



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Welcome to Des Moines Parks and Recreation

Director's Perspective

As 2025 comes to a close, I am proud to reflect on a year that strengthened our parks, programs, and partnerships while setting the stage for an even more vibrant 2026. Des Moines continues to prove that when a community invests in its public spaces, everyone benefits. Our parks and recreation system is more than playgrounds and programs. It is the heart of a connected, healthy, and resilient city.



Throughout 2025 we focused on improving access to quality parks, delivering inclusive recreation opportunities, and completing capital projects that enhance both neighborhood and regional destinations. We made progress on community priorities such as sustainability, access, and wellbeing, and we continued to modernize how we manage and maintain the system. These efforts ensure that every resident can experience a park, trail, or recreation program that meets their needs close to home.

Our success this year reflects the dedication of our staff, volunteers, and countless partners who give their time and expertise to make Des Moines a better place to live, work, and play. From maintaining green spaces to running youth programs, their commitment is the foundation of everything we accomplish. I am deeply grateful for their creativity, professionalism, and service to our community.

As we look toward 2026, we remain focused on expanding access, strengthening partnerships, and building on the momentum of projects already underway. We will continue investing in high-impact facilities, recreational opportunities for all ages, and innovative public spaces that bring people together. We will also keep listening to residents and using data to guide decisions that reflect our shared priorities for Des Moines' future.

The year ahead promises new opportunities to celebrate, connect, and grow together. Whether you visit a park, volunteer at an event, or share your ideas for the next generation of projects, your involvement helps shape the city we all enjoy. Thank you for being part of our story and for supporting the parks and programs that make Des Moines a great place to call home. See you in the parks, Des Moines.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Page'.

Ben Page
Director of Parks and Recreation

OUR MISSION

Helping Des Moines

LIVE WELL, PLAY HARD AND PROTECT THE EARTH

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Follow Us on Socials!



Note to Readers

Our work across Parks and Recreation is deeply interconnected.

While each goal highlights a specific focus or initiative in our Comprehensive Plan, LIVE DSM, many of our projects naturally overlap, reflecting how Access, Attraction, Heart, Nature, and Innovation work together to strengthen our community.

While the stories in this report are organized by goal, their impact extends across them all, by design.

Department Overview

MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL



Connie Boesen
Mayor



Carl Voss
At-Large



Mike Simonson
At-Large



Chris Coleman
Ward I



Linda Westergaard
Ward II



Josh Mandelbaum
Ward III



Joe Gatto
Ward IV

PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD

Maria Alonzo

Brooke Avila

Marc Beltrame

James Bollard - Chair

Barb Bremner

Debra Chiodo

Jack Daugherty

George Davis

Luke Garnaas

Sarah Lohmeier

Anna Loiocono

Erin Lowe

Brent Millis

Joel Potter

William Thompson

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Sonya Fox

Cynthia O'Brien

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GOLF ADVISORY

Wendell Adamson

Rex Coble - Chair

Beverley Helversen

David Kaili

Rob McCargar

Brent Millis

Bill Nassif

Gene Nicolai

Joel Potter

Sam Pugh

Mark Scigliano

Stephen Vilmain

URBAN CONSERVATION

Doug Adamson

Brooke Avila

Barb Bremner

Jane Clark

Vicki Facto - Chair

Loren Lown

Susan Noland

Tom Rosburg

Tyler Stubbs

DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATION



PARKS AND RECREATION DIRECTOR Ben Page

ADMINISTRATION Jenny Richmond

Community Garden Program, Customer Service, Financial Operations, Fundraising and Donor Relations, Golf Oversight, Staff Support, Volunteer Engagement

DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING Daniel Calvert

Community Input, Design and Project Management, Parks and Trails Master Planning

PARK SERVICES Mike Gaul

Cemeteries, Gray's Lake, Greenhouse, Grounds Maintenance, Heavy Equipment, Natural Resources, Ornamentals and Trail Maintenance

RECREATION Janis Steele

Aquatics, Athletics, Community Engagement, Community Recreation Centers, Environmental Education, Special Events, Special Facilities

Staff Totals **71** Full-Time Employees **33** Part-Time Employees **348** Seasonal Employees

STAFF SPOTLIGHT



Callie Le'au Courtright

Recipient of a national Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement (ALIVE) Exemplary Leader Award



Derek Hansen

Recipient of ASLA Iowa Presidents' Award and nominated/selected as ASLA Iowa Chapter President-Elect



Rebecca Linhart

Recipient of Iowa Parks and Recreation Association: Executive Administrative Assistant Award



Jenny Richmond

Selected to serve as 1 of 5 Gold Medal Judges for American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration



John Woolson

After 33 years dedicated to DMPR, John will be entering a new chapter - RETIREMENT! CONGRATULATIONS!

Goal 1: Access

Play Belongs to Everyone

Expanded Adapted Programming

In fall 2024, Des Moines Parks and Recreation (DMPR) launched its first Adapted Recreation program, Adapted Soccer, providing 34 youth with an inclusive, supportive place to play. Building on that success, the department expanded its adapted offerings in 2025 to better serve residents of all abilities.

What began as one program has grown into 10 free adapted activities spanning sports, outdoor recreation, and seasonal celebrations, including baseball, basketball, soccer, summer camp, swim lessons, kayak camp, floor hockey, ice skating, flag football, and a holiday party.

This expansion was made possible through an HDR Grant, which provided critical support for growing the adapted program.

We will continue to adjust and improve our adapted programming to provide access to all residents of our city.



176 Participants

9 Volunteers

70 Volunteer Hours

Updated Number of Parks in Our System

A comprehensive review of Parks and Recreation properties completed in 2025 led to several welcome advancements. By working closely with staff from the Legal, Engineering, and Information Technology departments plus partners at Des Moines Public Schools and our own long-tenured staff, we collectively established our definition of a park versus other types of properties such as open spaces, greenways, cemeteries, and golf courses.

Through this process, several existing properties that were not previously counted but had long functioned as parks were formally added to the roster. Joint-use school/park sites were also incorporated in the count based on the updated shared use agreement with Des Moines Public Schools.

Our official park count total was revised from 77 to 92 as a result. This update reflects a fresh accounting of the assets we manage and the public spaces our community relies on for all dimensions of wellbeing. Additionally, it marks an important milestone in supporting consistent reporting to national-level Parks and Recreation organizations and future planning and programming efforts.

Explore all 92 locations in the Parks Directory





Park-N-Play: Expanding Access

In its first year, Park-N-Play brought FREE, high-quality recreation directly into Des Moines neighborhoods, expanding access to play, learning, and wellness opportunities for residents of all ages. The brightly wrapped van serves as a mobile hub, stocked with equipment and materials that activate parks, sidewalks, and open spaces with movement and creativity.

In 2025, Park-N-Play reached more than 2,500 residents across 25+ locations through drop-in activities designed to meet people where they are. By reducing barriers and creating welcoming gathering spaces, the program is strengthening neighborhood connections and advancing the City's commitment to inclusive access to recreation.



Park-N-Play Discovery

"My granddaughter and I took advantage of the Park-N-Play program at Franklin Library. It was such a nice opportunity to get out of the house, have room to run, kick balls and play with new and different toys. I will continue using the program going forward."

~ Tracy S.



Karras-Kaul Connector: Strengthening Regional Trails

In June 2025, DMPR and regional partners celebrated the opening of the 3-mile Karras-Kaul Connector Trail, a new, multi-use, concrete trail that closes a long-standing gap in the regional trail network. Riders are now able to travel continuously on this significant north-south connector from Saylorville Lake and Big Creek State Park to Indianola, with Des Moines as the central hub of activity. Its completion greatly strengthened central Iowa's trail network, expanding recreation and active transportation options for residents.

The \$4+ million project was funded through competitive grants, partner contributions, and local match. Key features include a grade-separated tunnel under E. Army Post Road for safer crossing, streambed enhancements designed for better water quality, solar-powered lighting as a cost-saving, energy-efficient alternative along with durable concrete surfacing, and wayfinding signage.

This multi-jurisdictional effort brought together the City of Des Moines, City of Carlisle, Warren County, Iowa DOT, Iowa DNR, the Des Moines Area MPO, watershed partners, and Friends of Des Moines Parks. The project outcomes include improved regional connectivity, enhanced ecological function, and reduced long-term operational costs, all achieved through strong collaboration and community support.



Goal 2: Attraction

Destinations That Draw Us Together

Cemeteries: Where History Brings Us Together

Des Moines' cemeteries continue to serve as some of the community's most cherished historic destinations - places where residents come together to learn, reflect, and honor those who came before us.

In 2025, more than 600 residents participated in 25 guided cemetery tours, exploring themes such as Civil War history, notable Des Moines women, and the stories embedded throughout Woodland and Glendale Cemeteries. To increase access for visitors with mobility needs, the Friends of Des Moines Parks generously donated a new six-person golf cart, allowing more people to experience these tours and the rich history they illuminate.



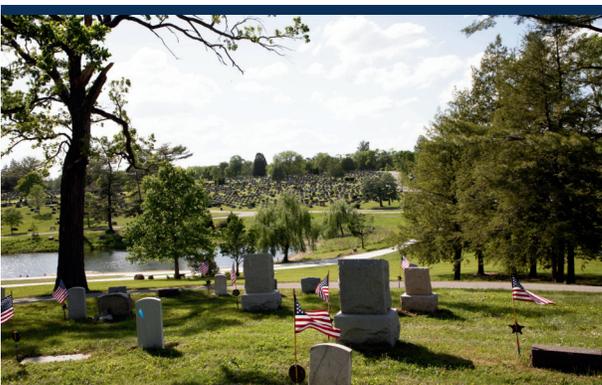
Community participation also shined through national remembrance traditions. Cemeteries remain some of our crown jewels, especially on Memorial Day, when more than 20,000 visitors come to pay their respects. Staff begin preparations in early spring by beautifying grounds, placing 8,500 flags on veterans' graves, and readying these sacred spaces to welcome families, veterans, and community members.

Through Wreaths Across America, sponsors helped place more than 1,100 wreaths on the graves of fallen service members at Woodland Cemetery, creating a moving display of gratitude and unity.

Together, these programs and traditions reinforce our cemeteries as destinations that draw us together in remembrance, in learning, and in community.

Cemetery Tours Offered

- Civil War History
- Glendale History
- Woodland History
- Notable Women of Early Des Moines



Beautifully Maintained Glendale

"Good morning! Yesterday I was at Glendale Cemetery decorating my family's graves. Just want to say that the crew there has done an incredible job of maintaining the cemetery. The whole place is beautifully manicured - the job they have done there is an honor to our deceased loved ones."

~ Vic S.

Year-Round Programming That Connects Community

In 2025, Des Moines Parks and Recreation expanded year-round programming across recreation centers and dog parks, creating more destinations that bring residents together.

At Pioneer Columbus, Fourmile CRC, and the MLK Jr. Park Shelter, our partnership with Polk County continued to provide free senior meals and social activities for adults 60+, serving 18,000+ meals alongside weekly wellness classes, speakers, and themed gatherings. Yoga offerings grew from two sessions in 2024 to five sessions in 2025, and Pioneer Columbus added drop-in Sepak Takraw and Hip Hop Dance, supporting unique and growing interest groups.

Community connection extended outdoors as well. Paws & Claus, a donation event at Ewing Dog Park, brought dog owners together and donations supported pets in need through the Animal Rescue League of Iowa. The Black Friday Hike created new opportunities to de-stress in nature on a traditionally chaotic day.

Together, these programs strengthen our recreation centers and parks as vibrant destinations for gathering, wellness, and community year-round.



Sport Courts as Neighborhood Destinations

In June 2025, DMPR celebrated the completion of the \$2.2 million Stone Park Improvements Project, transforming the park into a high-use, multi-generational sports destination. Nearly 40% of the project was funded through generous grants and donations. The generational project added four new LED-lit pickleball courts, resurfaced and re-striped an existing basketball court, added a Kick It Forward Mini-Pitch futsal court with LED sports lighting, as well as a new sprayground, playground, shelter, walking loop, and accessible pathways. These enhancements complement Pioneer Columbus Community Recreation Center programming, including the very popular indoor pickleball activities.

At Birdland Sports Park, a completed renovation delivered seven new tennis courts in place of five existing, two new LED-lit basketball courts, and repurposed outdated courts to five stand-alone pickleball courts. All courts received modern surfacing, striping, and ADA-compliant access with generous improved spectator areas, LED lighting, stormwater improvements, and seating.

Together, these investments position Stone Park and Birdland Sports Park as premier sport court destinations that draw the community together through play, competition, and connection.



Cultivating Community

“This winter break my 9 year-old son spent his time at the Pioneer Columbus Community Center, playing basketball with adults, twice his size. What stood out wasn’t just the fun he had and the skills he built, but the way these players welcomed him as one of the “big guys.” They made sure he felt part of the team.

A huge thank you to the incredible community at Pioneer Columbus and the City of Des Moines for investing in safe, inclusive spaces where connections like this can happen!”

~ Community Recreation Center User

Creativity in Shared Spaces

Through community-based partnerships with local artists, community groups, and organizations such as the Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation and BRAVO Greater Des Moines, Des Moines Parks and Recreation is providing opportunities for accessible, participatory visual arts, creating a welcoming, memorable park and trail experience for all users.

Art Corridor installations bring rotating local artwork to high-use trails, transforming everyday routes into cultural experiences while expanding access to art citywide. These installations strengthen trail identity, enhance the experience for thousands of users, and provide paid opportunities for local artists. Along the Bill Riley Trail, the Colin J. Witt Memorial Group funded and supported the installation of two ArtForce artworks.

Art is also integral within community and neighborhood parks. Murals at Evelyn K. Davis Park celebrate local identity, shared vision and participation, with another mural planned at Pioneer Columbus Community Recreation Center, to be completed by local artist Maddie Fusco. At Riverside Bridge Park, Des Moines' first "park on a bridge" features artistic elements that transform infrastructure into interpretation of the river and enhance the aesthetics of this new public park space.

Together, these projects and partnerships coupled with community involvement, position art as a catalyst for connection that draw people together through creativity, culture, vibrancy and community.



Pioneer Columbus CRC



Riverside Bridge Park



Trail Art Corridors



Trail System Appreciation

"Thank you for all you do to maintain and continue developing this great trail network! I have had so many people from out-of-town comment about how great our trail system is and how they wish they had this where they lived.

We are very pleased to hear that concrete is the goal for all future trails vs. asphalt and we will always help be proponents of trail vs. bike lane. The enjoyment and safety factors allow someone of all ages, skill level, etc. to get out and enjoy nature and improve their health!

Thanks again for all you do to make Des Moines trails great!"

~ Isaac V.

Goal 3: Heart

Where Community Comes Alive



Strengthening Youth Experiences

Our Summer Camps continued to thrive in 2025, supported by a strong and growing network of community partners dedicated to enriching the lives of youth across the city. Our success is built on meaningful collaborations with organizations such as Blank Park Zoo, Central Iowa Shelters and Services, Des Moines Public Library, Des Moines Art Center, Polk County Conservation, Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, Iowa Gold Star Military Museum, the Iowa Cubs, UnityPoint Health/Blank Children’s Hospital, and many others.

Collectively, partners contributed an estimated \$200,000 of in-kind support in 2025. Their generosity and expertise allow us to deliver high-quality programming that inspires active lifestyles, sparks curiosity, and advances the City’s commitment to ensuring recreation is accessible to all Des Moines youth.



Adoption Programs

Our Adopt-a-Park, Adopt-a-Trail, and Adopt-a-Block programs build community stewardship while supporting the City’s work to care for parks, trails, and cemeteries. By engaging volunteers in litter removal, light maintenance, and beautification, these programs enhance the department’s capacity to keep public spaces clean and welcoming. These volunteer partnerships strengthen community pride and supplement municipal resources. 2025 was a banner year for all three programs engaging over 1,100 volunteers contributing time valued at more than \$107,000:

Adopt-a-Block

- 161 Volunteers
- 1,571 Hours
- \$54,654.97 Value

Adopt-a-Park

- 780 Volunteers
- 1,182 Hours
- \$41,121.79 Value

Adopt-a-Trail

- 185 Volunteers
- 358.25 Hours
- \$12,463.50 Value



Neighborhood Association Liaison Program

DMPR leads the way in fostering community-building with residents, above and beyond the typical role of Parks and Recreation professionals. Our Neighborhood Association Liaison Program plays a large role in this and has also been valuable in gaining a clear understanding of the true needs and wants of residents at a neighborhood level and cultivating widespread support for the department.

The program helps us sustain trusted relationships and open, accessible lines of communication so residents continue to feel our facilities and programs are the heart of our community and view our staff as trusted leaders. Liaisons become the go-to for fostering close relationships with Neighborhoods by actively participating in meetings, special events, providing updates to association leadership, being a resource for all questions, and an internal resource for other staff when projects and programs take place in their Neighborhood.

Approximately 20 staff are liaisons to two or three individual Neighborhood Associations and establish close relationships with their leadership and active participants. In 2025, liaisons attended nearly 300 meetings or events and supported programming, improvements, and important connections with every Neighborhood.



Community Garden Highlights

Community gardeners at all three of our locations have grown and donated extra produce to local pantries for years. Through a new partnership, gardeners donated 114 pounds of fresh produce to a nearby neighborhood non-profit, Knock and Drop Iowa, in 2025. The donated food was used in family meal packages, helping bridge a gap for disadvantaged and underserved populations.

242 Total Plots
Franklin: 179 Stone Park: 34
Woodlawn: 29

154 Returning Gardeners
54 New Gardeners

569.75 Hours Volunteered
\$19,821.60 Value



692 LBS of produce grown, harvested and donated to local pantries

Hear from a Gardener 

Parks and Pools: The Heart of Our Neighborhoods

Parks and pools are more than amenities, they are the places where daily life happens: first steps, pick-up games, summer splash days, weekend festivals, quiet morning walks, and moments that create memories and stitch a neighborhood together. Our projects aren't just about concrete and features; they create settings where relationships form, culture is shared, and communities thrive.

Every successful park project starts with listening. From initial analysis and visioning through refinement and confirmation, we design with our neighborhoods. Public input shapes both major prioritization decisions and important design details. Neighborhood Associations prioritize amenities and program preferences. At Jordan Park, for example, the Elementary students at Lovejoy School helped choose playground equipment and colors.

Thoughtful infrastructure design, efficient systems and durable materials keep these community spaces open, safe, and accessible, reflecting community identity, and creating opportunities for connection, joy, and belonging in every season. When we partner with our residents to successfully design and implement their park, they become invested stewards who bring these spaces to life through use, care, and shared ownership.

DID YOU KNOW?

Des Moines Parks & Recreation issued 339 park and trail permits, 2,048 shelter and facility rentals and 3,632 Gray's Lake boat rentals in 2025!



Kathryn Krieg Park

This new park honors the legacy of Kathryn Krieg, one of the nation's first female parks and recreation senior leaders and the first DMPR female Director. It provides access to more than 1,200 residents within a 10-minute walk.



Jordan Park

This reimagined neighborhood park features modern, low-barrier play and spray amenities and builds on what neighbors asked for most: a safe, inviting, and colorful place where kids can play close to home.



Aquatics Investments

Investing in utility and mechanical infrastructure improvements is critical in keeping cherished summer spaces running strong all season long.

Ashworth Pool

"I went swimming today at Ashworth. I believe this marks my 71st or 72nd year swimming at least once a summer in a Des Moines pool.

I was stunned at the water quality at Ashworth. I dove to the bottom of the pool and it was absolutely perfect in terms of clean. It was rare when I would visit a pool and find the quality of the water to be so fabulous. It easily places Ashworth (at least today) in the top five of pools I have ever seen in terms of cleanliness and clarity. It was fun to swim through the pool.

Please give my congratulations to the people that are taking care of the chemistry and cleanliness of the place."

~ Mark H.



Learn About Park Projects

Goal 4: Nature

Sustaining Our Natural Legacy

Monarch Butterfly Conservation

2025 marked the 10th anniversary of Des Moines' commitment to the National Wildlife Federation's Mayors' Monarch Pledge, reaffirming the City's long-standing dedication to creating and maintaining habitats that support Monarch populations and other vital pollinators.

Annual hands-on monarch tagging events offer residents the opportunity to learn about monarch migration, contribute valuable data to national research efforts, and explore the conservation practices taking place throughout our parks. In the fall, residents helped capture, tag, and release 200 Monarch butterflies.



Collaboration and Water Quality

Protecting the Earth is a pillar of DMPR's mission. Some of our most substantial impacts come through our collaborations with other organizations and with the help of volunteers.

One example of this impact can be seen via our staff and volunteers monitoring the health of streams that flow through our watersheds twice a month to provide current and relevant information to the Polk County Conservation Water Quality Monitoring Program (PCCWQMP). Integrating into this program allows us to utilize existing quality assurance protocols for gathering accurate data and scientific information. All materials, training, data entry and interpretation, quality control, and support are provided by the PCCWQMP.

Data collected is sent to and interpreted by Polk County Conservation staff. This information helps the county and City determine the watershed's health based on chemical, physical, habitat, and biological parameters. Having updated information helps all partner organizations act fast if an issue were to occur.

11 Monitored Sites

**20 Water Monitors: 5 Staff Members
15 Volunteers**



Learn More



Love of Nature

"Our love of nature calls us to engage in conservation activities in nearby parks. We conduct several wildlife surveys, test water quality, and remove trash, especially plastics so they don't harm the wildlife. Having so many like-minded people join our efforts has also been rewarding."

~ Mike S. and Karen S.



Conservation Efforts

The City of Des Moines is home to expansive wildlife, flowing streams, and diverse ecosystems. Protecting these natural resources is essential to supporting healthy environments and a high quality of life for our residents. In 2025, Des Moines Parks and Recreation advanced this mission through partnerships, habitat restoration, and ongoing stewardship.



This year, the department collaborated with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to capture Buffalo Carp for display at the Iowa State Fair. The electrofishing method used is also an important tool for safely surveying fish populations and assessing lake health. As part of these efforts, the DNR stocked additional 2-inch Largemouth Bass at Witmer Park and introduced 500 Hybrid Striped Bass into Gray's Lake to support healthy fisheries.

In fall 2025, DMPR received an \$8,000 seed grant through a partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to begin restoring floodplain land near Cownie Soccer Complex to native habitat. This initial phase will restore a portion of a larger 120-acre floodplain, with the long-term goal of transitioning the full area over multiple years as additional seed grants are secured. Staff have begun site preparation by removing invasive species and improving soil conditions ahead of spring planting.



2025 also marked the first full year DMPR provided grounds maintenance for the 16-acre property off Maury Street that hosts the City of Des Moines' first municipal solar field, supporting the city's commitment to sustainability and responsible land management.

Exploring the Outdoors

"My family and I have participated in the GPS hunts for the past five years. They've become one of our favorite family activities, teaching us how to use a GPS device while also encouraging us to get outside, enjoy each other's company, and learn more about nature. The Environmental Education programs are engaging, fun, clever and entertaining for all ages!"

~ Dawn S.





Nature's Tree "Planting"

About five years ago, Des Moines Parks and Recreation's Grounds Crew began a simple but effective approach to growing future canopy: protecting naturally sprouted trees planted by squirrels. Each spring, staff identify acorns and hickory nuts that have taken root in appropriate locations and protect select seedlings from mowing and wildlife damage using posts, fencing, and mulch.

With minimal intervention and no supplemental watering, these native trees are allowed to regenerate naturally. Five years later, many are thriving and growing quickly while requiring far fewer resources than nursery-grown trees. New seedlings are now identified and protected each year across multiple parks.

This low-cost, sustainable practice mirrors how many of Des Moines' historic oak trees likely took root generations ago and reflects the department's ongoing commitment to environmental stewardship and long-term care of the park system.

From Recovery to Renewal

In July 2024, an EF1 tornado caused significant damage at Glendale Cemetery, removing 105 trees and severely damaging 75 more. Within a year, all non-tree damage was restored, and in April 2025, 70 new trees were planted to support recovery and regrowth. These plantings were made possible through private donations, a significant gift from the Wright Foundation, and grant support from Friends of Des Moines Parks, along with hundreds of staff and volunteer hours.

Beyond storm recovery, intentional tree planting continued across the park system. Through the Memorial Tree Program, 20 additional trees and nine lilacs were planted, supported by community donations and Friends of Des Moines Parks. Tree additions are also built into every park planning project, ensuring long-term growth of Des Moines' urban canopy and reinforcing a comprehensive, community-driven approach to caring for our parks.



Goal 5: Innovation

Adapting, Achieving and Inspiring



Accomplishing More Together

Des Moines Public Schools (DMPS) currently does not offer elementary or middle school feeder programs to support their high school athletic teams, whereas many suburban districts in the Des Moines metro are able to support this and reap the benefits.



To close this gap, Des Moines Parks and Recreation is making swift progress in supporting DMPS in establishing at least one team per grade level at each elementary and middle school, effectively creating internal feeder programs across our Parks and Recreation youth leagues.

This structure aims to encourage students to explore new sports and increase participation numbers in parks and recreation youth programs. It has also enabled teams to build skills together, strengthen their chemistry, and increase long-term participation in athletics. This change helps kids, parents, and coaches feel more connected with our community sooner with opportunities to come together in an organized and positive way well before high school.

Getting the Full Experience of Gray's Lake

Introduction to Stand Up Paddleboarding Classes

"I was thinking about checking out the paddleboards from Gray's Lake, but I had never done it before, so I didn't feel as comfortable and so when I saw this class pop up, I took it and after taking it, I feel a lot better about getting on a paddleboard, it was really fun."

~ Brianna B.



Training Through Technology

Did you know? We hire over 150 Lifeguards each year!

To strengthen our aquatic safety practices, DMPR introduced the Red Cross Virtual Reality (VR) lifeguard training as part of our updated certification and in-service procedures.

This innovative technology allows lifeguards to:

- practice maintaining consistent scanning patterns,
- heighten situational awareness,
- improve ability to quickly identify distressed swimmers,

All within a realistic, simulated environment.

Integrating VR technology into our training toolkit enhances preventative lifeguarding, supports more confident decision-making, and helps ensure our staff remain highly prepared while on deck.



Year 1 at the New Greenhouse

Powered by a nearby solar field and nestled among native prairie, pollinator habitats, and advanced stormwater management systems, this innovative net-zero greenhouse enhances plant production and operational efficiency. The thoughtfully designed space also supports community connection through volunteer opportunities and events.

By the Numbers:

- 154 volunteers assisted in greenhouse operations
- 6,500 spring annual flowers planted at City facilities
- 8,200 annuals grown for fall planting displays
- 10,620 native plants grown
- 34,800 plants grown and 45 groups participated in the Neighborhood Flower Program
- 38,470 annuals grown for Fleur Drive and Water Works Park
- 56,500 fall bulbs planted on Fleur Drive and 8,920 fall bulbs planted in parks
- 149,500 summer annual plants grown and planted at City facilities



Dinner in the Greenhouse was an elegant evening event held on November 7, 2025 by Friends of Des Moines Parks, where guests gathered in the beautiful setting of the City Greenhouse. The atmosphere was filled with lively conversation, delicious local cuisine, and warm camaraderie. This special dinner brought together neighbors, families, and friends for an evening of shared enjoyment, celebrating the community's dedication to Des Moines parks and green spaces.

Translation Services Expand Reach

Across the department, staff have expanded the way vital information can be shared so more residents can meaningfully engage with Des Moines Parks and Recreation. We are ready to serve our diverse community and now offer bilingual “how-to” videos and translation services via phone and on our updated website.

Spanish Translation Services

- Online shelter reservations form
- “How To” sign up and apply for scholarships
- “How To” create a Civic Rec account
- “How To” register for programs
- Youth Sports overview flyer

Website Advancements

- Built-in language translation
- Expanded audio and visual accessibility features



Did You Know?

Our Customer Service Team assisted:

10,049
customers via phone

1,101
via walk-in patrons

32
multi-language phone calls
(LanguageLine Solutions offers 240+ languages interpretation)



Volunteers - Service Enterprise Accreditation



Des Moines is the first city Parks and Recreation Department in Iowa to become an accredited Service Enterprise organization, through the Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement (ALIVE).

Through this accreditation, we've been able to:

- **Embrace Technology**
- **Expand Access to Participation**
- **Create New Volunteer Opportunities**

The accreditation process included standardizing processes and procedures to help the team become even more efficient and effective in volunteer engagement. Over 40 operating procedures were updated or created to help guide staff and volunteers and the accreditation team consisted of staff from across the department to provide broad, comprehensive input.

DID YOU KNOW?

DMPR is in the TOP 11% for volunteer program performance in the U.S.



Volunteer Info

2025 Milestones and 2026 Momentum



Milestones

- Received Des Moines Heritage Trust’s Historic Preservation Project of the Year for Union Park Rocket Slide renovation
- Launched Park-N-Play Mobile Recreation Programming
- Awarded significant grants for implementation of Birdland Park & Marina Master Plan
- 2025 Volunteer Statistics: 30,865.7 Hours, \$1,149,972.46 Value, 4,195 Volunteers
- Received ASLA Iowa Merit Award for Evelyn K. Davis Basketball Court Mural

Momentum: Looking Ahead

- Dedicate the new Reichardt Community Recreation Center
- Advance data collection with CityData.ai and additional trail Eco Counters
- Implement golf course management advancements for greater revenue, engagement, and sustainable approaches
- Celebrate opening Gray’s Lake Park Playground and Sprayground
- Implement Nike Coaches Training Program via NRPA grant funding
- Provide expanded trail connectivity with the addition of Central Place Trail Phase II



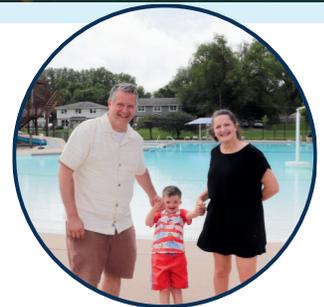
It’s Who We Are

“My name is Jeremy. My wife and I have been going to Northwest Aquatic Center this week, taking our son to swim lessons. I just wanted to tell you how impressed we’ve been with the staff. Our son Marek is an 8-year-old with Down syndrome. He can occasionally be a roamer and require a little extra attention.

My wife and I have been beyond impressed with how quickly staff adapted to accommodate him. One staff member recognized that another employee was building a strong rapport with Marek and thoughtfully paired them together. That employee was extremely patient, while also not being afraid to push Marek outside of his comfort level, all while keeping it fun. In moments when Marek began to lose focus, another staff member jumped in to offer extra encouragement.

What we have been so appreciative of is the level of professionalism, patience, and genuine desire to form relationships that your staff has demonstrated.”

~ Jeremy, Sarah, and Marek J.



FRIENDS OF DES MOINES PARKS



MISSION

At Friends of Des Moines Parks, we are dedicated to creating a healthier and more vibrant Des Moines community for all by preserving, enhancing and advocating for parks, trails and recreational programs.



\$452,000 Raised to help support Des Moines Parks and Recreation

2025 Partner of the Year: Ruan Family Foundation

FORE! Our Parks Golf Tournament and Bike Ride

The 12th annual FORE! event funded six needs throughout the park system ranging from providing an accessibility service vehicle to art supplies and more...

- 6-Passenger Golf Cart for Improved Cemetery Visitor Access
- DMPS-Designed Coloring Books for PARK-N-PLAY Mobile Recreation Van
- Central Place Trail Identity Signage
- Pioneer Columbus Community Recreation Center Received:
 - Bleachers
 - Gym Curtains
 - Pool Table



FUNDED PROJECTS



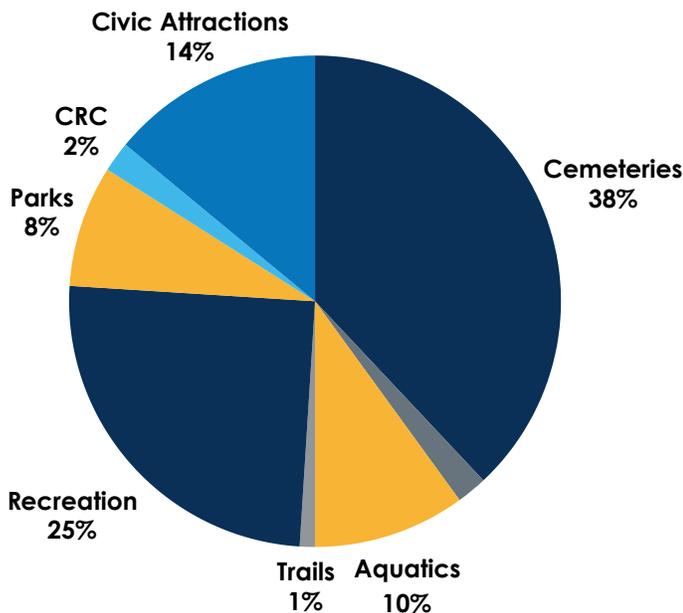
Join Us!

To learn more about Friends of Des Moines Parks how YOU can make an impact, visit: [FRIENDSOFDMPARKS.ORG](https://www.FRIENDSOFDMPARKS.ORG)

Financial Overview: Operating Budgets

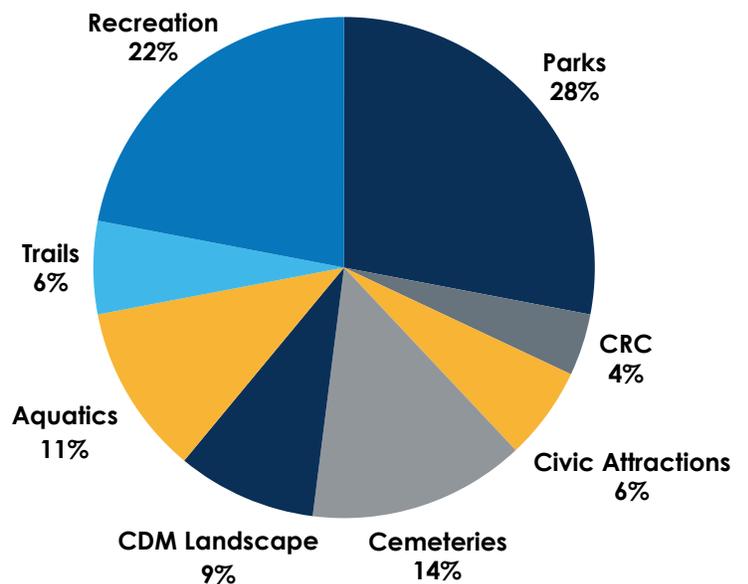
Revenue

FY2026 Adopted Budget
\$4,530,815

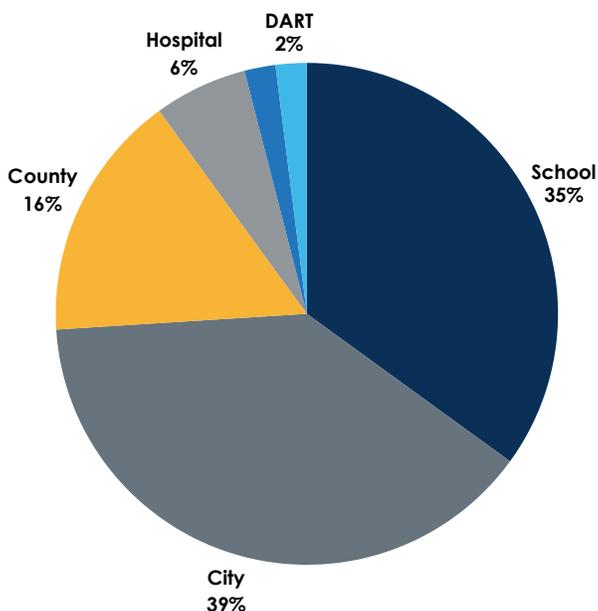


Expenditures

FY2026 Adopted Budget
\$19,518,789



Where Does Your Property Tax Dollar Go?



A Greener City

"I actually didn't realize the depth and the spread of how much the Parks and Recreation Department A) cares for and B) have implemented into making the city greener and more beautiful."

~ Alison C. (EngageDSM Cohort 1 Member)



An Investment in Your Community



Big value for a small investment. The average Des Moines homeowner contributes just \$162 in annual property taxes to Parks and Recreation for a median assessed home of \$194,100 - opening the door to a wide range of amenities, programs, and services such as:





[DMPARKS.ORG](https://dmparks.org)

