



Parks, Open Space, and Natural Resources

St. Louis Park's Vision 3.0 includes the recommendation to "Ensure Access to Green Space for Future Generations." Further, the strategic priority of leading in environmental stewardship includes: "increasing opportunities to connect with nature in the city" and "continuing to protect and improve the quality of natural resources, parks, lakes, creeks, wetlands, and surface water planning and using green spaces effectively."

St. Louis Park is committed to preserving, enhancing and providing good stewardship of our parks. The purpose of this section is to provide a guiding plan for parks, open space and natural resources management.

St. Louis Park's parks, open space, and natural resources play an important role in making the city a desirable place to live, work and play. Parks deliver community benefits far beyond each park's borders. They improve our physical and psychological health, enhance community life, provide outdoor experiences and serve as anchors for strong neighborhoods.

St. Louis Park has 52 parks of diverse sizes, amenities and opportunities for recreation. Since the city is fully developed, the focus for the future is on upgrading, expanding, and improving the park system to meet the recreational needs of citizens throughout their lifetimes.

Where We Have Been History

Over the past 120 years, parks, open space and recreation planning in St. Louis Park has experienced robust change. In its early days, parks were not seen as a priority mainly because there was so much vacant land for children to play in. Some of the Village's (as it was known then) parks were first dedicated by the original developers of the Village. Jorvig Park, the Village's first park, was likely the park donated by the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railway in exchange for the Village naming itself the Village of St. Louis Park. Other lands became park and open space through tax forfeiture. These lands were essentially low, wet areas with soils unstable for building purposes.

Recreation planning was evident early on in the city's history. At a Village Council meeting in December, 1912, a committee was instructed to find a place for a toboggan slide and skating rink in response to citizen interest. In 1937 the Village Park Board was created with the aim of focusing on playgrounds and developing a park system for the Village. Supervised play areas were first established in the summer of 1948 with the first full-time playgrounds at Oak Hill, Fern Hill, Lenox School, Carpenter Park, and the village athletic field (now the High School). The following summer the first organized, expanded summer recreation program was created, and by 1951 the summer recreation program ran from June 25th through August 10th at 15 playgrounds. That same year the first Little League game was held. The old St. Louis Park Community Center was opened on W. Lake Street in November 1953.

In the mid-1950s city officials recognized that the population was expanding and urbanization of the community was occurring at a rate faster than the community's ability to provide necessary park and open space areas. The city also needed to improve existing parks for the use and enjoyment of residents and to protect them from the dangers of flooding. In 1959, the city had its first park bond sale to acquire land and to improve park and open space areas. Most of the initial improvements consisted of grading, seeding, drainage facilities, and basic play equipment.

During the late 1970s and through the 1980s many diverse programs, activities and facilities were being implemented and constructed. In the early 1970s, the original Rec Center was built, including one indoor ice sheet and an outdoor Olympic-sized pool. In addition to the Rec Center, additional land purchased through federal block grants became the Westwood Hills Nature Center. The city began the process of planting trees, building trails planning and constructing the main interpretive building.

Many ponds were created in city parks during this time to improve water quality. The Clean Water Act led to the creation of many NURP (Nationwide Urban Runoff Program) ponds promoting the holding and potential filtering of runoff storm water before it moves into the nearby discharge system (underground pipes).

The late 1970s also saw the rise of urban forestry as a program of the Parks and Recreation department. This program was a response to the spread of Dutch elm disease through St. Louis Park's urban forest, which consisted predominantly of American elm trees. The spread of Dutch elm disease prompted the city to dedicate resources to urban tree management and the diversification of tree species in the urban forest.

In the 1970s and 1980s organizational sports offerings began to expand to other sports in addition to the standard baseball, football and basketball. Youth soccer participation exploded along with the introduction of girls' sports and opportunities to participate in traveling team sports. The increased demand for athletic facilities required the development of large athletic field complexes to meet the needs of the community.

The park dedication program and tree preservation program were both initiated during the 1980s. These programs provided large amounts of money to support park redevelopment and tree planting. Many neighborhood parks such as Cedarhurst, Knollwood Green, and Blackstone Park were developed utilizing these funds.

In the early 1980s Oak Park Village apartments were developed. The city-owned property to the south and west of this development was contaminated with creosote, prompting the city council to recommend it for redevelopment as a permanent green space/park. This property was eventually redeveloped into Louisiana Oaks Park. Many trails and trail connections were also implemented during this time period, including the George Haun Trail, which is a 1.25 mile loop around Bass Lake.



By the late 1980s year-round outdoor activities became a focus and the Northern Lights Winter experience was established in Oak Hill Park. This winter wonderland installed over 20,000 colored lights into trees, surrounded by a skating oval, hockey rink and a bobsled-like slide called the Stendelslide. Everything but the Stendelslide is still actively used and in place today.

The late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed the beginning of the renovation period within the city's park system. Many park infrastructure items and facilities were renovated and replaced, including trails, play structures, tennis courts, sun shelters, and athletic fields. The largest and most significant renovation and expansion was at The Rec Center in 1997, which added another indoor ice sheet, banquet room, meeting room, office area, and the Aquatic Park.

In the late 2000s to 2017 the community's focus shifted to a holistic approach to healthy living that included the construction of additional community gardens, a greater emphasis on walking and biking to community recreational facilities, more sustainable environmental features, and more year round facilities. The city studied the feasibility and possible locations for a future community center in 2014, and in 2016, the Recreation Outdoor Center (ROC) was added on to the Rec Center facility. The ROC is a year-round community asset, from skating in the winter months, to concerts, special events and community gatherings in the spring, summer and fall.

The park system is also a metro-wide leader in inclusivity and racial equity, and has programmed recreational opportunities for a variety of community needs, including women only and men only swimming days for religious purposes.

Recent Accomplishments

From the late 2000s through 2017, there were numerous physical and program improvements:

Parks

- » Renovated historic Lilac/Old Roadside Park in 2015.
- » Purchased property in 2016 at France and 40th Street for some additional park land and single-family homes.
- » Installed LED trail lights throughout the city.
- » Replaced city park lights with LED lights.
- » Installed lighting control systems in all illuminated ball fields to create efficiencies for electricity usage.
- » Designed all park buildings for longevity and conservation including steel roofing, hardy siding, high energy furnaces, and plumbing controls to conserve water.
- » Implemented rain gardens when practical and possible, including those in Northside Park.
- » Revised turf maintenance procedures to include minimal fertilizer and pesticide usage when possible.
- » Relocated the city's skate park to Carpenter Park in 2017, which also addresses storm water management by creating an underground stormwater detention system beneath the skate park.
- » Adopted Tobacco-Free Policy for Parks in 2013 to prohibit use of tobacco products on any St. Louis Park-operated recreational facilities.

The Rec Center

- » Replaced systems to increase energy efficiency at the Rec Center:
 - Dehumidifiers, cooling towers, and refrigeration systems were replaced with energy efficient systems.
 - Interior and exterior lights were converted to LED lights.
 - Low emissivity ceilings were installed in both indoor ice rinks.
 - Pool pumps and filters were replaced to reduce water, electrical, and chemical usage.
- » Constructed the Recreation Outdoor Center (ROC) in 2016 to host year-round events including winter skating, concerts, special events, and community gatherings.

Westwood Hills Nature Center

- » Upgraded plans for the Westwood Hills Nature Center
 - A new Master Plan was written for the Westwood Hills Nature Center
 - Conceptual design of a new 12,000-15,000 square feet Interpretive Center Building was initiated in 2017.

Natural Resources

- » Became a "Bee-Friendly" city by defining eight parks where no pesticides are sprayed. It also revised the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program to lower chemical inputs into parks/city-owned properties.
- » Created a Master Natural Resource Management Plan for the Westwood Hills Nature Center to enhance the diversity and resiliency of the plant communities.
- » Completed a city-wide tree inventory in 2010 to identify the composition of the urban forest. The inventory guides future tree planting decisions in order to make the city more diverse and more resistant and resilient to diseases, insects, and pests.
- » Created 4 new community gardens based upon a study to determine demand, public space available, and location for most equitable installations of gardens.
- » Initiated annual discount tree sale to public to promote diversification of tree canopy on private properties.
- » Developed a buckthorn removal program.



Community Partnerships and Initiatives

- » Partnered with the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District to restore a stretch of Minnehaha Creek between Meadowbrook Avenue and Louisiana Avenue to create the Minnehaha Creek Preserve.
- » Worked with the St. Louis Park School District to maintain shared-use parks and to coordinate volunteer activities.
- » Continued work on the “Children First” movement, an original initiative to St. Louis Park that encourages adults to positively support children of all ages. Work includes:
 - Providing structured year-round activities for young people of all ages
 - Improving youth connections to existing facilities and services
 - Finding creative ways to incorporate positive development into the everyday lives of children
- » Partnered with SEEDs to plant edible playgrounds throughout the city as part of the city’s Summer Park Playground Program.
- » Launched the Health in the Park initiative with funding from the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross Blue Shield in 2013. Action groups established from this program include active living, healthy eating and mental wellbeing.
- » Coordinated volunteer efforts to honor the city’s goal of supporting a connected and engaged community. In 2016 over 1,360 volunteers contributed over 10,000 hours to the community, making possible:
 - Adopt a Park
 - Adopt a Garden (Gardening planting and maintenance)
 - Arbor Day and Community Tree Planting events
 - Basketball in the Park
 - Community Emergency Response Team
 - Creek clean-ups
 - Youth sports
 - Halloween party at Westwood Hills Nature Center
 - Hydrant Hero
 - Parktacular
 - Police Reserves
 - Special events
 - Westwood Hills Nature Center volunteer services

Equity Initiatives

- » Conducted outreach, programming, and events to accommodate diverse cultural backgrounds and to be responsive to St. Louis Park residents
- » Implemented women-only and men-only swimming nights at the Aquatic Center
- » Programmed women-only fitness classes
- » Adapted Recreation programming opportunities for special needs citizens
- » Hired a Community Outreach Coordinator
 - Manage facility rentals
 - Youth sports
 - Playground programs
- » Made scholarships and volunteer opportunities available to assist with costs of programs
- » Partnered with Community Education to provide opportunities for seniors
- » Held events like Community Link to offer families information, services, and resources that may be difficult to access, including: bike repair, employment resources, and health insurance information



Where We Are Today

Today, St. Louis Park has 52 parks covering over 850 acres (see Figure 4-8 on page 4-52). Park amenities include the Rec Center with the outdoor aquatic park, two indoor ice rinks, and the Recreation Outdoor Center (ROC); the Westwood Hills Nature Center, bike and walking trails, a skate park, sliding hills, a splash pad, fishing, athletic fields and much more. Since the city is fully developed, the focus for the future is on upgrading, expanding, and improving the park system to meet the recreation needs of citizens over their lifetime. The city continues to place an emphasis on preservation of existing amenities, long-term planning, improvements to facilities and infrastructure, the continuation of recreational and leisure time opportunities, and focuses on creating a healthy environment for living, working, and playing in the city. Components of the Park system are described below.

Park Facilities

St. Louis Park categorizes the park land owned and operated by the city in five groups: neighborhood parks, community parks, open space, community playfields, and historical parks.

Neighborhood Parks

There are 30 neighborhood parks with an average size of 5.26 acres. Among the amenities found in neighborhood parks are play structures, athletic fields, community gardens, ponds, athletic courts, lakes, trails, sun/picnic shelters, park buildings, limited parking, sliding hills and winter skating areas. Table 4-3 lists the neighborhood parks in St. Louis Park.



Table 4-3. Neighborhood Parks

NEIGHBORHOOD PARK	SIZE (ACRES)
Ainsworth Park	5.1
Bass Lake Park	1.1
Birchwood Park	4.5
Blackstone Park	0.9
Bronx Park	2.9
Browndale Park	10.7
Cedarhurst Park	1.0
Cedar Manor Park*	9.22
Center Park	1.8
Edgebrook Park	12.4
Fern Hill Park*	5.5
Ford Park*	10.6
Jackley Park	0.6
Jersey Park	3.2
Justad Park	0.7
Knollwood Green	1.2
Meadowbrook Manor Park*	.09
Minikahda Vista*	5.1
Nelson Park*	7.9
Oregon Park	2.1
Parkview Park*	0.2
Pennsylvania Park	5.4
Rainbow Park	0.7
Roxbury Park	2.0
Shelard Park	7.2
Sunset Park	1.9
Sunshine Park	0.7
Texa-Tonka Park	20.9
Twin Lakes Park	28.0
Webster Park*	1.5
Willow Park	2.7

**Parks that have a public/non-profit or public/private partnership involved in ownership, maintenance, or upkeep.*

Community Parks

There are 8 community parks. The smallest community park is Carpenter Park at 7.4 acres and the largest is Westwood Hills Nature Area at 160.2 acres. Common community park features are play structures, athletic fields, community gardens, trails, boardwalk, lakes, wetlands, general park buildings, public art, and wildlife.

Other characteristics frequently included in community parks are ponds, athletic courts, sun/picnic shelters, amphitheatres, sliding hills and winter skating areas. Table 4-4 lists the community parks in St. Louis Park.

Table 4-4. Community Parks

COMMUNITY PARK	SIZE (ACRES)
Aquila Park*	30.0
Carpenter Park	7.4
Dakota Park	20.4
Louisiana Oaks Park	44.6
Northside/Northside Rotary Park	8.8
Oak Hill Park	13.8
Westwood Hills Nature Area & Center	160.2
Wolfe Park	32.3

*Parks that have a public/non-profit or public/private partnership involved in ownership, maintenance, or upkeep.



Park Open Space

There are 21 park areas designated as open space. The smallest open space area is the town green at 0.44 acres and the largest is Minnehaha Creek/Basin at 168.8 acres. Open space park areas typically include lakes, ponds, fountains, benches, public art, trails, athletic facilities, creeks, dense vegetation, and docks/landings. Table 4-5 lists public open space locations managed by the Parks and Operations Department.

Table 4-5. Park Open Space

PARK OPEN SPACE	SIZE (ACRES)
Bass Lake Preserve	61.9
Cedar Manor Woods	5.5
Flag & 22nd	16.7
Frederick Avenue	1.7
Hampshire Park	3.3
Hannon Lake	31.4
Hurd Park	3.1
Isaac Walton League Creekside Park	1.8
Kilmer Pond	3.4
Lake Cobblecrest	10.4
Lake Victoria	10.6
Lamplighter Park*	12.2
Meadowbrook Lake	21.2
Menzel Park (Mpls. Park Bd)	0.6
Minnehaha Creek/Basin	167.8
Minnehaha Creek Preserve	50.0
Otten Pond*	3.5
Sunset Ridge Wetlands	10.2
Town Green*	0.44
Utah Pond	1.9
Westdale Ponds	1.9
Westling Pond	4.0

Community Playfields

There are 5 community playfield areas identified in St. Louis Park. The smallest community playfield is Elie Park/Tower Park at 2.6 acres and the largest is Cedar Knoll Park/Carlson Field at 7.9 acres. Community playfields typically include athletic fields, trails, park buildings, and general recreation areas. Table 4-6 lists community playfields in St. Louis Park:

Table 4-6. Community Playfields

COMMUNITY PLAYFIELD	SIZE (ACRES)
Cedar Knoll Park/Carlson Field	7.9
Elie Park/Tower Park	2.6
Freedom Park/Paul Frank Field	2.8
Keystone Park	3.3
Walker Park	3.7

Historical Parks

There are two historical parks identified in St. Louis Park. The smallest historical location is Jovig Park at 0.6 acres and the largest is Lilac Park/Old Roadside Park at 2.4 acres.

Table 4-7. Historical Parks

HISTORICAL PARK	SIZE (ACRES)
Jovig Park	0.6
Lilac Park/Old Roadside Park*	2.4

Lilac Park/Old Roadside Park

There is one remaining roadside park in St. Louis Park (Lilac/Old Roadside Park) along the original Lilac Way/Highway 100 corridor. St. Louis Park was originally home to two of seven elaborate roadside parks that were constructed in the late 1930s as a showcase of “roadside beautification,” including the original Lilac Park and Roadside Park. Wayside parks were built in the “rustic” style using natural materials, such as wood and stone, and were given extensive plantings of lilacs and other flora.

In 2015 the original Lilac Park was eliminated due to the expansion of Highway 100. Roadside Park was restored as a historical park, and has since been renamed to Lilac Park. A restored beehive fireplace was relocated to the new Lilac Park and the grounds and landscaping have been restored to highlight the historical significance of the area. The park features additional historic structures including restored stone picnic tables, a council ring, and a walking trail.

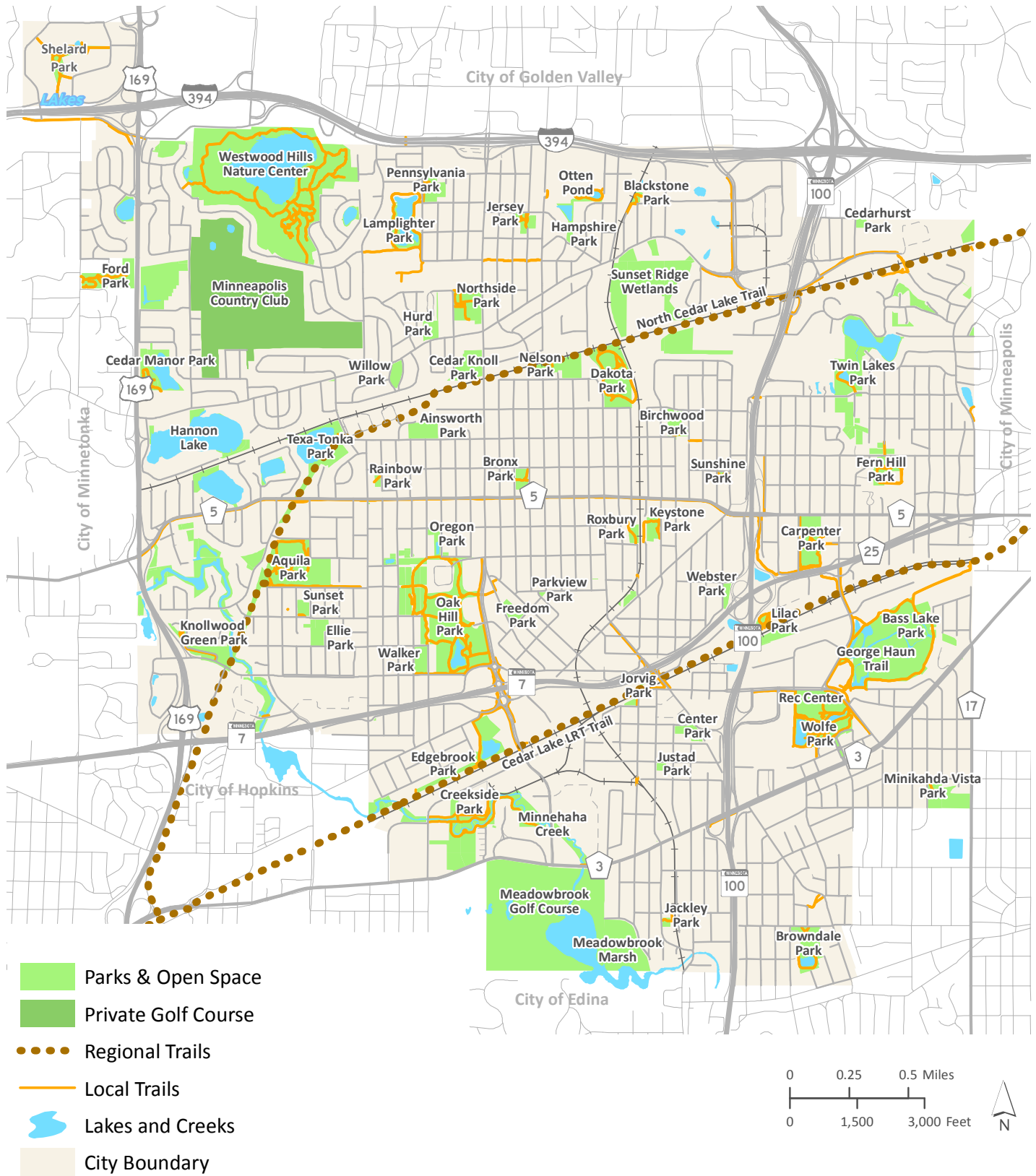


Off-leash Dog Areas

The growth of urban areas in the Minneapolis and St. Paul area has made open space for dogs increasingly scarce. Local park ordinances prohibit dogs from being off-leash which has left many dog owners without a place to exercise their dogs. The creation of “off-leash dog” areas within parks has given dogs and park users an opportunity to coexist in public areas.

St. Louis Park has created two off-leash dog park areas at Dakota Park and at Cedar Knoll Park. The established dog parks have fenced in locations for dogs to play and interact with other dogs. Enclosed play areas prevent off-leash dogs from infringing on the rights of other community residents and park users. Off-leash dog parks also serve as gathering places where pet owners socialize. The city is exploring other locations for additional dog parks.

Figure 4-8. Parks and Open Space



Source: City of St. Louis Park, 2018

2018 City of St. Louis Park
Community Development

Golf Courses

Two golf courses, Meadowbrook and the Minneapolis Golf Club, are located in St. Louis Park and represent a significant amount of open space. Meadowbrook is owned and operated by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and the Minneapolis Golf Club is privately owned. If an opportunity to acquire either land or a golf course becomes available, the city will carefully evaluate options related to additional land for the park system.

Regional Parks, Open Space and Trails

Several major regional trails pass through St. Louis Park. One possible future north/south regional trail is shown in the Metropolitan Council's 2040 Regional Trail Search Corridors as part of the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan. It is shown generally located along the existing CP Rail MNS Spur railroad track that runs north and south through the city (See Figure 4-9 for a general alignment).

The railroad is owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway (CP Railway) and is in active use. A feasibility study of the potential for a trail was conducted by Three Rivers Park District to identify general public concerns, potential construction and environmental challenges that affect the development of a trail, a future trail layout, and possible federal funding sources to pay for construction.

There are not any regional parks or open spaces within St. Louis Park, and none are planned at this time. However, if development opportunities become available, they may be pursued by the city in conjunction with Three Rivers Park District and/or the Metropolitan Council.



Improvements and Maintenance

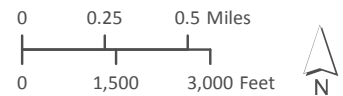
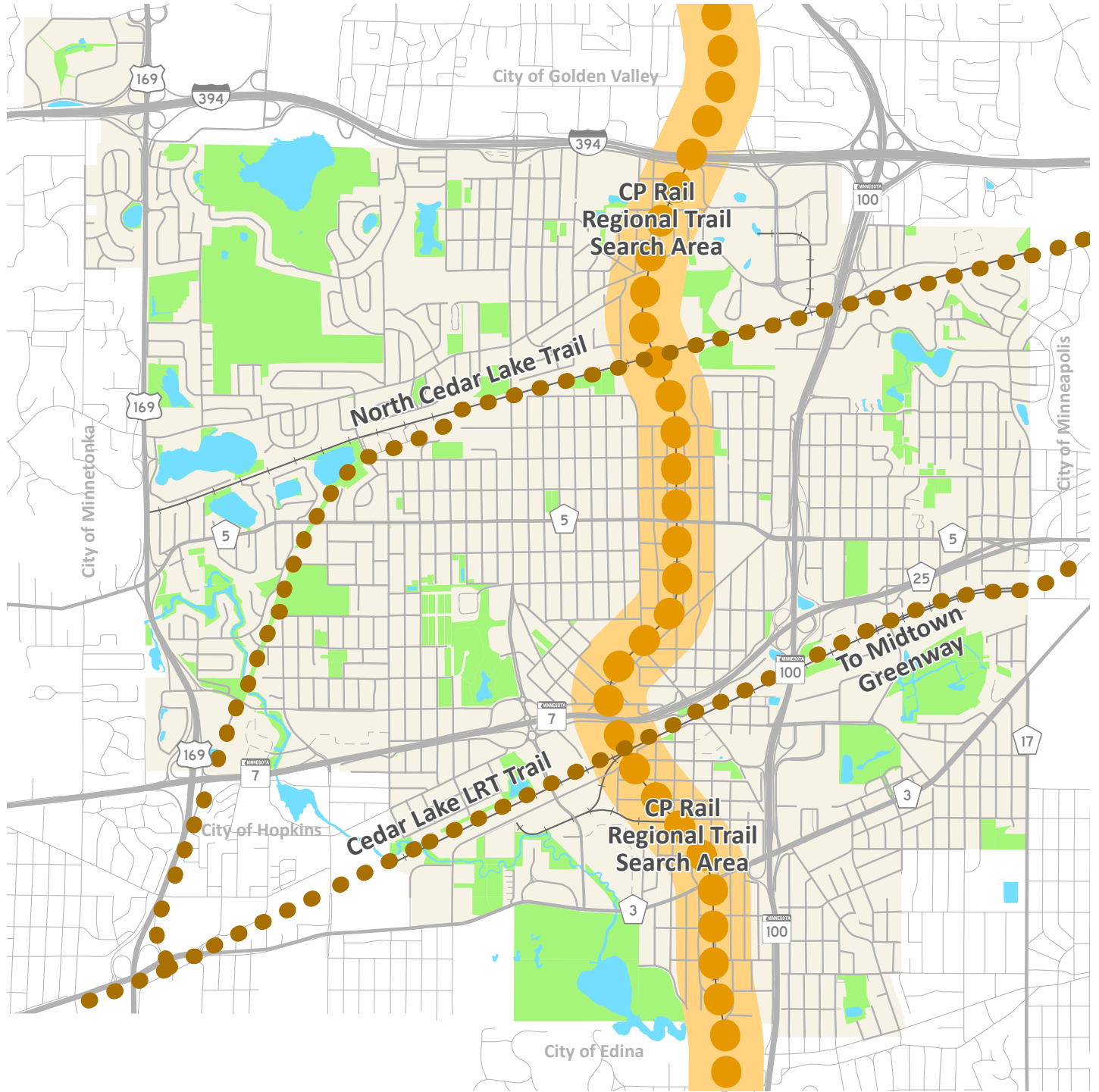
The city Parks and Recreation Department keeps an inventory of all park property and facilities. Table 4-8 is a general maintenance schedule for specific park elements and is based on current practices.

Table 4-8. Improvements

IMPROVEMENT	SCHEDULE
Basketball Courts	
Stripe and resurface	4-6 years
Re-construct	10-15 years
Tennis Courts	
Stripe and resurface	4-6 years
Re-construct	10-15 years
Parking Lots	
Seal Coat	7-9 years
Mill and overlay	18-22 years
Re-construct	38-42 years
Paved Trails	
Mill and overlay	14-16 years
Re-construct	28-32 years
Play Features	
New structure and container	13-15 years
Water Features	
Aeration	Summer maintenance
Fish stocking	Per Mn/DNR
General maintenance	
Tree pruning	9 years

Safety checks are conducted regularly on park equipment and facilities. Park improvements and park equipment replacement are continually prioritized and reprioritized as conditions change. The city's Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) schedules improvements on a five-year basis. It is revised annually with input from user groups, neighborhoods, athletic associations and other stakeholders. As a park improvement project approaches, Parks and Recreation Staff conduct a public input process to determine the specific improvements to be made.

Figure 4-9. Regional Trail Map



Source: City of St. Louis Park, 2018

2018 City of St. Louis Park
Community Development

Park Design Standards

St. Louis Park has an excellent park system that has served residents for many years. The park system has provided opportunities for special events, sports, family gatherings and many other social and recreational activities. Over time the system ages, and many facilities need repairs, reconstruction, or redevelopment. To ensure continuation of the high quality of the parks, the city has created design standards for the reconstruction and development of new park facilities. Park buildings incorporate design elements such as foundation requirements, roof-slope criteria, unifying color and material schemes, updated mechanical systems, and other environmentally sustainable design features.

Replacement Policy

The city has 43 parks with playground equipment. The playground equipment is replaced on a rotating basis every 13 to 15 years due to wear and tear. The city solicits input from the neighborhood to determine what the new structures should include, and does most of the demolition and installation with existing city staff expertise. Approximately 95 percent of the city's outdated playground equipment is donated to "Kids Around the World", which replaces old and damaged portions of the structure and repurposes the equipment in other countries. Play equipment from St. Louis Park has been donated to many communities including those in Jamaica, Poland, and Dominica.



Kids Around the World Park

Recreational Facilities & Programming

Many recreational facilities are owned and operated by the City of St. Louis Park for use and rental by the community, and play host to hundreds of events a year. These facilities include the Rec Center and the ROC's ice arenas and outdoor aquatic park, an amphitheater, splash pads, picnic shelters, park pavilions, play structures, skate park, outdoor winter ice rinks, trails, Westwood Hills Nature Center, banquet and meeting rooms, athletic fields and courts, and off-leash dog parks. These events are mostly housed at Wolfe Park, Louisiana Oaks, and Aquila Park. Rentals include multiple 5k runs, and dog, bike, and kite flying events.

From mid-December to mid-February the city maintains nine ice rinks and staffs five park buildings for patrons to use as a warming house facilities. Patrons can reserve the building or ice rink during the warming house season.

Rec Center

The Rec Center is one of the busiest municipal facilities in St. Louis Park with an average of over 360,000 visitors each year. The original Rec Center was built in 1971 and included an indoor ice arena, outdoor pools and meeting space. In 1997 a second sheet of ice was added and the outdoor pool was converted to an aquatic park. In 2016, with financial support through the St. Louis Park Hockey Association, the Recreation Outdoor Center (ROC) was added on to the Rec Center facility. The ROC is a year-round community asset, from skating in the winter months, to turf in the spring and dry floor activities in the summer and fall, to include concerts, special events and community gatherings in the spring, summer and fall.

Programming at the Rec Center includes: ice skating lessons, adult and youth hockey, summer hockey camps, open skating, broomball, Penny Carnival, open basketball, scuba diving classes, lap swimming, and swimming lessons.

Westwood Hills Nature Center

The City of St. Louis Park acquired its first parcel of park land at Westwood in 1958 from the former Westwood Hills Golf Course. Throughout the 1960s, Westwood was the site for a summer camp conducted by the Parks and Recreation Department. In 1976, the city gave thoughtful consideration to the natural amenities of this park and the need to provide a broader range of park spaces in an urban setting. A plan for the 160-acre site was prepared, and the Westwood Hills Environmental Education Center was established as the name for the facility.

Figure 4-11. Westwood Hills Nature Center



The site includes a lake, marshes, grassland, woodland, and fauna that provide enjoyment, and opportunities for preservation and study. The marsh, woods and restored prairie are beautiful throughout the seasons and provide homes for many animals including song birds, deer, fox, mink, coyotes, wild turkeys, hawks and owls. The site is dominated by Westwood Lake and a remnant maple-basswood forest. The interaction of the lake, the hillside, soil, moisture, and temperatures produces an exceptional, dynamic, and complex ecosystem with diverse flora and fauna. Over three miles of trails provide access to all of these areas.

Infrastructure including trails, boardwalks, docks, observation nodes, a parking lot and entrance driveway were added along with an interpretive center building, which was constructed and opened to the public in June of 1981. This building is the location for formal programs and exhibits, as well as an office and storage facility for staff.

Westwood Hills Environmental Education Center provides educational programs year-round for all age groups. Over 29,000 individuals per year on average participate in formal programs with many more informal visits for hiking, bird watching, wildlife observation, and picnicking. Programs include raptors, live animals, puppet shows, community events, bird watching walks, Jr. Naturalists, and archery.

The city council recognized that the current Interpretive Center Building no longer met current operational needs of the center, and the building was also deemed unrepairable. In 2016, the city conducted a study of the Westwood Hills Nature Center, and created a master plan that identified future programming and facility needs. The most considerable outcome of the plan is the construction of a new Interpretive Center Building which is planned to be constructed in 2019 and open in 2020. City residents believe the Westwood Hills Nature Center is an extremely important community asset and has been labeled the “Gem of the City”.



Athletic, Recreational, & Educational Programming

The city prides itself on quality community-based special events, facility services, and programming services. The city plans a wide range of special event, family, youth, and adult programs annually, and incorporates racial equity and healthy initiatives throughout the planning process. Examples of programs and events include a community celebration (Parktacular), concert series, kids’ penny carnival, holiday events, fireworks, kids’ garage sale, ice cream social, an egg hunt, athletic tournaments, and many other educational opportunities. These activities help create a positive and healthy community.

Athletic, recreational and outdoor educational programs are key assets to the community. Programs, leagues and camps are offered to all age groups throughout the year at a variety of locations. Athletic opportunities include t-ball, baseball, tennis, kickball, volleyball, soccer, basketball, martial arts, skateboard camps, broomball, skating lessons, and hockey.

Recreational opportunities include art programs, dance programs, family programs, holiday specials, yoga, field trips, pre-school activities, summer playgrounds, winter rinks, little tot drop-in, indoor open skating & hockey, and fabulous Friday specials.

The city's programs, events, and facilities are based on the interests and the needs of the community. Programming is adapted yearly based on the number of participants in each age category, regional and national trends, and cultural interest. Recent trends include special events, youth sports tournaments, low impact sports, and non-traditional individual sports and activities. The programming offered by the city has evolved along with the demographics of St. Louis Park.

Outdoor recreation and environmental educational programs are offered at Westwood Hills Nature Center all year long. Residents and non-residents of all ages can enjoy opportunities to learn about and experience wildlife, plants, and natural sciences. Opportunities include snowshoeing, fire building, day camps, canoeing, full moon hikes, bird watching hikes, maple syrup tapping, ice fishing, animal tracking, and more.

The Summer Park Playground Program takes place during the summer months from June through the end of July for youth ages 4 to 12. The program is held at 11 parks around the city and consist of three hour sessions Monday through Thursday in which youth participate in games, crafts, and other activities at their local park. Programming includes visits from a Playground Naturalist from Westwood Hills Nature Center, Activity Specialists that bring art projects, and an Edible Playground Instructor who helps youth plant edible playgrounds in the park system.

The Summer Park Playground Program also puts on Friday programs, a Youth Safety Camp, and a three week adventure camp in August.

A large community festival site can be created in the "West End" by Gamble Drive between Park Place Boulevard and Duke Drive. The 35,700 square foot area is designed to host up to one large event a month bringing new events, visitors and revenue to the city.



Natural Resources

The natural resources of St. Louis Park provide a valuable connection to the environment for residents, visitors and individuals working in the city. Stewardship of these resources is the responsibility of multiple city departments and various county and state agencies.

Most often, however, the natural resources of St. Louis Park are served by the city's Department of Operations and Recreation. The Department operates the Westwood Hills Nature Center; conducts the city's forestry, landscape, vegetation management (i.e. weed control); wildlife management; invasive species; and native restoration programs. It also coordinates its efforts with the Engineering Department on water-related issues and is the liaison to natural resource organizations.

Even though St. Louis Park is a fully developed community, it retains several important natural resources within its borders, as noted below.

Minnehaha Creek

Minnehaha Creek is a major natural waterway that runs through the southern part of St. Louis Park. During part of the year, the creek can be used for canoeing, its primary recreational purpose, and there are several canoe landings in the city on publicly owned land. Additional park land was recently acquired from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to restore and preserve the riparian buffer, which is a vegetated area near the stream, in this stretch.

As the creek passes through the city, land use along its borders becomes increasingly intense. Land use policy along the creek is set by the city; however, the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) plays an increasingly important role in regulating the health of the creek and of the water flowing into it. In 2004, Minnehaha Creek was listed by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) as an impaired waterway. It is the mission of the MCWD to manage and protect the water resources of the watershed. As a result, city officials work in an increasingly coordinated manner with the MCWD to realize the shared goals for the creek.

Figure 4-12. Minnehaha Creek Preserve





Trails and Creek Re-meander

In 2009 Methodist Hospital, the MCWD and the city completed a project to recreate the natural meander in the creek near the Hospital property. The restored meander returned the creek to a more natural shape and restored the wetland vegetation, improving habitat for wildlife in the area and promoting many ecological benefits of the creek. An elevated boardwalk and canoe landings were installed to increase public access, and educational signage was added throughout the site.

The overall outcomes of the project include: increased capacity for floodwater, additional stormwater capture, slowed flow of the creek allowing for filtering of pollutants, enhanced fish and wildlife habitat, and enhanced the recreation and public access of the creek.

The Methodist Hospital Creek project provided a strong example for how the MCWD can manage and restore wetlands within the District, and in 2012 the MCWD and the city started restoration work to return natural curves to the previously-straightened stream in the southwestern area of St. Louis Park. Through restoration and re-meandering, the stream now treats polluted stormwater from more than 80 acres that previously flowed untreated into the creek, prevents erosion by slowing down water, creates fish and wildlife habitat, and connects the creek to historic wetlands. It connects more than 600 housing units within walking distance of transit connections, and the project has created a great asset for the community.

The Minnehaha Creek Preserve opened in July, 2015 and features 2,200 feet of boardwalk and 4,600 feet of paved trail around the restored stretch of Minnehaha Creek between Meadowbrook Avenue and Louisiana Avenue. The project was financed, in part, by a grant from the Clean Water Fund, and is the cornerstone of the Minnehaha Greenway, which is a stretch of more than 50 acres of continuous green space along Minnehaha Creek.

Urban Forests, Lakes and Wildlife

Trees in our Parks

Thousands of trees thrive throughout the city's park system, growing in varied topography, terrain and conditions. A mix of hardwood species exist in the parks with the most common tree species found in the lowlands being box elder and cottonwood. There are also remnant stands of maple, basswood, black cherry and bur oak trees scattered within several parks. These trees once occupied the oak savannas of pre-settlement areas.

The city has an active tree planting and replacement program in the parks with the goal of establishing a diversity of tree types to create a healthier, more natural urban forest environment. Over the past 10 years, tree planting in parks, has been accelerated with hundreds of new, diverse trees planted.

Westwood Hills Nature Center Improvements

The city is focused on enhancing the diversity and resiliency of the plant communities at Westwood Hills Nature Center to increase their value as both wildlife habitat and to enhance their utility as outdoor classrooms. To accomplish this goal, the city created a Master Natural Resource Management Plan. Management strategies began in 2016 and include control of invasive species through mechanical means, herbicide application, and prescribed burns where applicable. Seeding and planting of native trees, shrubs, and herbaceous species occur where necessary to replace invasive species.

Restoration

The city wooded areas are currently heavily infested with buckthorn, garlic mustard, and exotic honeysuckle. An invasive plant management and native plant restoration plan has been implemented, including a Buckthorn Control Program

Shoreline management and restoration has been actively pursued through invasive species control and native vegetation plantings. Purple loosestrife, once a dominant species found in and along most of the city's wetlands and ponds, has now been reduced, and in some places eliminated through cooperative efforts with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR). Other bio-control options are on the horizon.

The city has planted native vegetation to replace eroded and turf grass areas along shorelines of many of our lakes and ponds. This native vegetation serves storm water management purposes and also provides habitat and food sources for the city's native waterfowl and animal population. It also inhibits geese from using nearby park turf areas. Shoreline restoration projects will continue.

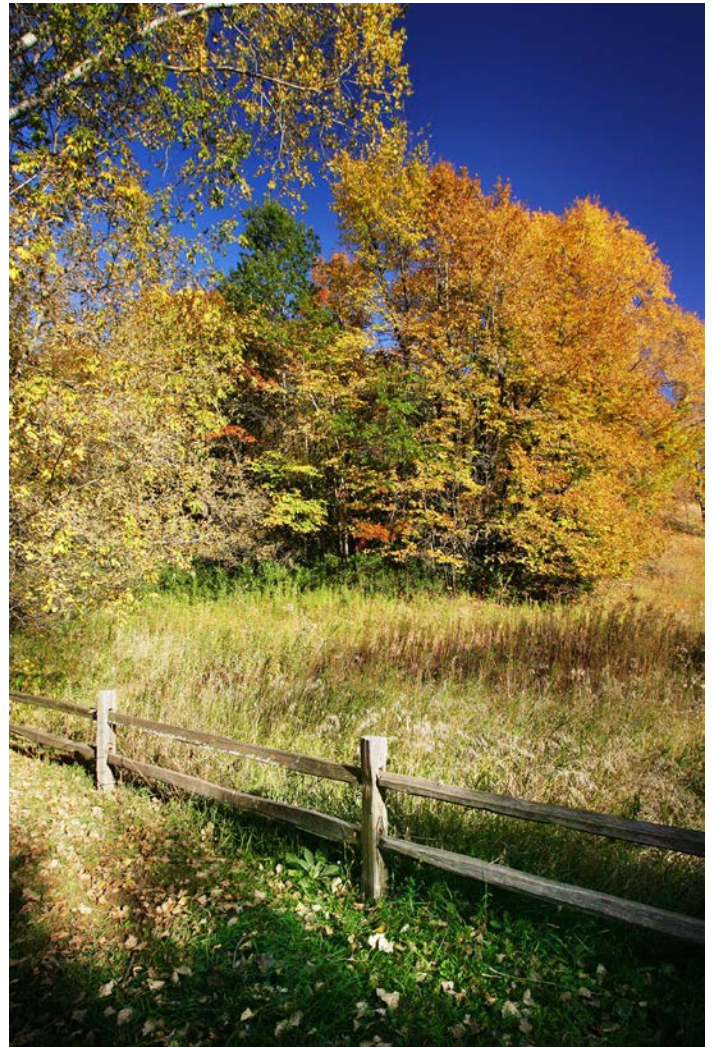
The city also encourages private homeowners to plant native vegetation in their yards. The city's Native Vegetation Permit allows private properties to grow native flora over six inches tall in over 25 percent of their yard.

Dutch Elm Disease

The city continues its 40-year battle to identify and promptly remove trees infected with Dutch Elm Disease (DED). Over the past 10 years the city has identified and removed approximately 500 trees per year. Unfortunately, the city is losing large trees that have the greatest environmental, aesthetic and social impacts and values to a community.

Bur Oak Blight

A new disease called Bur Oak Blight (BOB) has been identified in the Twin Cities area and is affecting bur oak trees in St. Louis Park. BOB mimics the symptoms of oak wilt disease, with lots of brown leaves appearing in a tree's crown and falling off during the latter half of the growing season, typically late to mid-July. BOB tends to be most prevalent during growing seasons that start out cool and wet. Successive years of BOB can kill an infected tree. The best treatment for BOB is a fungicide treatment administered by a St. Louis Park-licensed tree service in the early spring.



Tree Maintenance

A healthy urban forest needs care and maintenance. The city is committed to an active tree pruning program along streets, boulevards and in the parks. The goal of the pruning program is to properly manage and revitalize tree resources and investment. It also reduces hazards and impediments to traffic. The city prunes each boulevard and park tree on a seven to ten year rotation.

Tree Planting and Replacement

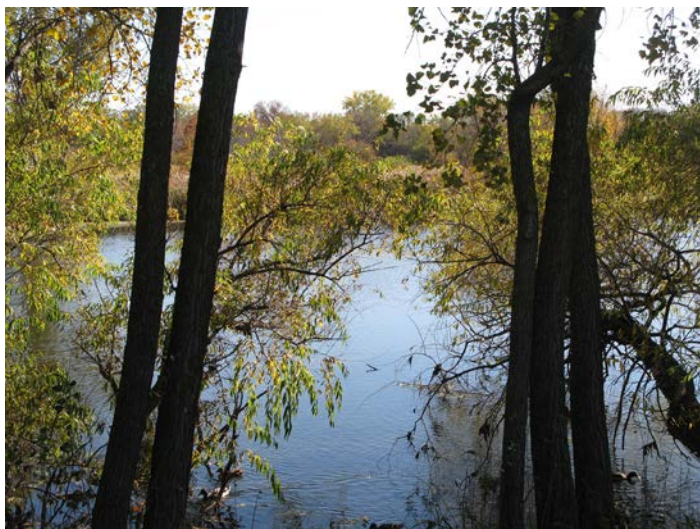
St. Louis Park is one of the few cities to actively support and plant trees along the street right-of-way (often referred to as the boulevard). In an effort to reduce the loss of tree canopy from diseases or other factors, the city implements an annual boulevard tree replacement and planting program. Each boulevard and park tree lost to a disease or other factor is replaced within a year of removal, if conditions are right.

The city plants approximately 500 trees per year within boulevards and city parks. The plantings diversity goal is to follow the 10-20-30 rule, which states that no more than ten percent of one species, no more than twenty percent of one genus, and no more than thirty percent of one family should be planted throughout the city.

The city strives to fill in as many current boulevard tree vacancies as economically feasible by filling in areas where no boulevard tree is currently or has ever been planted. This tree planting and replacement program culminates in a rich, hardy tree stock diverse in species, size and age, which is better suited to survive an unforeseen injurious invasive pest or disease epidemic.

St. Louis Park is losing trees on private residential property through disease, construction and other factors. There are approximately two to three residential trees lost for every one tree planted. The city offers numerous tree resources for private residents to maintain and diversify the city's canopy. Private tree replacement through new development or through the city's Annual Tree Sale is will allow the city to maintain a robust canopy and diversify trees on private properties.

The city's zoning ordinance requires the protection or replacement of significant trees on all public and commercial property and the replacement of trees on public land on a one-to-one per caliper basis. However, the city's tree preservation ordinance does not cover the single family areas of the city, where the city is experiencing the greatest tree canopy loss. Future policies should look at ways to achieve a one-for-one replacement for trees on private property.



Water Bodies

St. Louis Park has numerous water bodies within its boundaries including Wolfe Lake, Westwood Lake, and Bass Lake. The shoreland areas in the city are in good condition in some areas. Where residential property directly abuts the water bodies, however, there are some potential ecological problems. To improve the water quality of the city's water bodies, a buffer area between a typical suburban lawn and the lake should be provided.

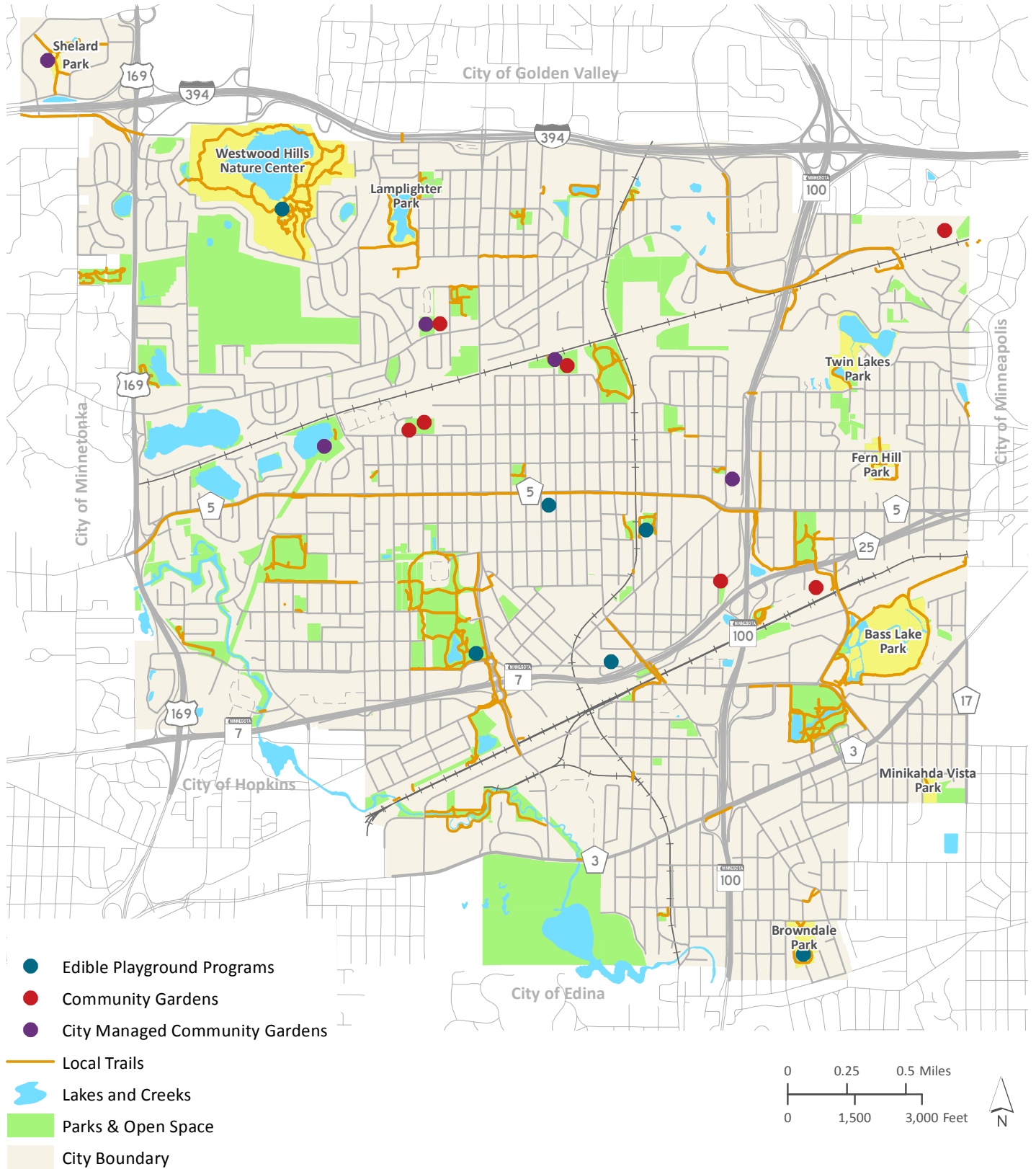
Water bodies in the city are not of sufficient size to accommodate major commercial or recreational fishing or recreational activities because of the type and size. Frequent recreational activities include canoeing, rowing, and pedestrian and bicycle activity on trails surrounding the lakes. City staff, in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, has implemented a program entitled "Fishing in the Neighborhood" (FIN). This unique program stocks fish in three water bodies (Wolfe, Westwood and Lamplighter), providing St. Louis Park youth an opportunity to learn to fish in a pleasant and relaxed environment.

Citizen-Assisted Monitoring Program (CAMP) is a resident volunteer program to monitor water quality of the water bodies within St. Louis Park through the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services program. Water quality of the water bodies in St. Louis Park are measured on a bi-weekly basis from April-October. Volunteers collect a surface water sample to help the city and other water managers document water quality impacts and trends. The lakes monitored in St. Louis Park include Twin Lake, Westwood Lake, South Oak Lake, and Cobblecrest Lake.

Wildlife Management

An abundance of wildlife thrives in St. Louis Park, which is a testament to the natural elements found throughout the community. The natural resource ecosystems required for all of the wildlife are intact, promoted and managed for this aspect in conjunction with other human-related functions, such as storm water storage and recreation. Striving for a greenway approach for wildlife ecosystems is ideal and could be accomplished through preservation of existing public and private open space, partnering with private open space landowners to keep the land as open space (i.e. conservation easements), and purchase of open space.

Figure 4-13. Bee Friendly Parks, Community Gardens, and Edible Playground Programs



Source: City of St. Louis Park, 2018

2018 City of St. Louis Park
Community Development



Bee Friendly

In 2015, the city passed a resolution declaring St. Louis Park a “Bee-Friendly” city. The resolution defines eight parks where no pesticides are sprayed and dandelions and white clover are promoted including: Shelard Park, Lamplighter Park, Westwood Hills Nature Center, Twin Lakes, Fern Hill Park, Bass Lake Preserve, Browndale Park, and Minikahda Vista Park.

The city is dedicated to increasing education about bees and bee-friendly landscaping, and promotes the creation of bee habitats throughout the city, on public and private property. In addition, the city has revised the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program to lower chemical inputs into parks and city-owned properties. A map of the city’s Bee-Friendly parks can be found at Figure 4-13.

Deer Management

The balance between wildlife populations and their respective biological carrying capacities (the available land/habitat for wildlife species to thrive) and those of human populations is delicate. If the tolerance level of people to wildlife impacts (cultural carrying capacity (CCC)) is out of balance, the human population, and often times the wildlife population, suffers. Natural habitats once rich in diverse plant life will be foraged while residential landscapes are preyed upon and potentially decimated. Other considerations and impacts such as the increased potential of deer/auto accidents and the potential threats of disease spread (i.e. Lyme disease) are considered when managing wildlife such as deer.

To manage this delicate balance requires actions to reduce wildlife populations. For deer in St. Louis Park, the CCC is closely monitored, with a management program effectively in place. This management program will continue into the foreseeable future and will be aided by the fact that surrounding cities have begun active management (control) programs within their jurisdictions, thereby lessening population pressure on St. Louis Park lands and deer herds.

Canada Goose Management

St. Louis Park has partnered with University of Minnesota and the DNR in the past for Canada goose control. Each season an inventory is taken of the high goose incidence areas within the city, with population control the goal. Control is necessary to reduce geese impacts (primarily defecation onto park turf and trails) to human recreation and community livability.

Previous control efforts, combined with an annual inventory, provide reasonable and effective management of the geese. The city is in the process of revising the Canada Goose Management Plan and will begin implementing new management techniques.

Invasive Species

St. Louis Park partners with other local, regional and national government organizations to deal with potentially severe invasions and outbreaks. For example, the city has an Emerald Ash Borer Preparedness Plan to respond to the anticipated invasion of Emerald ash borer.

Dutch Elm Disease is a fungal disease that was first introduced to the state in 1961 and is now found within every county in Minnesota. Oak Wilt Disease is caused by a nonnative fungus that invades the water vessels of oak trees and eventually kills most infected trees. The city combats both Dutch Elm Disease and Oak Wilt Disease by identifying, marking, and removing infected trees in a timely fashion.

Eurasian Milfoil and the Curly Leaf Pond Weed are invasive aquatic plants that are found and being treated in Wolfe Lake.

The city stopped planting maples in 2012 in preparation for arrival of the Asian Long-horned Beetle. This invasive species is not currently in St. Louis Park, but the city is proactively diversifying the tree stock in anticipation of its arrival.

Invasive plants are also found throughout the city, including Buckthorn, Leafy Spurge, and Garlic Mustard. Buckthorn is found throughout city land and a management program will be fully implemented in 2018. The management program categorizes city properties on a scale of eradication, control and lower priority. Land with little Buckthorn are on the eradication list, properties with some Buckthorn are being controlled, and those with a lot of Buckthorn are low priority as they are too difficult to control. Leafy Spurge is found at the Westwood Nature Center and the city is working with the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources on a bio-control plan. Garlic Mustard is also found at Westwood Nature Center and is being pulled and treated where feasible.

Healthy Living

The city is a leader in promoting healthy eating and active living and has been a partner in Active Living Hennepin County since 2006. St. Louis Park recognizes the built environment influences active living opportunities and that nature plays a vital role in human health and well-being. In 2013, the city council passed the Healthy Eating and Active Living Policy to encourage the development and implementation of policies and practices that support and promote healthy eating and active living in St. Louis Park. More detailed information can be found in the Health Section of this Plan.

Access to Parks

Active living means incorporating physical activity into one's daily lifestyle. St. Louis Park is dedicated to providing the option for its residents to lead active, healthy lifestyles through active non-motorized transportation (walking, bicycling, skateboarding, etc.) and through recreation. All city residents live within ¼ mile of a city park or the regional Cedar Lake LRT Trail and multi-use network. Providing a safe, accessible, and equitable network of sidewalks and bike lanes to get to city parks and major destinations has been one of the city's top priorities. In 2013, St. Louis Park adopted the a ten year capital improvement program "Connect the Park" to fund 12.8 miles of new sidewalks, 3.62 miles of new trails, and 35.4 miles of new bikeways. More detailed information can be found in the Mobility Section of this Plan.

Community and Edible Gardens

Community gardens contribute to St. Louis Park's desire to be a city where healthy living is a way of life. The city owns and manages five community gardens, and seven additional community gardens are privately operated throughout city neighborhoods. The city also manages six edible gardens as part of the Summer Park Playground Program. Community gardens offer many benefits to the city including an increased sense of community ownership and stewardship. Studies show that community gardeners and their children eat healthier diets than non-gardening families. Community gardens also provide opportunities for inclusivity, bringing together people from all backgrounds (age, race, culture, and social class), offering unique opportunities for cultural exchange between new immigrants, residents, and other gardeners, and providing access to neighborhood grounds and other community information points.



Climate Change

Trees that require a moister, cooler climate, such as sugar maples, have been dying off in large numbers over the last decade due to the change in climate. In response, the city is planting hardier tree species that grow well in drier climates, including native species if they are available. The city has been aggressive in removing potential hazard or poor structure trees, due to a high occurrence of stronger winds and ice storms. The city is also planting more perennial forbs to replace annual flowers, which require more watering.

To increase the city's resiliency, city departments collaborate on infrastructure projects when feasible. The skate park and underground stormwater system in Carpenter Park is a recent example. The stormwater system treats a 42-acre watershed and provides level surfaces for the skate park. The system was awarded the Minnesota Erosion Control Associated (MECA) 2018 Environmental Excellence Award.

In the short term, climate change is causing a wetter climate in Minnesota, with increased rainfall events and higher water levels. This is allowing for additional recreational opportunities within the city, including a longer season for canoeing in Minnehaha Creek.

Equity Initiatives

The city is focused on providing equitable programs, infrastructure, and opportunities that fit the needs and desires of all population segments in St. Louis Park. Some equity initiatives include: men-only and women-only swim events, adaptive recreational programs for individuals with developmental disabilities, yoga and pool exercises for senior populations including, and programs for youth and young adults.



Where We Are Headed

St. Louis Park is committed to providing parks that enhance the community's livability and vitality and provide a strong anchor for neighborhoods. The city will continue its efforts to maintain an integrated and balanced system of parks, open space, trails and recreational opportunities that accommodate the changing needs of its citizens. Future park and recreation planning will be influenced by changing demographics, trends in recreation programming and increased awareness of the natural environment. It will be important for the city to evaluate and plan to accommodate changing needs and evolving trends.

Neighborhood Vision for the Park System

The city held a series of neighborhood planning workshops in late 2017 to gather input from city residents. Attendees were asked to identify their neighborhood's most important features and answer questions regarding businesses, housing, health and safety, natural areas, and parks and recreation.

Parks, recreation, trail facilities, trees, and green space were ranked as the top neighborhood features. Residents highly value the existing park system, and frequent neighborhood parks and playgrounds, existing trails, the Rec Center, Westwood Hills Nature Center, ice rinks, and aquatic facilities. Additional facilities suggested include indoor park facilities, trails and trail lighting, community gardens, improvements to the existing dog park or a new dog park, and more park amenities.

Support was expressed for continued efforts to improve the natural areas in the city including tree planting, lake and wetland maintenance, preservation, enhancement, and the addition of green spaces, and an increase in native vegetation and pollinator friendly habitats.

Changing Demographics and Emerging Recreational Trends

Changing Demographics

As the population of St. Louis Park ages and diversifies, it will be important to respond to the changing recreational needs of city residents.

Aging Baby Boomers

According to the state demographer, by 2040 more than 1 in 5 people in the Twin Cities will be an older adult (65+), including Baby Boomers. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), regular physical activity is one of the most important things aging adults can do for their health, as it can prevent and lower the risk for heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression and some cancers.

Diversification

Since 2000, the city has become more diverse. The percentage of white residents has decreased 7 percent, while the number of residents of color has increased 55.7 percent. To respond to the changing demographics, the city will continue to actively address racial, age, and income inequities by providing infrastructure, programming, and opportunities for a more diverse population.

Emerging Recreational Trends

Recreational trends are constantly evolving based on national and local interests. The City of St. Louis Park stays up to date and engaged with national and regional recreational associations to learn about current parks and recreational trends. Additionally, in response to community engagement surveys, the city actively incorporates community feedback and ideas into its programming and facility plans.

Park Facilities

Neighborhood Parks

The city does not have any current plans to acquire additional land for park purposes. From time to time, however, the city may have the opportunity to acquire privately owned land. These opportunities should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Redevelopment may also provide opportunities to obtain new park land. Through the requirements for park dedication, up to 10% of any property that is being platted may be dedicated to the city.

In 2016 the city purchased additional land for park purposes near 40th Street and France Avenue. The city will determine the best use for the land, which could include an active park, a passive park, or a dog park, and some single-family residential lots.



Community Parks

Two golf courses, Meadowbrook and the Minneapolis Golf Club, are located in St. Louis Park and represent a significant amount of open space. If an opportunity to acquire either land or a golf course becomes available, the city will carefully evaluate options related to additional land for the park system. Potential uses for this land include space for active community parks with room for play fields and various community facilities.

Park/Open Space/Trails

There are large areas of open space within the city that are currently not programmed. It may be possible to utilize some of these areas through partnerships with the MCWD or Three Rivers Park District. Establishing green corridors connecting parks may be a desirable direction for the city. New connections via sidewalks and trails are important to the city, and priorities are established in the Sidewalk and Trails Plan (included in the Mobility chapter of this plan). Providing opportunities for residents to live active lives is of high importance within the city. Efforts should be made to provide additional trail connections to major destinations and areas of recreation, including the Minnehaha Creek boardwalk and trail access near Knollwood Target.

Shared Use Parks

The city has developed partnerships with public and private schools to provide additional park land that otherwise would not be available for St. Louis Park residents. There are approximately 13 parks that have a public/non-profit or public/private partnership. If in the future any private or non-profit entity no longer wants to have the shared use park, the city should consider the opportunity to acquire the property for city park purposes.

Privately-Owned Publicly Accessed Parks

As development occurs and the population density in St. Louis Park increases, retaining green space and recreational opportunities is increasingly important. It may be desirable to partner with private developers to provide public access to private land. In addition, the city will continue to require park dedication and a minimum of dedicated outdoor recreational areas for residential development.

Open Space

Preserving the city's green space is vital to the long-term health of the community. To accomplish this, the city should retain the community's existing park and open space according to the city's Disposition of Public Land Policy. The Resolution for the Disposition or Use of Public Land was adopted in 1997 and seeks to preserve parks, open space, and wetlands and other lands that serve a present or future public purpose, meet the goals of the Comprehensive Plan, provide open space for flora and fauna, and provide environmental protection. The eligibility of the land to be vacated includes:

- » The city council must find that the land in question has no existing or future public need or use.
- » The land must not have been acquired by the city through tax forfeiture or dedication.
- » The land must not be designated on the Comprehensive Plan as park land.
- » The land requested to be vacated must be under the jurisdiction of the city.
- » The city shall not vacate easements across any wetland.
- » A resulting right-of-way vacation will not land lock any existing parcel or lot of record.



Regional Trails

To meet the needs of the region in 2040 and beyond the Metropolitan Council 2040 [Regional Development Framework](#) indicates a potential for a new north/south regional trail. It is shown generally located along the existing CP Rail MNS Spur railroad track that runs north and south through the city (See Figure 4-9 for a general alignment). It measures 3.7 miles in length from the northern to the southern city limits, and has a right of way that varies in width from 65 to 280 feet. Land use adjacent to the track is a combination of single family residential, office, commercial and industrial. The railroad is owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway and is in active use.

A feasibility study of the potential for a trail was conducted by Three Rivers Park District to identify general public concerns, potential construction and environmental challenges that affect the development of a trail, a future trail layout, and possible federal funding sources to pay for construction.

Local Trails

Access to and within existing parks via local trails is valued by the St. Louis Park community, and efforts to increase local access should continue. A healthy park system includes a connected network of sidewalks and trails that connect local parks to larger community and regional parks and trails.

Facilities and Programming

The city desires to maintain high quality facilities and programs that meet the needs of the community. As the demographic makeup of St. Louis Park evolves, the city should actively engage the community to provide programming that meets the interests and desires of residents. Efficient operations of space and resources will continue to be implemented to help create a resilient park and facility system.

Natural Resources

Preservation, maintenance, and diversification of the city's natural, ecological, and scenic resources will remain a high priority for the city. The city will continue efforts to combat invasive flora and fauna species, and incorporate natural vegetation and trees to expand the city's tree canopy.

Healthy Living

St. Louis Park recognizes that the built environment influences active living opportunities and that nature plays a vital role in human health and well-being. Healthy living includes a well-connected and maintained park system that is in close proximity to where people live and work, access to open space and recreational activities, pesticide free parks and habitats, and a vibrant, robust and resilient natural environment. The city should continue to expand healthy living initiatives for all residents regardless of age, income, ability, or cultural background.

Climate Change

To reach the city's Climate Action Plan goal of 2040 carbon neutrality, park facility projects should take an aggressive role in adopting strategies to increase energy efficiency. Parks should also partner with other city departments to install collaborative infrastructure projects when possible to create a resilient park system. Park facility projects should also partner with watershed management organizations on land and water resource planning when feasible.

Equity Initiatives

The city is focused on providing equitable programs, infrastructure, and opportunities that fit the needs and desires for all segments of populations in St. Louis Park. The city should evaluate universal accessibility of park facilities and programming to ensure the community's assets are welcoming to all.

Parks, Open Space and Natural Resources Goals and Strategies

The city has an excellent, balanced park system. The city's plans and programs under its past comprehensive planning effort, coupled with efforts to obtain grants and aids in preserving major natural amenities, have been successful. However, opportunities for expansion of the park system still exist.

The city intends to continue providing the high quality system of parks, recreation and open space as a valuable component of strong neighborhoods and a livable, healthy, resilient, vital and equitable community.

Park System Goals

1. Preserve an integrated and balanced system of park and open spaces including:



- Neighborhood parks to provide park and open space close to residential development.
- Community parks for recreation activities.
- Community parks for citywide use for active and passive recreation.
- Historical parks that preserve the history of the area.
- Indoor facilities such as the Rec Center and the ROC that provide an aquatic park, skating rinks and meeting room space for the residents.
- Environmental areas such as the Westwood Hills Nature Center, providing places for people to experience nature.
- Undeveloped open spaces for natural vegetation, linear trails and as a relief for storm water storage.
- Regional and local trails.

Strategies

- A. Systematically upgrade existing park shelters, playground structures, trails and other park amenities to meet the changing needs of the community, in accordance with the improvement schedule, and prioritize improvements that will have the most positive impact on equity outcomes.
- B. Provide flexible and equitable spaces to accommodate changing trends in demand for park and open space programming.
- C. Involve the neighborhoods being served and the community to help shape park facilities and the use of open spaces within the city.

- D. Continue programs to promote volunteer efforts to assist with park amenities and aesthetic appeal.
- E. Continue to support the park/school partnership and to coordinate park use with educational providers. If in the future any private or non-profit entity no longer wants to have the shared use park, the city should consider the opportunity to acquire the property for city park purposes.
- F. Continue to support partnerships with outside entities.
- G. Implement established design standards for park buildings, and install art and educational tools in all new and updated facilities.
- H. Explore the need and options for additional dog parks.
- I. Carefully evaluate options related to additional land for the park system if an opportunity to acquire either land or a golf course becomes available.
- J. Consider the opportunity to acquire the property for city park purposes if in the future any private or non-profit entity no longer wants to have the shared use park.

2. Take steps to enhance and improve energy and environmental efficiency in our park areas and park buildings to increase resiliency and combat climate change.



Strategies

- A. Implement alternative vegetation management within the city’s park areas.
- B. Periodically conduct energy audits for all park buildings. Utilize audit results when planning for long term capital improvements to the park buildings to ensure compliance with the Energy Action Plan and the Climate Action Plan.
- C. During redevelopment of any park areas incorporate rain gardens, natural vegetative buffers, and other stormwater management techniques best suited to that park area, where appropriate.
- D. Increase environmental justice by planting more trees in areas of low income, which are often the same areas with the most impervious surfaces.

3. Seek permanent and reliable funding sources for parkland acquisition, capital improvements.



Strategies

- A. Ensure park dedication or a park dedication fee is collected for all new development where possible.
- B. Use trail dedication fees and other available funds to add trail links to connect neighborhoods to regional trail systems, parks, schools, and other destinations.
- C. Maintain a five-year Improvements Plan to implement planned park improvements.
- D. Continue partnerships with youth organizations to collaborate on park improvements on a shared-use basis.
- E. Evaluate and revise the park dedication fee ordinance, and forecast park and trail dedication funds to accurately assess opportunities for funding for capital projects and acquisitions.

Recreation Goals

1. Promote healthy living through the use of park and open spaces for active and passive recreation, organized sports, picnic facilities, and environmental programs, youth and adult leagues and programs, and special events for all ages, abilities, and cultural backgrounds.



Strategies

- A. Educate all residents in the community on the wealth of recreational and educational opportunities and pursuits that exist in the parks system, and identify an ongoing process to measure cultural responsiveness to ensure that opportunities, activities, and practices are meeting the community’s needs.
- B. Market programs and facilities using brochures, cable television, the internet and other available promotional avenues in a clear and available manner for all residents.
- C. Enhance park and trail opportunities for the city through partnerships with other governmental agencies including the Three Rivers Park District and surrounding cities.

- D. Evaluate and plan for the future demand for available youth and adult park areas. Offer new ideas and facilities that will provide the opportunity to expand entertainment programming, athletic leagues, cultural and artistic opportunities, family schedule-friendly programs, healthy lifestyle/holistic classes, and community wide special events.
- E. Eliminate as many participation barriers (i.e. disability, financial, cultural, etc.) as possible for the delivery of outstanding service.
- F. Promote opportunities for people to build connections with their peers, neighbors, and the greater community by supporting intergenerational and intercultural programs, activities, and events.

2. Integrate the trail system through and between parks and open space within the city.



Strategies

- A. Continue to maintain trails throughout parks in the city, and coordinate capital improvement planning to improve pedestrian and bicycle connections to and within parks.
- B. Identify high-use trails and consider appropriate trail surface materials to encourage safe, accessible use of the trail.
- C. Work with Minnehaha Creek Watershed District to develop park trails along Minnehaha Creek, where appropriate.
- D. Review trails throughout the parks system and consider if connections to the regional trail system or to other parks may be appropriate.
- E. Provide additional trail connections to major destinations and areas of recreation, including the Minnehaha Creek boardwalk and trail access near Knollwood Target.
- F. Provide adequate lighting in parks and on trails.

Natural Resource Goals

1. Establish, retain and maintain parks or open space along and adjacent to lakes, ponds and wetlands for public access, storm water detention, and resource protection.



Strategies

- A. Make habitat modifications and improvements that will benefit fish, wildlife, and native plantings within the city's park and open space areas.
- B. Use Best Management Practices (BMP's) to buffer lakes, ponds, wetlands and streams with native grasses and other ecologically appropriate plant species. Where possible, use buffers on public lands where appropriate to encourage residents, business owners, and developers to emulate best practices.
- C. Develop a natural resources inventory for the city's system of parks and open spaces.
- D. Continue to increase pursuit of ecosystem approach to natural resource management.

2. Enhance use of Westwood Hills Nature Center.



Strategies

- A. Maximize opportunities for enjoyment, educational opportunities, study and observation of nature.
- B. Minimize disruption to the park to preserve the character of the park's habitat and associated native flora and fauna.
- C. Implement the Westwood Hills Nature Center Master Natural Resource Management Plan.
- D. Construct a new Westwood Hills Nature Center building to meet the current and future needs of the community.

3. Recognize Minnehaha Creek as a shared community asset.



Strategies

- A. Acquire and maintain public ownership of the banks of the creek and parks along the creek throughout the city where possible.
- B. Maintain high quality canoe landings and seek to maximize use and access at strategic locations.
- C. Retain and improve the natural vegetation and amenities along the creek by working with the Minnehaha Creek Watershed district to protect it and provide a natural setting for its enjoyment and use.
- D. Restrict future development from the shoreline in order to protect the integrity of the creek and natural vegetation.
- E. Support shared property ownership agreements, including conservation easements, in locations where property owners are interested in improving public access to the Creek.
- F. Educate the public about the Creek by providing information on its course from Lake Minnetonka to the Mississippi River, the location of access to recreational opportunities on the Creek, and methods to improve its ecological health.

4. Collaboratively maintain the natural environment of the city.



Strategies

- A. Protect, maintain, diversify, and expand the city's tree canopy, and continue boulevard tree planting and replacement programs.
- B. Continue injurious pest sanitation efforts and programs and develop partnerships and future invasive pest management plans.
- C. Continue planting native plant species, including the restoration of wooded and native shorelines, throughout city and in all city park and landscaping efforts.
- D. Continue the boulevard and park pruning and maintenance plan on a 7-10 year rotation.
- E. Offer community gardening opportunities as need and interest arises.

- F. Partner with other public projects to improve the city's natural resources (Bass Lake Preserve, Minnehaha Creek re-meander)
- G. Continue to support policies for pollinators throughout the city, and encourage edible and pollinator-friendly landscapes on residential properties.
- H. Implement tree protection and replacement policies that seek to achieve a one-for-one replacement for trees on private property.
- I. Periodically revise and update the city's management and implementation procedures for invasive species
- J. Incorporate diverse cultures into natural resources through community gardens, SEEDs program with summer playgrounds, FIN program, events (such as Parktacular, tree plantings, et al.), presentations (at schools and targeted groups).

5. Support policies and practices that will create a more resilient natural environment to combat climate change.



Strategies

- A. Pursue invasive species management with other organizations and cities.
- B. Reduce ornamental plantings and plant more native varieties and begin to plant varieties for southern growing hardiness zones.
- C. Reduce mowing and increase areas of native forbs and grasses
- D. Promote alternative and native vegetation planting on residential lots