



Connecting Communities Program Description

The Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission (WCPARC) is committed to the continued development of non-motorized trails throughout the County and has made significant investments in non-motorized trail development. Through the Connecting Communities initiative, WCPARC is committing \$600,000 per year through 2024. The initiative's intent is to work in partnership with local communities and other organizations, providing funds to supplement those provided or obtained by the partner organization.

Funding is available for construction projects, planning/feasibility studies, or engineering. Eligible projects will be those that provide valuable, non-motorized connections between communities and activity centers, offering a healthy alternative for recreation, transportation, fitness, and energy conservation.

Application Process and Timing:

Applications for Connecting Communities funding will be reviewed once per year. In June, the new grant round will be announced. **Final applications are due by 4:00 PM on August 31.**

Staff will review and score applications and make recommendations for funding to the Parks and Recreation Commission, typically at their November meeting. The awarded funds will not be made available to the applicant until a Project Agreement has been executed and stipulated deadlines have been met. Please note that this is a reimbursement-based grant program.

Eligible Applicants:

Eligible applicants include local units of government or public entities in Washtenaw County. All construction project areas must be within the County borders.

Competitive Project Types:

- Important links between communities, parks, or other points of interest
- Grade separation structures to allow access across highway, river, railroad, and other barriers.
- Trail development within utility and abandoned railroad corridors
- Trails adjacent to waterways
- Trails that connect with the county park system
- On-road bike lanes and shoulder improvements providing important links
- Major multi-jurisdictional project
- Locally cost prohibitive project of regional or county-wide significance

Projects generally **not** considered eligible for county assistance:

- Trails constructed with staff or volunteer labor
- Trails solely within existing local parks
- Replacement or restriping of existing trails/trail facilities
- Limited use hiking or nature trails (non-hard surfaced)
- Trails related to building structures and parking lots
- Streetscape improvements or sidewalks
- Site furnishings (lighting, benches, bike racks, etc.)
- Street crossing improvements
- Utility relocations
- Fencing, buffers, and barriers
- Trail maintenance equipment
- Local signage or traffic controls
- Publications and marketing
- Staff overhead costs

*Communities with an active Connecting Communities grant are not eligible to apply for additional funds until the previously approved project is completed, and the grant has been closed out.

Eligible Project Types

All projects must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, as amended, where applicable.

Funding is available for:

1. Planning/feasibility studies or engineering (up to \$100k per year)
2. Construction (up to \$500k per year)

Note: Applicants may choose to apply for funding from multiple project categories in the same grant cycle; however, limited funding is available and not all requested funds may be awarded. If applying in multiple categories, applicant must demonstrate need for both categories in the same grant cycle, including a funding plan (with contingency), project schedule, availability of land for construction, understanding of permit and regulatory requirements, and other relevant information.

Feasibility and Engineering Studies

Many successful trail projects begin with a detailed professional assessment of which options are feasible to achieve the desired goals of the project. This process is known as a feasibility or engineering study. It is intended to engage the necessary stakeholders, including the public, to determine several key project conditions, such as: a preferred route, order of magnitude cost opinion for construction, regulatory requirements, maintenance considerations, and potential pitfalls of the project. It is often the first step to give local leaders the necessary information to make decisions on how, or if, the community should continue to pursue the project. This process typically takes three to twelve months to complete, depending on the complexity of the project.

If there is a desire for a non-motorized project in an area but the precise route has not been determined, it is recommended that your community start with a feasibility/engineering study. Only studies prepared by a professional consultant will be considered for funding. Components of funded Feasibility and Engineering Studies must include or address (where applicable):

- Executive summary
- Background and intent/goals of the project
- Inventory and analysis of existing conditions, including connectivity amongst people, non-motorized infrastructure, green space, and other destinations
- Analysis of available alternatives to achieve the goals of the project
- Selection of a preferred option, including a conceptual trail plan and cross sections
- Maps, such as: project location, site boundaries, natural features, etc.
- Opinion of probable cost and implementation/phasing strategy (i.e., financial feasibility)
- Potential funding sources (consider addressing potential grant requirements)
- Demonstrated public participation and stakeholder engagement
- Availability of land to construct the project. If the proposed project is not entirely on land that is owned by the applicant, include documentation of discussions with the necessary land managers (may include Rights-of-Way, utility covenants, or other easements)
- Regulatory requirements and the likelihood of receiving permits from the appropriate agencies
- Project operations, maintenance and security (local ability to perform required tasks)
- Photos of the project area

Engineering Drawings

Typically, a feasibility or engineering study should be completed before funding for engineering drawings may be awarded. This requirement may be waived at the discretion of the Director if the applicant can otherwise demonstrate a need for the project, its viability, and provide documentation of probable project costs.

Engineering plans must comply with ADA and all other applicable regulatory and permit requirements. Plans must be prepared by a licensed engineer, landscape architect, or similar professional consultant. Overhead costs associated with applicant's staff shall not be considered expenses eligible for reimbursement. This process typically takes six to twelve months to complete, depending on the complexity of the project.

Construction

It is desirable to WCPARC to award construction funding to projects that have completed all or most of the background process (planning, feasibility study, engineering, etc.). Applicants in this category should be ready for construction to begin within the next 24 months. Application should demonstrate why the project is ready for:

Construction project requirements:

- Shall be competitively bid and awarded to a qualified contractor.
- Shall comply with ADA and all other applicable regulatory and permit requirements.
- Shall provide a resolution from an authorized public entity agreeing to maintain the proposed facilities to be safe and open for use by the general public for a minimum of twenty years, if constructed.
- Engineering plans will be or were prepared by a licensed engineer, landscape architect, or similar professional consultant.
- Overhead costs associated with applicant's staff shall not be considered expenses eligible for reimbursement.

If you are unsure about the project type in which to apply, please contact Kira Macyda at macydak@washtenaw.org.

Review Criteria

Applicants must document a compelling need for the project and its value to county residents. In reviewing applications, the project will be scored against criteria established in the Scoring Criteria form (attached):

Rational:

- Links or has high potential to connect significant destinations or existing trails. Highest priority will be given to projects that connect to a WCPARC park or facility.

Use:

- Provides a wide range of functions (e.g., recreation, transportation, education/interpretation, conservation, water quality, tourism/economic, etc.).
- Has a high-use potential.

Planned Network:

- Is a component of an existing or planned greenway network (as shown on an existing planning or parks maps).

Partnerships:

- Involves partnerships of two or more adjacent communities or other entity (e.g., schools, Washtenaw County Road Commission).

Site:

- Provides critical access such as grade separation structures.
- Directly relates to the county's important natural features (e.g., Huron River, River Raisin, Saline River, etc.). Note: The Huron River Corridor has been identified as WCPARC's highest priority.
- Is located in an abandoned railroad corridor.

Trail Design:

- Considers physical quality of trail such as surface materials and trail width.

Sustainable Design:

- Includes sustainable design strategies beyond those required by law or regulations.

Financial Need of Applicant:

- Scoring is based on 2020 U.S. Census
- Ranking within Washtenaw County communities

Past Grant Assistance:

- Length of time since last grant.
- Communities not previously awarded a Connecting Communities grant are most desirable.

Applicant Match:

- Considers percentage of local match.

Commission Priority:

- Links to a WCPARC park or facility.
- Is locally cost prohibitive but of regional or county-wide significance.
- Other special considerations (e.g., visibility, geographical balance, development intensity, safety, etc.).

Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission reserves the right to modify these criteria whenever it feels the interest of the County will be so served.