

Black River Area Summary Report

Information about the Applicant

Since 1986, the Black River Area Foundation's mission has been "to enhance the quality of life in the Black River Falls area". We work to realize our goal with the support of individuals, families, businesses and organizations that share this commitment to continuously enhance the Black River Falls Community. We achieve this by: Providing a vehicle for donors with diverse community interests; protecting donations through prudent stewardship; Serving as a resource and catalyst to accomplish community projects. Expanding our communities endowment by encouraging philanthropy. We address a broad range of community goals rather than focusing on one particular issue. In this way, we are able to meet the changing needs and provide support to the people who live and work in the Black River Falls area.

The city of Black River Falls is the seat of Jackson County, Wisconsin, a rural county with approximately 21,000 residents and 4,000 children under the age of 18. There are around 2,000 people with a disability under the age of 65. Seeing that our community has generously supported many active programs for the aging population in our county, it became apparent that a need existed to support the younger disabled population in Black River Falls, Jackson County, and surrounding areas. This was how the accessible playground committee came to be created and will now operate under the umbrella of the Black River Area Foundation. The committee has now partnered with disability advocacy and assistance groups in the area to ensure this park can address this need.

Statement of Need

Currently, there is not an all-abilities public park or playground within a reasonable distance of our neighborhood. The nearest inclusive parks exist in Eau Claire, La Crosse, and Tomah, all of which are a 45-75 minute drive for residents in Jackson County. The Playground Improvement Planning Committee with Black River Falls Parks and Rec will help construct a local community space intentionally designed to help all children and caregivers feel welcome. The playground we are looking to replace is over 23 years old, is made of wood equipment that is currently rotting and has sand as the base under the equipment making it difficult for wheelchairs, walkers, and strollers to maneuver. We partnered with the City to choose this location because it is central to our town, and is an existing park infrastructure with two covered picnic areas, a fishing pond with an accessible fishing platform, and quarter-mile paved sidewalk walking path through the park. This wonderful community park already exists to serve as an important meeting place in our community, yet the playground is decades old and does not match the quality of the rest of the park. It seems logical that the all-abilities park would be placed here because the other amenities available at the park will make it a worthwhile travel destination for families with disabled children in surrounding counties and communities.

Project Goals and Expected Benefits

We hope that in creating an inclusive play space for children of all abilities, we can create a symbiotic outcome: children with disabilities making meaningful friendships that increase well-being and children without disabilities having exposure to and making valued friendships with those who have abilities different from their own. All abilities playgrounds are also deemed to be multi-generational, which allows parents and caregivers with disabilities or limited mobility to participate with their children. While this park improvement will benefit all children in Jackson County as almost all play grounds in our community are many years old, our hope is that the accessibility of this playground will allow for a safe, engaging, and valuable meeting place for all children, parents and caregivers, regardless of household income, age or disability.

Project Implementation Plan

Due to the large amount of interest in this project, The Playground Improvement Planning Committee has grown large enough to create sub-committees in charge of community fundraising, small and large business fundraising, as well as grant writing. In addition, the equipment planning committee who will choose the appropriate equipment pieces for this park includes: Rhonda Kastem Life Services Supervisor at Aptive and Sarah Larkin Board Member of the Disability Association of Jackson County (DAJC). Chad Duerkop, they City of Black River Falls Parks and Recreation Director, has volunteered to handle all applicable permits:

Timeline (subject to change based on donations and contractor timelines):

- Fall/Winter 2022: Fundraising phase
- Spring 2023 Go out for bid to several playground companies
- Late Summer/Fall 2023: Project Installation and completion

Evaluation Plan

We will use data from the annual health survey distributed by the Jackson County Health and Human Services Department. We anticipate an increase in all community members responding they accessed outdoor public resources to increase health and wellness. The committee will also seek feedback from our disability partners: DAJC, Aptiv, and OT/PT in both school and clinic settings.

Budget

Playground Equipment	\$200-\$250,000.00
Professional Installation	\$50,000.00
PIP Surfacing (7800sq ft)	\$180,000.00
Freight/Other charges/Permits	\$10-\$30,000.00
Removal existing equipment/surface	\$25-\$50,000.00
Restoration Landscaping	\$10-\$30,000.00
Extras (shade clothes, benches)	\$0.00 ?
Total Budget	\$525,000-\$675,000

Staff Recommendation

The grant application could be considered for approval. There are many unknown costs related to the budget, but the playground equipment would provide a direct benefit to persons with disabilities. At a cost of somewhere between \$200,000.00-\$250,000.00 a grant from Wispact for \$10,000.00 could be directly applied. The timeline is a challenge as they will not know when the project can be completed as they continue to seek additional donations for the project. Wispact could approve a grant for \$10,000.00 with a condition that the proceeds be returned if the project is not completed in time for the year end 2023 deadline.