



FLEIS & VANDENBRINK

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PLANNING AHEAD FOR BETTER PARKS TOMORROW

Park and recreation spaces play an important role in the community, offering a much-needed escape from our tech-driven world and supporting overall mental well-being. Creating these outdoor spaces requires planning, public engagement, and the right funding. The first step towards creating these important spaces is developing a 5-Year Recreation Plan.

Currently, Fleis & VandenBrink (F&V) is working with the City of Montague to improve three of their parks. They had a 5-Year Recreation Plan in place, but needed help with creating the park concepts, which are site specific development plans that may look at multi-year phasing improvements to work within a communities financial capabilities.

“Parks have always been important to the community,” said Jeff Auch, Montague City Manager. “We have many amenities that require maintenance to keep them operating. Most of our parks are 40-plus years old.”

RECREATION PLAN TIMELINE

It’s never too early to start your 5-Year Recreation Plan. The plan evaluates existing recreation opportunities, summarizes public input, and outlines a five-year plan to implement proposed park improvements and new initiatives.

“It’s important to have an updated recreation plan,” Auch said. “It has helped drive our park projects for the next five to ten years. It’s not a great expense, and we can prioritize what needs to be done over the next several years.”

The recreation plan doesn’t focus on a single park; instead, it offers an overview of a community’s parks and recreation landscape, both today and in the future. It also provides the community with a clear plan of action and a proposed timeline for future improvements.

SUGGESTED TIMELINE FOR PLANNING	
Create the recreation plan	Now
Draft plan available for public comment	September 2026
Public hearing to adopt plan	December 2026
DNR submittal of adopt rec plan	February 1, 2027
Grant application deadline	April 1, 2027

AVAILABLE FUNDING

There are several ways to fund park projects. These include local funds, private donations, grants with state or federal funds, and community foundations.

Grants available to Michigan communities include MDNR grants, which serve as primary sources of financial assistance, offering recreation grant programs to communities to acquire land for parks and open spaces or to develop public recreation facilities. Below are the MDNR grant options:

- **The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF)** offers the most extensive funding, with average grant awards of \$200,000 for development and no limits on land acquisition costs. The minimum/maximum grant amount for the development project ranges from \$15,000 to \$400,000, with a minimum local match of 25%.
- **The Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)** is offered through the National Park Service. The minimum grant request is \$30,000, and the maximum is \$500,000, with a 50% local match requirement for LWCF, and subject to additional requirements for SHPO 106 review and NEPA Compliance.
- **Recreation Passport Grants** also help pay for renovating facilities that have outlived their useful life expectancy. This program offers grants of \$7,500 to \$150,000, with a minimum local match of 25%, for indoor and outdoor renovations.

DEVELOPING A PROJECT CONCEPT

Once a project is selected from the recreation plan, F&V will work closely with your community to develop a strong, well-defined concept. This process is guided by community needs and feedback to help the project reflect local priorities. After the concept is finalized, we help complete and submit the grant application.

“Being able to walk through the initial concept and full engineering park plans with F&V has been extremely helpful,” Auch commented. “The back-and-forth working relationship with them makes the plan more feasible and ultimately, a better park in the end.”

For assistance with a 5-Year Recreation Plan, developing a project concept, or applying for grant funding, please contact **Kayla Palmer** at **616.588.1905** or kpalmer@fveng.com.

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- Jeff Auch, City Manager, Montague

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