

OUR VIEW

RECREATIONAL PARKS MAKING PROGRESS

The Mankato region is showing significant growth as a place for recreational opportunities. That's good for local residents but also for tourism.

It's important to take stock of what progress has been made on the recreational front. Providing residents with significant recreational opportunities fits into one of the key dimensions of building a healthy community. An assessment of recreational opportunities is part of the continuing effort by The Free Press to measure progress on developing eight aspects of a healthy community.



There have been several *new developments of note* in this area. North Mankato is installing an innovatively designed fishing pier for Spring Lake Park. The lake has been dredged. Sludge has been hauled away. The \$100,000 fishing pier was paid for by a special sales tax North Mankato residents approved a few years ago.

The pier will be a worthwhile investment for the city and the region. There will be no requirement to show a North Mankato I.D. Everyone is welcome. That will be an asset children from throughout the community will use. When a city can provide more opportunities for youth to have a fun day in the sun, the community as a whole grows and benefits. North Mankato's investments here are significant, and more importantly, they benefit the entire region.

North Mankato is also working to develop Benson Park, which will be a unique environment for recreational users and school children who may use the park as a field trip to discover area and regional wildlife.

The same can be said for Mankato's Riverfront Park. Christened last year, the park will offer lots of opportunities this summer for not only normal park use, but for concerts, festivals and events. There is opportunity for events such as RibFest to be held there. Again, this amenity benefits the region.

The nonprofit sector is doing its part as well. Mankato's Kiwanis dog park along the Minnesota River has been enthusiastically received by pet owners near and far. Unfortunately, this year's high water on the Minnesota River damaged the lower part of the park, making it unusable. However, the city of Mankato and a cadre of volunteers will be restoring the lower level of the park that's use is growing by leaps and bounds.

Finally, the Envision 2020 regional project has spurred enthusiasm for a new bicycle and bicycle trail advocacy group. The idea will be to advocate to build onto an already strong bicycle trail system.

All in all, there is clear momentum to developing the Mankato region's recreational and leisure opportunities. Elbow grease and volunteerism will bolster the effort.