



## STAFF REPORT

DATE: 3/11/2025

**REGULAR**

**TO:** City Council  
**FROM:** Marty Powers, Public Works Director  
**AGENDA ITEM:** Trail/Sidewalk Snow Removal  
**REVIEWED BY:** Nicole Miller, City Administrator

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### CORE STRATEGIES:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vibrant, inclusive, connected community | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Efficient, reliable, innovative services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Responsive, transparent, adaptive governance       | <input type="checkbox"/> Balanced Finances now and future                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managed Growth                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Resilient Infrastructure                            |

**BACKGROUND:** Over the years the community has grown and with it, many miles of trails and sidewalks have been added. Expectations of a walkable pedestrian system all year around have also been voiced. The city now has over 26 miles of asphalt trails. The City's past definition of a trail has been an 8-foot-wide asphalt surface designed for higher recreational speeds which include the ability to safely meet oncoming foot or bike traffic in both rural and residential areas. In the past a sidewalk has been defined as a much narrower concrete surface, designed for slower paced walking pedestrian traffic.

**ISSUE BEFORE COUNCIL:** Should the City Council consider snow removal be completed on all asphalt trails or specific segments of trails so they can be included in the snow removal process after snow events.

**PROPOSAL DETAILS/ANALYSIS:** In order to carry out walkway snow removal several factors must be considered; equipment, staffing, timeframe for completion, snow storage, costs, and other challenges including lawn and irrigation damage/repair, wind and lost snow.

- **Equipment-** The current fleet of Public Works vehicles and equipment can accommodate clearing of city trails. V-plows on Pickup trucks would be utilized in the rural sections for the majority of the snow events, as they are the most efficient until the snowbanks get to a height where the snow storage is full, which would then require larger Public Works equipment to wing or blow back the banks to allow for more snow storage
- **Staffing-** At its current staffing level, Public Works uses all 9 operators on the day of a snow event to clear over 99 miles of city streets, over 100 Cul de sacs, parking lots at the city hall, fire hall, county library in addition to completing necessary locates, meter drop offs, well/lift station daily record checks and water sampling. Depending on snow totals and when the snow ends, these tasks can typically be accomplished in an 8 to 12-hour day. On the day after a snow event, Public Works uses at minimum of 5 staff to clear all sidewalks abutting city facilities, parks and out lots, 6 park parking lots, the ice rink, 9 lift stations, 3 wells, 3 water towers, the booster, and both PW facilitates. The remaining 4 operators complete daily rounds, locates, water sampling, plowing equipment maintenance/repairs and start dumping off and washing the corrosive road salt off trucks

and equipment. PTO & ESST slow the progress of these tasks down immensely, which often stretches some of these tasks into the third day after a snow event. Back-to-back snow events also delay the completion of many of these tasks including sidewalk snow removal.

- Time frame for removal of snow on trails- What would be an acceptable time frame to complete the walkway snow removal? Adding no more than 2 miles of trails to the current sidewalk snow removal route would not add significant over time cost or challenges if the time frame of clearing them would stay consistent with our 48-hour rule to clear sidewalks after a snow event, unless they fall on weekends or holidays.
- Contracting Costs- Contracting out 26 miles of City Asphalt Trail Snow Removal estimates have been discussed based on clearing 1" or more snow events. We were informed to expect roughly \$28,000 to \$30,000 per year as there are an average of sixteen to twenty snow falls exceeding 1". This estimate does not include a bare pavement expectation or de-icing.
- Additional Concerns- In many locations where a trail abuts residential properties, the City's ROW or property often does not extend much more than 1-3 feet beyond the trail edge. From past experience, I have learned we do not have the legal right to deposit snow onto private property. When clearing trails in front of residential homes, a snow blower is the preferred choice of equipment as not to leave unwanted wind rows in driveways. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the potential of additional complaints regarding blocked trail access will arise if a private driveway is cleared and deposits snow on the trail after the trail was cleared. These complaints along with wind/drifts not concurrent to a snow event and sod or irrigation damage will lead to additional complaints and time to return for cleanup.

#### **FISCAL IMPACT:**

To clear all 26 miles of city asphalt trails

- Contacted Services- \$30,000 per yr estimated
- Additional Trail Snow Removal Equipment- No cost to the city unless snow blower equipment is required for all trails- roughly \$90,000 for a trackless Blower unit
- Additional Full-Time staff- Approximately \$80,000 per yr w/benefits
- Seasonal staff, if available- Approximately \$6,000 per year
- Additional lawn repair - labor, black dirt and seed \$3000

#### **OPTIONS:**

- Clearly Define Trail and Sidewalks
- Identify and add specific trail segments to Public Work's snow removal route
- Contract Out Snow Removal of all Asphalt Trails in 2025/2026
- Clear all Asphalt Trails with Additional Public Works Full Time Staff in 2025/2026
- Continue to allow and recommend HOA's to clear City Asphalt Trails in their Development
- Make no changes to the current sidewalk ordinance

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**Motion to identify specific trails segments as main corridors that do not have sidewalks along that street to be cleared by Public Works**

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Supplement Trail/Sidewalk Info
- 2023 Map of trail system

## **Supplemental Trail/Sidewalk Info**

### **Trails**

Current Definition. 8' wide asphalt path designed for higher speed travel that accommodates two-way pedestrian or bike traffic. Public Trails are on city property or retained with an easement for public use and are city maintained.

At this time Lake Elmo Public Works does not complete snow removal on any asphalt trails. A few HOAs have elected to contract out the clearing of asphalt trails in their development.

To carry out plowing of all 26 + miles of asphalt trails within 48 hours of a snow fall ending, additional resources would be needed. This could come in the form of full-time, part-time or contract services.

No additional city equipment is needed at this time to "plow" trails. Public Works has two pickups with V- Plows that could complete the clearing of rural section trails for the majority of snow events. As the banks get larger, Public Works has larger snow blowers or plows that could be utilized to create additional snow storage. Where trails cross numerous driveways, Public Works could utilize a snow blowers to minimize complaints and time.

### **Sidewalks**

Current Definition. 6' concrete path used by pedestrians. These Sidewalks are designed for walking pedestrian traffic. Currently all sidewalks in Lake Elmo are to be cleared by the abutting property owner within 48 hours of the snow ending. The current sidewalk plow route takes Public Works approximately 6.5 hours using a snow blower or broom on a Bobcat Tool Cat. This unit then assists to clear the ice rink for additional time.

### **Current Sidewalk Snow Removal Ordinance**

#### **9.16.120 Sidewalk Snow Removal**

- (a) *Removal of snow and ice from sidewalks.* The owner or occupant of any property within the city's corporate limits that fronts upon any public street that has an abutting sidewalk must remove any snow or ice from the sidewalk within 48 hours following the termination of any snow or ice formation. The owner or occupant of the property abutting the sidewalk must keep the abutting sidewalk reasonably clear and free of any snow or ice.
- (b) *Nuisance.* Failure by the owner or occupant of the property abutting the sidewalk to comply with this section shall constitute a nuisance and the nuisance may be abated by the city in accordance with LEC 9.28.

#### **HISTORY**

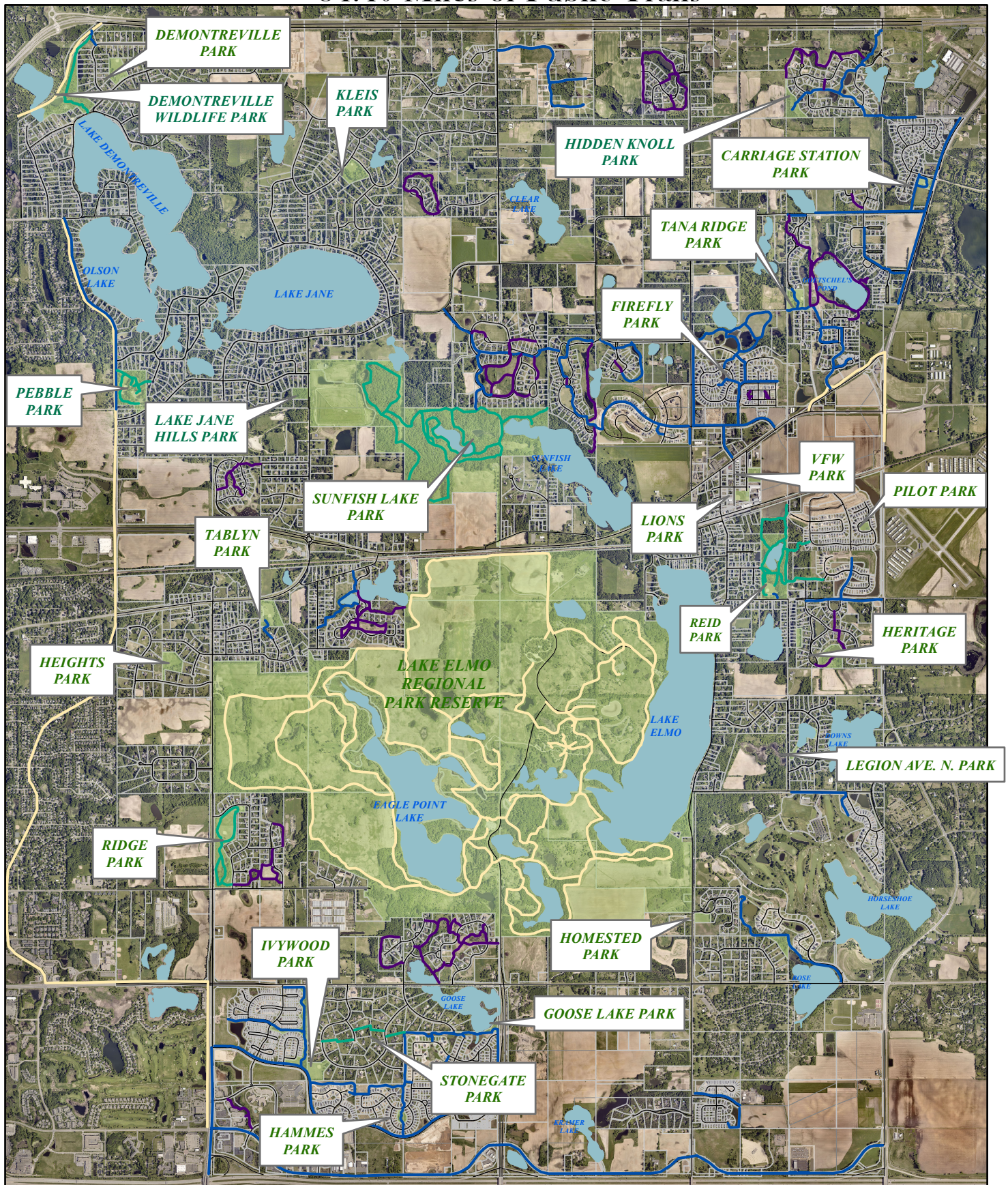
Adopted by Ord. [08-253](#) on 11/3/2021





# City of Lake Elmo Trails and Parks

34.40 Miles of Public Trails



## Trail Classification(s)

- Public Walking Trail
- Private Walking Trail
- Public Walking Trail Unpaved
- Lake Elmo Roads
- County/Regional Trail



0 0.375 0.75 1.5 Miles

Map Date: June, 203