

St. Joseph County Parks

Master Plan Update • 2009 – 2013



Section J:

Maintenance



LEHMAN & LEHMAN

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Park Maintenance

The image of the St. Joseph County Park and Recreation Department relates to how well its parks and facilities are maintained. Parks are known to be the welcome mat of cities and towns. Therefore, a visitor's first impression is critical. St. Joseph County Park and Recreation Department is fortunate to have beautiful parks and a maintenance staff dedicated to its works and to the County.

Park maintenance procedures and practices can be summarized as follows:

- Centralized
- Maintenance reviews conducted through daily site visits
- Trash pick-up of all park areas
- Winter snow plowing of all parks as well as some other municipal properties
- Annual inspections are conducted on all park facilities

It is important that the Maintenance Division continue to evaluate its role and purpose and make adjustments so that policies & procedures can be developed to enhance park maintenance efficiency. Each maintenance staff member should have a supervisor who assigns and monitors work assignments, etc. It has been demonstrated that an employee given responsibility and authority responds with increased pride in his/her work.

Maintenance Strategy

Park grounds maintenance involves turf maintenance, tree maintenance, structure maintenance, landscape maintenance and litter control.

- Turf Maintenance – includes mowing, trimming, fertilization and chemical application.
- Tree Maintenance – includes watering, pruning and insect control.
- Structural Maintenance – includes shelter houses, restroom facilities, playground equipment, fence lines, park trails, bleachers and parking lots.
- Equipment Maintenance – includes trucks, tractors, front-end loader, mowing equipment and all other mechanical equipment as required.
- Landscape Maintenance – includes mulch application, trimming and flower displays throughout town.
- Litter Control – (on all park sites) includes trash barrel collection and hand pick up work.

The following recommendations are based on review of existing maintenance practices. The recommendations are divided into four (4) basic categories for each division:

1. Operations
2. Facilities
3. Equipment
4. Staff



Operations

The maintenance operations of the Park Department are in good working order, requiring only a few changes. Recommendations are as follows:

During the public input sessions and planning team meetings there was concern expressed regarding the amount of facilities and manpower to maintain them. To help address these concerns Work Request and Work Order forms can be used. Samples of the forms have been included for review by the park staff.

It is recommended that an Operations and Safety Manual for maintenance practices be developed. Such a manual would provide direction in areas of responsibility and procedures. It would also be an excellent tool for new employee orientation and training.

Additionally, the development of a landscape maintenance program and schedule would help identify what needs to be done, where it should be done, and most importantly, when it should be done and by whom.

The old methods of administering the operations of the park and recreation department are not as productive and efficient in today's hi-tech age. It is recommended that The St. Joseph County Park and Recreation Department consider implementing a computer-based maintenance management program.

Goals of such a system would be to:

1. Facilitate better long and short term park planning and provide for more accurate monitoring of park maintenance activities.
2. Increase the cost effectiveness of maintenance practices and improve maintenance scheduling.
3. Provide management with more accurate and complete information on which to base budgets and make decisions.

A computerized "Parks Maintenance Management System" (as published in *Trends* by the U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service) includes nine basic components:

- Task Definitions
- Activities
- Inventory
- Accomplishment Units
- Quality Standards
- Service Levels
- Methods and Procedures
- Standard Crew Complement
- Productivity Standard

It is through such a management system that short-term planning and resource allocations can be determined along with long-term strategic decisions. In the short term it serves as an overall check on performance and budget results. Long term, it will aid in decisions on staffing, equipment purchases, budget forecasting, etc.

It is recommended that The St. Joseph County Park and Recreation Department investigate the possibility of computerizing its maintenance operations.

Facilities

The facilities in the St. Joseph County Park and Recreation Department are in various stages of maintenance attention. In general, and over time, all of the park facilities will require an upgrade. In order to implement an upgrade, budget resources and needs lists will be required. Many of these items have been addressed as a part of the Action Plan of this study.



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Once the facilities have been upgraded to a satisfactory level, it is recommended that a preventative maintenance program be developed and implemented. A Building & Structure Checklist form should be developed and reviewed on an annual basis, thus providing time to plan and budget for repairs and renovations. Items in the checklist may include structural conditions, roofing, mechanical systems, plumbing systems, electrical systems, doors, windows, painting, etc.

Equipment

The Park Department's maintenance vehicles and equipment were found to be in good condition. Vehicle/equipment replacement has been an on-going program in the St. Joseph County Park and Recreation Department. It is important to have the proper maintenance equipment and vehicles to complement the staff in its duties and responsibilities.

Due to the fact that some vehicles and equipment are in service longer than their expected life may necessitate that a service log system be developed. By tracking the maintenance and repairs on each piece of equipment, the replacement program can be better organized. "Trouble" pieces of equipment can be moved up in the replacement program and each piece can be better evaluated for the suitability of the job required.

The specific pieces of equipment or vehicles that will need replacement in the near future have been identified in the Five Year Action Plan.

Staff

It is good practice to review each new development, facility, or program to determine and anticipate any potential impact it may have on the maintenance staff.

A few recommendations for maintenance staff include:

1. Continuation of staff training and education programs.
2. Development of a staff manual with:
 - staff training
 - operations procedures
 - job descriptions
 - maintenance policies
3. Training for emergency procedures. (When an accident occurs in a park, often the maintenance staff is the only park personnel in the area and so each person should be knowledgeable of first aid emergency procedures.)



Safety Rules

General Rules

- ✓ Safety glasses must be worn when using: weed whip, edger, chainsaw, wood chipper, or any other equipment judged to present an eye hazard.
- ✓ Safety vests must be worn when working on or near roadways or when transporting equipment on roads (example: driving the mower to adjacent park site).
- ✓ Flashers on equipment must always be on when you are on public roadways.
- ✓ Under no condition should safety devices be removed from equipment.
- ✓ Empty paint cans, aerosol cans, paint thinner, brush cleaner, must be placed in the marked containers.
- ✓ All gasoline cans must be returned to the safety cabinet every night.
- ✓ You are expected to evaluate your work assignment and select the proper safety equipment for the job. *If you are not sure, ask!*
- ✓ Report any unsafe equipment to the safety manager.
- ✓ Never fill any gas tank with the engine running.
- ✓ Never adjust any mowers or other power equipment with the engine running.
- ✓ Look before you back up.
- ✓ Never stand up on any piece of equipment while in operation.
- ✓ Never borrow any piece of equipment without the supervisor's permission.
- ✓ No speeding or horseplay on any piece of park equipment.
- ✓ Keys must always be removed when leaving a piece of park equipment unattended in a park.
- ✓ Extreme caution should be used whenever working along the edge of a body of water, especially when mowing.
- ✓ Never allow anyone to ride on a mower or tractor.
- ✓ Anyone being transported in the back of a truck must be seated either on the floor of the bed or on an approved seat.
- ✓ No walkman-type devices are allowed while on the clock.
- ✓ Check out all equipment prior to using it (belts, blades, oil level, brakes, tire pressure).
- ✓ Never clear a clogged mower chute with the machine running.
- ✓ Extra caution must be used when mowing damp or wet grass or hilly areas. Don't use a machine in an area it's not designed for.
- ✓ Report any and all injuries and equipment malfunction or damage immediately.
- ✓ Radio must always be on to answer your calls.
- ✓ Follow all posted road signage (speed limits, etc.).
- ✓ Pace yourself throughout the day and ask for help when lifting – macho men end up disabled.
- ✓ There is no substitute for common sense. When in doubt, ask!



Playground Safety

Falls from playground equipment account for more than 70% of playground injuries. Equipment failures, per se, rarely cause the injuries. Of the injuries sustained, the following percentages apply:

climbers – 42%	slides – 16%	miscellaneous – 14%
swings – 23%	merry-go-rounds – 5%	

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has produced two handbooks: Volume I, *General Guidelines for New and Existing Playgrounds*; and Volume II, *Technical Guidelines for Equipment and Surfacing*.

Although the guidelines are not legal standards, in actual practice they might as well be. What happens when a child is hurt and a lawsuit is brought is that the courts look at the “state of the art.” And, the “state of the art” in playground equipment is the CPSC guideline. Failure to comply is likely to be considered negligence.

The installation of fall-absorbing ground cover is extremely important. Failure to install an acceptable (by the CPSC) fall-absorbing material under play equipment may be considered negligent no matter what other circumstances are present at the time of an accident.

A large number of lawsuits are now pending in this general area of “Playground Safety.” The Chicago Park District recently settled out of court for \$2.9 million in the case of a child who was injured in a fall onto an asphalt-surfaced playground. This information is provided, not as an authoritative commentary on the liability issue, but rather as historical facts for your review and understanding. Further, we strongly recommend a program of retrofitting to correct existing safety problems in the parks. The liability exposure is a growing concern and should be appropriately addressed.

When retrofitting, the safety surfacing should be installed as follows:

Protective Surface Area: Install with a minimum of six feet in all directions from all stationary equipment and seven feet in the direction of motion from such equipment as slides. The direction of motion for whirls is all the way around. In the case of swings, seven feet is added to the swing seat in its fully extended (horizontal) position.

No Encroachment Zone: For pieces of equipment this area extends six feet in all directions from the protective surface area. No other structure shall infringe on it. If two or more units are installed in the same protective surface area, the minimum distance between stationary pieces is twelve feet. Direction of motion footage is to be added to twelve feet.

Ground Hazards: In the course of play there is a tendency for holes to develop in some play area surfaces, especially under swings, at the foot of slides, around whirls, etc. These should be kept filled. There should be no exposed concrete footings to trip over or fall into.

A Public Playground Safety handbook is prepared by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and is available for download at www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/325.pdf.



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