

Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Village of Benton

March 17, 2021



PLANNING ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY



Resolution Adopting the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

WHEREAS, the Village of Benton has recognized the need for a Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan based upon an inventory of outdoor recreation facilities and natural resources within the Village, Lafayette County, and Southwest Wisconsin; and

WHEREAS, the development of the plan will serve as a guide for making future decisions related to outdoor recreation in the Village of Benton and through its adoption will make the Village eligible to participate in state and federal recreation aid programs; and

WHEREAS this comprehensive outdoor recreation plan has been prepared for the Benton Village Board by Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission; and

WHEREAS, this recreation plan is based on sound planning principles and long-range goals and objectives for the Village's recreational development;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Village Board for the Village of Benton hereby goes on record to adopt the Village of Benton Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan as the Village's guide for future outdoor recreation improvements and development;

AND, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Village board requests the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to provide eligibility to the Village of Benton for participation in the state and federal cost-sharing programs for an additional five-year period.

Dated this 17th day of March, 2021

VILLAGE OF BENTON

Gary McCrea

Gary McCrea, President

Beverly Hitz

Beverly Hitz, Clerk/Treasurer

ATTEST:

I hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of the resolution passed by the Village Board of the Village of Benton at the regular meeting thereof held on this 17th day of March 2021.

Beverly Hitz

Beverly Hitz, Clerk/Treasurer

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Executive Summary

The purpose of the 2021 Comprehensive Outdoor and Recreation Plan (CORP) is to guide the Village Council, Village Park Committee, Village Staff, interested residents, and volunteers in decision-making related to park programs and improvements over the next five years. Actual public policy decisions are contingent on funding sources, new opportunities, changing growth patterns, budget priorities, and shifting community goals. For this reason, the plan should be reviewed annually and a detailed update should be completed every five years.

This plan is the result of an extensive public outreach process. In view of public health concerns arising from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the public input stage of the process was adjusted to reduce in-person meetings. The survey period was extended to provide ample time for more community members to respond to the survey. Also, open-ended questions were included in the survey to solicit for detailed responses regarding needed improvements to the parks, recreational facilities, and amenities. In total, the Southwestern Wisconsin Planning Commission (SWWRPC) collected 259 completed surveys representing an estimated 29% sample size of the total population.

This document includes specific park-by-park recommendations as well as proposals to enhance accessibility of parks along paths and trails. Expanding recreational walking and hiking opportunities is not only a local priority, but is a top priority indicated by the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). More detailed information on recommendations for outdoor recreation within the Village of Benton can be found in the section “Recommendations for Outdoor Recreation” (Page 40).

Policy decisions regarding park development should be guided by the goals, objectives, and recommendations of this adopted plan. The following are the Goals and Objectives of the Plan organized around three topic areas:

GOAL: Continue to provide excellent maintenance to Benton’s parks and recreational facilities.

- Provide additional park amenities and facilities in existing parks including playground equipment, sports equipment, picnic tables, benches and others. Existing park amenities such as basketball and tennis court surfaces and fixed equipment should also be maintained.
- Continue to provide excellent equipment maintenance, repairing and replacing items like trash cans, water fountains, and recycling bins.
- Continue to make Benton parks handicap accessible, by incorporating updates into the formal maintenance schedule.

GOAL: Develop new parks and recreational facilities to meet the needs of Benton residents

- Develop a walking and hiking trail that connects the Swift Park to the Rolling Oaks Subdivision. The trail will not only be beneficial in accessing parks, but will enable kids to get to and from school safely.
- Provide park and recreation facilities that accommodate all user groups, including the special needs of the elderly and disabled.



GOAL: Continue to efficiently utilize existing funding streams and find new funding solutions for Benton’s parks systems.

- Continue to cooperate and coordinate work with the school district, county, and state agencies to provide efficient outdoor recreation programs and opportunities.
- Leverage local support to develop more external grant funding for additional park and recreation amenities, equipment, and maintenance.

Image 1: Music in the Park event at the Village Park



Introduction

This Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) for the Village of Benton is an expression of the community’s current goals and future objectives for recreational facilities. The intent of this document is to plan for the maintenance and improvement of Benton’s recreational and open space resources. This will be accomplished by outlining a strategy to manage existing resources and to develop new resources to meet future needs and demands.

Parks can serve a limited neighborhood area, the entire community, and the region as a whole. This provides outdoor recreation for both residents and visitors. Open spaces are not limited to parks but also include greenbelts, wetlands, and floodplains. Open space can also serve many functions for a community other than recreation, such as the following:

- Preservation of scenic and natural resources
- Flood management
- Protecting the area’s water resources
- Preserving prime agricultural land
- Limiting development that may occur
- Buffering incompatible land uses
- Structuring the community environment

A parks and facilities plan incorporates private as well as public open space areas in the community. The development and continual updating of the CORP becomes a valuable asset to a community to support its thoughtful development, community health, and visual appeal.

Image 2: Sledding at the Benton High School



Plan Purpose

This plan is an update of the Benton Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan prepared in 1995. The specific purpose of this plan is to guide the development and improvement of the Village's outdoor recreation facilities over the next five years to meet the recreational needs and demands of residents.

Policy decisions made by the Benton Village Council for park programs and improvements should be guided by the goals, objectives, findings, and recommendations of this adopted plan. Actual public policy decisions are contingent on funding sources, new opportunities, changing growth patterns, budget priorities, and shifting community goals. For this reason, the plan should be reviewed annually and a detailed update should be completed every five years. Updating the plan every five years is a requirement of the State of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) to remain eligible for matching government funds for parkland acquisition and facility improvements. But just as importantly, the Village of Benton would benefit from setting a course of action for ongoing improvement of its parks and outdoor recreational system.

Image 3: Music in the Park event at the Village Park



Goals and Objectives

The Village of Benton takes pride in its excellent park system. This portion of the updated Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan provides Village officials with general policies to guide the future growth and development of Benton’s park system and outdoor recreation facilities. The goals and objectives below are vital to the efforts in providing this important service.

GOAL: Continue to provide excellent maintenance to Benton’s parks and recreational facilities.

- Provide additional park amenities and facilities in existing parks including playground equipment, sports equipment, picnic tables, benches and others. Existing park amenities such as basketball and tennis court surfaces and fixed equipment should also be maintained.
- Continue to provide excellent equipment maintenance, repairing and replacing items like trash cans, water fountains, and recycling bins.
- Continue to make Benton parks handicap accessible, by incorporating updates into the formal maintenance schedule.

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- Leverage local support to develop more external grant funding for additional park and recreation amenities, equipment, and maintenance.



Definitions and Classifications

Open Space Need Standards

Standards are a good starting point or reference when determining a community's outdoor recreation land and facility needs. However, each community's needs are different based on such factors as a community's demographic profile and what types of facilities and outdoor recreation priorities the citizenry deem important. Resident input in the form of surveys and/or public hearings are also important when recreation and park planners look at future development and/or preservation of public lands.

National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) standards have been modified to more accurately define parks, recreation land, and open spaces within the Village of Benton. For example, NRPA recommends that a Community Park have a desirable size of 10 to 25 acres. Benton's community parks are in the 1 to 15 acre range. All parks, recreation lands, and open spaces under the jurisdiction of the Village of Benton have been assigned one primary classification or code using the following titles and abbreviations:

- **M-P: Mini Park (or Tot Lot)**
 - Desirable/Typical Size: 1 acre or less.
 - Service Area: 1/8 – 1/4 mile.
 - Acres/1,000 Population: 0.5 – 1.0 acre.
 - Use: Specialized facilities to serve a concentration of limited population or groups such as senior citizens or young children.
 - Site Characteristics: Within neighborhoods and in close proximity to concentrations of family or senior housing.
- **NP/P: Neighborhood Park/Playground**
 - Desirable/Typical Size: 1 to 10 acres.
 - Service Area: 1/4 – 1/2 mile radius.
 - Acres/1,000 Population: 2 – 3 acres.
 - Use: Area for intense recreational activities such as field games, court games, crafts, playground apparatus area, ice skating, picnicking, volleyball, etc.
 - Site Characteristics: Suited for intense development; easily accessible to neighborhood population; geographically centered with safe walking and biking access. May be developed as a joint school/park facility.
- **C/CP: Community Park**
 - Desirable/Typical Size: 10 to 25 acres.
 - Service Area: 1 – 2 miles.
 - Acres/1,000 Population: 6 - 9 acres.
 - Use: Area of diverse environmental quality. May include areas suited for intense recreational facilities such as athletic complexes or large swimming pools. May be an area of natural quality for outdoor recreation such as walking, viewing, sitting, and picnicking. May be any combination of the above depending on site suitability and community need.
 - Site Characteristics: May include natural features such as water bodies and areas suited for intense development. Easy access by all modes of transportation.



- SU: Special Use Area
 - Desirable/Typical Size: Variable depending on type of facility.
 - Service Area: Entire Community.
 - Acres/1,000 Population: Variable.
 - Use: Areas for specialized or single purpose recreational activities such as golf courses, nature centers, marinas, zoos, conservancies, arboreta, display gardens, arenas, outdoor theaters, gun ranges, and downhill ski areas. Also includes plazas or squares in or near commercial centers, boulevards, or parkways.
 - Site Characteristics: Located within the community.
- LP: Linear Park
 - Desirable/Typical Size: Sufficient width to protect resources and to provide maximum use.
 - Service Area: No applicable standard.
 - Acres/1,000 Population: Variable.
 - Use: Area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel or activity such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, fitness trails/cross-country skiing and canoeing. May include active play areas.
 - Site Characteristics: Built on natural corridors such as utility or railroad right-of-way, bluff lines, vegetation patterns, and roads that link other components of the recreation system or community facilities such as school, libraries, commercial areas, and other park areas.

The Village of Benton has a total of 34 acres of park and recreational space intensively developed for recreational purposes. Based on recommendations from the WIDNR and SWWRPC, the standard of 12 acres of developed park lands/open space per 1,000 population is used throughout this plan. This figure is viewed as a target number when recreation and park planners analyze a community’s park, recreation land, and open space composition. Based on that standard, Benton has more than enough developed park space for its residents because it only requires approximately 10.8 acres of developed park land for its population of 896 people. This analysis does not take into consideration the impact of park users residing outside the Village.

Development of Recreational Facilities Need Standards

Standards for the development of recreation facilities, similar to open space standards are expressed in facility units per population ratio. The purpose of evaluating a recreation system is to determine the amount of needed facilities in each recreation area.

A problems related to using facility development standards is the assumption of desired opportunities by the resident population. For example, an examination of the facilities standards may show that a horseshoe area is needed based on the municipality's population. In reality, it is possible that very few people in the community enjoy playing horseshoes, which eliminates the need for this type of facility. Another problem with using standards is they are developed primarily for urban communities and have limited application to rural areas.

Despite these problems, community leaders can use them to approximate the adequacy of their park systems. A listing of recreational facility development standards, prepared by the American Planning Association and the United States Access Board can be found on their respective websites:

American Planning Association Outdoor Recreation Facility Standards:

<https://www.planning.org/pas/reports/report194.htm>

United States Access Board:

<http://www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards/recreation-facilities/outdoor-developed-areas>



Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

“Our effectiveness in meeting future recreation needs will be shaped by many factors including the shifting demographics of our population, the quality of habitats and the impacts from invasive species and changing climate conditions, our ability to improve the compatibility between and among recreation participants, and sustainable financial resources. Parks and nature preserves, wildlife areas and refuges, and forests and trails connect people to the natural environment. These places, from small neighborhood parks to the large national, state and county forests, are the stages on which we enjoy the outdoors, improve our health, protect our air and water, and provide a large economic boost, particularly to our rural areas. – Wisconsin Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan

The 2019-2023 Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), provides recommendations to guide public outdoor recreation policy, planning decisions, the use of Land and Water Conservation Fund money, and other WIDNR administered grant programs.

High-quality outdoor recreation experiences available in Wisconsin contribute to our exceptional quality of life; reflected in sustained economic growth and in outdoor recreation traditions passed down through generations. From community river walks to expansive public forests, public recreation lands and facilities enhance our lives, draw millions of visitors, and support businesses large and small. The economic, social, and health benefits of outdoor recreation in Wisconsin far outweighs our investment.

To support the development of SCORP, a statewide survey of Wisconsin residents was conducted regarding outdoor recreation participation and frequency, as well as opinions about future needs. In addition, WIDNR undertook an assessment of recreation opportunities and needs in each region of the state. Together, these supporting documents show that an estimated 95% of Wisconsin adults participate in some type of outdoor recreation in the past year. Activities in which residents most frequently engaged tend to be those that require little preparation or travel time and can provide a high-quality experience in a limited amount of time. Examples include hiking and walking on trails, fishing, bicycling, dog walking, and bird/wildlife watching.

SCORP goals include:

- Boost participation in outdoor recreation.
- Grow partnerships.
- Provide high-quality experiences.
- Improve data to enhance visitor experiences and benefits.
- Enhance funding and financial stability.

Additionally, the SCORP highlights regional recreational demands that supports Benton’s priorities for its location in the Southern Gateways Region. The top five (5) most frequently identified recreation opportunities, needed in the Southern Gateways Region, based on public input gathered during the SCORP Recreation Opportunities Analysis process include:

- More trails for motorized recreation (ATVs, UTVs, off-road motorcycles, etc.).
- More hiking/walking/running trails.
- More natural surface (dirt) bicycling trails.
- More paved bicycling trails.
- More rustic/quiet campgrounds (pit toilets, no electricity or generators).



Plan Process

There are four essential baseline functions in developing a Community's Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP):

1. Understanding historical budget trends.
2. Creating an inventory of existing community recreational assets and facilities.
3. Development of relevant data and trends.
4. Coordinating outreach to the population that uses Benton's outdoor recreation facilities.

To develop Benton's CORP, SWWRPC tackled these four baseline functions, while receiving guidance from WIDNR. These four elements were used to develop priorities with the Village of Benton Parks Committee. These priorities became the plan goals and objectives listed in this document.

Figure 1: Plan Process



Each baseline function provided the planning process with essential insight into the community's assets, needs, and priorities; and were essential for the development of the final plan.

To create an inventory of existing community recreational assets, SWWRPC staff conducted an on-site inventory of existing parks, facilities, and equipment by using state-provided metrics for ranking recreation assets. To understand Benton's budget, SWWRPC examined Benton's parks budget from 2017 to 2021. This process was used to recognize patterns and the consistency between the amounts budgeted, and the amounts spent. Data compilation and mapping was done throughout the planning process. SWWRPC compiled data related to the Village's age, demographics, and economic makeup and mapped it in relation to the existing parks.

Finally, outreach is the most important plan activity. SWWRPC developed a survey and distributed it widely within the community. Copies were available in print and online. Over 259 responses were compiled by the end of the planning process. This information and a summary from all plan activities were presented in a public forum to the Benton Village Board and Park Committee on February 17th, 2021. Plan goals and objectives were also developed for the final planning document during the public forum. Village Board and Park Committee feedback from the February 17th, 2021 were compiled and added to the plan, incorporating implementation strategies for formal adoption and approval.

Table 1: Plan Activities

Activity	Date Conducted
Park Inventory	November 2020
Budget Analysis	January 2021
Data and Mapping	December 2020 – February 2021
Outreach	November 2020 – February 2021
Plan Development	November 2020 – March 2021
Approval	March 2021

Amending the Plan

Plan amendments are common, represent good implementation or plan usage, and should be acceptable for consideration by local decision makers. Amendments must follow the same process as when the original plan was prepared. Amendments generally prolong the effectiveness of the original plan.

The following steps will ensure the new amendment is approved with respect to state statutes and to the citizens of Benton.

1. Initial meetings/framing the amendment: Depending on the size and scope of the amendment, the Park Committee will meet several times to discuss the proposed amendment.
2. Opportunity for Public Input: A public forum should be provided with ample time for the community to know about the proposed changes to the plan. Then a public meeting should be held so the community can understand the need for amendment and have an opportunity to provide direct feedback on the proposed changes.
3. Draft Amendment: The Park Committee develops a draft amendment that captures the need for the amendment and feedback from the public.
4. Amendment Adoption: At an official public meeting, with 30 days of notice, the Village Council will vote to approve the plan amendment with the recommendation of the Park Committee.
5. DNR Approval: The council action on the plan amendment should be sent in writing to the Department of Natural Resources for re-certification of the Village's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan with the new changes. The plan amendment will not be effective until a letter is received from DNR indicating their approval.



Summary of Previous Outdoor Recreation Plans

Image 4: Main Street, Benton WI



Benton’s previous CORP was completed in 1995 by the Village Park Committee with technical assistance provided by the SWWRPC. This plan determined that Benton had about three times the amount of land necessary for recreation. So while Benton did not need to increase the amount of park space, improvements to facilities and equipment were required. Other recommendations included in the 1995 plan were to increase the amount of pedestrian and bicycle connections within and around the Village. The 1995 plan also recommended constructing a new neighborhood playground, one-half to two acres in size, in the northern section of the Village to serve residents living in those areas; During that time, State Highway 11 posed a safety problem for school-age children, living north of the Village, attempting to access the Elementary School or Swift Park south of the highway. To correct this deficiency, crosswalks and walkway connections to these residential areas have been constructed along Galena Street to alleviate hazardous conditions for young children walking to the Village Park and Swift Park.



Description of the Planning Region

Social characteristics of Benton

According to the 2019 US Census estimates, the population of the Village of Benton is 896, which is down 80 persons from the 2000 US Census count. Benton’s racial composition is largely homogenous; 96.5% of the Village’s population being white. The remaining 3.5% is split between the “Black” and “American Indian and Alaska Native” categories. Benton’s lack of racial diversity is standard for the southwestern Wisconsin region, and lags behind the state average, with 85% white and a 15% split of other races, black being the highest at 6%.

The Village of Benton maintains a median age of 42.7, similar to many communities in southwestern Wisconsin. Table 2 illustrates that roughly 53% of the community is between 20 and 64 years old. This wide working-age base helps ground the community economically and provides stability. However, the relatively small youth population means that the Village will likely not have sustainable long term growth.

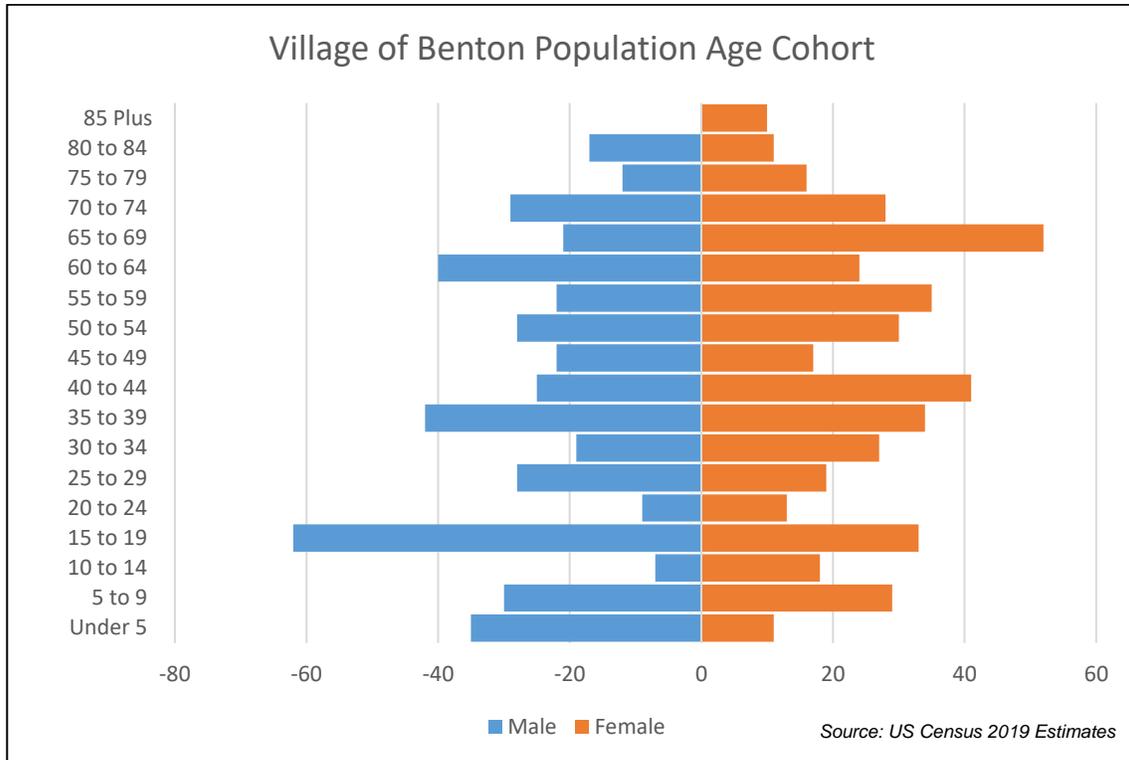
Table 2: Benton Age Cohorts

	Total Population		Total Male		Total Female			
Total Population	896	100%	448	50%	448	50%		
Under 5 years	46	5.1%	35	7.8%	11	2.5%	Total "youth" population 225	25.1% of total population
5 to 9 years	59	6.6%	30	6.7%	29	6.5%		
10 to 14 years	25	2.8%	7	1.6%	18	4.0%		
15 to 19 years	95	10.6%	62	13.8%	33	7.4%		
20 to 24 years	22	2.5%	9	2.0%	13	2.9%	Total working- age population 475	53% of total population
25 to 29 years	47	5.2%	28	6.3%	19	4.2%		
30 to 34 years	46	5.1%	19	4.2%	27	6.0%		
35 to 39 years	76	8.5%	42	9.4%	34	7.6%		
40 to 44 years	66	7.4%	25	5.6%	41	9.2%		
45 to 49 years	39	4.4%	22	4.9%	17	3.8%		
50 to 54 years	58	6.5%	28	6.3%	30	6.7%		
55 to 59 years	57	6.4%	22	4.9%	35	7.8%		
60 to 64 years	64	7.1%	40	8.9%	24	5.4%		
65 to 69 years	73	8.1%	21	4.7%	52	11.6%	Total retired-age population 196	21.9% of total population
70 to 74 years	57	6.4%	29	6.5%	28	6.3%		
75 to 79 years	28	3.1%	12	2.7%	16	3.6%		
80 to 84 years	28	3.1%	17	3.8%	11	2.5%		
85 years and over	10	1.1%	0	0.0%	10	2.2%		

Source: US Census 2019 Estimates

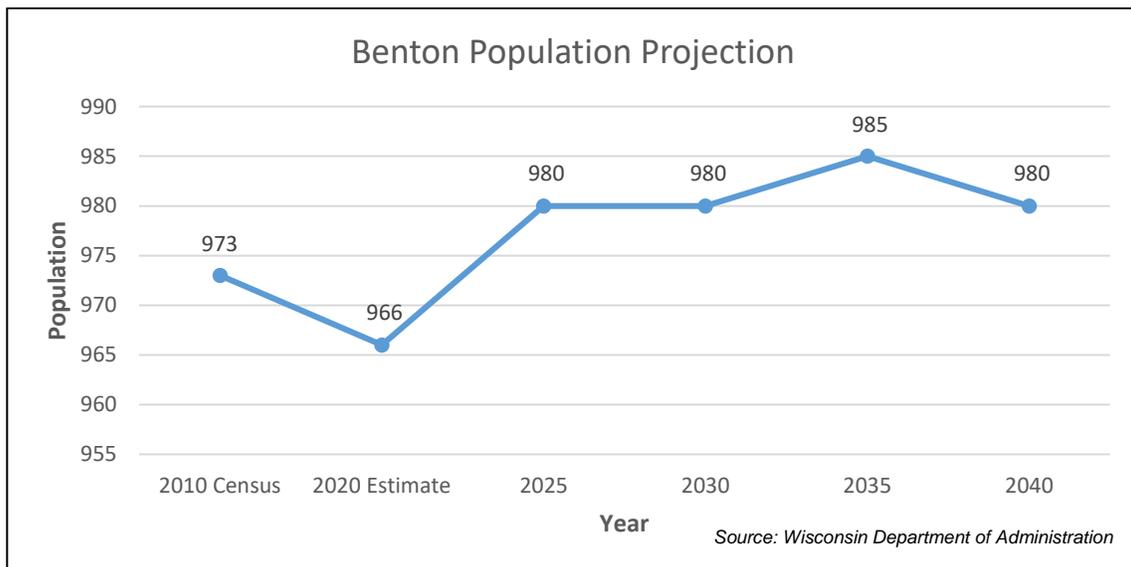
Figure 2 is a population pyramid that shows a snapshot of Benton’s population taken from the 2019 US Census Estimates. As mentioned previously, the largest portion of the pyramid is the “working-age” population between 20 and 64 years. The middle of the pyramid is bloated and the top and bottom are narrow. This means that while the Village’s population is currently stable, in the future it will decline, unless more residents move into the Village.

Figure 2: Benton Population Pyramid



These findings are consistent with information from the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA), which is believed to provide a more accurate reflection of population growth estimates. The Wisconsin DOA estimates are based on the prior census and analysis of contemporary data including housing units, dormitory and institutional populations, automobile registrations, and other indicators of population change. According to the DOA, Benton’s population will increase slightly from 2020 to 2025, but as the large “working-age” population advances in age, there will not be enough of a youth population to support their loss and the community will lose residents from 2035 to 2040. Figure 3 illustrates the potential rise and decline thereafter in population.

Figure 3: Benton Population Projection



Economy

While Benton is too small of a community to have a designated “Metropolitan Statistical Area,” it is the only municipality within the 53803 zip code. So while, the 53803 zip code is larger than Benton’s municipal boundary, some data can be used to gain an understanding of the local economy, even if it is not 100% defined by Benton’s Village limits. Within the 53803 zip code, the local economy is driven by businesses within the “Education and Hospitals” (Local Government), “Depository Credit Intermediation”, and “Services to Buildings and Dwellings” industries. The Village of Benton has an estimated 1.1% unemployment rate according to the 2019 US Census estimates and approximately 57 people at or below the poverty level. The median household income for people living within the Village is \$57,188 according to the 2019 US Census estimates.

Physical Characteristics of the Region

Location

The Village of Benton is approximately 0.84 square miles of territory in Lafayette County, nestled in the beautiful, serene southwestern Wisconsin countryside, and served by State Highway 11. The Galena/Fever River meanders past the eastern boundaries of the village and flows to Galena, Illinois, where it empties into the Mississippi. The Mississippi River cuts through nearby Dubuque, Iowa, and Galena, Illinois, and offers boating, fishing, and various other water sports.

Figure 4 is a map depicting Benton’s distance to other recreation areas. Benton is well-positioned to provide residents with nearby recreation activities. Within 25 miles, residents can utilize the Cole Acres Golf Course and Swimming Pool, Fever River Fishing and Canoeing Spots, Rountree Branch Trail, Galena Golf Course, Izaak Walton League Clubhouse, Yellowstone Lake State Park and Wildlife Area, Yellowstone Golf Course, Pecatonica Woods State Natural Area, Hardscrabble Prairie State Natural area, and others.

Figure 5 is a map that illustrates the local recreational assets within the Village of Benton. Even though Benton is a relatively small community, residents can enjoy recreation at the three local parks and other village-owned open spaces.



Figure 4: Benton's Distance to other Recreation Areas

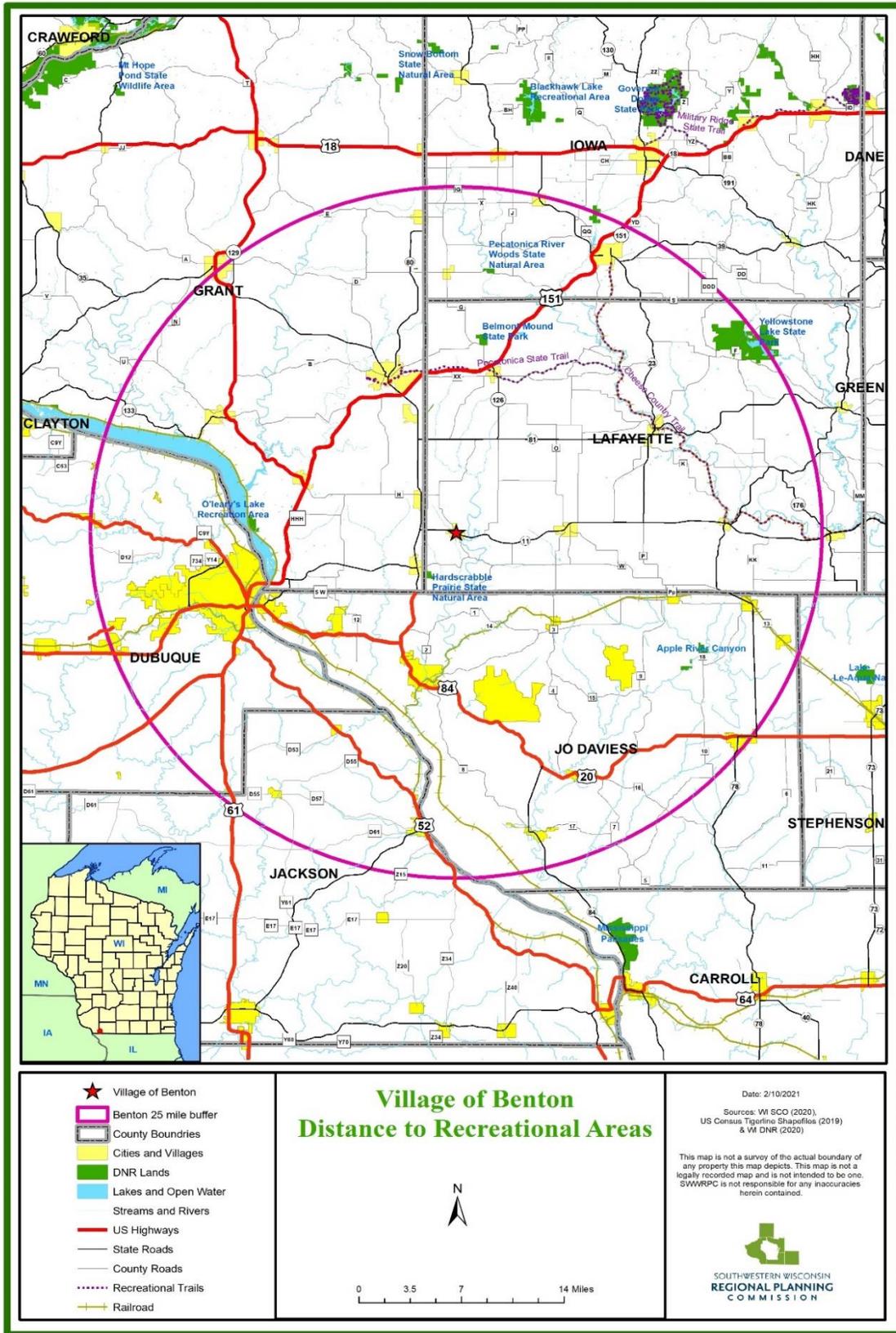
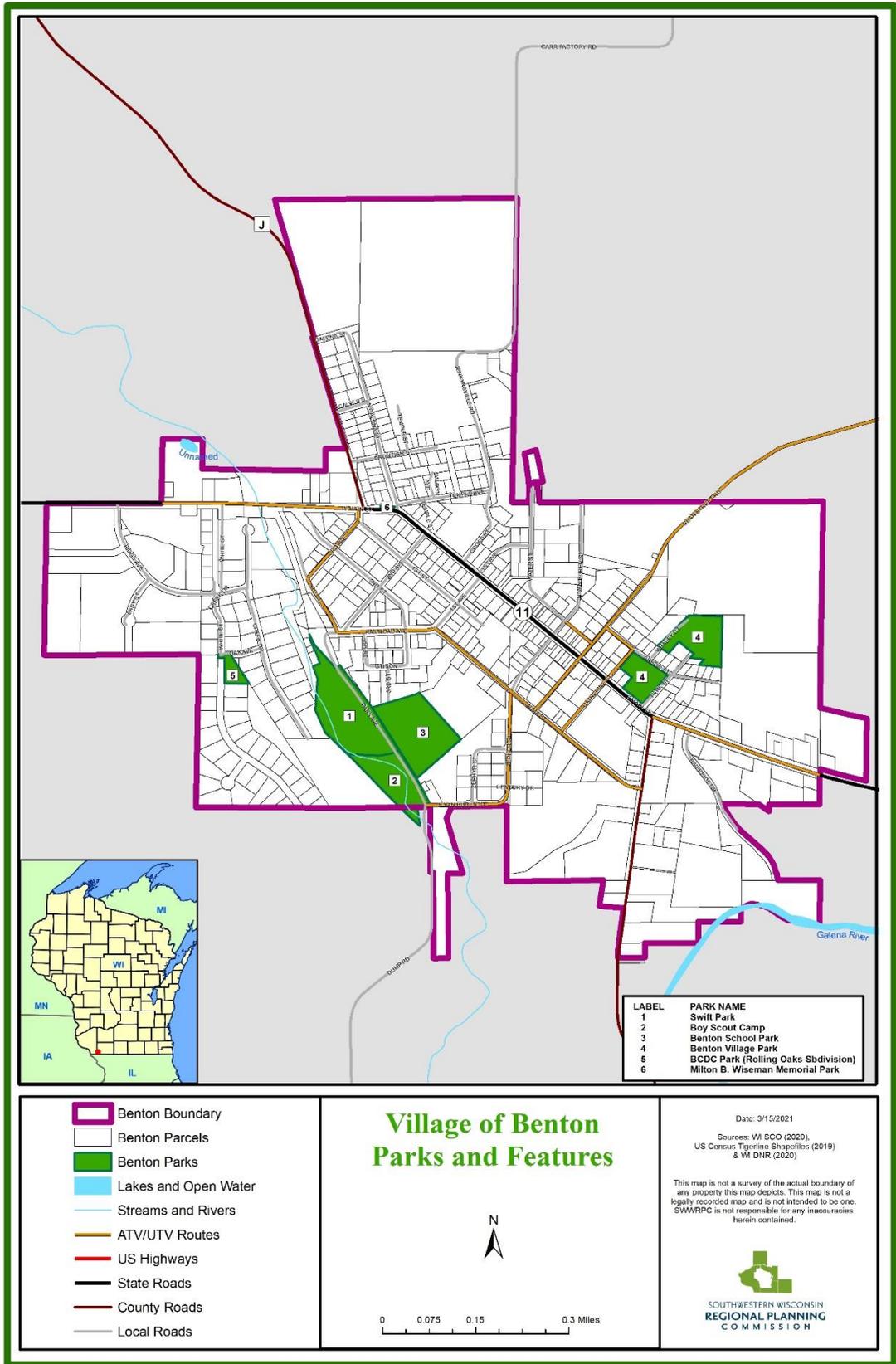


Figure 5: Benton Parks and Features

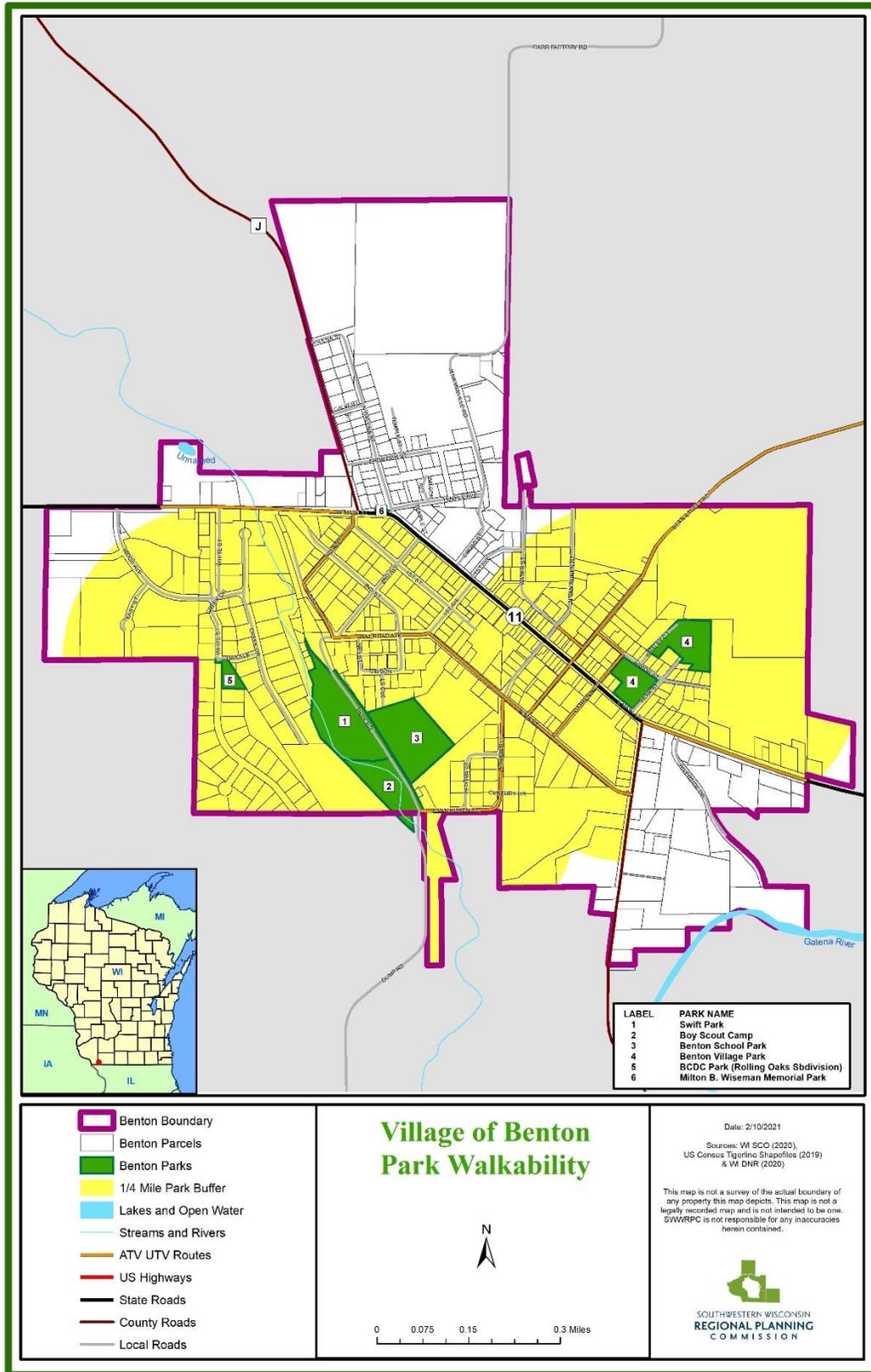


Walkability

In terms of access, approximately 61% of the Village is within one-quarter mile walking distance of a park. Figure 6 is a map depicting pedestrian access to each of Benton’s recreation areas. A yellow buffer was drawn around every recreation area in the Village. This highlighted section represents the quarter-mile distance to a park. A quarter-mile is conventionally considered to be “walkable” in most communities. This map also accounts for pedestrian obstacles such as highways or railroads. Because it is difficult for a pedestrian to cross these kinds of obstacles, the yellow buffer is truncated when it intersects a highway. However, in Benton, crosswalks and sidewalks have been constructed to connect the unserved residential areas in the northern and southeastern sections of the Village to the parks. This will alleviate hazardous conditions especially for young children walking to the Village Park and Swift Park.



Figure 6: Park Walkability

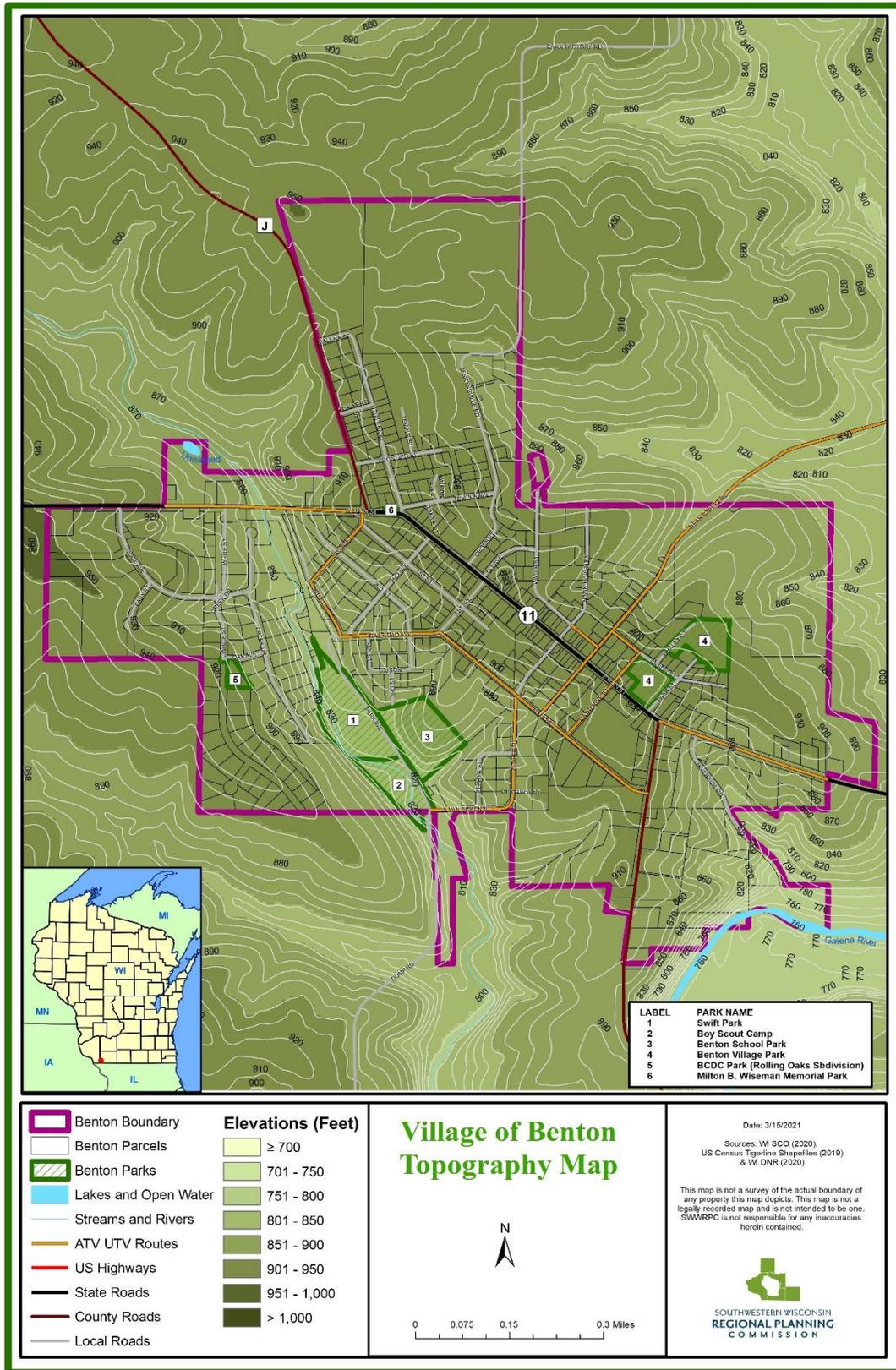


Topography

Benton and the surrounding areas of Lafayette County are located within the Western Upland, a thorough dissected highland. The average elevation in the region is between 900 to 1,200 feet above sea level, where the area immediately adjacent to the highland averages 600 to 900 feet in elevation. Aside from the Upland itself, the strongest topographic features of the region are the trenches of the Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers and their numerous branches. One of the most dominant topographic features of the region is the Military Ridge. The Ridge is the divide between the north flowing tributaries of the Wisconsin River and the south flowing streams of streams tributary to the Rock and Mississippi Rivers. The entire region, with the exception of the eastern half of Green County and a small portion of southeast Lafayette County, is characterized by rugged, steep-walled valleys and high relief. The region is generally referred to as the Driftless Area which preserves a large sample of what the rest of Wisconsin, as well as the northern and eastern United States were like before the Glacial Period. Figure 7 is a Topography map of the Village of Benton.



Figure 7: Benton Topographic Features



Climate

The climate of Benton and the surrounding area in Lafayette County is continental and typical of the central areas of a continent in the middle latitudes. Winters are relatively cold and snowy with extended periods of rain during the spring and autumn and intermittent periods of hot, humid summer weather. Air temperatures within the region are subject to large seasonal changes and yearly variations. Precipitation in the region for the six-month period from April through September falls largely as rainfall and may range in intensity and duration from light showers to destructive thunderstorms. The snowfall average for the region is about 40 inches annually. Prevailing winds are westerly in winter and southerly in summer.

Soils

Throughout the Driftless Area the work of weathering has continued since long before the Glacial Period and has produced a deep mantle of residual soil. This forms a notable contrast with the remainder of the state, where the continental glacier scraped away nearly all the residual soil and left a sheet of transported soil. Generally, the soils of the region have been classified as the Grayish-Brown Unglaciated Silt Loam, hilly or steep. The soils were formed from parent materials reflecting native vegetation such as prairie, oak-hickory forestry, and oak savannas. Their basic materials include clay residue from weathered limestone, weathered sandstone, loess, and stream-laid sand and gravel. The latter occurs in valleys of large streams, while the first three are wide spread. The entire southwest Wisconsin region is covered with a thick blanket of loess (windblown silt and sand). Over most of the region the loess is largely silt and is two to three feet thick. In addition, some sandy areas along the Wisconsin River have active dunes.

Flora and Fauna

Benton is located within the Southwest Savanna ecological landscape in Wisconsin. The Southwest Savanna was once dominated by fire-dependent natural communities of Prairie, Oak Savanna, Oak Woodland and Oak Forest. It is now predominately dominated by agriculture, however, remnants of the former natural communities do exist but typically in low-quality. Less than one-percent of the land in this eco-region are in public ownership so care for the public lands are important. The WIDNR believes this landscape offers the best opportunity in the state for large scale grassland management and restoration. Small and scattered remnants of prairie and oak savanna exist and harbor many rare plant species. High quality streams also exist in this eco-region making buffer zones adjacent to them important.

Threats from invasive plant species have been increasing and control of them should be considered. Invasive plants reduce opportunities for recreation, increase chances for erosion, decrease habitat, and lessen the aesthetics of areas. Some of these invasive plants include: *Alliaria petiolata* (Garlic mustard), *Centaurea stoebe* (Spotted knapweed), *Cirsium arvense* (Canada thistle), *Coronilla varia* (Crown vetch), *Dipsacus sylvestris* (Common teasel), *Elaeagnus umbellata* (Autumn olive), *Euonymus alatus* (Burning bush), *Hesperis matronalis* (Dame's rocket), *Lonicera tatarica* (Tartarian honeysuckle), *Lythrum salicaria* (Purple loosestrife), *Morus alba* (White mulberry), *Pastinaca sativa* (Wild parsnip), *Phalaris arundinacea* (reed canary grass), *Robinia pseudoacacia* (Black locust), *Rosa multiflora* (Multiflora rose). Any plant that is dominating an area could be considered as invasive.

Common trees of the area historically would include fire tolerant Oaks, Shagbark Hickory and Hazelnut undergrowth. Ravines and near waterways would have been Maple, Basswood dominated. However, due to mesophication, woodlands are becoming dominated by other low-quality tree species and stocking rates are much higher today than historical standards.



Most of the landscape (70%) is covered in agricultural crop production. Grassland, forest and residential areas comprise the remainder. The grasslands are primarily pasture, with some containing scattered open-grown oaks. These pastures mimic the historical oak savanna structure. Prairie remnants persist in areas poorly suited to agriculture. The area provides much potential for grassland and savanna restoration.

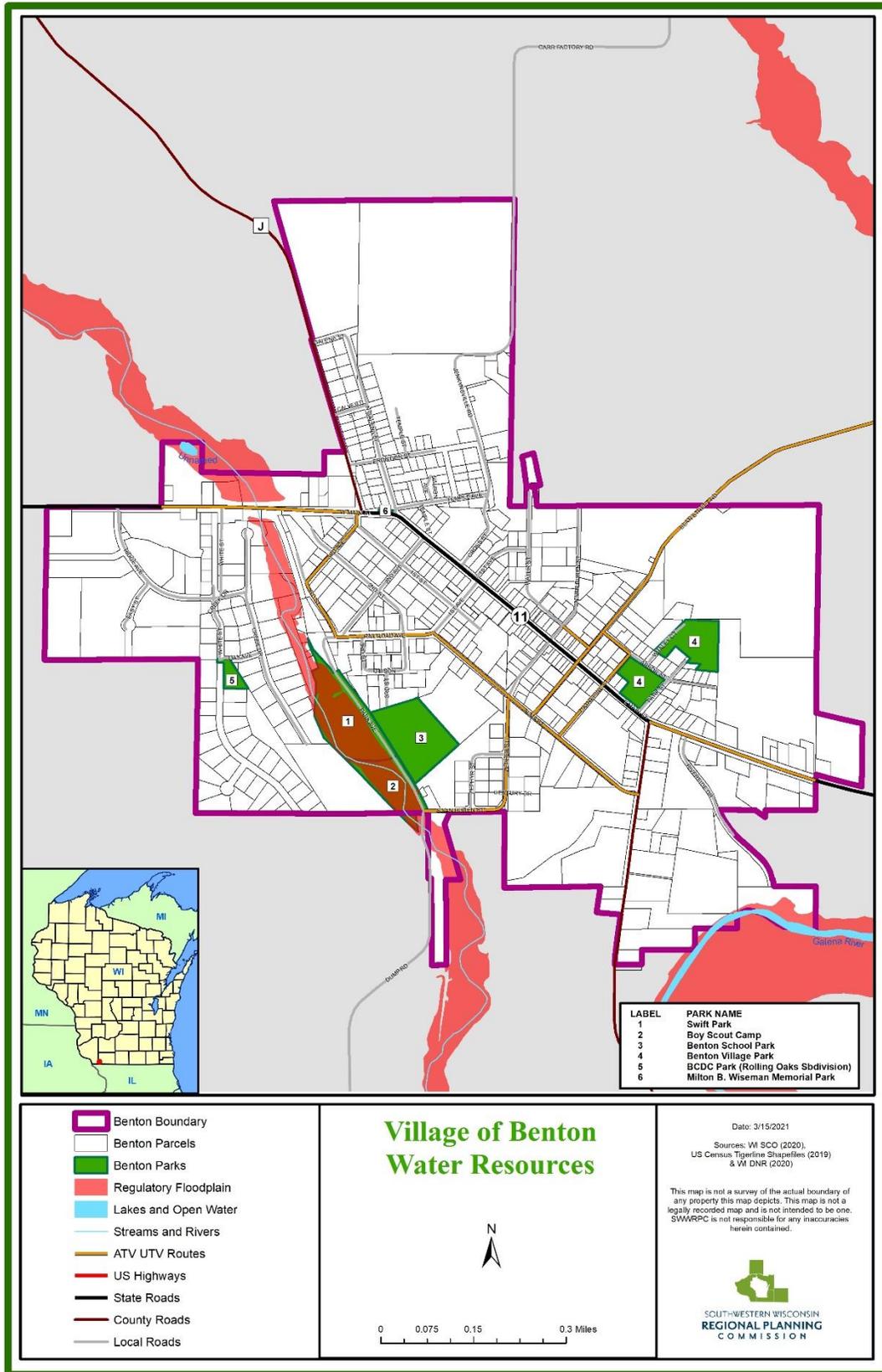
The Southwest Savanna contains public lands which provide abundant recreation opportunities with some of the most popular being surface trail bicycling, paddlesports, fishing and hiking, and walking or running on trails. The Southwest Savanna also contains nine Class I waters, 78 Class II waters, and four Class III waters. The protection of these waterways is imperative to any land use plan.

Water Resources

Two major rivers form boundaries of counties within the southwestern Wisconsin region. The Wisconsin River forms the northern boundary of Iowa and Grant counties, and the southern boundary of Richland County; and the Mississippi River forms the western boundary of Grant County. In addition, the area is traversed by a number of smaller rivers and streams that flow to either the Wisconsin or Mississippi Rivers. As mentioned above, there are no natural lakes in Southwestern Wisconsin due to the fact that the area was never covered by glaciers. However, there are a few man-made lakes in the region, most of which are located in state parks or other public recreation areas. The Coon Branch Creek runs along the Swift Park and Boy Scout Camp within the Village, while the Fever River meanders past the eastern boundaries of the village and flows to Galena, Illinois, where it empties into the Mississippi. Figure 8 illustrates the availability of water within the Village of Benton.



Figure 8: Benton Water Resources and Floodplain



Outdoor Recreation Supply Inventory

To determine what course of action Village officials must take to provide a comprehensive recreation program, it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of existing areas and facilities in meeting demands for recreation. This section of the report provides an inventory of Benton’s recreational facilities. The location of all park and recreation areas is recorded on Figure 5.

The following is a short description and inventory of existing village-owned park assets, community assets utilized for recreation, and potential assets for future recreation.

Image 5: Benton Village Park Playground area



Benton Village Park

Located on Highway 11 on the east side of Benton, the Village Park was originally the site of the 1852 St. Clara Academy, founded by the venerable Father Samuel Mazzuchelli. When the academy was moved to Sinsinawa and the remaining mission home destroyed by fire in 1896, the land on which the academy stood was subsequently sold to the Village to be used as a park. The Village Park at one time was home to bowery dances, band concerts in the gazebo, and even outdoor movies on Saturday nights. The park is also home to the 1851 Schoolhouse Museum which was used as a school for several years, then as a private residence. It contains displays related to children and to early school days. Old class records dating back to the 1870’s when members of the Dominican Sisters taught in the public school, as well as class photographs from 1900, are also housed here. The building is open to the public on Labor Day.

Separated from the park proper by a row of residences and Arbor Street is an open area located to the north, adjacent to Whaley Court which is used for field sports.



Classification: Village/Community Park

- 7.7 Acres
- Large landscaped open area with many trees and various recreational courts
- 1 shelter building with attached restrooms
- 12 Picnic tables
- 16 Benches
- 3 swing sets, and 3 swing benches
- 10 bins
- 1 band stage for music in the park.
- 1 sand digger
- 1 merry-go-rounds
- Climbing bars
- 1 multi use playground equipment
- 1 seesaw
- 1 drinking fountain
- Fenced multi-purpose court used for basketball and tennis
- Large area adjacent Whaley Court used for field sports such as baseball, football, and soccer

Image 6: Band Stage for Music in the Park



Swift Park (including Boy Scout Camp)

Much of the village and school-sponsored recreational activities take place at Benton's 11-acre Swift Park, located just below the school on Park Avenue. The park is named after Ray Swift, who was a Benton teacher, historian, and town activist. Across the Coon Branch Creek at the southern end of the park is the Boy Scout Camp.

Classification: Village/Community Park

- 11 Acres
- Landscaped with several shade trees
- The Park area contains the following features:
 - Lighted football, baseball, and softball fields with bleachers, 2 electric scoreboards, and 2 dugouts
 - 1 Batting cage
 - 2 Lighted tennis/pickle ball courts
 - 1 Basketball courts
 - 9 Picnic tables
 - 2 Drinking fountains
 - Restroom facilities
 - 2 Covered pavilions; One of the pavilions is part of a concession stand
 - 1 Dome climber
 - 1 Merry-go-round
 - 1 Large swing set
 - 1 Sand digger
 - 1 Multi-use playground equipment
 - 7 Bins
 - 6 Benches
 - 1 Bike rack

Image 7: Concession stand at the Swift Park



- The Boy Scout Camp area includes the following features:
 - A Cabin; used mainly for scouting-related activities, including scouts who take part in the annual Boy Scout Pilgrimage in Galena, Illinois
 - 1 Shelter
 - 2 Storage buildings
 - 4 Picnic tables
 - Camping grounds that can be accessed by a bridge

Image 8: Swift Park Ball Field



BCDC Park

BCDC Park is a parcel of land dedicated for public use in the Rolling Oaks Subdivision located on the Village's west side.

Classification: Neighborhood Park

- 1 Acres
- Landscaped
- 1 Multi-use playground apparatus
- 2 Picnic tables
- 2 Benches,
- 1 swing bench, and 1 additional swing bench frame
- 1 Large swing set
- Concrete platform for shelter building
- 1 Trash can

Image 9: Playground area at the BCDC Park



Benton School Park

This school facility provides a large area used for a variety of games and team sports. In addition, the area has a large hill which is used for sledding and tobogganing.

Classification: Neighborhood Park

- 14.6 Acres
- Grassy area available for field games
- 3 Picnic tables
- 1 Bench
- 1 Multi-use playground equipment
- 3 Funball apparatus
- 1 Ball pool equipment
- 1 Large swing set
- Basketball court (3 hoops)

Image 10: Benton Elementary School Playground area



Image 11: Sledding at the Benton High School



Milton B. Wiseman Memorial Park

This small, green-space park is marked by a memorial plaque as a tribute to local area veterans. The highway-median area, dedicated as the Milton B. Wiseman Memorial Park, is filled with blossoming flowers during the summer and is commonly known to locals simply as “the island.”

Image 12: Milton B. Wiseman Memorial Park



Outdoor Recreation Needs Assessment

To compose the Outdoor Recreation Needs Assessment, SWWRPC developed a comprehensive outreach strategy for the Village of Benton. The survey was created electronically and open from November 16th to December 28th, 2020. Survey access information was distributed with the water bill to residents in the Village. Paper copies were available upon request and in the clerk’s office. In total, SWWRPC collected 259 completed surveys with an estimated 29% sample size of the total population. However, some questions within the survey were not answered by all respondents.

These survey results were compiled, distributed, and presented in a meeting with the Benton Parks Committee and Village Board on February 17th, 2021. The results of the survey, public forum, and on-site evaluation for SWWRPC’s inventory process were instrumental in framing the Outdoor Recreation Needs Assessment.

Survey

The two primary purposes of the survey effort were to (1) identify the quality of existing parks, facilities, and recreation spaces, and (2) identify the need for future parks, facilities, and recreational spaces. Overall, park satisfaction in Benton is high (Figure 9). Both the Village and Swift Parks are rated highest in frequency of visits and as the highest quality, as shown in Figures 10 and 11 respectively. The Swift Park was indicated highest as “needing improvement” or “unacceptable” as shown on Figure 11.

Figure 9: Benton's Overall Park Satisfaction

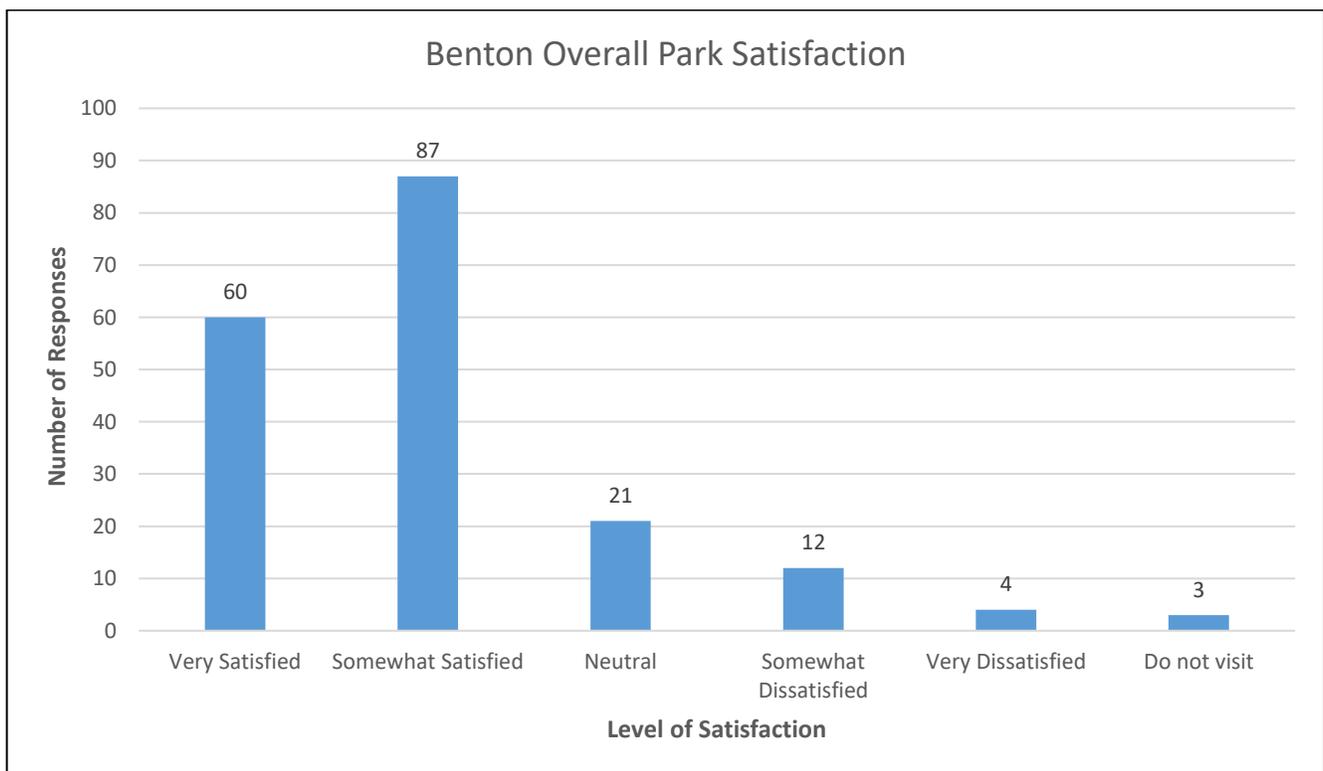


Figure 10: Benton's Annual Park Frequency

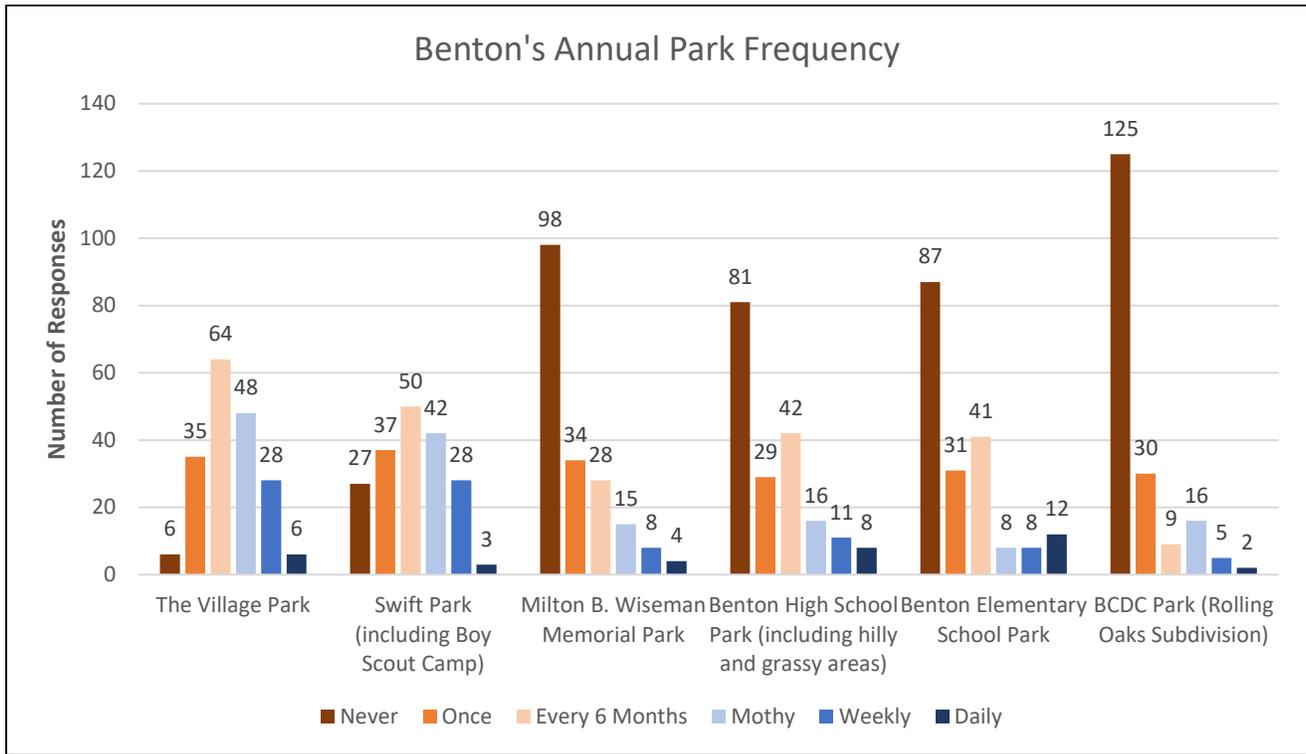
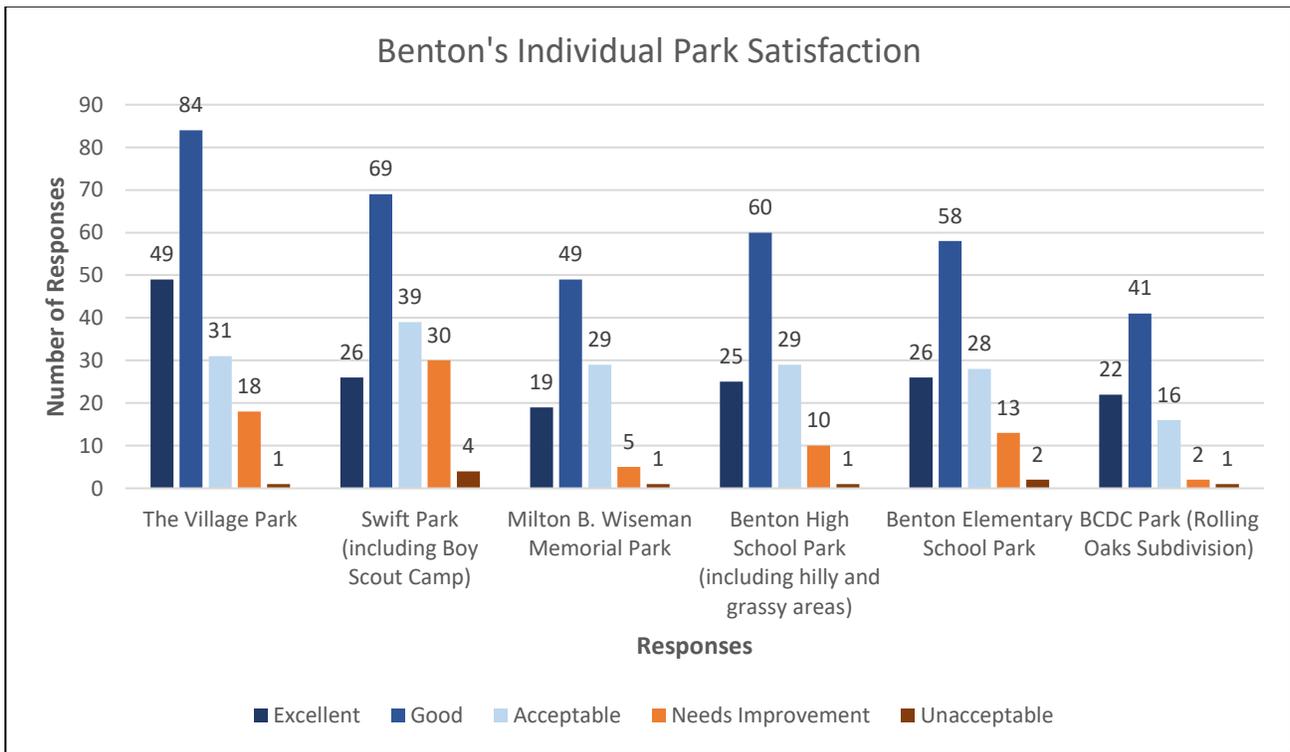


Figure 11: Benton's Individual Park Satisfaction



In terms of addressing future needs, survey participants indicated their top-3 highest priorities for park maintenance, as shown in Figure 12. These priorities include maintaining facilities (including park shelters, restroom, etc.), amenities (including picnic tables, trash cans, water fountain, etc.), and equipment (including playgrounds, basketball court and hoops, etc.). Of these three top priorities each were indicated as being “needed now,” rather than sometime within the next five years. Survey participants had the following comments:

“A path from Rolling Oaks over to Swift Park would be very beneficial, not only to access the parks, but for kids to get to and from school safely by walking or biking.”

“The pickle ball courts at Swift Park are in need of improvements. They are uneven, which effects the way the ball bounces and would not occur that way on a smooth court. It also causes more wear and tear to the pickle balls from bouncing on a rough service.”

“Swift Park tennis courts would benefit greatly from an upgrade.”

“I think we need an ice skating rink for winter. When I was young, the park with the skating ring had a shelter with a fire place. We could build a fire to stay warm, cook hot dogs on and electricity for a coffee pot to keep hot water for cocoa.”

“It would be great to see the BCDC Park add a pavilion with a restroom & water fountain (just a small one unisex stall would do fine) and more equipment.”

“The stage used for musical performances in the Village Park could be improved. Beautification projects always add a lot to our Village Parks as well.”

“Like other villages, our approach to our parks has been piecemeal. We need an overall plan that improves the green spaces within the village. And, we need to stop thinking of our parks as only places for sports and playground equipment (though they are important too).”

“I enjoy the options the Village has to offer currently and look forward to seeing what improvements they make for this community. Playing pickle ball here has been a great way to meet others in the community while being active and my favorite part of town thus far.”

“I think we are very lucky to have the parks/facilities we have for our village. I think Swift Park is one of the best kept secrets in our area.”

“The process of investigating a walking trail to Cole Acres has been looked at in the past, but nobody has pushed the subject. A long term committee to keep moving this forward would be great. If land needs to be purchased, start now. Maybe it would be 20 years before we see a trail, but at least it would be there for the next generation.”

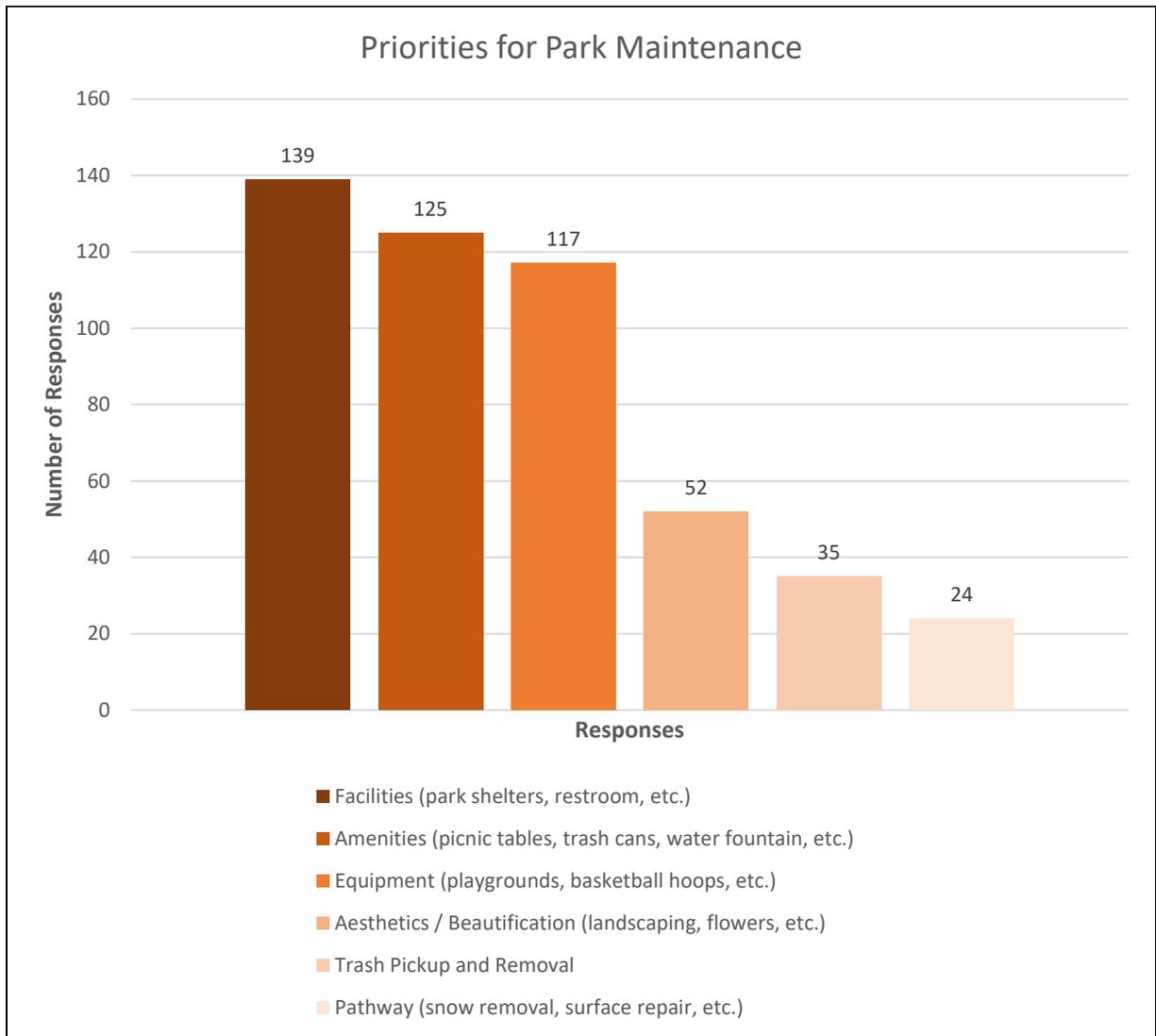
“Improving our parks benefits our residents and will also serve as a drawing point for potential residents as well.”

My kids love the village park. It's a favorite in the warmer weather months! Very nicely updated with freshly painted equipment and new basketball hoops!”

“Improving our parks benefits our residents and will also serve as a drawing point for potential residents as well.”



Figure 12: Benton Priorities for Park Maintenance



Summary of Public Outreach

Public input sessions are often a statutory requirement or prerequisite to the adoption of certain ordinances and plans at the local government level. In light of public health concerns arising from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the public input stage of the process was altered to reduce in-person meetings. Due to this, the survey period was extended to provide ample time for more community members to respond to the survey. Also, open-ended questions were included in the survey to solicit for detailed responses regarding needed improvements to the parks, recreational facilities, and amenities. In total, SWWRPC collected 259 completed surveys with an estimated 29% sample size of the total population.

At a Village Board meeting held on February 17th, 2021, SWWRPC shared data gathered from the surveys. The Village Board and Parks Committee reviewed the material, identified Benton’s critical issues, provided additional feedback on the survey, reviewed recommendations, and developed plan goals and objectives. The Plan was reviewed and adopted by the Village at their March 17th board meeting.

Needs identified through public participation include the following:

- A walking/hiking trail at Swift Park that extends to the Rolling Oaks Subdivision would be very beneficial, not only to access the parks, but for kids to get to and from school safely.
- Parks need regular equipment and maintenance improvements. Priorities for park maintenance should include: resurfacing basketball and tennis/pickle ball courts, restroom maintenance, equipment maintenance, facility maintenance, as well as increasing efforts like landscaping and beautification.
- Parks need to continue to be updated to become more handicap accessible.
- Park attendance needs to be improved.
- Benton residents need access to indoor recreational facilities during the winter months.
- More support should be provided for adult sports; Facilities should include yoga, craft classes, and a meeting place for clubs.
- Continual funding is critical for the existing and future needs of the Benton Parks system.



Recommendations for Outdoor Recreation

Action Program

Under the existing park and open space classification system, Benton has enough open space for its population of 896 people. In terms of access, approximately 61% of the Village is within one-quarter mile walking distance of a park. Crosswalks and sidewalks have been constructed to connect the unserved residential areas in the northern and southeastern sections of the Village to the parks. These walkway connections alleviate hazardous conditions especially for young children walking to the Village Park and Swift Park.

The following section features two sets of recommendations 1) to strengthen existing park assets through ongoing maintenance improvements and by providing additional park amenities, and 2) to strategically enhance walking and hiking opportunities in and around the Village.

Recommendations by Park

Benton Village Park

Several improvements are needed at Village Park. Recommendations for individual projects or activities are listed below:

- Provide more playground equipment including handicap-accessible equipment within the Village Park. Replace worn playground equipment with new and innovative playground apparatus.
- Upgrade lighting system in the court area which are not working appropriately.
- Upgrade the stage used for musical performances in the Village Park.
- Provide better restroom maintenance.

Swift Park (Including Boy Scout Camp)

Several improvements are needed at Swift Park. Recommendations for individual projects or activities are listed below:

- Resurface the Tennis/Pickle ball courts.
- Resurface the basketball court.
- Regular mowing of Boy Scout Park.
- Provide an improved walking access along the creek.
- Provide more playground equipment including handicap equipment within the Swift Park. Replace worn playground equipment with new and innovative playground apparatus.
- Provide better restroom maintenance



BCDC Park

Several improvements are needed at BCDC Park. Recommendations for individual projects or activities are listed below:

- Provide more playground equipment especially for younger kids.
- Add shelter/pavilion.
- Provide restroom facility.
- Plant more trees to provide shade.
- Add Small Basketball court.
- Provide water fountain.

Additional Recreation Spaces/Issues

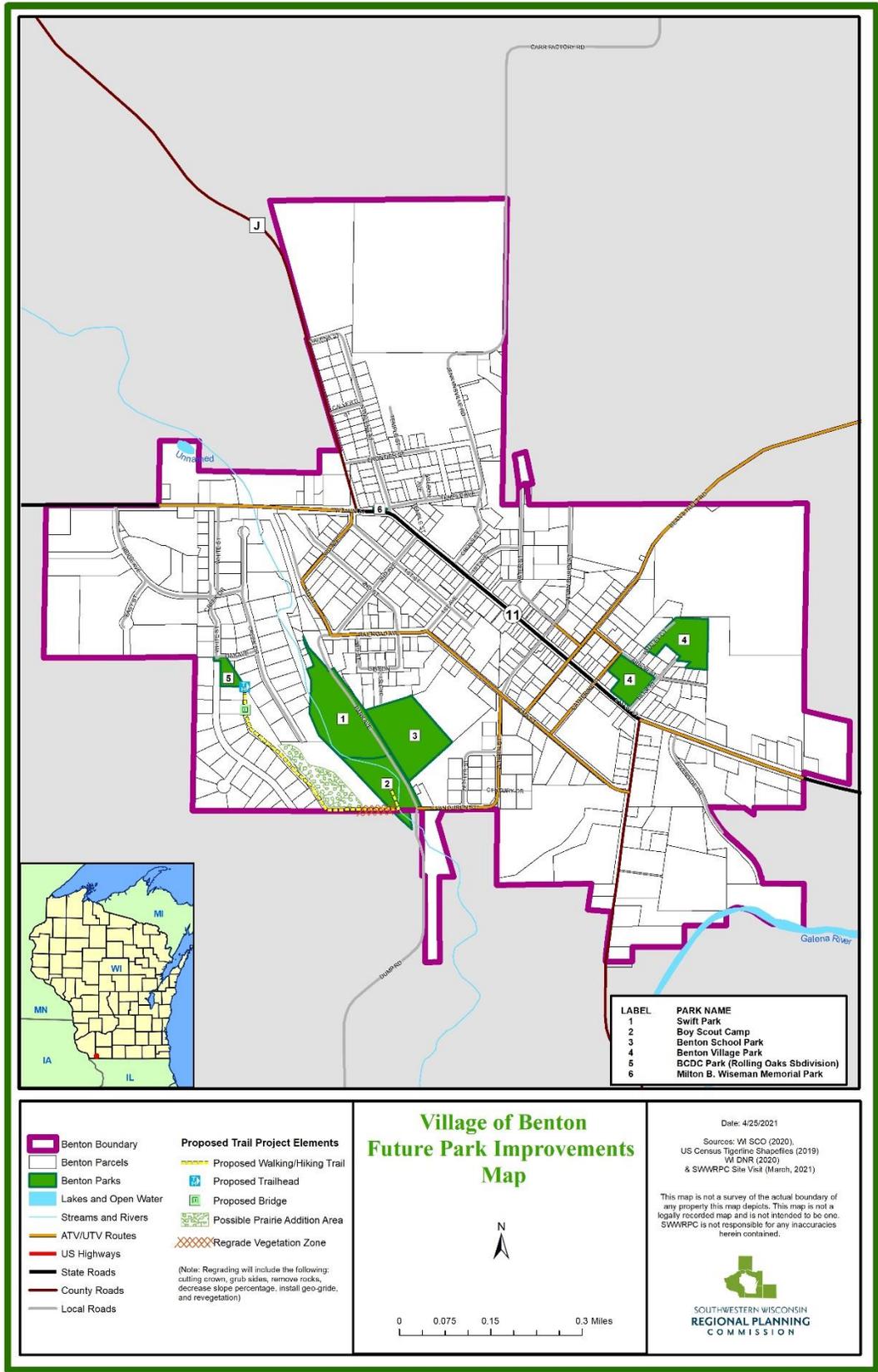
Other additional recreational needs include:

- Provide a walking/hiking trail at Swift Park that extends to the Rolling Oaks Subdivision. The proposed trail would be very beneficial, not only to access the parks, but for kids to get to and from school safely.
- Providing space in the proposed library/museum building to support adult activities such as yoga, craft classes, club events.
- Additional comments from the survey indicated that many residents are either (1) concerned that there is not any appropriate facility for dog-owners and their pets or (2) that dogs allowed within the parks create a nuisance for regular park visitors. It is recommended that the parks committee engage in a conversation with Benton residents to establish rules about access of dogs in parks and also to establish if a dog park is the best possible solution to the problem.

Figure 13 shows the locations of future recreational improvements within the Village of Benton.



Figure 13: Future Improvements Map



Appendix A: Capital Improvement Schedule

Over the next five years, the Village of Benton will focus on the improvements outlined in the previous section. These recommendations are in addition to the standard operations and maintenance schedule under which the Village currently operates. The highest priority outlined in the Capital Improvement Schedule is the construction of a walking/hiking trail at Swift Park that extends to the Rolling Oaks Subdivision. The proposed trail would be very beneficial, not only to access the parks, but for kids to get to and from school safely. The next highest priorities are many of the park-specific recommendations including the resurfacing of the basketball and tennis/pickle ball courts at the Swift Park, among others. Table 3 is the Capital Improvement Schedule which shows the park specific recommendations, priorities, estimated costs, funding sources and the number of years the plan recommendation will be completed by.

Table 3: Capital Improvements Schedule

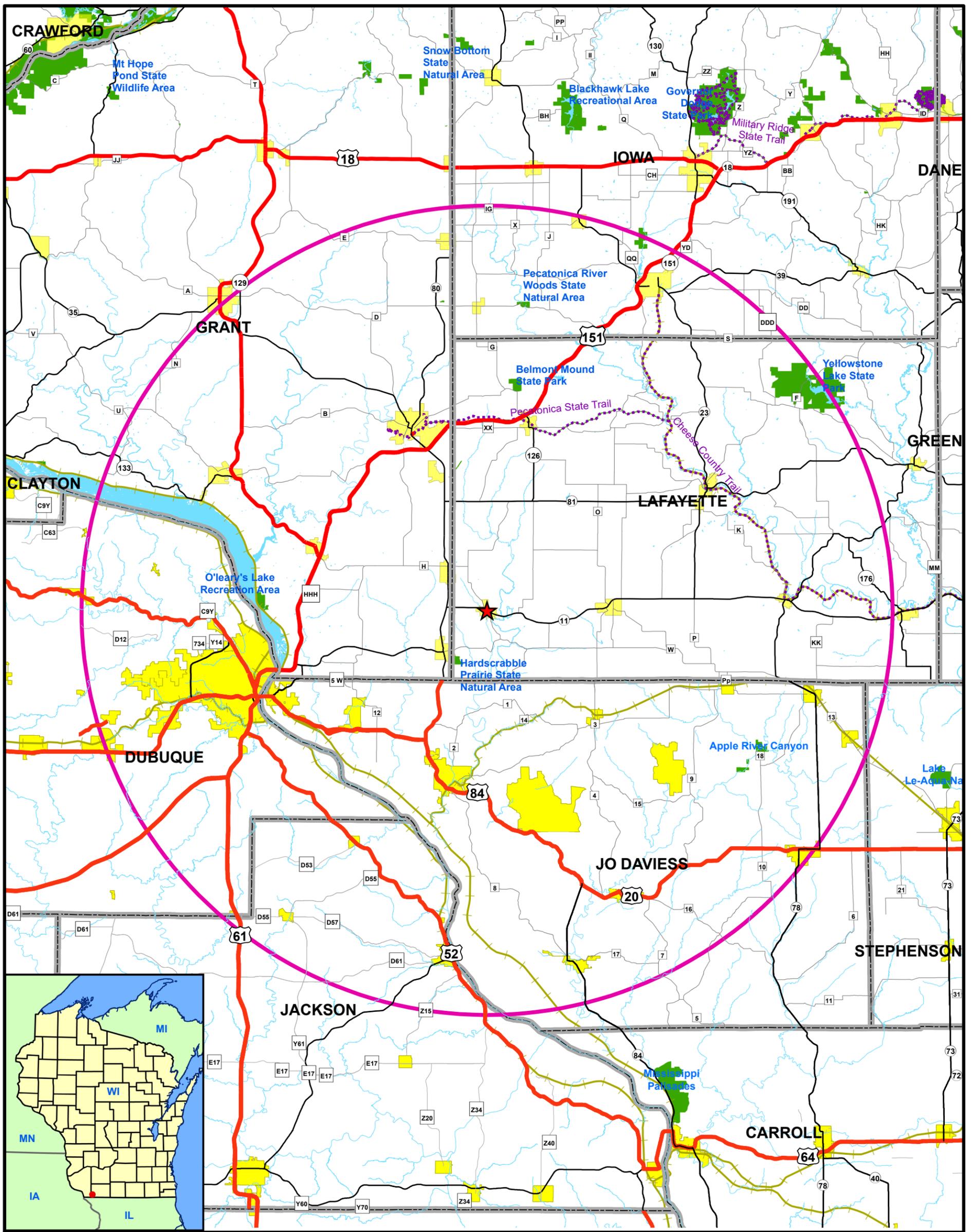
Park/Recommendation	Estimated Cost	Funding Source	Timeline	Priority
		GF = General Fund CO = Civic Organizations FR = Fund Raising DNR = Department of Natural Resources	Within 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years	1 – 5 1 being highest priority
Benton Village Park				
Provide more playground equipment including handicap-accessible equipment within the Village Park. Replace worn playground equipment with new and innovative playground apparatus.	\$5,000	GF, FR, CO, Grants	Within 5 years	3
Upgrade lighting system in the court area which are not working appropriately.	\$1,500	GF, CO, FR	Within 2 years	2
Upgrade the stage used for musical performances in the Village Park.	\$1,500	GF	Within 2 years	2
Provide better restroom maintenance.	NA	GF	(operational)	2
Swift Park				
Resurface the Basketball and Tennis/Pickle ball courts	\$50,000	GF, Grant	Within 3 years	2
Regular mowing of Boy Scout Park	NA	GF	(operational)	2
Provide an improved walking access along the creek	TBD	GF, CO, FR	Within 3 years	2
Provide more playground equipment including handicap equipment within the Swift Park. Replace worn playground equipment with new and innovative playground apparatus	\$5,000	GF, FR, CO, Grants	Within 5 years	4
Provide better restroom maintenance	NA	GF	(operational)	2
BCDC Park				
Provide more playground equipment especially for younger kids	\$5,000	Grants, GF, CO, FR	Within 5 years	2
Add shelter/pavilion	\$5,000	Grants, GF	Within 2 years	3
Provide restroom facility	TBD	Grants, GF	Within 4 years	4
Plant more trees to provide shade	\$300	GF	Within 2 years	2



Add Small Basketball Court	\$10,000	Grants, GF	Within 3 years	2
Provide water fountain	NA	(Already Donated)	(Expected Installation – Summer 2021)	2
Additional Recreational Spaces				
Construct a walking/hiking trail at Swift Park that extends to the Rolling Oaks Subdivision.	TBD	Grants, GF	Within 3 years	1
Providing space in the proposed library/museum building to support adult sporting activities such as yoga, craft classes, club events	NA	GF (Proposed Village project)	Within 5 years	4



Appendix B: Maps



-  Village of Benton
-  Benton 25 mile buffer
-  County Boundaries
-  Cities and Villages
-  DNR Lands
-  Lakes and Open Water
-  Streams and Rivers
-  US Highways
-  State Roads
-  County Roads
-  Recreational Trails
-  Railroad

Village of Benton Distance to Recreational Areas



0 3.5 7 14 Miles

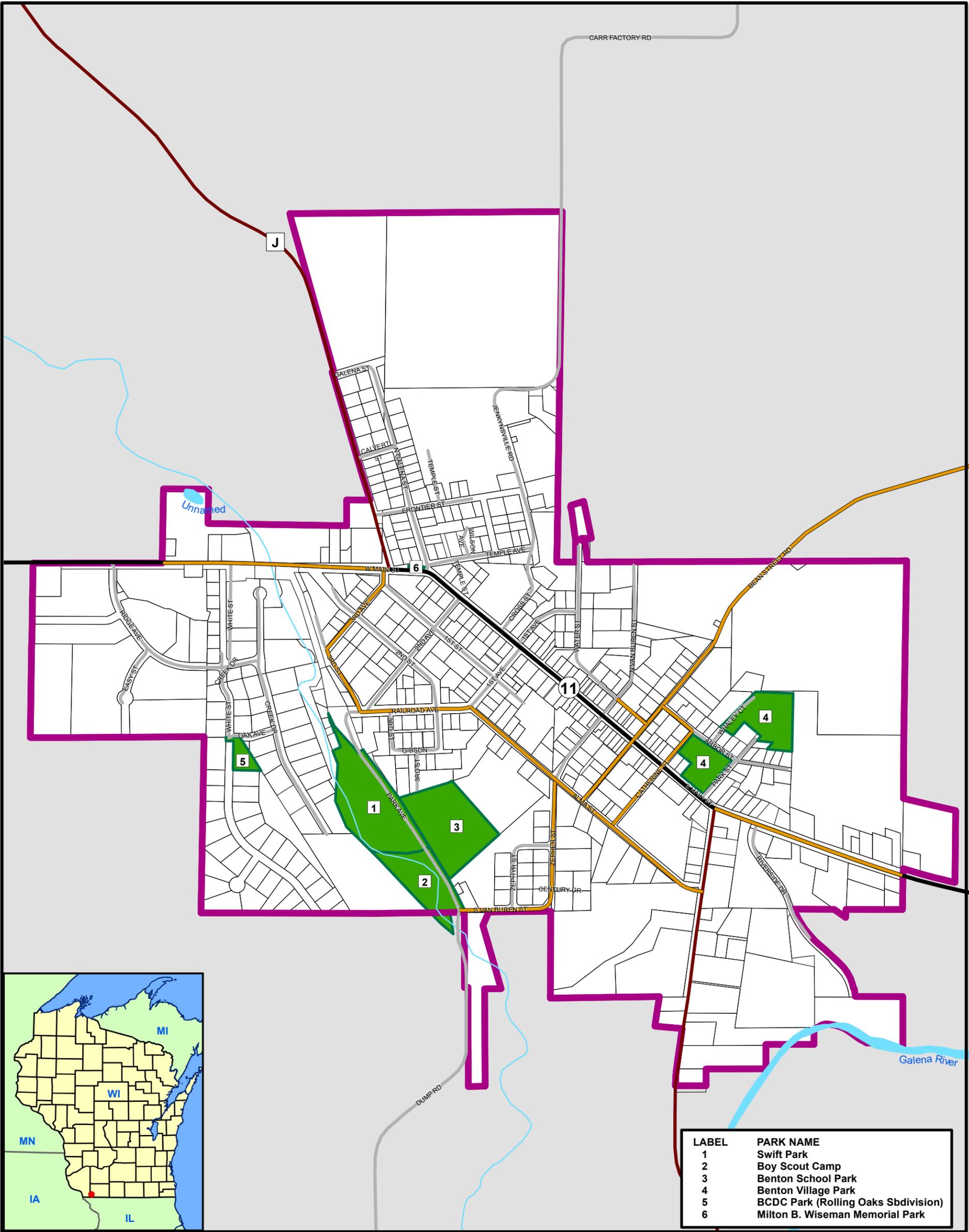
Date: 2/10/2021

Sources: WI SCO (2020),
US Census Tigerline Shapefiles (2019)
& WI DNR (2020)

This map is not a survey of the actual boundary of any property this map depicts. This map is not a legally recorded map and is not intended to be one. SWWRPC is not responsible for any inaccuracies herein contained.



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-  Benton Boundary
-  Benton Parcels
-  Benton Parks
-  Lakes and Open Water
-  Streams and Rivers
-  ATV/UTV Routes
-  US Highways
-  State Roads
-  County Roads
-  Local Roads

Village of Benton Parks and Features



0 0.075 0.15 0.3 Miles

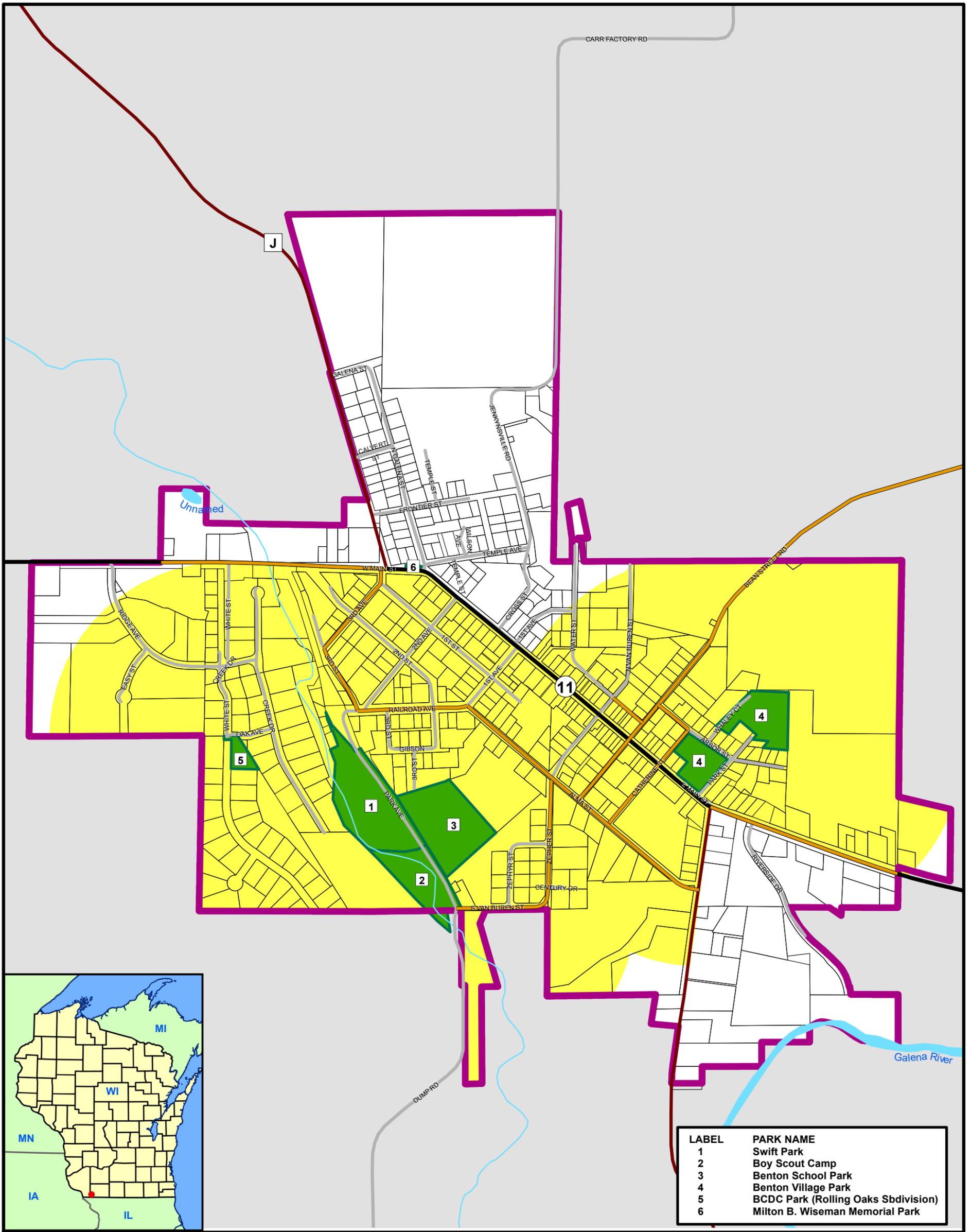
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Sources: WI SCO (2020),
US Census Tigerline Shapefiles (2019)
& WI DNR (2020)

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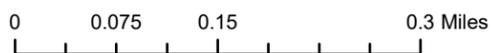
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LABEL	PARK NAME
1	Swift Park
2	Boy Scout Camp
3	Benton School Park
4	Benton Village Park
5	BCDC Park (Rolling Oaks Sbddivision)
6	Milton B. Wiseman Memorial Park

- Benton Boundary
- Benton Parcels
- Benton Parks
- 1/4 Mile Park Buffer
- Lakes and Open Water
- Streams and Rivers
- ATV UTV Routes
- US Highways
- State Roads
- County Roads
- Local Roads

Village of Benton Park Walkability



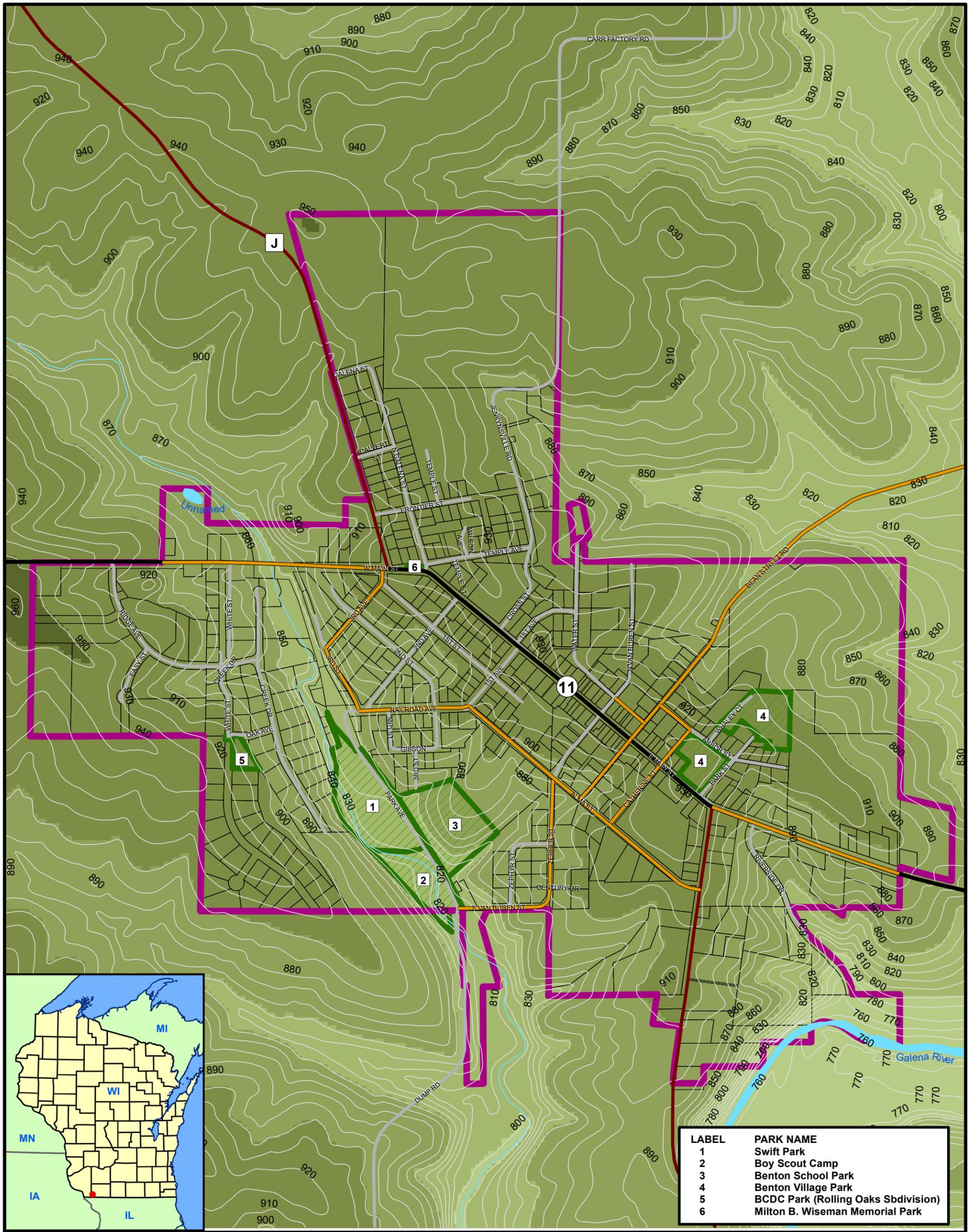
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Sources: WI SCO (2020),
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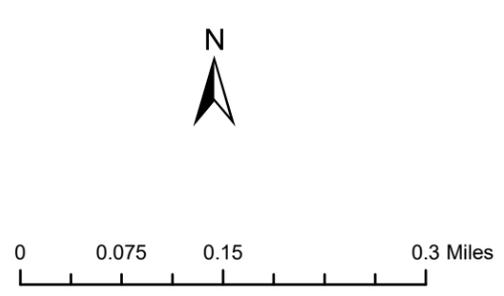
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- Benton Boundary
- Benton Parcels
- Benton Parks
- Lakes and Open Water
- Streams and Rivers
- ATV UTV Routes
- US Highways
- State Roads
- County Roads
- Local Roads

Elevations (Feet)	
	≥ 700
	701 - 750
	751 - 800
	801 - 850
	851 - 900
	901 - 950
	951 - 1,000
	> 1,000

Village of Benton Topography Map



LABEL	PARK NAME
1	Swift Park
2	Boy Scout Camp
3	Benton School Park
4	Benton Village Park
5	BCDC Park (Rolling Oaks Sbddivision)
6	Milton B. Wiseman Memorial Park

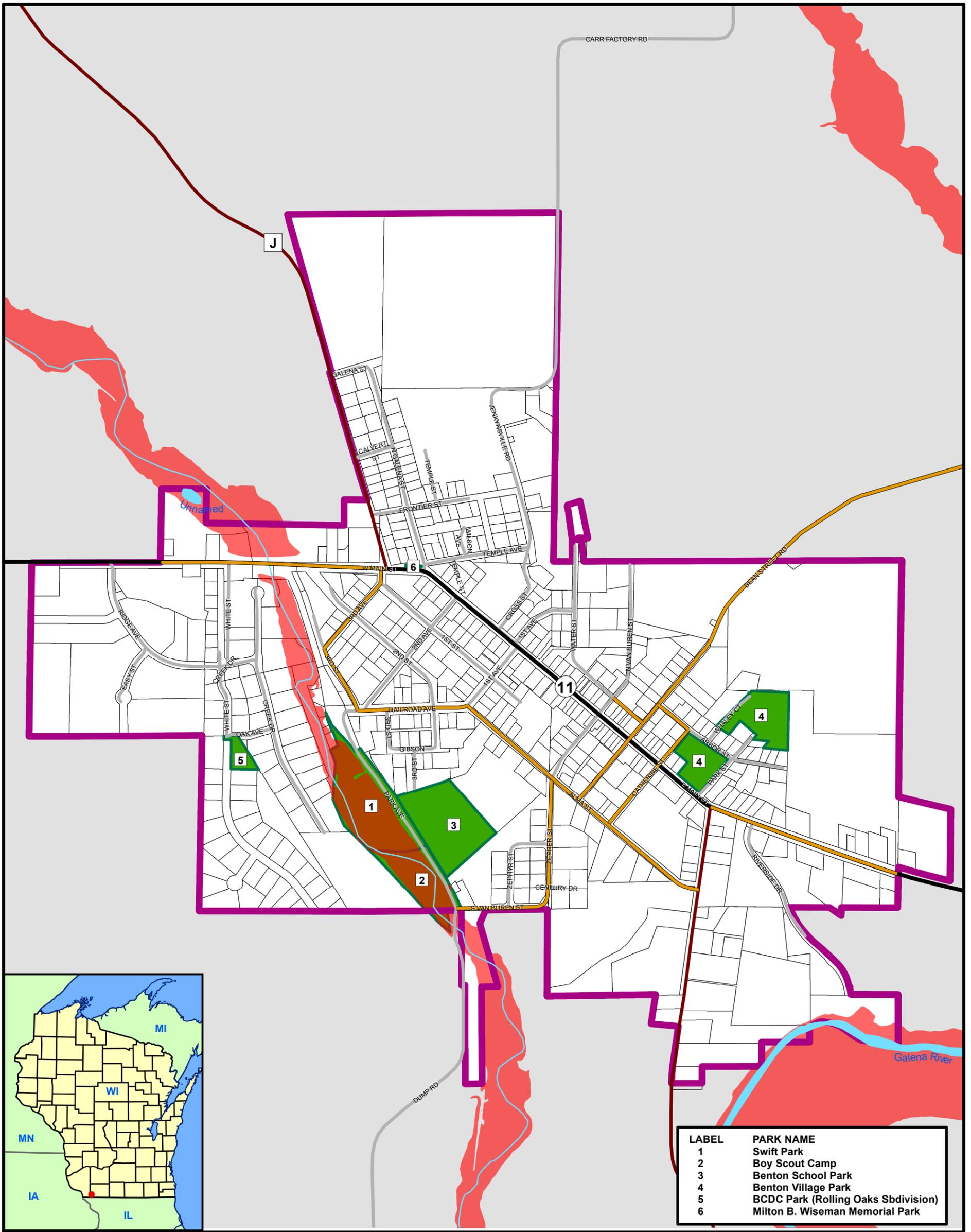
Date: 3/15/2021

Sources: WI SCO (2020),
US Census Tigerline Shapefiles (2019)
& WI DNR (2020)

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Village of Benton Water Resources



0 0.075 0.15 0.3 Miles

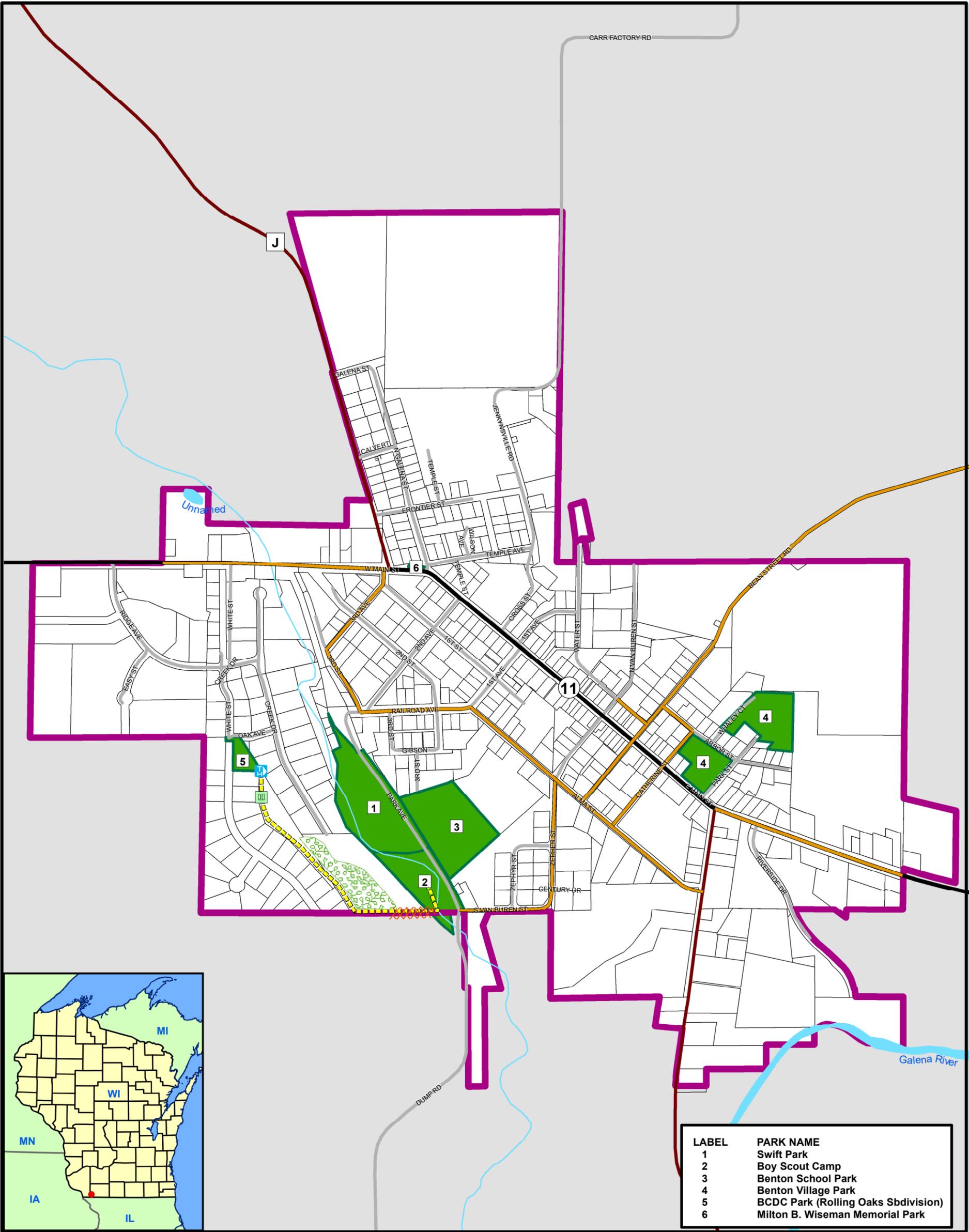
Date: 3/15/2021

Sources: WI SCO (2020),
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& WI DNR (2020)

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LABEL	PARK NAME
1	Swift Park
2	Boy Scout Camp
3	Benton School Park
4	Benton Village Park
5	BCDC Park (Rolling Oaks Sbddivision)
6	Milton B. Wiseman Memorial Park

Legend

- Benton Boundary
- Benton Parcels
- Benton Parks
- Lakes and Open Water
- Streams and Rivers
- ATV/UTV Routes
- US Highways
- State Roads
- County Roads
- Local Roads

Proposed Trail Project Elements

- Proposed Walking/Hiking Trail
- Proposed Trailhead
- Proposed Bridge
- Possible Prairie Addition Area
- Regrade Vegetation Zone

(Note: Regrading will include the following: cutting crown, grub sides, remove rocks, decrease slope percentage, install geo-gride, and revegetation)

Village of Benton Future Park Improvements Map

Date: 4/25/2021

Sources: WI SCO (2020),
US Census Tigerline Shapefiles (2019)
WI DNR (2020)
& SSWRPC Site Visit (March, 2021)

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