RUM VILLAGE PARK MASTER PLAN

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CITY OF SOUTH BEND

site landscape architecture urban design

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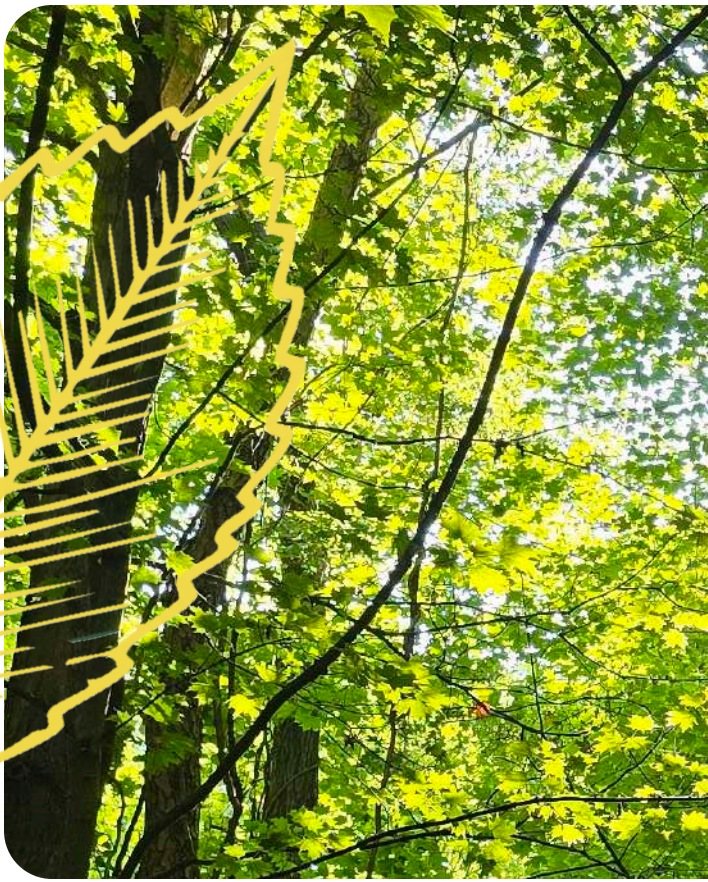

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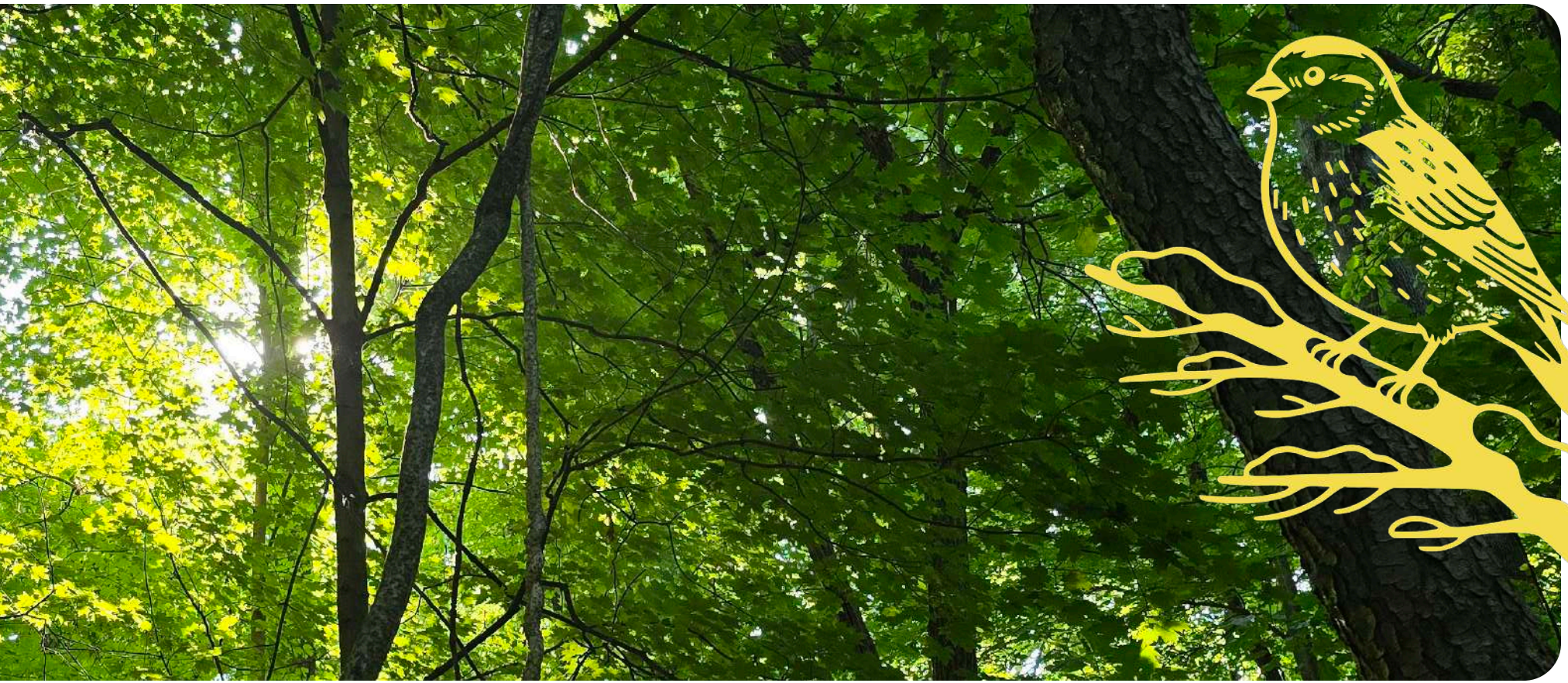


CT OVERVIEW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

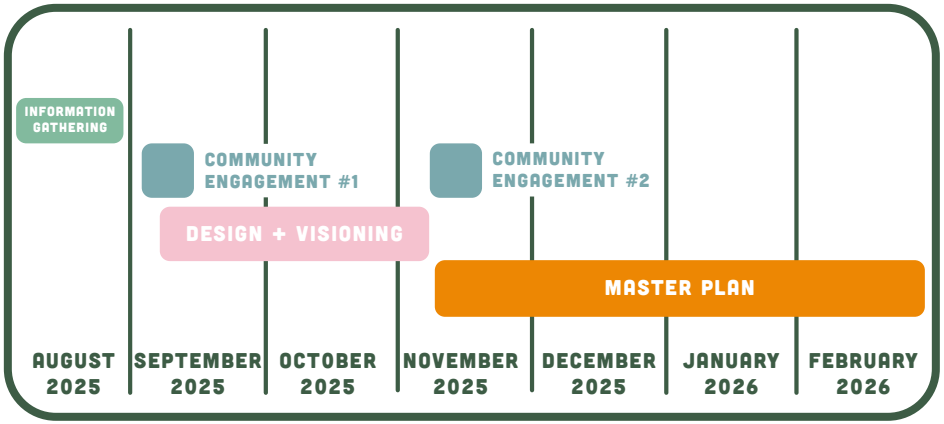
PURPOSE, SCOPE AND GOALS

Rum Village Park functions as both a neighborhood green space and part of a broader regional recreation network. A 30-minute drive reveals a landscape rich in outdoor amenities, while the 15-minute walk analysis highlights how visitors move to and through the park from nearby streets, transit routes, and access points.

Regionally, the park sits within reach of numerous recreational destinations, including 45 parks, 16 golf courses, 13 nature preserves, and several camping areas, dog parks, and recreation centers. These assets are largely concentrated in the north and east, positioning Rum Village as a key natural anchor for communities in the south. The diversity and density of nearby nature-based amenities reflect a strong regional preference for outdoor recreation and create opportunities for ecological partnerships and coordinated programming.

At the local scale, access is shaped by the street network and existing multimodal infrastructure. The park lies 1.65 miles from the Lincoln Highway and roughly 4,700 feet from the nearest bike lane on S. Michigan Street, indicating limited direct bicycle connectivity. Transit service is provided by Route 12 along W. Ewing Avenue, with 4 stops at the park's northern edge, and by Route 6 on South Michigan Street, offering additional service east of the site. Multiple access points along W. Ewing Avenue and a primary vehicular entrance on S. Gertrude Street define how visitors currently enter the park.

ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

EQUITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

- Ensure all residents of South Bend can access and enjoy the park regardless of age, ability, income, or neighborhood.
- Prioritize safe, welcoming entrances and clear circulation for walking, biking, transit, and cars.

COMMUNITY CENTERED DESIGN

- Provide spaces for gathering, play, and celebration
- Build flexibility into design so programming can evolve with community needs over time.

ECOLOGICAL STEWARDSHIP

- Protect and enhance existing natural systems, habitat corridors, and mature trees
- Incorporate green infrastructure (stormwater management, native planting, pollinator habitat)
- Balance recreation with conservation to ensure long-term ecological health.

HEALTH WELLNESS & SAFETY

- Promote physical activity with walking loops, bike paths, and open play areas.
- Incorporate restorative spaces (quiet nature trails, shaded seating, sensory gardens).

CELEBRATION OF CULTURE & IDENTITY

- Highlight South Bend's history, culture, and community pride through art, storytelling, and design features.
- Make the park a year-round destination for events, festivals, and daily recreation.

Figure 1. Aerial drone image of site

HISTORY

NATIVE AMERICAN ORIGINS

The land that is now Rum Village Park was originally home to the Potawatomi people. The area takes its name from Chief Torum (later shortened to “Rum”), whose village once stood within this forested landscape. Although initially documented as “Rum’s Village,” the name eventually became Rum Village.

Through a series of treaties in the 1820s, the U.S. government claimed the land, and by the early 1830s, the Potawatomi were forcibly removed under federal Indian removal policies. Despite the community’s seasonal return to the area during earlier years, their displacement became permanent following these policies. Rum Village stands today as part of this broader, complex history of Indigenous presence, land stewardship, and removal. Following the forced removal of the Potawatomi, the land was purchased by local traders and landholders. Unlike other growing areas of South Bend, the Rum Village tract remained largely intact, preserving its character as the surrounding city expanded.

PRESERVATION INTO A PARK

In 1916, the City of South Bend acquired the property, officially establishing Rum Village Park. This purchase marked a significant public investment in conserving one of the city’s most distinctive natural landscapes and ensuring its long-term protection as a public asset.

COMMUNITY USE AND EVOLVING LEGACY

Throughout the twentieth century, Rum Village Park became a center of community activity and recreation. The park hosted a range of beloved attractions, including Storyland Zoo (1957–1981), Safety Ville (1975–2007), and the Rum Village Nature Center, which continues to educate residents and visitors about local ecology and cultural history.

After a period of decline in the 1980s, Rum Village experienced a renewed surge in attention and investment. Hiking and biking trails, a disc golf course, picnic areas, and a dog park were added, strengthening the park’s role as a year-round recreational destination.

Today, Rum Village Park remains defined by its unique hilly terrain - uncommon in the area - and its dual identity as both an active public landscape and a reminder of the land’s deeper Indigenous history. Its continued evolution reflects South Bend’s commitment to balancing recreation, preservation, and cultural memory.

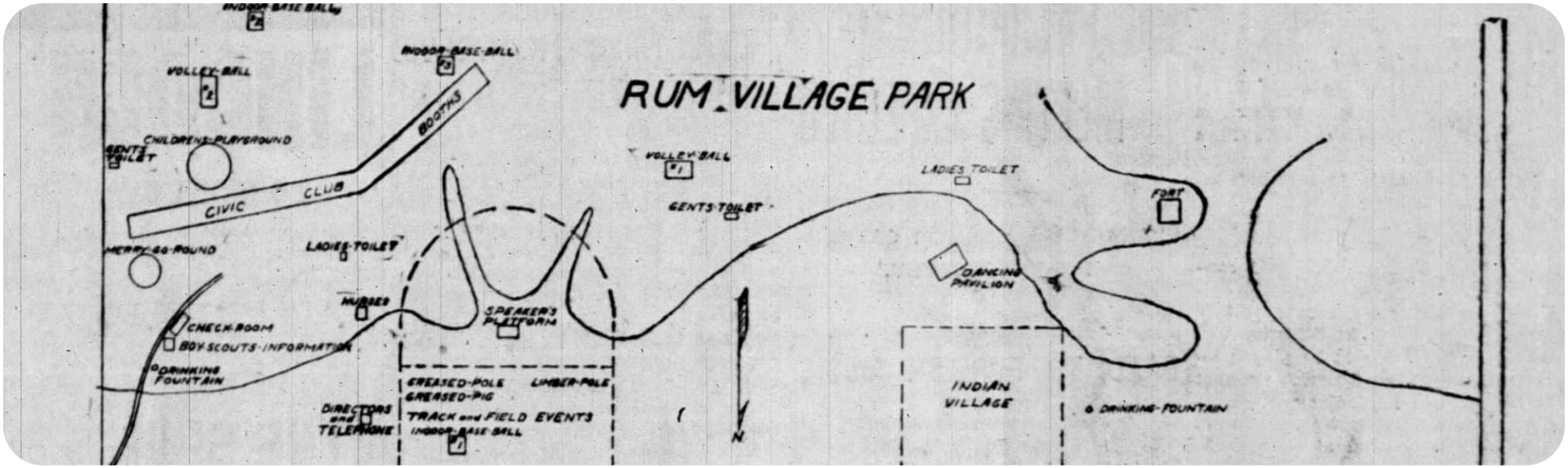


Figure 2. Map of Rum Village 1916 (Image source: NewsBank/Readex)

Figure 3. Storyland Zoo (Image source: Round the Bend 574)

MULTI-MODAL CIRCULATION AND CONNECTION ANALYSIS

Rum Village Park functions as both a neighborhood green space and part of a broader regional recreation network. Within a 30-minute drive, the park is accessible to a wide range of recreational destinations, including 45 local parks and one state park. At approximately 200 acres, Rum Village Park is the second-largest local park in the area, underscoring its significance within the regional open space system. Additional nearby recreational assets include 16 golf courses, 13 nature preserves, and multiple camping areas, dog parks, and recreation centers. The diversity and concentration of nearby nature-based amenities reflect a strong regional preference for outdoor recreation; however, these resources are primarily concentrated to the north and east, positioning Rum Village Park as a critical natural anchor for communities to the south. The proximity with other recreational and environmental resources also creates opportunities for partnerships and coordinated programming.

At the local scale, Rum Village Park is primarily surrounded by residential neighborhoods to the north and west, and with parcels of industrial use to the south and east. Transit service is provided by Route 12 along W. Ewing Avenue, which includes four stops along the park's northern edge. The main park entrance is located on S. Gertrude Street, where pedestrians and vehicles currently share a single paved access without differentiated paths.

Along the park's northern edge, a recently improved pedestrian entrance provides direct access for nearby residents; this entrance accommodates the change in elevation into the park and is designed to be accessible. An additional access point is located east of Gertrude Avenue, where a parking area and a pedestrian entrance provide access to the mountain bike circuit.

KEY FINDINGS

- Recreational amenities within a 30-minute drive are abundant and largely nature-based, with the greatest concentration located to the north and west of the park.
- Rum Village Park is strategically positioned to support partnerships and coordinated programming with nearby ecological and recreational destinations.
- The primary entrance on S. Gertrude Street is shared by vehicles and pedestrians, while a dedicated pedestrian entrance is provided on W. Ewing Avenue.
- Transit service along the park's northern edge provides convenient access for riders; however, bicycle access is limited, with the nearest dedicated bike lane approximately 0.9 miles away.

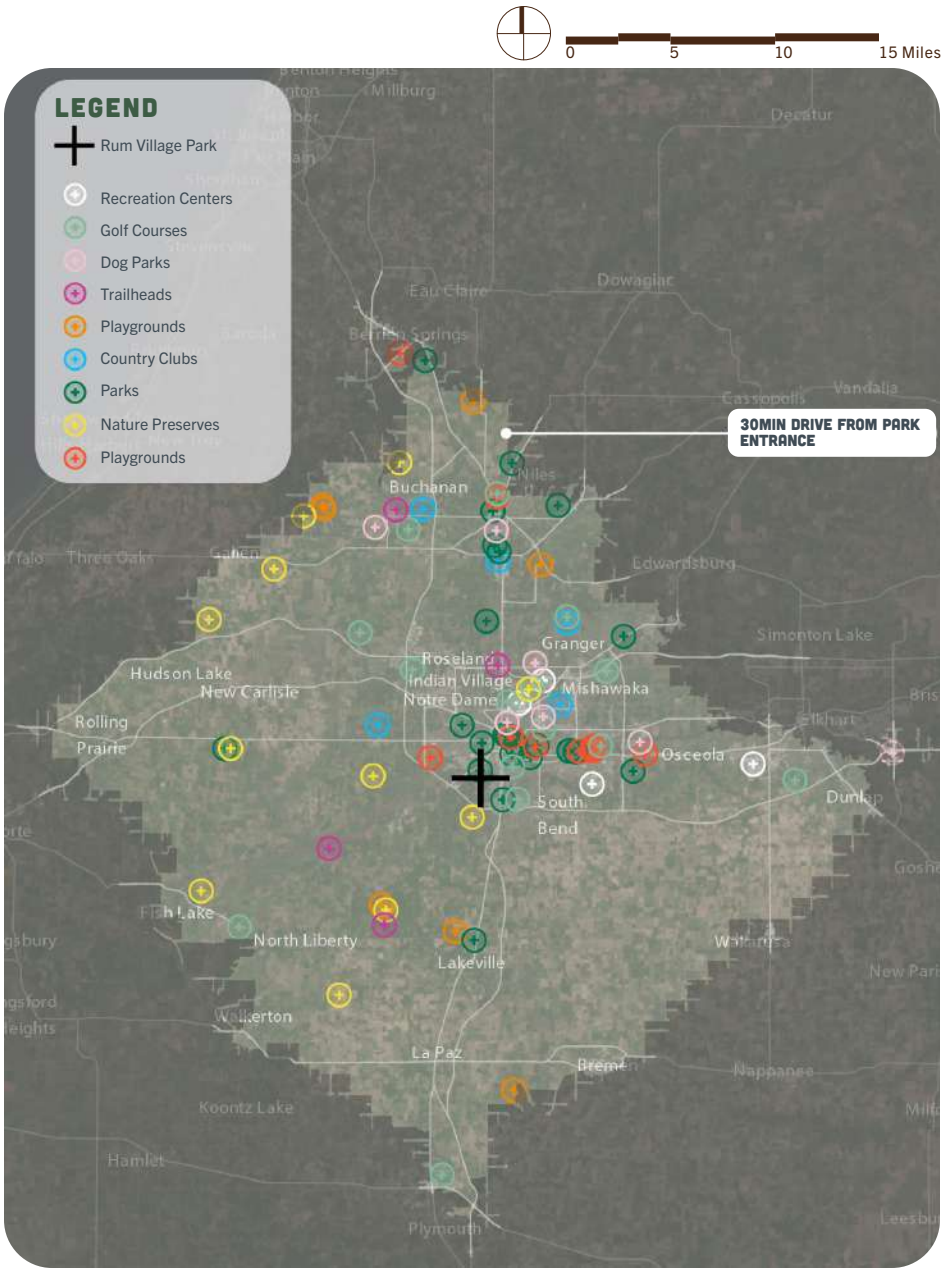


Figure 4. Neighborhood amenities within 30 mins drive

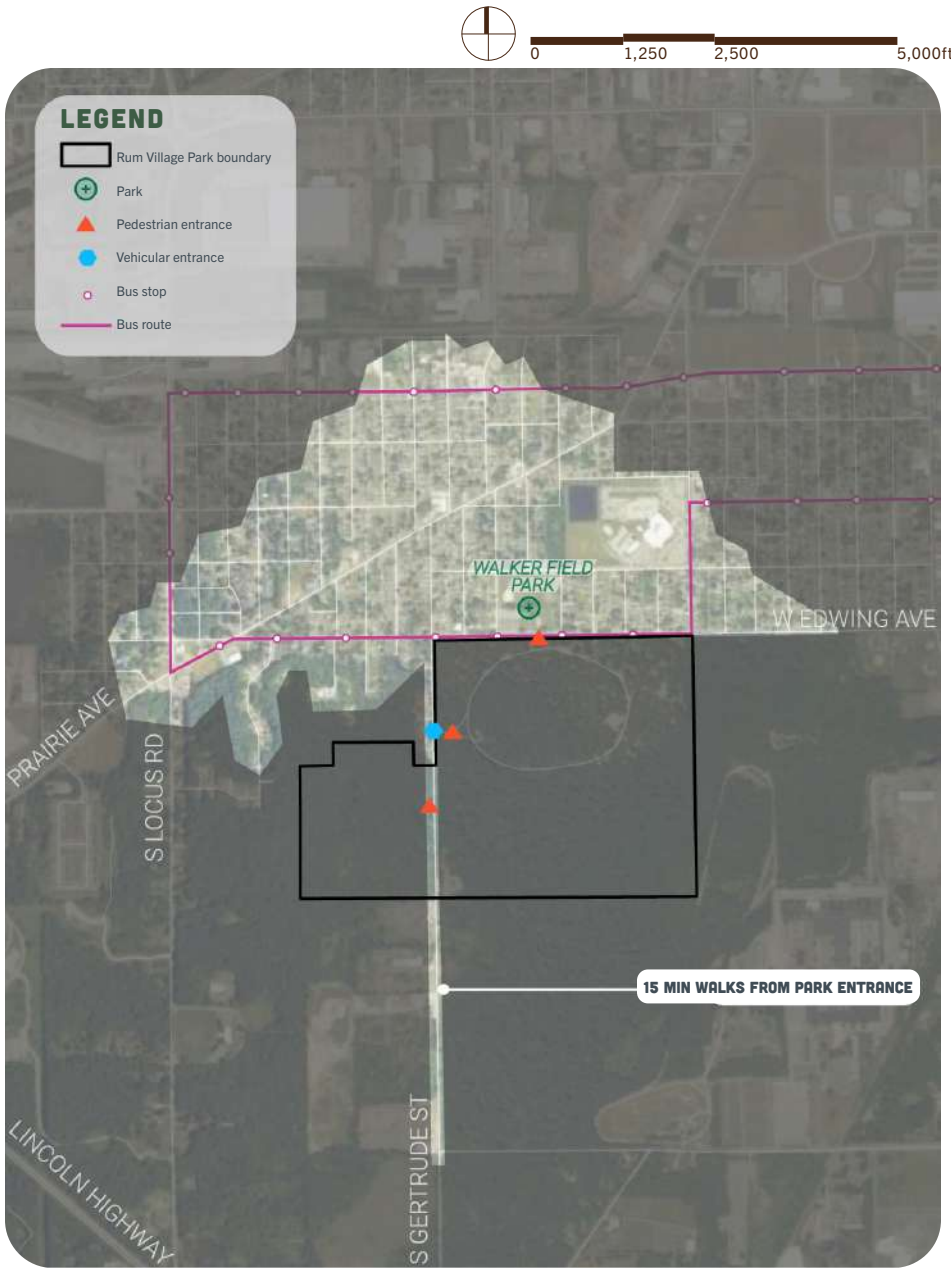


Figure 5. Neighborhood amenities within 15 mins walk

DOCUMENTATION METHODS AND APPROACH

On August 25, 2025, the consultant team conducted an initial site visit with representatives from the City of South Bend. The visit included a guided tour of the study area, beginning at the Nature Center. The group explored three of the trail segments and reviewed several key park amenities, including the disc golf course, dog park, and playground. The site visit provided the project team with an opportunity to observe existing conditions firsthand and better understand how visitors use different areas of the park, providing context for subsequent master plan recommendations.

Figure 6. Map of geotagged site photography

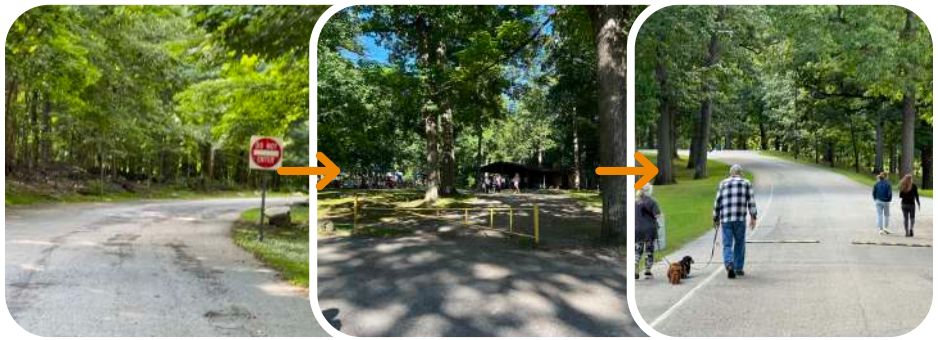
Figure 7. Site visit with project team members

Figure 8. Site visit with project team members

RED OAK TRAIL

INDIAN TRAIL

RUM VILLAGE PARK RD



MAIN ENTRANCE + NATURE CENTER

DISK GOLF COURSE START

DOG PARK

EXISTING PROGRAMS

Rum Village Park offers a diverse mix of active, passive, and nature-based recreation distributed across its wooded landscape. The trail system extends more than 4.73 miles and includes several routes that provide walking connections across the interior of the park. The 24-hole disc golf course occupies much of the northern portion near W. Ewing Avenue, forming one of the park's most prominent programs.

Family-oriented uses are concentrated near the park's center, where the playground (9,500 sq ft) and three picnic shelters form a small activity hub that supports group gatherings, community events, and informal play.

Two restroom buildings - located at the east and west sides - serve visitors throughout the day. The dog park, at 61,300 sq ft, sits as its own defined area and is a well-used facility that often draws visitors who arrive by car.

Parking is provided through a series of small to medium lots spread across the park, ranging from 4 to 64 stalls. This dispersed pattern supports access to different amenities, and larger parking areas tend to be concentrated toward the eastern side of the park. The mountain bike trail is located on a separate lot west of S. Gertrude Street, functioning as an additional recreational asset within the overall park boundary but accessed through a different entrance.


Pedestrian trails


Nature center


Picnic shelters


Playground


Disc golf course


Dog park


Mountain bike trail


Parking areas

KEY FINDINGS

- The park offers a balanced mix of active and passive recreation, from trails and disc golf to family and community gathering spaces.
- Many park amenities lack accessible and inclusive features to allow for all users.
- The playground and picnic shelters form a small activity hub at the park's center.
- Parking is dispersed across multiple lots, with larger lots adjacent to heavily programmed areas to the east.

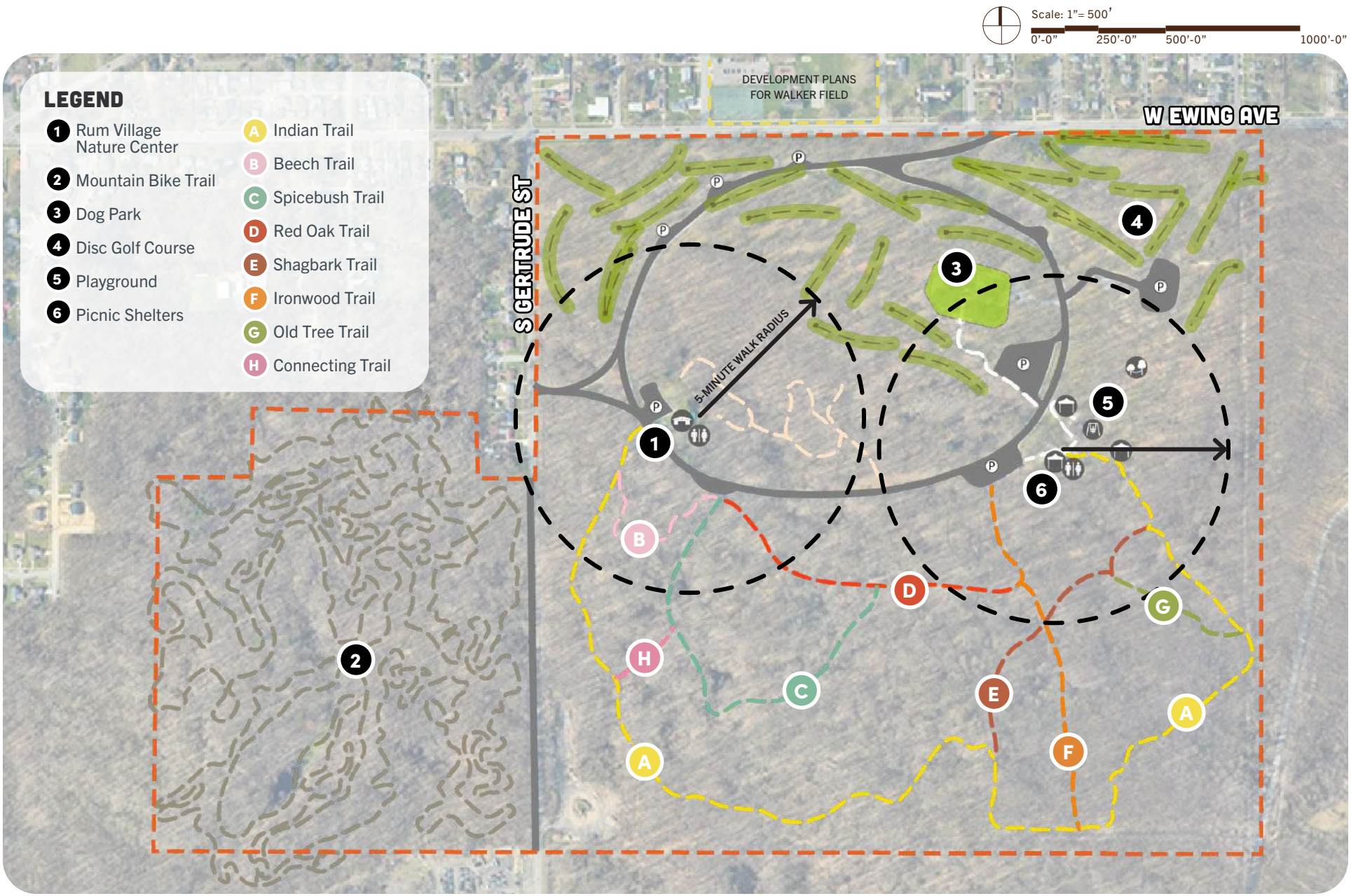


Figure 9. Existing programs and trails

EXISTING CIRCULATION AND ACCESS

PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

Figure 10. View looking west on W. Ewing Avenue

Figure 12. View looking east on W. Ewing Avenue

Figure 14. View looking south on S. Gertrude Street

VEHICULAR ACCESS

Figure 11. Vehicular access on S. Gertrude Street

Figure 13. Vehicular access at W. Ewing Avenue and S. Arnold Street

Figure 15. Vehicular entry from S. Gertrude Street

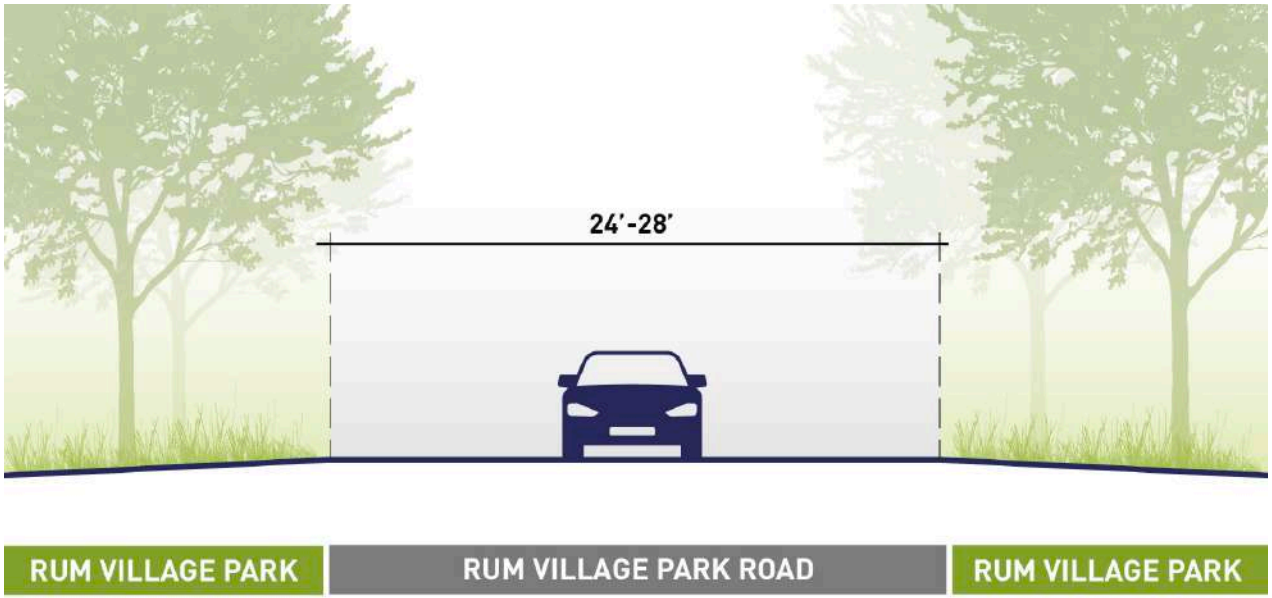


Figure 16. Vehicular use analysis cross section

The main pedestrian access is along W. Ewing Avenue, where three primary entry points lead toward the park. Recent improvements to this corridor include traffic-calming measures such as raised crosswalks, which connect directly to the park stairs ascending the hill on this side.

On the west side, pedestrian entry is available along S. Gertrude Street at the main vehicular entrance. From here, visitors can walk into the park or cross S. Gertrude Street to reach the mountain bike trail located on the separate western lot. While vehicular access is currently limited to the S. Gertrude Street entrance, it connects directly to the internal ring road, which provides access to parking lots, the playground, picnic shelters, and other amenities. A former vehicle entrance on W. Ewing Avenue is now closed and not in use. The internal ring road is a one-way route with a cross-section varying from 24 to 28 feet. It accommodates cars but also sees bicycle and pedestrian use.

Figure 17. View looking west on Rum Village Park Road

Figure 18. View looking west on S. Gertrude Street entry

Figure 19. View of pedestrian access on W. Ewing Avenue

EXISTING TOPOGRAPHY

SLOPE ANALYSIS

Slope analysis of Rum Village Park was conducted using Indiana's 2016–2020 hydro-flattened bare-earth Digital Elevation Model (DEM), also known as a Digital Terrain Model (DTM). The analysis highlights the park's distinctive hilly topography, which is unusual in the surrounding landscape and contributes to its prominence as a local landmark.

Elevations within the park range from approximately 775 to 840 feet above sea level. The central portion of the park features gentle slopes, providing more accessible areas for walking, circulation, and recreational programming.

Most of the park's trails, parking lots, and primary activity areas are located on these gentle slopes, leveraging the terrain for easier access while preserving the steeper slopes in more natural, undeveloped zones to the south.

Figure 20. Varying slopes at trail area

Figure 21. Very steep slopes at Rum Village Park ring road to the north

Figure 22. Very gentle slopes at parking lot area

Figure 23. Varying slopes at disc golf course area

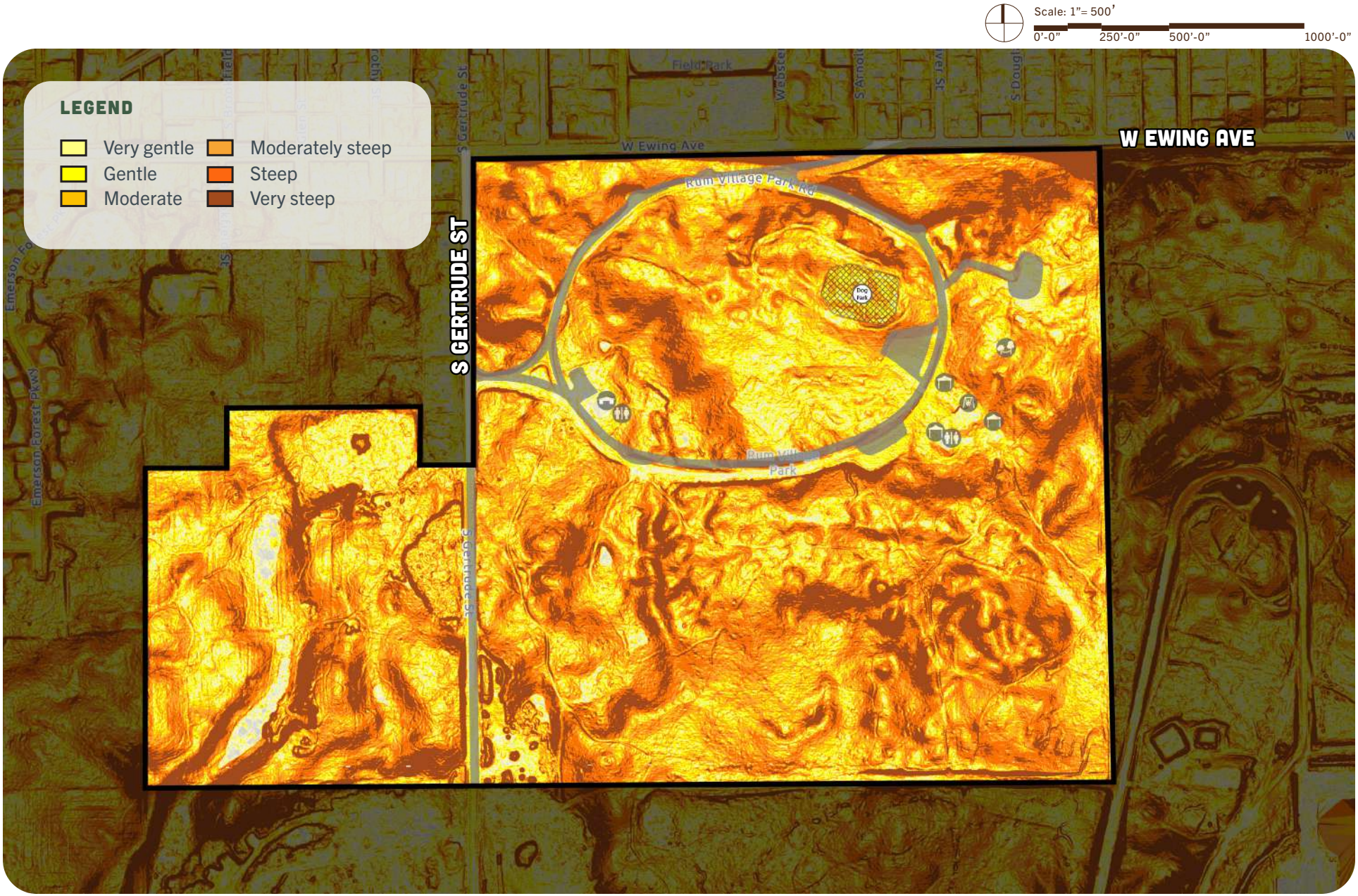


Figure 24. Slope analysis (based on Indiana's 2016-2020 DEM)

TREE CANOPY

Rum Village Park today reflects a mosaic of interconnected ecological communities. To the north, where the disc golf course is located, the landscape opens into an oak savanna with mowed lawn. The central portion of the park - particularly near the main vehicular entrance and the Nature Center - is defined by mixed deciduous forest, with mature trees and canopy structure that support a rich understory. A nearby meadow area adds further habitat diversity.

Toward the south, along the trail network, the landscape becomes more varied, transitioning into oak woodland and mixed deciduous forest with pockets of spring ephemerals. The terrain also contains several vernal ponds that contribute to seasonal habitat complexity. Together, these habitats form a layered ecological system that reflects both the park's natural heritage and its ongoing ecological processes.

WHITE OAK
Quercus alba

SHAGBARK HICKORY
Carya ovata

BLUE ASH
Fraxinus quadrangulata

SUGAR BEECH
Fagus grandifolia

AMERICAN SYCAMORE
Platanus occidentalis

WHITE WALNUT (BUTTERNUT)
Juglans cinerea

SUGAR MAPLE
Acer Saccharum

POPLAR
Populus sp.

WHITE ASH
Fraxinus americana

BLACK WALNUT
Juglans nigra

AMERICAN ELM
Ulmus americana

BLACK OAK
Quercus valutina

EXISTING ECOLOGY

LEGEND

- (A) Mixed deciduous forest
- (B) Meadow
- (C) Oak savannah within mowed lawn
- (D) Mixed deciduous forest, spring ephemerals, oak woodland and vernal ponds
- (E) Vernal ponds
- (F) Unmaintained invasive understory

Figure 25. Site ecology diagram

MIXED DECIDUOUS FOREST

• Dominated by deciduous trees with overlapping crowns, canopy cover of 60-100%

MEADOW

• Community dominated by herbaceous plants

•Woody vegetation can be present but is not dominant

OAK SAVANNAH WITHIN MOWED LAWN

• Dominated by widely spaces oak (Quercus spp.) trees

• Canopy cover is 10-50%

SPRING EPHEMERALS & OAK WOODLAND

• Herbaceous, typically perennial, plants that flower in spring and disappear above-ground in summer

• 30-80% canopy cover, dominated by members of the white oak group

• No woody midstory, sparse shrub layer, dense ground plants often dominated by sedges

VERNAL PONDS

• Small, isolated wetlands in woodland areas that experience cycles of flooding and drying

•Temporary bodies of water can last several months

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENT #1

On September 6, 2025, the Family Fun Fair took place at Rum Village Park, drawing a large number of families throughout the day. At the entrance of the Nature Center, a community engagement station was set up so visitors arriving from the school buses and others entering the event could learn about the ongoing planning process for the park. The activity also served to gather feedback on how people access the park, existing programs, their preferences for new activities, ideas for seasonal programming, and broader goals for the future of Rum Village Park. Participants ranked their top three choices for improving existing programs and for new program ideas, and were invited to share comments on park access, seasonal activities, and key priorities. More than 150 attendees took part in the engagement activity.

Figure 26. Family Fun Fair

Figure 27. Activity boards

Figure 28. Family Fun Fair

Figure 29. Activity boards

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENT #2

On January 29, 2026, a second community engagement event was held at the South Bend Technology Resource Center, where the community was presented with a concept plan and proposed park character vision. The event was well attended, bringing together a diverse group of community members and generating thoughtful discussion throughout the evening.

The program began with a presentation outlining the plan, followed by an open discussion where attendees were invited to share their reactions about the proposal. Throughout the event, engagement stations were set up to gather feedback on preferences regarding specific enhancements for each park amenity, as well as the preferred new destination experience to be offered at Rum Village Park.

Figure 30. Activity boards

Figure 31. Engagement activity

Figure 32. Engagement event

Figure 33. Activity boards

02

PARK

MASTER PLAN

MASTER PLAN CONCEPT PLAN

RUM VILLAGE PARK: DISTINCT YET CONNECTED AREAS

The proposed master plan builds on the park's existing programmatic framework, reinforcing its strengths while enhancing connectivity, usability, and overall experience. Organizing Rum Village Park into distinct yet interconnected areas clarifies how different activities coexist while reinforcing a cohesive park experience. Clearly defined areas for nature immersion, active recreation, community gathering, and quiet respite reduce conflicts between uses, improve safety and wayfinding, and help visitors intuitively navigate the site. At the same time, strong physical and visual connections between areas, through loops, overlooks, and shared trail corridors, allow users to move fluidly between programs. This layered structure builds on the park's existing assets, enhances usability, and creates a more legible, flexible framework that can evolve with community needs over time.

This master plan serves as a guiding document for the project's long-term vision and future improvements. It provides planning-level recommendations to support decision-making but is not intended for construction. Any proposed improvements will require further study, detailed design, coordination, approvals, and funding before implementation.

Figure 34. Existing mature tree canopy

SUSTAINING ECOLOGY, WELLNESS AND COMMUNITY OVER TIME

This framework supports long-term ecological stewardship by protecting habitat corridors and preserving mature trees, while flexible gathering and play areas allow programming to adapt over time as community needs evolve. Walking loops, bike connections, and quiet nature trails promote physical activity and restorative experiences, complemented by shaded seating and low-impact rest areas. Together, these areas form a cohesive park system that promotes wellness, strengthens connections to South Bend's identity, and sustains both people and nature for future generations.

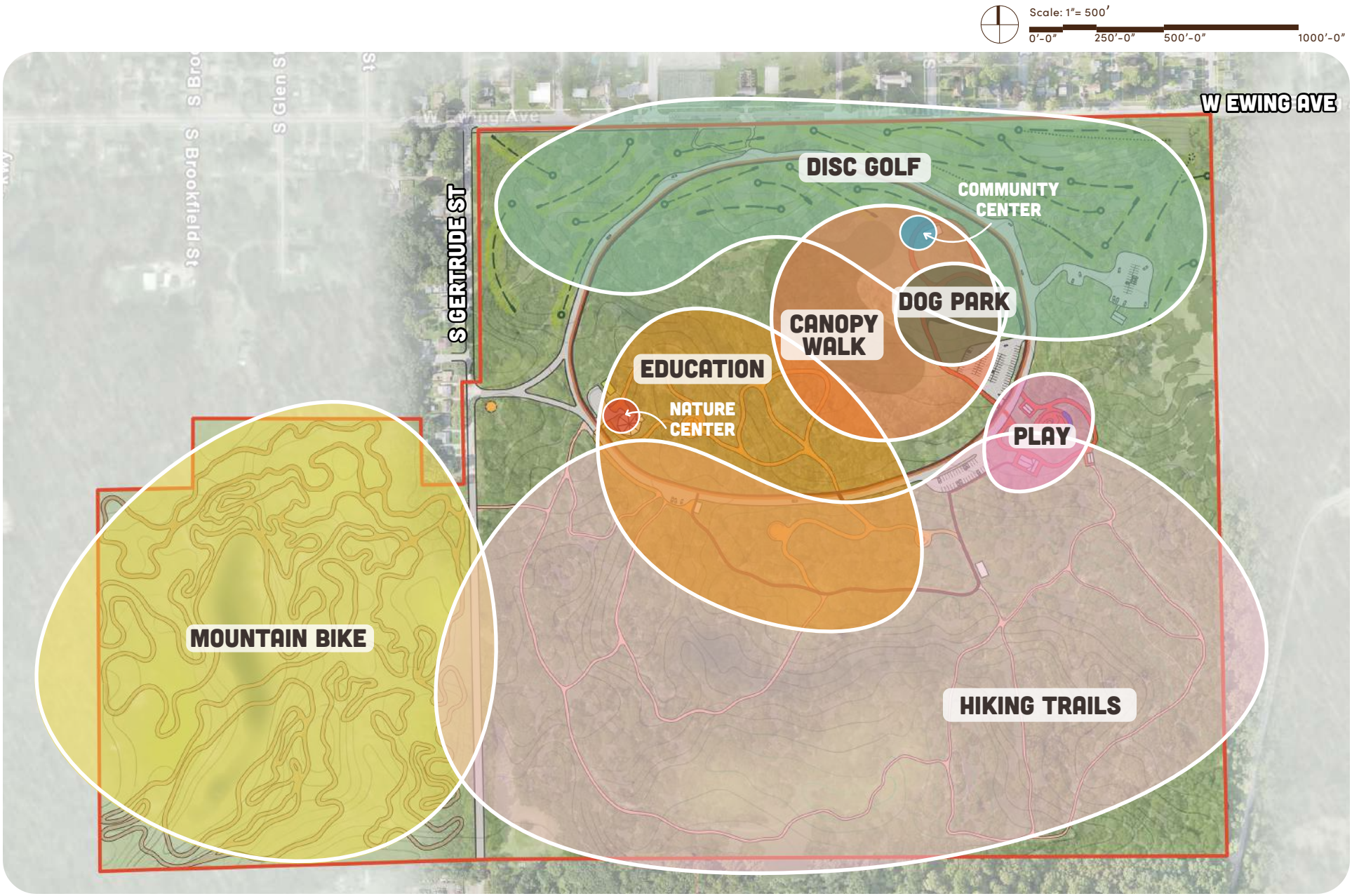


Figure 35. Master plan program concept

SAFETY AND ACCESS

Figure 36. Concept plan

EDUCATION

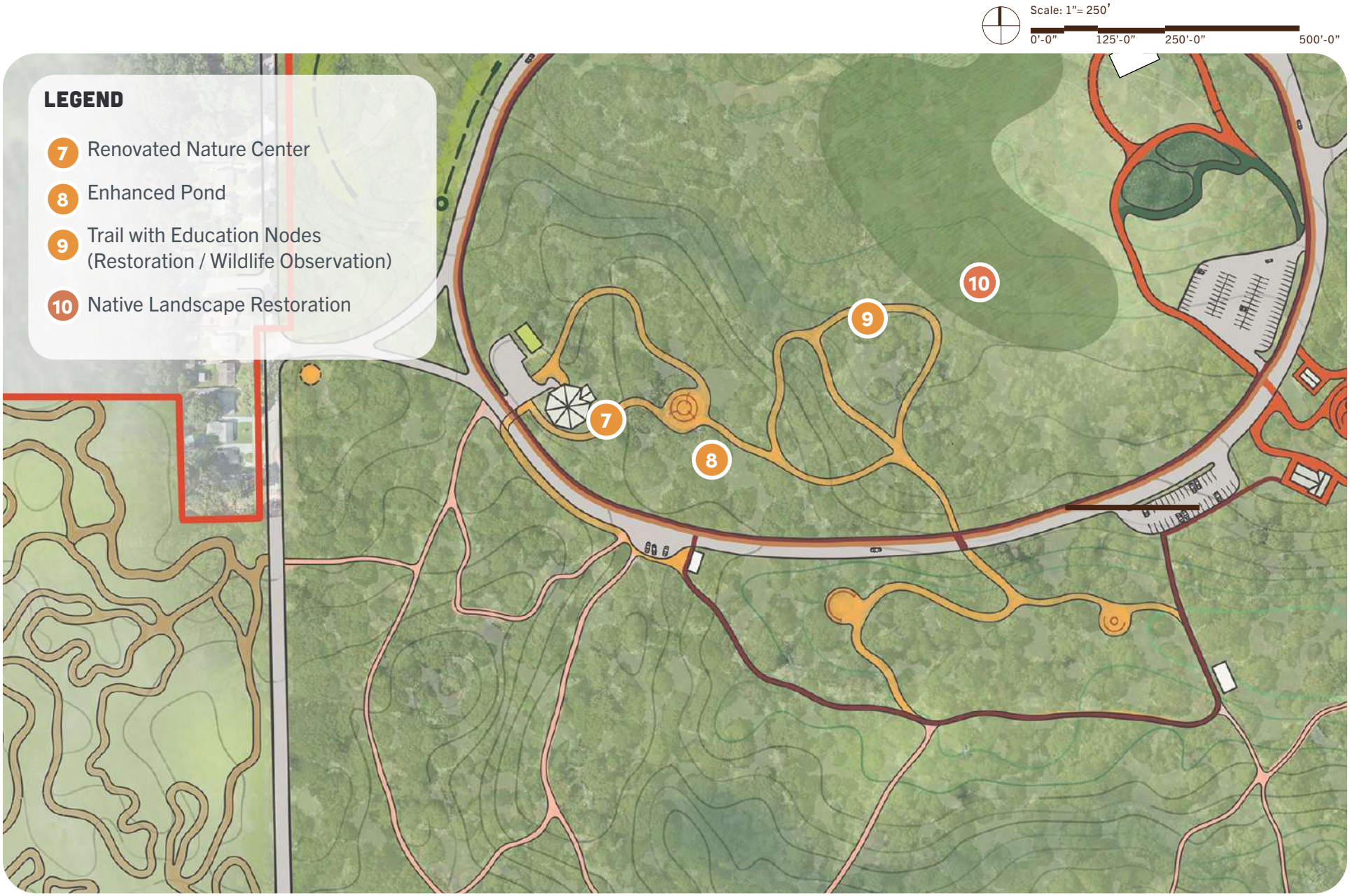


Figure 37. Concept plan enlargement

FEATURE AREA

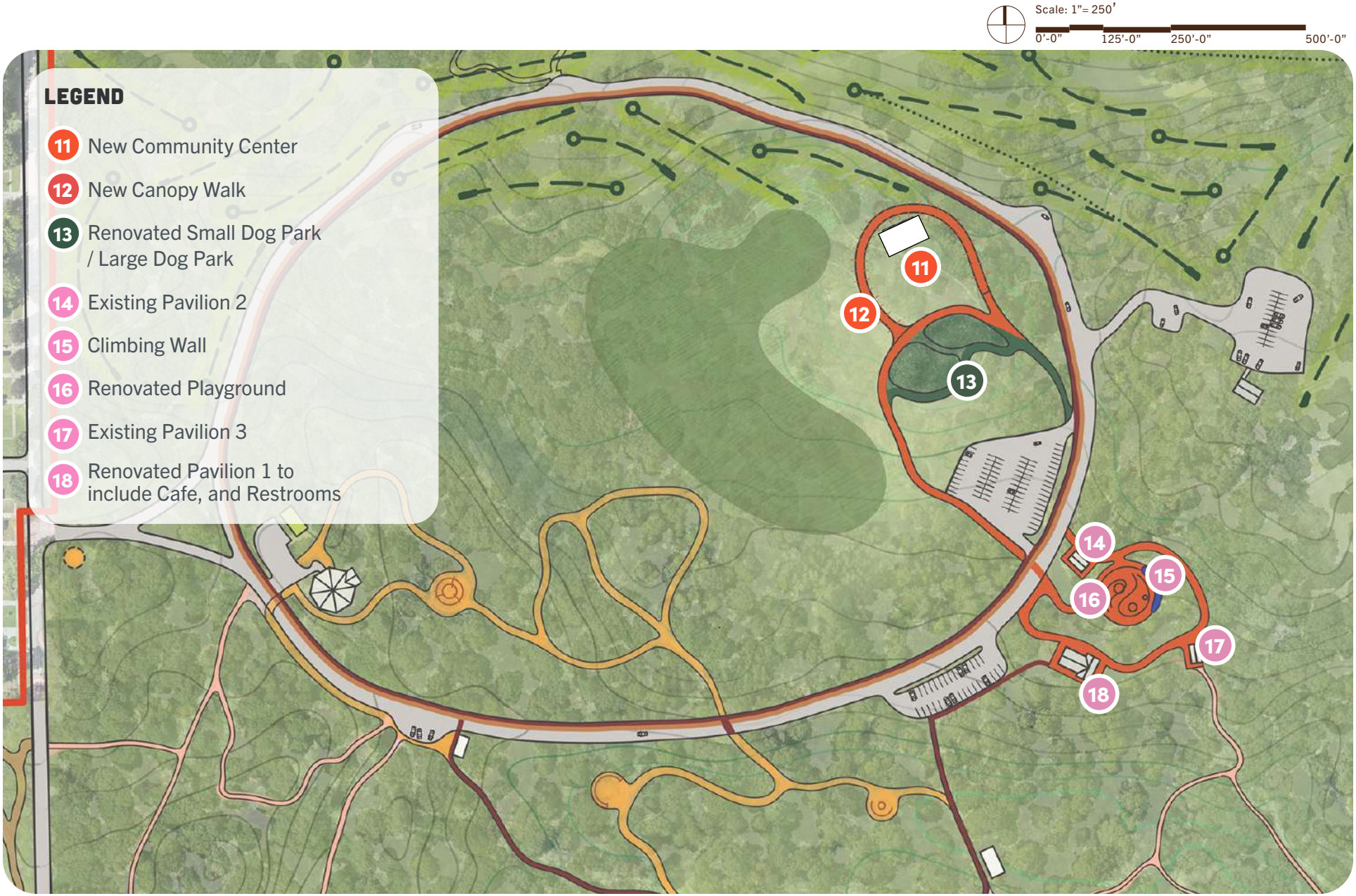


Figure 38. Concept plan enlargement

TRAILS

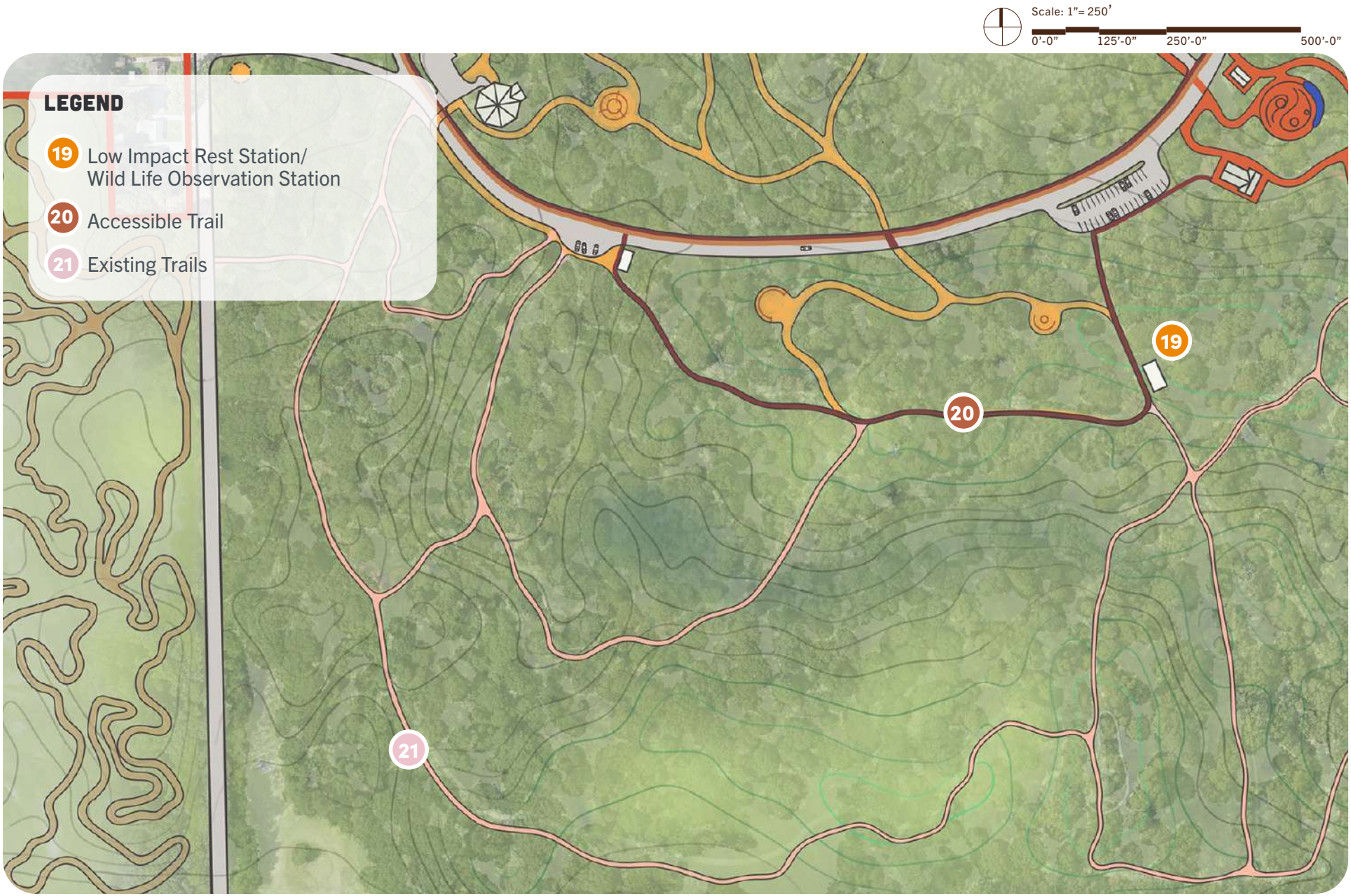


Figure 39. Concept plan enlargement

SAFETY AND ACCESS

TRAFFIC CALMING AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

The master plan prioritizes traffic calming and pedestrian safety at key vehicular entries to Rum Village Park. Along S. Gertrude Street and other primary access points, proposed measures include tabletop crossings, high-visibility striping, narrowed entry radii, and pedestrian-activated flashing beacons to slow vehicle speeds and clearly signal pedestrian priority. These interventions create safer, more legible thresholds into the park and improve comfort for visitors arriving on foot or by bike.

Building on these safer entries, the internal ring road will be refined to better support shared use and universal access.

Targeted improvements include clearer lane delineation, enhanced lighting, marked crossings to key program areas, and strategic traffic-calming elements to moderate speeds along the loop. Together, these upgrades strengthen circulation, improve safety, and create a more intuitive and welcoming experience throughout the park.

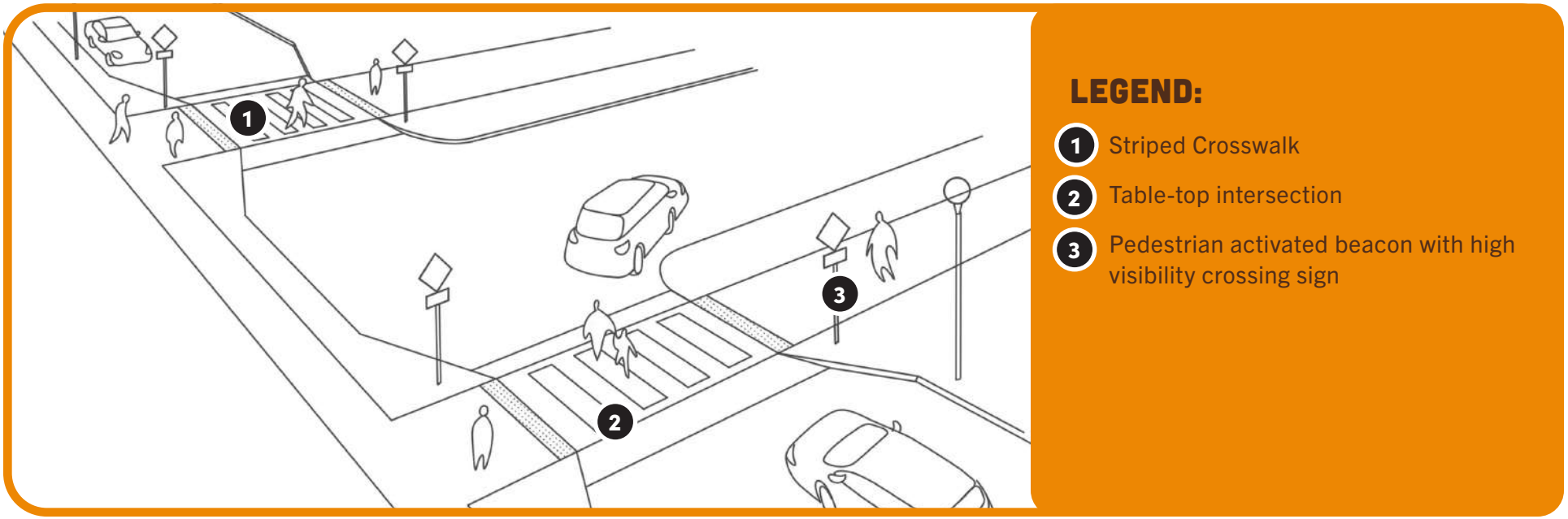


Figure 40. Traffic and pedestrian safety measures at park entry

SHARED USE PATH

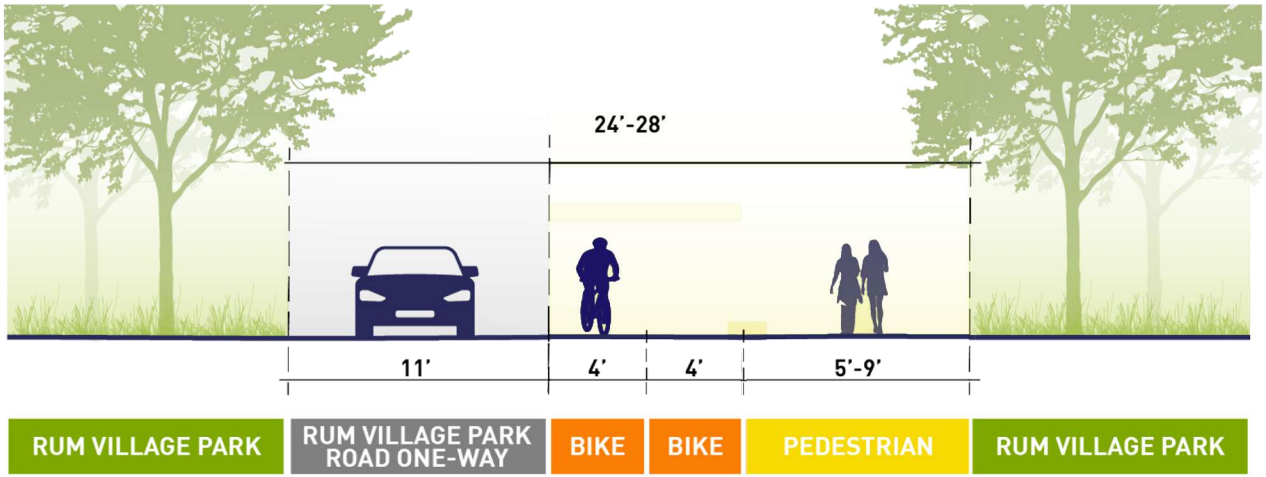


Figure 41. Proposed improvements to Rum Village Park ring Road

The main pedestrian access to the park is along W. Ewing Avenue, where three primary entry points lead toward the park. Recent improvements to this corridor include traffic-calming measures such as raised crosswalks that connect directly to park stairs ascending the hill.

Building on these upgrades, the master plan proposes striped, dedicated pedestrian paths and a two-way bicycle route along the inside edge of the Rum Village Park Road, creating a clear and legible circulation system that safely accommodates multiple user types. On the west side, pedestrian access is provided along S. Gertrude Street at the main vehicular entrance, allowing visitors to enter the park or cross the street to reach the mountain bike trail on the separate western lot. Vehicular access is limited to this entrance and connects directly to the internal one-way ring road, which serves parking areas, playground, picnic shelters, and other amenities. To improve safety, comfort, and wayfinding, the plan includes emergency call stations at key locations and clearly marked pedestrian and bicycle crossings linking the ring road to major program areas, strengthening multimodal circulation, visibility, and overall park safety.

Figure 42. Emergency call station

Figure 43. Tabletop crossing

SAFETY AND ACCESS

GATEWAY EXPERIENCE

The master plan enhances the entire intersection at S. Gertrude Street and the park to create a more cohesive, visible, and welcoming entry experience. Improvements focus on strengthening the spatial definition of the entry sequence through coordinated landscape, grading, and edge treatments that improve sight lines and clearly signal the park's presence. The design moves to establish a holistic arrival sequence, integrating planting, open space, and potential sculptural or identity features to frame views and guide movement from all approach directions. Together, these strategies transform the intersection into a recognizable and engaging threshold, reinforcing the park's identity and creating a safer, more intuitive point of access for visitors.

Figure 44. Current entry from S. Gertrude St

SIGNAGE CONSIDERATIONS

- Use consistent graphic standards between the different signage types to create a cohesive identity for Rum Village Park.
- Provide wayfinding and clear safety signage at key trailheads and decision nodes.
- Consider QR-linked digital maps.
- Signage to be durable, vandal resistant and low maintenance.
- Provide multilingual information reflecting the South Bend community.
- Consider large overhead welcome gateway for a strong park presence along S. Gertrude Street.

Figure 45. Gateway entry example

WAYFINDING

A unified signage and wayfinding system will be introduced to strengthen identity and improve navigation throughout the park. The new family of signs features simple pops of color and a clean, organic design language, offering clarity while complementing the natural character of the reserve. The system includes a range of sign types to support different user needs: mile markers along primary trails, educational signage at key ecological nodes, and clear directional signage at major intersections and entry points. Together, these elements create a cohesive, legible, and welcoming experience for visitors.

EXISTING SIGNAGE

Existing signage at Rum Village Park establishes a clear material language rooted in natural elements, with recent installations utilizing wood and stone to reflect the park's landscape and character.
The proposed signage builds upon this foundation, responding to the existing palette so new elements feel cohesive and integrated rather than visually separate. At the same time, the updated signage introduces a refined use of natural materials paired with subtle pops of color, supporting a refreshed identity while maintaining continuity with the park's established aesthetic.

Figure 46. Wayfinding signage example

Figure 47. Existing signage

SAFETY AND ACCESS

CULTURAL PLACEMAKING

Partnerships with culturally relevant organizations will guide the incorporation of culturally meaningful motifs, language, and interpretive signage throughout the park to honor the tribe's heritage and ongoing presence. These elements will be thoughtfully located along primary paths and gathering areas, varying in scale and format to suit each site. Together, they will share stories of the land, ecology, and Potawatomi traditions, enriching the visitor experience while strengthening cultural visibility and connection to place. Integrated into the landscape, this approach will become a meaningful layer within the park's identity and educational mission.

Wildlife and plant species that may be encountered in the park will also be highlighted throughout. Signage describing the migratory patterns of local fauna and various species of local flora will both serve to reconnect visitors with the cyclical and seasonal nature of the Midwest landscape. Educational signage along walking trails will feature brief descriptions and images of some of the over 100 bird species that have been seen in the park. Other endangered species such as the Indiana bat and the Mitchell's satyr butterfly will also be featured to bring attention to the value of preserving natural spaces and environmental stewardship. Small signs that identify plant species found in the park will serve as educational opportunities and reminders of the many different plant species that work together to create the environment.

Figure 48. Incorporating Native American motifs in signage

LIGHTING

Lighting improvements will begin with a comprehensive review of existing conditions throughout Village Park, including the ring road, pedestrian paths, bicycle routes, and key program areas. Current fixtures will be evaluated for coverage, brightness, spacing, and consistency to identify gaps, dark zones, and areas where lighting does not adequately support safe movement or visibility. Based on this assessment, new pedestrian-scale lighting will be added selectively along striped walking paths, the two-way bicycle route, and at marked crossings, curves, and intersections. Additional fixtures will be introduced at major access points, gathering spaces, and program destinations to reinforce wayfinding and enhance user comfort during evening and low-light hours.

Figure 49. Site lighting example

LIGHTING CONSIDERATIONS

- Provide dark-sky compliant lighting and limit to essential areas only such as entries, crossing and primary nodes as well as along ring road.
- Select warm color temperatures to reduce impact on wildlife and night time adaptation.
- Provide minimum 1 FC (foot candle) light level at Rum Village Park ring road and parking lots for accessibility and safety.
- Protect ecologically sensitive zones as no-light areas.
- Consider prioritizing lighting for overall public safety while minimizing spill into adjacent natural areas.

Figure 50. Existing lighting

FEATURE AREA

CANOPY WALK

The canopy walk will offer a unique opportunity for visitors to experience the park from a raised vantage point, located at the park's natural high point, taking advantage of the existing hill and topography to create an elevated experience with minimal structural intervention. Lightly touching down on the landscape, the wheelchair accessible structure will wind through the treetops, offering visitors a gentle ascent to a raised vantage point without disrupting the surrounding terrain.

From this height among birds' nests and flying squirrels, visitors will enjoy expansive views of the city and the golden dome to the north, as well as the picturesque geometries and restored landscapes of the park below.

Situated within the habitat restoration area that will replace portions of the existing disc golf course, the canopy walk becomes both an amenity and an educational experience, immersing visitors in a revitalized ecological setting. Designed for visitors of all ages and abilities, this elevated pathway invites people to be lifted above their daily surroundings and immerse themselves in the beauty of the tree tops.

CANOPY WALK TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Ensure the structure designed causes the least disturbance to existing trees and root protection zones.
- Maintain accessible slopes and provide handrails where needed (at slopes 5-8.3%)
- Ensure minimum clear width of 6ft to accommodate two-way traffic.
- Ensure route alignment avoids significant trees and sensitive habitat zones.
- Coordinate lighting as dark sky compliant fixtures integrated into railings.

Figure 51. View at existing dog park looking over high point

Figure 52. Perspective view of proposed canopy walk

MATERIAL PALETTE

The canopy walk will be crafted from a palette of natural and durable materials that harmonize with the surrounding landscape and minimize visual impact. Timber decking, railings, and structural elements will bring warmth and tactility to the experience, reinforcing a strong connection to the forest environment. In select segments, a metal grate walking surface may be incorporated to allow light to filter through and offer glimpses of the habitat restoration below, deepening visitors' awareness of the landscape beneath their feet while maintaining a light, unobtrusive presence.

Figure 53. Metal structure and grate

Figure 54. Timber decking and guardrails

Figure 55. Lightweight steel structure

Figure 56. Low impact foundation structure

EXPERIENTIAL ELEMENTS

The canopy walk is envisioned as a recreational and educational experience, offering new ways to engage with the park's restored landscape and treetops. Integrated educational signage will highlight native tree species, bird life, and local ecology, helping visitors understand habitat restoration and biodiversity visible from the elevated walkway. Interactive features such as hammock-style nets, overlook seating, and pause points will invite visitors to linger, rest, and experience the forest from new perspectives.

Figure 57. Wildlife viewing stations

Figure 58. Alternate paths

Figure 59. Educational signage

Figure 60. Interactive seating

FEATURE AREA

UNIVERSAL NATURE PLAY AREA

The proposed Universal Nature Play Area replaces the existing playground at Rum Village Park with an inclusive, nature-based play environment rooted in the character of the surrounding reserve. Designed to be accessible to children of all ages and abilities, the play area emphasizes universal play principles, encouraging collaborative, imaginative, and sensory-rich experiences rather than prescriptive equipment. Natural topography, trees, and open clearings are incorporated to create flexible play zones that support climbing, balancing, social interaction, and quiet retreat. Play elements are intentionally open-ended, allowing children to invent their own games and engage with the landscape in multiple ways.

Figure 61. Existing playground equipment

PLAY AREA CONSIDERATIONS

- Provide diverse play elements to support a range of physical and sensory experiences.
- Use park-sourced natural materials where possible.
- Ensure adequate fall zones are provided for all equipment.
- Consider providing natural boundaries with strategically placed planting beds to control access.
- Consult Universal Design Index for inclusive use. (see pg 42)

Figure 62. View of existing playground

Figure 63. Perspective view of proposed nature play area

MATERIAL PALETTE

The nature play area prioritizes natural and durable materials that reflect the reserve landscape, including locally sourced logs and timbers, boulders and stone, sand, wood mulch, and native plantings. These materials are combined with select universal-access components - such as firm, stable surfacing and accessible routes - to ensure safety, durability, and inclusive access while maintaining a natural appearance.

Figure 64. Engineered wood fiber

Figure 65. Loose aggregate / decomposed aggregate

Figure 66. Natural stone

Figure 67. Natural logs and stumps

PLAY ELEMENTS

The nature play area would incorporate a range of informal, nature-based elements that encourage exploration, creativity, and physical activity. Features such as fallen tree trunks, planted play mounds with integrated steps and platforms, and low climbing walls constructed from natural materials would provide varied opportunities for fine and gross motor skills. Sensory play components, including a play kitchen, building area with loose natural materials like sticks, leaves, and stones, would support imaginative and tactile experiences. Together, these elements create an open-ended play environment that blends seamlessly with the landscape of Rum Village Park while inviting children to engage with nature in a hands-on, self-directed way.

Figure 68. Fallen tree elements

Figure 70. Sensory-rich outdoor activities

Figure 71. Mounded play

Figure 69. Climbing element

UNIVERSAL PLAY DESIGN

Universal design for play spaces goes beyond simply meeting accessibility compliance, it is a philosophy that reimagines how environments are conceived from the ground up, so that every child, regardless of ability, can engage meaningfully and independently. Rather than treating accessibility as a retrofit or an afterthought, truly inclusive play design considers the full spectrum of human experience: physical, sensory, and intellectual.

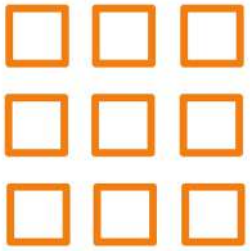
This approach recognizes that disability is not a fixed condition but a relationship between a person and their environment, and that well-designed spaces have the power to reduce that gap entirely. When play spaces are planned with universal design principles at their core, they become richer, more dynamic environments for everyone, fostering social connection, confidence, and imaginative play across all ages and abilities.

PRINCIPLES FOR A UNIVERSALLY INCLUSIVE PLAY SPACE

1.

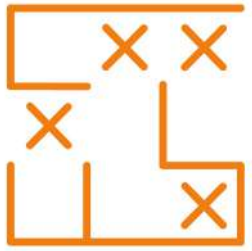
Provides opportunities for people of all abilities to play alongside one another.

2.



Free of any social or environmental barriers for people with and without impairments, allowing for people of all abilities.

3.



Provides acceptable risk and graduated challenges to people with and without impairments.

TARGET USERS

MOBILITY/PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Wheelchair / Mobility device user
Poor stamina
Poor balance
Muscle weakness
Limited use of arms / hands
Limited dexterity

SENSORY DISABILITIES

Blind or visual disability
Deaf or hearing disability

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Learning disability
Cognitive disability
Emotional disturbances
Developmental delay
Challenging behavior

UNIVERSAL PLAY DESIGN INDEX CHECKLIST

Comfort
Are there obtrusive elements that disorient users?

Orientation
Are there multiple forms of sensory orientation using sound, touch smell and sight?

Refuge
Are there escape pods or quiet areas where users can take a break?

Mitigation
Is the space designed to control the effect of the surrounding acoustics and light?

Green space
Are green elements incorporated in the play area?

Means
Are there components that allow for self-sufficient access?

Latitude
Is space provided for parents and caretakers to observe?

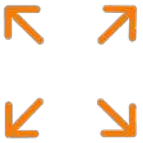
Flexibility
Are there interactive elements for a range of physical abilities?

Collaboration
Are there elements that promote teamwork and collaborative play?

Boundary
Are the different play areas defined with natural boundaries?

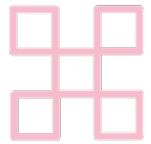
Approach
Is there enough space for free unobstructed movement at each play element?

Contiguity
Are there oportunities for side by side activity for users with different ability levels?



Capacity
Is there sufficient access space around play elements for both engagement and observation?

Sensory
Are there different sensory experiences for sound, smell, touch and sight?



Compartmentalization
Are spaces subdivided into smaller areas to avoid over stimulation?

Reach
Are there interactive elements at multiple levels of reach?

Circuit
Is there an orientation path that loops around the entire play area?

Signage
Is there signage that clearly define play elements and areas, skill and activity levels?

Creativity
Are there ambiguous play elements that encourage imaginative play?

Transition
Are there transition zones that help users to recalibrate between one area to the next?

FEATURE AREA

DOG PARK

The master plan proposes a right-sized reduction in the existing dog park footprint. This adjustment frees up underutilized land for native habitat restoration while supporting the introduction of a destination canopy walk experience. The redesigned park retains its core program with dedicated areas for small and large dogs, and introduces new opportunities including improved trail connectivity and enhanced passive surveillance from adjacent pathways. New amenities such as agility features, dog drinking fountains, and owner seating enrich the experience, with durable, low-maintenance materials such as decomposed granite and wood mulch for the ground plane and timber or powder-coated steel for fencing and other equipment.

Figure 73. Existing dog park

DOG PARK CONSIDERATIONS

- Provide double gate at entry point with trash receptacles.
- Provide 6ft high minimum fencing around perimeter of dog park.
- Ensure maintenance needs when selecting ground surface material and equipment.
- Provide separate areas for large and small dogs with separated entries.
- Consider creating a planted buffer around the dog park to obscure area from wildlife.

Figure 72. Dog park equipment example

Figure 74. Perspective view of proposed dog park area

EDUCATIONAL AREA

EDUCATIONAL TRAIL AND NODES

The educational trail would meander through restored habitats and existing woodland, encouraging visitors to slow down and engage more deeply with the landscape rather than simply pass through it. Thoughtfully placed interpretive signage would highlight native plants, wildlife, and seasonal changes, supporting self-guided discovery while reinforcing the park's ecological stewardship goals. Along the route, small seating and observation nodes would provide comfortable places for rest, nature viewing, and informal learning. Flexible outdoor classroom areas integrated at key clearings could host hands-on programs, school group activities, and guided walks.

Figure 75. Wildlife observation

EDUCATIONAL COMPONENTS CONSIDERATIONS

- Provide small interpretive nodes highlighting ecology, wild life and other relevant information.
- Consider use of QR links for deeper digital content.
- Incorporate tactile and sensory elements for inclusive learning.
- Ensure nodes are accessible to all users, including elements such as companion seating, handrails, and appropriately placed signage.

Figure 76. Educational signage

DEMONSTRATION AND SENSORY GARDENS

Planting is used to create moments of interest and pause within the park, forming distinct garden nodes that support both learning and respite. A demonstration garden would showcase habitat restoration through curated native plant communities that illustrate ecological functions such as pollinator support, seasonal change, and soil health. In contrast, a sensory garden would provide a quieter, restorative setting, using layered textures, fragrance, and shade to create a calming place for reflection. Together, these gardens introduce new programs that highlight ecological stewardship while offering inclusive spaces for education, healing, and connection with nature.

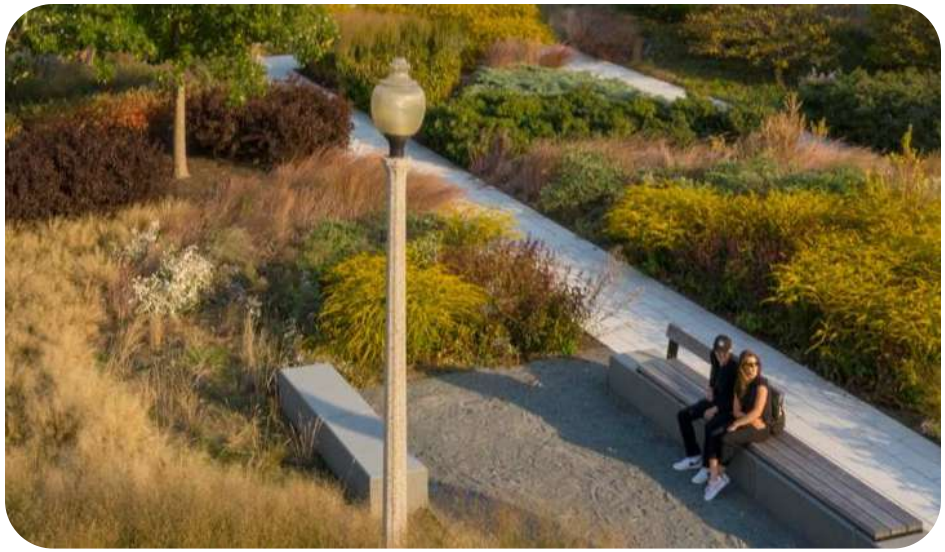


Figure 78. Seating node in sensory garden

GARDEN DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

- Ensure the use of plant species native to the area of South Bend in accordance with forestry and Purdue guidelines.
- Consider irrigation and maintenance needs when planning location and size of gardens.
- Ensure the garden allows space for hosting small groups as part of Nature Center led programs.
- Ensure paths main paths through the garden are accessible.
- Provide interpretive signage for self-guided use.

Figure 77. Sensory planting

EDUCATIONAL AREA

ACCESSIBLE TRAIL

The existing Red Oak Trail will be enhanced to function as the primary ADA-accessible loop within Rum Village Park, offering a continuous, barrier-free route through the woodland setting. Upgrades will include accessible surfacing, refined grading, clear wayfinding, and shaded rest areas to support comfort and ease of movement. Educational trails will be extended and improved to form an accessible network branching from the Red Oak Trail, allowing visitors of all ages and abilities to explore key ecological areas while maintaining the trail's natural character.

Figure 80. Existing Red Oak trail

ACCESSIBLE TRAIL CONSIDERATIONS

- Provide durable, stable and slip-resistant trail surface material suitable for all season accessible use.
- Consider construction methods to minimize habitat disturbance and protect existing tree root zones.
- Ensure direct, accessible connections to adjacent parking lot and trail heads.
- Incorporate gentle switchback ramps, sloped walkways and raised boardwalk segments to navigate topographic changes while maintaining accessible grades.
- Consider locating inclusive furniture throughout the length of the trail to ensure adequate breaks between rest stations.

Figure 79. Existing Red Oak trail

REST STATION

Low-impact rest stations are thoughtfully placed at key intervals along the trail to provide shaded seating, wayfinding, and opportunities to pause without interrupting the surrounding landscape. Constructed with durable, low-maintenance materials, the stations are designed to blend with the natural setting and minimize ground disturbance. Integrated educational signage can share information about local ecology, habitat restoration, and cultural context, supporting both accessibility and a more meaningful interpretive experience while preserving the park's character.

Figure 82. Low impact rest station with built-in seating

REST STATION CONSIDERATIONS

- Provide essential amenities such as shade, drinking fountains, seating with backs/armrests, and space for mobility devices.
- Consider locating at regular, comfortable intervals based on trail length and grade to support a range of user abilities.
- Ensure clear sight lines to and from the trail for safety, visibility, and intuitive wayfinding.
- Position at natural pause points (overlooks, junctions, interpretive nodes) to enhance the visitor experience.

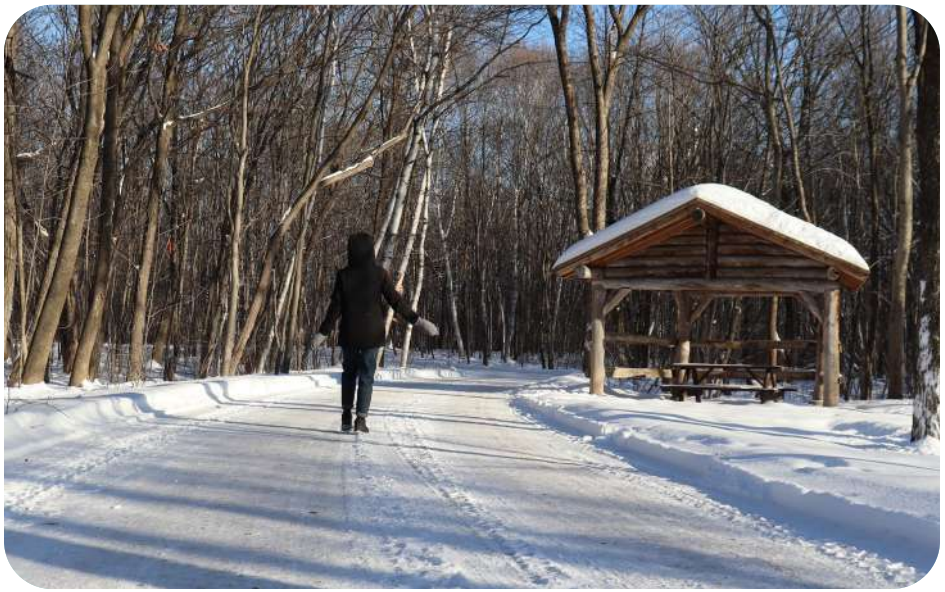


Figure 81. Rest station in winter

MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS

An addition of a Green Line course is identified as a potential opportunity to the existing mountain bike trail system, creating an accessible entry point for riders who are new to off-road cycling. As a purpose-built introductory loop, a new Green Line would complement the existing trail network, broadening participation and supporting skill development before riders transition to more advanced routes. It would also help distribute trail use more evenly, reduce user conflicts, and provide a dedicated space for youth programs, lessons, and community events, ultimately strengthening the park's recreational offerings and long-term trail stewardship.

Figure 83. Existing mountain bike trail

CONSIDERATIONS

- Refer to plant inventory and assessment to minimize damage to high quality vegetation and tree canopy.
- Engage a qualified mountain bike trail designer for the design, layout and placement of the Green Line mountain biking trail.
- Maintain gentle grades and smooth, predictable alignment suitable for beginner riders.
- Provide wider trail widths and clear sight lines to support passing and confidence.
- Connect logically to existing trails with clear wayfinding and skill-level signage.
- Ensure analysis and avoidance of environmentally sensitive areas, inclusion of appropriate drainage measures and erosion prevention measures.
- The surrounding landscape to be planted with low, hardy species to allow for safe, open views and clear path delineation that discourages exploring off-trail.
- Future expansion to be guided by community feedback.
- Trail routing and programming to be evaluated and designed in alignment with the site's ecological value.
- The mountain biking trail expansion is identified as an opportunity within the master plan, with final scope and delivery to be determined through subsequent phases of study and engagement.

DISC GOLF IMPROVEMENTS

Improvements to the disc golf course would enhance both playability and spectator experience while aligning with the broader park master plan. Updates to be considered include upgraded tee boxes to align with tournament level requirements, improved signage and wayfinding, designated accessible spectator paths, and shaded rest areas for players and visitors. The course layout would be thoughtfully reconfigured to accommodate new concept plan elements such as habitat restoration areas, the canopy walk, and the future community center, while carefully preserving existing memorial tees and the character of the current course.

Figure 85. Existing disc golf tee box

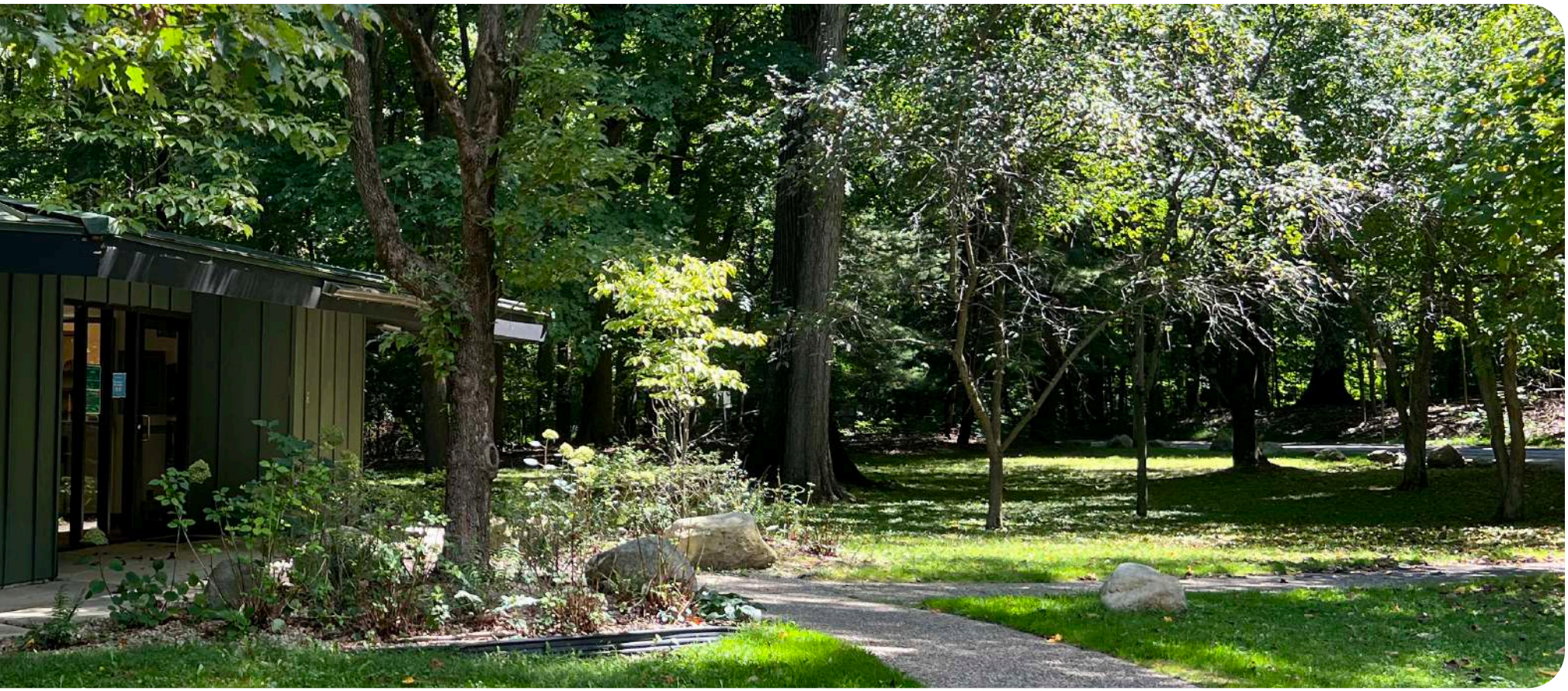
CONSIDERATIONS

- Engage a qualified disc golf course designer for the reconfiguration and layout of the course.
- Maintain safe separation between fairways and primary pedestrian routes.
- Coordinate grading and drainage to prevent erosion and muddy play areas.
- Preserve existing trees and vegetation where possible, limiting new mowed lawn areas and prioritizing native planting.

Figure 84. Existing disc golf net

03

BUILDI



NG AMENITIES

NATURE CENTER

While a detailed assessment is not included as part of this master plan, future renovations to the existing Nature Center would enhance its overall functionality and visitor experience. Potential upgrades may include clearer exterior and interior wayfinding and interpretive signage, refinements to the interior layout to improve circulation and flexibility, and enhancements that support the ability to host educational programs and community events. Beyond physical improvements, continued investment in programming including naturalist-led activities, seasonal events, and school and community partnerships, would ensure the Nature Center remains an active and evolving resource for park visitors. Together, these improvements represent an opportunity for future investment that would further strengthen the Nature Center's role as an orientation and learning hub within the park.

Figure 86. Existing Nature Center entry from parking lot

Figure 87. Existing Nature Center exterior

Figure 88. Existing Nature Center lobby

Figure 89. Existing Nature Center interior

Figure 90. Existing viewing window at Nature Center

Figure 91. Existing viewing window at Nature Center

RENOVATED PAVILION

The existing Pavilion 1 will be renovated and updated to improve accessibility, functionality, and year-round usability. The pavilion is envisioned to accommodate a small-scale café or rental kiosk, providing refreshments, equipment rentals such as for the sledding hill, and other visitor services that support park activities. Planned infrastructure includes dedicated utility connections for water, sanitary, and power, as well as electrical capacity to support refrigeration, small appliances, and point-of-sale systems. A compact service sink, counter top workspace, and a roll-up or sliding service window will enable efficient operation and direct engagement with park visitors.

These improvements will transform Pavilion 1 into an active, welcoming hub that enhances the park experience, promotes inclusive use, and maintains the pavilion's original character while better serving the diverse needs of the community.

Figure 93. View of existing Pavilion 1

Figure 92. View of existing Pavilion 1

Figure 94. View of existing Pavilion 1

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY

Upgrades will include an accessible entry and approach, improved circulation, and modernized building systems to serve a wide range of visitors. Pavilion furniture and seating will be reconfigured to provide inclusive, comfortable options for all ages and abilities, including wheelchair-accessible tables and flexible seating. Existing restrooms will be renovated to meet current ADA standards, with compliant stalls, grab bars, door clearances, lever hardware, accessible lavatories, and properly mounted accessories. Heating, ventilation, insulation, lighting, and durable finishes will be upgraded to ensure safe, comfortable year-round use.

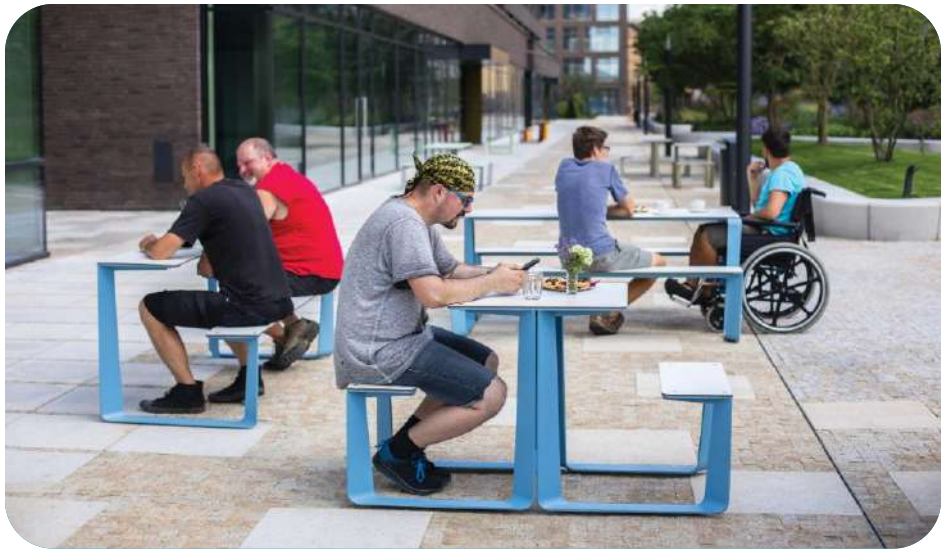


Figure 96. Inclusive furniture

Figure 95. Accessible pavilion space

Figure 97. Accessible restroom

04

TRAILS

S AND LANDSCAPE

LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

To best protect the site's ecological and historic significance, project priorities will focus on improving the overall natural ecotype and habitat function, preservation of rare species, and mitigation of harmful factors such as invasive species. These efforts will enhance the beauty of the site, provide local wildlife with necessary food and shelter, support visiting pollinators, and increase landscape resilience to a changing climate.

The remnant land onsite has ecological components that are almost impossible to reproduce with the plant communities that existed pre-European settlement. It is a connection we can make throughout this document for the benefit of the Native American community and allies. The woodland & other remnant areas act as a living museum in need of curation.

A site-wide ecological restoration plan, developed by a qualified entity with experience in northwest Indiana ecotypes, will be essential. This should include an inventory of desirable plants, identification of degraded areas and invasive species colonies for management all coordinated alongside ongoing volunteer efforts. Trail corridors present a particular opportunity, with restoration plantings along trail edges reinforcing ecological connectivity while enhancing the user experience and discouraging off-trail encroachment. Coordination with DNR alongside continued partnerships with local conservation groups, native plant societies, and trail stewardship volunteers will be key to sustaining this work and fostering long-term community ownership of the park's ecological health.

Figure 98. Elm-leaved Goldenrod (*Solidago ulmifolia*) on site - a species that very likely existed pre-settlement

Figure 99. Blue Cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*) on site - good indicator of ecosystem health.

Figure 100. Landscape restoration plan

AREA A: EROSION CONTROL AREA

Where soil erosion reveals existing paths of water flow, introducing plants with an affinity for rooting in wet areas will offer a unique opportunity to introduce and showcase green infrastructure, or stormwater management through plants, in Rum Village Park. Given the steep slopes present in this area and sandy soils on site, erosion control efforts through regrading and planting will be important. Native or adapted plants with deep roots provide structure to soil that previously was home to only shallow-rooted turf, which is not well-suited to withstand flowing storm waters. Careful planting layout of native species can help provide an aesthetic arrangement that maintains a native ecology and slow the flow of rainwater, not only increasing biodiversity, but also preventing erosion, flooding, and contribute to recharging the groundwater that supplies St. Joseph County with its drinking water.

Figure 101. Existing soil erosion

Figure 102. Proposed planting style for erosion remediation

AREA B: CANOPY WALK UNDERSTOREY AREA

In order to improve the ecological value of the park and to work in tandem with the existing woodland, the area around the canopy walk will feature lush understorey plantings. Situated in ways that will not disturb the existing tree root systems, smaller understory trees, shrubs, forbs, and grasses will be planted that not only provide habitat and foraging material, but also wonderful visual interest both from ground-level and the walkway above. Blooming spring ephemerals ushering in the new season will catch the eye of even frequent park visitors. Verdant foliage in summer will offer wildlife chances to play hide-and-seek with keen-eyed visitors. Rich fall colors will extend from the skies down to the native woodland species of the forest floor.

Priority will be on not only maintaining the health of existing beeches and oaks, key components of the ecosystem, but also on planting keystone species in the understory.

The following species would be considered as keystone species to highlight on the site:

- Common Witch Hazel (Hamamelis virginiana)
- Blue Cohosh (Caulophyllum thalictroides)
- Elm-Leaved Goldenrod (Solidago ulmifolia)
- Pussytoes (Antennaria plantaginifolia)
- Seersucker Sedge (Carex plantaginea)
- Wild Strawberry (Fragaria virginiana)

Figure 103. Existing conditions

Figure 104. Reference for woodland understory

AREA C: HABITAT RESTORATION DEMONSTRATION AREA

This area, adjacent to both the canopy walk and educational loop, will offer visitors the opportunity to see the habitat restoration process unfold before their eyes. Lawn encroachment and soil compaction in this area have depleted the land's natural healthy state; the goal is to reinvigorate this space into a highly functional, biodiverse landscape reminiscent of the rich woodlands that once dominated the ecoregion.

Simple split-rail fencing along the trails will denote this area as one to watch - where activities such as surveying of existing trees, planting and enhancement of native woody and herbaceous species, monitoring, and other stewardship-related happenings will be on full display to the public. Visitors to the park will be encouraged to come back throughout the year as they see these efforts change the landscape in real time.

This area will also offer an educational opportunity where visitors experience the effect of all the labor, resources, and planning involved in restoration of healthy and flourishing ecosystems. This new understanding can serve to strengthen commitment to maintaining the well-being of all natural areas.

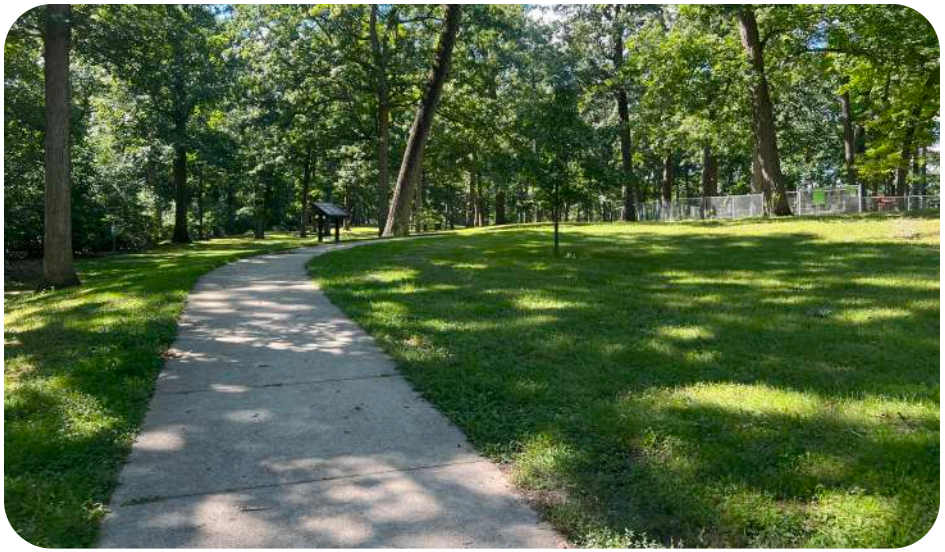


Figure 105. Existing conditions photo

Figure 106. Restoration area reference

AREA D: MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL RESTORATION AREA

An essential part of ecological restoration and maintenance in natural areas is the removal of invasive species. In the existing mountain biking area, removal of invasive species such as honeysuckle and selective thinning of tree species will increase light penetration and allow planting of native shrubs and perennials to thrive. Clearing invasive species in this area will also prevent bike wheels from picking up and transporting seeds of invasive plants to other high-quality areas both on and off the site.

Creating a management plan that focuses on reducing invasive species spread as well as placement of signage and plantings to discourage off-trail usage would be essential to this restoration effort. Given that negative ecological impacts of mountain biking are often caused by bikers going off-trail, a more densely vegetated understory would assist in discouraging this practice. More native understory species would also be beneficial to local wildlife by providing food and shelter, and would also create a more enriching experience for those biking through. Aligning mountain biking goals with the park's restoration efforts throughout the site as a whole will guarantee success for both communities.

Figure 107. Existing conditions

Figure 108. Woodland understory reference for areas off-trail

05

OPERA

TIONS

SEASONAL EVENTS

The Rum Village Park Master Plan lays the perfect groundwork for flexible and multifaceted seasonal programming. In the spring, guided walks can illuminate the fleeting beauty of woodland ephemerals like trillium and bloodroot. Sensory planting gardens can further enrich this experience, engaging visitors through fragrance, texture, and seasonal change.

In the summer, outdoor movie nights near the nature center can provide family-friendly ways to enjoy long days and beautiful weather, while night market pop-ups in the nature center parking lot offer opportunities for local vendors, food, and community gathering after hours. In the fall, canopy walks can showcase the stunning reds, oranges, and yellows of deciduous trees, while other wooded areas create ideal settings for spookier seasonal events. Even the freezing winters can be activated with snowy programming such as snowshoe hikes and snowman-building competitions, ensuring year-round use of the park.

Figure 109. Flower festival

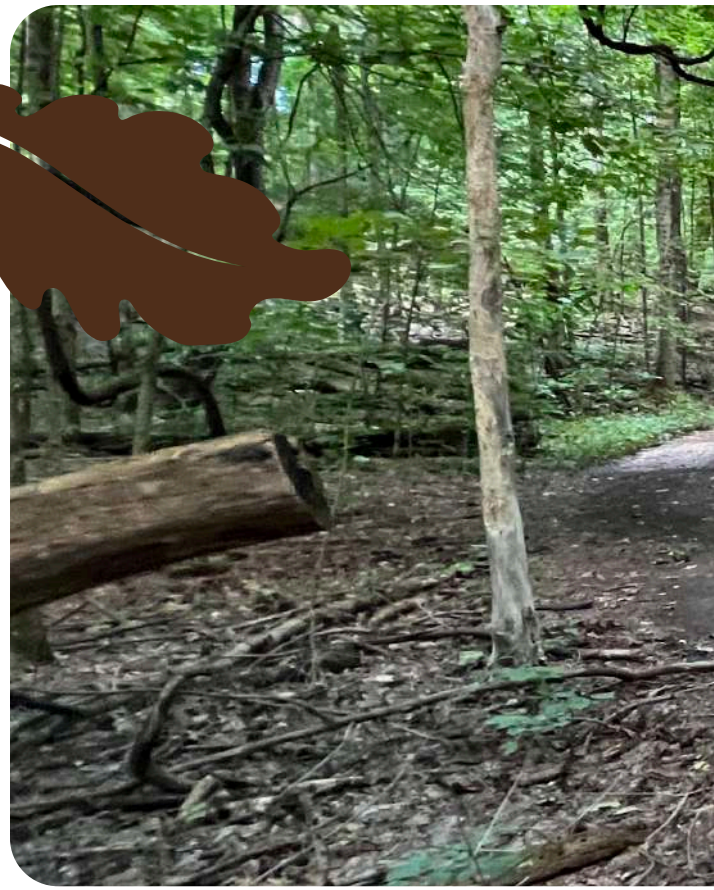
SEASONAL EVENTS CONSIDERATIONS

- Identify extents of flexible open spaces that can accommodate temporary programming and various crowd sizes.
- Ensure access to power, lighting and water to support various events.
- Plan circulation and emergency access.
- Coordinate event use spaces to minimize disturbance to sensitive habitats and wildlife areas.

Figure 110. Nature movie night

Figure 111. Seasonal event locations plan

06



IMPLE

MENTATION

PROJECT PHASING

This chapter provides a clear, actionable roadmap for implementing the recommended park improvements over time. The phasing strategy is designed to:

- Reduce disruption by sequencing projects in a logical order and bundling compatible work.
- Support long-term stewardship through restoration, durable materials, and maintainable systems.
- Deliver early visible benefits to park users.

Phasing is conceptual and reflects the current understanding of city priorities. Phasing should be refined and updated annually to align with:

1. Funding availability
   Grants, private donations, and City capital budgeting
2. Current City needs and operational capacity
3. Permitting timelines
4. Site conditions discovered during design
5. Community priorities

As opportunities arise, projects identified in later phases may advance (and projects in earlier phases may shift) to align with awarded grants, matching fund requirements, urgent maintenance needs, or coordinated construction windows.

This master plan is intended as a guiding document to inform the long-term vision and future improvements within the project area. Any proposed improvements will require further study, detailed design, coordination, approvals, and funding before implementation.

PHASE 1: NEAR TERM FOUNDATIONAL ACCESS, SAFETY AND WAYFINDING

Prioritizes safety and experience of current users, building on and enhancing existing assets the community already enjoys.

FUTURE PHASES: CORE PARK PROGRAM, RESTORATION AND ACCESSIBILITY

Delivers major upgrades to facilities and recreation areas while advancing habitat restoration and universal access.

DESTINATION ELEMENTS AND MAJOR NEW FACILITIES

Implements signature features and major capital construction that typically require the most fundraising, design, and permitting.

Figure 112. Phase 1 elements

PHASE 1: NEAR TERM

PRIORITIZES SAFETY AND EXPERIENCE OF CURRENT USERS, BUILDING ON AND ENHANCING EXISTING ASSETS THE COMMUNITY ALREADY ENJOYS.

Phase 1 focuses on immediate improvements that help visitors confidently access and navigate the park. These upgrades also establish the circulation and wayfinding "framework" that later capital projects will connect to.

SHARED USE PATH

- Obtain pavement cores and compaction testing to determine subbase structure and depth of restoration needed.
- Review vehicular entry and approach with existing tree location to minimize disturbance and protect tree root structure. Review potential for entry drive reconfiguration to enhance daily and special event operations.
- Confirm alignment, widths, slopes, and crossings; prioritize universally accessible connections to programmatic nodes.
- Create high visibility pavement markings to clearly delineate bike and pedestrian lanes.
- Review potential for vertical barriers to create differentiation between vehicular, bike lanes and ADA accessible paths.

SIGNAGE

- Implement a cohesive signage family: entry signage, directional wayfinding, trail markers, rules/regulations, and interpretive signage.

NEW PLAYGROUND

- Prioritize inclusive design: accessible surfacing and ADA accessible paths, sensory-rich play, varied challenge levels, shade, seating, and accessible routes to/from parking and restrooms.
- Coordinate drainage, surfacing, and maintenance capacity up front.

RENOVATED PAVILION / EXTERIOR RESTROOM

- Confirm structural condition and the desired level of café service (full café vs. kiosk/service window).
- Obtain a utility assessment and need evaluation (water, sanitary, grease management if needed, electrical load, wi-fi point-of-sale).
- Identify operational partner options (City-run vs. concessionaire) and plan for hours, security, waste management, and staffing.
- Provide ADA accessible paths at the pavilion, café program and exterior restroom.

FUTURE PHASES

CORE PARK PROGRAM, RESTORATION, AND UNIVERSAL ACCESS

Phase 2 delivers the heart of the park experience, major program upgrades, improved accessibility, and meaningful ecological restoration while building momentum toward long-term destination investments.

FACILITIES AND PROGRAM UPGRADES

- Nature Center Renovation (may advance to Phase 1)
    - Confirm project goals: building renewal, accessibility, exhibit/program space needs, and site arrival improvements.
    - Evaluate code compliance, mechanical/electrical systems, and consider operational impacts during construction (temporary program relocation and/or closures).
- Lighting
    - Prioritize lighting at gateways, key program nodes, and areas with higher evening use.
- Dog Park
    - Confirm location suitability (buffers, drainage, shade, parking, noise considerations).
    - Define program elements: separated areas by dog size, double-gated entries, seating, lighting if evening use is anticipated, and maintenance access.
- Disc Golf Restoration/Enhancement
    - Confirm layout refinements, tee conditions, signage, and erosion control needs.
    - Coordinate with restoration areas and trail improvements to reduce user conflicts and protect sensitive areas.

FUTURE PHASES

CORE PARK PROGRAM, RESTORATION, AND UNIVERSAL ACCESS

TRAILS, ACCESSIBILITY, AND EDUCATION

- ADA Trail
    - Identify accessible path to connect rest areas, trail heads, and restrooms with compliant grades, cross slopes and stable surfacing. Identify areas of steep slopes and determine strategy to maintain accessible slopes while protecting existing mature trees.
    - Coordinate with interpretive nodes and trailheads to create a fully inclusive experience.
- Educational Trail
    - Develop a trail story framework (themes, key learning stations, cultural/natural history).
    - Coordinate sign content and placement with habitat restoration so interpretation reflects updated conditions.
- Gertrude Traffic Calming
    - Coordinate with Department of Public Works for feasibility, design standards, and implementation timing.
    - Evaluate measures appropriate to the corridor context (speed reduction elements, crosswalk enhancements, signage, sidewalk connections, curb extensions where feasible).
    - Prioritize safe pedestrian connections to park entry points and trailheads.

RESTORATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

- Habitat Restoration: Existing Mountain Biking
    - Engage in a vegetation assessment
    - Use best practices: erosion control, trail hardening where appropriate, closure/signage, replanting, and seasonal protection measures.
    - Coordinate with user groups for compliance, stewardship, and volunteer restoration days.
- Habitat Restoration Areas A–C
    - Establish restoration priorities and success metrics (invasive removal, native replanting, canopy goals, erosion reduction).
    - Sequence restoration to avoid re-disturbance from adjacent construction (restore after heavy work where possible).
    - Incorporate ongoing stewardship: watering establishment periods, adaptive management, and volunteer programming.

ADDITIONAL PHASES

DESTINATION ELEMENTS AND MAJOR NEW FACILITIES

Phase 3 introduces signature, destination-level investments that strengthen the park's identity and civic value. These projects typically require substantial fundraising, detailed design, expanded stakeholder coordination, and robust operational planning.

CANOPY WALK

- Anticipate longer lead time due to structural design, specialized construction, environmental considerations, and accessibility requirements.
- Confirm routes and viewing opportunities that minimize ecological impacts while maximizing educational value.
- Plan for long-term inspection and maintenance (structural, decking, railings, safety systems).

NEW COMMUNITY CENTER

- Establish a clear program and operations model early: community uses, hours, staffing, partnerships, revenue strategy, and security.
- Coordinate siting with considerations for views to Notre Dame, circulation, connection to canopy walk, parking/arrival experience, ADA routes, utilities, and outdoor program spaces.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

These actions support implementation across all phases and can begin immediately:

- Establish an annual Capital Improvement phasing review (update schedule, costs, funding targets, and readiness).
- Pursue grants and partnerships strategically by matching project types to typical funding categories:
- Safety/accessibility (paths, lighting, ADA trails)
- Environmental restoration (habitat areas, erosion control)
- Health and recreation (playground, trails, disc golf)
- Community facilities (Nature Center, Community Center, café enhancements)
- Create a coordinated communications plan for closures, detours, and construction milestones.
- Confirm maintenance responsibilities and budgets before adding new assets (lighting, specialty structures, play equipment, café operations).
- Track success with measurable outcomes such as: improved accessibility coverage, reduced conflicts/erosion, increased program participation, and improved perceived safety.

POTENTIAL GRANT FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

SHARED USE PATH / ADA TRAIL

- Next Level Trails, Indiana DNR
- Indiana Trails Program, Indiana DNR
- Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), INDOT

LIGHTING + WAYFINDING/SIGNAGE

- National Endowment for the Arts, Our Town

GERTRUDE TRAFFIC CALMING

- Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), INDOT
- Safe Streets and Roads for All, USDOT
- Community Crossings if bundled with eligible roadway work

PLAYGROUND / DOG PARK / DISC GOLF / PARK AMENITIES

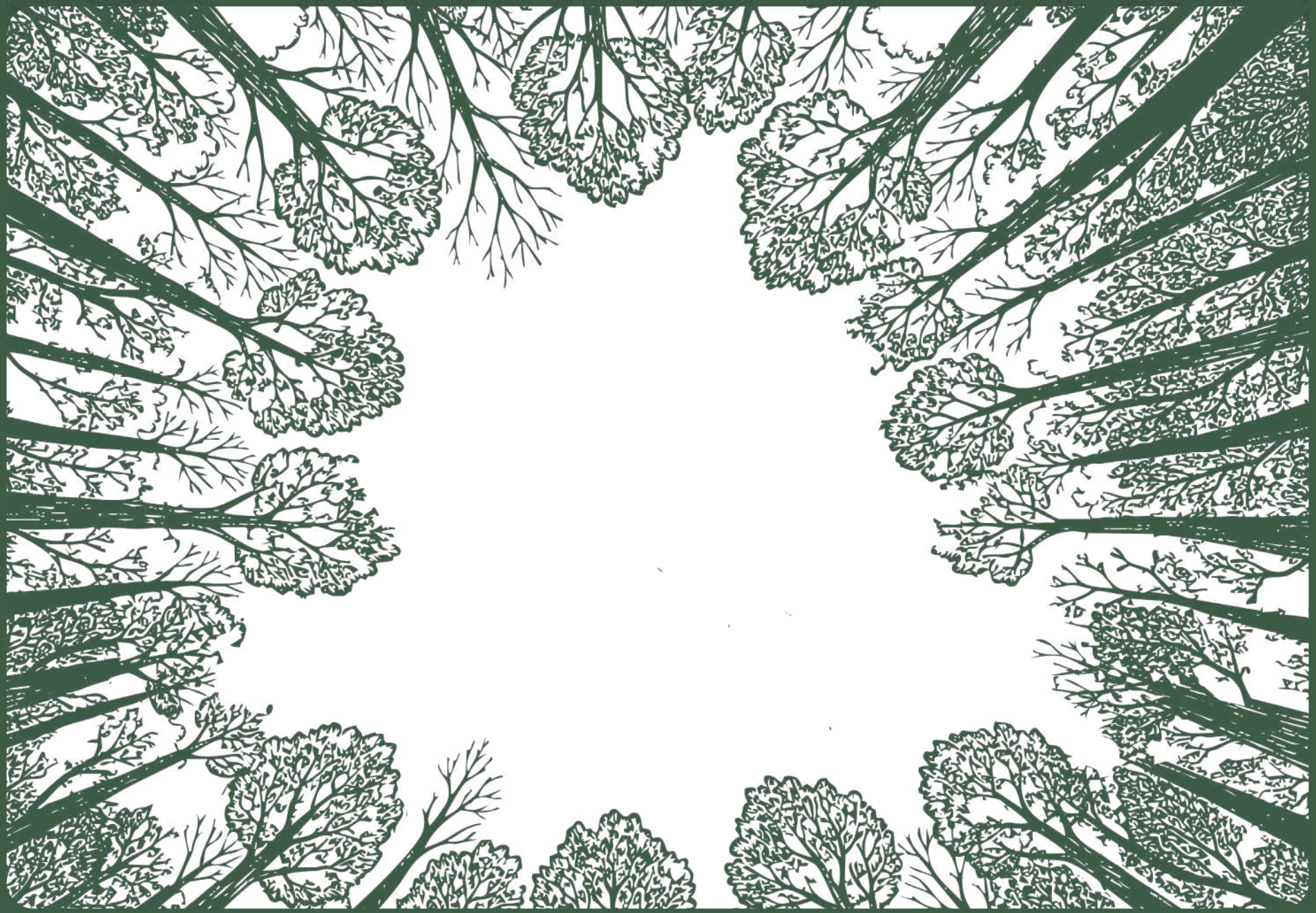
- Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP), National Park Service
- Land & Water Conservation Fund LWCF State Assistance, National Park Service
- CDBG, Indiana OCRA (depending on eligibility)

HABITAT RESTORATION AREAS

- Lake & River Enhancement, Indiana DNR (invasive management)
- NFWF Five Star
- Community & Urban Forestry Annual Grants, Indiana DNR Forestry

COMMUNITY CENTER (PHASE 3)

- U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) Public Works (tie to economic outcomes)



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CITY OF SOUTH BEND

site
landscape
architecture
urban design