MASTER PLAN

POPLAR BLUFF PARKS & RECREATION

2025 POPLAR BLUFF COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

The City of Poplar Bluff updated its Comprehensive Plan starting in 2024 with the goal of also updating the Parks & Recreation Master Plan as part of that process. While the City's Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 2008 and featured a chapter on Parks, the Master Plan for the Parks Department was last updated in the 1990s. Since both plans offer a road map to the City's future, it was determined that combining these efforts would be beneficial and practical project.

FUNDING FOR THIS PROJECT

The City partnered with the Ozark Foothills Regional Planning Commission to seek grant funding for the project and for the Commission to produce the final report. The Delta Regional Authority awarded the City a grant to fully fund the project on Oct. 1, 2023, as part of the Strategic Planning Program.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This Master Plan was produced with the help of many people, including Parks & Recreation Director Lanny Corcimiglia and his staff, as well as the Parks Board that included non-voting City Council member Lisa Parson.

The Park Board include:

- Eric Arnold
- Seth Gragg
- Quentin Morrow
- Ronald McCain II
- Derek Rahlmann
- Matt Schindler
- John Scott
- Stefanie Tinsley
- Jeanette Townsend

Members of the community were given the chance to provide input through surveys, public meetings and a review of this publication's first draft before it was ultimately approved by the Park Board and finally the City Council.

POPLAR BLUFF PARKS & RECREATION



Walking trail at Henderickson Park

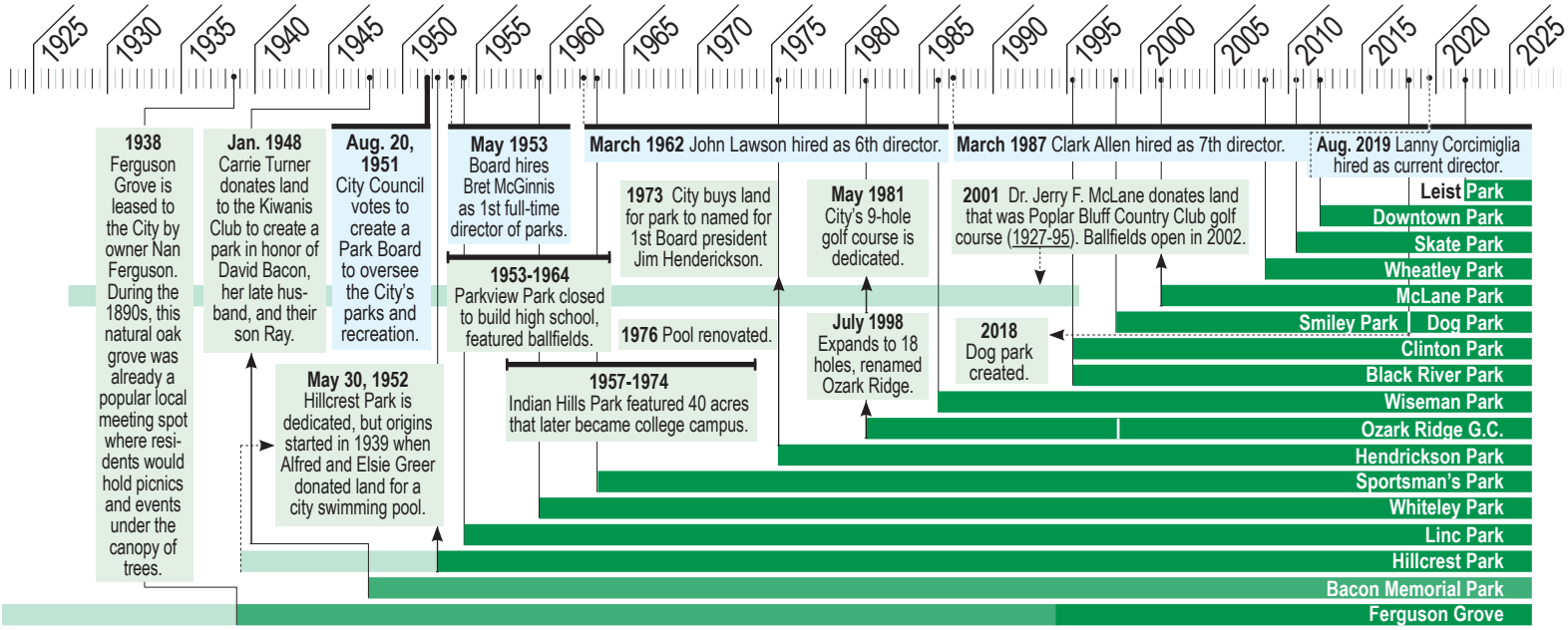
The City of Poplar Bluff has a long tradition of providing parks and recreation for its citizens, even before the official formation of the Park Board in 1951.

Currently, the Parks and Recreation Department operates 16 parks and three recreation facilities that encompass approximately 411 acres and includes nearly seven miles of trails. The park system features a variety of activities and amenities, including leagues for youth baseball, softball, basketball, football, soccer, tennis, volleyball, track and field, wrestling, along with adult softball and volleyball, recreational options to play basketball, golf, disc golf, tennis, pickleball, horseshoes, indoor and outdoor swimming that includes swim lessons and water aerobics, fitness trails and natural areas, playground equipment, pavilions and shelters.

The history of parks in Poplar Bluff, however, preceded the creation of the Park Department. Baseball and football teams played at the old Sportsman's Park on the east side during the turn of the century or at Boeving Ball Park south of the rail yard. Waterworks Park was built in 1909 along the Black River and Ferguson Grove has hosted events since the 1890s, long before the land was leased to the City. The Kiwanis Club has owned Bacon Memorial Park since 1948 when the land was donated in honor of D.P. Bacon and his son Fay.

Poplar Bluff Parks and Recreation was created when Mayor E.W. Robinson and the City Council approved a Park Board on Aug. 20, 1951 and named nine members. The first full time director of parks was named in May 1953 when Bret McGinnis was hired by the Park Board. Lanny Corcimiglia is the Park Department's eighth director and has held the position since August 2019. Clark Allen (32 years) and John Lawson (25 years) were the previous directors while McGinnis (1953-55), Johnny Jones (1955-56), Ronald Perry (1956-57), John Cardwell (1958-59) and Charles Keller (1959-62) also served as directors.

Hillcrest Park was the Park Board's first park in 1952. It was named by 10-year-old Kittye Alice Hall and featured a swimming pool. A clay tennis court was added a year later. Linc Park, named for Linc Hinrich who donated the land, opened in 1954 followed by a 40-acre park three years later west of the city named Indian Hills Park that would later become the campus of Three Rivers College. Whiteley Park, named for the donors Joe Whiteley and his son Maynard, was created in 1959 to host baseball and softball games. Parkview Park also had a baseball field but it closed when the new high school was built. Whiteley Park hosted the high school and college baseball and softball teams for a time, as well as the high school soccer team when it started in the mid 1990s. The five-field baseball and softball complex at McLane Park opened in 2002.



Other parks that were created through a donation include Joe Wiseman Memorial Park in 1986, Ray Clinton Park (1995), Dr. Jerry F. McLane Park (2001), Downtown Park (2010) and Leist Park (2022). Hendrickson Park was one of the few parks that was purchased when the Park Board paid $21,000 in 1973 (it would have cost $148,726 in 2024). It opened in 1975 and was named for Jim Hendrickson, the first Park Board president.

The current Sportsman's Park was created by the Southeast Missouri Sportsmen's Association and leased to the City starting in 1963 while the Black River Industrial Park held events as early as 1988 before the creation of practice fields for baseball, softball and soccer in 1994.

A playground was first placed at Wheatley School in 1960 by the Park Board but the site was officially dedicated as a park in 2008. Along with the addition of Downtown Park, the Skate Park and Leist Park, one, Smiley Park, was transformed into the Downtown Dog Park.

The City also operates a public golf course – Ozark Ridge Golf Course. The 18-hole championship course with large bent grass greens, protective bunkers and tree-lined fairways features a large driving range, practice green, fully stocked pro shop and concessions in the clubhouse.

The Black River Coliseum also provides recreational opportunities for residents. The 115,000-square foot multi-purpose center was built in 1999 and features a seating capacity of 5,000, hosting concerts, conventions, banquets, sporting events and many other community events. It also includes an indoor swimming pool, fitness center, walking track and can feature three basketball courts.

The Parks and Recreation Department features a staff of 12 full-time employees led by Corcimiglia with oversight from a nine-person Park Board that is appointed by the City Council. The department is a member of the National Recreation & Park Association and the Missouri Park & Recreation Association.

This master plan intends to continue Poplar Bluff's proud tradition of parks and recreation to long serve its citizens.



Playground at Whiteley Park

POPLAR BLUFF PARKS & RECREATION

MISSION

"The Parks and Recreation Department is committed to improving our community's quality of life by providing outstanding parks, trails, facilities and recreational opportunities for all Poplar Bluff residents."

VISION

Our goal is to engage our community in various activities from the arts to athletics. We strive to keep everyone informed on how they can be involved in these community events. Parks and Recreation — through our parks, trails, tournaments, sports and activities — can help provide health and economic benefits to our community.

CORE VALUES

CUSTOMER SERVICE We exist to provide the best possible service to all residents.

COMMUNICATION We listen to our residents and respond with clear, compassionate and timely communication.

IMPROVEMENT We value improvement through planning, learning and innovative practices.

INTEGRITY We expect our employees to be ethical, honest and responsible.

TEAMWORK We achieve results through valuing diversity and partnerships within our community. East person's contribution is critical to our success and progress.

STEWARDSHIP We develop and empower our employees to serve the community to the best of their ability. We are responsible with the resources the community entrusts to us.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

MAINTAIN LAND & FACILITIES Efficiently maintain parks and facilities for public safety, attractiveness and environmental stewardship including the protection of cultural and natural systems.

RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES Provide quality recreation services and well managed facilities that are financially sustainable, provide excellent customer service, and meet the needs of our patrons.

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT Provide park and facility planning, acquisition, and development to meet the needs and expectations of residents.

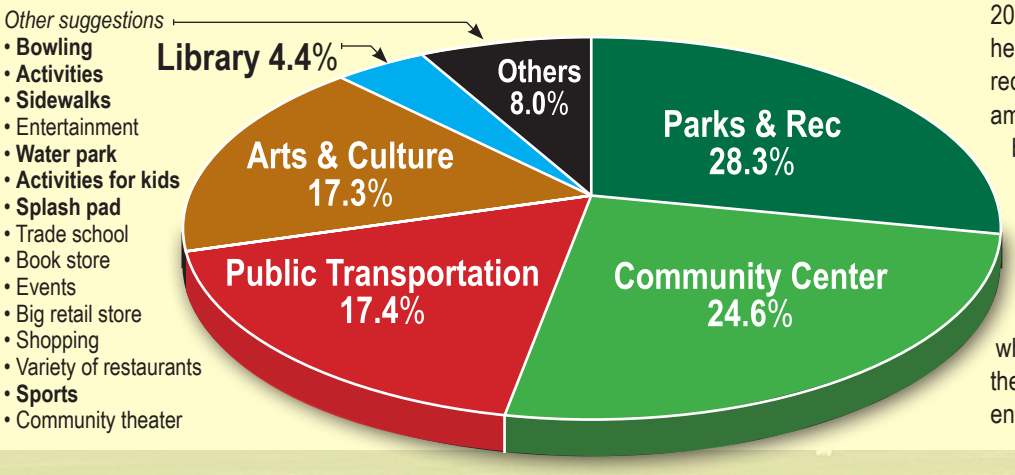
PARKS & TRAILS LINK CITY Create a trail system throughout the city that will provide opportunity for recreation as well as alternative modes of transportation.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT Plan for growth to insure adequate financial resources to meet increasing citizen demands for park and recreation services.

COMMUNICATION & CAPACITY Create an environment that produces a high performing, qualified workforce dedicated to delivering excellent customer service and communicating with Poplar Bluff's citizens in a timely, clear manner.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

What community amenities could be improved or added?



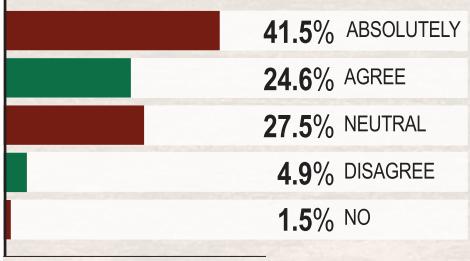
PB2025 SURVEY

Among those surveyed in 2024 for the City's Comprehensive Plan, parks and recreation ranked the most among "What amenities could be improved" with 37.4% absolutely agreeing and 34.7% agreeing that the City should have more parks and trails. When asked if the City needs more recreation programs, 44.3% absolutely agreed while 36.2% agreed, making it one of the most agreed upon responses in the entire survey of 2,100 residents.

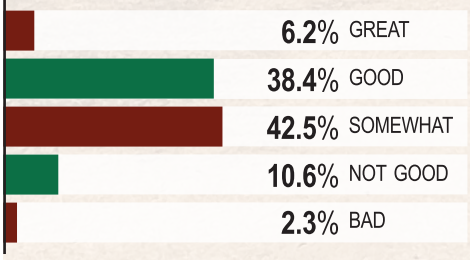
The Park Department created an online survey in July 2025 seeking additional input from the public.

NUMBER OF RESPONSES	LIVE IN CITY	GENDER	HAVE CHILDREN	AVERAGE AGE
415	49.9% Yes, live in city limits.	79.0% Female	71.1% Yes, children under 16	30s 38.4% answered 30-39

City should add more parks



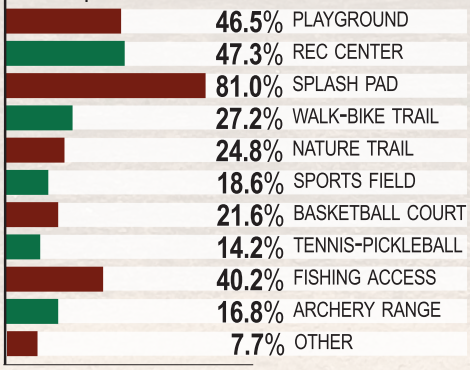
How well-maintained are park facilities



Most visited parks among respondents:

McLane (86%)	Black River (13%)
Henderickson (59%)	Shelby Taril (12%)
Whiteley (56%)	Downtown (10%)
Coliseum Center (52%)	Dog Park (10%)
Kiwanis Bacon (48%)	Wheatley (7%)
Huntington Pool (29%)	Ferguson (6%)
Ozark Ridge (19%)	Skate (6%)
Hillcrest (18%)	Sportsman's (5%)
Ray Clinton (14%)	Linc (4%)
Leist (1%)	Wiseman (2%)

Which park amenities should be added

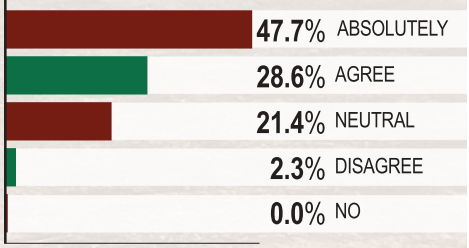


Other amenities suggested

Water park (18.5%)
New indoor pool (8.8%)
Parking (4.3%)
Parks (4.3%)
Accessible playgrounds*
Shade for playgrounds*
Bowling* Disc golf*
Pavilions* Picnic tables*
Putt-putt* Restrooms*
Security* Sidewalks*
Shooting range*
Volleyball court-sand*
Bike Park, Fencing, Boxing, Food vendors, Grills, Lessons at skate park, Movie nights, Museum for kids, Off-road trail, Rock climbing wall, Shuffle board, Tennis courts.

**multiple mentions*

City needs more recreation programs



What kind of recreation programs?

Splash pad (20.6%)	Indoor soccer*
Water park (11.9%)	Sports complex*
Young children (6.9%)	Volleyball*
Pickleball (6.3%)	Walking trails*
More of current (5.0%)	Travel baseball*
Bowling (4.4%)	Clinics*
Anything (3.8%)	Community Center*
Fishing (3.8%)	Disc Golf*
Hobbies (3.8%)	Events*
Life skills classes (3.1%)	Fitness classes*
Coliseum upgrades (3.1%)	Flag Football*
Archery (2.5%)	Kickball*
Camps for kids (2.5%)	Kids Tennis*
Outdoor / Nature (2.5%)	Lacrosse*
Senior programs (2.5%)	Music events*
Sidewalks (2.5%)	Pet events*
Open fall baseball*	Sand Volleyball*
Basketball*	Shooting sports*
Football*	More soccer fields*
Indoor pool*	Swimming lessons*
Kids golf*	Wiffleball*
More playgrounds*	YMCA-type programs*

Adult basketball, Biking program, Boxing, Cornhole, Dance, Dodgeball, Fencing, Hockey, Indoor activities, Horseback riding, Putt-putt, Rock wall, Rope course, Running club, Rule changes, Shuffleboard, Skating rink, Tennis, Track & Field, Ultimate league, Mud volleyball, Water activities, Yoga.

CURRENT CONDITIONS



Soccer at Whiteley Park (above); Park Department office (below)



Along with maintaining the parks and trails, the Park Department is also charged with providing recreational activities for residents of all ages. There are 10 different programs for sports with the Park Department partnering with community groups to run soccer, swimming, and football. The Park Department also hosts events, training and lessons that entertain and educate residents. Among all recreation programs, a total of 3,131 residents were served in 2024 with 83.5% of those age 6-12.

A team of 12 full-time employees run the daily operations that span all but two days out of the year – Thanksgiving and Christmas – with an $1.5 million operating budget generated from a quarter-cent sales tax in the city dedicated to parks that started in 2000. The director oversees all parks and recreation within the City while various supervisors direct the daily operations in departments such as recreation, maintenance, aquatics and the golf course. The administrative staff includes a financial administrator, a program coordinator and two assistants. The maintenance staff includes the supervisor and three employees plus a horticulture supervisor. The golf course staff features a manager, course superintendent, maintenance and mechanic.

EVENTS & CLASSES

The Park Department hosts a number of events throughout the year, many partnering with the Poplar Bluff Library, such as "Get Kids Outdoors" in April. Other partners include Downtown Poplar Bluff and the Community Resource Council. There were also six Cruise-In car shows scheduled for 2025 along with the "Welcome Summer" event in June, "Back to School Bash" in August, "Turkey Tumble" in November and "Santa Land" in December, among others.

The Park Department partners with the American Red Cross to host a babysitting and child care training program for six weeks along with CRP classes, lifeguard training and water safety instructor training.

YOUTH SPORTS

When it was created in 1951, the Park Board was tasked at providing recreational sports for the growing number of children in the city. Baseball and softball games have been apart of the summers in Poplar Bluff long before that and have taken on many different forms of leagues and names.

The current Park Department baseball and softball leagues are played at the McLane Park complex and feature leagues for boys and girls age 7 to 14. There were 302 baseball, 142 softball and 232 T-ball players in 2024. Registration fee is $20 for the league that starts in May. Batters face a pitching machine in leagues for players age 7-8 for boys and 7-10 for girls. A fall league that starts in September is held for teams featuring players age 7 to 13.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

The Park Department hosts basketball leagues for boys and girls in grades 3-6 and a camp for players in kindergarten and grades 1-2. The league starts in November and his played at the Black River Coliseum with a registration fee of $20.

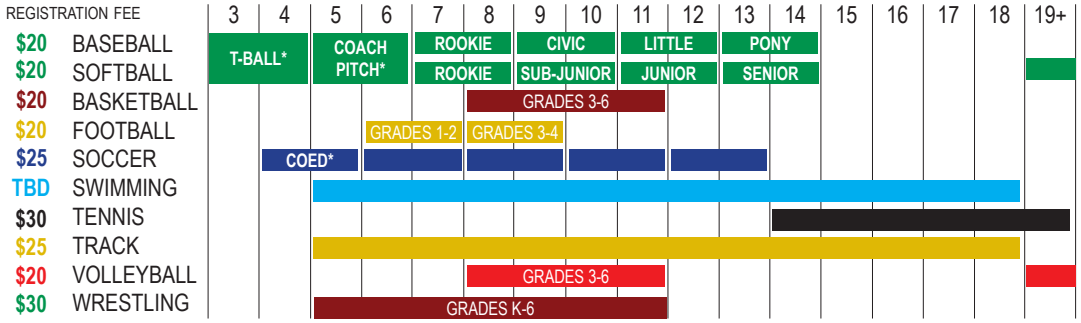
Providing residents with a safe place to swim was also among the first recreation programs for the Park Department, which upgraded the pool at Hillcrest Park in the 1950s when it was still more popular to swim in the Black River. Today, R.W. Huntington Municipal Pool at Hillcrest Park provides a safe place to cool off during the summer with open swim each day. Swimming lessons are also available for $40 in which students attend two lessons per week for a six-week program. A competitive swim team, the Poplar Bluff Piranhas (pbst.swimtopia.com), is organized for boys and girls age 5-18.

A flag football league is held in the fall for boys and girls in grades 1-4. Registration fee is $20 with games held on Saturdays at Morrow Stadium at the Junior High School. A introductory camp is held prior to the season. A traveling tackle football team is organized for players in grades 3-6 through the Poplar Bluff Elite organization.

A soccer league is organized by the Optimist Club and has served the area since 1982. The Optimist Soccer League (pbosl.com) features a fall season for boys and girls age 4 to 14 and a spring season for grades kindergarten through sixth with games held at Whiteley Park. Registration fee is $25.

A camp to teach tennis to boys and girls in kindergarten through eighth grade is held while players age 14 and older can compete in a league with adults.

RECREATION BY AGE



The Poplar Bluff Youth Track & Field Club is for boys and girls age 5-18. Registration is $25 with practices and meets held in the spring at the Sam Giambelluca Track Complex at the Junior High School.

A volleyball league is held during the winter for boys and girls in grades 3-6 with a $20 registration fee.

Wrestling is held in the winter for boys and girls in kindergarten through sixth grade. Registration is $30 with practices held at the Senior High wrestling room.

ADULT SPORTS

Softball is one of the most popular adult programs with leagues for men, women and coed teams in the summer and fall. The men's and women's summer leagues are played at Hillcrest Park and McLane Park and cost $350 per team as is the women's and coed fall league. A men's church league is held in the summer and fall and costs $400 per team.

An adult volleyball league is held in the winter and costs $300 per team.

Ozark Ridge Golf Course hosts a golf league starting in April while tennis features a women's league starting in March and coed leagues in the summer and fall. pickleball leagues are also starting to form with the completion of new courts at McLane Park.

The Park Department hosts a 5K Series for runners with races in March (McLane Park), April and May (Hendrickson Park), July (downtown), November (Hendrickson Park) and December (McLane Park).

A community group offers a league and tournaments to play disc golf at Hendrickson and Kiwanis Bacon parks while the Skate Park hosts competitions and exhibitions by various groups.

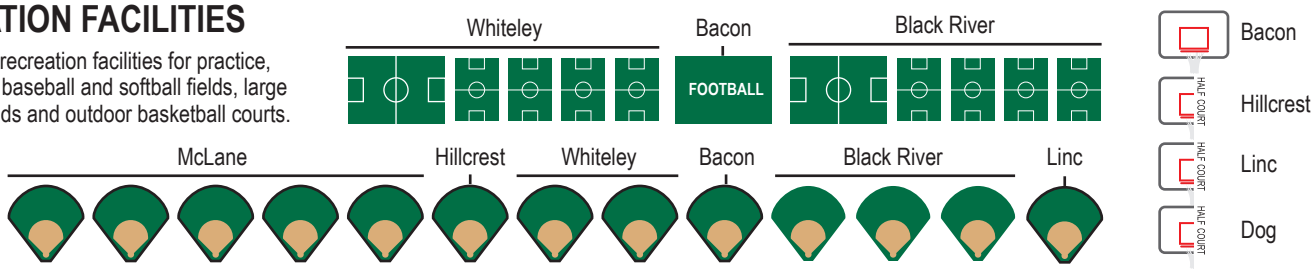
Water Aerobics classes are held at the municipal pool for $3 a session or $60 for the season which runs for 11 weeks each afternoon.

FUNDING

Registration fees are included for each sport to offset some costs along with sponsorships from local businesses, but the majority of the Park Department's funding comes from a quarter-cent sales tax within the Poplar Bluff city limits. The tax started in April 2000 following voter approval. It generated approximately $1.6 million in 2023 while operating expenses totaled just over $1.9 million resulting in a deficit of $27,797. Tax revenue, when adjusted for inflation over the past 15 years, show an average revenue of $1.5 million a year. Individual fundraising efforts, such as the Robert's Adventure Playground at McLane Park, or donations, such as the pickleball courts at McLane Park, represented less than 1% of the Department's FY2025 budget.

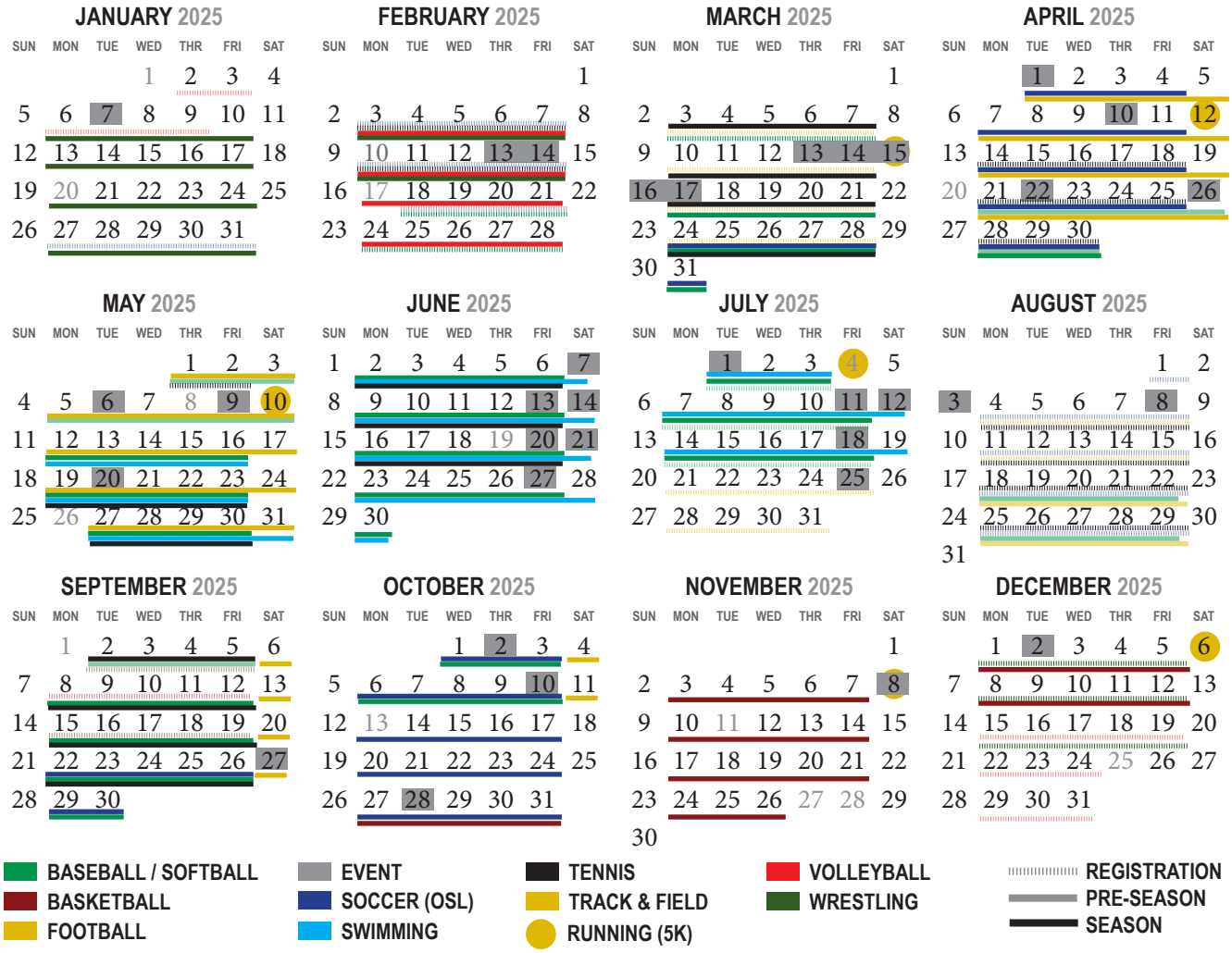
RECREATION FACILITIES

A look at the recreation facilities for practice, by park, with baseball and softball fields, large and small fields and outdoor basketball courts.



CURRENT CONDITIONS

RECREATION SCHEDULE



FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

BLACK RIVER COLISEUM While the City's facility provides recreation and hosts sporting events, it is not considered part of the Park Department. It is recommended that this change if the City will continue to have an aquatic and fitness recreation area within the building. Having the fitness side of the building fall under the Park Department can only help.

PARTNERSHIPS The Park Department partners with the Poplar Bluff R-I School District in many sports to help development athletes to become future Mules. This can be beneficial to both the school and Park Department and is a good example of the community working together. Similar partnerships would be beneficial in other areas of recreation and parks.

MORE OPTIONS As noted in the survey for the City's updated Comprehensive Plan, residents want to see more recreation programs and especially more options for teenagers. The Park Department could expand options for adults to play more sports, with perhaps a basketball league, but recreation programs are more than just sports (see list for alternatives). The Park Department already partners with the Library for events and many of the activities listed are provided by other community organizations such as the City's art museum. Partnering with other organizations, the school district or Three Rivers College to promote existing programs or create new ones will expand teen and adult recreation options to benefit the community.

RECREATION ALTERNATIVES

Recreation is more than just sports, it can also include any number of activities for children and adults. Here is a partial list of activities offered by other communities as an example:

Arts - painting, sculpture, pottery
Biking
Camps - Space, Outdoor Adventure
Cooking - bread making, baking, cake decorating
Dance - ballet, tap, swing dancing,
E-Sports
Environmental / Nature
Extreme Sports
Fitness - Weight training, ABCs (arms, butt, core), kickboxing, bootcamp.
Games - Bridge, Chess, Mah Jongg
Gymnastics / Tumbling
Historical Programs
Hobbies - Gardening, photography, knitting, sewing, floral arrangement, scrapbooking, calligraphy, bird watching, journaling, Origami.
Horseback Riding
Language Arts
Lifelong Learning - Typing, Pet Care, Civics, DIY projects, Staying Home Alone,
Martial Arts - Karate, Taekwondo, Tai Chi.
Music
Open Gym
Seniors - 50+ Fitness, Lunch & Bingo, Balance and Flexibility.
STEM - Classes, camps.
Theatre / Acting
Trips
Wellness – Yoga, Qigong, meditation.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

PARK CLASSIFICATION

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) developed a classification system that describes several categories of parks, recreation areas and open spaces. This system was used in the previous Comprehensive Plan and is used here to show any changes since 2008.

Mini Park - Addresses limited, isolated or unique recreation needs (Service area: ¼ mile radius).

Neighborhood Park - Serves as recreational and social focus of a neighborhood; Emphasizes informal active and passive recreation (¼ to ½ mile radius).

Community Park - Serves similar but broader purposes of the neighborhood park; Focuses on meeting community-based recreation needs; May preserve unique landscapes/open spaces (½ to 3-mile radius).

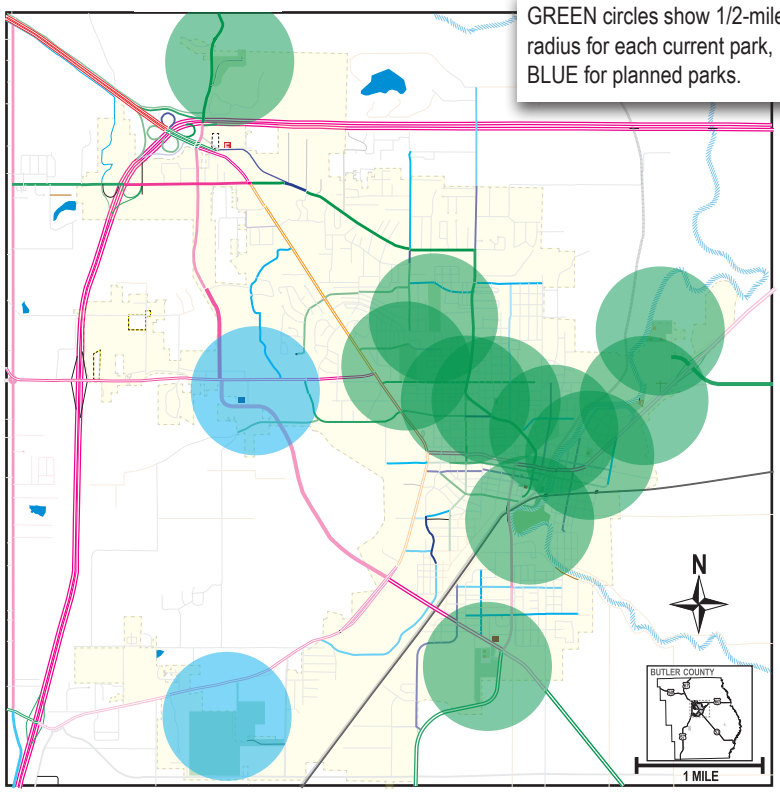
Natural Resource Area - Serves lower intensity of use; Lands set aside to preserve unique natural resources and remnant landscapes; May include open or green spaces and area of visual/aesthetics buffering (entire community).

Greenway - Serves to form interconnected park system; Ties park system components together with green corridors; Size is 25-foot width minimum, 200- or more feet optimal for right-of-way; actual path will vary, with 8 foot width minimum (Service area based on resource availability and opportunities).

School Park - Combines parks with school sites; Service area is based on school district site distribution but is frequently similar to neighborhood park function.

Sports Complex - Serves to consolidate a single purpose use; Concentrates programmed athletic fields to larger and fewer sites (Service area is the entire community).

Special Use - Covers a broad range of parks and recreation facilities oriented toward single-purpose use (Service area is variable).



Poplar Bluff's growth since 2008 has been west and north since land to the east and south is mostly in a floodplain. However, the majority of that growth is outside city limits. City parks are all located east of the Westwood/Business 67 corridor and only one park with a playground (Whiteley) south of Pine/Business 60. There are currently plans for future parks in the works - Leist and Pike Creek.

The NRPA establishes recommended acreage guidelines for mini-parks (0-1 acre, serves 5-minute walk, 0.25 to 0.5 acres per 1,000 people), neighborhood parks (1-10 acres, 10-minute walk, 1.0 to 2.0 acres per 1,000 people) and community parks (10-50 acres, 3-mile radius, 5.0 to 8.0 acres per 1,000 people).

Based on the NRPA guidelines in the previous Comprehensive Plan, the City had a historic deficit of land dedicated to mini-parks and neighborhood parks while the community parks were up to NRPA standards based on acres per 1,000 population. Currently, the national median for acres of parkland per 1,000 residents is 10.6 acres with 2,396 residents per park. Poplar Bluff is above those averages at 21.5 acres per 1,000 residents and 1,014 residents per park. With nearly 350 acres of park space, the bulk of that space falls under the community parks category, leaving a small shortfall under smaller parks.

LEVEL OF SERVICE

Population (2020) **16,225**
City square miles ...**13.14**
Pop. per sq. mile....**1,234.9**

Parks: **16**
Acres: **348.85**

			NRPA MEDIAN
Residents Per Park	**1,014**	1,172	2,386
Acres per 1,000 residents	**21.5**	12.6	10.6
Miles of Trail	**7.7**	4.5	16.0
		Pop. less than 20,000	*Total Agencies*

The below table shows the City's level of service compared to NRPA suggested norms by specific park type classifications. For example, the City's total acreage for mini parks is below the suggested minimum and dropped slightly since 1990. It should be noted that school playgrounds are not included in this survey, which could serve as mini parks. Total acres do not include undeveloped or natural areas of parks and the golf course is not included because it is considered a special use park.

		POPLAR BLUFF		NRPA TARGET	
PARK TYPE		TOTAL ACRES	ACRES PER 1,000 POP.	TOTAL ACRES	ACRES PER 1,000 POP.
Mini Parks	2025	**1.4**	**0.08**	2.9	0.25-0.5
> 2 ACRES	1990	1.8	0.10	(3.3)	✗
Neighborhood Parks 2-10 ACRES	2025	**10.4**	**0.64**	11.6	1 to 2
	1990	8.2	0.48	(1.2)	✗
Community Parks 10+ ACRES	2025	**236.0**	**14.55**	58.1	5 to 8
	1990	170.4	10.02	+117.2	✓

CURRENT CONDITIONS



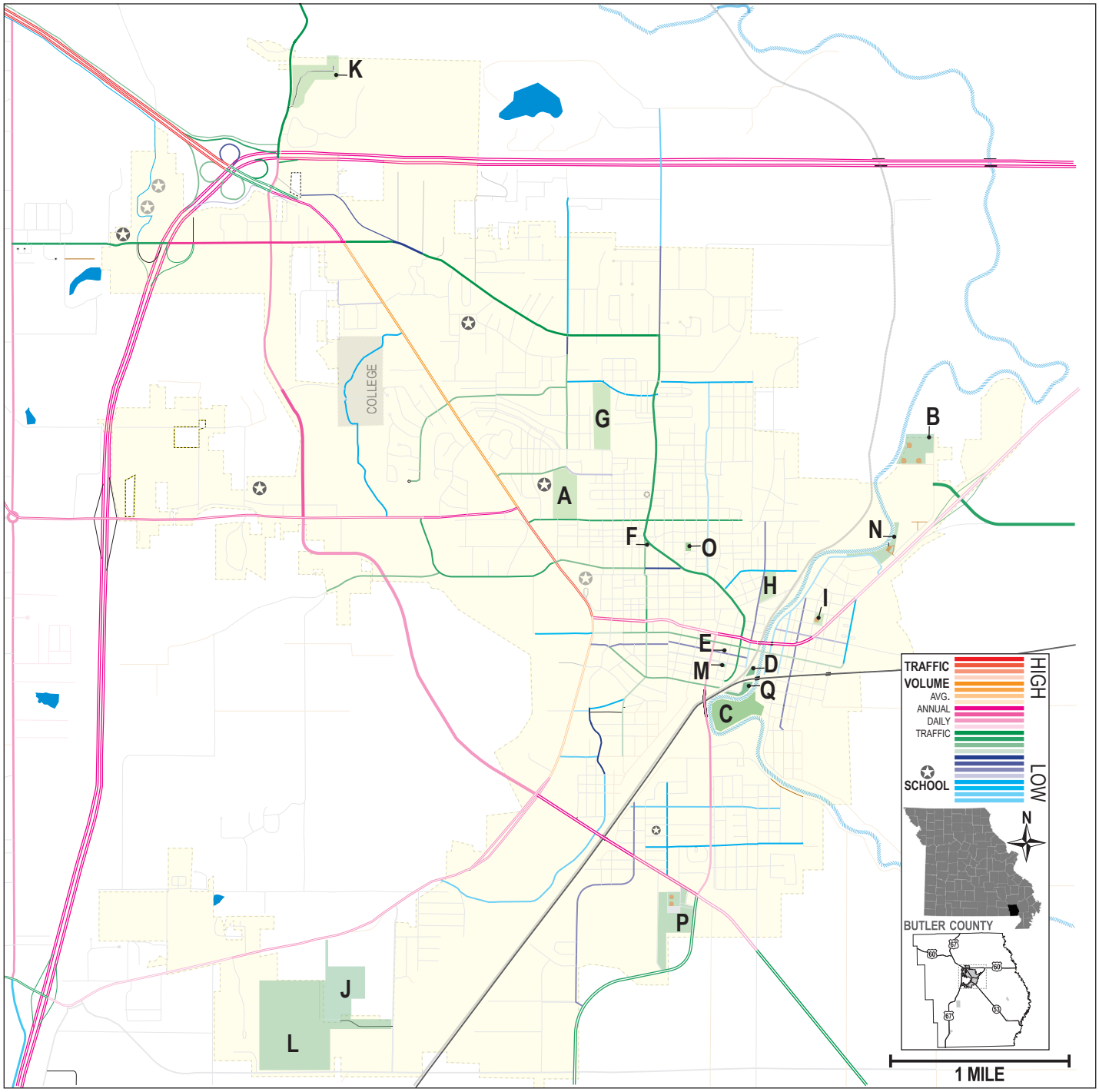
Playground at Henderickson Park

Parks can feature any number of amenities, or be just a greenspace that provides open or wooded land that can be accessed by the public. The many different offerings the parks of Poplar Bluff provide are noted in the below table. **Paved parking** and paved trails offers accessibility to residents. **Trails** can be used for walking, running and biking. **Nature trails** offer unpaved access to natural areas for hiking. Playgrounds are one of the most desired features in a park and include any number of climbing, sliding or swinging equipment. **Pavilions** provide space for cultural needs such as parties, gatherings and events while **grills** provide the ability to cook. **Picnic** areas can include tables or open grass to enjoy a meal. **Restrooms** allow visitors longer stays within the park while **pet friendly** parks offer stations for cleaning up after pets. **Athletic fields and courts** provide space for specific sports while **outdoor recreation** can be enjoyed with boat ramps and fishing piers.

○ - Planned for future use

	Paved Parking	Paved Trail	Nature Trail	Playground	Pavilion	Grill	Picnic	Restroom	Pet Friendly	Baseball / Softball	Basketball	Soccer	Skateboarding	Disc Golf	Golf	Tennis	Pickleball	Swimming	Boat Ramp	Fishing
Kiwanis Bacon Park	●	●		●	●	●	●		●	●	●			●						
Black River Park										●		●								
Clinton Park							●												●	●
Dog Park	●								●		●									
Downtown Park		●			●	●	●		●											
Ferguson Grove	●	●					●		●											
Henderickson Park	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●					●						
Hillcrest Park	●			●	●	●	●	●		●	●					●	●	●		
Linc Park	●			●	●	●	●			●	●									
Leist Park	○	○	○	○	○	○	●		○											○
McLane Park	●	●		○			●	●	●	●							●			
Ozark Ridge G.C.	●							●							●					
Skate Plaza	●						●						●							
Sportsman's Park	●				●	●	●												●	●
Wheatley Park				●	●		●													
Whiteley Park	●			●	●	●	●	●		●		●								
Wiseman Park							●													●

CURRENT CONDITIONS



	PARK	SIZE	OPENED
A	Kiwanis Bacon Memorial Park	26.45	1948
B	Black River Industrial Park	15.58	1995
C	Ray Clinton Park	21.90	1995
D	Downtown Dog Park	2.47	1998
E	Downtown Park	0.23	2010
F	Ferguson Grove	4.59	1938
G	Hendrickson Park	36.97	1975
H	Hillcrest Park	9.35	1952
I	Linc Park	1.33	1954

	PARK	SIZE	OPENED
J	Leist Park	37.45	2022
K	McLane Park	68.18	2001
L	Ozark Ridge Golf Course	142.65	1981
M	Skate Plaza	0.43	2012
N	Sportsman's Park	4.67	1963
O	Wheatley Park	0.60	2008
P	Whiteley Park	31.70	1959
Q	Wiseman Memorial Park	4.58	1986

*SIZE MEASURED IN ACRES


HILLCREST PARK
POPLAR BLUFF PARK
AND RECREATION DEPT.


BACON
MEMORIAL
PARK
GIVEN BY MRS. H. W. TURNER
IN MEMORY OF
FAY D. BACON
1947


Poplar Bluff
Skate Park


JERRY F. McLANE
PARK AND RECREATIONAL AREA


HENDRICKSON PARK
POP R B UFF
PARK & RECREATION DEPT.


FERGUSON GROVE


WHEATLEY PARK
POPLAR BLUFF PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
WHEATLEY HISTORICAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY


WHITELEY PARK
POPLAR BLUFF PARK
AND RECREATION DEPT.
LAND FOR THIS PARK
DONATED TO THE
CITY OF POPLAR BLUFF
BY
MR. & MRS. JOE WHITELEY
AUGUST 31, 1959

HILLCREST PARK



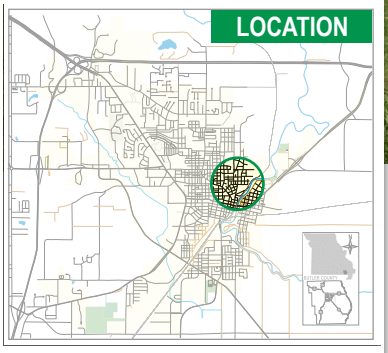
The area located north of downtown Poplar Bluff became the City's first official park under the newly created Park Department on May 30, 1952, but its origins trace back to the late 19th century when the hill was a popular sledding spot. Hillcrest Park, named in a contest, features a playground, shelter, two tennis courts, half basketball court, lighted ballfield and an outdoor swimming facility, named for Dr. R.W. Huntington, a longtime member of the Park Board.

FAST FACTS:

OPENED: **1952**
ACRES: **9.22**

PARKING	✓ PAVED
	ACCESS OFF SECOND ST. AND RELIEF ST.
PLAYGROUND	✓ TOTAL: 1
PAVILIONS	✓ TOTAL: 1
TRAILS	✖ NONE
RESTROOMS	✓ AT SWIMMING POOL
FEATURES	✓ SWIMMING POOL
	✓ TENNIS COURTS
	✓ BALLFIELD
	✓ BASKETBALL COURT

LOCATION



ORIGIN & LAND USE

Hillcrest Park holds the distinction of being Poplar Bluff's first official city park, established in 1952. Prior to its creation, recreational facilities in the city were limited, and the post-war population boom created demand for public leisure space. The park's name, "Hillcrest," was chosen in a rather charming way — a contest invited residents to name the new park and a 10-year-old girl named Kittye Hall won by suggesting "Hillcrest." The name aptly describes the terrain – the park is situated on a prominent hill in the central part of town known as Standpipe Hill when the city's waterworks opened in 1895 and sledding the hill during the winter was popular. Additional land was purchased by the city in 1925 and the standpipe was removed in August 1931 as the area was turned into a park to go with the nearby Water Works Park, which opened in 1909 on the bank of the river. A swimming pool was completed by the Work Projects Administration in 1938 but it was seldom used until the City upgraded it and formally organized the park in 1952.



DEVELOPMENT OF AMENITIES

The crown jewel of Hillcrest Park has always been its swimming facility. In 1976, as part of a bicentennial improvement and to replace the aging structure, the city constructed the current Olympic-sized pool and bathhouse, naming it the R.W. Huntington Municipal Pool. R.W. Huntington was a respected city leader – a 30 year member of the Park Board and chairman of Junior Chamber of Commerce. This modern pool complex, complete with a large bathhouse, became a major summer attraction for residents.

HILLCREST PARK



HILLCREST PARK

Beyond the pool, Hillcrest Park was developed to offer a variety of recreation on its two levels. On the hilltop, alongside the pool, the city built two tennis courts and paved a parking lot accessible from Second Street. On the slope and foot of the hill, accessible from Relief Street, a large ballfield was laid out (used for youth baseball and softball), a basketball court was installed and a playground with swings and slides was added. A single pavilion with picnic tables was constructed near the playground so families could host gatherings. The grassy hillside connecting the two elevations remained open – famously serving as the town's favorite sledding hill on snowy days, as noted in city lore and even the park's official description. Notably, Hillcrest Park does not have a walking trail due to its compact size and hilly topography.



Dr. R.W. Huntington (1922-2010) came here from Osgood, Indiana, to open his optometry practice in 1951 and was involved in youth sports over the next four decades. He helped raise funds to light the ballfield at Linc Park as president of the Jaycees, joined the Park Board in 1955, serving for 33 years, won numerous awards for service to the community, including induction in the Poplar Bluff Sports Hall of Fame.







NOTABLE EVENTS

As the city's first park and longtime only public pool, Hillcrest has been the backdrop for countless memories. In the 1950s and '60s, it was common for civic clubs to host ice cream socials and Fourth of July picnics at Hillcrest. The pool turned the park into a summertime social hub – many residents recall learning to swim in Red Cross lessons at the Huntington Pool or cooling off during the hot summers there. The pool area also facilitated events like the annual City Swim Meet and occasional high school swim competitions (before an indoor pool existed). The park's athletic facilities have seen local legends as well; generations of kids played Little League baseball on the Hillcrest diamond, and city tennis tournaments were held on its courts. One particularly unique event is the winter tradition of meeting on the hill. Whenever a decent snowfall hit Poplar Bluff, families converge on Hillcrest Park's slope for sledding, sometimes numbering in the hundreds with sleds, toboggans and makeshift cardboard sliders. That enduring image – of a hillside speckled with joyful children on sleds – is a cherished part of Poplar Bluff's collective memory.



COMMUNITY IMPACT

Hillcrest Park's importance to the community is profound. As the first park, it signified Poplar Bluff's commitment to quality of life for its citizens. The story of a 10-year-old naming the park in 1952 is often retold as local folklore, highlighting how residents – even children – have a voice in shaping their city. Nearly every longtime Poplar Bluff resident has a Hillcrest story, whether it's a first swim, a first home run, or a family picnic memory. The park's multi-generational appeal, from little children on the playground to seniors walking their dogs, has made it a true community keystone. Hillcrest Park also spurred the development of the Park Department itself; its success led city leaders to continue investing in more parks throughout the latter half of the 20th century. In short, Hillcrest Park is not just a physical space but a repository of communal experience – the heart of Poplar Bluff's park heritage, where traditions have been born and continue to be celebrated.

HILLCREST PARK

FUTURE PROJECTS



Basketball Courts
Upgrade current court and create new court.

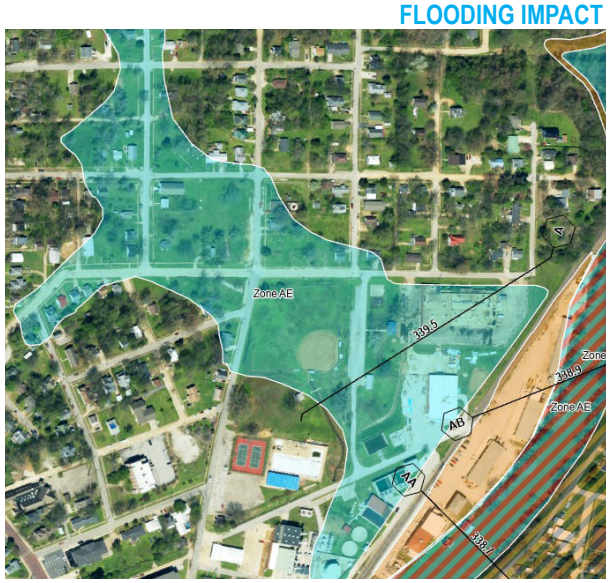
Parking Lot
Expand the parking lot at top of hill,

Swimming Pool Upgrades In 2022, the pool facility got a new vinyl liner, a privacy fence, a refurbished concession stand and added shade structures for patrons. These improvements extended the life of the pool and improved the comfort and safety for swimmers. Funding provided from City capital improvement funds (part of a 2021 parks improvement budget).



Sidewalk / Trail
Create half-mile loop for walking/running and cycling.

FLOODING IMPACT



FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

WALKING TRAIL A sidewalk along 2nd and Relief streets is needed to access the park and could be turned into a loop with a sidewalk along Johnson Drive that cuts through the park.

EXPAND PARKING The current paved parking lot next to the pool and tennis courts only features 35 spots. It could use resurfacing and lines that better use of the space. Additional parking could be added on the north side of the tennis court to also provide parking to access the sledding hill during the winter.

SPLASH PAD This feature could be an added amenity to the swimming pool by providing a water play experience for children who cannot swim. It would upgrade the current children's pool.

BASKETBALL COURT There is only one hoop, the concrete pad is showing its age and it is smaller than a half court — it is approximately 41 feet wide and 48 feet long (half-court size is usually 50 feet wide and 47 feet long). There are no markings for a free-throw or 3-point lines. Adding an additional full or half court would also be beneficial.

TENNIS COURTS With the popularity of Pickleball, the two tennis courts can currently be converted with temporary nets. An upgrade to the surface by creating one tennis court with two Pickleball courts might allow for expanded use.

FLOODING Hillcrest Park will typically flood when the Black River is above 16 feet or when heavy rainfall is too much for the system to handle. This will cause water to run over the road along Relief Street and North 2nd Street intersection into the lower side of the park. The City purchased homes on the north side of Relief Street as part of a flood buyout program. Using this area for a retention pond may help lesson the flooding impact to the park and the area. It could also create an open area that can be enjoyed by residents or used as extra practice fields when dry.

HENDRICKSON PARK



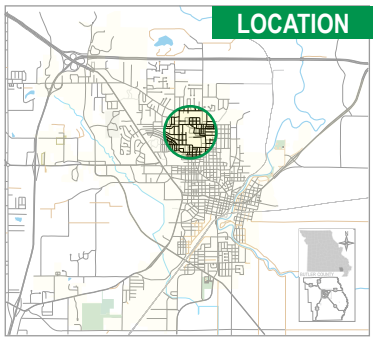
The area adjoining the City Cemetery was purchased in 1973 and developed into a park, which expanded in 1994 when the Butler County Health Department leased an additional 11 acres to the City. Named for Jim Hendrickson, the first president of the Park Board, this park features wooded and open land along Hogg Creek with playgrounds, shelters, an 18-hole disc golf course and a half-mile trail which is part of the Poplar Bluff Greenway trail system.

FAST FACTS:

OPENED: **1975**
ACRES: **36.97**

PARKING	✓ GRAVEL
	ACCESS OFF DAVIS, THIRTEENTH STREETS
PLAYGROUND	✓ TOTAL: 2
PAVILIONS	✓ TOTAL: 1
TRAILS	✓ MILES: 0.56 PAVED-GRAVEL
RESTROOMS	✓ SEASONAL
FEATURES	✓ NATURE TRAIL
	✓ DISC GOLF - 18 HOLES
	✓ MOMMY AND ME SWING
	✓ STAGE, EDUCATIONAL AREA

LOCATION



ORIGIN & LAND USE

Hendrickson Park, which opened in 1975, was one of Poplar Bluff's first major park developments in the postwar era. In the early 1970s, as the city recognized the need for more public recreation space, the park board identified a wooded tract on the northwest side of town (near what was then the Butler County Hospital and Health Department) as a prime location. In 1973, the city purchased the initial 25-acre parcel for $21,000. This investment demonstrated the city's commitment to expanding its park system. The chosen name honors Jim Hendrickson's contributions as the first president of the Park Board, he had championed the acquisition and planning of this park, so upon its opening it bore his name as a tribute.

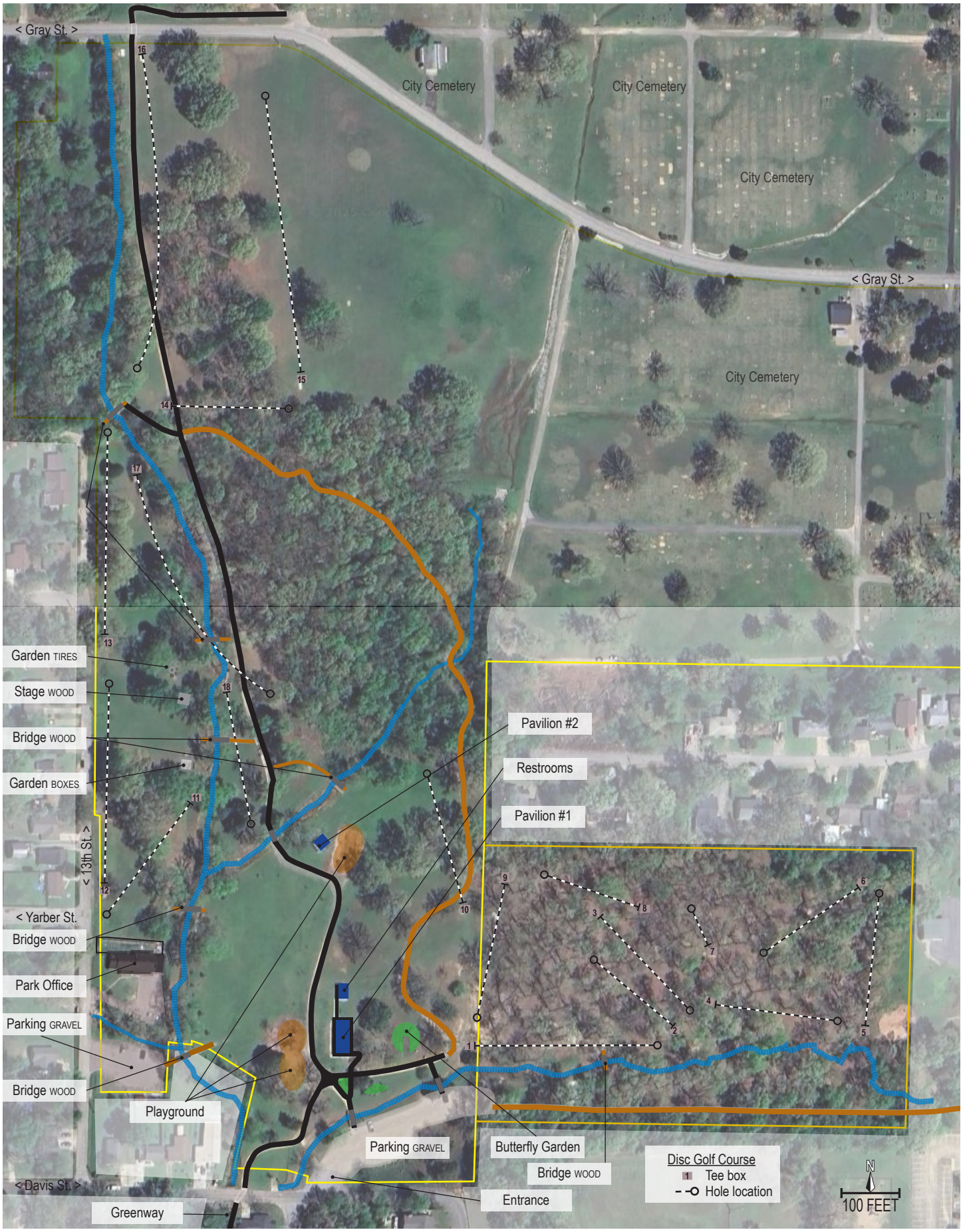


Half-mile radius from park.

EXPANSION & FEATURES

Originally around 25 acres, Hendrickson Park's size grew significantly. In 1994, the Butler County Health Department, which owned adjacent land, agreed to lease an additional 11 acres to the City for park use. Additional property on the east side of 13th Street was added in 2016. This expanded the park to nearly 37 acres, incorporating more of the natural wooded area and extending the park northward toward the City Cemetery. The park's landscape is a mix of rolling woodland and open meadows on its southern end. Early development of Hendrickson Park focused on creating walking paths and picnic spots to take advantage of the scenery. A half-mile nature trail was laid out, meandering through the woods. Over time, Hendrickson Park became known for some unique features. It boasts an 18-hole disc golf course set among the trees, which was added in 2013 as the sport gained popularity.

HENDRICKSON PARK



HENDRICKSON PARK

A seasonal restroom and a gravel parking area off Davis Street were built to support visitors. Notably, Hendrickson Park's layout preserved much of its natural charm — even with amenities — large portions remain wild, offering a taste of the Ozark forest within city limits.



James 'Jim' Hendrickson (1894-1969) was an editor of the *Daily American Republic*, working for the paper for 42 years, the first chairman of the Park Board and the first president of the Southeast Missouri Sportsman's Association. His grandfather founded the town of Hendrickson.











NOTABLE EVENTS & USES

As a sizable and versatile park, Hendrickson Park has hosted a variety of community activities. In the late 1970s and 1980s, it was the site of the city's annual Easter egg hunt, drawing hundreds of children to scour its lawns. The park's trail has been used for cross country training by local high school runners, and in recent years a "Haunted Trail" event each October takes advantage of the wooded paths for a spooky seasonal fundraiser. Environmental and educational events are common as well – the Missouri Department of Conservation has led nature walks here, teaching residents about native plant species in the park's rich ecosystem. When the disc golf course was added, Hendrickson began attracting regional disc golf tournaments, putting Poplar Bluff on the map for enthusiasts of the sport. Throughout the year, one can find individuals and families hiking, birdwatching and enjoying the serenity that Hendrickson offers. Its connection via the Greenway trail to Kiwanis Bacon Park means one can even bike or jog from one park to the other, a fact celebrated with occasional fun-run events linking the two.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Hendrickson Park represents Poplar Bluff's dedication to both recreation and conservation. By naming it after Jim Hendrickson, the city cemented the legacy of a leader who helped shape its park system. The park's expansion and enhancements over the years show a responsive evolution to community interests – whether adding disc golf or connecting trails. Culturally, Hendrickson Park has become a beloved spot for those seeking respite in nature without leaving town. Many residents cite it as the place they learned to appreciate the outdoors — children on field trips or Scout hikes often have their first encounter with wildlife (like seeing deer or hearing owls) in these woods. Its proximity to residential neighborhoods means it's woven into daily life — one might see retirees on morning walks and families on weekend picnics concurrently. In essence, Hendrickson Park has fulfilled the vision of its namesake by offering a multi-faceted recreational space that balances active play, community gathering, and the quiet enjoyment of Poplar Bluff's natural beauty.

HENDRICKSON PARK

FUTURE PROJECTS



Nature Center / Meeting Space
Move the Park Department offices to 13th Street or create an educational or nature center in this space.



Improved parking
Pave parking lot to make park more accessible.

Improved trail to Main Street
Create access from Main Street with a trail through woods.

Splash Pad
Create water feature in open space.



FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

PARKING UPGRADES The gravel area for parking off Davis Street requires a reconfigured entrance to create a better intersection with 12th Street and safer to exit with cars coming down the Davis Street hill. Expanding and paving this area will provide access to the Poplar Bluff Greenway trail and create an accessible entrance to the park for people using wheelchairs. A parking area on the north side of Gray Street would create a trailhead for the Greenway trail, allow easy access to the open field to the south, which can be used for kite flying, and offer safe parking for anyone visiting the west side of the cemetery.

SPLASH PAD This feature provides a water play experience for anyone with or without the ability to swim. It allows residents a place to cool off without traveling to Hillcrest Park or the river.

NATURE CENTER The addition of the property on 13th Street in 2021 included a 2,400 square-foot residential building. A gravel parking lot was added and the building is used for Park Board meetings and storage space. The site could be easily converted into a nature or learning center, offering meeting space for groups or recreational classes. Visitors could view interpretive displays of the park's natural history, including animal and nature exhibits, such as those featured in the Poplar Bluff Museum.

HOGG CREEK RESTORATION At times of heavy rain, the creek can become a fast-moving stream that floods portions of the park. Stream restoration involves a variety of techniques aimed at improving the health and functionality of streams by addressing issues like erosion, habitat loss and pollution. This project could extend along the Greenway trail and Bacon Park.

TRAIL TO MAIN STREET While residents to the north, east and south can access the park by foot, those to the east are cut off. A trail connecting the park to Main Street, or the Butler County Health Department would provide more access to the rest of the park and the wooded hill on the east side of the park.

KIWANIS BACON MEMORIAL PARK



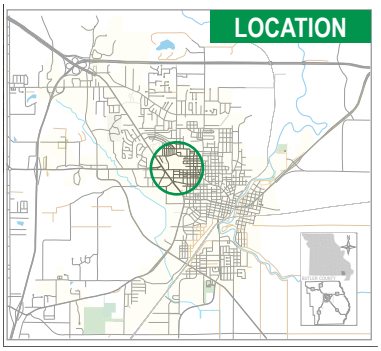
Established in 1948 through the generosity of Carrie Turner, Kiwanis Bacon Memorial Park honors her late husband David P. Bacon and their son, Ray Bacon, a charter member of the Poplar Bluff Kiwanis Club. Centrally located along Hogg Creek, the park is still owned by the Club. It features playgrounds, shelters and areas for sports including a football field, baseball-softball field and basketball court. The half-mile paved trail that loops within the park is part of the Poplar Bluff Greenway trail system.

FAST FACTS:

OPENED: **1948**
ACRES: **26.45**

PARKING	✓ PAVED AND GRAVEL ACCESS OFF PERSHING ST. AND HARPER ST.
PLAYGROUND	✓ ALL-INCLUSIVE
PAVILIONS	✓ TOTAL: 4
TRAILS	✓ MILES: 0.52 PAVED LOOP
RESTROOMS	✓ WALKING TRAIL, BALLFIELD
FEATURES	✓ BASKETBALL COURT
	✓ FOOTBALL FIELD
	✓ SOFTBALL FIELD

LOCATION



ORIGIN & LAND USE

Kiwanis Bacon Memorial Park spans approximately 26 acres between West Pershing and West Harper streets, bordering Hogg Creek and adjacent to the Poplar Bluff Middle School. The land was originally privately owned and was donated in 1948 by Carrie Turner to the Poplar Bluff Kiwanis Club. Turner made this gift in honor of her late husband, David P. Bacon, and her son, Fay "Ray" Bacon, who had been a charter member of the Kiwanis Club. Prior to becoming a park, the tract was open ground likely used for agriculture or left fallow; after the donation it quickly became a public green space. Kiwanis, a civic service organization, took stewardship of the land, and to this day the club retains ownership while partnering with the City for its use.



ESTABLISHMENT & KEY FIGURES

The park's creation is closely tied to the Kiwanis Club's mission of serving children. Carrie Turner's donation established the park as a living memorial to her loved ones. The park was named "Bacon Memorial" to honor the Bacon family legacy. Over the decades, Kiwanis members have remained key figures in the park's development. For example, they have organized an annual Pancake Day fundraiser for over 80 years, channeling proceeds into park improvements and youth programs. These efforts recently funded an all-inclusive playground so children of all abilities can play together on safe, rubberized surfaces. This reflects the club's ongoing commitment to making Kiwanis Bacon Park a haven for community youth.

KIWANIS BACON MEMORIAL PARK



KIWANIS BACON MEMORIAL PARK



Carrie Turner (1865-1955) moved to Poplar Bluff in 1897 with her husband David P. Bacon (1860-1907) who was president of the State Bank when he died. Their son, Fay D. Bacon (1886-1947) was a charter member of the Kiwanis Club. Turner, whose second husband Willis died in 1940, was an active community leader, including the public library as one of the organizers.





Trail



Shelter



Pavilion #1



Pavilion #2



Pavilion #3



Pavilion KN

NOTABLE DEVELOPMENTS

In its early years, the park featured basic amenities for family recreation. Over time it grew to include sports fields and trails. A half-mile paved loop trail now winds through the park, forming part of the Poplar Bluff Greenway trail system that connects the park northward to Hendrickson Park. The park's flat lands along Hogg Creek have been home to a softball field and a youth football field for many years. On the east side, a prominent hill overlooks the grounds, and Kiwanis plans have proposed adding a small amphitheater into the hillside. Over the past 25 years, Kiwanis-driven upgrades included new playground equipment (with a universally accessible design) and additions like a disc golf course and picnic pavilions. Notably, the park does not have permanent restrooms since it began as a club-owned facility, but it continues to adapt to community needs with planned improvements such as expanded parking and better trail connectivity.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

For over 75 years, the park has served as a beloved recreational hub on Poplar Bluff's west side. Generations of families have enjoyed its playgrounds, ballgames, and community events. The Kiwanis Club's stewardship has meant that the park is a living memorial that continually "fills a void" in the community by providing safe play opportunities for children. The park's dedication to inclusivity – from its founding in memory of local citizens to its modern accessible playground – illustrates the cultural impact of civic groups in Poplar Bluff. Kiwanis Bacon Park stands as a testament to how a personal legacy donation in 1948 grew into a vibrant public space, fostering community, honoring local history, and giving children and families a place to create lasting memories.

KIWANIS BACON MEMORIAL PARK



FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The partnership between the Kiwanis Club and Park Department to maintain the park will continue and shape its future use. Among the improvements that should be considered include:

SPLASH PAD This feature provides a water play experience for anyone with or without the ability to swim. It allows residents a place to cool off without traveling to Hillcrest Park or the river.

HOGG CREEK RESTORATION At times of heavy rain, the creek can become a fast-moving stream that floods portions of the park. Stream restoration involves a variety of techniques aimed at improving the health and functionality of streams by addressing issues like erosion, habitat loss and pollution.

SOUTH PARKING UPGRADE A reconfigured entrance off Harper Street would create a better four-way stop with Ida Street. Expanding and paving this area will provide access to the Poplar Bluff Greenway trail and offer enough parking when the park hosts larger events. Adding striping to the north parking lot could also help provide more spaces due to the odd shape that creates confusion.

AMPHITHEATER A hill already creates a large grassy area that slopes toward a concrete building that features a flat 20-by-40 foot roof with railing on three sides to create a stage-like area. An amphitheater could easily be created with the addition of a structure on the stage and some lighting.

BASKETBALL COURTS The current court is one of the most popular areas of the park and accounts for two of five outdoor hoops in the park system. The concrete pad is showing its age and smaller than a full court — approximately 10 feet too small in both length and width. Extending the width would provide space for a full 3-point line. Adding an additional full or half court would also be beneficial.

PARK ENTRANCES The park is current disconnected to the neighborhood to the east other than a small, well worn footpath off 13th Street between Mulberry and Apple streets. Opening this area so that residents can walk or ride their bicycles into the park here, as well as Hickory Street to the north, will provide better access. A footbridge over Hogg Creek would be required to connect the park to Hickory Street. A sidewalk along Pershing Street will also connect the neighborhood to the north and provide a safer walking/biking path over Hogg Creek to connect the neighborhood to the east.

McLANE PARK



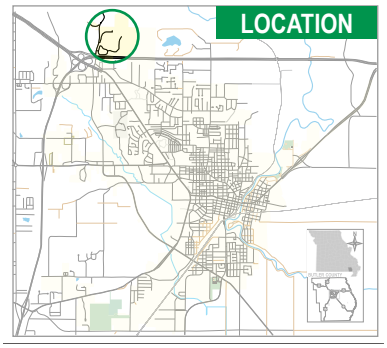
This park features three distinct areas with a community park in the south that features a 1.33-mile paved walking trail, a five-field sports complex for baseball and softball along with covered pickleball courts, and a 63.5-acre natural area on the northern end of the property. The park is named for Dr. Jerry F. McLane who donated in the land and served on the Park Board. The sports complex opened in 2002 while an all-inclusive playground is planned. The park is also part of the Shelby Trail.

FAST FACTS:

OPENED: **2001**
ACRES: **124.29**

PARKING	✓ PAVED
	ACCESS OFF HIGHWAY W
PLAYGROUND	✓ ALL-INCLUSIVE
PAVILIONS	✕ TWO GAZEBOS
TRAILS	✓ MILES: 1.33 PAVED
RESTROOMS	✓ BALLFIELD, WALKING TRAIL
FEATURES	✓ FIVE BALLFIELDS
	✓ CONCESSION STAND
	✓ PICKLEBALL COURTS
	✓ SMALL POND

LOCATION



ORIGIN & LAND USE

McLane Park is a sprawling park on the northwestern edge of Poplar Bluff, established in the early 2000s through the philanthropy of Dr. Jerry F. McLane. A prominent local physician and businessman, Dr. McLane owned a large tract of land off Highway W that was once the Poplar Bluff Country Club, which he generously donated to the city for a park in 1997. Dr. McLane had a reputation for supporting youth and community initiatives – for instance, he was instrumental in starting the Poplar Bluff Showdown high school basketball tournament and backing the local college's athletics. In declining health in the late 1990s (he died in 1998 at age 63), he arranged for this land gift as part of his legacy to the city. The park, comprising roughly 65–70 acres initially, was named in his honor to recognize his contribution. When it officially opened in 2001, it instantly became one of the largest parks in Poplar Bluff. Over time, additional adjacent land was acquired or incorporated, and by the mid-2020s, park planning documents list McLane Park at 124 acres.



DEVELOPMENT OF PARK

McLane Park was designed as a multi-zone park, and today it features three distinct areas:

COMMUNITY PARK (Southern area): Near the main entrance off Highway W, the city developed a community park area with broad appeal. A highlight here is the 1.33-mile paved walking trail that winds in a loop. This trail encircles open lawns and a small pond, providing scenic exercise paths. Alongside the trail, the city installed benches, fitness stations and lighting for evening walks.

McLANE PARK


Natural Area
Storage Building (NEW)
320'
< Overhead Lines >
Concession / Restroom
300'
3
Covered Team Bench
2
300'
4
Bleachers: 2 per side
300'
1
5
Scoreboards (5)
300'
N
200 FEET
< MO Highway W >
Parking
NOT PAVED
Maintenance Shed
Gazebo
Restroom
Parking
40 SPOTS
1 ACC
Parking
324 SPOTS
7 ACC
Natural Area
Creek
Pond
Trail
Pickleball Courts (NEW)
Playground (FUTURE SITE)
Bench
Water Fountain
Entrance
Bench
Shelby Trail
TRAIL PATHS
PARKING
PARKING
PARKING
DISTANCES
Large loop (RED) = 1.10 miles
Small loop (BLUE) = 0.27 miles
Shelby Trail (GREEN)
to Highway 60, back = 0.55 miles
to Barron Rd, back = 0.95 miles
N
200 FEET

McLANE PARK

Also in this southern zone is the new site for Robert's Adventure Playground, an all-inclusive playground in memory of Robert Rowland. This modern playground offers accessible play equipment for children of all abilities. Restroom facilities serve this area, and a large paved parking lot off Highway W accommodates visitors.

SPORTS COMPLEX (Central area): One of the earliest developments in McLane Park was a five-field sports complex for youth baseball and softball. Completed in 2002, this complex has fields arranged in a cloverleaf with a central concession stand. The complex allowed the city to host tournaments and relieved pressure from older fields at Whiteley and Hillcrest parks. In addition, a set of covered pickleball courts was constructed and opened in 2025. pickleball, which had grown very popular, now has dedicated indoor/outdoor style courts at McLane, drawing daily enthusiasts. The sports zone is supported by the concession/restroom building and plenty of paved parking. Adjacent to the pickleball courts, the park plan calls for adding basketball courts as well, aiming to create a comprehensive sports destination.

NATURAL AREA (Northern area): Dr. McLane's donated land included extensive woodlands and wetlands. his

area (over 60 acres) was left largely untouched initially. Plans have been set to develop gentle nature trails hrough here – a 0.5-mile loop is proposed that would connect to the main paved trail, forming a larger circuit for hikers and runners.







Jerry McLane (1935-1998), originally from Piedmont, was



a Poplar Bluff physician, businessman and community supporter who served on the Park Board. He was Board president when Ozark Ridge Golf Course opened and supported many athletic teams and leagues.

The terrain includes a creek and some low-lying wetland spots, so part of it will remain a nature preserve where wildlife can flourish within city limits. The idea is to balance recreation with conservation here – perhaps adding interpretive signs about local flora and fauna but keeping it primarily for passive use.

COMMUNITY USE & EVENTS

Since its opening, McLane Park has become a hub of activity in Poplar Bluff. The sports complex host numerous leagues and tournaments, including regional baseball tournaments and softball championships, which bring teams from surrounding areas. The walking trail and future playground make the park a daily destination for families, seniors, and fitness enthusiasts – one can see stroller-pushing parents, joggers and groups of friends walking laps at almost any time.

IMPACT & LEGACY

McLane Park stands as a living legacy of its namesake's generosity and love for the community. The donation of such a large parcel enabled Poplar Bluff to create a park unlike any it had before – one that could serve a wide array of recreational needs in one place. The fact that the park carries Dr. McLane's name keeps his memory alive while visitors may not know him personally, but they benefit daily from his gift. Those who did know Dr. McLane recall that he "helped promote youth activities" and always looked for ways to give back. Fittingly, he park that bears his name is heavily focused on youth sports and activities, from ballgames to playground fun. The park has also spurred growth in its vicinity — new homes, a church and a school have popped up or expanded not far from its borders, drawn by the amenity of a nearby park. In essence, McLane Park has shifted Poplar Bluff's center of gravity a bit northwestward, encouraging the city's expansion in a planned, livable way. Culturally, it shows the power of public-private partnership – the city provided development and maintenance, but it was a private citizen's initiative that made it possible. As one of the most frequented parks in town, McLane Park is a daily reminder of how one person's foresight can enrich an entire community for generations.

McLANE PARK

FUTURE PROJECTS



Nature Area Trail Create a trail through wooded area for trail walking/running with 0.5-mile loop connected to a 1-mile loop.

Ballfield Upgrades New lighting, bleachers, shade canopy.

Splash Pad Create water feature near new Playground.



Robert's Adventure Playground Project planned.



Parking Expand and pave parking off Highway W to create easy access for trail - northern trail head of Shelby Trail.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

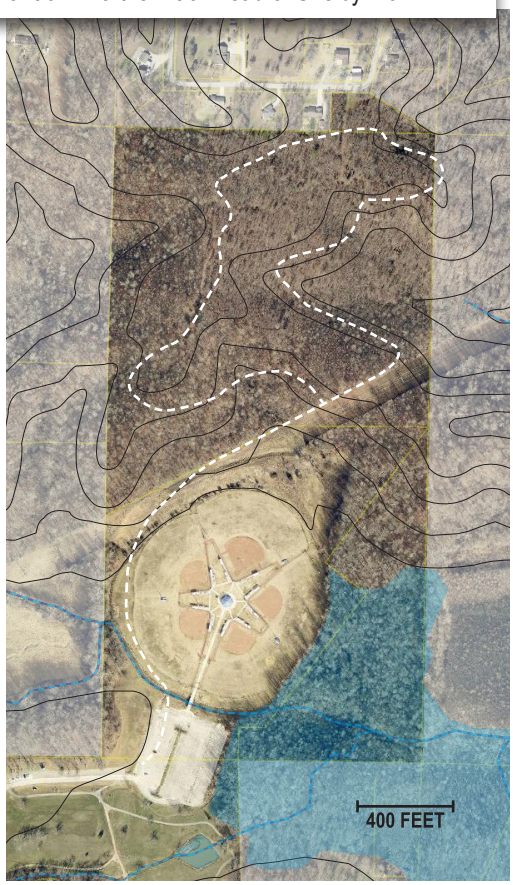
EXPAND PARKING Creating a paved parking lot off Highway W, currently a gravel area, will allow for easier access to the park's walking trail, lowering traffic within the park itself, and creating a northern trail head for the Shelby Trail, which enters the park at the south end and connects with the park's trail. The sports complex parking lot will need to be improved and expanded south in the future in order to provide parking for the planned playground and pickleball court.

SPLASH PAD This feature could be an added amenity, providing a water play experience for children looking to cool off after using the nearby playground.

BASKETBALL COURT There is currently no basketball courts in the park, which could be added near the pickelball courts.

BALLFIELD UPGRADES Future improvements could include netting or fencing, bleachers, lighting, shade canopy among others.

NATURE TRAIL A large part of the park, 60 acres, is not being used due to a lack of access. This is the hilly forest land north of the sports complex. A natural trail could be built from the east side of the sports complex parking lot to this area. The eastern side of the sports complex consists of marsh land making it more difficult to build a trail through this area. The trail could loop up the hill to the north of the sports complex through the woods and join the trail to lead back to the parking lot. The trail will offer an overlook to the sports complex from the hill for a short walk and a longer hike through the wooded hills.



WHITELEY PARK



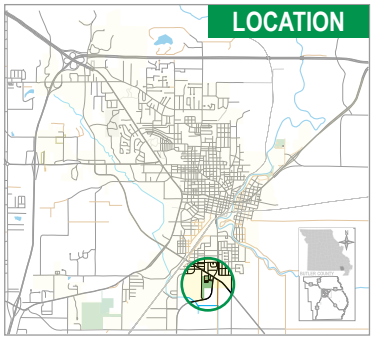
This park has hosted recreational sports for over 65 years since the land was donated by Joe Whiteley and his son Maynard. The longtime home of youth recreational sports, there are two ballfields and nearly 11 acres of soccer fields following the expansion of the park in 2025 and features a concession stand with restrooms and portable bleachers. It also includes playgrounds and pavilions as the only park located on the south side of the city.

FAST FACTS:

OPENED: **1959**
ACRES: **31.70**

PARKING	✓ PAVED / GRAVEL
	ACCESS OFF HIGHWAY 53 OR CHESHIRE BLVD
PLAYGROUND	✓ TOTAL: 2
PAVILIONS	✓ TOTAL: 2
TRAILS	✕ MILES: 0.5 PARKING LOT LOOP
RESTROOMS	✓ AT CONCESSION STAND
FEATURES	✓ SOCCER FIELDS
	✓ CONCESSION STAND
	✓ TWO BALLFIELDS
	✓ SAND VOLLEYBALL COURTS

LOCATION



ORIGIN & LAND USE

Whiteley Park is a long-standing sports complex on Poplar Bluff's south side, dating back to 1959 when the land was first dedicated for public recreation. The park originated from a generous land donation by local residents Joe Whiteley and his son, Maynard. The Whiteley family owned a significant piece of open land in south Poplar Bluff, an area that at the time had few city parks. Wanting to provide athletic facilities for youth and the community, Joe and Maynard conveyed approximately 20 acres (initially) to the City. In recognition, the new park was named Whiteley Park. Following the donation, through the early 1960s the city began developing the site into playable ballfields. By the mid-1960s, Whiteley Park was known as the home of local youth baseball and softball leagues, effectively serving as Poplar Bluff's version of a traditional "sports complex" decades before that term was commonplace.



EXPANSION & FACILITIES

A pivotal improvement for the complex was the construction of a concession stand with restrooms near the ballfields, which allowed for refreshments and proper facilities during games. The Noon-Day Optimist Club started a soccer league in the spring of 1982, using the practice field at Kiwanis Bacon Park before moving to Whiteley Park ballfields the following year. Working with the Club, the Park Department sought a permanent home for soccer and in 1985, three fields were created at Whiteley Park and named the Frank J. Luecke Soccer Complex. When the complex at McLane Park opened in 2002, the large baseball field at Whiteley was converted into what is now Soccer Field 3.

WHITELEY PARK



WHITELEY PARK

The two smaller ballfields remained for practice. One of these fields is often referred to as "Whiteley Field" and has hosted countless tournaments and even summer league games. The park also features two playgrounds for children – one near the ballfields and another by the soccer area – so that siblings and young spectators have equipment to play on during lengthy sports events. Two pavilions provide shaded picnic spots for families in between games. Over the years, portable bleachers have been added to various fields to accommodate spectators. In the early 2020s, recognizing the park's heavy usage, the city undertook upgrades such as paving more of the parking areas and expanding west to Cheshire Boulevard. New grass was installed on the western fields along Cheshire in 2024 and fencing along the road to catch stray balls are planned. Notably, Whiteley Park remained the only major park on Poplar Bluff's south side for decades, making it incredibly important geographically for balanced city services.



Joe Whiteley (1903-1981) moved here from Berryville, Arkansas and married in 1923. He later operated the Pepsi Cola distributorship for 21 years and served on the Park Board for several years, including as president.







SPORTS & EVENTS

Whiteley Park has been synonymous with organized youth sports for over 60 years. Little League and other youth baseball leagues have called Whiteley home since the 1960s. Many residents recall summer nights under the lights at Whiteley, with parents cheering and the concession stand grilling hamburgers. Championship games and all-star practices often took place on its diamonds. In the late 1970s, when softball leagues formed, Whiteley Park also accommodated those, sometimes with temporary fencing adjustments. Moving into the 1980s and beyond, the explosion of youth soccer meant every Saturday in the fall, the park's soccer fields would be filled with dozens of teams playing simultaneously, with colorful jerseys dotting the landscape. The Butler County Soccer League and high school baseball and soccer teams have used Whiteley. Whiteley Park has hosted the Butler County Fair's rodeo and tractor pull on a portion of its grounds a few times historically, when scheduling allowed and before Clinton Park was available. Additionally, the park facilities have made it ideal for large community events and fundraiser.



COMMUNITY IMPACT

Whiteley Park has arguably touched more of Poplar Bluff's residents than any other park, simply by the volume of youth and adult sports participants who have cycled through it. It is often affectionately referred to as the place, "where Poplar Bluff learned to play ball." The generosity of the Whiteley family in 1959 created a ripple effect – providing a space that kept generations of young people engaged in healthy activities and out of trouble. Socially, it has been a melting pot with children from all backgrounds coming together on teams, forging friendships and community connections that transcend neighborhoods. For the south side of Poplar Bluff, Whiteley Park is a source of neighborhood pride and identity, being "their" big park in a way. The presence of such a facility also encouraged development in that part of town. Whiteley Park set the template for multi-use sports parks, paving the way for later projects like McLane Park. Few places capture the nostalgic essence of small-town American life like Whiteley Park on a summer evening – the crack of a bat, kids chasing a soccer ball, families on picnic blankets between games – it's a living piece of Poplar Bluff's social fabric, made possible by a family's contribution and sustained by community passion.

WHITELEY PARK

FUTURE PROJECTS



Walking Trail
Create a 0.33-mile walking trail around ballfields.

Basketball Court
Add court near parking lot or near sand volleyball courts.

Move Road, Create Parking
Create a chicane for Cheshire with a roundabout to slow traffic and create new entrance into a new parking lot. Connect the new parking lot with the existing lot, reconfigure parking spaces to create drop-off zone in front of plaza at the center of new walkway to existing fields to the east and new fields to the north and south. Create a 'championship field' in this area with a natural hill seating for viewing.

Concession Stand
Relocate concession stand and restrooms to more central location. Create entrance plaza for team meetings and pickup.



FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

EXPAND PARKING The addition of more soccer fields along Cheshire will require more parking. There are currently 190 paved parking spots with an additional gravel space that connects to Cheshire. Creating more parking opens up the eastern lot for residents who want to enjoy the pavilion and playground side of the park. Additional parking on the west side of the park also opens up the current gravel area for future development of a concession stand and provides an alternate exit for the park.

ROAD CHICANE Cheshire Boulevard was built to create space for more businesses in the area. Now that much of the space is owned by the City, it cuts through the park and creates a dangerous proximity to the soccer fields. By relocating the road with a chicane, it slows traffic and creates a new entrance to the park with a roundabout into the new parking lot.

CONCESSION STAND With the westward expansion of the park and additional soccer fields along Cheshire, the concession stand should be moved to a more central location. Using the current gravel parking area for this purpose, while creating an area for post-game snacks or meeting place, will create a central hub of the expanding park.

BASKETBALL COURT There is currently no basketball courts in the park, which could be added near the parking lot on the east side of the park, or near the sand volleyball courts.

FLOODING IMPACT



WALKING TRAIL Create a loop round the ballfields and another along Cheshire to connect the soccer fields with a spur to the existing fields.

DRAINAGE UPGRADES The ditch that runs north-south in the middle of the park (blue line on above map) provides drainage but also leaves standing water leading to mosquitoes. Ways to keep the water moving south to avoid standing water should be determined. The park is protected from flooding from the Black River by Highway 142 to the south, however, the lower parts of the northeast corner of the park can see some minor flooding when the river reaches major flooding stage.

OZARK RIDGE GOLF COURSE



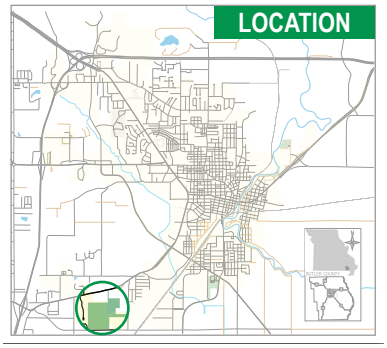
This 18-hole championship course features large bent grass greens, protective bunkers and tree-lined fairways. The course was created in 1981 featuring nine holes while the second nine holes were developed in 1998. It hosts league play, tournaments and special events. The 6,260-yard, par-70 course is open all year, weather permitting, and features a driving range, practice green and a clubhouse with concessions and a fully stocked pro shop.

FAST FACTS:

OPENED: **1981**
ACRES: **157.15**

PARKING	✓ PAVED
	ACCESS OFF CRAVENS ROAD
PLAYGROUND	×
PAVILIONS	× DECK AT CLUBHOUSE
CART PATH	✓ MILES: 4.4 PAVED
RESTROOMS	✓ CLUBHOUSE, 2 ON COURSE
FEATURES	✓ DRIVING RANGE
	✓ PRACTICE GREEN
	✓ PRO SHOP
	✓ CONCESSIONS
WEBSITE	OZARKRIDGEGOLF.COM

LOCATION



ORIGIN & LAND USE

Ozark Ridge Golf Course is Poplar Bluff's city-owned 18-hole facility, with a history dating back to 1981. Before Ozark Ridge, the only golf in town was at a private country club, and city leaders wanted to provide a public course to broaden access. In 1980-81, the city acquired roughly 140 acres of rolling land south of town off Cravens Road and developed a course initially known simply as the Poplar Bluff Municipal Golf Course. The course was designed by Edmund B. Ault, a noted golf course architect, and opened for play in 1981 with nine holes. Those first nine holes featured a classic parkland style with several ponds and sand bunkers integrated into the design. For the rest of the 1980s, the course operated as a 9-hole venue and was very popular, serving local golfers of all skill levels and hosting the Poplar Bluff High School golf team's practices and matches. The city's investment paid off quickly with the course hosting tournaments that brought people to the city while



the high school team won state championships in 1980, '81, '88, '95, '96 and 2024.

EXPANSION & NAME CHANGE

In the late 1990s, demand and vision aligned to expand the course. Using additional adjacent land, the city commissioned a second nine holes. In July 1998, the new back nine opened, transforming the facility into a full 18-hole course. With this expansion came a rebranding – the course was officially renamed "Ozark Ridge Golf Course" in 1998. The new name highlighted the region's Ozark foothills character and gave the course a distinct identity. The back nine, also designed in line with Ault's plans or under his firm's guidance, introduced different challenges — it has two large ponds affecting multiple holes (Nos. 10-13) and elevation changes that offer scenic views of the wooded surroundings. The combined 18-hole layout plays to a par of 70, stretching 6,260 yards from the back tees. To support the larger course, amenities were upgraded with a larger parking lot that was paved. The expansion firmly established Ozark Ridge as a premier municipal course in Southeast Missouri.

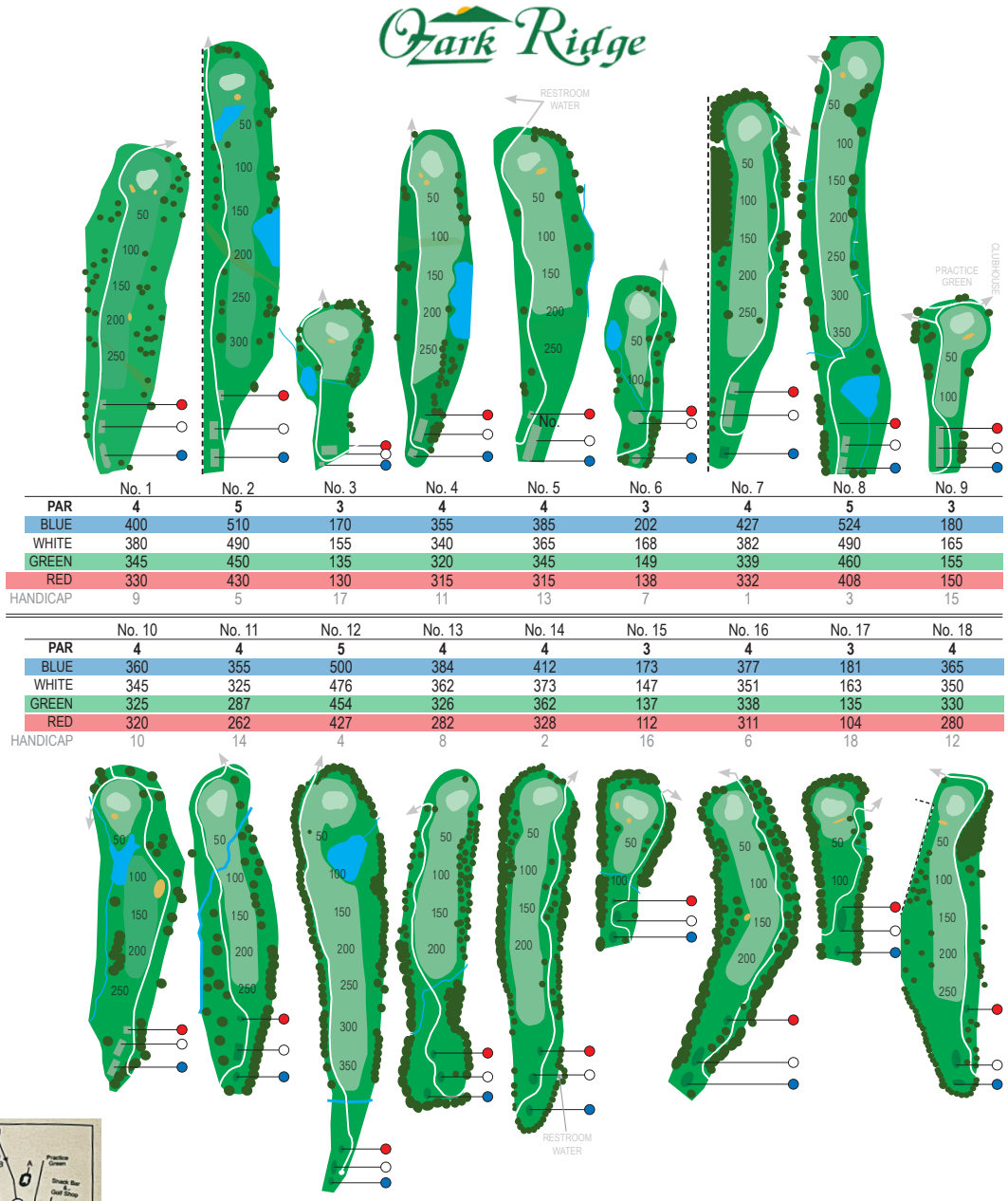
OZARK RIDGE GOLF COURSE



OZARK RIDGE GOLF COURSE

NOTABLE EVENTS

Over the years, Ozark Ridge has been the venue for numerous golf tournaments and community events. The Poplar Bluff High School Mules golf team calls it home and the course has hosted district and sectional high school tournaments regularly. Each year, the course holds the Poplar Bluff City Championship, a tournament open to local amateurs that has crowned the best golfer in town. Another highlight is the annual Four-Ball Tournament, attracting golfers from around the region for a weekend of competitive play. Charity tournaments are also held here hosted for a variety of organizations. The wide open front nine fairways have even doubled as a cross country course on occasion – the high school has hosted cross country meets running through the fairways and roughs when the schedule allowed. Social events are common too. The clubhouse deck is a popular spot for Chamber of Commerce mixers or wedding receptions with a view of the sunset over the greens.

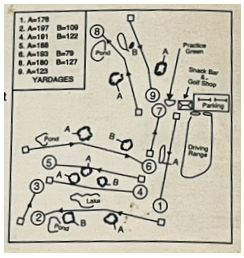


	No. 1	No. 2	No. 3	No. 4	No. 5	No. 6	No. 7	No. 8	No. 9
PAR	4	5	3	4	4	3	4	5	3
BLUE	400	510	170	355	385	202	427	524	180
WHITE	380	490	155	340	365	168	382	490	165
GREEN	345	450	135	320	345	149	339	460	155
RED	330	430	130	315	315	138	332	408	150
HANDICAP	9	5	17	11	13	7	1	3	15

	No. 10	No. 11	No. 12	No. 13	No. 14	No. 15	No. 16	No. 17	No. 18
PAR	4	4	5	4	4	3	4	3	4
BLUE	360	355	500	384	412	173	377	181	365
WHITE	345	325	476	362	373	147	351	163	350
GREEN	325	287	454	326	362	137	338	135	330
RED	320	262	427	282	328	112	311	104	280
HANDICAP	10	14	4	8	2	16	6	18	12

COMMUNITY ROLE

Ozark Ridge has significantly impacted Poplar Bluff's recreational and social landscape. As a public course, it introduced the game of golf to many who might not have had access otherwise. The city offered youth clinics and summer golf programs that produced talented players and avid lifelong golfers. The course's afford ability and openness broke down social barriers that once accompanied golf. Culturally, Ozark Ridge became a place where friendships were formed and retirees form their regular morning foursomes.



A scorecard prior to the expansion of Ozark Ridge shows the layout of the course at the time.

In maintenance and improvements, the City has kept pace. The cart paths have been extended and paved (covering over 4 miles around the course), new bridges and drainage systems were installed to improve playability and bunkers have been renovated over time to modern standards. By the 2020, however, the original 1981 clubhouse showed its age. A new deck overlooking the first tee was rebuilt in 2022. The comprehensive parks plan calls for replacing the aging clubhouse with a new building that would overlook the practice green and better serve both golfers and users of the new Leist Park to the north. This indicates the city's commitment to keeping Ozark Ridge a centerpiece of recreation. In essence, Ozark Ridge has grown from a humble 9-hole course to an 18-hole regional draw, all while remaining a friendly neighborhood course at heart. For Poplar Bluff, it's not just a place to play golf, but a landscaped parkland where community members gather – whether for a round of golf, a charity event, or even just a quiet lunch at the clubhouse. The course's tree-lined fairways and rolling "ridges" embody the local geography and hospitality, making it a source of pride for the community.

OZARK RIDGE GOLF COURSE



Leist Park Development The new park next to the golf course will offer a new entrance from Westwood.

See plan for Leist Park

Clubhouse Replace aging clubhouse with new building overlooking practice green, or renovate interior of current building.



Parking Lot Expand current lot for more cars to access Leist Park and connect with new entrance to Westwood.

Course Upgrades to consider:

- Planting new trees;
- Drainage issues;
- Cart path concrete;
- Bridges (5);
- Tee boxes;
- Sand bunkers (18);

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

PARKING The plan to create a new entrance from Westwood (Business 67) will reconfigure the parking lot at Ozark Ridge. It currently features 73 spots, which is not enough to accommodate a large tournament. For example, a four-person scramble with 18 teams would feature 72 players.

DRAINAGE Issues with water draining across the fairway on Nos. 2 and 4 should be addressed along with other areas of concern so the course can handle rain that causes short-term flooding.

CLUBHOUSE Built in 1981, the clubhouse could use a renovation or replacement. The deck was replaced in 2022 and the building does an adequate job of serving the needs of the course but a plan needs to be made to either renovate or replace before it turns 50.

GOLF HISTORY IN PB

Golf in Poplar Bluff is a nearly century-old tradition.

The first nine-hole course opened June 10, 1928, and city residents have been playing non-stop ever since, finding success in tournaments at all levels and creating a lasting legacy.

Poplar Bluff High School has won seven state golf championships, ranking third among all schools and most by a public school. Poplar Bluff players have won the state amateur, qualified for the U.S. Amateur, U.S. Open and played in numerous amateur and professional tournaments. The Mules golf program was inducted into the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame along with the Godwin family featuring champions Buddy, Ben and Bobby.

POPLAR BLUFF COUNTRY CLUB City residents started the club on May 20, 1925, but their efforts to build a golf course north of town along Highway 67 were paused following the devastating tornado that destroyed downtown two years later. The nine-hole course opened with sand greens in 1928 and the club operated until the group disbanded in January 1937 following the opening of a new country club south of the city. It later reorganized in 1938, while the course remained open under course superintendent Pres Dennis, who died in October 1940.

Under the management of Ira Stahl the course was briefly expanded to 18 holes but it closed in July 1943 when the land was sold to Ray Sanner for timber. He operated the site as a nine-hole public course in 1948 while the Jaycees took over from 1951-55. Sanner sold the club in 1958 to Allen and Grace Garner who added grass greens in 1959. Dr. Jerry McLane purchased the club in 1987 and it closed in 1995 before he donated the land to the Park Department.

WESTWOOD HILLS A second country club opened south of the city limits on Highway 67.

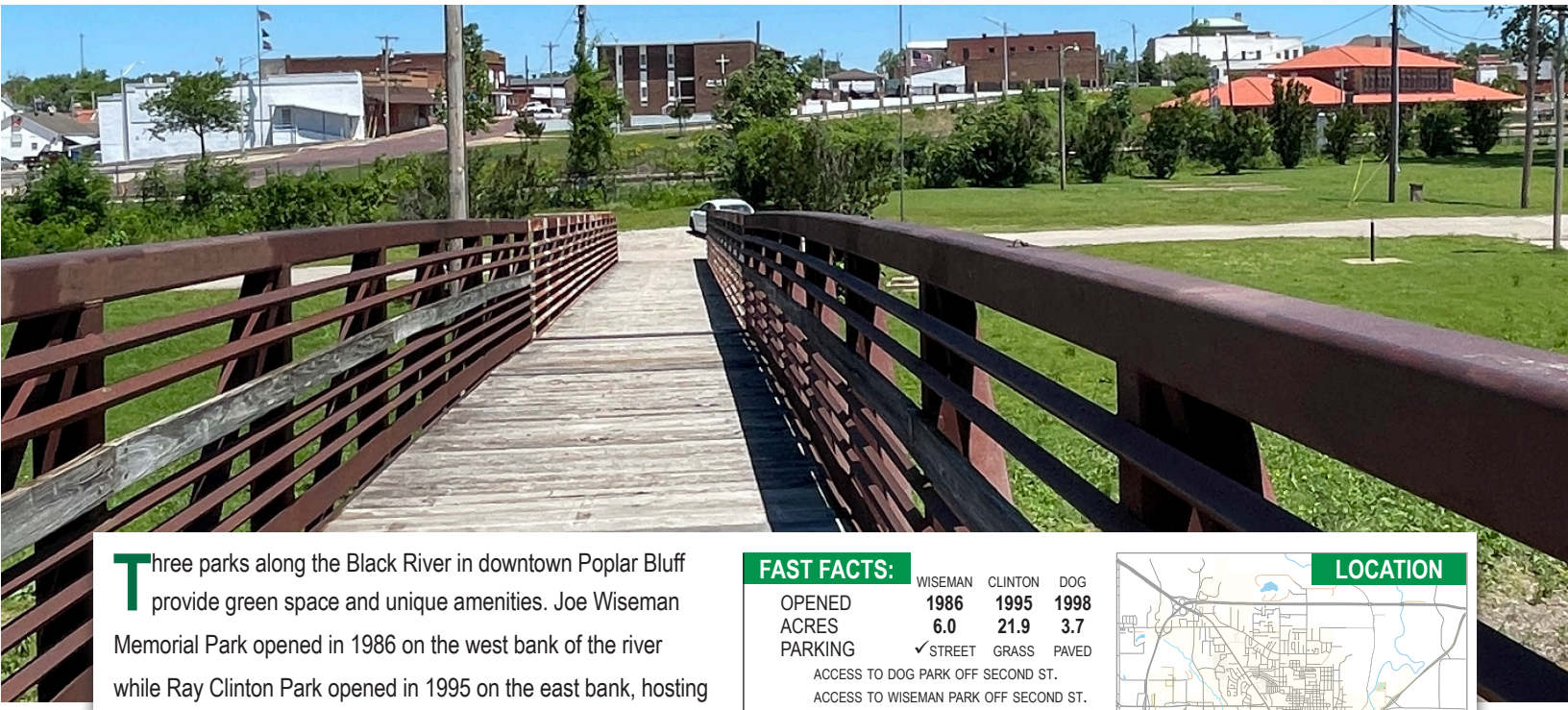
Westwood Hills Country Club opened on June 17, 1937 with a par-36, nine-hole course featuring hardpan fairways, unmowed rough and sand greens. The club featured 60 charter members after attempts failed to purchase the Country Club, which at the time only had six holes. Instead, they purchased 120 acres for $2,100 and the first nine holes were designed by Homer Herpel, a golf architect from St. Louis, for $150.

The first grass putting surface didn't appear at Westwood Hills until August 1951. Only one hole — No. 9 — featured a grass green until the rest were built in 1957. Sand greens, which were much smaller than the putting greens, were oiled to keep the sand from blowing out.

Westwood Hills grew to 18 holes in 1968 and there were renovations to the course in 1977 and '94. In 2001, a nine-month rebuilding of the greens was needed when a 6-inch rain was followed by 100-degree heat, destroying the Bermuda grass. Roger Null designed the layout and Bill Lowery of Alton, Illinois, built it.

Each spring the course holds a two-day tournament featuring the top amateurs from the region since 1947. Westwood Hills has also won the annual SEMO Cup 14 times since 1990, most of any club.

DOWNTOWN RIVER PARKS



Three parks along the Black River in downtown Poplar Bluff provide green space and unique amenities. Joe Wiseman Memorial Park opened in 1986 on the west bank of the river while Ray Clinton Park opened in 1995 on the east bank, hosting festivals, rodeos and drag/pull races. Founders Footbridge over the river connects the two parks. The Downtown Dog Park, previously Smiley Park, features two fenced areas with obstacles for dogs to showcase their skills since 2018.

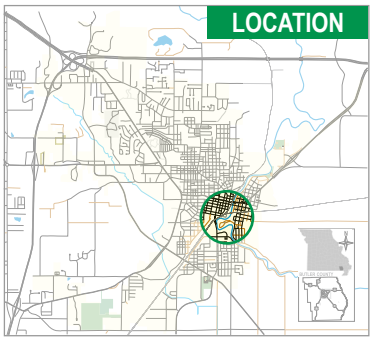
FAST FACTS:

	WISEMAN	CLINTON	DOG
OPENED	1986	1995	1998
ACRES	6.0	21.9	3.7
PARKING	✓STREET	GRASS	PAVED

ACCESS TO DOG PARK OFF SECOND ST.
ACCESS TO WISEMAN PARK OFF SECOND ST.
ACCESS TO CLINTON PARK OFF B STREET

RESTROOMS
FEATURES
- ✗ NOT AVAILABLE
- ✓ BLACK RIVER ACCESS
- ✓ RODEO ARENA - CLINTON
- ✓ DRAG-PULL TRACK - CLINTON
- ✓ BASKETBALL - DOG PARK

LOCATION



WISEMAN PARK

Officially the Joe Wiseman Memorial Park, this compact park on the west side of the Black River provides green space in downtown Poplar Bluff. It was established in 1986 and named in memory of Joe Wiseman, a respected local figure who had previously owned the land as part of his business. In the mid-1980s, as downtown revitalization efforts began, the idea to create a green space on the west bank of the river took shape. By naming it after Joe Wiseman, the city provided a lasting tribute, ensuring his name stayed tied to public service and community well-being.



LAYOUT & FEATURES

Wiseman Park is relatively small (6 acres), straddling a piece of land between South Second Street and the Black River. One of its defining features is that it serves as the western anchor of the Founders Bridge, the pedestrian footbridge that connects downtown Poplar Bluff across the river to Ray Clinton Park on the east side. The park's location was intentionally chosen to be the landing for this bridge, which was completed in 1996. As such, at Wiseman Park you find the entrance ramp to the bridge amid landscaped surroundings. In terms of amenities, Wiseman Park is modest, it has a gravel and grass parking area accessible from South Second, a few picnic tables and benches for people to sit by the river, and a small open lawn. There is also a walking path that loops around the park's perimeter, though quite short in length. Because the park lies in a floodplain, no permanent buildings are on site. Trees and flowerbeds, some maintained with the help of downtown groups, dot the park, making it an inviting green patch in the urban landscape.

DOWNTOWN RIVER PARKS



DOWNTOWN RIVER PARKS

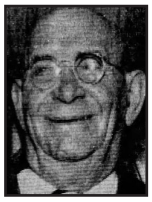
ROLE IN DOWNTOWN

Wiseman Park's creation was art of re-stitching downtown Poplar Bluff after years of neglect. It introduced a bit of nature and leisure space downtown and also provided a natural connection to new development across the river. The Founders Bridge project that it anchors was a significant event – chaired by community members in 1996, it was called the "Founders Bridge" and funded by community donations. Once the bridge opened, Wiseman Park saw increased foot traffic, as people could park downtown, enjoy Wiseman, then walk over to Clinton Park for fairs or rodeos, and come back. Over the years, Wiseman Park has been used for a number of community events in its own right. It has served as the gathering point for the Butler County Fair and downtown festival events. At times, the Butler County Fair has extended some attractions into Wiseman Park, such as setting up petting zoos or small exhibits there to draw downtown visitors across the bridge to the main fairgrounds at Clinton Park. Moreover, Wiseman Park has been eyed as a potential site for a permanent Butler County Fair facility — local leaders have discussed building a pole barn there to give the fair a home base downtown that's out of the floodway but close enough to use the park land. The idea is that Wiseman Park could house fair displays or a farmers market structure, enhancing its use.

IMPACT & SIGNIFICANCE

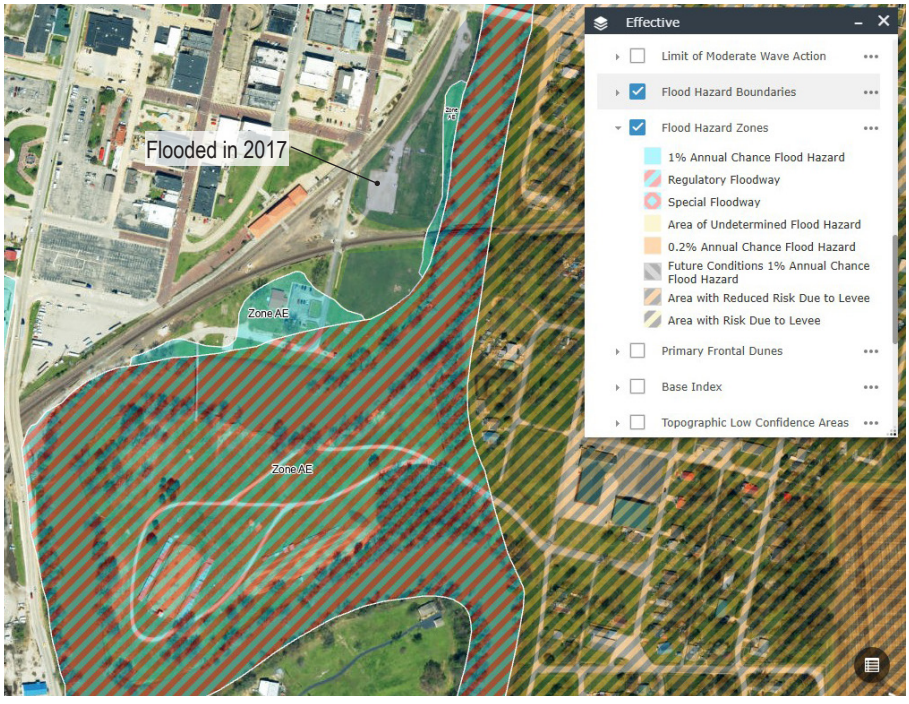
Although Wiseman Park is small, its impact is tied to its strategic location and memorial purpose. As a memorial, it has kept alive the name of Joe Wiseman for nearly four decades; even if newer generations don't know who he was, the name "Wiseman" on local maps and in conversations stands as a quiet testament to a citizen of Poplar Bluff. The park gave the west side of the riverfront an identity and a much-needed recreational outlet, especially important in a part of town that historically was working-class and lacked yards or play space. The connectivity it provides (through the footbridge) physically linked two halves of Poplar Bluff that were divided by the river, symbolizing unity. Additionally, Wiseman Park showcases how even a relatively small park can play a key role in urban revitalization. Culturally, one could say Wiseman Park and the Founders Bridge together helped "re-center" Poplar Bluff, making the river a focal point of beautification rather than a barrier. For community members, the park offers a scenic view of the Black River and a place to reflect or eat lunch outside, adding to the quality of life. There is also a sense of continuity: with Whiteley Park covering the south side, Hillcrest central, Hendrickson north, and now Wiseman downtown, the parks system touches all geographic and demographic parts of the city. Wiseman Park, in essence, is the downtown community's backyard and a living memorial, modest but cherished, maintaining the legacy of civic contribution while serving present-day needs.

Joe Wiseman (1871-1967) came to Poplar Bluff to buy salvage from the tornado in 1927 and ended up staying, starting a similar business on the banks of the Black River. Born in Eastern Russia, he came to the U.S. in 1905 and ran Joe Wiseman & Sons for 15 years until his retirement. His sons Sam and Alex donated the land.



FLOODING IMPACT

All three parks along the Black River in downtown Poplar Bluff have portions that lie within the regulatory floodway, the adjacent land that must be kept clear to allow the base flood to pass without significantly increasing water surface elevations upstream. Flooding starts to impact Clinton Park at 16 feet and there have been 17 flooding events of 16.32 feet or higher since 2000, including three of the four highest crests on record (22.15 feet is the record crest set on March 20, 2008). Not all floods are slow rising, allowing for the removal of equipment, such as May 2017 when the river jumped from 8 to 21 feet in 24 hours.



DOWNTOWN RIVER PARKS



CLINTON PARK

Ray Clinton Park was created as a large multi-use fairground and event park. The land lies along the eastern bank of the Black River, which creates a horseshoe bend across from downtown, and was acquired by the City when the Ray Clinton family donated the land in January 1995. Clinton, who was an Army pilot in the Pacific during World War II, founded a construction company in Sikeston and later owned several local businesses, died in 2011. Once the city secured the acreage, it quickly began constructing facilities to transform it into a fairground-style park.

FACILITIES & DEVELOPMENT

From its inception, Ray Clinton Park was designed to host festivals, rodeos, and motorsport events. By 1995, it featured a large open arena space and a dirt track. A rodeo arena was built to accommodate rodeo shows and equestrian events, complete with pens and bleachers. Adjacent to it, a drag and tractor pull track was laid out, enabling the park to host tractor pulls and mud drags popular in the region. The park's flat expanse also made it ideal for carnivals, circuses, and concerts. Over the years, minimal permanent infrastructure (such as small ticket booths, lighting, and electricity hookups) was added, as the space needed to remain adaptable. One major improvement to access came through the construction of the Founders Footbridge in 1996, which linked Ray Clinton Park to the downtown area across the river. This pedestrian bridge, funded by community donations and led by citizens like Pauline Hearne, made it easy for visitors to walk from downtown Poplar Bluff across the Black River into the park, integrating it with the city's core.

NOTABLE EVENTS

Ray Clinton Park quickly became home to the Butler County Fair and other large regional gatherings. For about two decades, the Butler County Fair Board annually rented the park to host the fair's carnival rides, agricultural exhibits, and demolition derbies. The spacious ayout, however, also attracted attention beyond Poplar Bluff. On September 6, 2004, the park notably served as the venue for a sitting president's campaign rally when President George W. Bush spoke during his re-election tour. The ability to accommodate a presidential visit underscored the park's status as the area's premier large event location. In addition, Ray Clinton Park has hosted countless rodeos, horse shows, and motorsport meets since the late 1990s, cementing its reputation regionally. By the 2010s, as events grew, the city worked on improving access. In 2019, the City Council approved plans to build a direct-access road into the park from C Street, aided by a local church donating land, to better handle the heavy truck and trailer traffic for big events.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Ray Clinton Park's cultural impact on Poplar Bluff has been significant. It revived the tradition of a centralized fairgrounds within the city, bringing in visitors from across Butler County and surrounding areas each year. The park gave the east side a recreational identity and spurred some ancillary developments (like food vendors and improvements in nearby neighborhoods during fair time). The pedestrian connection to downtown via the footbridge helped unify the city's social landscape, allowing downtown businesses to benefit from park events and vice versa. In essence, Ray Clinton Park became a community gathering ground, where everything from rural 4-H exhibits to rock concerts and political rallies could take place. As the city looks to the future, there are ongoing discussions about expanding facilities (for example, constructing a pole barn for fair activities and improving flood resiliency), ensuring that Ray Clinton Park will continue to adapt and serve as a central stage for Poplar Bluff's biggest community moments.

Ray Clinton (1922-2011) moved to Sikeston following his service as a pilot during World War II and started a construction company that built many Poplar Bluff projects, including Valley Plaza and the Twin Towers. He later owned businesses in Butler County including Williamsville Stone.



DOWNTOWN RIVER PARKS



DOWNTOWN DOG PARK

The Downtown Dog Park began life in 1998 under a different name – Smiley Park. The land was donated to the City in August 1993 by the Russell Stover Candies company, which ran the Smiley Container plant there before relocating it to the Industrial Park. The building, which was built in 1911 by the Dalton Adding Machine Company, was considered for a new county jail and later a community center, but the project was later determined to be too expensive and the building was demolished in 1997. The open land was known as Smiley Park — or just part of Wiseman Park — when it opened in 1998 with a playground and basketball hoops. It later hosted a tractor pull or demolition derby in the open land near the river.

CREATING A DOG PARK

In the 2010s, as the downtown area evolved, the Parks Department saw an opportunity to repurpose Smiley Park to meet another community need — an off-leash dog exercise area. The original playground equipment had aged, and the park's size made it suitable for pets. Thus, the park was rebranded as the Downtown Dog Park, and new installations were added specifically for canine visitors. The renovated park now contains two fenced sections (to separate large and small dogs) with agility obstacles and play features for dogs to showcase their skills. Water stations, waste bag dispensers, and seating for pet owners were also incorporated. This conversion was part of a broader trend in the 2000s recognizing the importance of pet-friendly public spaces.

FEATURES & EVENTS

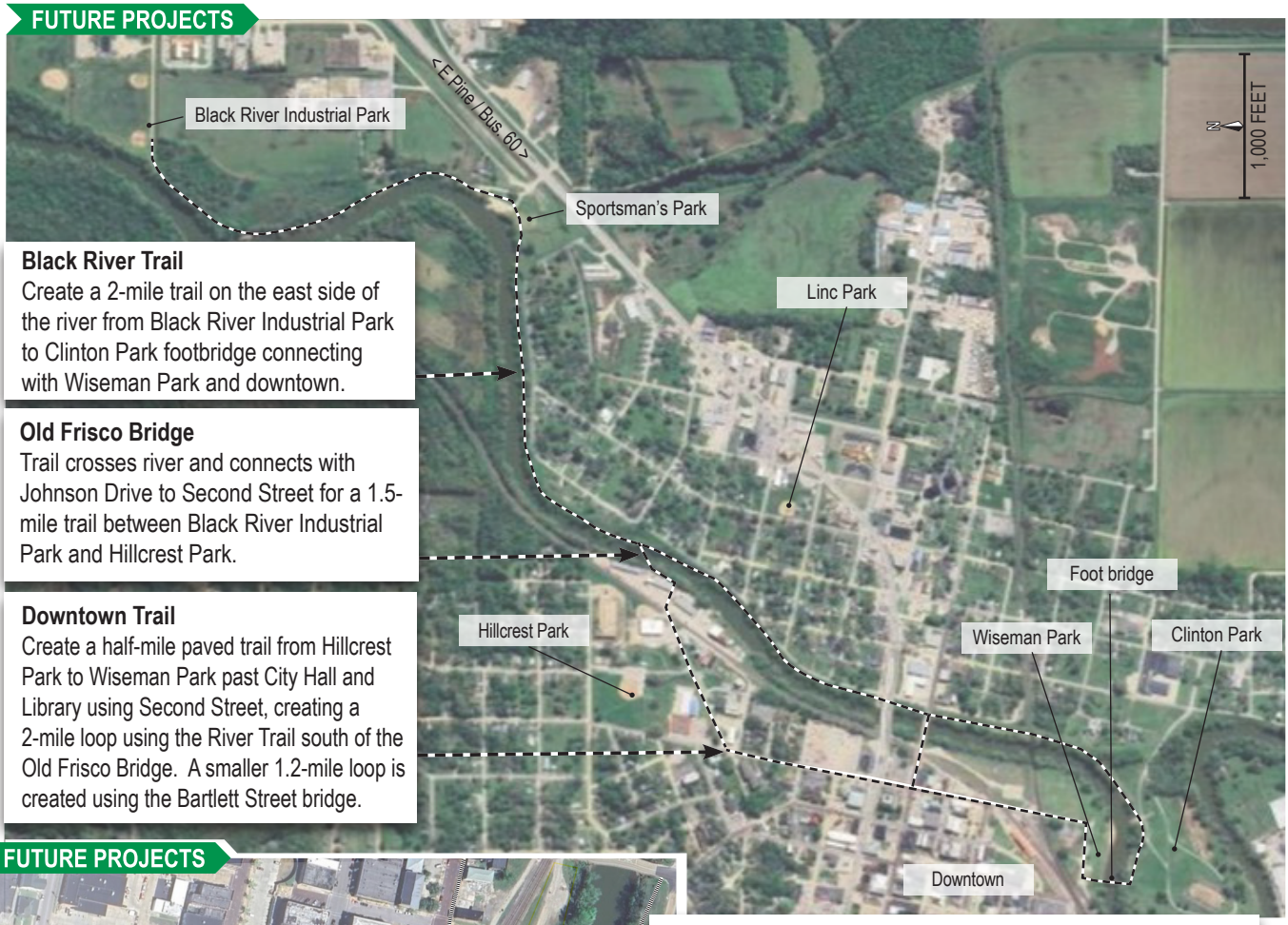
As Smiley Park, the space was a simple neighborhood park used for casual play and as a rest stop for those crossing the footbridge. After becoming the Downtown Dog Park, it quickly gained popularity among dog owners. Occasional "Bark in the Park" events and pet adoption days have been held here, drawing animal shelters and pet-related businesses to engage with the public. While not a venue for large events, its proximity to the Founders Bridge means it sees foot traffic from downtown visitors and fairgoers heading to Clinton Park. The park's single basketball hoop (a remnant of Smiley Park days) is still present, making it a quirky dual-use space – one corner for shooting hoops, the rest dedicated to off-leash play. The juxtaposition of these uses reflects the park's community-centric flexibility.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

The Downtown Dog Park provides a rare patch of green in the urban downtown grid of Poplar Bluff. Culturally, its existence signals the city's responsiveness to changing community lifestyles – as more residents began living in apartments or smaller homes downtown, a place to exercise pets became important. It has also contributed to downtown revitalization by bringing people (and their dogs) into the area for daily visits, thereby increasing foot traffic on nearby streets. For longtime residents, the site's transformation from Smiley Park to a dog park demonstrates how public spaces can adapt over time — what was once a children's play lot is now a social hub for pet owners. Through all these changes, the park has remained free and open to the public, continuing the original mission of providing downtown Poplar Bluff with a pleasant outdoor retreat – whether you come to play catch with a dog or simply smile at the sight of dogs at play.

DOWNTOWN RIVER PARKS

FUTURE PROJECTS



Black River Trail
Create a 2-mile trail on the east side of the river from Black River Industrial Park to Clinton Park footbridge connecting with Wiseman Park and downtown.

Old Frisco Bridge
Trail crosses river and connects with Johnson Drive to Second Street for a 1.5-mile trail between Black River Industrial Park and Hillcrest Park.

Downtown Trail
Create a half-mile paved trail from Hillcrest Park to Wiseman Park past City Hall and Library using Second Street, creating a 2-mile loop using the River Trail south of the Old Frisco Bridge. A smaller 1.2-mile loop is created using the Bartlett Street bridge.

FUTURE PROJECTS



Home For Butler County Fair
The Butler County Fair is seeking a permanent home and a pole barn or structure at Wiseman Park would tie into the downtown area and be out of the floodplain.



Benches & Picnic Area
Provide benches or a picnic table at Wiseman Park near the parking spot so people can enjoy a picnic area overlooking the river.

DOWNTOWN PARK



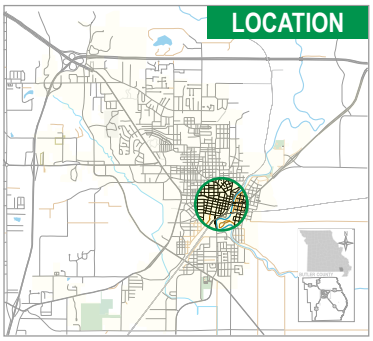
Nestled in a block of downtown Poplar Bluff near the Post Office on the corner of Poplar and Moran streets, this small park features a pavilion with picnic tables, benches and small walking loop lined with flowers and bushes. This area is the perfect outdoor lunch spot for employees of nearby businesses or residents of the senior housing complex across Moran Street which cleared the land and donated it to the City in 2010.

FAST FACTS:

OPENED: **2010**
ACRES: **0.24**

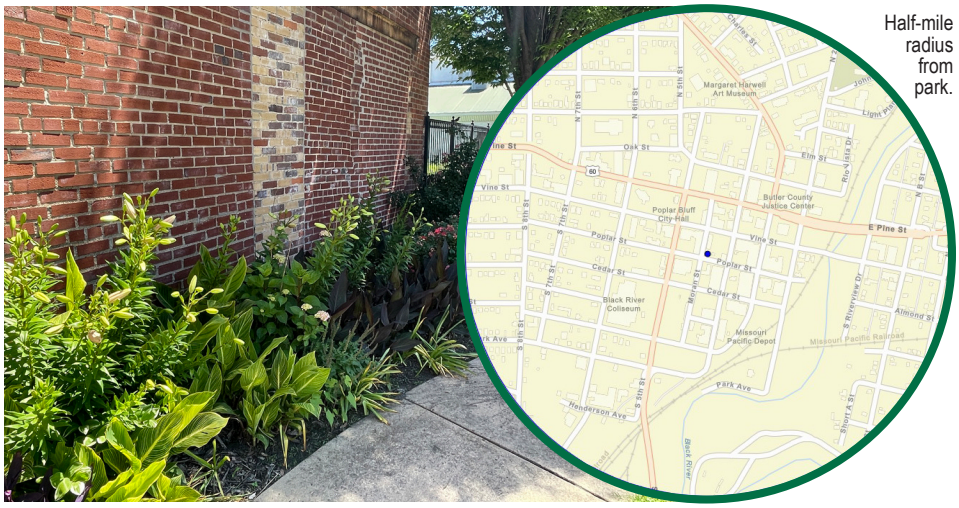
PARKING	✓ STREET
	ACCESS OFF POPLAR AND MORAN STREETS
PLAYGROUND	×
PAVILIONS	× TOTAL: 1
TRAILS	✓ MILES: 0.07 PAVED LOOP
RESTROOMS	×
FEATURES	✓ FLOWERS
	✓ BENCHES
	✓ LIGHTS

LOCATION



ORIGIN & LAND USE

Downtown Park is a small urban oasis nestled on a block near the Poplar Bluff Post Office, established in 2010. Occupying roughly 0.24 acres (about 19,000 square feet), this mini park was built on the site of the former auto dealership. The MACO Development Company created a 42-unit senior housing project and agreed to demolish an old building across Moran Street from the project to create a park. The City took over the property in April 2010. The transformation was part of a broader downtown revitalization initiative. The new Downtown Park opened, seamlessly "blending into the downtown area" with landscaping and brickwork that matched the historic streetscape.



DESIGN & FEATURES

Despite its modest size (less than a quarter-acre), Downtown Park was thoughtfully designed to maximize utility and charm. The layout includes a small walking loop, a paved path that winds through flower beds and around shade trees. This loop — only a few hundred feet long — gives downtown residents and visitors a pleasant place for a short stroll. At the park's center stands a covered pavilion with picnic tables. This pavilion provides a lunchtime refuge for employees of nearby businesses and a venue for occasional small events (like live music or book readings). The landscaping features ornamental trees, neatly trimmed bushes and seasonal flowers, which add color to the downtown block. Decorative lamp posts line the park, keeping it well-lit in the evenings and enhancing safety. The design intentionally kept the space petite and welcoming, with an open sight line from the street, so that it feels like an inviting extension of the sidewalk.

DOWNTOWN PARK



Given its city center location, only street parking is available, but pedestrians form the bulk of the park's users.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

The decision to create a park not only prevented a blighted empty lot, but also symbolized a new chapter for the site. Downtown Park has had a gentle yet meaningful impact on Poplar Bluff's community life. The perfect spot for a "lunch al fresco." Its proximity to the post office and courthouse means it's frequented by citizens running errands, who take a few minutes to relax there. Culturally, the park demonstrates Poplar Bluff's dedication to preserving livability in the downtown area. By converting an open site into a green pocket, the city acknowledged the importance of blending history with quality of life. The park's well-groomed appearance and constant, but low-key, use have also made it a showcase during downtown events. In summary, though tiny, Downtown Park carries forward the legacy of its location in a new form – it remains a place where the public can gather, reflecting Poplar Bluff's respect for both its past and its people's well-being.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

PARK NEAR PARKING Downtown Park itself may not need future improvements, but it could be included in the continued revitalization of downtown. The old parking garage location on the east side of Broadway features green space on the south end that has added trees and a mural has been painted on the eastern wall. The semicircle wall on the north end of the lot could feature a splash pad or a type of fountain that could act like a splash pad. This open space could be used during festivals and fairs held downtown and could link Downtown Park with the Skate Park and Frisco Depot to the south.

SKATE PLAZA



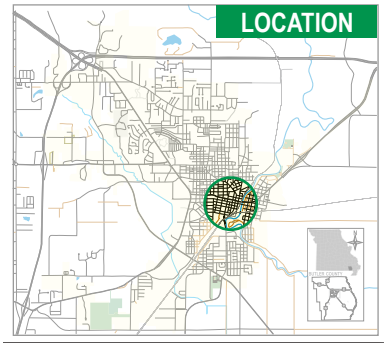
Built on the site of the former City Hall and Jail location on South Broadway, the 19,000-square-foot plaza blends into the downtown area. It features a variety of ramps and elements designed for beginners and skaters with developing skills. Skate Plaza represents Poplar Bluff's commitment to youth culture and urban renewal, providing an inclusive and dynamic environment for skateboarding and community interaction. It has become a popular destination, fostering a sense of active engagement.

FAST FACTS:

OPENED: **2012**
ACRES: **0.43**

PARKING	✓ PAVED
	ACCESS OFF MORAN STREET
PLAYGROUND	×
PAVILIONS	× SHADED AREA
TRAILS	×
RESTROOMS	× PORTABLE
FEATURES	✓ WATER FOUNTAIN
	✓ PICNIC TABLES
	✓ BICYCLE RACK

LOCATION



ORIGIN & LAND USE

The Poplar Bluff Skate Plaza, which opened in 2012, is a modern concrete skate park that symbolically rose from the footprint of the old city government center. It is built on the site of the former City Hall and jail, which once stood at the corner of Broadway and Moran. The building was demolished in 1986, four years after the city hall moved to a temporary location. In the 2000s, local youths and skaters had been campaigning for a safe place to skate – prior to this, skateboarders were often seen doing tricks on downtown sidewalks and curbs, to the chagrin of business owners. The city embraced the idea of converting the old City Hall site into a dedicated skate plaza, thus not only solving a recreation need but also finding a use for the vacant lot. With input from area skaters, designers created a street-style skate park emulating an urban plaza.



DESIGN & FEATURES

The Skate Plaza is noteworthy for its integration with the downtown street scape. Covering roughly 19,000 square feet (about 0.43 acres), the park is essentially an open concrete plaza filled with skateboarding elements. It was intentionally designed to look like part of the city – using brick-textured concrete and steps – rather than a fenced-off skate area. Key features include a variety of ramps, rails and ledges that cater to different skill levels. For beginners and those developing skills, there are low boxes and gentle bank ramps. More advanced skaters can tackle the stair sets with handrails, grind on the long ledge benches, or drop into the quarter-pipe style bowl section at one end.

SKATE PLAZA



The plaza's open layout allows multiple skaters to use it simultaneously, mimicking a real urban plaza environment. A unique aesthetic touch came in 2019, when the city gave the plaza a cosmetic update with brighter, bolder colors. This involved painting murals and designs on some ramps and adding graffiti-style art to give the space more character. Supporting amenities include a few picnic tables and seating blocks for skaters to rest or for spectators to watch. There's also a water fountain and bicycle rack, as many kids ride their bikes to the park. Notably, much of the perimeter is open (no high fences), making it inviting and easy to access from the street, though the park is under video surveillance to deter vandalism after hours.

CULTURE & EVENTS

Since its opening, the Skate Plaza has become a focal point for youth culture in Poplar Bluff. It's busy after school and on weekends with skateboarders, inline skaters and BMX bikers honing their tricks. The park has hosted a number of competitions and exhibitions, often organized by local skate shops or youth organizations. These events, like the "Bluff City Grind" competition, draw participants from around Southeast Missouri. They often feature music, announcers and prizes, injecting energy into downtown. Each June 21st – Go Skateboarding Day – the plaza sees an unofficial gathering of skaters celebrating their sport together. Beyond skating, the space has even been used for occasional community events: for instance, a portion of the plaza might serve as a stage for a downtown block party or the backdrop for a teen art show, capitalizing on its urban vibe. The Skate Plaza also inadvertently became an intergenerational meeting point – you'll sometimes see older residents, curious about skateboarding, sitting on a bench watching the younger generation flip and fly, bridging a cultural gap. Its presence downtown meant that businesses adapted; a nearby coffee shop might stock sports drinks and band-aids knowing skaters will stop in.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

The establishment of the Skate Plaza marked Poplar Bluff's recognition of alternative sports and youth-driven recreation. It provided legitimacy to skating, moving skaters off hazardous streets and into a venue of their own. As a result, downtown storefronts have less skateboard damage, and youths have a healthy outlet. The plaza's integration into the city fabric – no admission, open access – has been lauded as an example of inclusive urban planning. Moreover, turning the old City Hall plot into a skate park rather than a parking lot or leaving it vacant was a culturally progressive move. It signaled an embrace of youth culture and a willingness to invest in something that, while non-traditional, enriches community life. The park has undoubtedly kept many teens constructively engaged and has likely inspired some to pursue creative interests like filming skate videos or designing skateboard art. One can also consider the Skate Plaza as a form of downtown revitalization; it regularly brings young people (and their families) downtown, some of whom patronize nearby eateries and shops, thus contributing to the local economy. Safety has improved too – whereas skaters once were at risk in traffic, now they have a designated safe zone. The success of Poplar Bluff's Skate Plaza is often cited by nearby towns as a model: it turned a once utilitarian civic location into a vibrant recreational hot spot, all while honoring the site's legacy by keeping it a public gathering place (only now with ollies and kickflips instead of council meetings). In summary, the Skate Plaza has become a dynamic urban park that reflects Poplar Bluff's adaptability and its commitment to serving the recreational needs of all its citizens, especially the youth.

FERGUSON GROVE



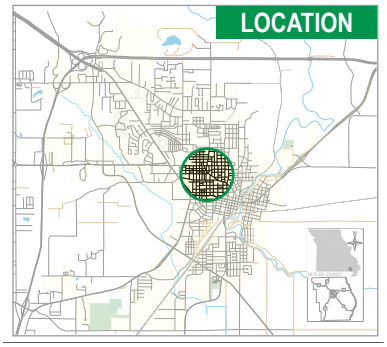
Located along North Main Street, Ferguson Grove has served as a meeting place since the late 19th century but it was not until 1938 that Nan Ferguson leased the land to the city and 1996 when the city acquired it. The park features a shaded, paved walking trail measuring 0.27 miles per lap, picnic tables and pet-friendly amenities. It stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of community collaboration and the importance of preserving natural spaces within Poplar Bluff.

FAST FACTS:

OPENED: **1995**
ACRES: **4.52**

PARKING	✓ PAVED ACCESS OFF NINTH STREET
PLAYGROUND	✗ NONE
PAVILIONS	✗ NONE
TRAILS	✓ MILES: 0.27 PAVED
RESTROOMS	✗ NONE
FEATURES	✓ PICNIC TABLES

LOCATION



ORIGIN & LAND USE

Ferguson Grove is a verdant, wooded park located in the heart of the city along North Main Street. Its history as a community gathering place stretches back more than a century (it appeared as "T.D. Ferguson grove" in an 1897 newspaper story). By 1900, this natural oak grove was already a popular local meeting spot where residents would hold picnics, rallies and outdoor events under the canopy of trees. The grove was part of land owned by the Ferguson family, one of Poplar Bluff's early prominent families (James Ferguson, for example, built one of the first substantial store buildings in town in the mid-1800s). Recognizing the grove's social value, Nan Ferguson – an heir of the family – took steps to preserve it for public use. In 1938, she leased the property to the City specifically for use as a park. This act can be seen as the formal founding of Ferguson Grove Park. The lease arrangement kept the land in the Ferguson family's name but allowed the city to improve and maintain it for the enjoyment of all.



CITY OWNERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT

It wasn't until decades later, in 1994, that the Poplar Bluff Park Department assumed full management of Ferguson Grove and not until the summer of 1996 that the City purchased the land for $120,000. With city stewardship, modest developments were added to enhance usability while carefully preserving the natural character of the grove. A 0.27-mile paved walking trail was installed, looping through the shaded woods to invite strolls and exercise. The city also constructed a small off-street parking lot off Ninth Street for visitor convenience.

FERGUSON GROVE

To maintain the grove's tranquil atmosphere, minimal play equipment was introduced. Instead, the city placed a few picnic tables and park benches throughout the clearing. A notable addition in recent years is a public art piece – a sculpture that serves as a focal point among the trees, celebrating the blend of nature and culture. Throughout its development, great care was taken not to overly manicure the area: Ferguson Grove remains one of Poplar Bluff's most naturalistic parks, characterized by tall mature trees and dappled sunlight.

NOTABLE EVENTS

Over its long life, Ferguson Grove has seen countless community events. Oral histories recall that in the early 20th century, the grove was the site of annual Juneteenth celebrations, as well as family reunions for many in the community. In the 1930s and 1940s, the park provided a free gathering place for morale-boosting events like pie suppers and patriotic sings. More formally, the grove was occasionally used for city ceremonies; for example, when the Poplar Bluff National Guard returned from World War II, a welcome-home picnic was purportedly held here. In modern times, Ferguson Grove's events have been smaller in scale but continual – neighborhood Easter egg hunts, weekend barbecue get-togethers, and the annual "Music in the Park" summer mini-concert series have all found an ideal setting here. Its walking trail also became a favored route for older residents seeking gentle exercise and for nearby school children who explore the grove on field trips, learning about local tree species and history in an outdoor classroom.



CULTURAL IMPACT

Ferguson Grove is often affectionately called the "Central Park" of Poplar Bluff due to its central location and historic role. Culturally, it serves as a living link to the city's past – the same grove that hosted turn-of-the century gatherings still welcomes citizens today, offering continuity amidst change. The Ferguson family's early generosity in leasing (and later transferring) the land ensured that a piece of Poplar Bluff's natural heritage remained accessible to the public. The park's longevity has made it the backdrop for generations of memories; many locals can point to Ferguson Grove as where their grandparents courted, where their parents took them for afternoon walks, and where they now bring their own children. It's also a symbol of preservation in an urban environment. As the city grew around it, the grove stood as a green sanctuary, its giant trees surviving storms and development pressures. Ferguson Grove's impact lies in its quiet steadfastness – a place where community spirit has been nurtured under the same towering oaks for over 120 years, making it a cornerstone of Poplar Bluff's cultural landscape.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

A small playground might be a popular draw, however, Wheatley Park features one three blocks to the east. Ferguson Grove has served as a passive park for walking or enjoying nature so adding botanic garden area for education or creating an outdoor history walk to tie in with the nearby Poplar Bluff Museum might expand the park's appeal.

Thomas D. Ferguson (1848-1911) was a pioneer businessman who served as circuit clerk of Butler County for 18 years and in the state legislature for one term. Ferguson's son Harry (1889-1924) inherited the grove his wife leased it to the city in 1937. Alice 'Nan' Ferguson (1887-1962) was a charter member of the Citizenship club, which sponsored a children's home.



WHEATLEY PARK



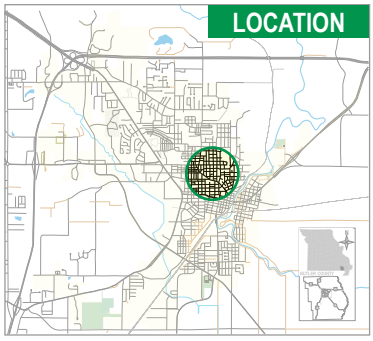
Once the site of Wheatley School, the Park Board first placed a playground here in 1960. Currently, the Park Department and Wheatley Historical Preservation Society have partnered to create a park, officially dedicated on April 26, 2008, with a pavilion and new playground equipment. The school, built in 1928 and named for poet Phillis Wheatley, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998 honoring the city's diverse heritage.

FAST FACTS:

OPENED: **2008**
ACRES: **2.20**

PARKING	✓ GRAVEL
	ACCESS OFF GARFIELD AND BENTON STREETS
PLAYGROUND	✓ TOTAL: 1
PAVILIONS	✓ TOTAL: 1
TRAILS	✗ NONE
RESTROOMS	✗ NOT AVAILABLE
FEATURES	✓ HISTORIC SCHOOL BUILDING

LOCATION



ORIGIN & LAND USE

Wheatley Park is a small yet culturally significant park on Poplar Bluff's north side, established in 2008 on the grounds of the historic Wheatley Public School on Garfield Street. The site's history stretches back to 1928, when the school was built to serve Black students during segregation. Named after Phillis Wheatley, the famed 18th-century Black poet, the school served Poplar Bluff until desegregation began in 1954. After 1958, Wheatley School closed as students integrated into other schools. The imposing two-story Colonial Revival brick building remained, later re-purposed for various community uses. To preserve its legacy, it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998. The surrounding land, including the old school playground and yard, thus carried deep historical importance as the center of Black education and community life in segregated Poplar Bluff.



CREATION OF PARK

The idea to formalize the schoolyard into a park took shape in the 2000s, spearheaded by the Wheatley Historical Preservation Society – a group of alumni and community leaders dedicated to preserving the school and its heritage. The Poplar Bluff Park Board had actually placed a simple playground on the site as early as 1960, shortly after the school closed, allowing neighborhood children continued use of the grounds. But it wasn't an official city park with amenities. In partnership with the preservation society, the city developed a plan to upgrade the area, and on April 26, 2008, Wheatley Park was officially dedicated. The ceremony was a heartfelt community event, attended

WHEATLEY PARK

by former Wheatley School students and local officials, celebrating both the new park and the 80-year legacy of the site. The park improvements included a new playground with modern equipment, a picnic pavilion and signage explaining the historical significance of the location. The historic red-brick school building still stands adjacent (its exterior preserved), serving as a tangible backdrop to the park's activities. In total, the park covers only about 2 acres, essentially the footprint of the old schoolyard.



FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

BASKETBALL COURT There is currently no basketball courts in the park, which could be added near the pavilion.

SPLASH PAD This feature could be an added amenity, providing a water play experience for children looking to cool off after using the playground.

FEATURES & EVENTS

Wheatley Park's playground is a cheerful mix of slides, climbers and swings, often filled with children from the surrounding neighborhood. The pavilion provides shade and a meeting spot for community gatherings. A unique feature of the park is the proximity of the historic Wheatley School building, which visitors can walk around. The building, though not currently a museum, has commemorative plaques and occasionally is opened for tours during special events. Wheatley Park has become a focal point for cultural and educational gatherings. Each year for Martin Luther King Jr. Day or Black History Month, the preservation society organizes celebrations at Wheatley Park, sometimes including speeches by distinguished alumni, musical performances and history exhibits in or near the old school. The park is also the ending point for an annual Wheatley School Reunion parade, where former students and their descendants march through the neighborhood and culminate in a picnic at the pavilion. In summer months, church groups utilize the park for Vacation Bible School sessions and back-to-school backpack giveaway events have been held here, honoring the site's educational roots. In 2017, when the Garfield Historic District (which includes Wheatley School) was recognized on the National Register, Wheatley Park hosted the celebration, reinforcing how intertwined the park is with the preservation of local history.

CULTURAL IMPACT

Wheatley Park is far more than a typical playground – it stands as a tribute to the resilience and heritage of Poplar Bluff's Black community. By preserving the Wheatley School site as a park, the city ensured that the legacy of segregated education and its eventual triumph through integration would not be forgotten. The park provides a physical space for storytelling and remembrance — older generations can bring grandchildren to the playground and at the same time point to the building where they studied in a segregated system, thus passing down important historical knowledge. This intergenerational connection is a powerful cultural contribution of Wheatley Park. Additionally, the park's existence galvanized the community. It was one of the first parks in Poplar Bluff created through a citizen-driven historic preservation effort. It illustrates how a place of historical significance can be transformed into a place of joy and unity as an inclusive public park. The Wheatley Historical Preservation Society's involvement means the park is always cared for with a sense of honor – for instance, landscaping and maintenance often see volunteer help from society members. For the Northside neighborhood, Wheatley Park is a source of pride and a much-needed green space. It is the only park with playground equipment in that immediate area, making it vital for local recreation. And for the city at large, dedicating the park in 2008 signaled a recognition of the Black experience in Poplar Bluff's history. In effect, Wheatley Park serves as a living museum and a community playground in one, embodying the principle that preserving history and promoting community well-being can go hand in hand.

BLACK RIVER INDUSTRIAL PARK



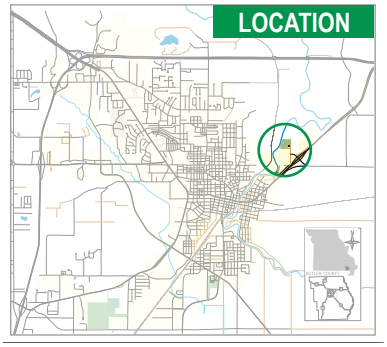
Featuring open space for practice fields that can host soccer or baseball and softball, Black River Industrial Park was developed by the Park Department in 1994. The area located near the eastern city limits also hosted a festival six years prior to becoming a park and its name comes from the surrounding industrial park district. Because much of the land lies within the floodplain along the eastern bank of the Black River it was converted to park land.

FAST FACTS:

OPENED: **1995**
ACRES: **15.58**

PARKING	✓ GRAVEL
	ACCESS OFF BARNHART ROAD
PLAYGROUND	× NOT AVAILABLE
PAVILIONS	× NOT AVAILABLE
TRAILS	× NOT AVAILABLE
RESTROOMS	× NOT AVAILABLE
FEATURES	✓ BALLFIELDS
	✓ SOCCER FIELDS

LOCATION

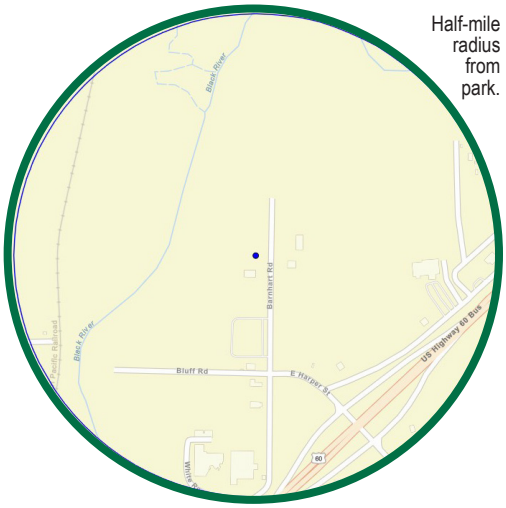


ORIGIN & LAND USE

Black River Industrial Park, roughly 15 1/2 acres of open fields near the Black River, was developed into a city park in the mid-1990s. The Park Department officially opened it in 1995, but the land had seen community use even before then. As early as 1988, the site hosted large public events – a local festival took place on the grounds, indicating the area's potential as an event space. Prior to its park development, this tract was part of an industrial or undeveloped floodplain area on Barnhart Road. The name "Industrial Park" stems from its location adjacent to an industrial park district, but when the industry did not fully occupy the space, the city re-purposed it for recreation. In 1994, the Park Department prepared the land by clearing and leveling, creating basic recreational fields by the following year.

DEVELOPMENT & FEATURES

From its inception, Black River Industrial Park was geared toward sports and event overflow. The park remains mostly open green space, allowing flexibility for various uses. It was initially laid out to provide practice fields – wide, flat turf that could accommodate youth soccer matches, baseball or softball practice, and other field sports. Unlike more developed parks, it started with minimal infrastructure — no permanent playground, pavilion, or restrooms were built, reflecting its role as a multi-purpose open area. Over time, the city added a gravel parking area off Barnhart Road and backstops for ballgames, but the emphasis has remained on the open-field utility of the park. The lack of dedicated structures also made it an ideal venue for temporary events like fairs, carnivals and festivals that need large space. Indeed, the Butler County Fair utilized this park in its early years before moving to larger venues, and a planned Black River Trail is slated to link Ray Clinton Park to this park, enhancing its accessibility.



EVENTS & USAGE

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Black River Industrial Park frequently hosted youth sports practices and occasional tournaments when other city fields were booked. A large festival took place here in 1988, and community fairs have intermittently used the grounds due to its open size. In recent years, a plan envi-

BLACK RIVER INDUSTRIAL PARK

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Among the improvements that should be considered include:

NAME CHANGE There are two industrial areas along the Black River — one on the east side and the other south of downtown — but a new name is less about clearing up any confusion and more about honoring a citizen. One option would be naming it Moss Park to honor the family that features professional athletes who excelled at multiple sports here while another person to consider is Richard D. "Dick" Welsh, who helped push the formation of the Park Board and later served on it for 12 years.

RIVER TRAIL Create a 2-mile trail on the east side of the river from the park to Clinton Park. See the Black River Trail on Page 20.



sions integrating this part into a broader trail network — a proposed "Black River Trail" would connect it with Clinton Park, encouraging more use of the area by walkers and cyclists. This plan underscores the park's evolving role from a simple practice field into a connecting greenway segment.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

The park may not have the amenities of other city parks, but it holds an important place in Poplar Bluff's recreation landscape. Its creation reflected a practical adaptation of land for community needs, transforming unused industrial-zoned land into a flexible public space. Over the years it has absorbed overflow from busy sports schedules, ensuring local teams have a place to play. The park's continued use for events and plans to link it via trails show its ongoing value. In effect, Black River Industrial Park is a "blank slate" park – modest in development but significant as a communal space that can be whatever the community needs it to be at any given time.

SPORTSMAN'S PARK



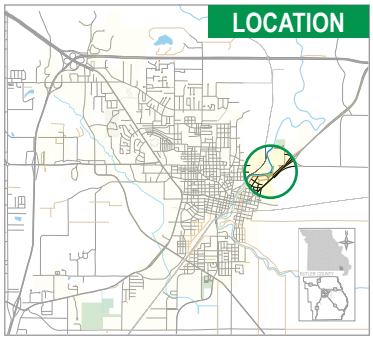
Located on the Black River on the east side of the city, this park is a partnership with the Missouri Department of Conservation, which built a new boat ramp in 1991 and a handicap accessible fishing platform in 2019. The area was first developed in 1963 by the Southeast Missouri Sportsmen's Association and is owned by the City. The eight-acre park serves as a beloved destination for outdoor enthusiasts, featuring picnic areas and offering a scenic retreat along the river.

FAST FACTS:

OPENED: **1963**
ACRES: **4.67**

PARKING	✓ PAVED, GRAVEL
	ACCESS OFF EAST PINE ST. - BUS. 60
PLAYGROUND	✗ NOT AVAILABLE
PAVILIONS	✓ TOTAL: 1
TRAILS	✗ NONE
RESTROOMS	✓ PORTABLE - SEASONAL
FEATURES	✓ RIVER ACCESS
	✓ BOAT RAMP
	✓ ACCESSIBLE FISHING AREA

LOCATION

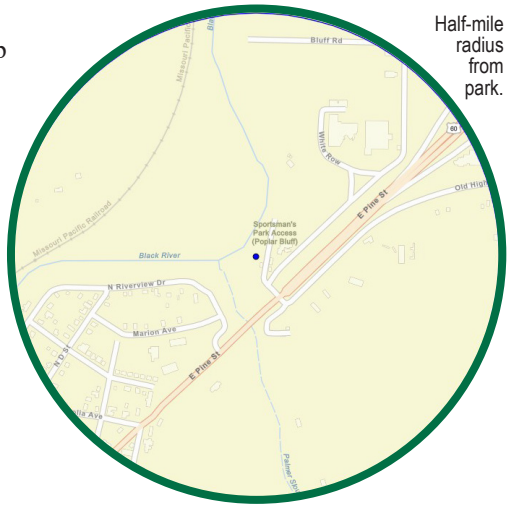


ORIGIN & LAND USE

Sportsman's Park is a riverside park located on the east bank of the Black River, established in 1963 through the efforts of local outdoorsmen. In the early 1960s, the Southeast Missouri Sportsmen's Association – a group of local hunters, anglers and conservationists – identified a spot along the river ideal for a public boat launch and fishing access. Working with the city, the association led the initial development of the area in 1963. They cleared a small area by the river, built an earthen boat ramp, and added a gravel drive, effectively creating a primitive river park. The city eventually took ownership of the land, formalizing it as a city park, but the "Sportsman's Park" name stuck as a tribute to the association that created it. The term "Sportsman" here reflects the old-fashioned notion of the outdoor sporting life – hunting, fishing, boating – which the park was intended to promote.

PARTNERSHIP WITH STATE

In the decades after its founding, Sportsman's Park benefited from significant improvements thanks to a partnership with the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). Recognizing the park's importance as a public water access, the MDC invested in upgrades. In 1991, the Conservation Department constructed a new, modern concrete boat ramp into the Black River. This replaced the original dirt launch, making river access safer and usable in various water levels. Later, in 2019, the MDC added a handicap-accessible fishing platform extending from the bank. This metal and wood platform juts out over the river, allowing anglers, including those in wheelchairs, to cast into deeper waters without needing a boat. These enhancements turned Sportsman's Park into a premier public fishing spot on the Black River. The city, for its part, maintained the surrounding park area: a small picnic pavilion was built, along with a few picnic tables and a barbecue grill for day-use gatherings. A simple swing-set was added at one time, though no full playground currently exists. The park's layout is straightforward – a loop drive (paved and gravel) off East Pine Street that encircles the boat ramp and pavilion area. Portable restrooms are available seasonally, but no permanent restroom building has been added, maintaining the park's rustic focus.



Half-mile radius from park.

SPORTSMAN'S PARK

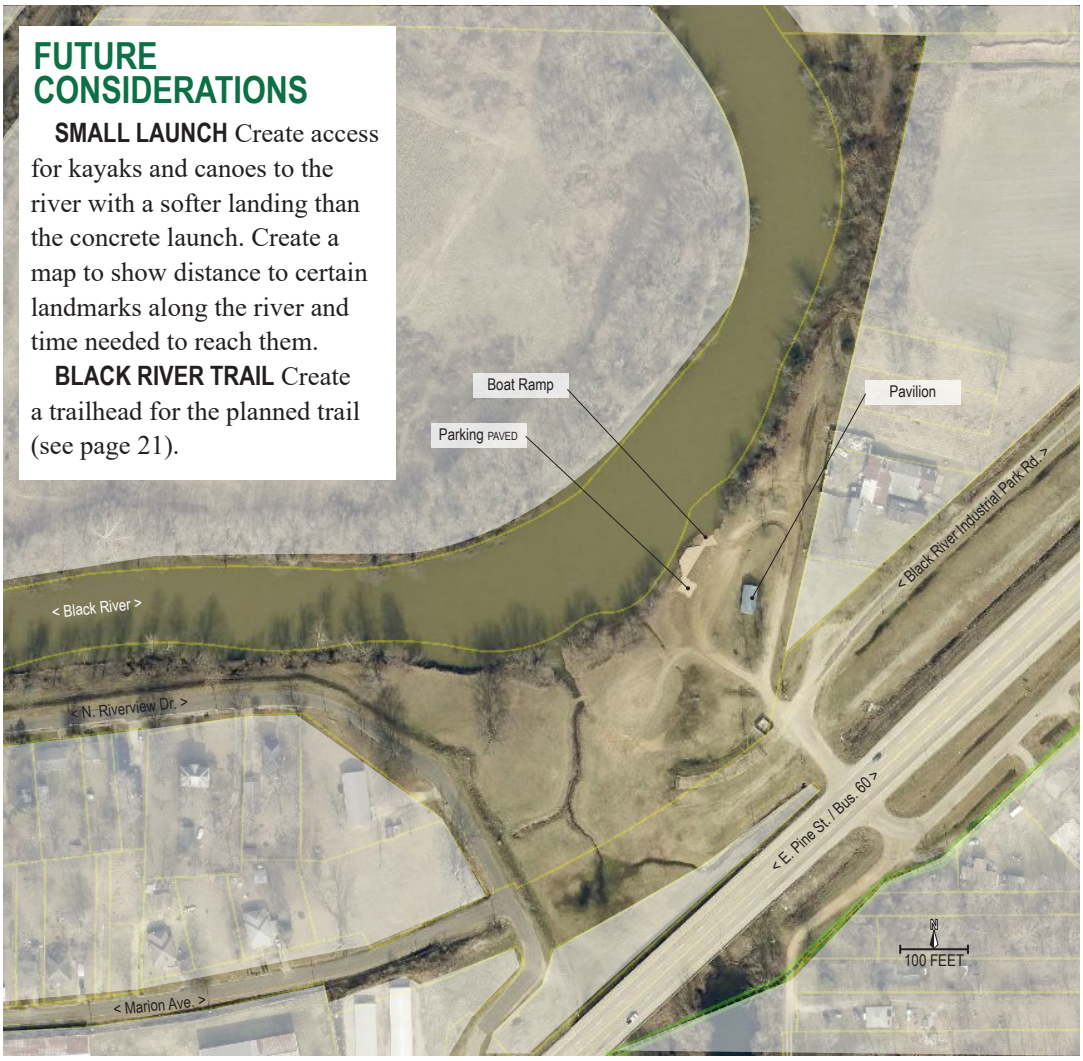
USE & EVENTS

Sportsman's Park has always been an activity-focused park rather than a venue for large events. Its primary use is for boating and fishing. On any given morning in warm weather, one can find anglers trying their luck for bass, catfish, or crappie from the accessible platform or along the banks. The boat ramp sees heavy use during fishing seasons – it's a launch point not just for recreational boaters but also for local fishing tournaments. Small bass club tournaments frequently kick off at Sportsman's Park at dawn, with weigh-ins held under the pavilion in the afternoon. The Black River's gentle flow near the park also makes it a favored launch for canoe and kayak trips. Outfitters sometimes start guided floats from this ramp, and conservation agents host annual river cleanup floats beginning here. The Sportsmen's Association held an annual "Fish Fry Jamboree" at the park, where members would fry up their catch and invite the public – this tradition faded but has been occasionally revived by conservation groups. The park has been a site for youth education too: conservation agents have run fishing clinics for kids here, teaching them how to bait a hook and cast a line, often using the platform built in 2019 which is safe for groups of children.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

SMALL LAUNCH Create access for kayaks and canoes to the river with a softer landing than the concrete launch. Create a map to show distance to certain landmarks along the river and time needed to reach them.

BLACK RIVER TRAIL Create a trailhead for the planned trail (see page 21).



COMMUNITY IMPACT

Sportsman's Park embodies Poplar Bluff's connection to the Black River and the outdoor heritage of the region. Culturally, it highlights the importance of hunting and fishing traditions in the community. The very fact that local sportsmen took initiative to establish a park in 1963 speaks to that heritage – it was a park created by outdoors enthusiasts, for outdoors enthusiasts. Over the years, the park helped democratize river access. Before its existence, only those with private land or club memberships could easily launch boats or fish the river. Sportsman's Park opened the Black River to everyone, from casual family outings to serious anglers. The partnership with the Missouri Conservation Department further cemented its role as a gateway to nature. The improvements like the accessible fishing pier also reflect social progress – making sure that even those with mobility challenges can enjoy the simple pleasure of fishing by the river. Many lifelong Poplar Bluff residents have fond memories tied to this spot — catching their first fish, boating along the river, or simply enjoying a quiet picnic while watching the water flow by. The park has remained relatively low-key – there's no playground, no sports fields – and that's part of its charm. It's a slice of riverside tranquility amid the bustle of town (just off a busy road) where one can reconnect with nature. In city discussions, Sportsman's Park is often mentioned as a success of multi-agency collaboration and a model of maintaining a specific focus (boating/fishing) for a park. By staying true to its roots, Sportsman's Park continues to serve the community exactly as intended — as a haven for anyone seeking a moment of outdoor respite by the Black River.

LINC PARK



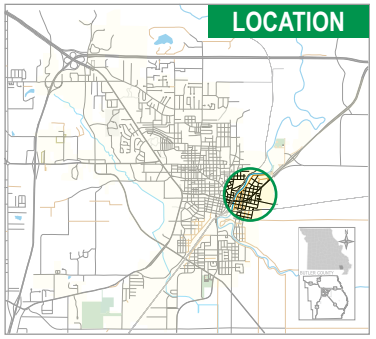
Established in 1954 through a generous donation by Abraham and Mary Hinrichs, Linc Park was envisioned as a dedicated playground for children. The half-block of land on the East Side of Poplar Bluff along D Street features a playground, pavilion, basketball hoop and lighted ballfield. Linc's park was the first home of a youth baseball league and it continues to serve the neighborhood and the legacy of Hinrichs providing a cherished space for recreation and joy to local families.

FAST FACTS:

OPENED: **1954**
ACRES: **1.20**

PARKING	✓ PAVED
	ACCESS OFF NORTH D STREET
PLAYGROUND	✓
PAVILIONS	✓ TOTAL: 1
TRAILS	✗ NONE
RESTROOMS	✗ NOT AVAILABLE
FEATURES	✓ BALLFIELDS
	✓ BASKETBALL COURT

LOCATION



ORIGIN & LAND USE

Linc Park is a small neighborhood park on the east side of the Black River. The land for the park was donated in 1954 by Abraham 'Linc' and Mary Hinrichs. At the time, the east side of Poplar Bluff had few recreational facilities, and the donation was instrumental in giving children in that part of town a place to play. The city accepted the approximately 1.3-acre parcel and, in gratitude, named the park after the donors. It was known as Linc's Park, as is inscribed on a stone memorial at the corner of Gum and D streets, but changed at some point. The park's location near East Pine Street made it easily accessible to the surrounding residential blocks and to those crossing the river from downtown.



DEVELOPMENT & FEATURES

After its establishment in 1954, Linc Park was outfitted with simple, classic park amenities typical of that era. A ballfield was one of the first features – essentially a backstop with an open field – allowing for youth baseball and softball games. This ballfield made Linc Park a hub for neighborhood pick-up games and for organized Little League games. A small playground was installed as well, with swings, a slide, and a merry-go-round for local children. Overlooking the play area, a modest pavilion was built, essentially a single picnic shelter where parents could sit and keep an eye on their kids. Linc Park features a solitary basketball hoop on a paved half-court, which became a popular spot for teenagers to shoot baskets after school. Given the park's small size, these few facilities neatly filled the space. For many years, Linc Park remained largely unchanged it was well-kept but not heavily

LINC PARK

developed, keeping the charm of a "mini park." One recent enhancement has been a plan to improve connectivity and safety: the city intends to build a sidewalk connecting the park to a lighted crosswalk on East Pine Street, making it safer for kids in the neighborhood to walk or bike to the park across what can be a busy street.

Linc Hinrichs (1894-1987) was a World War I veteran who built the city's first golf course and tennis court, many of the buildings on the east side, including a boy's club on North B Street and later planted 10,000 pecan and walnut trees along the region's river banks.



ROLE & EVENTS

Linc Park has always been a hyper-local park, serving the immediate community around it. Once ballfields were built on the south side, it has not hosted large city-wide events, but it has been central to neighborhood traditions. The park's ballfield was home to informal summer little league practices and many a competitive wiffle ball game among friends. Church groups from the east side occasionally used Linc Park for outdoor Bible schools or picnic outings. In recent years, small volunteer-driven improvement days occur, where neighbors gather to repaint playground equipment or plant flowers, underscoring the community's stewardship of the park.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Despite its modest scale, Linc Park has had a meaningful impact on the lives of those around it. It is often the "first playground" that young children in the neighborhood experience, given its walking-distance proximity to many homes. For generations, Linc Park has been a social anchor of the North D Street area – a place where children from different families meet and play, where lifelong friendships have their start on the swings or ballfield. The fact that it originated from a private family's donation also sets a precedent and example of local philanthropy; the Henrichs' gift in 1954 enriched community life and likely inspired others to consider similar contributions. The park has helped keep the east side included in Poplar Bluff's recreation offerings. Its continual use demonstrates that even a small green space can greatly enhance urban quality of life. In city planning discussions, Linc Park is frequently cited as a success story of a neighborhood park – small in size but big in importance for local residents. The park's enduring presence since 1954 shows the lasting legacy that a single generous act (the Henrichs' donation) can have on a community's cultural fabric.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

BASKETBALL COURT There is only one hoop, the concrete pad is showing its age and it is smaller than a half court — it is approximately 29 feet wide and 25 feet long (half-court size is usually 50 feet wide and 47 feet long). There are no markings for a free-throw or 3-point lines. Adding an additional full or half court would also be beneficial.

SIDEWALKS A sidewalk along Gum St. will connect the park to the Pine Street crosswalk, however, additional sidewalks along D and Sycamore streets would create safer access to the park.

LEIST PARK



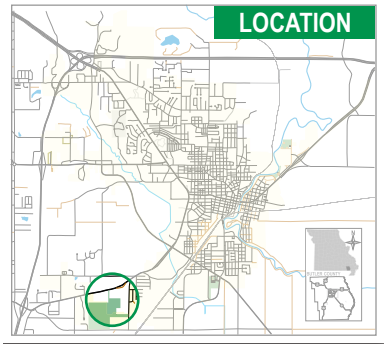
Land for this park was secured by the Park Department in the spring of 2022 when John W. and Tammy A. Leist sold it at a reduced price. The first phase of the plan is to expand the fishing pond and create access to it for the public, which is currently the parking lot at Ozark Ridge Golf Course. The next phase is to build a road off South Westwood (Business 67) to the golf course then building walking trails, playgrounds, pavilions with options of a recreation center and nature center in the future.

FAST FACTS:

OPENED: **2022**
ACRES: **37.45**

PARKING	✓ PAVED
	ACCESS AT GOLF COURSE OFF CRAVENS RD.
PLAYGROUND	× PLANNED
PAVILIONS	× PLANNED
TRAILS	× PLANNED
RESTROOMS	✓ AT COURSE CLUBHOUSE
FEATURES	✓ NATURAL PONDS

LOCATION

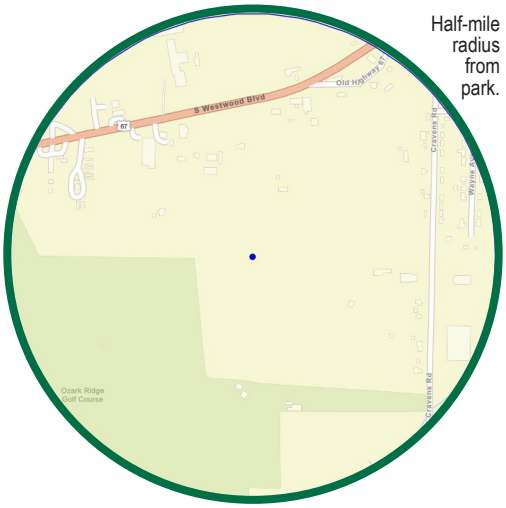


ORIGIN & LAND USE

Leist Park is one of Poplar Bluff's newest park projects, a large tract of land in the southwest part of the city. The park is named after John W. and Tammy A. Leist, the couple who owned the property and agreed to sell it to the City at a reduced price in the spring of 2022. This effectively partial donation by the Leist family enabled the city to secure approximately 37 acres of land adjacent to the Ozark Ridge Golf Course for public use. Prior to city acquisition, the land was largely undeveloped – a mix of open fields, woods, and a small private fishing pond. Its access to Business 67 and Cravens Road made it an attractive candidate for a park, as it sits at a growing edge of the city. Seeing the potential community benefit, the Leists facilitated the purchase, and in recognition the future park was named Leist Park. Planning for the park's development began immediately after acquisition, marking the first major parkland addition to Poplar Bluff in many years.

DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Leist Park is still in the development phase, guided by a multi-stage master plan. The vision for the park is to create a blend of outdoor recreation and nature preservation. One of the first planned improvements is to expand the existing pond on the property into a roughly 3.25-acre lake. This expanded lake will be stocked with fish (even considering seasonal trout stocking) to establish a new public fishing spot – a relatively novel amenity for city parks. Alongside the water feature, a fishing pier with all-inclusive access is planned. Another key element is a trail system. At least 1.25 miles of walking trails are planned, including a 0.5-mile loop around the pond and additional paths through wetlands and wooded areas. Picnic areas and pavilions will be added near the pond and in a northern clearing, providing shelters for family gatherings. Recognizing the need for a playground, Leist Park will also feature a playground area in a central spot, likely



Half-mile radius from park.

with modern all-ages equipment (plans mention it as "planned" in the first phase). Importantly, because the park is adjacent to Ozark Ridge Golf Course, integration is a theme. The existing golf course parking lot (off Cravens Road) will serve Leist Park initially, and eventually a new entrance road from Westwood Boulevard (Business 67) will be built to provide direct access.

LEIST PARK

This road will also tie into the extension of the Shelby Trail, connecting the park to the city's trail network along Shelby Road. In later phases, the plan even allows for constructing a small nature center, a recreation center and possibly replacing the aging Ozark Ridge clubhouse with a new one that serves both golfers and park-goers.



CURRENT STATUS & USAGE

Although Leist Park is in early stages, parts of it have opened informally to the public. Residents have begun using the area for bank fishing in the original pond and for walking, even before formal trails are laid, drawn by the scenery and the novelty of a new open space. The city has been clearing brush and shaping the land since 2022, so one can already see outlines of future features. For now, events at Leist Park have been limited to things like volunteer tree plantings and planning meetings held on-site to gather community input. As construction progresses, small sections (like the trail spur connecting to Shelby Road) might open incrementally. The Poplar Bluff Parks Department has highlighted Leist Park in its promotions, and in 2023 it hosted a "Walk the Park Day" where residents were invited to tour the grounds and envision the improvements to come.

ANTICIPATED IMPACT

Leist Park represents a significant expansion of recreational opportunities for Poplar Bluff, especially for the south and west sides of town. Its development addresses several needs voiced by the community — more walking trails, more fishing and nature options and additional sports facilities (indirectly supporting golf and possibly cross-country running around the trails). There is great anticipation for its economic impact as well – by drawing visitors for fishing or nature programs at the future nature center, Leist Park could spur activity along the Westwood/Business 67 corridor. The park's adjacency to Ozark Ridge Golf Course creates a synergy; families might split up for different activities – some golfing, others picnicking or hiking – then reunite at a shared facility like the clubhouse. In terms of cultural impact, Leist Park is forging a new identity for an area of the city that was previously just outskirts. It's giving a name – Leist Park – to what will become a community focal point, thereby honoring the Leists' generosity. If the phased plan comes to fruition, future generations will know this land not as an undeveloped tract, but as a versatile park where they learned to fish, enjoyed nature, and spent weekends playing. As a modern comprehensive park, Leist Park is poised to become a flagship for Poplar Bluff's park system, carrying forward the legacy of public-spirited land donation into the 21st century and providing a rich, engaging environment for the community.

LEIST PARK

KEY ELEMENTS

Park Entrance
A road from South Westwood (Business 67) connects the park and Ozark Ridge Golf Course. This will give the park and golf course a easy-to-find entrance.

Parking
The golf course lot, which features 70 spots, is expanded north of the practice green while parking along the park road is included near the large pond and near the entrance.

Fishing Pond
The current pond on the south end of the park is expanded and stocked with fish. A smaller pond on the northeast side of the park is also expanded.

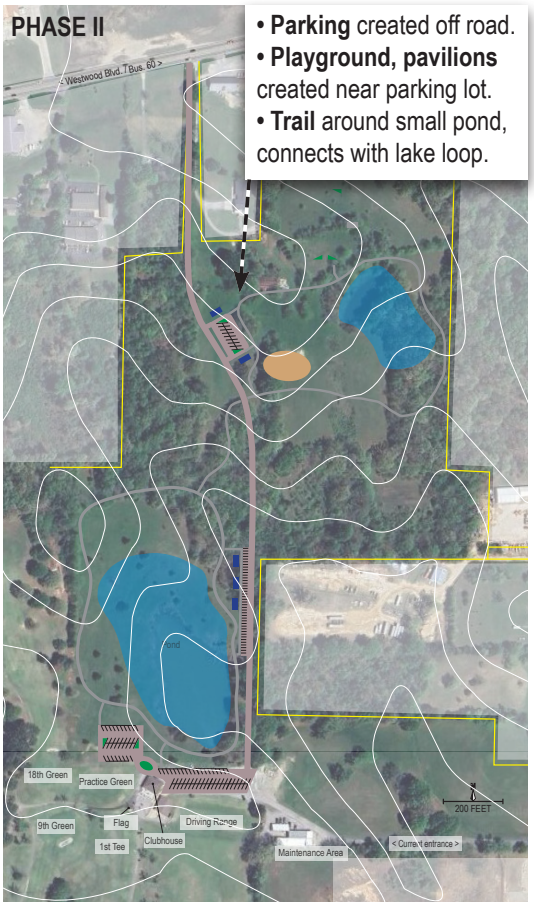
Trails
A trail around each pond is created and connected, creating a 1.25-mile trail while an additional trail through the woods on the eastern side of the park could be a nature trail. The park could be connected to Shelby Trail with a 1.4-mile extension.

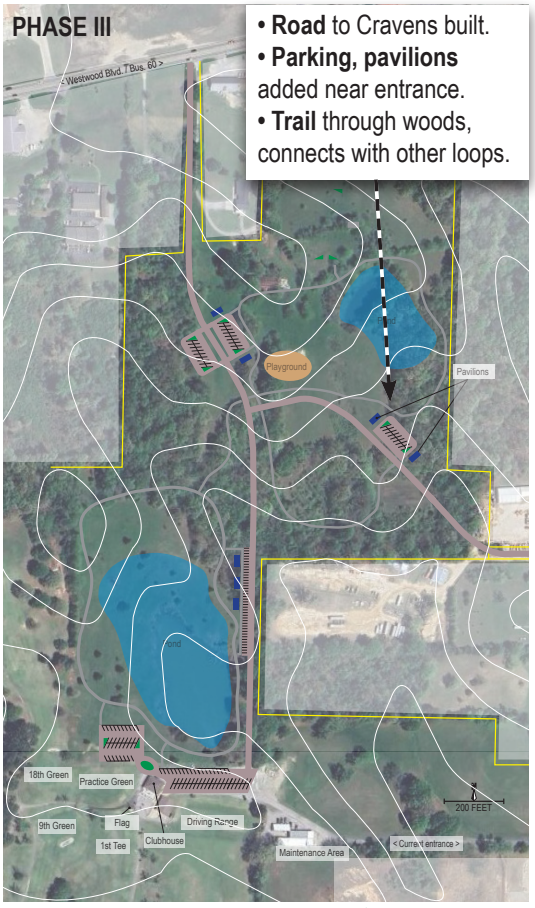
Pavilions & Playground
Picnic areas will be near the parking lots located at the entrance and the large pond. A playground will be near the entrance parking lot.

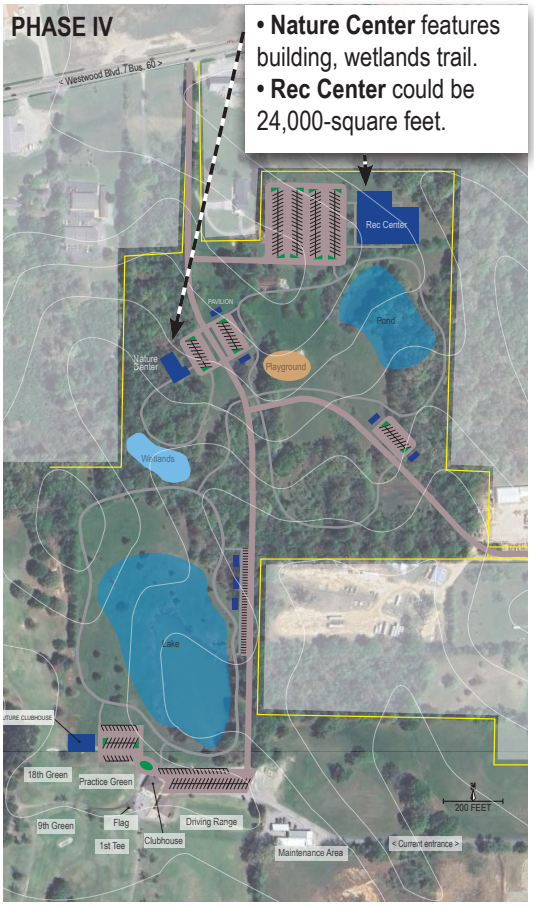
Nature Center
A building to house a nature center could be included on the west side of the park road with a natural trail through the wetlands.

Recreation Center
A 24,000-square foot building could be included in the northeast corner of the park featuring basketball, volleyball courts as well as other indoor activities.





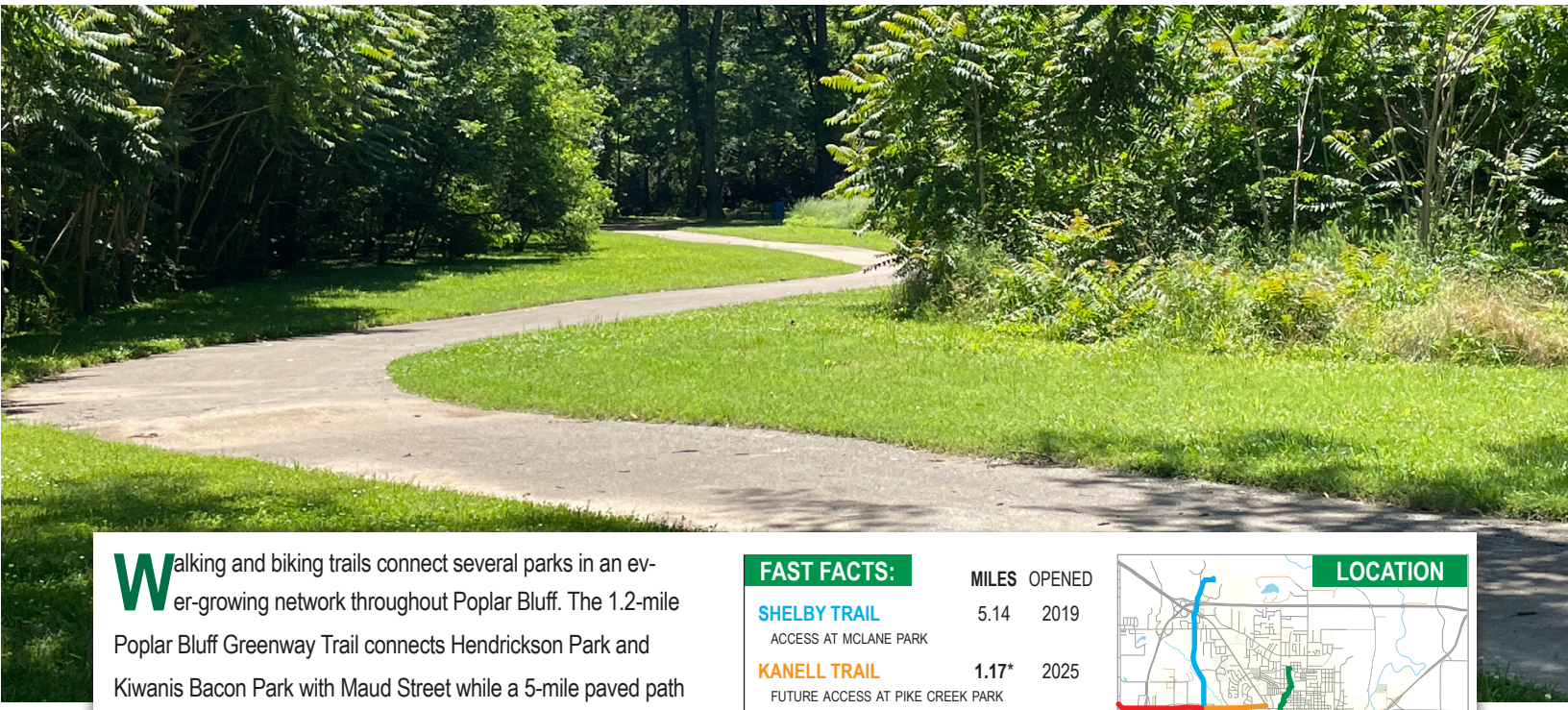




LEIST PARK


< Westwood Blvd. / Bus. 60 >
Rec Center
PAVILION
Pond
Nature Center
Playground
Wetlands
Lake
< Cravens Road >
FUTURE CLUBHOUSE
18th Green
Practice Green
9th Green
Flag
Driving Range
1st Tee
Clubhouse
Maintenance Area
< Current entrance >
N
200 FEET

TRAILS

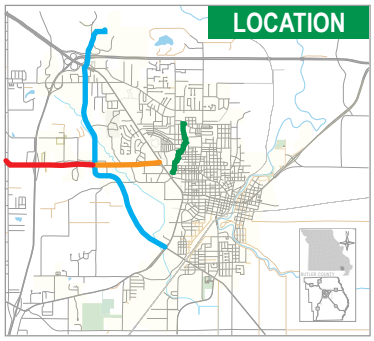


Walking and biking trails connect several parks in an ever-growing network throughout Poplar Bluff. The 1.2-mile Poplar Bluff Greenway Trail connects Hendrickson Park and Kiwanis Bacon Park with Maud Street while a 5-mile paved path along Shelby Road connects McLane Park to the intersection of Westwood Boulevard and Highway 53. A path along PP Highway connect Westwood to Shelby (Kanell Trail) and the Wolf Creek Trail in the Mark Twain National Forest that features 21 miles of trails.

FAST FACTS:

	MILES	OPENED
SHELBY TRAIL ACCESS AT MCLANE PARK	5.14	2019
KANELL TRAIL FUTURE ACCESS AT PIKE CREEK PARK	1.17*	2025
GREENWAY TRAIL ACCESS AT BACON AND HENDRICKSON PARKS	1.22	2016
WOLF CREEK CONNECTOR FUTURE ACCESS AT PIKE CREEK PARK	3.25*	2025

*WHEN COMPLETED



ORIGIN & LAND USE

Walking and biking trails have expanded outside individual parks over the past 15 years. During the City's previous Comprehensive Plan in 2008, the Park Department created a Greenway Trails plan that sought to connect the city's parks and create more access for residents who sought safer places to walk, run or bike. Shelby Road between Oak Grove Road and PP Highway opened in 2010 and a trail was developed that extended east along PP Highway to include a pedestrian bridge over Pike Creek. Shelby Road was extended south to Highway 53 in 2019, completing the trail that also ran north along Highway W to McLane Park and an extension to the Three Rivers College campus along a new entrance from Shelby Road. The pedestrian bridge along PP Highway that connected to Shelby Road to the west was extended east to Lurlyn Road and then to Westwood. This trail became the Kanell Trail, named for Billie Kanell who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. The Shelby Trail also meets the Wolf Creek Connector which runs west along PP Highway to the Wolf Creek Trail in the Mark Twain National Forest and was completed in 2025. The Poplar Bluff Greenway Trail connected Hendrickson Park and Bacon Park starting in 2016. It extends south to Maud Street and runs through property bought out due to flooding of Hogg Creek.



NATURE TRAILS

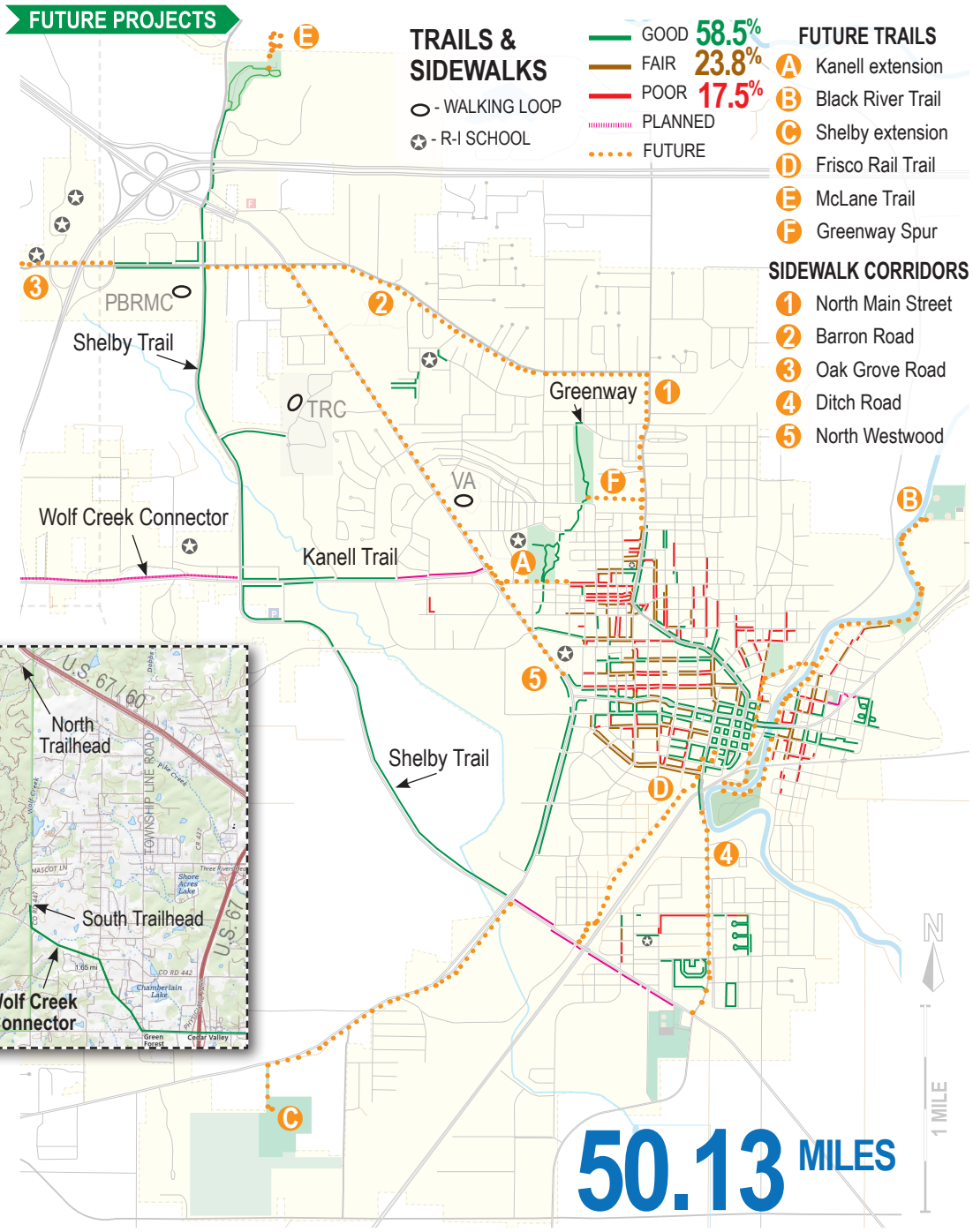
The Mark Twain National Forest created trails in the Wolf Creek area northwest of the city limits in 2011. The area features 21 miles of unpaved trails for hiking, running and biking. The area features several trails of varying lengths, including, the Wolf Creek Trail (12 miles), Cane Creek Trail (0.75 mile), Crooked Branch Trail

TRAILS

(5.25 miles), Oak Ridge Trail (1 mile), Still Hollow Trail (1 mile) and South Trailhead Spur (0.5 mile). The Wolf Creek Connector Trail connects the South Trailhead to the city limits. Natural hiking trails within the city limits are limited to the unpaved trail through the wooded area at Hendrickson Park while a proposed trail in the undeveloped northern section of McLane Park could offer a longer hiking experience through wooded hills.

CONNECTING PARKS

Once the Kanell Trail is extended to Westwood, the next phase calls for an extension to Bacon Park and the Greenway Trail, while the Shelby Trail will extend south to Whiteley Park to connect four of the city's largest parks. The plan for Pike Creek Park will create a trailhead for the Shelby, Kanell and Connector trails while the Black River Trail plan mentioned previously will connect all the parks downtown and on the east side of the river. Sidewalks connect downtown to the Greenway Trail, which could use a spur that connects Hendrickson Park to Main Street at the Health Department. A proposed trail along the old rail lines south of downtown could reach Highway 53 and extend to Shelby Trail and Leist Park in an area with no parks or sidewalks while tying into the city's historic Frisco Depot. The trails system can also connect to several Poplar Bluff R-I schools including the Middle School, Junior High and Senior High School if a trail is developed along Oak Grove Road. Both the Junior and Senior High Schools feature 400-meter tracks while walking loops are located at both the Regional Medical Center and VA as well as Three Rivers College.



SIDEWALK NETWORK

Along with providing safe spaces for residents to exercise through walking, running or biking, trails also provide a alternate transportation option. By connecting into the existing sidewalk network, the trails provide more access to parks, schools and businesses to benefit all residents. There are 50.13 miles of sidewalks in the city. However, for the vast majority of residents, sidewalks do not connect residential areas to the parks or trail system. Connecting parks and schools with sidewalks along high traffic streets will improve safety and accessibility for residents.

FUTURE PARK EXPANSION



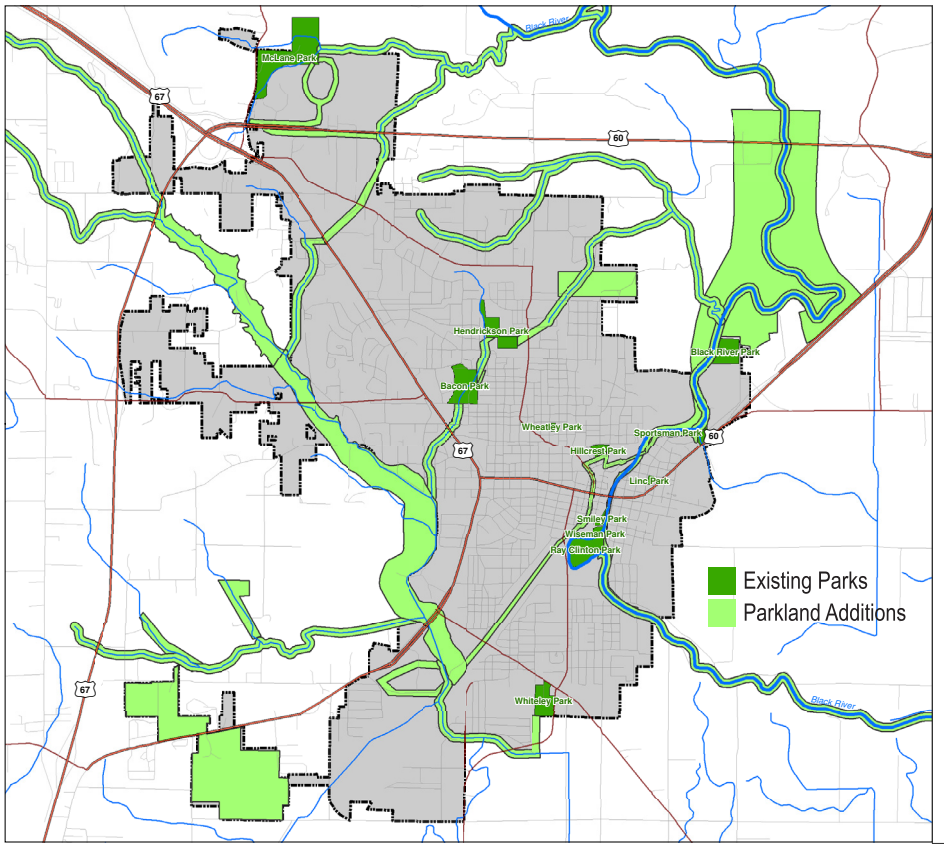
Pike Creek Park (above), Existing Parks and Parkland Additions Map from 2008 Comprehensive Plan

When the City of Poplar Bluff's 2008 Comprehensive Plan was created, it called for "creation of four to six mini-parks, playgrounds or small neighborhood parks in the city currently under-served by parks" and provided a map of such areas to consider. Much of the proposed areas for park development were along creeks to create green zones to protect the sensitive natural features. One such area included the Pike Creek greenway.

The City was able to acquire land within the this greenway while developing the new police headquarters site along Shelby Road. This additional land south of PP Highway and north of Roxie Road is within the regulatory floodplain with open fields and woods. Pike Creek Park would be the only City park west of Westwood/ Business 67 and centrally located.

This project, along with Leist Park, will expand the Park Department's portfolio but also tie up funding over the next several years. Unless more land is donated to create a park, there are few options for expansion. There are, however, other opportunities to create small neighborhood parks in areas that are under-served.

The Parks Department partners with the Poplar Bluff R-I School District on a number of recreational projects. They could also partner to upgrade a mini park on the south side near Eugene Field Elementary School. The small park is located between Nickey and Henry Streets east of Cross Street. It already features some playground equipment and one basketball hoop but is closed during school hours. There is also an open field north of Nickey Steet. In 1972, this land was purchased using federal grant fundings. "The proposal was introduced with the cooperation of the City Park Department and given state agency approval," according to a newspaper report.



Another partner is the Housing Authority of Poplar Bluff, which currently serves approximately 435 children. There area already playgrounds at the Roxie Street and State Street locations. Expanding and including these areas and developing others within the city limits to include them in the parks system would benefit all citizens.

FUTURE PARK EXPANSION

PIKE CREEK PARK

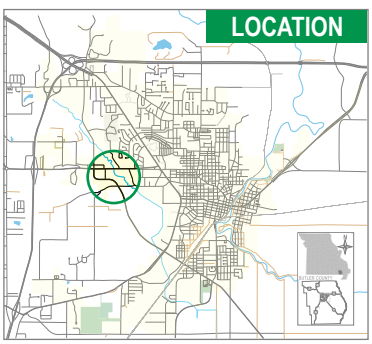
The land for this future park was secured by the City in the spring of 2020 as part of the police department project. The portion of the land within the floodway between Pike Creek and Shelby Road north of Roxie Road cannot be developed. Efforts to create a park were started in 2022 to secure grant funding but no development of the area has taken place. The plans called for a 3.25 acre lake to be stocked for fishing trout, a paved trail around the lake and connecting to the Kanell Trail along PP Highway (Kanell Blvd.) on the north end of the park and Shelby Trail on the south end with a parking lot and road creating an entrance on Roxie Road. Future projects included a nature trail through the woods on the west side of the park, pavilions, playground and restroom.

FAST FACTS:

OPENING: **TBD**
ACRES: **29.38**

PARKING	× PLANNED
ACCESS OFF ROXIE ROAD OR WHITELEY WAY	
PLAYGROUND	× PLANNED
PAVILIONS	× PLANNED
TRAILS	× PLANNED
RESTROOMS	× PLANNED
FEATURES	× PLANNED FISHING POND

LOCATION



FUTURE PROJECTS



Neighborhood Park
The area near the police station provides a safe park with a playground, pavilions and basketball courts off Whiteley Way.

Walking Trails
There could be three different loops accessed by either parking lot, one around the pond, one using Shelby Trail and a bigger one using both.

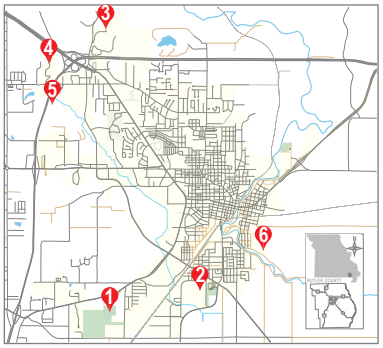
Natural Park
The area closer to Pike Creek, in the floodplain, (map below) will remain natural in state with a pond stocked for fishing and trails for wildlife viewing. Access and parking off Roxie Road would be gravel.

FLOODING IMPACT

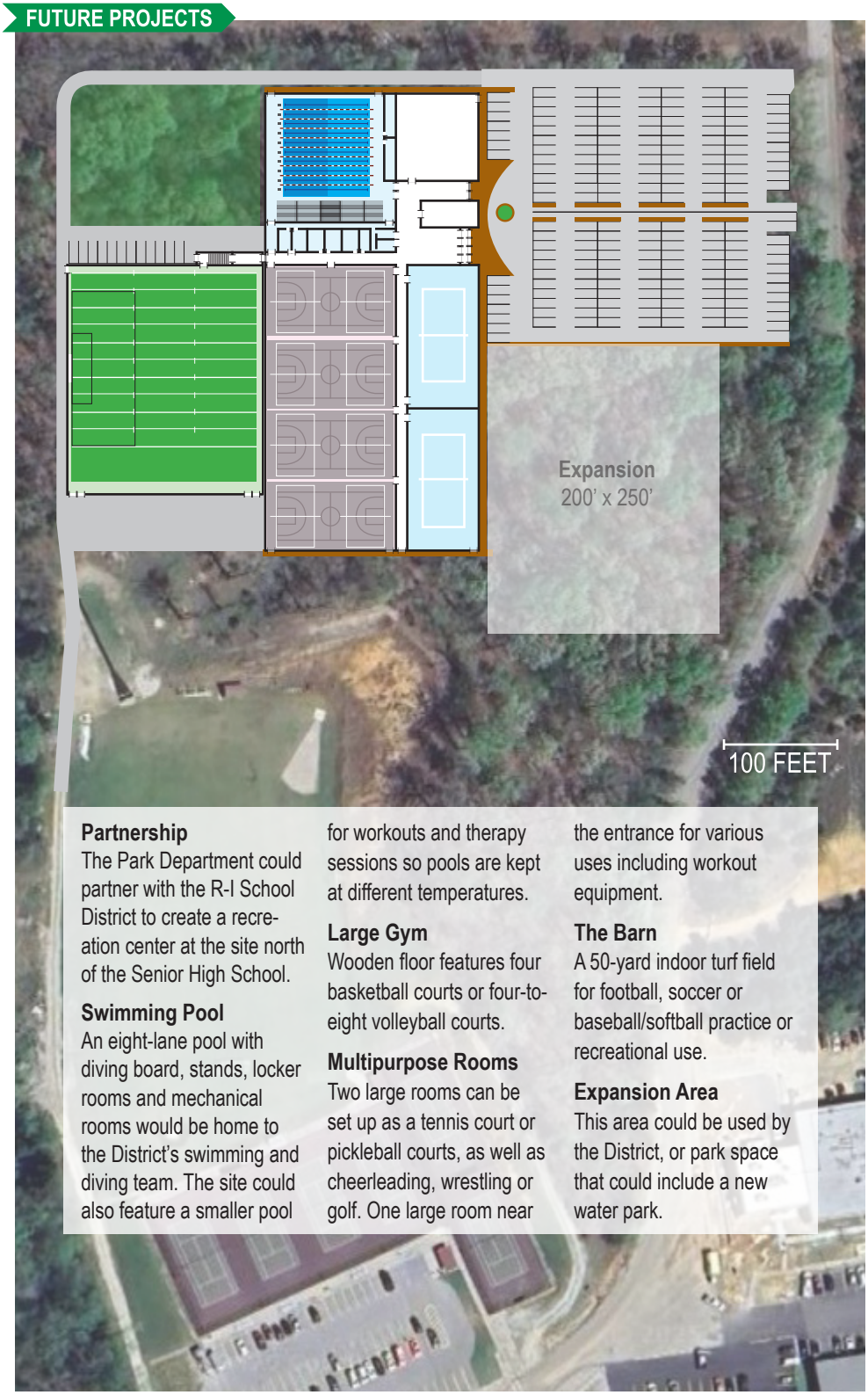
FUTURE PARK EXPANSION

RECREATION CENTER

When plans for what would become the Black River Coliseum were first proposed, the civic center project as it was known then, was to be "the flagship of the Park Department." Plans changed over the next seven years before the Coliseum opened in 1999 and the building, while not part of the Park Department, serves recreational needs of the City today. Prior to that, Poplar Bluff featured an indoor recreational facility with the Community Recreation Center (CRC), located next to the Armory on North Fifth Street, when it served the city from the 1950s until it was sold in 1983. The City's Comprehensive Plan updated in 2008 noted that "an indoor recreation facility is needed, in addition to the Black River Coliseum." The Coliseum pool is unable to host competitive swim and dive meets due to its depth so partnering with the school district to build a facility to serve as a regional attraction for competitive swimming.



FUTURE PROJECTS



Partnership
The Park Department could partner with the R-I School District to create a recreation center at the site north of the Senior High School.

Swimming Pool
An eight-lane pool with diving board, stands, locker rooms and mechanical rooms would be home to the District's swimming and diving team. The site could also feature a smaller pool for workouts and therapy sessions so pools are kept at different temperatures.

Large Gym
Wooden floor features four basketball courts or four-to-eight volleyball courts.

Multipurpose Rooms
Two large rooms can be set up as a tennis court or pickleball courts, as well as cheerleading, wrestling or golf. One large room near the entrance for various uses including workout equipment.

The Barn
A 50-yard indoor turf field for football, soccer or baseball/softball practice or recreational use.

Expansion Area
This area could be used by the District, or park space that could include a new water park.

<< POSSIBLE LOCATIONS

Leist Park (1 on the map) is the most reasonable location given the open land that is ready for development, however, it is 1.5 miles from the highway and not visible from South Westwood. Whiteley Park (2) is another option on the south side, but again not very close to the highways, while McLane Park (3) is near the highways but would take up green space in the park. There is land north of the High School (4) that could be developed along with one south of Oak Grove (5) that could benefit high school athletes. There is also undeveloped land east of the river (6) that would be large enough.

SUMMARY

Currently, the Poplar Bluff Parks and Recreation Department operates 16 parks and three recreation facilities that encompass approximately 411 acres and includes nearly seven miles of trails. The park system features a variety of activities and amenities, including leagues for youth baseball, softball, basketball, football, soccer, tennis, volleyball, track and field, wrestling, along with adult softball and volleyball, recreational options to play basketball, golf, disc golf, tennis, pickleball, horseshoes, indoor and outdoor swimming that includes swim lessons and water aerobics, fitness trails and natural areas, playground equipment, pavilions and shelters.

STAFF

A team of 12 full-time employees run the daily operations that span all but two days out of the year – Thanksgiving and Christmas – on an $1.5 million operating budget generated from a quarter-cent sales tax in the city dedicated to parks that started in 2000. The director oversees all parks and recreation within the City while various supervisors direct the daily operations in departments such as recreation, maintenance, aquatics and the golf course. The administrative staff includes a financial administrator, a program coordinator and two assistants. The maintenance staff includes the supervisor and three employees plus a horticulture supervisor. The golf course staff features a manager, course superintendent, maintenance and mechanic.

RECREATION

The Park Department is also charged with providing recreational activities for residents of all ages. There are 10 different programs for youth sports with the Park Department partnering with community groups to run three programs. There are three adult sports programs along with a 5K running/walking series held throughout the year. The Park Department hosts events, training and lessons that entertain and educate residents. Among all recreation programs, a total of 3,131 residents were served in 2024 with 83.5% of those age 6-12. A number of events are held throughout the year, many partnering with the Poplar Bluff Library, Downtown Poplar Bluff, Community Resource Council, among others, and the American Red Cross to host a babysitting and child care training, CRP classes, lifeguard training and water safety instructor training.

POPLAR BLUFF PARKS & RECREATION

PARK	ACRES	LOCATION
Black River Industrial Park	15.58	East
Clinton Park	21.90	Downtown
Downtown Dog Park	3.70	Downtown
Downtown Park	0.24	Downtown
Ferguson Grove	4.52	Central
Hendrickson Park	36.97	North
Hillcrest Park	9.35	Downtown
Kiwanis Bacon	26.45	Central
Linc Park	1.20	East
Leist Park	37.45	South
McLane Park	68.18	North
Ozark Ridge Golf Course	142.65	South
Skate Plaza	0.43	Downtown
Sportsman's Park	4.67	East
Wheatley Park	0.60	Central
Whiteley Park	31.70	South
Wiseman Park	4.58	Downtown

PARKS

Based on National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) guidelines the City had a historic deficit of land dedicated to miniparks and neighborhood parks while the community parks were up to standards based on acres per 1,000 population. Currently, the national average for acres of parkland per 1,000 residents is 10.6 acres with 2,396 residents per park. Poplar Bluff is above those averages at 30.3 acres per 1,000 residents and 954 residents per park. In the first decade of the Park Department the number of acres dedicated to parks in the City nearly doubled to 73. It was 104 acres by 1980 before the addition of the municipal golf course. In 2000, there were a little over 300 acres of park land while it is currently 348.89 acres, which represents approximately 4.1% of the total acres within the city limits. Walking and biking trails connect several parks in an ever-growing network throughout Poplar Bluff. The 1.2-mile Poplar Bluff Greenway Trail connects Hendrickson Park and Kiwanis Bacon Park with Maud Street while a 5-mile paved path along Shelby Road connects McLane Park to the intersection of Westwood Boulevard and Highway 53. A path along PP Highway connect Westwood to Shelby (Kanell Trail) and the Wolf Creek Trail in the Mark Twain National Forest that features 21 miles of trails.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the last few years the City was able to acquire land to create two new parks. Leist Park is located next to Ozark Ridge Golf Course with access to South Westwood (Business 67) while Pike Creek Park is centrally located along Kanell (PP Highway) and would be the only City park west of Westwood (Business 67). These projects will tie up capital funding over the next several years with attempts to secure grant funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) or Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), among others. Unless more land is donated to create a park, there are few options for expansion. There are, however, other opportunities to create small neighborhood parks in areas that are under-served with partnerships that could include the school district and housing authority. It is recommended that the Park Department also continue to improve the current parks with additional amenities, such as a splash pad, basketball courts, improved parking and trails. Paying for these improvements and completing the plans for two new parks and an indoor recreation center exceeds the current budget. A little over half of the FY25 park budget was tied to personnel while expenditures outpaced revenues in each of the previous three years. An increase to the quarter-cent sales tax that started in April 2000 following voter approval would help expand the parks and recreation programs currently offered. Otherwise, individual fundraising efforts or donations are the only way reach the goals set in this master plan.

REGIONAL RECREATION



Lake Wappapello (above), Current River (below)



In addition to City owned parks, there are several local, state and federally owned natural areas within and near Poplar Bluff. The area provides superior hunting and fishing opportunities year round. Hunters and anglers have traveled to Poplar Bluff, known as the "Gateway to the Ozarks," to enjoy the many outdoor opportunities of the region. These recreational opportunities put Poplar Bluff in a unique position as a regional hub for outdoor recreation tourism.

PARKS WITHIN CITY LIMITS

MINI PARK Located at Garfield and West Harper Street, this park – also known as the Rotary Park in the 2008 Plan – features a basketball court, picnic tables and grill. The property was purchased from the Park Department in 2021 and is still maintained as a park.

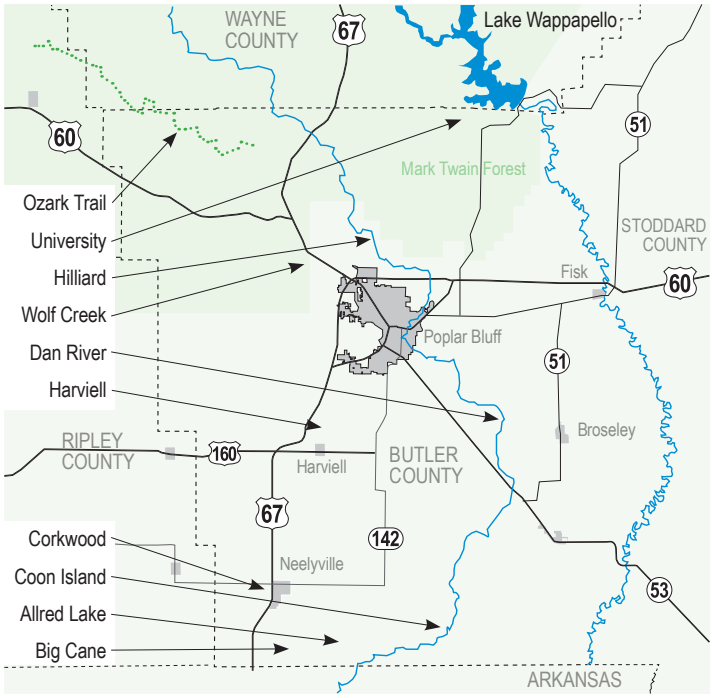
THE POPLARS ON THE BLUFF Created in 2006, this mini park owned by the County was created by the Butler County Historical Society, with support from the Poplar Bluff Parks and Recreation Department, and funded by the Rotary Club to celebrate the 60th anniversary of their Poplar Bluff chapter. It includes a "Liberty Tree" tulip poplar grafted from the last standing Revolutionary War-era tree.

PARKS WITHIN BUTLER COUNTY

WOLF CREEK Part of the Mark Twain National Forest, this area features 21 miles of trails designed for mountain biking, hiking or trail running. The trail crosses several tributaries of Wolf Creek and can be accessed at three trailheads - the North Trailhead at County Road 429 west of the Highway 67 Outer Road, 2.2 miles north of the City limits; the South Trailhead at County Road 447 (West Lakeview Drive) north of Highway PP, 2.3 miles west of the City limits; and the Central Trailhead on County Road 429. All three offer gravel parking areas while a restroom is located at the North Trailhead. From the North Trailhead there are loops of 3.6 miles, 6 miles and 11 miles. The trail was constructed with a partnership between the Missouri DNR, Poplar Bluff Trails Coalition, Friends of Wolf Creek, City of Poplar Bluff Parks and Recreation, SemoGeo and USDA Forest Service.

OZARK TRAIL With over 430 miles of trail throughout the region, two sections can be found in Butler County – the Victory Trail and Wappapello Trail. The Victory Trail, named after the one-room schoolhouse that formerly stood near the trailhead, features 19 miles of trail that follows through heavy oak forests, with small meadows and streams providing variety in the landscape. The primary trailhead for this section, located off County Road 410, features a very large parking area. The Wappapello Trail is 35 miles long starting at the southern trailhead located at the Hendrickson Recreation Area off Highway O. A connector trail allows access to Lake Wappapello State Park.

REGIONAL RECREATION



ALLRED LAKE NATURAL AREA (MDC) This 76-acre area southeast of Neelyville features lowland swamp and bottomland forest around Allred Lake and can be accessed from County Road 260 and 2601.

BEAVER LAKE Part of the Mark Twain National Forest located off County Road 434, this 15 acre lake is stocked with fish while primitive camping is allowed but no facilities are provided.

BIG CANE CONSERVATION AREA (MDC) This 2,154-acre along the Arkansas border can be accessed from County Road 276 and features a boat ramp to Cane Creek Ditch and primitive camping areas.

COON ISLAND CONSERVATION AREA (MDC) This 3,222-acres of swamps along the Black River provides habitat for waterfowl and features a boat ramp off County Road 244 and another off County Road 240

CORKWOOD CONSERVATION AREA (MDC) This 433-acres of bottomland forest features a rare shrub, corkwood, and can be accessed off Highway 142 one mile west of Neelyville.

DAN RIVER ACCESS (MDC) This boat ramp into Black River is located southeast of Poplar Bluff on County Road 611 and features parking.

FISK ACCESS (MDC) Located in Fisk north of the Highway 51 bridge over the St. Francis River, this area features a boat ramp and parking.

HARVIELL ACCESS (MDC) This 35-acres site along Cane Creek can be accessed off County Road 321 and features a boat ramp and parking.

HILLIARD ACCESS (MDC) Located at the Highway W bridge over Black River, this area features a boat ramp and parking.

JAMES CLARK ACCESS (MDC) This 12-acre site on the south side of the St. Francis River can be accessed from County Road 579 and features a parking lot for hand launching boats.

HENDRICKSON ACCESS (MDC) This boat launch is located on the Black River near the town of Hendrickson off County Road 501. The site features an accessible loading platform, and also has a large parking lot.

POPLAR BLUFF and STEPHEN J. SUN CONSERVATION AREA (MDC) This 1,106-acre area north of Poplar Bluff on the Black River can be accessed from Route NN and features a trail to an oxbow lake and bottomland forest.

RINGO FORD ACCESS (MDC) Located at the Highway 160 bridge over the Little Black River, this 1-acre area features a parking lot.

UNIVERSITY FOREST CONSERVATION AREA (MDC) This 7,149-acre area, which can be accessed from Routes W, KK and T, features trails through forests and connects to the Ozark Trail.

WILHELMINA CONSERVATION AREA (MDC) Located six miles southeast of Qulin, this 1,519-acre site of bottomland forest near the St. Francis River can be accessed from County Road 203.

FISK CITY PARK (Fisk) Located on Garfield Street, this park features a walking trail, playgrounds and shelter.

KRAMER MEMORIAL PARK (Neelyville) Located on Park Street, there is a playground and picnic shelter along with historical markers.

QULIN LIONS PARK (Qulin) Located on 5th Street, this park features a walking trail, playgrounds and shelter.

NEARBY PARKS

CLEARWATER LAKE (USACE) Approximately 52 miles northwest of Poplar Bluff, this 2.5-square mile lake was created in 1948 to control flooding on the Black River. Recreation includes boating, swimming, camping and trails.

LAKE WAPPAPELLO (USACE) Located approximately 16 miles northeast of Poplar Bluff, it was created in 1941 to control flooding along the St. Francis Rier. Recreation includes boating, swimming, camping, trails and features Lake Wappapello State Park.

OZARK NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAYS NATIONAL PARK (NPS) The first national park to protect a river system, it was dedicated in 1974 and features 80,000 acres along the Current and Jacks Fork rivers in Shannon, Carter, Dent and Texas counties.

SAM A. BAKER STATE PARK (MoDNR) Located in Wayne County along the St. Francis River and Big Creek, this 5,323-acre recreation area features camping, trails, access to the river and a nature center.

MORRIS STATE PARK (MoDNR) Located on Crowley's Ridge, this 161-acre site in Dunklin County near Campbell features a trail.

OTTER SLOUGH CONSERVATION AREA (MDC) Located in Stoddard County near the St. Francis River, this 4,866-acre site features swamp and marsh for migrating waterfowl.

MINGO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE (USFWS) This 21,592-acres of bottomland forest, swamp and marsh land in Stoddard County north of Puxico is a refuge for waterfowl and other wildlife.

MDC - Mo. Dept. of Conservation
MoDNR - Mo. Dept. of Natural Resources
NPS - U.S. National Parks Service
USACE - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USFWS - U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

POPLAR BLUFF PARKS & RECREATION

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