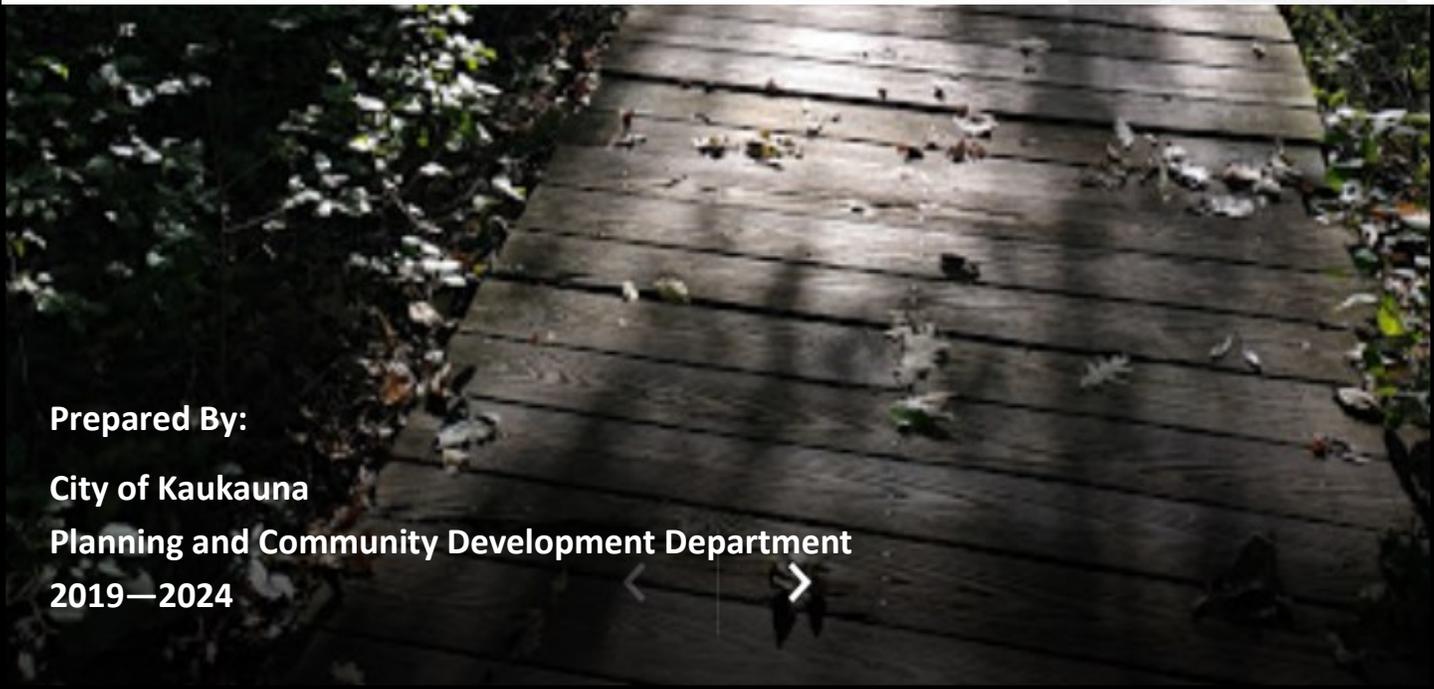




# RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

CITY OF KAUKAUNA, WISCONSIN



Prepared By:

City of Kaukauna

Planning and Community Development Department

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## **Chapter 7. Description of the Physical Characteristics of the Planning Region**

### *Waterways*

Kaukauna is situated within the Lower Fox River Basin which is part of the Lake Michigan drainage area. This large basin area includes portions of Brown, Calumet, Outagamie and Winnebago Counties. The Fox River and its adjoining tributaries serve as the major natural drainage way in southeastern Outagamie County. Approximately three and one-half miles of the Fox River are within the Kaukauna municipal boundaries. Riverfront and canal front property has been developed for residential, commercial, industrial and recreational uses. Some undeveloped land and publicly owned open space still remain along the riverfront in Kaukauna.

The City limits are located wholly within two federally recognized HUC (Hydrologic Unit Classification) 10 watershed areas. The entire southern portion of the City and much of the northern portion of the City (boundaries skirting just south of Interstate 41) is located in the Plum Creek – Fox River watershed. The northern portion of the City (mostly located north of Interstate 41) is in the Fox River – Frontal Green Bay watershed<sup>i</sup>.

Konkapot Creek provides a natural drainage system for the City's south side. The creek originates south of the City and drains into the Fox River at the western edge of the 1000 Islands Conservancy Area. After a moderate to heavy rain the creek carries significant amounts of sediments from the agricultural lands south of Kaukauna. The southwest side of Kaukauna is drained by an intermittent stream with portions of this stream adjoining residential areas having been channeled underground through storm sewer pipes before joining Konkapot Creek at Horseshoe Valley Park. Several small intermittent streams exist within the City limits and eventually discharge into the Fox River.

There are several intermittent streams in the 1000 Islands Conservancy Area. These provide surface drainage for the extreme southeast portion of the City. Both streams flow in a northerly direction and discharge into the Fox River.

North of the Fox River, there is limited surface drainage that flows towards the river. There is an intermittent stream in the vicinity of Grignon Park that flows adjacent to the Fox River Valley Railroad spur line. This stream drains a portion of the northeast area of Kaukauna and discharges into the canal near the Ahlstrom-Munksjo Paper Mill.

Some north side channels flow first to the Apple Creek watershed before entering the Fox River. Apple Creek flows to the northeast away from the City. The Industrial Park network for the City of Kaukauna all drains to this watershed. The NEW Prosperity Center and the Commerce Crossing development both have streams which flow to this watershed, special care was taken to ensure these streams were protected during the construction of the developments.

The entire Lower Fox River basin is a highly urbanizing area and is consequently facing water quality issues from industrial runoff as well as concentrated agricultural runoff in diminishing acreage committed to agricultural enterprise<sup>ii</sup>. State and national attention has been given to this particular water system as the runoff challenges have been directly tied to declining water quality and poor aquatic habitat. This has the potential to negatively impact water recreation, such as boating and fishing in Northeast Wisconsin. Neither the Fox River-Frontal Green Bay nor the Plum Creek-Fox River have

been identified as priority watershed areas for remediation at this time, but the Plum Creek-Fox River was rated as a high consideration watershed for future remediation efforts<sup>iii</sup>.

### *History and Use of Waterways in Kaukauna*

Throughout history, the Fox River has had a major historical impact on Kaukauna. The river served as the primary transportation route for indigenous people as well as for early European immigrants. Indigenous peoples who were pushed out of their traditional lands by European immigrants in the Eastern United States resettled in the Fox River basin as refugees, creating at one time, a highly diverse and highly organized indigenous refugee community of displaced First Nations peoples. Many of these indigenous groups would later be displaced to small reservations in remote areas of the state of Wisconsin as European and American expansion pushed westward.

The series of rapids known as the Grand Kakalin Falls required the early (mid-17<sup>th</sup> century) river travelers to portage their canoes. Due to this fact, Kaukauna became a central point for rest and trade along the Fox River and a trading post was established by the Ducharme and Grignon families in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>iv</sup>.

The river is now used for recreational boating, fishing, industrial manufacturing and power generation. The series of rapids necessitated the construction of a lock system in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The river provides an excellent area for water-oriented recreational activities. From the dam area to the eastern edge of the 1000 Islands Conservancy Area (approximately one and one-half miles) the river drops 51 feet in elevation; a significant drop considering over the next 24 miles, it drops only 22 feet before discharging into Green Bay.

In 1884, to compensate for the change in elevation and to provide access to the upper and lower reaches of the Fox River, twenty-six hand operated locks were constructed. One hundred years later, the lock system was placed in “caretaker” status by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers due to the high maintenance and operating costs. In 1985, the Fox River Management Commission began operating several of the Fox Locks in Green Bay and Neenah to provide recreational boaters with opportunities to utilize the Fox River. The locks in the City of Kaukauna have remained closed and in “caretaker” status. On September 17, 2004, the Fox River Locks system was transferred from Federal ownership to State ownership and thereafter the Fox River Navigational System Authority assumed responsibility for the repair, rehabilitation, maintenance and operation of the system. After years of planning, the lock system did begin to reopen. The presence of invasive species and the threat these species pose to the recreational fishing economy have slowed the process of reopening greatly.

At the time of the writing of this plan (2019), a number of the locks within the system are open seasonally for recreational boater use – however, the mid-section of the Fox River (Kaukauna Locks #1-5 and the Rapid Croche Lock) are restored, but are not open, nor is the Menasha lock connecting the Fox River to Lake Winnebago<sup>v</sup>. The Menasha lock and Rapid Croche lock are closed to prohibit spread of invasive species spread between Lake Winnebago and Lake Michigan. At this time of writing this plan, the Rapid Croche lock may be permanently closed and operate in the future with a boat lift system. The Kaukauna locks have been restored but are not open for use, although the Fox River Navigational System Authority assures the City that the system will be fully operational in the year 2021.

The City of Kaukauna has entered into a long-term lease agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the placement of certain recreational features. These include trail improvements along the North bank of the Fox River and will likely include future improvements to Central Park behind the former Carnegie Library.

The Fox River has become increasingly important as a recreational resource. Water quality has improved dramatically due to increased environmental regulations. The riverfront is a source of both active and passive recreation and will continue to develop as water quality continues to improve.

### *Topography of Kaukauna*

The terrain in Kaukauna ranges from flat to areas that are fairly steep and rolling. Elevations range from 610 to 730 feet above sea level. Ravines and sloped areas along the Fox River provide interesting terrain for the City's park system. Examples of this include Riverside Park, La Follette Park, Horseshoe Valley Park and Grignon Park, as well as the unique terrain at the 1000 Islands Environmental Center and within the 1000 Islands Conservancy Area.

### *Woodlands*

The establishment of the 200 acre 1000 Islands Conservancy Area preserved the most extensive wooded area in the City is an example of Kaukauna's commitment to open recreation areas. The Conservancy Area lies in a unique vegetation belt described by botanists as the tension zone. Wisconsin's Tension zone runs across the state of Wisconsin from Polk County in Northwest Wisconsin to Racine County in Southeast Wisconsin and is the area where Wisconsin's boreal region meets the prairie region<sup>vi</sup>. This unique zone includes plant features of both vegetative areas. This transitional area features specific vegetation such as red and white pine, paper birch traditionally seen in the Northern boreal region and oak trees more traditionally located in the Southern prairie region.

The wooded area along Konkapot Creek consists of a series of ravines which become more expansive at Horseshoe Valley Park. Over 70 percent of the park site is wooded. Most of the northern shoreline along the Fox River is also wooded. In addition, several City parks have wooded areas. Impressive stands of old growth trees are located in La Follette and Riverside Parks, White City, Horseshoe and Grignon Parks are also home to stands of mature hardwoods.

### *Land Use*

The predominant land use in the City of Kaukauna is single-family residential. Almost the entire western half of the City's south side has been developed residentially and residential growth continues to expand south and east in Kaukauna, as well as pushing north toward Interstate 41 on the northern side of the City.

Commercial areas are located in the central business district as well as along major arterials connecting County roads CE, OO and KK, as well as connections to Interstate 41. The City of Kaukauna originally developed as two separate communities on the north and south sides of the Fox River, each with its own business district, referred to colloquially as Uptown (Wisconsin Avenue area) and Downtown (Second and Third Street area). Strip commercial development also exists along Crooks Avenue and

Lawe Street (State Highway 55), Hyland Avenue (County Highway OO) and Delanglade Street (State Highway 55).

Industrial Development is concentrated in three areas. The Ahlstrom-Munksjo Paper Mill is the largest employer in the City of Kaukauna and is located on the large island area along the Fox River. The City's highly successful industrial park network centers around the Interstate 41 corridor and features three distinctive industrial parks and one professional business park.

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<sup>i</sup> Source: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Online surface water data viewer tool

<sup>ii</sup> Source: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Lower Fox River Basin description

<sup>iii</sup> Source: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Lower Fox River Basin description

<sup>iv</sup> Source: Kaukauna Public Library website, History of Kaukauna page, excerpted from 1985 publication Voyageurs Magazine.

<sup>v</sup> Source: Fox River Navigational System Authority website information, [www.foxlocks.org](http://www.foxlocks.org)

<sup>vi</sup> Source: Wisconsin Woodlands Magazine, Wisconsin's Tension Zone Explained, 2013