

## **Funding Challenges Persist as Greencastle Parks Remain Vital to Community Life**

*By Abigail Marin May 1, 2026*

**GREENCASTLE, Ind.** — Public parks in Greencastle serve as more than just recreational spaces — they are central to childhood development, community connection and public well-being. Yet despite strong local support and ongoing investment, city officials and volunteers say funding limitations continue to slow progress on key improvements.

Park and recreation funding in Greencastle is built on a mix of public-private partnerships, grants and grassroots contributions. A major goal is to establish a \$500,000 endowment by the end of 2026, supported in part by a dollar-for-dollar match from the Putnam County Convention & Visitors Bureau through the Friends of the Park initiative. This funding model has helped support projects such as People Pathways, which aim to expand walking and biking access throughout the city and create safer, more connected public spaces.

At Robe-Ann Park, one of the city's most frequently used recreational areas, funding comes from city allocations, private donations and federal and state grants. Recent investments include a \$500,000 grant from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, as well as a \$245,000 upgrade to the Emerald Palace playground. These improvements are intended to modernize facilities and provide safer, more engaging spaces for children.

Still, those closely involved with the park system say the current funding is not enough to meet the growing needs of the community.

“Local businesses have contributed generously, and that support has made a real difference,” said Riley Gailes, a first-year Bonner Scholar and park volunteer. “But we’re still not where we need to be. There’s a lot more that needs to be done to keep these spaces safe, updated and accessible for everyone.”

For children in Greencastle, parks play a particularly important role. In a small community, access to safe outdoor spaces can shape childhood experiences in lasting ways. Parks provide opportunities for physical activity, social interaction and unstructured play — all of which are critical for healthy development. Without consistent investment, volunteers say, these opportunities could become limited.



“Parks give kids a place to just be kids,” Gales said. “Not every family has access to large backyards or private play areas. These public spaces are where kids learn to interact, build friendships and stay active.”

Research has long shown that access to green space improves both physical and mental health in young people, reducing stress and encouraging exercise. In Greencastle, residents say the impact is visible in everyday life, as families gather at playgrounds, sports fields and walking paths.

Beyond their impact on children, parks also serve as essential gathering spaces for the broader community. Over the past two decades, Robe-Ann Park has hosted events, celebrations and informal meetups that help strengthen local ties.

City officials have increasingly looked to parks as multipurpose spaces that can support community services. During an April 1 meeting, the civic clerk discussed plans for a non-food pantry initiative that could be hosted within park grounds, reflecting the growing role of public spaces in addressing community needs.

“They’ve become a place where people don’t just relax — they help each other,” one official said during the meeting.

Partnerships have also played a key role in sustaining park programs. DePauw University has contributed by hosting events and collaborating on initiatives that support local families. These partnerships have helped expand programming while bringing additional volunteers and resources into the park system.

Even with these collaborations, progress has been gradual. City leaders say that while 2025 brought meaningful improvements, many projects are moving forward slowly due to limited funding and rising costs.

One of the most significant upgrades underway is at the aquatic center, where a \$59,459 ultraviolet filtration system is set to be installed. Mayor Lila Dunbar said the system is expected to reduce chemical costs by up to 30% and improve reliability.

“We’ve had issues with the pool shutting down almost every year,” Dunbar said.

“Sometimes it takes days just to get everything back on track. This system should make a big difference for both safety and efficiency.”

The aquatic center project now totals \$657,931, with financing expected to come through the city’s Economic Development Income Tax (EDIT) plan over a three-year period. Officials say the investment reflects a long-term commitment to maintaining quality recreational facilities.

Meanwhile, Phase II of the Robe-Ann Park reconstruction project is nearing completion but facing delays. Officials estimate about \$20,000 in change orders, primarily due to additional rock needed to strengthen park roadways and extend their lifespan. After paving, the roadway will require a two-week curing period before it can reopen to traffic, pushing back the anticipated timeline.

Despite these challenges, community members remain optimistic about the future of Greencastle’s parks. Volunteers, local organizations and city leaders continue to work

together to secure funding and improve facilities, driven by a shared understanding of the parks' importance.

“These parks are part of people’s lives from childhood into adulthood,” Gailles said.

“They’re where memories are made — from birthday parties to everyday afternoons.

Investing in them is really investing in the community itself.”

As Greencastle works toward its long-term funding goals, residents say the continued success of its parks will depend on sustained support, collaboration and a recognition of the vital role these spaces play in shaping both individual lives and the community as a whole.

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Meetings information for Civic Clerk <https://greencastlein.portal.civicclerk.com/>