



# PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

# Introduction

The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Chapter sets broad policy to create an equitable, safe, connected and sustainable park system for all users. The Saint Paul park system includes parks, parkways, recreation centers, public spaces and trails. It comprises a large, diverse and vibrant network of people, spaces and facilities that is recognized by Saint Paul residents as one of the city's great shared assets. Together, the system components form a vital connective tissue, facilitating a sense of community, and fostering stewardship of nature and community spaces.

Park facilities and programs improve the quality of life for all residents and visitors. They foster public health by providing opportunities for physical fitness, and promoting mental and social well-being. Parks and Community Centers serve an important role for the city's youth by providing safe and healthy places and activities. Parks connect us to the Mississippi River and lakes by providing access and spaces to enjoy them. Great public spaces are an important component of sustainable economic development, drawing and retaining residents, increasing nearby property values and attracting businesses.

Changes in demographics, technology and development are constant. It will be necessary to periodically evaluate how well the park system is meeting changing needs, challenges and opportunities.

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**The following goals guide the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space chapter:**

1. Equitable allocation of programs, resources and amenities.
2. People, programming and spaces responsive to changing needs.
3. Environmental and economic sustainability.
4. A healthy network of community partnerships.
5. Strong and accessible connections.

## Goal 1: Equitable allocation of programs, resources and amenities

**Policy PR-1.** Ensure equitable access to Parks and Recreation programs, resources and amenities.

**Policy PR-2.** Reduce barriers to Parks and Recreation facilities and programming, including those caused by financial, physical, language and perception issues.

**Policy PR-3.** Engage diverse community groups and all potentially impacted stakeholders in setting balanced priorities for park-related matters.

**Policy PR-4.** Prioritize investment to ensure that residents have access to a park within a 10-minute walk.

**Policy PR-5.** Prioritize investment in physical assets of Community Centers to ensure that common minimum standards are met.

**Policy PR-6.** Use mobile recreation to fill park or recreation service gaps, enhance events, and provide quality recreation to neighborhood and community parks.

**Policy PR-7.** Foster opportunities for community-building and personal connections through Community Center facility use and programming.

**Policy PR-8.** Ensure that communications are up-to-date, understandable and engaging.

## PERCEPTIONS OF “PARK”

Parks mean different things to different people, and those differences are often linked to race and culture (Johnson & Bowker, 1999). For example, white people tend to favor a natural and less managed environment, while African Americans and Latin Americans prefer a more structured park landscape (Kaplan & Talbot, 1988; Ozguner, 2011).

Parks staff have found that some recent immigrants perceive the natural areas of our parks as unwelcoming. It is for this reason that the phrase “open space” is included in the title of this chapter - to signal that the natural, less formal areas are also part of the park system and welcome to all.

The perception of barriers to parks also differs by race and culture. A report released by the Metropolitan Council in 2014 found the following differences in perceived barriers to park visitation by focus group:

Rank	African American	African Immigrant	Asian American and Asian Immigrant	Hispanic/Latino/Latina	Diverse Composition
1	Lack of Awareness	Time	Lack of Awareness	Lack of Awareness	Time
2	Transporation	Lack of Awareness	Language Barriers	Time	Lack of Awareness
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear/Safety</li> <li>• Map Challenges (tie)</li> <li>• Cultural Insensitivity/ Discrimination (tie)</li> </ul>	Transportation	Weather	Cost	Fear/Safety

Source: Metropolitan Council

As the demographics of the city change, it is important to understand and respond to changing perceptions so that the system is welcoming and accessible to all.



## THE GRAND ROUND

The Saint Paul Grand Round was conceived of in 1872 by landscape architect H.W.S. Cleveland. He envisioned a park system connecting all parts of Saint Paul with expansive boulevards and luxurious greenery that would serve cyclists and pedestrians.

Although the Grand Round was conceived in the late 19th Century, it was only partially realized in the decades that

followed. In the early 2000s, a focus on completing the system was renewed. This effort was supported by community interest and prioritized through the adoption of planning documents, including the Comprehensive Plan. More than 140 years after it was initially conceived, the Grand Round is finally close to being realized as a unifying recreation, wildlife corridor and transportation asset for the entire city.



## Goal 2: People, programming and spaces responsive to changing needs

**Policy PR-9.** Use customer and resident feedback on needs, satisfaction and trends to improve park experience and bring in new users.

**Policy PR-10.** Embrace and integrate emerging cultural and recreation trends, particularly those that meet the recreational needs of youth, underserved populations and emerging resident groups.

**Policy PR-11.** Strengthen the cultural competency of Parks and Recreation staff.

**Policy PR-12.** Ensure Parks and Recreation staff reflect the demographic diversity of a dynamic city to better inform decisions regarding operations and facilities.

**Policy PR-13.** Account for seasonality and climate resiliency in the design, maintenance and programming of Parks and Recreation assets to maximize activity throughout the year.

**Policy PR-14.** Support volunteer engagement and participation to enhance stewardship, programming, social cohesion and ownership.

**Policy PR-15.** Innovate in park design and maintenance, while making use of best practices.

**Policy PR-16.** Improve safety in existing and future parks through design, maintenance and programming.

**Policy PR-17.** Support innovative and sustainable transportation options that enhance access to and use of Parks and Recreation facilities, such as electric vehicles, bike share and ride share.

**Policy PR-18.** Ensure that investment in City parks accounts for planned increases in development density.

### Goal 3. Environmental and economic sustainability

**Policy PR-19.** Improve the environmental sustainability and resiliency of parks through strategies such as shared, stacked-function green infrastructure; best management practices in stormwater management; increased tree canopy; increased plant diversity and pollinator-friendly plantings.

**Policy PR-20.** Closely monitor invasive species on park property and respond to threats.

**Policy PR-21.** Ensure that programming and facilities support public health and personal improvement efforts, such as education, job training, and fitness and nutrition programs.

**Policy PR-22.** Model sustainable practices in park construction and operations when possible.

**Policy PR-23.** Perform routine and preventative maintenance on park assets to protect them and maximize the service life of structures and natural resources.

**Policy PR-24.** Develop shared-use facilities as a first option when contemplating new or replacement indoor recreation facilities.

**Policy PR-25.** Strive to make programming financially self-sustaining.

**Policy PR-26.** Use data-driven evaluation of park assets to develop a maintenance and replacement schedule, and plan for future budgetary needs.

**Policy PR-27.** Rate future building investments as they are presently but with additional weight given to cost benefit analyses and return on investment principles.

### Goal 4: A healthy network of community partnerships

**Policy PR-28.** Collaborate with other public and private entities to maximize use and create operational efficiencies of existing facilities and programming when there is a net benefit to the public.

**Policy PR-29.** Seek out partnerships with private entities to finance capital and maintenance costs of Parks and Recreation facilities without compromising good design solutions or over-commercializing the public realm.

**Policy PR-30.** Encourage and support private landowners and developers to create and maintain privately-owned public space (POPS) and green infrastructure, especially as land use intensity and activity levels increase.

**Policy PR-31.** Support community gardens and private landscape beautification efforts where physically and financially feasible.

**Policy PR-32.** Encourage business partnerships that provide value-added services to park users, cover city costs, and generate revenue to enhance and expand programming.





**Policy PR-33.** Coordinate with Saint Paul Public Schools to reduce redundancies, and become more efficient in maintaining physical plants and managing fields.

## Goal 5: Strong and accessible connections

**Policy PR-34.** Prioritize safety and equity when filling gaps in the trail and bikeway system to ensure seamless connections throughout the city for pedestrians and bicyclists of all ages and abilities.

**Policy PR-35.** Integrate parkways and trails with the city's broader transportation network to provide convenient and safe access to the park system.

**Policy PR-36.** Pursue strategic acquisitions to fill existing gaps and address changing needs in the parks system.

**Policy PR-37.** Improve and encourage pedestrian and bicycle connections between park facilities and other significant destinations, such as lakes and rivers, schools, transit facilities and Neighborhood Nodes.

**Policy PR-38.** Emphasize safety, convenience and comfort when designing new trails or rebuilding those that already exist.

**Policy PR-39.** Provide interpretive elements to educate users about unique aspects of the park system.

**Policy PR-40.** Provide consistent wayfinding signage in each project or park so that it is recognizable as part of the broader City system.

**Policy PR-41.** Involve staff from the Department of Parks and Recreation from the beginning of discussions regarding large-scale land redevelopment sites.

**Policy PR-42.** Address physical park encroachments that impair use through effective parkland management and protection.