



Chapter Five
Community Trails



**CHAPTER 5
COMMUNITY TRAILS**

OVERVIEW	5-1
INTRODUCTION.....	5-1
DEFINITION OF TRAIL SYSTEM ELEMENTS.....	5-2
Trail Classifications	5-2
Transportation Trails	5-2
Recreation Trails	5-2
Nature Trails	5-3
Cross-country Ski Trails	5-3
Existing Trails.....	5-3
Proposed Trails	5-4
SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE POLICIES	5-4
Trail Development Goals and Policies	5-4
General.....	5-6
Functional Considerations	5-7
Design Considerations	5-8
Maintenance Considerations.....	5-9
Welfare, Safety and Security Considerations	5-10
Programming and Financing Considerations	5-10
DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION GUIDELINES.....	5-12
Suggested Design Standards for Bicycle Trails.....	5-12
Suggested Design Standards for Cross-country Ski Trails.....	5-12
General Objectives.....	5-12
General Dimensions.....	5-13
Grade and Variety of Terrain.....	5-13
Exposure	5-13
Trail Alignment.....	5-14
Trail Length	5-14
Trail Difficulty Rating	5-14
Signage.....	5-15
Suggested Design Standards for Nature Trails.....	5-16
General Objectives.....	5-16
General Dimensions.....	5-16
Grade.....	5-16
Surface Material.....	5-17
Clearing.....	5-17
Signage.....	5-17
CHAPTER SUMMARY.....	5-18

CHAPTER 5 COMMUNITY TRAILS

OVERVIEW

The trails chapter of the Parks System Plan acts as a tool that directs City decisions about trail investments. It responds to the needs of trail users, whether they are pedestrian, bicyclist, wheeled travelers, cross-country skiers or hikers. Trails deliver an important recreational and transportation service for the City. This chapter discusses trail classification, system development and maintenance policies, as well as design and construction guidelines. As such, it provides a comprehensive set of tools for decision-makers and staff, who are stewards of the City's parks, open space and trails system.

INTRODUCTION

All of the planning studies that were completed from the late 1960s through the present day, including the 1989 Comprehensive Guide Plan, the various sector studies, the Major Center Area Task Force Report and the Housing Task Force Report, cited the need for a complete pathway system connecting activity nodes and population centers.

In 1976, the City completed a Hike/Bike Task Force Report that studied the need for a hike/bike system. As part of this study, a pedestrian survey was taken requesting public input about the development of a trail system plan. This survey indicated strong community support for a hike/bike trail system. In 1978, 1984, 1988, and 2000, community surveys indicated that the residents supported the trail system above any other individual segment of the park system.

The Hike/Bike Task Force Report included many recommendations that were later adopted as policy for developing a trail system within the City. Those recommendations have been integrated into the goals and policies stated later in this chapter.

A Community Forum held in October 2000 indicated that 89 percent of community residents use trails. Strong trail use was indicated in each age group. Satisfaction with existing trails also scored high with an overall approval rating of 8.35 on a scale of 1 to 10. Forum participants pointed to increased use of and improved trails for hiking, walking and biking by 2010.

In January 2001, a citywide household survey was conducted. Residents indicated support to develop more bike trails and nature trails.

DEFINITION OF TRAIL SYSTEM ELEMENTS

Trail Classifications

Because of the different standards that apply to different types of trails, it is necessary to differentiate between them. The City presently has four different trail classifications as follows: transportation trails, recreation trails, nature trails, and cross-country ski trails.

Transportation Trails

Transportation trails provide as direct a link as possible between population areas and activity nodes, such as schools, parks, churches, places of work and shopping places. These transportation pathways provide functional, safe pedestrian or bicycle access to activity nodes, instead of a walking or riding on a busy street. The transportation trails generally occur adjacent to collector streets and minor arterials. Transportation trails are 8'-0" wide asphalt pathways that are considered combination bicycle/ pedestrian trails or 5'-0" wide concrete sidewalks that are designated exclusively for pedestrian use.

In locations where heavy pedestrian and bicycle traffic would be expected, the City will require an 8'-0" wide asphalt pathways for bicycle traffic and a 5'-0" wide concrete sidewalk for pedestrian traffic on the opposite side of the street. Transportation trails along county highways or state highways will generally have an 8'-0" wide asphalt pathway on both sides of the highway.

Transportation trails along existing roads are funded with the assistance of federal, state and county grants whenever possible and are required along all new collector streets and minor arterials, or along existing streets during construction and/or reconstruction.

In 1984, the City Council agreed that it was inappropriate to use cash park fees for the development of transportation trails, but it agreed to fund those trails with general operation funds or funds from referendums designated for trail construction.

The Parks and Recreation staff has recommended requiring developers to construct 8'-0" wide asphalt bikeways/bikeways along collector streets that will generate sufficient traffic to warrant concern for either pedestrian or bicycle use within the road right-of-way. City staff has recommended that developers be required to construct sidewalks along those residential streets that can accommodate bicycle traffic but would be hazardous for pedestrian use, and along both sides of all streets within the Major Center Area commercial area.

Recreation Trails

A recreation trail in Eden Prairie is generally natural resource oriented. This means that the recreation trail system occurs in places of interest, such as natural areas, around lakes, or in areas that are specially suited for recreational use. Limited application may exist in creek valleys. A recreation bikeway is generally designed to a 10'-0" width with an 8'-0" asphalt surface. In addition, the recreation bikeways have maximum turning radii, maximum visibility, minor grade changes, and a length of one to five miles.

Recreation trails are generally found within community parks or conservation areas, and are funded through cash park fees or park bond referendums.

Nature Trails

The City has designated six creek valley floodplain areas as future trail corridors. The majority of the trail system within these creek valleys will be considered “nature trails” using soft surface construction materials, such as aglime or wood chips, or will be mowed grass trails. (Hard surface trails may cross these valleys as part of a transportation trail system.) Bituminous surface will be used in areas where erosion or high traffic use could potentially degrade the trail or adjacent areas.

These trail systems will not be developed until complete sections of a creek corridor are acquired, connecting activity nodes or other trail systems at each end of the corridor. Interpretive signage and wildlife blinds will be incorporated where appropriate.

Nature trails are also proposed within most of the 14 conservation areas. Four miles of nature trails have been completed in the Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area in 2002.

The majority of the nature trails will be limited to pedestrian use only.

Cross-country Ski Trails

Cross-country ski trails are marked and groomed in Staring Lake Park. The Eden Prairie High School cross-county ski team has helped develop this trail and grooms the trail for its team practice and a limited number of ski meets each year.

Future potential cross-country ski areas could be developed in the Edenbrook Conservation Area and the Edenvale Conservation Area.

The Minnesota Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area have included cross-country ski trails within its development plan.

Existing Trails

In 1974, the Hikeway/Bikeway Task Force submitted to the City Council a list of streets having the greatest importance for trails in the community. Those major streets—County Road 4, County Road 1, Valley View Road, Duck Lake Trail, and Scenic Heights Road—were referred to as the spine system of the City trail system. Additional spine trails have been constructed since 1988 along Baker/Mitchell Road, Anderson Lakes Parkway, Dell Road, Homeward Hills Road, and the Crosstown Highway. Trails have been constructed along all of these streets, although the entire length of some of the streets will not be completed until sometime in the future due to the elimination of the state and county grant programs for bicycle trails.

In 2002, Eden Prairie has approximately 80 miles of 5'-0" wide sidewalks. Existing 8'-0" hike/bike ways amount to approximately 90 miles with another 10 – 15 miles planned. Proposed nature walkways will amount to approximately 20 miles. Eden Prairie's existing and proposed trails are shown in Figure 5.1.

Proposed Trails

Eden Prairie's existing trail system provides a backbone serving most of the community's neighborhoods. However, some trail segments remain undeveloped and fall into the following general categories:

- a) Transportation corridors: Improvements to street and highway corridors will accommodate parallel trails. Examples include the TH 212, CSAH 4 and the commercial core ring road.
- b) Natural resource corridors: Trail development in creek valleys, adjacent wetland basins and river valleys are planned. Purgatory Creek Valley, the Purgatory Park wetland basin, the various conservation areas and the Minnesota River Valley represent these opportunities.
- c) Land use changes: Land use designation changes or increasing density may suggest trail improvements to connect commercial or residential uses with community recreational facilities. Potential changes within the "Golden Triangle" area reflect these opportunities.
- d) Missing links: Important connecting segments of the trail system remain undeveloped due to a variety of constraints. Land use development, right of way changes, multi-agency cooperation and available funding should be resolved to complete the missing segments.

SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE POLICIES

The following section describes both goals and policies that govern trail development in Eden Prairie. Goals are included in these sections to provide larger objectives for decision-makers to use as a basis for decisions about allocations of resources. Policies are discussed separately as a more detailed set of criteria to ensure that decisions are made in keeping with specific standards. The distinction is useful to decision-makers and those charged with implementation because it guides everyday behavior, such as trail maintenance, as well as larger and longer-term initiatives (such as land acquisition for purposes of trail development).

Trail Development Goals and Policies

Goals and policies are included to state the priorities for trail system maintenance and development. These goals coordinate trail system planning and implementation with comprehensive planning efforts, including subdivision review, capital improvements planning, and citizen participation activities. Goals also assist decision-makers as they make commitments to trail development through the application of financing policies, facility design standards, user policies, maintenance and operation policies and citizen input.



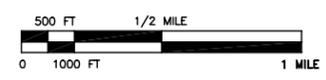
PARK AND OPEN SPACE SYSTEM PLAN

The City of
Eden Prairie

Figure 5.1

COMMUNITY TRAILS AND SIDEWALKS

- Existing 8' hikerway/bikeway
- Existing 5' sidewalk
- Soft surface trails
- Three Rivers Park District "LRT" Trail
- Three Rivers Park District trails
- Proposed trails
- || Bridge



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General

The overall goals of the City's trail system are to:

- Reflect citizen needs and be consistent with the Comprehensive Land-Use Plan and the Comprehensive Park and Open Space Plan.
- Provide year-round multiple use.
- Be consistent with county, regional and federal/state objectives and should be coordinated with those implementation efforts.
- Be developed and maintained in a cost-effective manner.
- Serve existing community recreational needs and anticipate growth trends of the City.
- Develop a Citywide trail system that minimizes potential conflicts between trail users and motor vehicles and ensures the safety of the trail users.

The policies that correspond to these goals will:

- Respond to community-wide desires and satisfy user group needs.
- Conform to the Eden Prairie Comprehensive Plan and the Comprehensive Park and Open Space Plan by:
 - Designating routes for pedestrians and bikers
 - Separating trails from streets where possible
 - Connecting park, open space and recreation nodes and areas of commercial or cultural importance
- Trail development will be efficient, and avoid duplication.
- Accommodate a broad range of year-round use by encouraging multiple modal use.
- Conform to or complement standards set by upper levels of government.
- Complement federal, state, county and abutting community trail planning efforts.
- Comply with plans supported or recognized by:
 - Eden Prairie Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources Commission
 - Eden Prairie City Planning Board
 - Eden Prairie City Council
 - Eden Prairie School District 272

- Support the City’s high quality of living and reinforce the unique natural characteristics of Eden Prairie.
- Meet the existing community’s recreational needs and continue to grow in scale and location of community development trends.
- Minimize negative effects and maximize beneficial effects for adjacent landowners through location and design decisions.

Functional Considerations

The overall utility of the system to a user is an important element of a functional trail system. Access, connections to key destinations, multi-use facilities are all elements of the functional considerations that need to be considered in system design and maintenance.

The goals for functional considerations associated with the City’s trail system are to:

- Establish a hierarchy of system elements
- Apply safety considerations to the separation of trail and highway facilities.
- Perform transportation functions and link neighborhood, educational, recreational and other community activity nodes and tie into existing or proposed public and private trail facilities.
- Conserve or preserve natural amenities and buffer incompatible land use from the user.
- Consider maximum potential use capacity and provide alternative facilities for special user groups.

The policies that correspond to these goals will:

- Define levels of trail system development as:
 - Transportation trails
 - Recreation trails
 - Nature trails
 - Cross-country ski trails
- Physically separate trails from highway facilities or lanes designated within roadway corridors.
- Establish a pedestrian network criss-crossing the City and linking the various neighborhoods.
- Link parks, schools, libraries, commercial shopping areas, and other community amenities.
- Connect City trails to Three Rivers Park District, US Fish and Wildlife Service, abutting community and private trail systems.

- Where possible, trail corridors shall utilize, make accessible and preserve natural amenities including: creek valleys, drainage courses, wetlands, lake bodies, bluff lines, and major wooded areas.
- Consider nodal facilities for specialized groups, including training areas for cross-country skiers and competitive runners.
- Prohibit the use of all-terrain motorized vehicles and snowmobiles on the City trail system.
- Review the need for trails and sidewalks in planning, design and construction of all streets and highways along designated bike and pedestrian trails. Trails along County and State highways should be a minimum of 8'-0" wide.
- Provide an 8'-0" wide bituminous bikeway on one side of the road and a 5'-0" wide concrete sidewalk on the opposite side of the road to accommodate pedestrian/bicycle traffic on all collector roads leading to schools or major parks.
- Provide an 8'-0" wide bicycle/pedestrian pathway separated from the roadway adjacent to other collector streets within the City where traffic is too heavy or too fast to safely accommodate bicycle traffic.
- Require a 5'-0" wide concrete pedestrian walkway on "through streets" that pass through residential neighborhoods where traffic does not justify a separate bicycle trail, but where traffic is too heavy to safely accommodate pedestrians or young children on bicycles.

Design Considerations

Design of the trail system must reflect user needs and trail function. Safety and aesthetics, as well as user comfort, are other important considerations.

The goals for design considerations associated with the City's trail system are to:

- Ensure that trail designs reflect specific use.
- Utilize but remain sensitive to natural areas.
- Allow population density and development to dictate trail patterns.
- Consider roadway and utility easements to assemble trail corridors.
- Provide ample access and comfort/support facilities.
- Be incorporated into new residential and commercial areas as they emerge.
- Ensure design consistency with other trail systems.
- Apply proven design standards with modifications considered for unique local conditions.

The policies that correspond to these goals will:

- Ensure that trail elements shall be designed with the following user groups in mind:
 - Hiking and pleasure walking
 - Bicycling
 - Ski touring
 - Bird-watching or nature trails
- Utilize open space occurring due to natural features for trail design where appropriate, such as conservation areas and creek valleys.
- Develop trails proportionate to City development patterns and population density.
- Use highway and utility right-of-ways where appropriate and feasible.
- Provide trail support facilities including access points, signing and striping, parking, bridges and, where needed, sanitation and shelter items.
- Continually extend the trail system into new housing or commercial areas as they are developed.
- Integrate trail elements into existing environments with sensitivity to design and neighborhood character.
- Ensure trail type, design and signing consistency within the City and that a smooth transition shall take place between trails of differing jurisdictions.
- Exercise creativity when conforming design and construction standards to specific sites, especially those with sensitive natural characteristics or significant physical constraints.
- Provide ramped curbs to facilitate access by handicapped persons and bicycles.

Maintenance Considerations

Eden Prairie's well-developed parks system places a significant emphasis on maintenance as existing facilities age and require increasing maintenance attention. Maintenance considerations are also critical when new trail development is under consideration.

The goals for maintenance of the City's trail system are to:

- Generate minimal maintenance; that which does occur should be within the capabilities of the City of Eden Prairie.
- Encourage user upkeep and minimize vandalism.
- Restrict or avoid user groups that generate high maintenance or negative impacts.

The policies that correspond to these goals will:

- Locate, design and construct the trail system to minimize maintenance cost.
- Ensure that trail maintenance procedures shall be feasible by the City of Eden Prairie, both now and in the future. Where possible, maintenance procedures shall conform to existing City activities for efficiency.
- Reinforce user comfort and safety.
- The organization, design and construction of the trails should encourage maximum user maintenance and upkeep. Potential for vandalism should be kept to a minimum.
- Limit users who cause high maintenance or are potentially destructive to trail facilities, or provide alternate facilities, which can bear the user impact.

Welfare, Safety and Security Considerations

The goals to guide overall welfare, safety and security decisions related to the City's trail system are to:

- Create a positive impact on Eden Prairie's quality of life both culturally and environmentally.
- Ensure compatibility with adjacent land owners and land use whenever possible.
- Integrate safety considerations into the trail system through design and regulation.
- Protect adjacent property from unauthorized use by trail users.

The policies that correspond to these goals will:

- Enhance the City's aesthetics where possible and shall not produce undue noise, physical erosion or degradation.
- Safety considerations, including sight distances, trail dimensions and other items of personal well-being, shall be integrated into trail standards.
- Policing responsibilities shall be designated utilizing City, community and user group resources.

Programming and Financing Considerations

The goals to guide programming and financing decisions related to the City's trail system are to:

- Ensure that design, construction and maintenance costs associated with the trail system are within existing or anticipated City fiscal capabilities.
- Use all available financial assistance to implement the trail system.
- Employ a long-term implementation strategy to maintain and further develop the trail system.

- Secure easements to assemble trail corridors in a financially prudent manner, as soon as it is possible to build consensus about new trail corridors.
- Obtain trail system segments from private interests by feeless easement or dedication, whenever possible.

The policies that correspond to these goals will:

- Avoid placing unreasonable demands on Eden Prairie’s fiscal resources for purposes of trail design and construction.
- Actively request federal, state, metropolitan and county financial assistance to develop the trail system. Assistance efforts shall focus on:

State of Minnesota

- Office of Local and Urban Affairs - LAWCON and DNR grants.
- Department of Natural Resources – cross-country ski trail assistance grants.

Minnesota Department of Transportation

- Bikeways Grants Program
- Mn/DOT, MSA, or CSAH Funds

County

- Hennepin DOT

Private

- User groups
- Land holdings
- Developers
- Explore innovative methods to finance or expand the trail system.
- Establish a basis for trail system development that is logically sequenced, included in the City’s capital improvements programming activities and coordinated with major utility and road construction projects.
- Obtain land for trails as soon as possible. Corridor acquisition should generally have a higher priority than trail construction.
- Appropriate trail corridors will be required of all major subdivisions as a part of required open space dedications upon the selection of trail corridors to maintain the trail network.
- Require dedication or easements to ensure continuation of the trail corridor and future development of the trail, whenever development occurs adjacent to floodplains or trail corridors.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION GUIDELINES

Suggested Design Standards for Bicycle Trails

State and federal design standards are intended to guide the future construction of trails in Eden Prairie. These standards should be used to review private-sector trail construction and to direct detail for municipal trail construction and improvements.

Difficult design issues are frequently encountered, and they may require special design consideration. Individuals using design standards must review on a case-by-case basis whether the design conflicts require deviation from the standards. In arriving at such exceptions, attention should be given to issues pertaining to user safety, liability, comfort, construction costs and consistency with abutting trail segments.

Design resources that should be consulted as needed include:

- a) Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities, American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO), 1999.
- b) Minnesota Bicycle Transportation Planning and Design Guidelines, Minnesota Department of Transportation, June 1996 with amendments.
- c) A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets (Green Book), American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), 1994.
- d) Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), Federal Highway Administration, National Advisory Committee on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, 1988

Suggested Design Standards for Cross-country Ski Trails

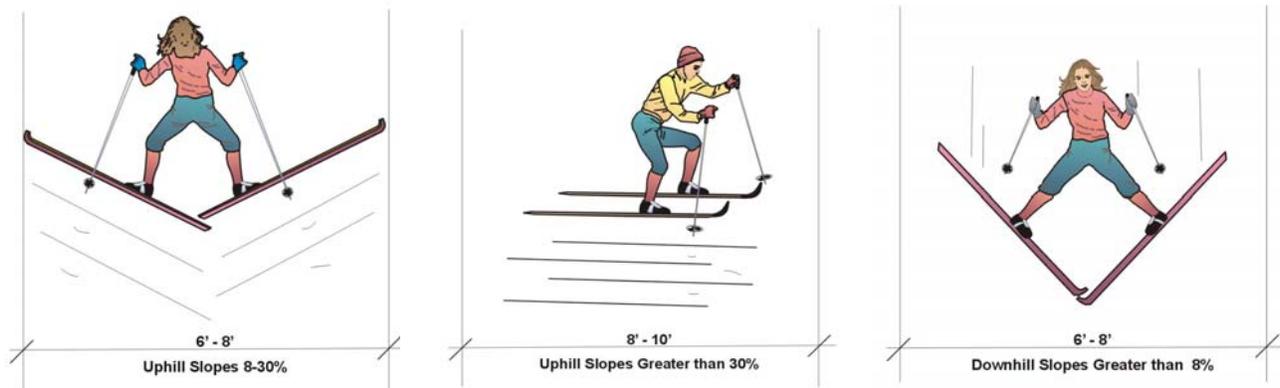
General Objectives

Due to the fact that ski touring is recreational in nature, trail facilities should provide a variety of natural experiences. Successful trails will interweave open and wooded vegetation and flat and hilly topography. Rural lands are desirable for this quiet winter sport because they introduce fewer distractions and provide the skier with a better opportunity for solitude. Short trails around residential developments can be used for exercise or to link these communities with elements of the larger recreational ski trail system.

General Dimensions

Ski touring, like hiking, reflects just the dimensions of the person using the trail. In designing ski touring trails, dimensions must allow for the depth of the snow when providing vertical clearance.

Figure 5.2
Suggested Cross-country Ski Trail Widths



Trail width should be increased as slope increases.

Grade and Variety of Terrain

The maximum grade for expert skier trails should not exceed a 40 percent slope for a short-run. The maximum practice slope should not exceed 12 percent. Steep trails can be traversed to avoid dangerous runs.

Avoid exhausting the trail user by providing sections of level trails in trail areas with many slopes. Trails should provide a variety of terrain. A trail should offer 1/3 uphill, 1/3 downhill and 1/3 flat. Provide separation between two trail directions when on a slope.

Exposure

To get the longest and most comfortable seasonal use, avoid cold, north winds. Attempt to direct trail use to the low, wind-protected and tree shaded, sun-protected areas. Also, avoid areas of wind erosion and wind slab (hard wind-packed snow).

Trails should also be laid out to hold snow. Methods of achieving this are:

- North-facing slopes; and avoid south-facing slopes when possible.
- Valleys
- Areas of vegetation
- Woods
- Tree lines

Trail Alignment

Clear and widen the trail in areas of turns especially when they occur on a hill. Avoid any sharp corners. Provide adequate run-out at the bottom of all slopes to allow the skiers to slow down.

Trail Length

Recreational ski-touring trails should be set up in a loop system varying from one to three miles in length, thereby allowing skiers optional distances. General trail classifications are:

- Short 0-6 miles
- Day 7-14 miles
- System 15+ miles

Trail Difficulty Rating

Easy: Slopes less than 10 percent
Smooth turns
Trails clear of obstruction

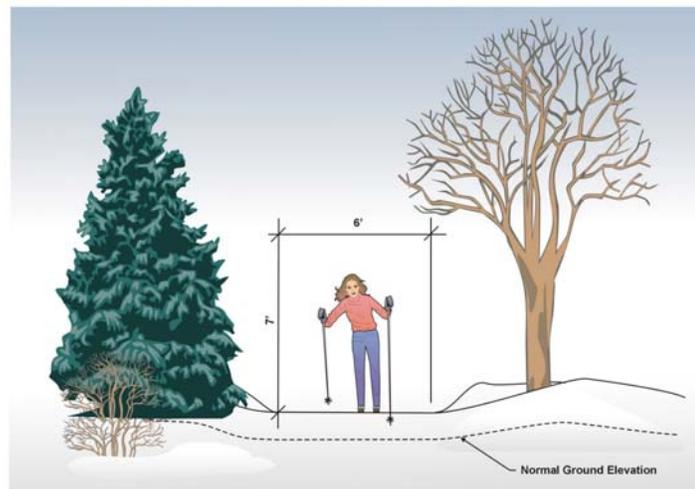
Intermediate: Slopes less than 25 percent
Sharp turns with overshoot areas
Less than 1/3 of course is uphill

Advanced: Slopes less than 40 percent
Sharp curves
Rough trail surface

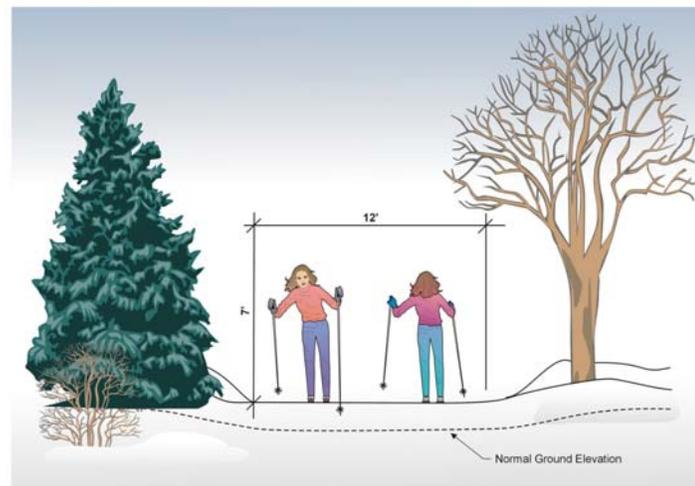
Signage

Signage is important for indicating trail direction and giving important trail information, such as distance, difficulty, hazards, rules and regulations, and locations of ski trail facilities. A trail head sign is important for showing length and direction of overall trail.

Figure 5.3
Design Criteria for Cross-country Ski Trails



One-Way Trail



Two-Way Trail

Suggested Design Standards for Nature Trails

General Objectives

Nature trail facilities should provide a variety of natural experiences for a diverse group of users. Successful trails will interweave diverse landscapes, including open and wooded vegetation, flat and hilly topography, as well as wetland areas where available. Short trails around residential developments can be used for exercise or to take advantage of interpretive programs drawing the user into an educational, as well as recreational experience.

General Dimensions

The general dimensions accommodate pedestrians and occasionally wheelchair users, so the width of the trail, as well as vertical and horizontal clearances, is determined by these two principal user groups.

Trail Width

- Hiking use trails should be wide enough for two persons to walk abreast (six feet).
- Nature trails are lower-use trails and can be half this wide (three feet).

Vertical Clearance

- Eight feet

Trail Length

- Nature and hiking trails will be determined by destinations.
- Nature and hiking trails should be loop routes, “figure eight” being desirable, allowing use of only half the trail without backtracking. These trails are intended for pleasure walking.
- Trail length should be approximately two to four miles to provide a one to two-hour experience. An alternative of a 1 1/2 mile trail can provide a pleasant, brief experience.

Grade

- In general hiking, trails should not exceed 15 percent.
- Trails anticipating use by the handicapped should not exceed 1 percent.
- Extreme steep slopes should be avoided if possible but can be negotiated by installing steps.
- Hiking trails require very little special attention compared to other trail uses. Sharp curves, narrow widths and other natural obstacles, such as logs and rocks, do not present a particular hazard to hikers and can provide barriers to unwanted users.

Surface Material

Occasional wet areas can be filled with gravel. Constant wet areas should be avoided if possible, otherwise bridges can be installed or catwalks created by use of granular fill.

Heavy Use Trails

This type of trail should be surfaced with asphalt or concrete.

Rural and Nature Trails

Part of the experience of this type of trail is to find oneself integrated into the surrounding landscape. In this case, wood chips or natural cover provide the best surface material.

Clearing

Trails should be cleared to sufficient width so that no brush touches hikers as they walk. Special attention should be paid to clearing branches, which could snap back.

Signage

Signs can be posted on hiking trails and should be used especially for separating hikers from bicyclists and other users on wheels, and warning motor vehicles of pedestrian crossings.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The City strives to provide a variety of trails to meet the recreational and transportation needs of residents. Trails provide connections and unique recreational opportunities for residents, and allow people of all ages and abilities a method of experiencing the parks system that diverges from traditional parks and open space use.

Existing trails in the City form a network based on a spine and feeder system. These spines were established in the City's early days and link the north, south and western districts of the City. County Road 4 in the west, County Road 1 along the southern boundary, Valley View running east-west along the northern edge, Duck Lake trail west of County Road 4 and Scenic Heights Road are the foundation of the City's system. Over time, feeder routes have been added to these spines to connect natural features, such as the creek beds and conservation areas. They also link the citywide system to regional facilities such as the Minnesota River bottoms area, under the jurisdiction of the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Proposed trails will fill in some of the underserved non-residential areas of the City. Some of these trails have been recently built in the Golden Triangle area. Others, which would border Highway 212 and link into the Riley Creek Conservation Area, are still in the planning phase. Still others, such as the Purgatory Creek trails proposed in the Park System Plan, are currently under construction.

As the trail system continues to evolve, maintenance and operation policies will be of primary importance for the Parks and Recreation Services Division, in terms of user enjoyment of the trail system, as well as safety and financial concerns related to maintenance activities.

Design and construction guidelines establish parameters for new trail development and any subsequent trail renovation. These parameters rely on widely accepted engineering standards to define the physical criteria for trail design. The extent of these guidelines includes trail dimensions, grades, crossings and surface materials, and varies by the type of trail in order to respond to user needs and traffic volumes on specific types of trails.