



104 United Drive
Collinsville, IL 62234
Phone: (618) 346-4905
Email: info@meprd.org

Press Release

Contact: Bryan Werner or Cole Preston
Phone: (618) 346-4905

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METRO EAST PARK AND RECREATION DISTRICT ANNOUNCES FY 2027 GRANT CYCLE, OPENING MORE THAN \$8.4 MILLION FOR PARKS, TRAILS, AND RECREATION

Funding supports park improvements, trail development, community planning, and public events throughout Madison and St. Clair Counties, IL.

MADISON AND ST. CLAIR COUNTIES, IL — The Metro East Park and Recreation District (MEPRD) today announced the opening of its Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) Grant Cycle, making more than \$8.4 million available to support local parks, trails, recreation facilities, planning initiatives, and community events throughout Madison and St. Clair Counties.

Applications for all four grant programs open July 15, 2026, and will be accepted on a rolling basis through May 31, 2027, or until available funding has been fully committed, whichever occurs first.

"For more than two decades, MEPRD has partnered with local governments, park and transit districts, and others to enhance quality of life throughout the Metro East," said Bryan Werner, Executive Director of MEPRD. "The FY27 grant cycle represents another significant investment by MEPRD in the parks, trails, recreational amenities, and community spaces that make our region a healthier, more vibrant, and more connected place to live."

FY 2027 FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

For the new cycle, MEPRD is offering four (4) funding programs designed to support a wide range of community and regional needs:

Park and Trail Grant Program supports the acquisition, development, and improvement of public parks, trails, and recreational facilities throughout Madison and St. Clair Counties.

- **Total Program Budget:** \$5,000,000
- **Maximum Grant Award:** Up to \$500,000 for qualifying trail projects; or up to \$250,000 for eligible park and recreation; or up to 40% of eligible project costs (whichever is less).
- **Eligible Applicants:** Municipalities, Townships, Counties, Transportation Districts, Park Districts, Universities and 501(c)3 Nonprofit Organizations in Madison and/or St. Clair Counties, IL.
- For more information, visit www.meprd.org/park-trail-grant.

Community Planning Grant Program supports the development of community-wide (jurisdiction-wide) master plans for parks and recreation, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and natural resource planning initiatives.

- **Total Program Budget:** \$400,000
- **Maximum Grant Award:** Up to \$40,000 or 40% of eligible costs, whichever is less.
- **Eligible Applicants:** Municipalities, Townships, Counties, Transportation Districts, Park Districts in Madison and/or St. Clair Counties, IL.
- For more information, visit www.meprd.org/planning-grant.

Event Sponsorship Grant Program provides financial assistance to public agencies and 501(c)3 nonprofits for qualifying public events held in Madison and/or St. Clair Counties that increase awareness and use of local parks, trails, and other public recreational facilities in the Metro East.

- **Total Program Budget:** \$30,000
- **Maximum Grant Award:** Up to \$2,500 or 40% of eligible out-of-pocket event costs, whichever is less.
- **Eligible Applicants:** Public Organizations and 501(c)3 Nonprofit Organizations
- **Eligible events** include, but are not limited to, physical activity and recreation-related events (e.g., 5Ks, Walks, Bike Rides, and Biathlons) and those promoting environmental stewardship, education, and other community benefit.
- For more information, visit www.meprd.org/event-sponsorship.

Priority Paths Grant Program provides targeted financial assistance for the development of priority trail connections designed to close critical regional gaps, creating a more cohesive and interconnected regional trail network.

- **Total Program Budget:** \$3,000,000
- **Maximum Grant Award:** Up to \$1,500,000 per project or 40% of eligible project costs, whichever is less.
- **Eligible Applicants:** Madison County Transit (MCT) and St. Clair County Transit District (SCCTD)
- For more information, visit www.meprd.org/priority-paths-grant.

Applicants are limited to one MEPRD award per program during the FY 2027 cycle. Because programs close when their respective budgets are fully awarded — which may occur before the May 31, 2027 deadline — applicants are encouraged to submit as early as possible.

Complete program guidelines and application materials will be available at meprd.org/funding beginning July 15, 2026. Prospective applicants with questions are encouraged to contact MEPRD Grant Coordinator Cole Preston at (618) 346-4905 or cpreston@meprd.org.

Building on Recent Successes

The FY27 grant cycle builds upon another successful year of local investment through MEPRD's FY26 funding programs. Through partnerships with municipalities, park districts, transit districts, and others, MEPRD helped advance projects that expand recreational opportunities, improve public health,

strengthen community gathering spaces, and enhance regional connectivity throughout Madison and St. Clair Counties.

MEPRD's FY26 grant awards supported:

- More than three (3) miles of new bike trail development and trail expansion projects.
- Reconstruction of nearly 7 miles of existing regional trail infrastructure.
- New recreational amenities, including pickleball courts, playgrounds, sports field improvements, pavilions, and expansion of park paths.
- Long-range planning initiatives to evaluate existing park assets and help inform and guide future park and recreation needs, priorities, and investments.
- Community events that encouraged approximately 2,000 residents/visitors to walk, run, bike, volunteer, and explore local parks and trails in the Metro East.

"Whether it's a new trail connection, an upgraded recreation facility, a neighborhood park improvement, or a community event that encourages residents to get outdoors, these investments create lasting benefits for those living, working, or visiting in the Metro East," said Cole Preston, MEPRD Grant Coordinator.

Over its 25+ year history, MEPRD has supported more than 315 local projects (48 of which are still active) with nearly \$46 Million invested to date to advance its mission... and that impact is only expected to grow. "These investments create opportunities for residents to be active, connect with nature, and enjoy high-quality public spaces close to home ... and collectively, the projects being supported help create healthier communities, expanding recreational opportunities, attracting visitors, and strengthening the region's growing network of parks and trails," said Preston.

Let's Continue Building a Greener, Healthier, and Better-Connected Metro East

MEPRD encourages you to visit your local park or trail and take a moment to appreciate the value it adds to your life and those around you. To see a full list of the ongoing and completed projects funded in part by MEPRD, go to www.meprd.org/projects.

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The Metro East Park and Recreation District (MEPRD) was established by the voters of Madison and St. Clair Counties, Illinois, in November 2000. MEPRD collaborates with local governments, special districts, and other jurisdictions to develop and improve parks, recreational facilities, and trails throughout the two-county area. Additionally, MEPRD works to increase awareness and utilization of these amenities by providing related maps, data, statistics, and marketing materials.

For more information, visit www.meprd.org.

MEPRD FY 2026 GRANT CYCLE – AWARD RECAP

Over the past year alone, MEPRD funding helped advance more than twenty projects and events across the Metro East, including new trail connections, park improvements, recreational facility upgrades, and community planning initiatives.

Expanding the Regional Trail Network

- **City of Collinsville (\$164,973.10):** Construction of a 0.24-mile segment of the Summit Avenue Shared-Use Path, from Knotting Hill Court to Dooner Drive.
- **City of Edwardsville (\$300,000.00):** Construction of a 0.36-mile concrete shared-use path (10') along New Poag Road connecting to the MCT Goshen Trail.
- **City of Fairview Heights (\$148,926.92):** Construction of Phase 4 of the St. Ellen Trail, a 0.2-mile shared-use path (10') along Ashland Avenue, from Judy Lane to 300' east of IL-159 (near Krispy Kreme).
- **Jarvis Township (\$300,000.00):** Construction of Phase 4 of the Silver Creek Trail along US-40, a 0.83-mile shared-use path (10') extending from Creekside Drive (CA Henning Elementary School) to Bethany Drive (Triad High School).
- **Madison County Transit (\$300,000.00):** Reconstruction of 6.9 miles of the MCT Nature Trail, from Mockingbird Lane to University Drive. Includes trail surface improvements and rehabilitation of four (4) bridges.
- **St. Clair County Transit District (\$300,000.00):** Construction of a 1.1-mile shared-use path (10') along Union Hill Road, between Frank Scott Parkway and Longacre Drive.
- **City of Wood River (\$300,000):** Construction of Phase 1 of the IL-143 Shared-Use Path, a 0.36-mile, shared-use path (10') that will extend along the north side of IL-143, from the MCT Wood River Transit Station to 2nd Street.

Upgrading Sports & Recreation Facilities

- **Freeburg Park District (\$150,000.00):** Replacement of lighting fixtures with brighter, energy-efficient LED luminaires on ballfields 1-4, and replacement of four (4) damaged light poles.
- **City of Highland (\$89,700.00):** Conversion of tennis courts into five (5) pickleball courts at Spindler Park, along with parking lot improvements and new accessible routes connecting the parking lot to the courts.
- **City of O'Fallon (\$150,000.00):** Installation of synthetic turf on Soccer Fields #9 and #10 at the O'Fallon Family Sports Park.

Elevating Local Parks & Amenities

- **Village of Glen Carbon (\$150,000.00):** Phase 3 improvements to Schon Park, including construction of four (4) pickleball courts, two (2) tennis courts, and two (2) basketball courts, along with connecting paths, new lighting, and landscaping.

- **Village of Hamel (\$150,000.00):** Development of the 3.26-acre Hamel Heroes Park, featuring a firetruck-themed playground, zip-line, and challenge course, wiffleball field, multi-use path (10'), pavilion, restrooms, parking, and various site furnishings.
- **Village of Maryville (\$150,000.00):** Construction of an open-air pavilion with an elevated stage at Firemen's Park, along with general site improvements.
- **Village of Millstadt (\$17,764.80):** Installation of new sunshades at the Millstadt Municipal Pool.
- **Roxana Community Park District (\$150,000.00):** Construction of a restroom and pavilion building at Burbank Park, with connecting sidewalks and ancillary furnishings.
- **St. Clair County (\$150,000.00):** Construction of a 1-mile extension of the Engelmann Park Trail (6') and installation of three (3) benches.
- **Tri-Township Park District (\$28,635.18):** Installation of a new security camera network at Tri-Township Park, including twenty (20) total cameras, necessary networking/fixture equipment, and integration with the local police department.

Planning for the Future:

- **City of Alton (\$39,999.00):** Development of a City-wide parks master plan.
- **Village of Smithton (\$14,000):** Development of a Village-wide parks master plan.
- **City of Belleville (\$40,000):** Update to the City of Belleville's 2008 *Parks, Recreation, and Greenways Master Plan*.

Encouraging Public Use of Parks and Trails:

- **Village of Millstadt (\$2,500):** Millstadt 35th Annual Parks Biathlon & Parks 5K/Run (2025) – 9/14/2025
- **SIUE Foundation (\$2,500):** Cougars Unleashed Homecoming Run (2025) – 9/27/2025
- **Emma L. Wilson King Foundation (\$2,500):** EMMAFEST 5K Walk/Run (2025) – 10/4/2025
- **City of Highland (\$2,500):** Gobble Hobble (2025) – 11/27/2025
- **City of Belleville (\$2,500):** Gingerbread 5K Walk/Run (2025) – 12/6/2025
- **HeartLands' Conservancy (\$2,500):** Exploration Garden Volunteer Stewardship Days (2026) Event Series – 3/13, 4/10, and 5/8/2026