, gardens, public green space
- Yes, a park closer to us.
- A dog park
- A dog park!!! Also updated trail cleaned up city of Marion Mount Ida Wilderness
- Rope park (like Catawba Meadows). A park at one of the greenways so you can extend the time used there. Little kids get bored biking/walking, but if we can play at a playground after, it would be a great meetup spot!
- A trail in East Marion like the Greenway would be great!
- Any park or trail that allows for open view of sky, mountains, or water that is cardiac friendly.
- Yes. Something like Catawba Meadows where the kids have a ton of room and walking trails too.
- Dog Park
- Skate Park
- Mountain bike trails
- More water features, open play areas, shelters
- Catawba Valley Meadows / expand Greenway
- More rails to trails access or hiking trails
- I think each community Nebo, PG, Glenwood etc should have their own park/trail. All the parks we have are basically the same. Having different equipment at different parks to make them different from each other may encourage people to use them more.
- Yes, anything new would be good for the community. Also more parks and trails would give the people of Marion more of a variety to choose from to go to.
- I would like to have more walking trails near town that would have lighting. I would also like to know more information about the walking trail near the railroad tracks.
- We need more parks that have walking paths within sight of playgrounds that are accessible to a wide range of children's ages and capabilities
- Catawba Meadows park is amazing
- Dog Park Public Pool Skate Park
- One close to Nebo with a fenced in playground also walking track
- No we cannot maintain the ones we currently have
- A biking and walking trail that is not wooded and safe to be on at all times of the day.
- The sidewalk on State Street That would make a good trail.
- Track and field facilities
- No I think we need to close down the ones that aren't in use by tax paying citizens
- Disc golf multi-use park

2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

- I would like to see a park with an amphitheater at the Drexel site
- Bike friendly
- I would like a trail or bike path or sidewalk making it accessible to walk or bike to Walmart and also North Main St.
- There are too many criminals and drug users in these trails and parks.
- A skate park or dog park
- ADA wheelchair easy access, skateboard park, picnic pavilions, area for community outdoor events (like concerts) which are not paved.
- Regulated dog park
- No-we have plenty I think
- Extend the Peavine Rail Trail
- Something similar to Catawba Meadows
- I would enjoy a trail that would connect the Isothermal Thermobelt Rail Trail.
- Would love a play area similar to Catawba Meadows with ropes and various play areas
- Why don't we have a soccer field open to the public?
- More paved trails like the Greenway or the YMCA
- We always go to the greenway
- A bigger splash pad park like the one Hickory has.
- A park with equipment for older kids to use.
- Water park, climbing park, trampoline park

Which age group(s) in your household are not adequately served by City of Marion parks or trails?
(select all that apply)

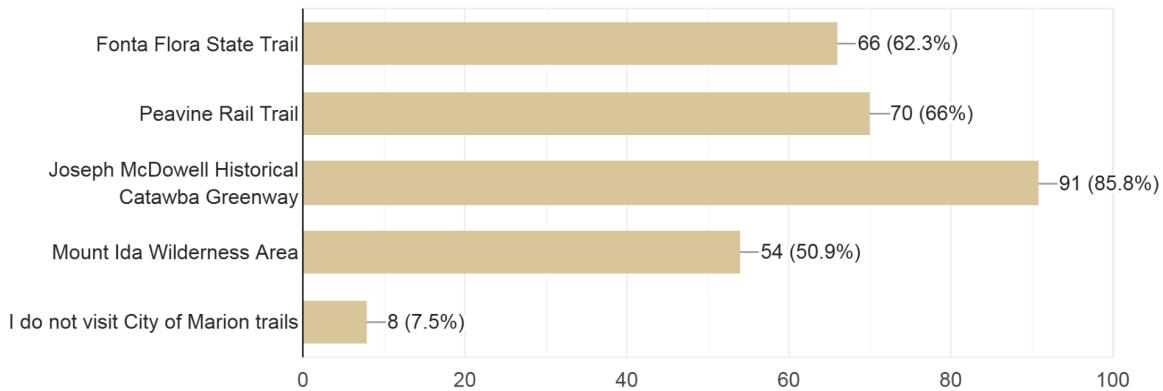
99 responses



2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

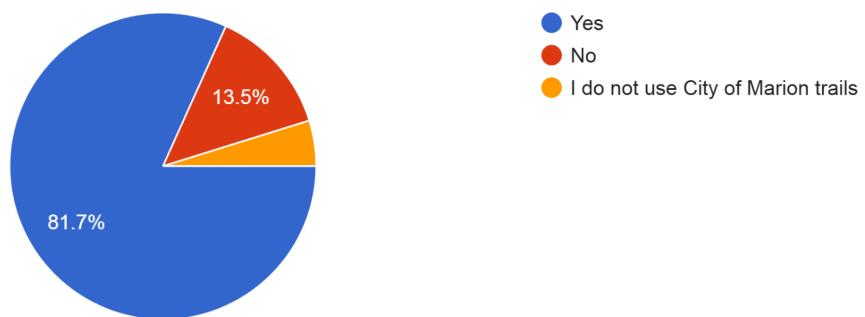
Mark all the City of Marion trails that you are familiar with.

106 responses



Do you know the location of City of Marion trails?

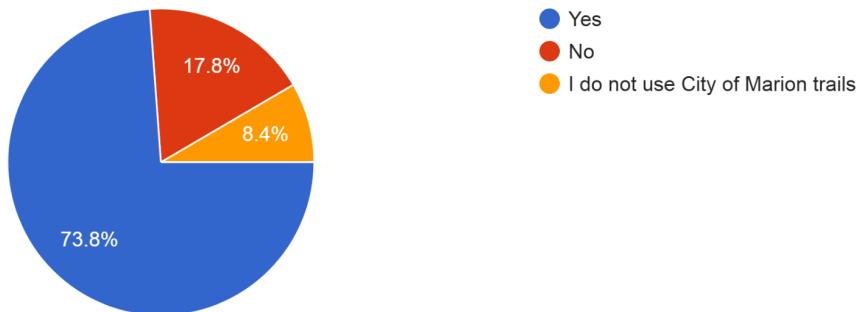
104 responses



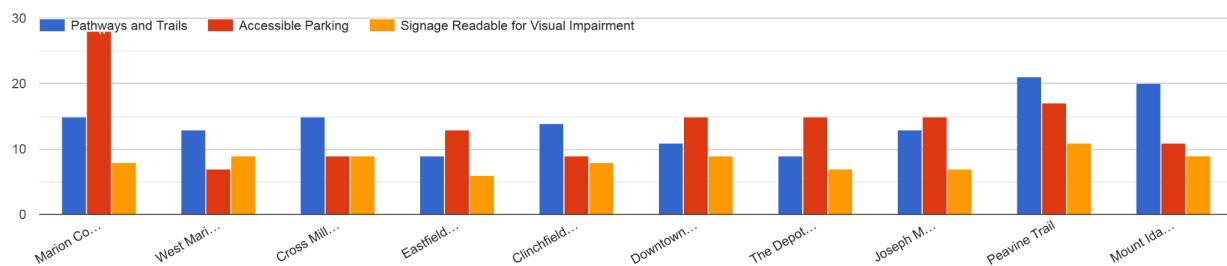
2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

When you use City of Marion trails, do you know the trail routes and the location of your nearest access points?

107 responses

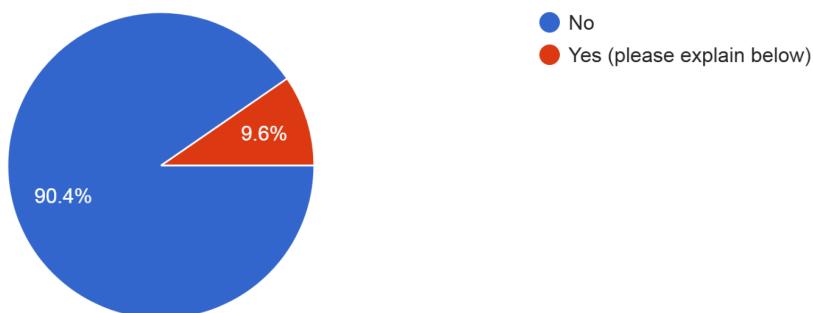


Please evaluate the condition of the following accessible features at City of Marion parks and trails. Check only the boxes for features you believe need improvement.



Have you experienced any accessibility barriers not mentioned above that prevent you from fully enjoying the City of Marion parks?

104 responses



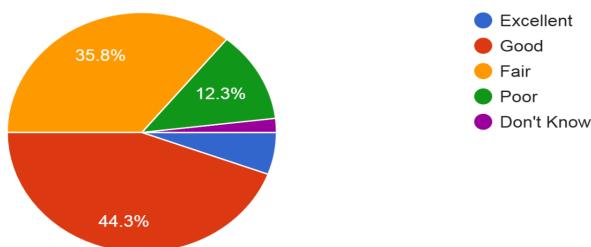
If you answered yes to the question above, please describe your experience. (250 words or less)
11 responses

2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

- Sidewalks to allow walkable access
- We don't have the accessibility to come here without fearing for a group of teenagers that run rampant here of the afternoon and smoke pot and cuss and destroy the property they are who ripped the ceiling out of the covered picnic area and they also have a pitbull that they let run loose without a leash. There needs to be a stronger police presence or really a video camera visible to where they know they are being watched maybe it would cut down on it and people could actually come here and visit it stays pretty barren to be a park and I think that is why
- Difficulties parking (Accessible Parking) and helping someone with disabilities get out on a level spot with room for their walker.
- Lack of safety fencing, Lack of communication boards for non-verbal individuals., no racquetball, no bocce, no access to structure surrounded by railroad logs, no ice rink, vandalized accessible swings/equipment, lack of dog running areas with fencing, lack of shade,
- There are no lights at Clinchfield Park especially for the basketball court and a water fountain would be nice too, more people come to Clinchfield Park than you think.
- Homeless people at Joseph McDowell Historical Catawba Greenway. Also homeless people safety concerns and trail debris at Peavine trail.
- There are too many drug abusers and drug paraphernalia
- My family and I are too afraid to visit these parks because of the known violent criminals and drug addicts who frequent them.
- I do not visit these parks because of criminal activity
- Would love park with playground equipment like Morganton surrounded with picnic areas and walking trails which make it a family destination
- Parking is a concern for many parks/trails, safety is also a concern.

Overall, how would you rate the City of Marion's existing parks?

106 responses

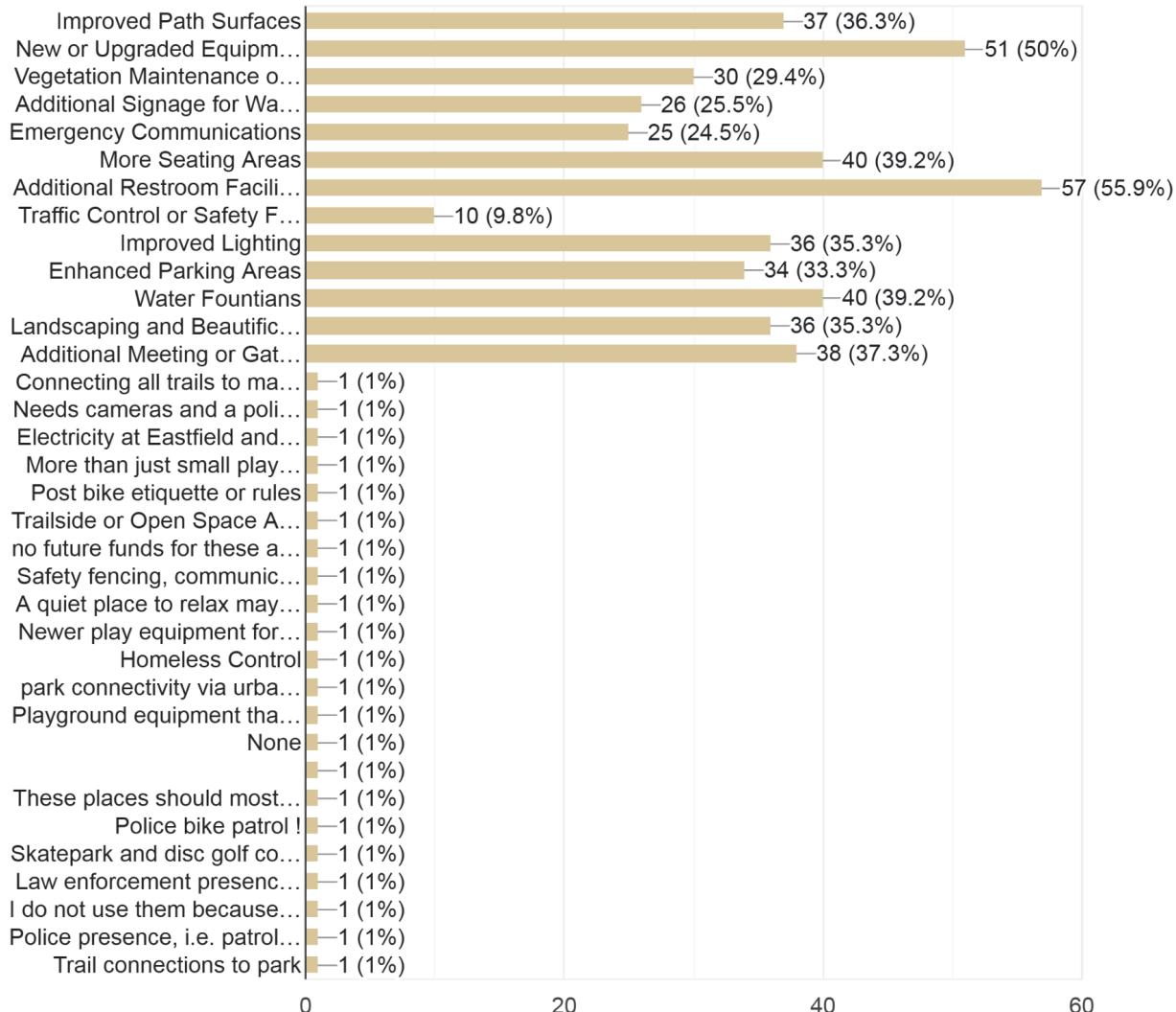


2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

The City of Marion is exploring ways to enhance its parks and trails to better serve the community.

What improvements should the City of Marion make...ture investments to enhance the park experience.

102 responses

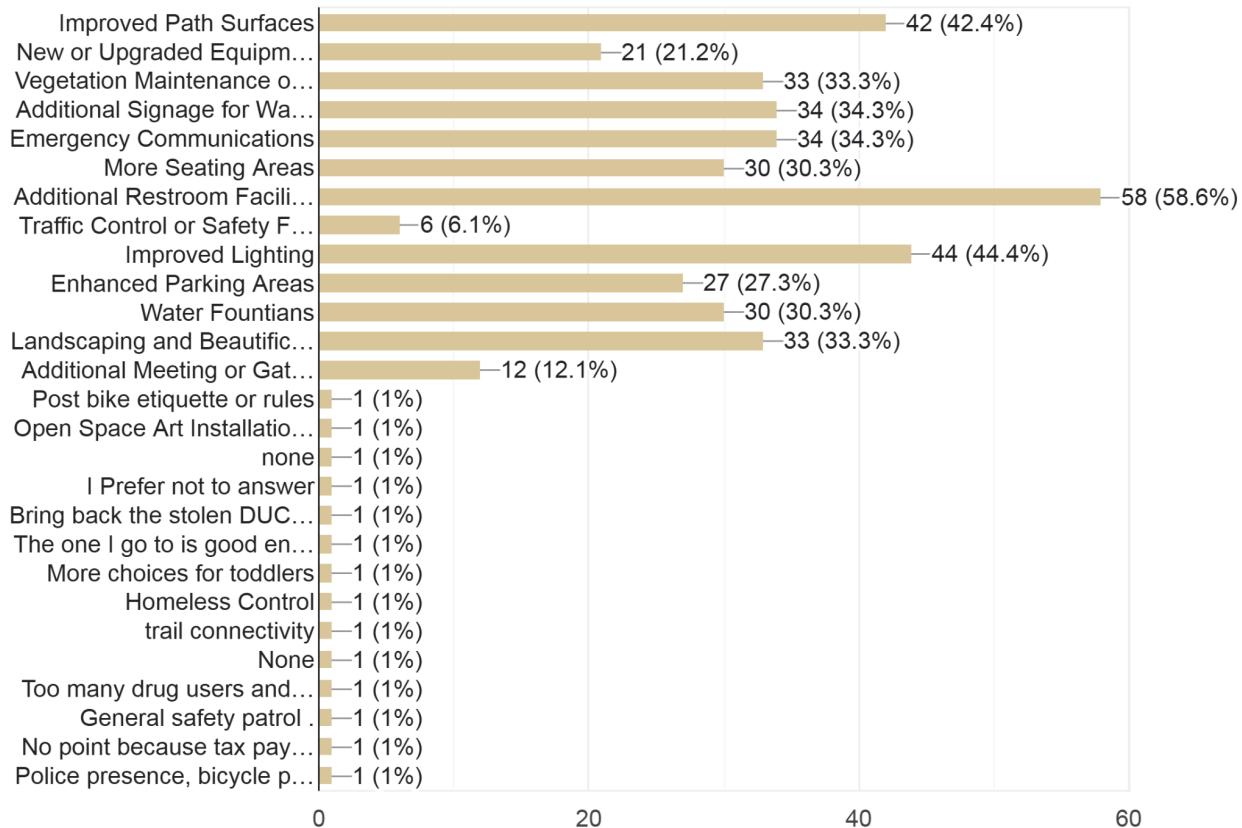


2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

The City of Marion is exploring ways to enhance its parks and trails to better serve the community.

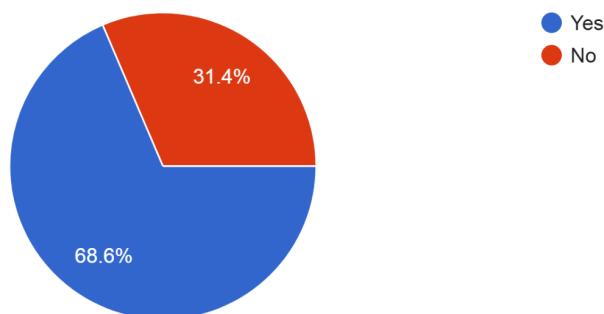
What improvements should the City of Marion make...ture investments to enhance the park experience.

99 responses



When visiting City of Marion parks or trails, do you feel safe?

105 responses



If you answered the last question No, please explain. (100 words or less)33 responses

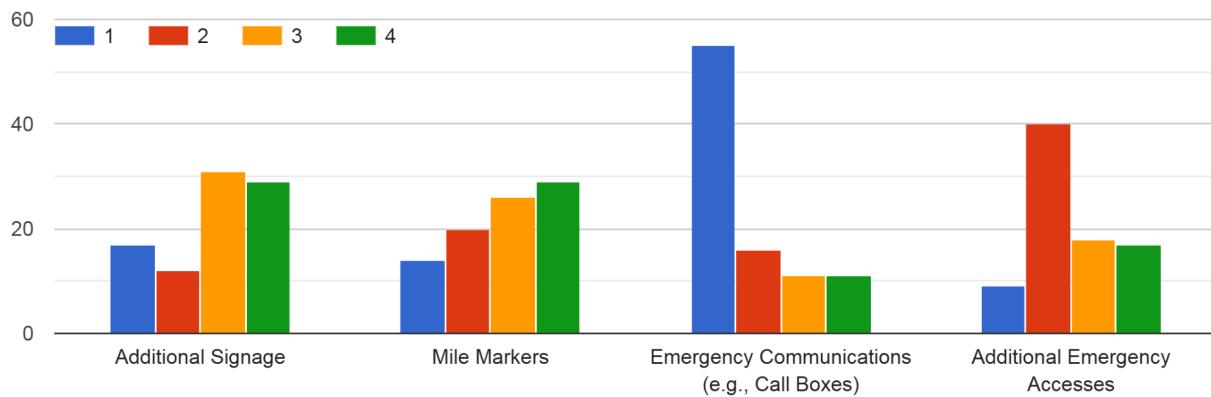
- The Eastfield park does not have good access in parking. There is a questionable house nearby that deals in drugs.
- There are always sketchy people walking around the parks. The lighting isn't good, and if someone attacked you, it would be hard to get away.
- Poor cell reception, trash in parks indicates drug usage, lack of landscaping feels like opportunities to hide a body or crime
- Smaller parks have no lighting or very little, fencing needed for kids that bolt or run, close access to parks and trails at night. Trails used for drug trafficking, Greenway included.
- Some trails are so long at times you feel like someone is watching you or following. Lighting is not great. Needs to be controlled better for people living in the trails.
- Park at corner of Main St. and Morgan St. homeless men walk around the park until late at night. They leave garbage along the sidewalk. There is a man that carries a stick and yells at the top of his voice obscenities'
- Too many weird people around the area
- Cameras or patrols would be even better so single women or older folks can feel safe.
- Need improved lighting and public safety officer with a bicycle.
- Yes, Greenway - No, Peavine, Homeless people on Peavine Trail doing drugs
- Sometime the homeless population, lack of emergency systems, and poor lighting becomes worrisome
- Sometimes. The trails get scary.
- Vagrancy, criminal activity at some parks
- Single mom, with 2 kids. Junkies like to use our parks, never know what your kid might find.
- I feel safe at the Greenway but not the one near the tracks. I'm not even sure which one that is
- Due to homeless population that the majority is substance use as well as cars being broke into while visiting trails
- There are a lot of homeless individuals that utilize several of our trails, and while there is nothing wrong with that it's intimidating as a mom of children who is often alone with them.
- There are frequently dogs off leash on the Peavine trail. People also do not slow for the crosswalk across Baldwin
- Too many violent criminals & drug users
- When I walk on the Peavine trail, I feel that there are homeless people watching from the woods which is super creepy. I have seen them coming in and out of the woods as I have

2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

walked on the trail with my children. This feels very unsafe. Particularly because there are many areas of that trail that cannot be seen by anyone not on the trail.

- Homeless using track and using bathroom beside trails.
- Too many drug users and violent criminals present
- The paved trails need a bike patrol. Too many homeless people and unleashed or out of control dogs.
- Homeless varmints
- Not enough lighting on some trails
- Specifically, the Greenway needs cameras and law enforcement or security presence.
- too many violent criminals
- At certain times I do not. Especially on the Fonta Flora near camping world.
- Have been approached by individuals asking for drugs, won't walk alone which limits available to take advantage of trails which are there.
- Trails- concerning r/t safety in secluded areas.
- Drug use, mental health challenged individuals pose safety concerns with erratic behaviors.
- Leaving trail is very sketchy

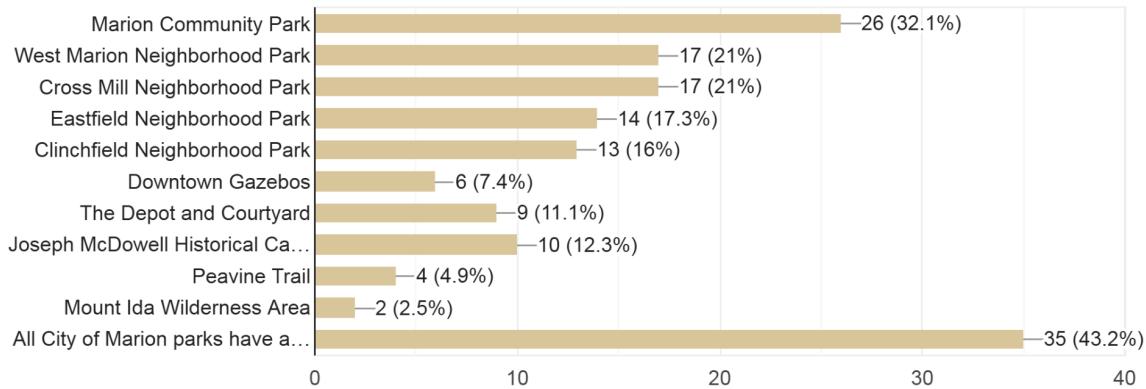
Please rank the following safety-related improvements from 1 (Highest Priority) to 4 (Lowest Priority), assigning each number only once.



2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

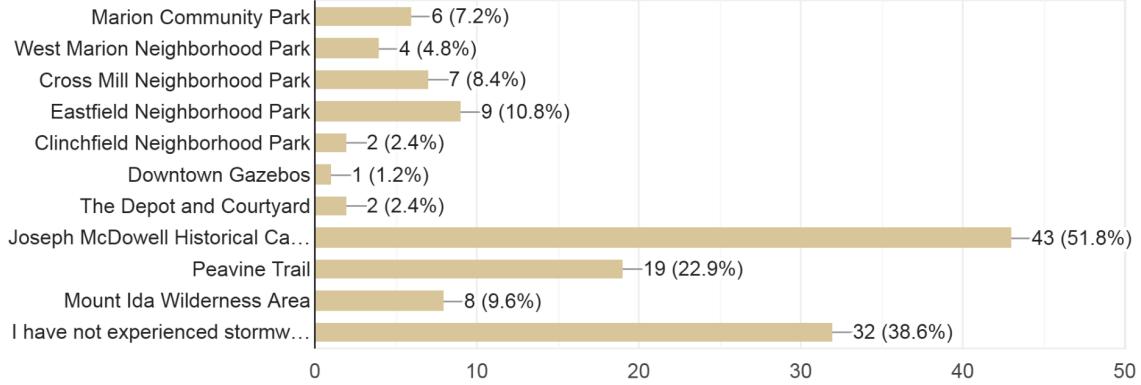
Select the following City of Marion parks that you feel DO NOT provide adequate shade during hot weather? (check all that apply)

81 responses



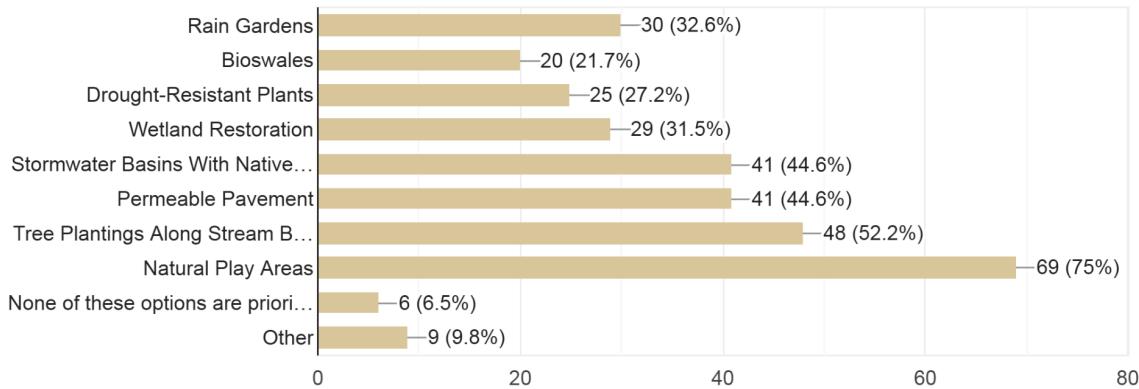
Select the City of Marion parks or trails that are frequently impacted by stormwater runoff or standing water (excluding extreme rain events like tropical storms and hurricanes)? (check all that apply)

83 responses



2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

Please select any of the following green infrastructure options that are priorities for future investments in the City of Marion parks and trails....tering physical, cognitive, and sensory development
92 responses



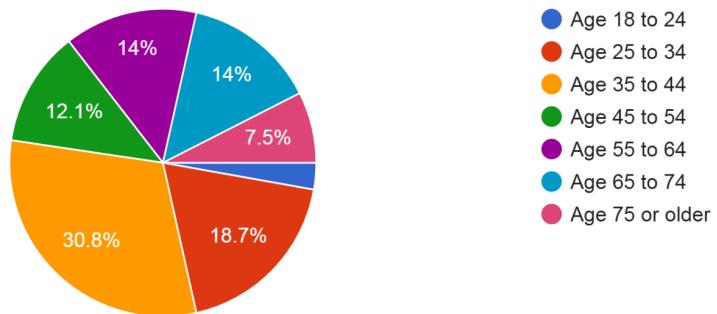
If you answered the last question Other, please specify. (150 words or less)
10 responses

- I against funding for these areas
- Pools of sitting water will increase chances of autistic or wandering individuals drowning
- Children's nature center - petting zoo-local animals - farm animals
- Toddler playgrounds, toddlers don't have safe playgrounds
- Potentially more community gardens or flower beds so we can teach our children about native vegetation and crop growing
- Community gardens
- Please do not take anymore funds to use towards these parks. We already pay too much in city property tax.
- Please pick up the garbage and debris along the Catawba River Greenway that's visible from the path. There's a lot of debris like blue large barrels, pallets hanging from trees, a port-a-pot on its side on the other side of the river, debris on the other side of the river like tarps, etc. There's garbage (plastic bottles, etc) on the one side of the streams that's visible from the path. There's also a dumpster on the property adjacent to the path that has been sitting there since the flood, and there's garbage all over the place, especially near the businesses and the roads near the Greenway.
- Landscape that improves the appearance of our parks and trail areas that appropriate for our environment
- Do not use any more tax payer funds on these areas they do not benefit tax payers

2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

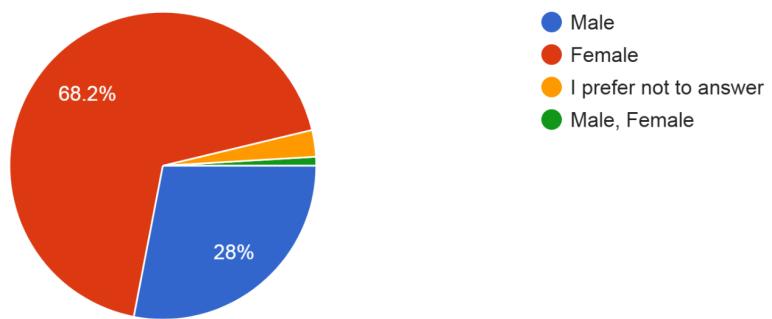
What is your age?

107 responses



What is your sex?

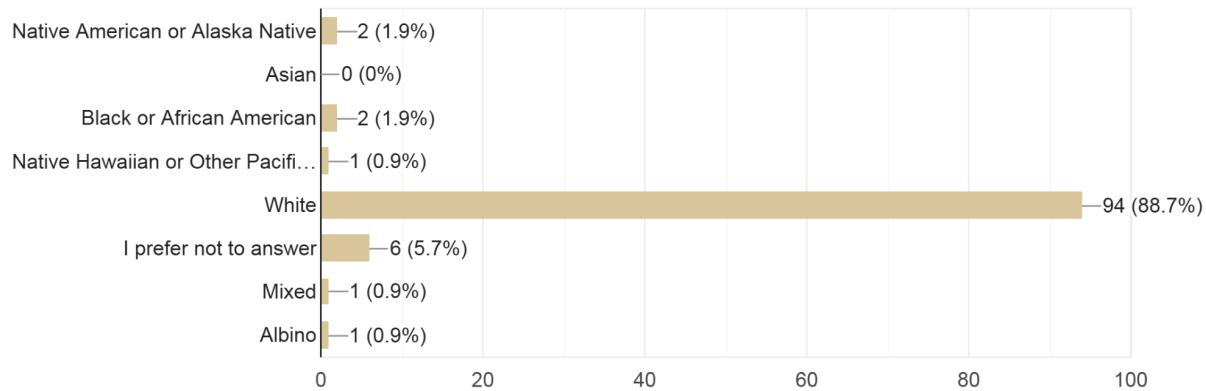
107 responses



2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

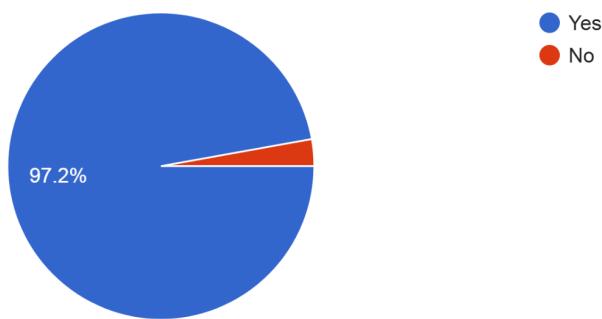
How would you best describe yourself? (check all that apply)

106 responses



Is English your first language?

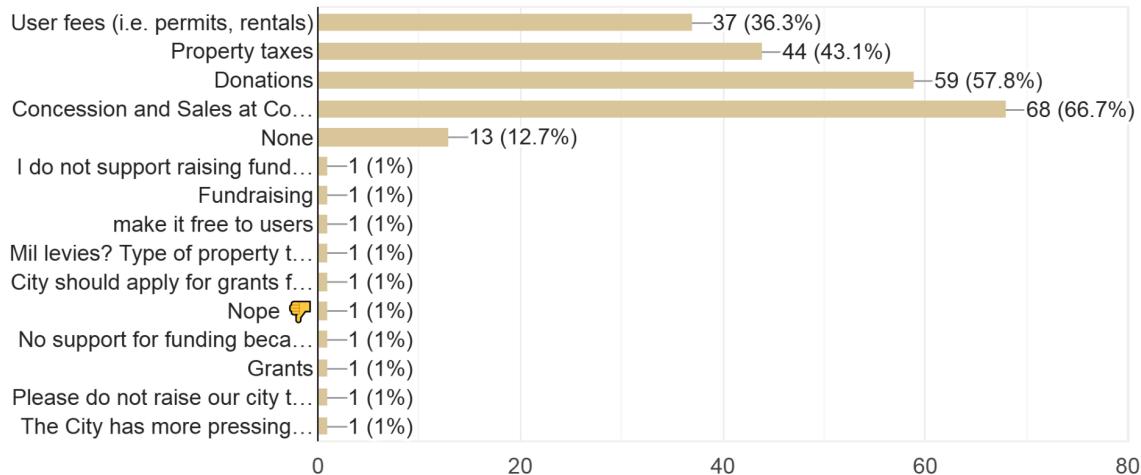
106 responses



2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

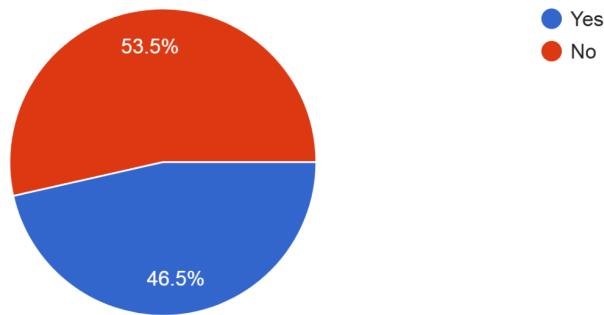
What, if any, sources of funding are you willing to support in order to make improvements, build new facilities, and create programs? (check all that apply)

102 responses



Is current information about upcoming events and programs adequate?

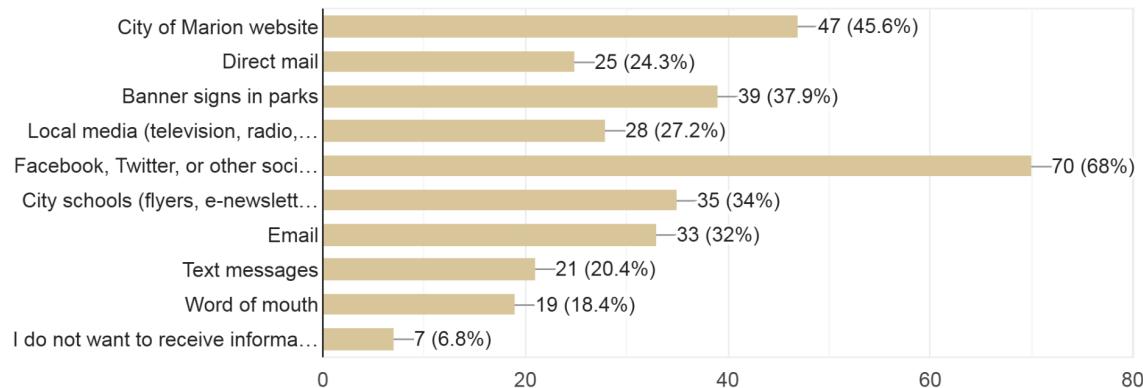
99 responses



2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

How would you most like to receive information about park events/programs?

103 responses



Is there anything else that you would like to share about the City of Marion's parks and trails? (250 words or less) 26 responses

- I would like to see bathrooms at all city parks and trails. At least a porta potty at each. When you have a child it's not way to stay and play.
- Bike trails other than mountain bike trails.
- Please update! Let's catch up to our surrounding communities. We need better areas for our kids. Let's get a pool back at the rec center! Come on Marion!
- Each one of the parks would be better if each one had a main attraction sport focus. For instance, tennis courts, pickle ball, racquet ball could all be in one park, then another for basketball, another for field space games like bocce, all could have picnic areas and other playground equipment - just make each one unique.
- I have noticed some events too late
- Upgrade West Marion park with water and power at lower end of park and walkway from Addie's Chapel shed to park shed.
- More kid friendly activities, like rock climbing
- You all are doing a fine job.
- Wish trails were longer
- No
- So far things have been a very large improvement since I (35) was a child. Let's keep making our community a safe, healthy, environment for ourselves and future generations.
- I personally think the biggest bang for your buck improvement would be substantially more seating at the community building park. It seems to be the most used park but only has like 3

2025 City of Marion Parks and Recreation Survey Responses

or 4 picnic tables? You could easily fit at least 8 picnic tables under the overhang and maybe even just benches along the wall. Birthday parties take up all the tables regularly but not everyone needs a table, lots of parents just need a bench to sit at while watching their kids.

- All that said I feel Marion does a great job maintaining the facilities with the budget they are given, so thank you all for your efforts.
- Utilize more city-owned property for trail development
- Thanks for creating this survey. My kids and I look forward to hearing the results.
- No thank you
- I love all of them!
- Taking dogs on walking trails and messing on track and owner not cleaning up their mess
- There is too much drug use and criminal activity in these parks they tax paying citizens are suffering and struggling to pay these already extremely high property tax. *Note from Accessibility Section "I believe that the drug addicts shouldn't be allowed to use drugs on these premises. Also, I think the ones that aren't actively in use should be closed down."*
- It would be nice to have a Disc golf course in Marion maintained by the city. Also we need a skateboard park better than the old one, and other things for our youth to do. Pickle ball courts would be a nice addition for everyone especially our seniors. Thanks for all that the city of Marion and parks and rec do.
- Focus on the cleanup of garbage. Add a few garbage pails.
- These parks used as a haven for drug users and criminals
- While pocket parks are nice and fit a neighborhood need, it would be great to have a larger space.
- It would be wonderful for fenced, secure play area for dogs at the parks and trails. Cross Mill Park - walking surface is uneven because of tree roots I think. A business is now parking semi-trailers in front of park making it feel unsafe.
- For the population, parks and trails are adequate. The additional county trails provide ample outdoor recreational opportunities for citizens. Primary concern is safety/police presence.
- We walk the greenway and YMCA trails once or twice a week We see a lot of people enjoying them and are lucky to have them. Living in Marion a little over a year if is hard to get find info on all the trails offered
- The greenway is beautiful I like to look at the turtles