

Fairmont & St. James Bike Share Program Case Study Report

Stronger Together



COMMUNITY HEALTH INITIATIVE OF
FARIBAULT & MARTIN COUNTIES



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Supported by the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership, Minnesota Department of Health

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Introduction

Two southern Minnesota communities—Fairmont and St. James—have recently launched bike share programs that are already making it easier for residents to get outside, be active, and explore their communities. Fairmont’s Kids Just Want to Have Fun and the St. James Area Convention and Visitors Bureau teamed up with Faribault, Martin & Watonwan Counties’ Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (FMW SHIP) to offer residents and visitors a fun new way to enjoy the outdoors. This case study report walks through how each community turned an idea into a working bike share program and offers lessons for others looking to start one in their community.

About FMW SHIP

With support from the Minnesota Department of Health and funding from the Minnesota Health Care Access Fund, FMW SHIP helps community partners across the tri-county area to create long-lasting changes that improve resident health and wellbeing. FMW SHIP supports community-driven, evidence-based programs that tackle the root causes of chronic disease, with a particular focus on improving access to healthy foods, opportunities for active living, mental health and wellbeing supports, and preventing commercial tobacco use.

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Report Methodology

Data Sources

Information for this case study was gathered through two site visits, key informant interviews, and a document review. The interviews were conducted separately with:

Kristy Olson, volunteer with Fairmont's Kids Just Want to Have Fun - Project 1590 nonprofit organization;

Tammy Stevens, Community Outreach and Marketing Director of the City of St. James and President of the St. James Area Convention and Visitors Bureau;

Kaley Hernandez, Caroline McCourt and Jordan Niles, Faribault, Martin and Watonwan Counties SHIP staff.

Interviewees shared about the steps their organizations took to help launch the bike share program in each community.

This report also draws on media coverage of the bike share programs in the Fairmont Sentinel from July 2022 through May 2025, and in the St. James Plaindealer in May 2024. Additional documents analyzed include the Faribault, Martin and Watonwan Statewide Health Improvement Partnership annual survey.

Data Analysis Methods

An external evaluator from NorthStar Data Partners analyzed qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documents using content and thematic analysis methodology. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies.



About the Fairmont Bike Share Launch



About Fairmont

Fairmont is the county seat of Martin County, Minnesota, a south central county bordering Iowa. Fairmont is known as the “City of Lakes” because

of the inviting chain of lakes that cut through town. Fairmont is also Martin County’s largest city, with a 2025 population of about 10,500 residents.



About Project 1590 and Fairmont’s Kids Just Want to Have Fun Committee

Project 1590 is a group of residents in Fairmont striving to create a vibrant community. This non-profit organization was founded in 2014 and supports a variety of projects that make Fairmont a great place to work, live and play.

Kids Just Want to Have Fun is one of Project 1590's seven subcommittees. This group is committed to bringing fun, affordable activities for youth of all ages in the Fairmont community.

They’ve built a free indoor playground at Five Lakes Town Centre and a free 18-hole miniature golf course near the Fairmont Aquatic Center. Kids Just Want to Have Fun hosts a variety of yearly family-friendly events, including mother-son events, father-daughter dances, and a community Easter egg hunt.



Fairmont Bike Share from Idea to Launch

Members of Kids Just Want to Have Fun learned of the bike share program in neighboring Jackson County and were inspired to bring the program to Fairmont. Committee members Kristy Olson, Ed Willett and Meaghan Slama presented the idea to the Fairmont Park Board in July 2022. Kids Just Want to Have Fun planned to fundraise for the estimated \$7,400 needed to install five bikes. The committee sought the City of Fairmont's support in making this amenity free and available to the public. Initially, the Park Board expressed interest in the project and Kids Just Want to Have Fun had hoped to be up and running by Spring 2023.



In February 2023, the group was still garnering City support for the bike share program. The City had some concerns about the implementation of the program - primarily insurance liability and maintenance of the bikes. Kids Just Want to Have Fun provided the City of Fairmont with examples of recently implemented bike share programs in Jackson and Mountain Lake. Kids Just Want to Have Fun had a history of successfully maintaining the mini golf course they gifted to the City, and proposed taking a similar approach for the bike share.

In November 2023, Faribault and Martin County's Stronger Together Coalition, a group of community leaders that guide the work of SHIP in Faribault and Martin Counties, approved a \$5,000 SHIP grant application from Kids Just Want to Have Fun to launch a bike share in Fairmont. The grant opportunity was a key win for the group as they continued to work towards offering free biking opportunities for residents.

Fairmont Bike Share from Idea to Launch

In Spring 2024, Fairmont hired a new City Administrator, Matt Skaret, who had previously served as the Administrator of Jackson. The City of Jackson had launched their bike share program under Mr. Skaret's administration, and he was very familiar with what it took for a city to get the program off the ground. This resulted in renewed interest in the project. In August 2024, Kids Just Want to Have Fun members returned to the City Park Board with specific requests to include the project under their existing liability insurance policy and support bolting down the docking stations. They also requested the Board to approve their SHIP grant application funding to purchase the bikes. At that point, Park Board members made a recommendation to move forward with the SHIP grant funding, contingent on staff discussions about bike maintenance, placement of the bikes, and other logistics.

A key turning point in this process was connecting directly with City of Jackson leaders about the successful launch of their bike share. This included Mr. Skaret, and Luke Ewald, SHIP staff at neighboring Des Moines Valley Health & Human Services, who both were instrumental in launching the City of Jackson's bike share program. Learning from the nearby community helped assure Fairmont City leaders this project could also be viable in their town. The bike share was covered under the city umbrella insurance policy with no premium increase.

Together, the group decided that the bike share would be installed at near the Fairmont Aquatic Park. This location was ideal as it is on the bike trail system, and near other local amenities, including the mini-golf course and off-leash dog park. Additionally, the Aquatic Park staff could support helmet check out systems, much like they support check out of mini-golf equipment.



Fairmont Bike Share from Idea to Launch

With funding and technical assistance from SHIP staff, and support from the City of Fairmont, Kids Just Want to Have Fun was ready to move the project forward. In addition to the SHIP grant of \$5,000, Kids Just Want to Have Fun raised an additional \$5,000 to cover the remaining \$2,400 required for installation and future maintenance costs. In February 2025, the Fairmont Rotary Club presented Kids Just Want to Have Fun with a generous donation for the project, and the group raised additional funds through their community events. The group also received a Hometown Health Grant from Mayo Clinic Health System - Fairmont to purchase 10 bike helmets to be checked out at the Aquatic Park for bike share users.

The five bikes were purchased and delivered in February 2025, ready for a spring install. On May 13, 2025, the City poured cement for the concrete pad at the bike share site.

On May 29, 2025, community members gathered to hold a ribbon cutting ceremony for the bike share program, with representatives from Kids Just Want to Have Fun, the City of Fairmont, FMW SHIP and more.



Fairmont Bike Share from Idea to Launch

In early May, Kids Just Want to Have Fun publicized the new bike share program by bringing the bikes to community events, such as the Kiwanis Bike Rodeo.

In the first biking season of 2025, there were 257 rides made by 145 registered users. Some riders only had one bike trip, while others were repeat riders. They had no stolen bikes, or any intentional damage, so no users were charged for their rides. There were a few maintenance needs that were managed by the local contracted maintenance partner, Landsteiner repair. For example, in early August, a few bikes had water damage to the locking system and needed repair. Kids Just Want to Have Fun has set aside donations to fund needed maintenance and repair for future biking seasons.

Kids Just Want to Have Fun board members reported that partnering with FMW SHIP helped them offer something to the community that they would have not otherwise been able to provide. Board member Meaghan Slama shared, *“With our grant, we were able to purchase, install, and put in to use five bicycles for the community. Using these bicycles is completely free, and we had good numbers for our first summer in use!”*

FMW SHIP staff provided support in the grant application process, and all Kids Just Want to Have Fun board members surveyed said they were very satisfied with their partnership. Meghan Slama shared, *“Everyone at SHIP was very helpful, encouraging, and courteous. Communication was very good, and we appreciate all they did for our group this year!”*



About the St. James Bike Share Launch



About St. James

St. James is the county seat of Watonwan County, Minnesota, a south central county located about hour north of the Iowa border. St. James has just under 5,000 residents and is known as a close-knit, culturally diverse community. Data from the 2025 American Community Survey shows that nearly half (45%) of St. James' residents are Latino, compared with 6% of Minnesota residents that are Latino.



About the St. James Area Convention and Visitors Bureau

The St. James Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) works to promote St. James tourism and support local visitors. The CVB is led by a volunteer Board of Directors that live and work in the community. They partner with the local Chamber of Commerce to bring events and opportunities to the community.



Photo credit: discoverstjamesmn.com

St. James Bike Share from Idea to Launch

During the mid-2010s, several St. James residents banded together to explore how they could establish a bike share program in the community. Although leaders from schools and health care settings were eager to provide this opportunity, the effort was put on hold because of liability concerns related to potential injuries.

Fast forward to 2023, several bike share programs had successfully launched in neighboring communities. While visiting Sleepy Eye, Tammy Stevens—Community Outreach and Marketing Director for the City of St. James and President of the St. James Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB)—noticed their bike share program and immediately recognized it as a great fit for St. James. As CVB President, Ms. Stevens is always looking to offer and promote opportunities for healthy living in the community.

Ms. Stevens also sits on the Watonwan County Public Health Advisory Committee, a group of community leaders that advise Watonwan County's Public Health Department and guide Watonwan County's Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) work. Through the Committee, Ms. Stevens learned of the SHIP active living grant opportunity and recognized the opportunity to make the bike share a reality in St. James.



St. James Bike Share from Idea to Launch

Ms. Stevens shared about the SHIP grant opportunity with members of the CVB and received their support to apply for the bike share grant. FMW SHIP staff Kaley Hernandez provided technical assistance with grant writing and was responsive in answering questions about the grant. Ms. Stevens reported that working with SHIP staff was a very positive experience.

In November 2023, the Watonwan County Public Health Advisory Committee unanimously approved a \$5,000 grant to the CVB, with Ms. Stevens abstaining from the vote. Following the award, the CVB quickly moved forward with project implementation. Ms. Stevens' dual role as a City employee with knowledge of municipal systems and as CVB President helped the project come to fruition efficiently. The CVB handled all coordination with the city to include the bike share program under the liability insurance. In addition to the SHIP grant, the CVB applied for and won a \$2,000 Hometown Health Grant from Mayo Health Clinic System - St. James to support the remainder of the project cost.

The group chose to install the bike share near the St. James pool. This was an ideal location because of proximity to the bike path along St. James Lake, and proximity to other amenities including Tiell Park Campground. The location is also close to a Discover St. James visitors kiosk which includes information on accessing local attractions by bike.



St. James Bike Share from Idea to Launch

The bikes were purchased in Spring 2024 and the city donated and installed the concrete pad where the bikes are housed in May 2024. By Memorial Day 2024, the CVB and City of St. James celebrated the launch of the bike share program.



Bike share launch, May 2024.
Photo credit: St. James Plain Dealer

In St. James, it costs \$1 to rent a bike for four hours, with \$3 per hour for each additional hour. To date, the program has experienced no theft or vandalism.

Three city employees help manage the bike share program. The group has contracted with a local provider, True Value, to provide maintenance and repair of the bikes when needed. The bike shares follow the Tiell Park Campground calendar, and bikes are stored by the city off-site when the campground is closed.



St. James Bike Share from Idea to Launch

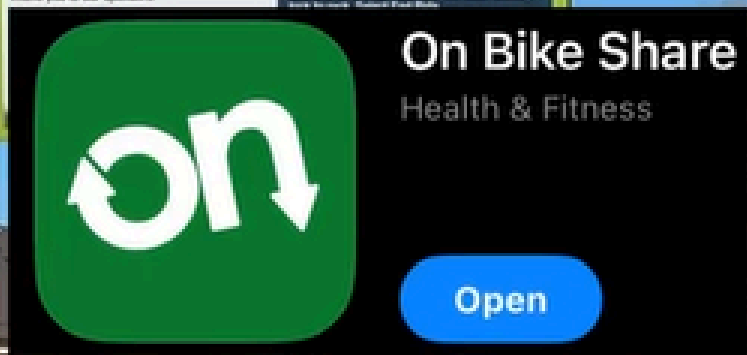
In the 2025 season, there were 170 bike share rentals, reaching locals and visitors to the campground alike. Ms. Stevens shared that some families would load their kids' bikes in the car and check out the bike share fleet to enjoy a family bike ride.



Tammy Stevens shared that the installation of the bike fleet in St. James “has encouraged healthy, active transportation, increased awareness of alternative mobility options, and allowed more people to enjoy our local parks, trails, and downtown areas.”



How to rent a bike



How to rent a bike!



St. James and Fairmont residents created “how to” videos for renting bikes using the On Bike Share app.

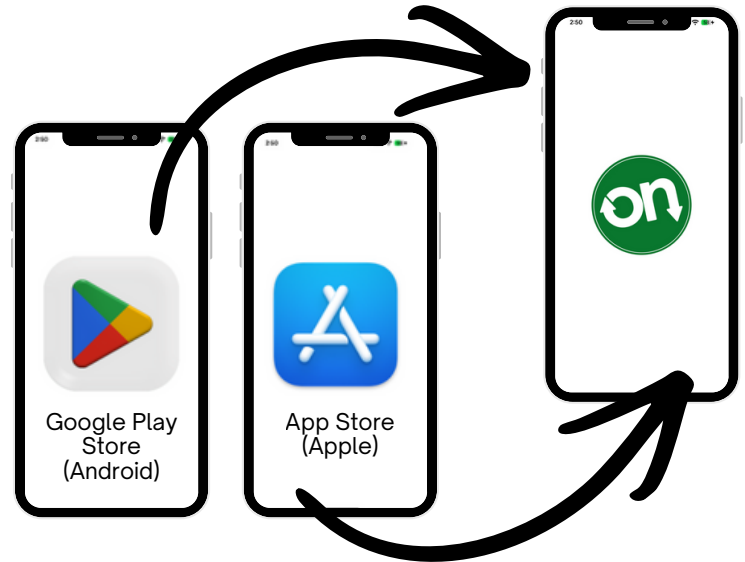
A step-by-step overview of the process is provided on the following pages.



Step-by-step guide to rent a bike

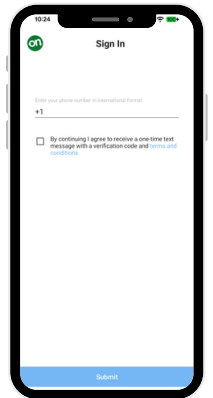
Step 1: Install app

In the Google Play store on your Android Phone or the App store on your Apple phone, search for the “On Bike Share” app. Install and launch the app.



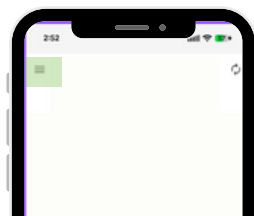
Step 2: Create account

After opening the app, you will be asked to create an account. Enter your phone number and you you'll be texted a code to verify your identify. Net, you will sign a liability waiver and enter a credit card number in case of damages or unreturned bikes.

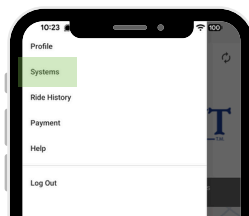


Step 3: Select system/location

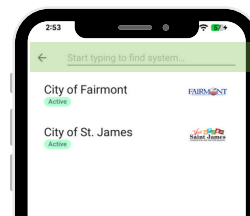
After you set up your account, you will join the bike share “system” or location where you’ll rent your bike.



Click on menu bar



Select Systems from the menu



Select or type in your community

Step-by-step guide to rent a bike

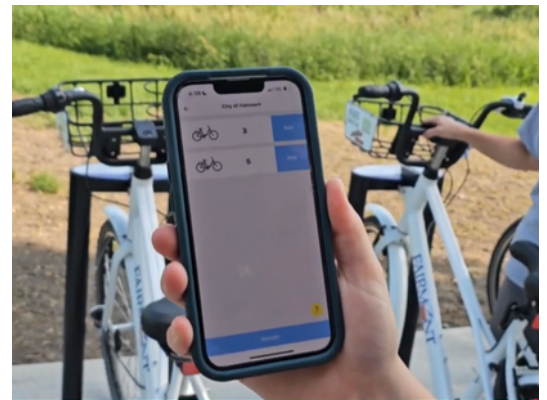
Step 4: Join system and look for available bikes

Join the bike share “system” and then search for available bikes.



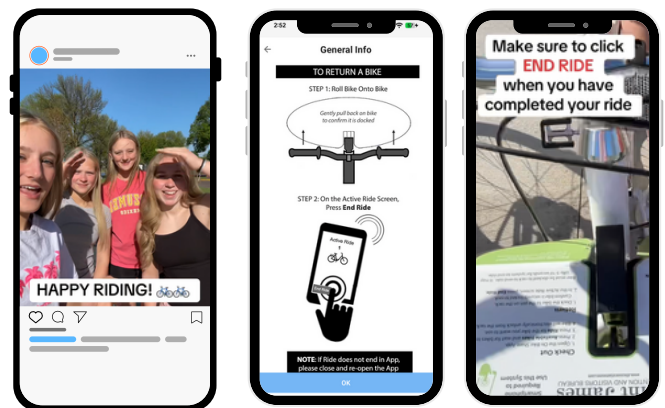
Step 5: Choose an available bike

The app will allow you to choose one of the bikes currently available to rent.



Step 6: Have a great ride & then return your bike

After your ride, click “End Ride” in the app and click your bike back into the docking station.



Taking the bikes out for a spin



A Bike Share Ride

On Monday, August 11, 2025, the evaluation team gathered in Fairmont to try out the new bikes. The team included NorthStar Data Partners evaluator, Liz Radel Freeman, and Collaborative for Rural Public Health Innovation intern, Matt Haley.

The team met at the Fairmont Aquatic Park at 10:30 a.m. It was sunny and 78 degrees - a perfect day for biking! Upon arrival, we found two bikes available for check out and three bikes that were already rented out. Neither of us had the On Bike Share app installed, so we started by downloading the app as instructed on the bike docking stations.



It took a total of four minutes to download and install the On Bike Share app, register for an account and check out a bike. After the bikes were checked out and electronically unlocked, we reviewed the bike features.

The bike share bikes are sturdy, seven-speed bikes with an easily adjustable seat.



A Bike Share Ride

The bikes are equipped with a kickstand, reflective lighting, and a bell to alert others nearby as you bike past.



Each bike comes with a basket that is large enough to hold a backpack or purse. The basket includes rules for the bike share program, a QR code that links to a “how to” video created for the Fairmont bike share, a QR code with local bike trail maps, and ideas of places to visit on your bike ride.



A Bike Share Ride

The bikes come with a locking mechanism so we can keep the bike secure if we choose to stop and enjoy local amenities on our ride. After a “tour” of the bikes themselves, we strapped on our helmets and headed out on the bike trail right next to the Aquatic Park. The trail brought us to a residential neighborhood and we enjoyed views of Fairmont’s chain of lakes as we biked. Most of our bike ride was on a paved, designated bike/pedestrian path with a small portion on the street in a very quiet residential neighborhood . Our bike ride was about 20 minutes long and it was mostly flatland.



A Bike Share Ride

During our ride, we encountered a number of people using Fairmont's trails, including people running, biking, and walking dogs. A young child was biking on the trails while his mother pushed a sibling in a stroller. It was easy to navigate the paths with others in the area.

After we finished the ride, we used the app to return the bikes into the docking stations. The process took less than a minute. The bikes were easy to check out and enjoyable to ride.



Lessons Learned Starting a Bike Share Program



Lessons Learned

This section offers reflections from FMW SHIP staff and partners who worked to create bike share programs in Fairmont and St. James.

Engage a local champion to advance the work

Kids Just Want to Have Fun in Fairmont and the St. James Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) are both well known and trusted groups in their communities. SHIP staff provided valuable technical assistance and training to the partner organizations and to the cities. Champions in the partner organization shared their vision with city decision makers, and worked to address the cities' concerns and logistical questions. This process went fairly quickly in St. James and took several years in Fairmont. The consistent and diligent support of a trusted champion helped both projects reach the finish line.



Garnering city-level support is crucial; learning from other cities can help pave the way

To establish a bike share, it helps to have City Administrators, Engineers, and Parks and Recreation staff on board. The launch of the bike share requires designating permanent space to house bikes during the summer, another space to store them during off season. The City must review insurance liability coverage for the project. The group must also make plans to address future repair and maintenance needs. After project start-up, the project requires less time and resources to maintain.

St. James and Fairmont could look to neighboring communities- Jackson, Mountain Lake, and Sleepy Eye - to learn about how the programs could successfully roll out and continue. Neighboring communities shared their experiences with the program, and it even inspired some friendly-level competition for communities to “match” the amenities available in nearby towns.

Lessons Learned

Contract with a local organization for maintenance

Kids Just Want to Have Fun and St. James CVB contract with local providers to maintain and repair the bikes. The names of the repair providers are prominently displayed, which help both residents and visitors seek repairs for the bikes as needed.

Install your bike share near existing amenities

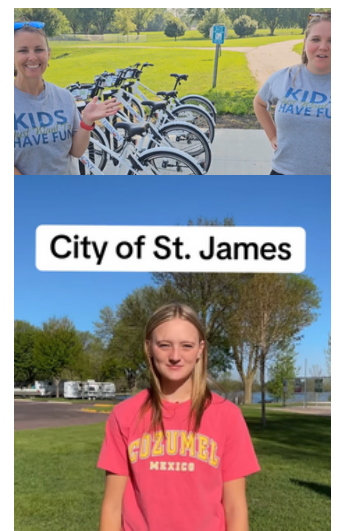
St. James and Fairmont strategically located their bike share stations along bike paths and near their aquatic centers and local lakes. This proximity to other amenities increases the chance that individuals would notice the bikes and try them out. In St. James, data shows that local residents and area visitors are using the bike share bikes. Tammy Stevens of the CVB reported that campers staying at the nearby Tiell Park Campground have also made use of the program.



Create how to ride guides featuring local residents

Adults using the bike shares are required to enter a credit card number which is only charged in the event of bike theft or intentional damage. A handful of community members reached out to Fairmont's bike share program with concerns about this requirement, and questions about the check out process.

Kids Just Want to Have Fun volunteers Kristy and Meaghan created a "how to" video that walks individuals through the check out process and highlights features of the bikes available for rent. In St. James, a group of local students created a TikTok video describing the check out process for their city's bike system. Seeing familiar faces explain the system helps make bike share feel more accessible and welcoming.



Conclusion

The bike shares have already become a source of pride for St. James and Fairmont. They help people enjoy parks, lakes, and trails; provide a healthy way to get around; and offer free or low-cost activity for families and visitors. Local leaders say the most important lessons are to build strong partnerships, learn from other communities, and keep projects focused on community needs.



For more information about Faribault Martin Watonwan SHIP, contact SHIP Coordinator, Kaley Hernandez at 507-238-4757 or visit tinyurl.com/FMWship

For more information about Fairmont's Bike Share, visit <https://visitfairmontmn.com/listings/fairmont-bike-share-program/>

For more information about St. James' Bike Share, visit <https://www.ci.stjames.mn.us/422/Bike-Share-Program>

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