



Trails for Everyone

Community Voices and Priorities
for the Future of Lawrence Area Trails

Contents

- 1** / Introduction
- 2** / Key findings and priorities
- 3** / How people use trails
- 4** / What people appreciate about trails
- 5** / Challenges and barriers
 - Connectivity gaps and roadway safety
 - Maintenance and upkeep
 - Trail etiquette and shared use
 - Amenities and wayfinding
- 8** / Community priorities for future trail investments
- 10** / Looking ahead
- 11** / Acknowledgements
- 13** / Appendix A. Demographics
- 14** / Appendix B. Methods
- 15** / Appendix C. About Friends of Lawrence Area Trails

July 1, 2026

A community engagement report prepared
by Friends of Lawrence Area Trails (FLAT)

With deep appreciation to the Sunflower
Foundation who provided financial support
for data collection, analysis, and report
development.

Introduction

Lawrence area residents care deeply about trails. Trails are one of our most frequently-used and appreciated community assets ([2022 City of Lawrence Community Survey Findings Report](#)). Friends of Lawrence Area Trails (FLAT) recently engaged with hundreds of community residents, through a survey and a series of planned forums in the community, to better understand community perceptions of our trail system. Residents described trails as an essential community asset supporting recreation, transportation, public health, environmental quality, and overall quality of life. People consistently emphasized that trails make Lawrence feel more connected, more accessible, and more livable.

This report summarizes what community members shared with FLAT about how they use trails, what they value most about the current system, the challenges they experience, and what they hope to see in the future. The findings highlight areas for improvement, but also show our community values our local trail system and strongly supports continued investment in safer, more connected, and better maintained trails throughout Lawrence and the surrounding area.



Trails are one
of the best
things about
Lawrence.

“

Key findings and priorities



Safety

One of our community's top priorities is trail safety. Safety at road/trail intersections is a primary concern.



Connected Trails

Residents want a more connected trail system that avoids conflicts with roadways and vehicle traffic.



Maintenance

Ongoing maintenance of the trail system is valued as much as expansion.



Development

Ongoing development of the trail system, especially completing the Lawrence Loop, is strongly supported.

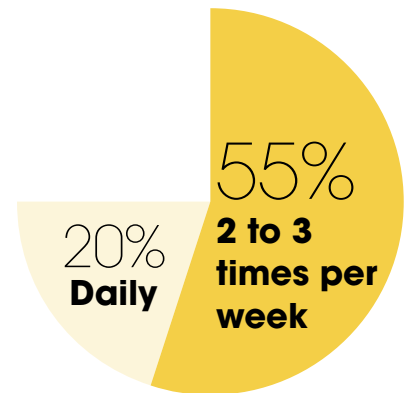


Access to Trails

Residents value trails for recreation, access to nature, connections to priority destinations, and enhancing quality of life.

How people use trails

People in Lawrence use area trails frequently, and for an array of reasons. Over half of survey respondents reported using area trails three or more times per week, many (almost one in five) on a daily basis. We enjoy using trails for recreation, particularly biking, walking, running, and experiencing nature. At the same time, many residents also described using trails to commute, access destinations around town, and travel without relying on cars.



Trail Use Frequency



Biking

20%



Walking

19%



Experiencing Nature

19%



Time with friends/family

12%



Transportation to non-work destinations

9%



Most of my trail use is spent exploring with my kids. I like trails that feel private, drenched in nature, safe, and accessible.

What people appreciate about trails

Community members have a strong appreciation for the local trail system and repeatedly described trails as one of Lawrence's most valuable community amenities. What residents appreciate most is safety, accessibility, recreation, health, and opportunities to experience nature.

One of the most common themes during FLAT's engagement efforts was safety and separation from traffic. Many respondents emphasized that trails allow people to walk, run, or bike in ways that feel safer and less stressful than traveling on roads. Several comments specifically referred to the comfort of being able to bike with reduced interaction with traffic.

Residents also valued the accessibility and connectivity provided by the trail system. Respondents frequently praised the ability to access trails from different neighborhoods and connect to destinations throughout the community.

I appreciate being able to connect
across Lawrence without always
needing a car.

“





“

I like to use the trails as a way to get out into nature, to be around landscapes and wildlife.

Many respondents also emphasized the recreational and mental health benefits associated with trail use. Walking, biking, running, and spending time outdoors were repeatedly described as important contributors to physical activity, stress reduction, and overall quality of life.

The Lawrence Loop was mentioned frequently as one of the most valued components of the trail system. Residents praised the Loop’s design, accessibility, connectivity, and diverse environments it passes through on its journey around town. Comments reflected a sense of community pride in the Loop as a signature local amenity. One respondent described the Loop as “one of the best things Lawrence has done,” while another praised the ability to “ride around the city almost entirely separated from traffic.”

Challenges and barriers

While participants expressed strong appreciation of our trails, they also shared varied concerns, including connectivity gaps, conflicts with vehicles, maintenance issues, user conflicts, and uneven geographic access across the community.

Connectivity gaps and roadway safety

The most common concern involved disconnected trail segments and dangerous roadway crossings. Many respondents described frustration with trails that end abruptly and then require users to navigate busy streets, or that fail to connect key destinations. Incomplete trail networks reduce convenience and safety, particularly for cyclists and families. Several respondents noted that “gaps in the system make it difficult to travel continuously across town,” while others pointed to “dangerous street crossings” that interrupt otherwise comfortable trail routes.

Maintenance and upkeep

Maintenance emerged as another major concern. While many respondents noted overall good conditions on our trails, residents also mentioned pavement cracks, flooding, snow and ice accumulation, debris, and vegetation overgrowth as barriers that reduce trail usability and comfort. A high percentage of participants emphasized that maintaining existing trails is just as important as expanding the network.

It's hard to get downtown on foot or on a bike, which is crazy for a pedestrian-oriented community.

“

Trail etiquette and shared use

Residents discussed user conflicts, insufficient amenities, and wayfinding challenges. Conflicts between different types of trail users were commonly mentioned. Respondents described challenges associated with crowded trails, fast-moving cyclists, unleashed dogs, and inconsistent trail etiquette. Some walkers reported feeling uncomfortable around cyclists traveling at high speeds, while some cyclists expressed frustration with pedestrians blocking paths or failing to maintain awareness of other users. One respondent mentioned “people not paying attention or sharing the trail,” while another cited concerns about “speeding bikes on narrow sections.”

Amenities and wayfinding

Other concerns were an insufficient number of benches or places to sit and rest along trails, not enough water fountains and restrooms, poor lighting, limited shade cover on some trails, and a lack of trail maps and directional signage. One respondent noted, “It would be great to have some covered benches along the sunny areas, some cool resting areas.” Several people indicated an interest in more lighting, while another noted, “I am not keen on lighting for trails, as I worry about light pollution.” Several individuals described their concerns about signage. One explained, “My main wish would be for more maps at trailheads... I like to see a map so I know I won't get lost and know how far to expect to travel.” Another noted, “There are enough offshoot trails that sometimes you come to a fork. If you don't already know the trail, there's not a clear way to know. Signage at the beginning of the trail would give people an idea what they are getting into.” A number of respondents noted that not everyone has ready access to area trails and noted a limited number of formal “trailheads” and limited access to trails through the public transit system.

What matters most is
my ability to ride my bike
without conflicts with cars.

“



Community priorities for future trail investments

Across all methodologies of data collection, residents emphasized several shared priorities for future trail investment. They emphasized that ongoing improvements would make the system more welcoming and easier to navigate for people of all ages and experience levels.

To understand investment priorities, FLAT asked survey respondents to rank a series of proposed trail improvements in order of priority, while participants at in-person community engagement sessions completed an interactive budgeting exercise. The methods yielded different results, although some clear priorities did emerge.

Issue/Improvement priorities as ranked by respondents

Weighted Priority Rank	Issue/Improvement
1	Safety improvements at road/trail intersections
2	Finish the Lawrence Loop
3	Establish wayfinding/signage system for trails
4	Build hard surface trails (other than Loop)
5	Routine trail maintenance
6	Improve trail system connectivity
7	Improve amenities (lighting, bathrooms, etc.) along trails
8	Build more natural surface trails

Budget priorities as ranked by respondents

Budget Priority Rank	Issue/Improvement
1	Finish the Lawrence Loop
2	Build more natural surface trails
3	Routine trail maintenance
4	Safety improvements at road/trail intersections
5 (tie)	Improve trail system connectivity
5 (tie)	Improve amenities (lighting, bathrooms, etc.) along trails
7	Establish wayfinding/signage system for trails
8	Build hard surface trails (other than Loop)

There was particularly strong agreement around the need for future, ongoing investments in:

- Completion of the Lawrence Loop
- Safety improvements, including improvements of trail crossings of roadways
- Ongoing maintenance of the trail system

Consistent support for completing the Lawrence Loop in both the survey and budgeting exercises confirm that the Loop is viewed as a central long-term investment priority for the community.

Survey responses suggest that safety improvements at road/trail intersections are a resident priority and align closely with many open-ended comments, where roadway crossings and conflicts with vehicles were repeatedly identified as major barriers to trail use.

Ensuring maintenance of trails was also noted as a high priority. This is consistent with many open-ended comments, with respondents frequently emphasizing that the long-term success of the trail system depends not only on expanding the network, but also on maintaining existing trails in safe and usable condition. Several respondents noted that poor maintenance can create accessibility and safety challenges, particularly for cyclists, runners, older adults, and individuals with mobility limitations. Others stressed the importance of preserving the quality of trails already in place before prioritizing large-scale expansion projects. Collectively, responses suggest that residents view maintenance as a core component of trail system quality, safety, and long-term sustainability.

The greatest discrepancy between the prioritization and budgeting questions was the importance of natural surface trails. While survey respondents did not prioritize natural surface trails, both the budgeting exercise and many comments suggested that residents put a high value on natural surface trails. The Lawrence River trails, Clinton Lake Northshore Trails, and trails at the Baker Wetlands, Lawrence Nature Park, and Rock Chalk Park were all mentioned as valued community assets.



Looking ahead

Friends of Lawrence Area Trails (FLAT) values the perspectives, opinions, and values of the community members and is committed to ensuring that our work reflects the interests and priorities of Lawrence trail users and the broader community.

We agree with residents, who consistently describe trails as an important investment in recreation, transportation, health, environmental quality, and overall quality of life. Trails help connect people to neighborhoods, parks, schools, businesses, and natural areas while creating safer and more accessible ways to move throughout the community.

Trails are also a relatively cost-effective community investment. Unlike many forms of public infrastructure, much of the development of Lawrence's trail system has been substantially supported through philanthropic, state, and federal funding, with local tax dollars contributing only a small fraction of the total costs. Trails are not free, but community members repeatedly emphasize that the benefits they provide far outweigh the costs.



This report provides valuable insight into the investments Lawrence residents want to see in the future of the trail system. Participants repeatedly emphasize that Lawrence already has a strong foundation in place, but also express a clear desire for a safer, more connected, and better maintained trail system. Taken together, the findings suggest broad public support for continued investment in trails throughout the community. While residents express diverse views on trails, we share a common vision: a trail system that safely connects people to neighborhoods, parks, schools, businesses, and nature while enhancing the overall quality of life in Lawrence.

Acknowledgements

Friends of Lawrence Area Trails would like to thank the Sunflower Foundation for financial support that made this report possible, for individuals who invested their time and energy providing their insights that informed the development of this report, and for resident and visitors to Lawrence who support the vibrant trail community of which FLAT is proud to be a part.

Thank you to Susan Patton and Chris Tilden for contributing their photographs and to Eliza Mayo for designing the report.

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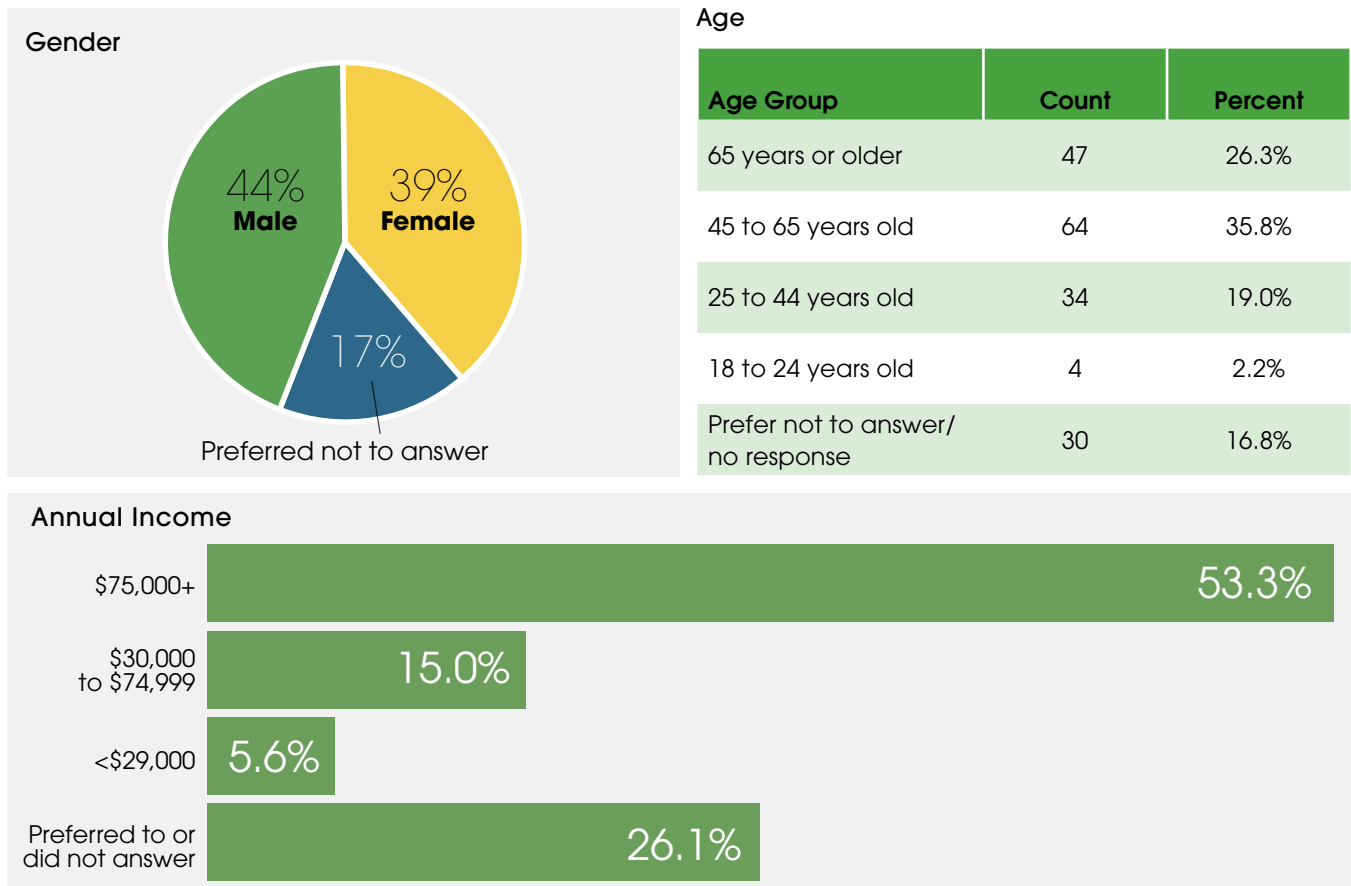
Trails increase citizen ownership and relationships with our town!



Appendices

Appendix A. Demographics

Demographic information was collected from the survey and during community engagement events. There were 179 respondents who provided some demographic information.



Gender: Gender distribution among males and females was balanced. One respondent preferred not to answer.

Age: The sample was concentrated among older respondents, with almost two-thirds of respondents represented in age groups 45 years or older. There were limited respondents less than 25 years of age, as seen in the table above.

Race/ethnicity: Of those who provided race/ethnicity information, 98.5% were White. Thirty-two respondents did not provide information.

Income: Participants were asked to provide information on their annual family income. Responses were skewed towards higher-income households.

Appendix B. Methods

FLAT used a mixed-methods approach to better understand how residents use the local trail system, the challenges they experience, and their priorities for future trail investments. Data were collected through both an online survey and a series of four in-person community engagement sessions, three held at the Lawrence Public Library and one during the Trails that Connect Us spring celebration of trails. FLAT also hosted a one-hour in-person focus group allowing participants to provide insight through a variety of methods.

The survey and community engagement sessions involved a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to capture both measurable trends and more detailed community perspectives.

Respondents were asked about:

- how they use local trails
- perceived barriers and challenges
- frequency of trail use
- ideas for future improvements

There were 180 online survey responses and approximately 100 participants in the four in-person sessions. Five individuals participated in the focus group which used a semi-structured focus guide collecting additional detailed insights into the topics described above. Four of these individuals participated in an in-person group discussion; a fifth who was unable to join the discussion provided written answers to the question set. Focus group participants were provided with a \$75 pre-paid gift card to compensate them for participation.

Open-ended questions from both the survey, in-person sessions, and the focus group were analyzed qualitatively to identify recurring themes, concerns, and priorities expressed across responses. Priority rankings from the survey were analyzed using a weighted scoring system in which higher-ranked items received greater point values. During the budgeting activity at the in-person sessions, participants were given ten symbolic “budget dollars” and asked to allocate them across a set of proposed trail improvement categories in any way they chose. Some participants concentrated all resources on a single issue, while others distributed funding across multiple priorities. Budget allocations from all four sessions were combined to quantify priority issues.

The survey ranking question and in-person budgeting exercise provided insight into how participants prioritized investments under constrained resource conditions. Open-ended responses further contextualized these findings by allowing participants to explain concerns, experiences, and preferences in their own words.

180
online survey
responses

In person
participants
~100

5
Focus group
participants

Appendix C. About Friends of Lawrence Area Trails

Friends of Lawrence Area Trails (FLAT) is a non-profit organization committed to building a community of individuals who use and support trails and advocating for development and maintenance of a connected, accessible trail system for residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. FLAT works to educate and inform, and support collaborative efforts to enhance local trails. Examples of recent projects involving FLAT:

- “Walk the Loop,” a Lawrence Parks, Recreation, and Culture program to familiarize residents with sections of the Loop through sponsored walks.
- Partnering with the Lawrence Arts Center and other partners in the development of the “La Yarda” memorial along the Loop in east Lawrence (created by local artist Javy Ortiz) to honor the Mexican-American families who lived in the La Yarda neighborhood (before its destruction by floods in the 1950s) and helped build the transcontinental railroad as it ran through Kansas.
- The International Mountain Biking Association study of the Cameron’s Bluff area to assess the feasibility of creating more recreational river trails in Lawrence on Evergy-owned property on the west bank of the Kansas River. FLAT is continuing discussions with the city and multiple partners to determine how to create public access to this area to expand recreational trails and promote greater access to the river near downtown Lawrence.

FLAT also advocates for ongoing inclusion of trail projects in local government budgets and capital plans and has helped develop grant applications and raised funds to support a variety of projects. Learn more at flatks.org.

