

PLANNING WAUKEE'S TRAIL SYSTEM FOCUSES ON CONNECTIVITY & COMMUNITY

Waukeee is known as an active, family-friendly city with plenty of outdoor leisure opportunities. Parks, outdoor shelters and sports fields provide occasions for fun and a sense of community. And distinctive neighborhoods with nearby schools provide the small-town atmosphere that residents crave. The City of Waukeee is working diligently to ensure that eventually all of those outdoor leisure pursuits, neighborhoods and schools are connected by an easy-to-follow and beautifully maintained amenity—Waukeee's trail system.

Residents enjoy the Storywalk along the Heart of the Warrior Trail.



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HEART OF THE WARRIOR TRAIL

In 2011, the City of Waukeee was awarded a \$125,000 REAP grant from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources to connect several portions of the Heart of the Warrior Trail. The trail, northeast of Centennial Park and running east-to-west through the city, now crosses Alice's Road and connects to Clive's Greenbelt Trail in Lions Park, thanks in part to the grant. These new connections helped to unify the Waukeee community and provide a continuous trail through the core of established neighborhoods in the city. And city leaders are just getting started.

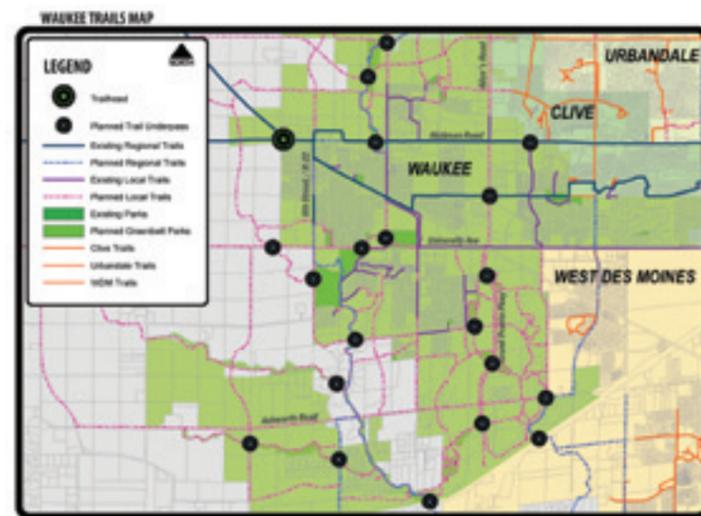
"Our planning philosophy is based on connecting trails within neighborhoods and then connecting those trails to our schools and parks," said Waukeee Development Services Director Brad Deets. "Getting kids to school safely, families to parks safely and providing regional trail connectivity is the goal."

Cities have found that investing funds in trails and greenways makes it easier for people to travel by foot or bike in their own neighborhoods and beyond, fostering a greater sense of community. Waukeee leaders know that designing the community to support active pursuits through a comprehensive trail system also creates recreational opportunities and safety, while promoting a healthy lifestyle. The Waukeee trail system continues to grow in that direction.

"Our long-term goal is to make a trail system that allows access to every part of the city, while granting passage to neighboring communities," said Deets.

Waukeee's growth has put it on the map in Iowa as the fastest growing city in the state. And with 19.2 miles of winding trails, the growth of their trails matches that pace. Waukeee Parks and Recreation Director Matt Jermier said the system the city has created with the trails, along with the connectivity, are the most impressive aspects of that growth.

"In the last five years we've made connections that have truly made our trails a system," he said. "The trail system now connects neighborhoods and residents to different parts of the city."



RACCOON RIVER VALLEY TRAILHEAD

The Raccoon River Valley Trail is an 89-mile-long paved trail beginning at the trailhead in Waukeee, winding through 14 other communities and looping back to Waukeee. The trail was built on a former railroad right-of-way and in October 2012, Waukeee celebrated the completion of new facilities at the trailhead including restrooms, new landscaping, benches, shade structures and other furnishings. These recent improvements at the trailhead have helped to put a greater focus on Waukeee's trails while making the city a hot-spot for bicycle enthusiasts from all over Central Iowa.

"Waukeee is quickly becoming known as a bicycle-friendly city and that fits well with our future vision for the community," said Waukeee Mayor Bill Peard. "Activity, recreation and engaging community experiences are all the result of a well-planned trail system and a bicycle-friendly community."

The popularity of the Raccoon River Valley Trail and the gateway the trailhead creates helped to bring the very first **BACooN Ride** to Waukeee in June of this year. The event, a unique combination of biking and bacon, was created by RAGBRAI, BaconFest organizers and the Iowa Bicycle Coalition. It brought thousands of riders to Waukeee to experience the community and the trails.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The future strategy for trails in Waukeee shows careful planning and continuous improvement. The 10-year plan includes more than 12 underpasses allowing safe crossing at major roads through Waukeee like Hickman Road, and an eventual trail under I-80 that connects to the West Des Moines trail system. That planning also includes eight miles of trails through the future Kettlestone development that will link the area to regional trails and Waukeee neighborhoods.

"A series of linked trails in Kettlestone will connect all of the open and retail spaces so that once a resident or visitor leaves their home or car, they won't have to return until they want to," said Deets.

In addition, the City of Waukeee is integrating three locations where the trails will pass under the future Grand Prairie Parkway—the street that will bisect the Kettlestone development. Plans for Kettlestone to feature green spaces and trails that create a walkable environment will serve to bolster the power and convenience of Waukeee's current trail system.

In the immediate future, the Sugar Creek Trail project continues its incremental steps towards completion with phases one and two recently concluded. The trail, which starts at the intersection of Warrior Lane and University Avenue, now connects the southern Waukeee neighborhood of Glynn Village to Centennial Park and centrally located Waukeee schools. The installation of a bridge along the trail is in the final stages and will connect the Spyglass neighborhood to Centennial Park and beyond. Trail enthusiasts are already enjoying exploring the beautiful connecting trail featuring sweeping views of Sugar Creek Golf Course.

"The impact the Sugar Creek Trail has on our trail system is huge," said Jermier. "Up until recently, our southern neighborhoods were isolated but now they're linked to the central community. The trail helps us build a greater sense of community each day."

Waukeee celebrates the completion of the trailhead project in October 2012



Thousands of bicyclists flooded Waukeee for the first annual BACooN Ride



A rendering of the future Kettlestone shows what a pedestrian underpass could look like.



View from the Sugar Creek Trail.

