



## **Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Committee**

---

### **Johnson County REAP Committee Agenda Monday, August 5, 2024 at 4:00 p.m.**

Second Floor Boardroom 203C  
Health and Human Services Building  
855 S. Dubuque St., Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Participate in person or by joining the Zoom meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84388010803>

Meeting ID: 843 8801 0803  
or dial (312) 626-6799

### **Agenda**

*Meetings of the REAP Committee are open to the public. Written comments may be submitted to [jwenger@johnsoncountyiowa.gov](mailto:jwenger@johnsoncountyiowa.gov). If you require accommodations to participate, please contact the Board Office at (319) 356-6000 prior to the meeting. Public comment is at the discretion of the Chairperson. Comments should be limited to three minutes. Due to public meeting laws, the Committee may only discuss or act on matters presented on this agenda. Welcome.*

1. Call to order: 4:00 p.m.
2. Public comment
3. Election of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson
4. Approve August 3, 2023 Johnson County REAP Committee meeting minutes
5. Presentation of REAP grant applications for review and comment by the Committee:
  - a. City of Iowa City application for \$200,000 for Sycamore Greenway Ecological Restoration, presented by Tyler Baird, Superintendent of Parks and Forestry
6. Discuss/review the *2021-2025 Johnson County Resource Enhancement and Protection Plan*
  - a. Per Iowa Code Chapter 455A.20, the Committee is required to submit a five-year plan, including one-year expenditure plan, to the Iowa DNR
  - b. Discuss and assign work on the next plan for 2026-2031 (finalize and submit in Fall 2025)
7. Next meeting date and time: Tuesday, August 5, 2025 at 4:00 p.m. (subject to change)
8. Adjourn

**Applicant**

City of Iowa City

**Project Title**

Sycamore Greenway Ecological Restoration and Trail Amenities

**Address**

3050 Sycamore St. Iowa City, IA 52240

**Grant Amount Requested**

\$200,000.00

**Project Summary**

This project includes ecological restoration of the Sycamore Greenway and enhancement of trail amenities. The Sycamore Greenway is a popular park for trail use and passive nature viewing. This project will remove invasive woody species from the prairies and wetlands and replace them with enhanced prairie cover to benefit natural systems and recreational opportunities. Trail amenities will also be updated to improve signage, benches, and bike repair opportunities.

**City Population**

74,828

**Quality of the site and/or project**

This project focuses on ecological restoration and ecosystem health and function in a constructed stormwater management and wetland complex. The site contains a series of stormwater management areas and wetlands that help capture and purify runoff from a 600-acre watershed. This watershed includes an area of Iowa City with a history of stormwater challenges. The engineered stormwater infrastructure and constructed wetlands of the Sycamore Greenway have successfully managed runoff and mitigated impacts to the surrounding neighborhoods. Furthermore, the greenway has become important habitat for local flora and fauna of all sizes. Greenway visitors regularly experience nature at all scales from snails and insects to bald eagles and sandhill cranes to deer and coyotes.

At approximately two miles long and over 100 acres the greenway functions as an important linear habitat and recreational connection on the south side of Iowa City. At the north terminus lays an elementary school and neighborhood park, the south terminus is a large soccer and cross-country complex, and spurs leading to the west connect an additional elementary school, growing neighborhoods, a popular large recreational area, the Iowa River, and the regional trail network. The greenway functions as a habitat and recreational spine in a growing area of Iowa City.

The largest components of the project will focus on removal of invasive and aggressive woody species that have encroached upon the stormwater management, wetland, and prairie areas of the greenway. Typical invasive or aggressive woody species slated for removal include Autumn Olive, Honeysuckle, Willow, Dogwood, and Mulberry. All woody species will be removed from the stormwater infrastructure areas of the greenway. This work is essential to the continued function of the stormwater infrastructure and health of the wetland and prairie ecosystems that surrounding neighborhoods and many local faunas depend upon. Once controlled for, invasive species will be replaced by planting and overseeding

with native species. These species will further diversify the ecosystem and improve the aesthetics along the greenway. Recognizing the importance of diversity in a habitat matrix, native shrubs planted approximately a decade ago in more upland conditions and a few wooded areas will remain. Additional native trees and shrubs will also be added to a western spur of the trail. The entirety of this project is important in preparation for additional future development along all portions of the greenway. The value of the greenway for stormwater management and as a refuge for flora, fauna, and recreationists will only increase as adjacent development continues.

The value of wetlands and their role in the local ecosystem cannot be overstated. The system of constructed wetlands on this project site fills an important role in a landscape that has lost so much of its natural wetland habitats to development and intensive agriculture. These wetlands serve as a home for many species that depend on the few remaining wetlands in the area for survival. At the same time, they serve as a cleansing sponge that naturally purifies runoff from hundreds of acres of surrounding development and agriculture and makes us better neighbors to those downstream.

Other elements of this project will focus on additions to and improvements of trail amenities. There are approximately three miles of paved trail to explore along the Sycamore Greenway, including a popular out and back route that takes trail users on a four-mile roundtrip. It is a popular area for walkers, runners, cyclists, birders, and nature lovers. Improvements to and additions of amenities like benches, bike repair stations, and signage will serve trail users along the greenway. Additional benches will fill in gaps in seating along the trail and encourage visitors with less stamina to recreate further with promise of regular respite. With long stretches of trail without roadway interruptions, the greenway also provides a safe space for beginner cyclists to venture out on longer trips while building their skills. The bike repair stations positioned at key points along the trail will ensure there is a way to make minor repairs and air up a flat tire along the trail making it more welcoming to cyclists.

There are no known historical or archaeological elements on the project site. However, the region has a long history of human habitation with the first European settlement and trading post less than one mile from the greenway and a history of trail networks crossing through the surrounding area. The project will not impact any historical elements.

## **Maps**

See Attached

## **Relationship to local, regional and state plans**

The project draws from recommendations of the 2017 City of Iowa City Natural Areas Inventory and Management Plan (<https://bit.ly/3B9rxpt>), and 2017 Iowa City Parks Master Plan (<https://bit.ly/3wINsR1>). The Natural Areas Plan includes general recommendations and management briefs for the Sycamore Greenway while the Parks Master Plan provides a broader view of the greenway and its place in the park system. These plans highlight the benefits to be gained from the proposed work and the Natural Areas Plan considers the Sycamore Greenway to be a top five location for investment in the park system.

Johnson County's REAP plan includes a priority of "Protect and preserve remaining woodland, wetland, and prairie vegetation within urban boundaries." The work proposed in this application will restore and protect the integrity of a constructed wetland and prairie complex that has grown to support an array of flora and fauna. This application also supports the goal of "Restore wildlife habitat in wetland, woodland

and marginal soil areas.” The project supports healthy wetland and prairie ecosystems to form a mosaic of habitat where diverse wildlife can thrive. The wetland restoration will also improve the visitor experience and enhance opportunities for environmental education and passive recreation. Additionally, this project supports the goal of "protection and restoration of wetland areas as natural filters for ground water..." as the area naturally purifies runoff from 600 surrounding acres.

This project will contribute to the following goals within the 2018 SCORP priorities.

Priority 1: Availability and diversity of natural resources, parks and outdoor recreation opportunities enhance the quality of life of Iowans.

Goal 2: The Sycamore Greenway connects multiple parks on the south side of Iowa City and provides accessible physical activity in a natural setting close to where people live. The proximity of the park eliminates barriers sometimes found in reaching high quality natural settings in which to recreate. This project will improve the quality of the natural setting which is expected to translate to increased use of the park for physical activity. Use is also expected to increase as the neighborhoods surrounding the greenway continue to develop.

Goal 3: The greenway draws visitors at the local level and is connected to the regional trail network by bikeways. The park also benefits citizens and makes Iowa City a more attractive place for businesses to establish workplaces as it adds to quality of life and the ability to attract workers. This project will improve the desirability of recreating along the greenway and is expected to help draw visitors and economic development in the future as the neighborhood grows.

Priority 2: Natural resource, parks and outdoor recreation opportunities are available to all Iowans.

Goal 1: Iowa City is committed to embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion for all citizens. The planning efforts this grant application stems from are rooted in use of a Social Equity Toolkit. This toolkit prioritizes significant outreach and public input including specific efforts to reach minority and underserved populations.

Priority 3: The right opportunities. In the right place. Done the right way.

Goal 1: Much effort has gone into the planning processes supporting the current proposal and past development of the Sycamore Greenway. The greenway has increased the quality of life for those who access its resources and are in response to local ecosystem and recreational needs. The size, location, and quality of the resources the greenway has to offer make this the right opportunity, in the right place, and are a continuation of projects done the right way.

## Iowa Wildlife Action Plan

The following vision elements and conservation action strategies are supported by this project as it improves diversity and sustainability of habitats of the Sycamore Greenway. With control of invasive non-native plant species and increase in diversity of native plants, wildlife habitat is expected to improve in response to the greater variety of plant species providing food, cover, and breeding sites. Recreational desirability is also expected to increase with this work.

Vision Element: Iowa will have viable wildlife populations that are compatible with modern landscapes and human social tolerance.

-Action: Focus on protection, restoration, reconstruction, connection and enhancement of native plant communities and wildlife habitats.

Vision Element: Iowa will have healthy ecosystems that incorporate diverse, native habitats capable of sustaining viable wildlife populations.

-Action: Use the Plan as a tool for private lands and public land natural resource protection, management and restoration efforts.

Vision Element: Diverse wildlife communities will be developed on public and private lands and waters through the use of adaptive ecological management principles.

-Action: Develop and implement management plans on public and privately-owned lands and waters that promote biodiversity and improve the status of species of greatest conservation need.

-Action: Expand and create local habitat working teams to implement the plans on private and public lands and waters. Provide these teams and private contractors' incentives for equipment.

-Action: Develop and implement a statewide strategy to eradicate invasive species.

Vision Element: More Iowans will participate in wildlife-associated recreation, and all Iowans will have access to publicly owned recreation areas to enjoy wildlife in its many forms.

The Sycamore Greenway and this project further the efforts of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy. The greenway is a wonderful example of using green engineering practices and natural filtering to improve the water quality from the associated 600-acre watershed. This project will improve the natural functions of the greenway and prepare the area for the increased loads it is likely to experience as the surrounding area continues to develop.

### **Environmental Benefits**

Habitat restoration is vital to the overall function of the ecosystems of the Sycamore Greenway. This project will provide environmental benefits through improvement of the flora of the park which will attract wildlife and visitors alike. Invasive plants are abundant in much of the proposed restoration area while smaller patches are in better condition but exist at a tipping point as non-native species start to further encroach. If growth is left unchecked, the invasive vegetation could become much more difficult to control and there is concern the invasive species will spread to other areas in the greenway and watershed.

The ecological restoration of the prairie and wetlands will remove invasive species and promote native species growth and establishment. These actions will work in tandem to increase the resiliency of the

resulting landscape cover. Once restored, prescribed burn plans are ready to be implemented by Iowa City Parks staff to maintain and continue to improve the health of the prairie and watershed.

Restoration of the prairie and wetlands will provide improved water quality in the greenway system and increase the flora's ability to capture runoff. Much of the area currently surrounding the greenway is agricultural land that will experience growth in housing development in the next decade. As surrounding permeable surfaces are replaced by built developments the greenway will only become more important in its role of capturing runoff.

Improved trail amenities will help welcome more recreationists to the already popular Sycamore Greenway. These trail users will be able to experience the beauty of the greenway and make connections that will foster their understanding of and advocacy for the types of environmental features this project will enhance and highlight.

### **Public Benefit Served**

The effects of the proposed ecological restoration are expected to greatly enhance visitor experiences along the Sycamore Greenway and will also help ensure the green infrastructure continues to function properly as it handles greater demands from continued adjacent development. The greenway is currently heavily used by walkers, joggers, cyclists, birders, nature enthusiasts and others with targeted outdoor recreation interests. Completion of this project is expected to improve the aesthetics and general experience of those recreating in the park. This translates into positive social impacts and wellness opportunities to the increasing population along the greenway. The infrastructure value of the greenway also serves the public with greater water quality, flood mitigation, and ecosystem services for a 600-acre drainage area surrounding the greenway.

The ecological restoration will provide continued improvement to the flora and fauna of the greenway and environmental benefits to the surrounding area. Although ongoing and long-term maintenance of the ecosystem will be necessary, this and previous work along the greenway will make that management sustainable with local efforts. Once restored and established, healthy native ecosystems will require less intensive input and promote more self-sustaining networks of vegetation and habitat. This project will return the area to a state that ongoing volunteer efforts and staff capacity can maintain.

Foregoing this project would have a long-term negative impact on native species, recreationists, the greater ecosystem, and the engineering function of the greenway. Rather than delay, action now will come at a reduced cost compared to what would be necessary if the ecosystem is allowed to degrade further. In its current state the area of planned restoration retains much of its reconstructed native plant structure under the non-native plant competition. The native seedbank and natural regeneration will help improve the area as restoration efforts give the native species an advantage.

All City of Iowa City construction projects meet Federal ADA requirements and the City has staff with training and expertise in this area. The recent Parks Master Plan included a physical accessibility audit of all park facilities and efforts are well underway to provide additional accessibility to park users across the park system. This project will ensure the recreation opportunities surrounding over three miles of accessible trail remains attractive to visitors. In addition, Iowa City is committed to using a Social Equity Toolkit when engaging residents which was used in the planning processes that preceded this grant request. This entails additional and specific outreach efforts to underserved populations.

### **Local Support**

Local support for the Sycamore Greenway began at its inception and continues today. The original project was led by retired University of Iowa Earth and Environmental Sciences Professor, Dr. Drake. The stormwater system and wetland creation of the original project was implemented in place of less environmentally beneficial engineering solutions. This collaboration with community experts laid the foundation for a project that has benefited wildlife and recreationists for over 20 years. Volunteer efforts did not stop once the project was constructed. Over the years, volunteers have assisted with maintenance of the greenway, and it has hosted projects and experiences for University of Iowa students multiple times. Today, there is a group of residents who regularly remove invasive species along the greenway and share the joys of the Sycamore Greenway on social media to expand its reach and impact.

Beyond the many volunteer efforts, the Sycamore Greenway is a popular recreation destination for many residents and is well connected to the larger regional trail network. It is a much-loved natural space in close proximity to neighborhoods that continue to grow along its span. The Iowa City South District Plan (<https://rb.gy/qmnwjx>) was updated in 2021 and included public outreach and opportunity to share comments and suggestions. This process once again highlighted the park amenities in the area and the Sycamore Greenway as an important connection for community members moving between the park spaces and recreating along the greenway itself.

Other recent planning processes included the 2017 Natural Areas Management Plan and the 2017 Iowa City Parks Master Plan which had input from a combined 650 residents and engaged 50 partner/service groups. Participation was through stakeholder meetings, written comments, on-line comments, public open houses, Parks and Recreation Commission meetings and City Council meetings and work sessions. All recent planning processes have highlighted local support for parks and greenways.

### **Public Communications Plan**

The City of Iowa City will communicate this project to the public using the following methods:

- Press release about project and REAP funding (example from a previous REAP grant award attached).
- Posting the project materials and timeline on the City Website.
- Announcement of the project and progress updates through City social media including highlighting the REAP Grant funding.






- Public meetings with the Parks Commission and City Council to approve the grant application and award, as well as the contract and acceptance of the work.
- Updates to our volunteer group that assists at the greenway.
- Posting of project plans and updates including the REAP logo in the display case at Robert A. Lee Recreation Center.
- Permanent posting of REAP signage at Sycamore Greenway.

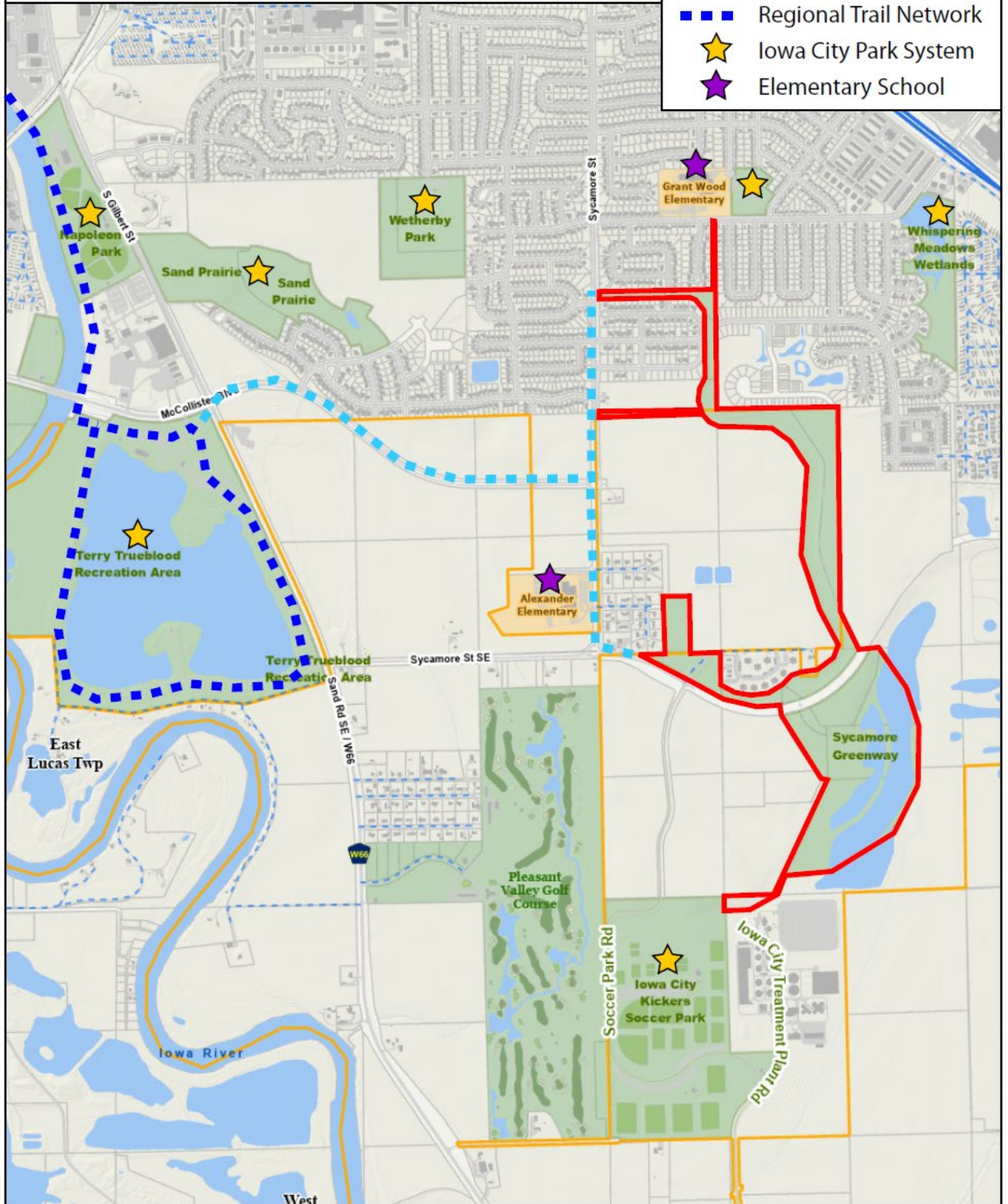
**Project Budget**

Invasive Tree/Shrub Removal	\$125,000
Invasive Tree/Shrub Resprout Herbicide Treatment	\$20,000
Prairie Overseeding	\$30,000
Shrub Planting	\$6,000
Bench Replacements (7) and Additions (3)	\$12,000
Bike Repair Stations (2)	\$4,000
Trail Signage Replacement	\$3,000

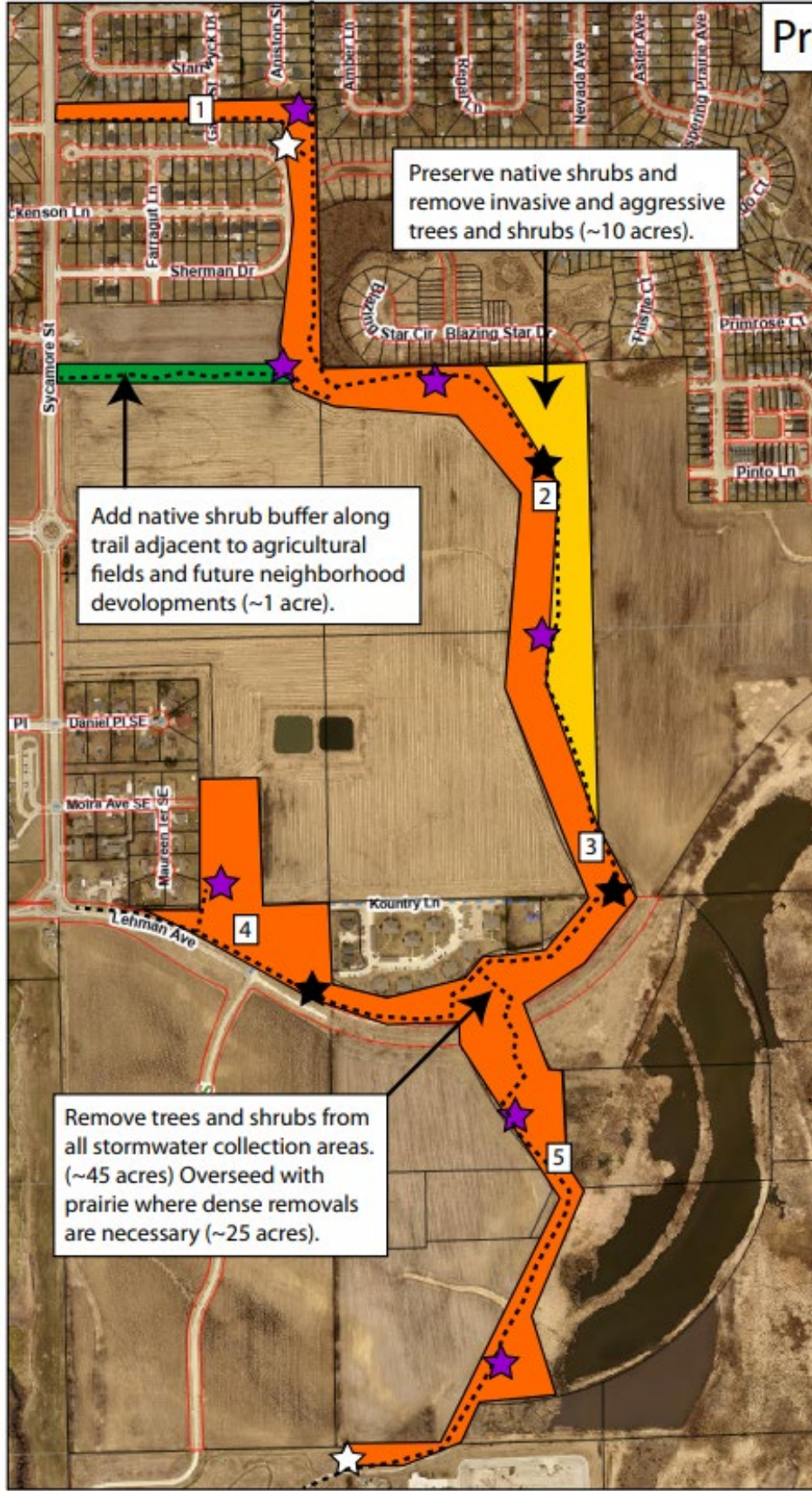


# Sycamore Greenway Location

-  Sycamore Greenway
-  Bikeway Connection
-  Regional Trail Network
-  Iowa City Park System
-  Elementary School



# Project Overview



- Trail
- ☆ Bike Repair Station
- ★ Replacement Bench
- ★ New Bench



## **Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Committee**

---

### **MINUTES**

#### **Johnson County REAP Committee**

**Thursday, August 3, 2023 at 4:00 p.m.**

Second Floor Boardroom, 913 S. Dubuque St., Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Participate in person or by joining the Zoom meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83837717695>

Meeting ID: 838 3771 7695

Or dial (312) 626-6799

### **Agenda**

*Members of the public are welcome to join in person or electronically by video call, which links into the location at the top of this agenda. For those unable to join, public comments may be emailed to [jwenger@johnsoncountyiowa.gov](mailto:jwenger@johnsoncountyiowa.gov) for distribution to Committee members.*

*Johnson County strives to host inclusive, accessible meetings and events that enable all individuals to engage fully. To request a modification, inquire about accessibility, or request language interpretation, contact the Board of Supervisors Office at (319) 356-6000 or email [jwenger@johnsoncountyiowa.gov](mailto:jwenger@johnsoncountyiowa.gov) at least 48 hours in advance.*

*Thank you for participating in today's meeting.*

1. Call to order: 4:00 p.m.
2. Public comment – None.
3. Election of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson – Deferred.
4. Approve August 4, 2022 Johnson County REAP Committee meeting minutes – Moved by Dahms, second by Linda Schreiber, approved.
5. Presentation of REAP grant applications for review and comment by the Committee:
  - a. City of Hills application for \$50,000 for a Songbird Sanctuary Park – presented by Tamara, Deputy City Clerk and Mayor Tim Kemp
  - b. City of Iowa City application for \$200,000 for the Ashton House Grounds Ecological Restoration and Recreation Amenities – presented by Laura Hawks
6. Discuss/review the *2021-2025 Johnson County Resource Enhancement and Protection Plan*
  - a. Per Iowa Code Chapter 455A.20, the Committee is required to submit a five-year plan, including one-year expenditure plan, to the Iowa DNR
7. Next meeting date and time: Thursday, August 1, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. (tentative)
8. Adjourn