

1 INTRODUCTION

People are increasingly relating open spaces and recreational trails to an enhanced quality of life. They know that having a safe place for children to play in their neighborhood is a positive amenity for their community. They have heard about how walking and biking trails can help increase property values and decrease fuel consumption. They are perhaps seeing more people getting out of their cars and onto a bicycle to go to work or recreate. They sense the calming effect that being out in the open air with plenty of grass and natural vegetation has on hectic lifestyles. They appreciate having public swimming pools, nature centers, and a means to a destination other than a motorized vehicle.

Here in Champaign County, we have seemingly endless agricultural landscapes, acres of wooded areas and prairie, historical and natural places of interest, and urban activity centers, all waiting to be visited and appreciated. Local agencies and residents are actively seeking ways to unite the community with its surroundings. The *Active Choices* Plan is an important step toward completing a countywide Greenways and Trails system residents and visitors alike can use and enjoy.



Children enjoy playing at the Homer Lake Natural Playscape
Courtesy: Champaign County Forest Preserve District (CCFPD)

2 VISION STATEMENT

Imagine it is the year 2033, Champaign County's bicentennial. Two hundred years earlier, the County had built its foundation on the railroad. Once oriented towards trails, and later the automobile, Champaign County has evolved its transportation system into a network of rails, complete streets, greenways and trails that support all modes of transportation. More specifically, coordinated efforts between municipalities and governmental units have resulted in a local and regional system of greenways and trails that accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists. It accommodates users for both recreation and transportation.

The overall network is safe and accessible for all users. Routes and trails are paved and have special markings and other specific design elements to be accessible for people with disabilities. Safety features such as landscaping, design, and lighting help make these routes and trails safe. The routes and trails' continued maintenance and high quality design keep the infrastructure in usable condition and create a pleasing environment.

The County's trail network provides a variety of recreational opportunities. Connecting trails link urban areas to state parks, county forest preserves, municipal parks, and various activity centers in other counties. The trail and bikeway network also provides linkages to park district and other recreational facilities including parks, natural areas, gyms, water parks, and other indoor and outdoor facilities. The greenways and trails themselves also provide different recreational uses including running, walking, and bicycling.

Besides recreation, the greenways and trails within the County create opportunities for people to use other transportation modes for reaching shopping areas, places of employment, residential neighborhoods, educational facilities and other attractions. Various paths provide direct and indirect links from residential areas to destinations throughout urban and rural areas. They remove conflicts with motorized vehicles or avoid barriers such as dangerous intersections and interstates. These routes also provide for appropriate and sufficient bike storage at publicly and privately owned destinations.

While 2033 is still two decades away, this future ideal scenario is *Active Choices: Champaign County Greenways and Trails Plan's* ultimate vision.



Meadowbrook Park, Urbana

3 PLAN PURPOSE

Active Choices seeks to foster interagency cooperation to implement the best greenways and trails system possible for Champaign County. The purpose of this plan update is to compile information and recommendations from active transportation and environmental plans and documents completed by Greenways and Trails (GT) member agencies since the 2004 Champaign County Greenways & Trails Plan. This plan also aims to incorporate public input primarily on active transportation in Champaign County.

This document is designed to provide guidance and a framework to ensure the county's desire to create a bikeable, walkable, and environmentally aware and active community. This updated plan reflects the desires of Champaign County residents and community leaders to improve mobility through a safe, efficient, and well-connected multi-modal transportation system designed to be sensitive to the surrounding land uses as well as to protect environmental assets, both for their ecological functions and as key elements of community character and livability.

This plan also recognizes that each facility type and user may be different and will require various planning approaches and strategies, always keeping in mind the value of planning for an interconnected system. An all-inclusive plan can help identify gaps in service that hinder connectivity and help present a complete vision and action plan for improving bicycling, walking, and the natural environment. This plan update will allow communities in Champaign County to continue leveraging their investments to create the greatest impact for county residents.