



## 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 Parks and Recreation system consistently ranks as one of the best in the nation, with more than 179 city-managed parks and open spaces, 25 recreation centers, more than 100 miles of trails, aquatic facilities, municipal golf courses, and the Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. 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. Beautiful landscapes and facilities for recreation foster public health by promoting mental and social well-being, and providing opportunities for physical fitness. Community centers and parks 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. The City will need to be vigilant to ensure that the park system responds to changing needs, challenges and opportunities, and that a person's access to the benefits provided by our world-class parks is not pre-determined by race, ethnicity, age, income or ability.

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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 early 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, play areas, pools, and other amenities 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 at 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”

The term “park” generally conjures up the image of a manicured landscape with amenities that include lawns, picnic benches, formal trails, perennial gardens, etc. These tend to be the most heavily used places in our public lands. However, natural and naturalized areas are significant components of our system of public recreational space in the city. Such landscapes provide important opportunities to experience nature, understand the natural world around us, and promote the urgency to care for it. White people, though, are significantly more likely to explore those parts of our park system than are African Americans, African Immigrants, Asian Americans, Asian immigrants and Hispanic/Latino/Latina people (Kaplan & Talbot, 1988; Ozguner, 2011). As a city, we are obligated to ensure that everyone has access to and feels welcome within our public lands.

We have chosen to add the phrase “Open Space” to the chapter title to promote an understanding that the entire spectrum of park types is open to all members of the Saint Paul community. As the stewards of our system of open spaces, we need to continually consider ways to ensure that everyone feels welcome and everyone has an opportunity to explore the greater natural environment for improved collective well-being.

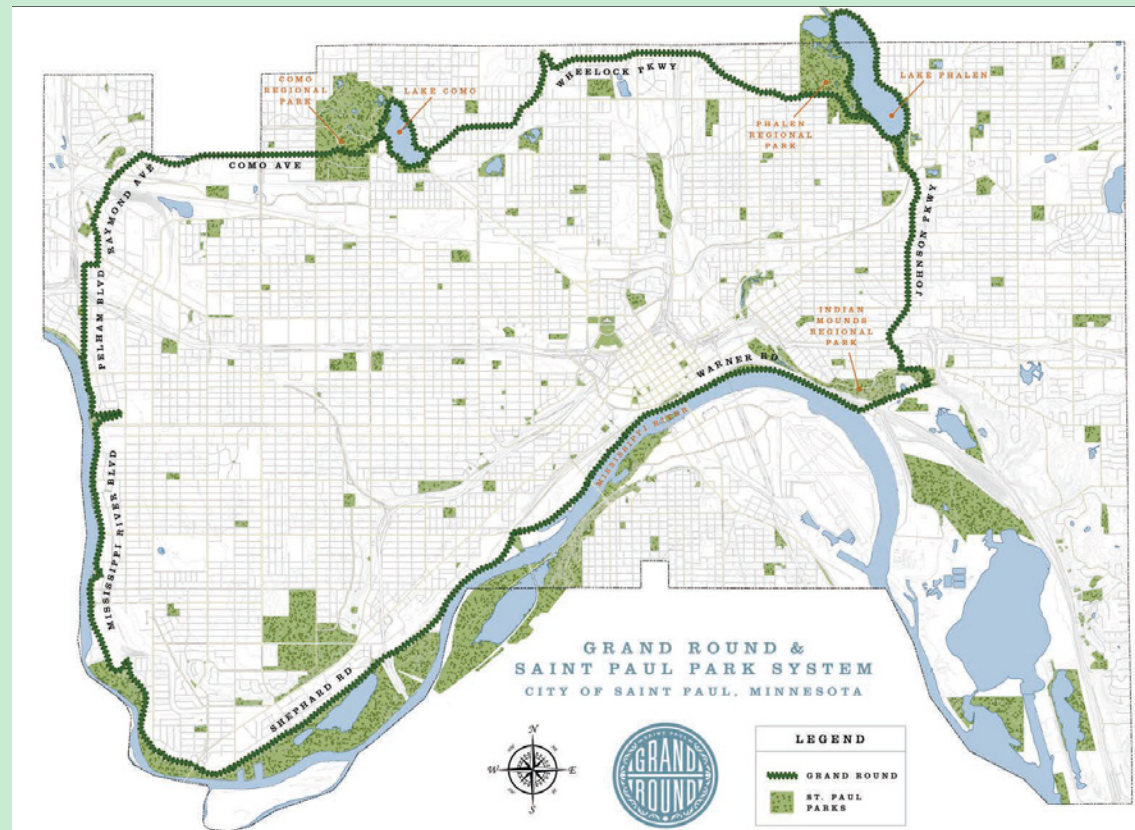


## THE GRAND ROUND

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, advance equity 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 through tools such as parkland dedication.

### 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 publicly-accessible 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.

**Policy PR-28.** Promote the ecological function of parkland and open space, while balancing it against nature-based recreation and other public uses.

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

**Policy PR-29.** 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-30.** Seek out partnerships with private entities, such as Como Friends, to finance capital and maintenance costs of Parks and Recreation facilities without compromising good design solutions, reducing public access or over-commercializing the public realm.

**Policy PR-31.** 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-32.** Support community gardens and private landscape beautification efforts where physically and financially feasible.



### “NO NET LOSS” POLICY

Parkland in Saint Paul is protected for future park users through the City’s “no net loss” policy. The policy is a part of Saint Paul’s City Charter and reads in part, “Lands which may have been heretofore acquired by any means or which may hereafter be acquired by any means for park purposes shall not be diverted to other uses or disposed of by the city...”

Any diversion or disposal is reviewed by both the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Commission and the City Council. When the City Council decides that diversion or disposal of parkland is in the public interest, additional parklands must be acquired to replace the lands that are diverted, preferably within the same District Council area and of a similar nature to the diverted parkland. (City Charter Section 13.01.1)



**Policy PR-33.** Encourage business partnerships that provide value-added services to park users, cover city costs, and generate revenue to enhance and expand programming.

**Policy PR-34.** 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-35.** 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-36.** Integrate parkways and trails with the city's broader transportation network to provide convenient and safe access to the park system.

**Policy PR-37.** Pursue strategic acquisitions to fill existing gaps and address changing needs in the parks system.

**Policy PR-38.** 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-39.** Emphasize safety, convenience and comfort when designing new trails or rebuilding those that already exist.

**Policy PR-40.** Provide interpretive elements to educate users about unique aspects of the park system.

**Policy PR-41.** Provide consistent wayfinding signage in each project or park so that it

is recognizable as part of the broader City system.

**Policy PR-42.** Involve staff from the Department of Parks and Recreation from the beginning of discussions regarding large-scale land redevelopment sites.

**Policy PR-43.** Address physical park encroachments that impair use through effective parkland management and protection.

**Policy PR-44.** Support facility improvements that better connect neighborhoods to the Mississippi River.



## Great River Passage Master Plan

In 2013, the City of Saint Paul adopted the Great River Passage Master Plan – a comprehensive framework for creating vibrancy in the city’s 3,500 acres of parkland along the river. The Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department is now implementing the next phase of the Great River Passage – a bold initiative to steward and tap into the potential of the 26 miles of riverfront in Saint Paul.

The recently-created Great River Passage Conservancy, an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit, advocates for projects and guides private fundraising efforts for projects that create places and activities to strengthen existing connections and create new ones along the Mississippi River.

