



# Planning Implementation Tools Capital Improvement Plan



Center for Land Use Education

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## TOOL DESCRIPTION

A capital improvement plan (CIP) is a community planning and fiscal management tool used to coordinate the location, timing and financing of capital improvements over a multi-year period — usually 4-6 years. Capital improvements refer to major, non-recurring physical expenditures such as land, buildings, public infrastructure and equipment. The CIP includes a description of proposed capital improvement projects ranked by priority, a year-by-year schedule of expected project funding, and an estimate of project costs and financing sources. The CIP is a working document and should be reviewed and updated annually to reflect changing community needs, priorities and funding opportunities.

## COMMON USES

### Annual Capital Budgeting

Preparation of the CIP and annual budget are closely linked. The first year of the CIP, known as the capital budget, outlines specific projects and appropriates funding for those projects. It is usually adopted in conjunction with the government's annual operating budget. Projects and financing sources outlined for subsequent years are not authorized until the annual budget for those years is legally adopted. The out years serve as a guide for future planning and are subject to further review and modification.

### Plan Implementation

The CIP is a powerful tool for implementing a community's comprehensive plan, strategic plan, and other planning documents. Capital investments such as utility extensions, highway improvements, and the purchase of parkland or environmental corridors can have a substantial impact on patterns of growth and development. By providing funding for strategic investments at a given time and location, the CIP helps ensure that development occurs consistent with a community's plans and vision.

## Purposes of Capital Improvement Planning:

- ◆ Ensure the timely repair and replacement of aging infrastructure.
- ◆ Provide a level of certainty for residents, businesses and developers regarding the location and timing of public investments.
- ◆ Identify the most economical means of financing capital improvements.
- ◆ Provide an opportunity for public input in the budget and financing process.
- ◆ Eliminate unanticipated, poorly planned, or unnecessary capital expenditures.
- ◆ Eliminate sharp increases in tax rates, user fees and debt levels to cover unexpected capital improvements.
- ◆ Ensure that patterns of growth and development are consistent with the comprehensive plan.
- ◆ Balance desired public improvements with the community's financial resources.



*Figure 1: The capital improvement plan is used to identify, prioritize and assign funding to major capital expenditures such as land, buildings, public infrastructure and equipment.*

## What is a Capital Improvement?

Most communities define capital improvements as major public expenditures, usually physical in nature.

Local policies may specify the *cost* and *useful life* of qualified projects. For example, a small community may set minimum project costs at \$1,000 or \$2,500, while larger communities set the threshold at \$10,000 or \$25,000. Expenses below this level are considered “operational” and appear in the annual budget. The Government Finance Officers Association recommends a useful service life of at least three to five years.

Common categories of capital expenditures include:

1. Purchase of major equipment (*ex. playground equipment, snow plow, computers*).
2. Acquisition of land for a public purpose (*ex. park, landfill, industrial site*).
3. Construction, expansion or major renovation of a public building or facility (*ex. library, roads, sewage treatment plant, building retrofit for energy efficiency*).
4. Related planning, engineering, design, appraisal or feasibility costs (*ex. LEED certification, architectural fees*).

Note: Some communities specifically exclude vehicles and equipment from the CIP.

## IMPLEMENTATION

### CREATION

The following general steps are involved in preparing a capital improvement plan:

1. *Project Submission* – Local agencies and departments are asked to submit a list of capital improvement projects in order of priority. Project request forms may prompt the applicant to provide a project description and justification, an estimate of initial project costs, ongoing operating and maintenance costs, and recommended funding sources.
2. *Evaluation and Selection* – The CIP team reviews, prioritizes and selects projects based on specific criteria, such as:
  - desired service level standard
  - project demand, as determined by an inventory of existing land, equipment and facility conditions
  - number of residents or geographic area served
  - return on investment, cost savings or revenue generation
  - sustainability or energy efficiency improvements
  - economic, environmental, aesthetic or social impacts
  - public health, safety or other legal concerns
  - consistency with community plans and policies
  - public or political support
3. *Financial Analysis* – Financial data, including historic and projected local government revenues, expenditures and debt service are used to assess the community’s ability to pay for proposed projects and to select appropriate financing tools.
4. *Plan Preparation* – The draft CIP includes a list of recommended projects by funding year, project and scheduling details, and financing sources. Detailed maps, photos, graphs, timelines and other illustrations may accompany the plan.
5. *Review and Adoption* – Following public review and revisions, the governing body adopts the CIP and capital budget.

### ADMINISTRATION

A single official is usually responsible for coordinating preparation of the CIP. This task may be assigned to the chief executive or administrative officer (mayor, president, manager, administrator), a budget officer, or a member of the planning, finance or public works departments. The CIP coordinator often works with an advisory committee which may consist of local officials, citizens, or key departmental staff. It is also a good idea to refer the CIP to the plan commission for review and approval. In most communities, the CIP is prepared in the months preceding adoption of the annual government budget. To provide sufficient time for project solicitation, financial analysis and community input, preparation of the CIP may take on a year-round function in some communities. The CIP should be reviewed and updated annually.

# Report Card: Capital Improvement Plan

<b>Cost</b>	<b>Money or staff resources required to implement tool.</b>
<b>B</b>	Once approved, projects recommended in the CIP are funded through the annual capital budget. A variety of funding mechanisms may be used to fund individual projects such as property taxes, user fees, impact fees, special assessments, grants or bonds. The presence of a CIP can help a community to achieve other financial goals such as securing a good credit rating (thus lowering borrowing rates), promoting economic development, avoiding unexpected expenditures, and competing more successfully for state or federal funds. The team assembled to prepare the CIP must be skilled in financial management (i.e. budgeting, cost estimation and forecasting), project management, and public participation.
<b>Public Acceptance</b>	<b>The public's positive or negative perception of the tool.</b>
<b>B</b>	The CIP helps to keep the public informed about future public improvements, thus providing a level of certainty to residents, developers and business owners regarding community vitality, tax burdens, and service costs.
<b>Political Acceptance</b>	<b>Politician's willingness to implement tool.</b>
<b>B</b>	The CIP provides a rational, defensible and analytical approach for scheduling public improvements, thus reducing pressure on politicians to implement projects that are not highly ranked. Politicians that are uncomfortable sharing control with the public or other levels of government may shy away from this tool.
<b>Equity</b>	<b>Fairness to stakeholders regarding who incurs costs and consequences.</b>
<b>A</b>	Ranking projects based on pre-determined, measurable criteria such as number of residents served, geographic area served, or socioeconomic needs can help ensure that public improvements are strategically located where public needs and priorities are greatest.
<b>Administration</b>	<b>Level of complexity to manage, maintain, enforce, and monitor the tool.</b>
<b>B</b>	Developing and implementing a CIP takes a considerable amount of work from local officials, administrative staff and departmental staff, particularly upfront. After the first year, the work becomes more familiar and less demanding. An annual review process and project request forms can make the process run more smoothly.
<b>Scale</b>	<b>The geographic scale at which tool is best implemented.</b>
<b>City, Village, Town, County</b>	Use of the CIP is most common among cities and villages, and growing among counties. Town use is limited but also appropriate.

## GRADING EXPLANATION

A - Excellent  
B - Above Average

C - Average  
D - Below Average

F - Failing

Grades are subjective ratings and should be considered in light of local circumstances.

## WISCONSIN EXAMPLES

Figure 2: This excerpt from the Marshfield CIP shows common CIP features such as a project description and justification statement; expected capital, operating and other impacts; detailed funding sources by year; project rank; and graphic details.

**Marshfield, WI** - Since the 1990s, the City of Marshfield has prepared an annual five-year capital improvement plan with the stated purpose of providing for the timely renewal and extension of the city's physical plant, controlling the city's long-term debt, and coordinating capital development. The CIP serves as a link between the city's comprehensive plan and annual budget process.

### Capital Improvement Program

2008 thru 2012

City of Marshfield, Wisconsin

**Project Name:** Wildwood Station-McMillan Marsh Trail

**Project #:** PR-L-1647

**Contact:** Ed Englehart

**Department:** Parks & Recreation

**Category:** L - Parks

**Useful Life:** Unassigned

**Priority:** Level 1

**Description:** The project would complete a pedestrian/bicycle trail from Wildwood Park on the south to McMillan Avenue near Fig Avenue on the north. This project narrowly missed 80/20 funding by the State of Wisconsin in 2006 and will be resubmitted in the next round of state trail funding allocations in 2008. The project will require acquisition of the former Texas Spur rail corridor from 7th Street south to Wildwood Park and cooperation from the School District of Marshfield for the trail segment on the west boundary of Grant School. A segment of the trail from Depot Street to Cleveland Street will consist of a combination of on road bike lanes and sidewalks. The remainder of the trail is proposed to be 10' asphalt surface.

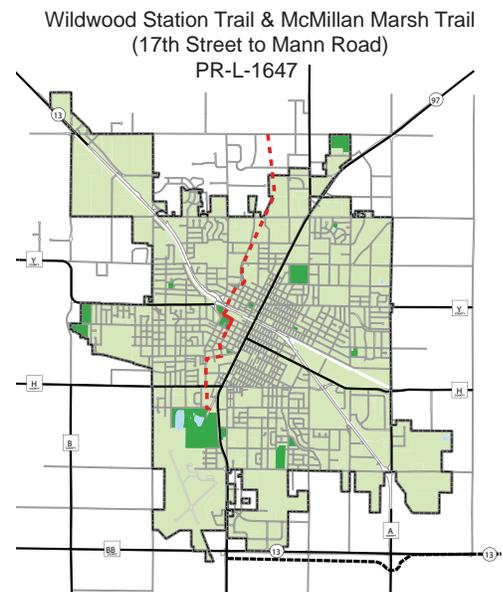
**Justification:** This would provide a key connector segment to other existing trails through the center of the trail system plan, including the Veteran's Parkway pedestrian overpass, and would create a connection to the medical complex area, Security Health, and Grant School. This project was suggested by the Friends of the Trails and is supported by staff. Design and R.O.W. acquisition will occur in 2010 and construction in 2011. It will be important to continue to include St. Joseph's Hospital, the Marshfield Clinic and the School District of Marshfield in the planning of the project.

**Operational Impact/Other:** Increased maintenance cost for mowing, snow removal, and other trail and grounds maintenance.

Expenditures	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total
Design			100,000			100,000
Right of Way			157,000			157,000
Construction				725,000		725,000
<b>Total</b>			257,000	725,000		982,000

Funding Sources	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total
Non-Local Revenue			207,000	580,000		787,000
Operating Funds				25,000		25,000
Room Tax			50,000	120,000		170,000
<b>Total</b>			257,000	725,000		982,000



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Bowyer, Robert A. (1993). Capital Improvement Programs: Linking Budgeting and Planning. American Planning Association, Planning Advisory Service Report 442.
- Chandler, Michael. (1996-97). Capital Improvement Programs – Parts I, II and III. Planning Commissioners Journal, Numbers 25, 26 and 27.
- Tigue, Patricia. (1996). Capital Improvement Programming: A Guide for Smaller Governments. Government Finance Officers Association.
- Vogt, A. John. (2004). Capital Budgeting and Finance: A Guide for Local Governments. International City/County Management Association.

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