

02

THE PARKS BLOOMINGTON HAS

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HISTORY OF BLOOMINGTON'S PARK SYSTEM

02

A Park Board was established in Bloomington Township in 1946 following the dedication of Beaverbrook and Lower Bryant Parks. The Park and Recreation Advisory Commission was later established in 1955 and the first park land purchase was made in 1954 for 28 acres of Moir Park. In 1958, an ordinance was passed requiring park dedication from subdivision developers and the City used this dedicated land or money from developers to create a majority of the Bloomington park system. The 1960's and 1970's included a number of successful park bond referendums, grants, and land acquisitions. The Federal Land and Water Conservation Program (LAWCON) was created in the 1970's and provided grant opportunities to acquire parks and recreational areas. North Corridor Park, Tierney's Woods, Pond-Dakota Mission Park, and Marsh Park were purchased with support from LAWCON. State and Metropolitan Council funding helped create the Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve and the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

Schools in Bloomington have also provided important recreation services to neighborhoods. Playgrounds are co-located at a majority of elementary school locations. As the City developed, schools have provided both indoor and outdoor active recreation facilities like sport courts, playfields, play equipment, and indoor gymnasium space. School facilities are not open to residents at all times. School playgrounds are closed to residents during school and after-care school hours. Playground use during these after school times can cause potential conflicts where adjacent residents are hoping to use the playground for their kids at the same time as after-care playground usage.

In the past there has been a decline in student population in the City and some schools were closed. Access to recreation at these facilities was also lost, except in instances where the City purchased the former school land from the School District. Creekside Community Center and Gene Kelly Playfield are the most prominent example of this acquisition.

PARK PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

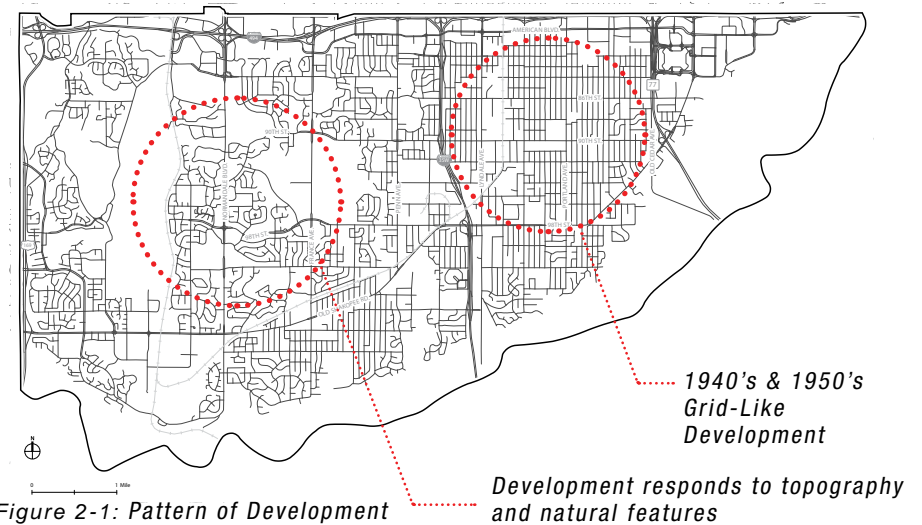


Figure 2-1: Pattern of Development

Patterns of development in Bloomington occurred based on location of natural features and topography. The east side of the City has few natural features in the way of development and as a result, grew more quickly than other areas of the City. This development occurred primarily in the 1940's and 1950's in a grid-like pattern, and the parks on the east side fit into the grid format and typically focus on active recreation. There are fewer trails on this side of the City because, during this era, they were not a focus in city development.

Central Bloomington follows a similar, grid-like pattern as the east side with the exception of Nine Mile Creek and the wetland complexes surrounding it, which have been set aside as natural areas. Many community amenities are conveniently located at the center of the City including the Bloomington Ice Garden, the National Guard Armory programmed for indoor gym space, Bloomington Aquatic Center, and Creekside Community Center.

Greater topographic change and natural features are found on the west side of Bloomington. Development on the west side happened much slower and later than the east side and the City was more equipped to take on progressive planning efforts that included parks and trails. The Western Area Plan in the 1970s, and the 1980 Bloomington Comprehensive Plan created a park vision for Bloomington. The City planned for parks, playfields, natural corridors, and trails as development continued on the west side of the City.

REGIONAL & FEDERAL PARK DEVELOPMENT

The City has long maintained partnerships with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and (USFWS) Three Rivers Park District (TRPD) to provide public access to facilities and to operate programs. These partnerships have been critical to providing needed neighborhood and community facilities and programs to the residents of Bloomington, and to a regional user group.

USFWS MINNESOTA VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The USFWS Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1976 as an effort to preserve the corridor's natural resources from the areas rising population and development. The Refuge stretches nearly 70 miles along the Minnesota river from Bloomington to Henderson, Minnesota. It provides valuable habitat for birds, fish, and other wildlife. Amongst its 46 miles of trails and two visitor centers, the Refuge also offers community programs, education, and access to nature to visitors.

Today walkers, bikers and birders are the primary users of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (MNVNWR) and City-owned land in the River Valley.

The City of Bloomington owns approximately 1,180 acres within the Minnesota River Valley that includes escarpments, wetlands, shallow lakes, and alluvial floodplains. Figure 2-2 shows the ownership and management responsibilities of various landholders in the river valley that Bloomington partners with.

HYLAND-BUSH-ANDERSON LAKES PARK RESERVE

Hyland Lake Park Reserve is a part of the larger system, Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve. The City of Bloomington manages Bush Lake and Normandale Lake while TRPD manages Hyland and Anderson Lake. The 2,565-acre Park Reserve has a variety of recreational and educational opportunities including the Richardson Nature Center, Hyland Hills Ski Area, disc golf, hiking, biking, camping, boating, and play. Additionally, North and South Corridor Parks and Tierney's Woods are managed by BPRD.

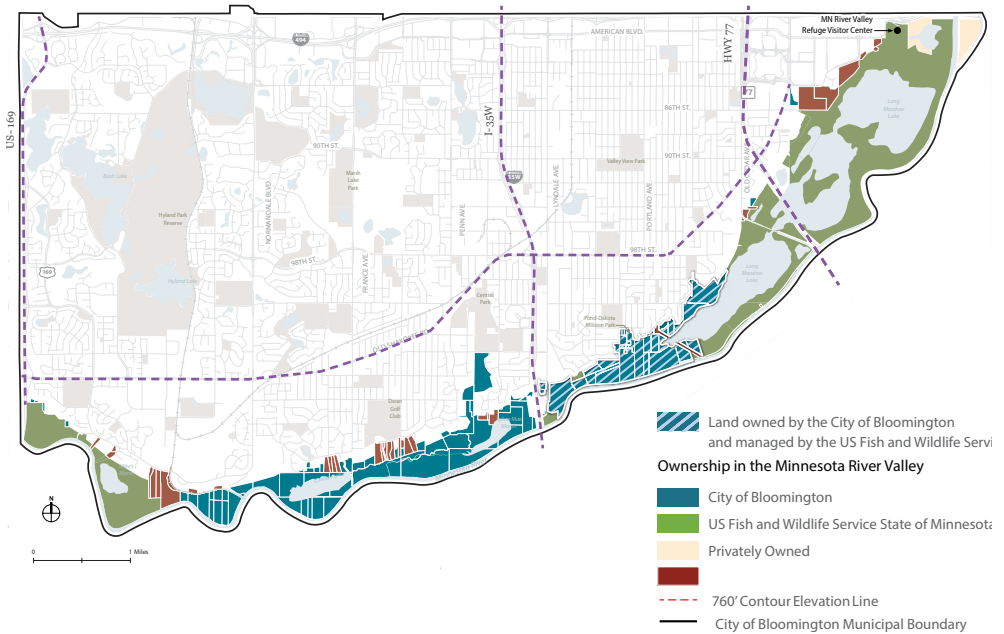


Figure 2-2: Ownership and Land Management in the River Valley

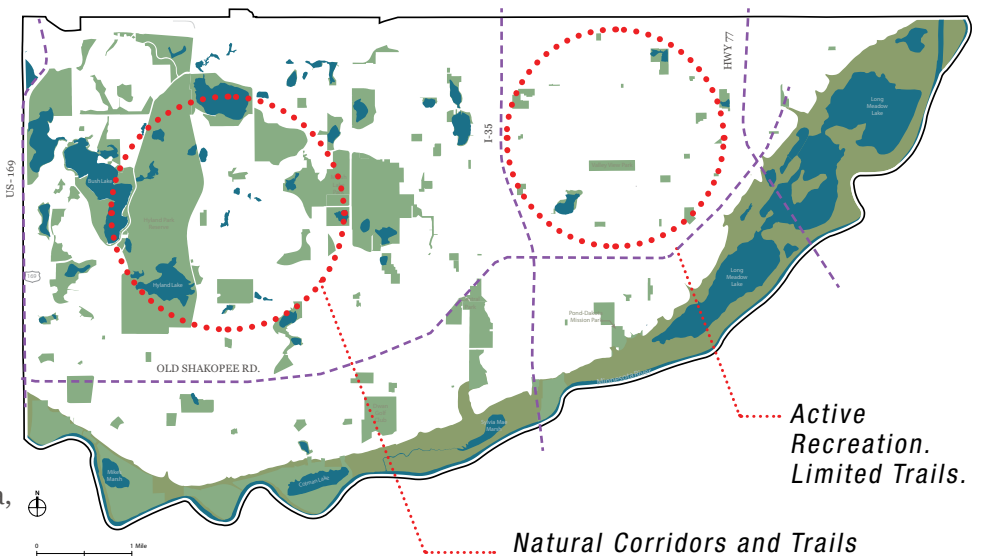


Figure 2-3: Bloomington Park System



ELEMENTS OF BLOOMINGTON'S PARK SYSTEM

The City of Bloomington's park system has been studied and analyzed by a consultant team of parks planners and parks administrative specialists. Bloomington's park system is vast and varied, but the consultant team identified a number of elements that provide great impact to the overall system. These elements touch on everything from infrastructure and facilities to programs and operations and maintenance. All of these elements work together to provide the park and recreation experience in Bloomington. Impacting and changing one element in the system will likely cause modifications and adjustment throughout the other elements of the system.

Residents, City leadership, and staff have all identified that significant changes need to occur to maintain and improve the level of quality that Bloomington residents expect in their park system, and to modernize the system so that it can remain a critical part of city life into the future. The City has begun the changes necessary to identify and enact this evolutionary process. One critical change is giving the Parks and Recreation staff more ability to steer the direction of the system. Parks used to be a division of Community Services, but in 2019 became its own department, the Parks and Recreation Department. The park elements identified and described in the next section are intended to assist the Department in this transition.

The master plan looks at 12 key park elements that are vital to transforming the Bloomington Park System. Though all of these elements, when improved upon, will fuel a more successful parks system, there is recognition that resources are limited and it is unlikely that the City will implement everything at once. The 12 key park elements have been prioritized into two categories: "Priority Park Elements", and "Additional Park Elements". This categorized method allows the City to focus on four key park elements to maximize resources.

These four elements were identified through stakeholder engagement efforts, previous studies and completed work, and City staff recommendations. The City can add in the other additional park elements as resources become available. There is significant overlap and synergies between all of these park elements and working on one will impact a number of other park elements.

An analysis of the additional park elements is found below with a brief outline of key issues and recommendations based on the consultant teams analysis and experience with other park systems. These recommendations have been further refined and developed with staff input in Section 04 - Action Plan.

PARK ELEMENTS:

PRIORITY PARK ELEMENTS

PARK ELEMENT 01 NATURAL RESOURCES

Protect and restore natural resources to sustain a healthy, diverse and balanced natural park system for all to enjoy and understand.

PARK ELEMENT 02 PARK NEEDS (LEVEL OF SERVICE)

Achieve an appropriate balance of parks, recreation facilities, programs, and experiences in each planning area to support access to parks, trails, sports facilities, and recreation amenities that residents want and need.

PARK ELEMENT 03 TRAILS AND MOBILITY

Implement past planning recommendations and integrate parks as key destinations into the overall transportation system. Provide a variety of interesting and safe trail experiences inside parks to encourage mobility as recreation.

PARK ELEMENT 04 EQUITY AND ACCESS

Build equity and accessibility into the park system to provide exceptional parks and recreation opportunities for ALL residents that meet their needs, and their community's needs.

ADDITIONAL PARK ELEMENTS

PARK ELEMENT 05 SUSTAINABILITY

Use sustainability best practices in projects to mitigate climate change and conserve natural resources.

PARK ELEMENT 06 ARTS AND PLACEMAKING

Work with existing successful arts and placemaking organizations to implement more artistic elements into the park system.

PARK ELEMENT 07 CORE SERVICES - EXPANDING USER BASE

Provide additional Health, Fitness, Environmental Educational, Recreational, Sports and Special Event Experiences.

PARK ELEMENT 08 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Create an organizational structure that provides the best customer experience and cost management for the future of the Department.

PARK ELEMENT 09 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUDGET ENHANCEMENT

Promote economic development and establish a budget that matches the expectations of the community.

PARK ELEMENT 10 POLICY UPDATES

Create policies that provide flexibility for the Director to operate efficiently and effectively to achieve the Vision for the Master Plan.

PARK ELEMENT 11 EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Create Key Performance Metrics to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department.

PARK ELEMENT 12 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Understand, respect, and honor the cultural resources throughout the City and beyond that connect it to the past, present, and future.



Photo Credit: Doug Wallick

PRIORITY PARK ELEMENT 01 | NATURAL RESOURCES

The foundation of Bloomington's Park System is built around natural resources and natural areas. The pre-settlement landscape of Bloomington was rich with diversity and was part of a much larger ecological matrix. While diverse, the two major ecozones were the vast prairie and wetlands at the top of the bluff, and the forested river valley and blufflands at the southern edge of the City. As Bloomington was settled, the prairie was attractive to farming because of the flat terrain and rich soil. Large portions of the river valley were even converted to agricultural fields in areas where it was possible to get a plow. As Minneapolis and St. Paul grew the same agricultural land was attractive for development and was quickly converted to homes, commercial, and industrial uses. The remaining natural areas were those that were not easily tilled or developed. Buckthorn and other invasive and undesirable species have spread quickly into these remaining patches and threaten to reduce quality further. The key remaining natural areas and natural features of Bloomington's park system include:

- The Minnesota River Valley and Bluff
- Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve
- Nine Mile Creek and the wetland complexes in its corridor

Natural areas are scattered and isolated throughout open spaces and parks

in the City, but the once great and connected prairie no longer exists. The next chapter of Bloomington's natural areas is being written now by those that understand its importance to the City and desire to:

- Preserve the remaining portions of quality habitat; and
- Restore the functional, aesthetic, and unique qualities of Bloomington's natural heritage.

Time is critical to achieve the goals mentioned above. Natural areas have not received adequate maintenance activities in the past and are constantly under attack from invasive and undesirable species. Fragmented natural areas are more susceptible to invasives and can degrade faster than larger contiguous natural areas. Management and protection of existing, intact natural areas should be prioritized because it will provide the greatest cost-benefit to the City. Existing natural areas have adapted over hundreds to thousands of years and contain significant amounts of diversity throughout their plant structure, soil profiles, and ways which have not been discovered yet. Once they are out competed by undesirable species, it will be nearly impossible to bring the quality back to pre-infestation level. Preserved sites will always contain significantly more diversity than restored sites and should be prioritized. Climate change is accelerating the degradation of natural areas by dramatically changing historic weather patterns and hydrology. These effects are changing the competitive field and making it more difficult for native plants to compete with invasive and undesirable species that are rapidly spreading. However, the biggest threat to natural areas in

Bloomington might also be its greatest hope – people.

There is no question that Bloomington's past residents have historically tilled, harvested, paved over, dumped trash into, and ignored Bloomington's natural areas to create today's degraded condition. Once these natural areas are lost, they are gone forever. Today's generation of Bloomington residents have a chance to mitigate these losses, create a new relationship with natural areas, and protect and restore Bloomington's natural heritage for present and future generations. Healthy societies rely on healthy environments. Degraded environments are often a reflection of the societies they reside in. An investment in Bloomington's natural resources is an investment in our future.

KEY NATURAL RESOURCE ISSUES:

There are a number of challenges and issues to natural resource preservation and restoration at an effective scale in the City. The key issues that need to be addressed to provide effective preservation and restoration of natural areas in Bloomington include:

- Prioritizing Resources
- Leadership and Collaboration
- Access and Preservation

PRIORITIZING RESOURCES

Natural resources and natural areas consistently rise to the top of characteristics that contribute to Bloomington's high quality of life. Community engagement for the Park System Master Plan (PSMP) asked participants to rank their top priorities and themes. 'Natural Resources' and 'Environmental Sustainability and Resiliency' were the top two themes identified. The City Council identified 'Environmental Sustainability' as one of their strategic priorities in 2017. A statistically valid survey also identified access to nature trails as one of the top 5 priorities of need that are currently not being met by the city, and nature trails and natural areas/ reserves as 2 of the top 3 facilities that respondents feel are most important to their households.

Natural Areas

Natural areas is a broad term used throughout the PSMP. It is generally defined as: a geographical area having a physical and cultural individuality developed through the growth of native plant communities.

Natural areas can have different levels of quality associated with them based on the amount of native plant material versus invasive or non-desirable flora.

Natural areas also refer to geographical areas that were intentionally managed or restored with more desirable native flora.

02



Natural resources are a priority to Bloomington residents. However, the budget and past work plans have been inadequate to comprehensively support this priority. Bloomington has historically allocated approximately \$65-75,000/ year in the CIP budget for natural resource projects. Park Maintenance has dedicated additional dollars for maintenance, but these amounts will be inadequate to achieve the enhancement and restoration desires expressed by the community. For example, 1,262 acres of Natural Areas were identified in the Public Works Restoration Priority Study. Maintenance strategies identified in The Minnesota River Valley Natural & Cultural Systems Plan (MRVNCP) included cost estimates at \$400-\$2,000/ acre for typical maintenance approaches. Performing restoration activities on 1/4 of the restoration priorities mentioned above would range between \$120,000-\$600,000/ year. A more detailed maintenance cost per acre and an annual work plan should be established to provide the most accurate estimate for budgeting purposes, but this is a large discrepancy in the budget allocated and budget needed for effective natural resource management.

Planning for natural areas and natural resources has also not been prioritized as highly as other issues in the City. Bloomington does not have a comprehensive Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP). All other cities that were benchmarked for comparison have a completed natural resource management plan to guide their natural resource work. Bloomington has completed planning studies and documents in the last 15-years that have provided great insight and knowledge for the City, but they have not completed a comprehensive study that leverages staff knowledge, volunteer efforts, partnership opportunities, and sets a holistic vision for natural resources. A NRMP is beyond the scope of this document but should be a priority for the City. A cohesive plan for addressing natural resources in Bloomington is needed that incorporates input from a broad range of stakeholders. A NRMP would build upon the planning work and studies that have previously been completed. These studies include:

- (2007) Natural Resources Inventory of the City of Bloomington (NRICB), prepared by Great River Greening and Hennepin County Environmental Services. The Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS) was utilized to identify 3297 distinct landscape areas within the City. Approximately 84% of the land-use polygons

were field checked. The study identified areas that qualified for the Natural Community Quality Rankings according to the DNR’s Natural Heritage Element Occurrence Ranking Guidelines. Three natural areas received the highest quality ranking. The intent of the study was to inventory natural areas identified for future planning and natural resources protection efforts. While an excellent resource, this study was completed thirteen years ago.

- (2016) The Minnesota River Valley Strategic Plan (MRVSP) summarizes the finding of a broad based assessment. The Plan describes the historic, ecological, and existing conditions context of the river valley and identifies key opportunities and challenges to be addressed. The Plan’s vision and goals are: “To enhance awareness, appreciation, and enjoyment of the Minnesota River Valley in a manner that balances resource preservation with appropriate access and utilization.”
- (2018) The Minnesota River Valley Natural & Cultural Systems Plan (MNRVNCP) was created to address management of natural resources on City-owned land in the Minnesota River Valley. Many of the resource management and education findings and recommendations can be applied to natural areas throughout the City. The City will continue to engage with other stakeholders in the River Valley to create a holistic view and plan moving forward, but this document provides a framework as a guidance document. The plan builds on the vision of the 2016 MRVSP and field verified areas identified in the NRICB to verify that the resource quality rankings were largely still accurate. This field verification was limited to areas within the Minnesota River Valley. The MNRVNCP built upon the MLCCS work completed in 2007. This plan also identified a number of techniques and cost ranges to provide effective natural resource management. These recommendations were limited to natural areas within the Minnesota River Valley but could be applied to other natural areas throughout Bloomington.
- (2019) Restoration Priority Study developed by Public Works staff was created to begin to fill the void identified in natural resource management planning during adoption of the MNRVNCP. In 2018 City staff worked with the Sustainability Commission on a project to

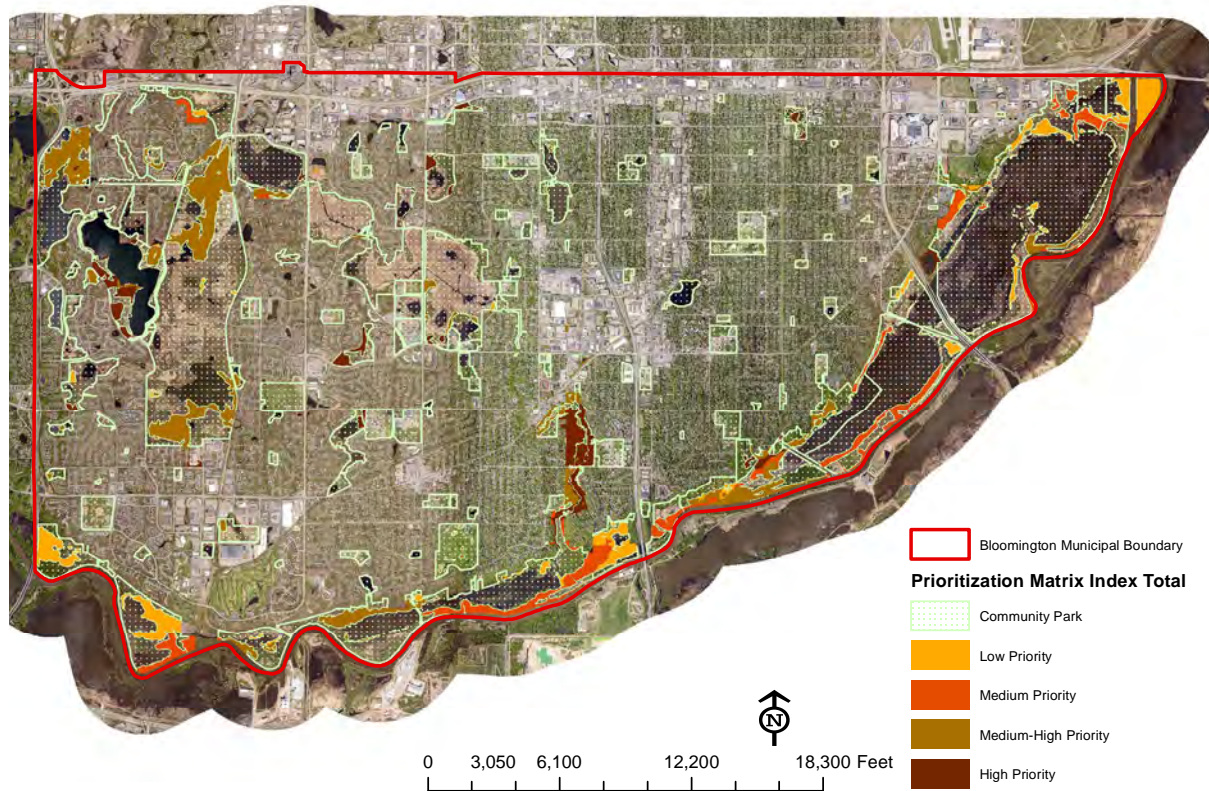


Figure 2-4: Priority Restoration Sites in Bloomington. Source: City of Bloomington

prioritize natural resource restoration opportunities throughout Bloomington. The study was based in GIS and adapted scoring methods used to prioritize natural resource management sites in the Minnesota River Valley Natural and Cultural Systems Plan. The study identified priority areas to target for restoration so that resources can be allocated more effectively in the future (Figure 2-4). The restoration areas defined in this study will need to be maintained over time and this should be further reviewed and prioritized in the overall NRMP.

- (Various) Engineering Departments Water Resources Technical Documents including the Surface Water Management Plan, Wetland Management Plan, and Penn Lake Management Plan, and the City's storm water pollution prevention program. City Water Resources staff identified opportunity zones for potentially integrating water resource improvements with park improvements.

LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

City staff, the Sustainability Commission, non-profit groups, other agencies, and individual volunteers have been making a difference in protecting natural resources and natural areas in Bloomington for several years. They have been 'holding the line' and are responsible for an elevated level of quality that would likely not exist without their commitment, expertise, and passion. The Park System Master Plan (PSMP) seeks to pull these efforts and actors together to create a more organized and effective approach to natural areas preservation and restoration through the Parks Department.

Natural resources maintenance is currently provided by Park Maintenance staff in the Public Works Department. This staff has done a good job of completing various projects and conducting ongoing maintenance of natural areas along with their various other duties. However, the amount of work necessary to maintain Bloomington's extensive natural areas needs dedicated full-time staff. These staff members should be solely in charge of natural areas maintenance and management. This may mean that some duties are reassigned to provide this focus.

Providing dedicated full-time staff for Bloomington's natural resources is important for its size; particularly given the acreage of natural resource areas to maintain, as well as residents' interests in protecting and restoring natural areas. Several cities in the Twin Cities Metro have full-time natural resource staff positions including:

- Eden Prairie – Parks and Natural Resources Manager, Forester, Forest Technician, Environmental Coordinator
- Minnetonka – Natural Resource Manager, City Forester, Forestry Technicians, Natural Resource Specialist, Restoration Specialist, Multiple Technicians (5 staff plus seasonal technicians)

- Golden Valley – Environmental Coordinator, City Forester
- Plymouth – City Forester, Forestry Aide/ Technician
- Burnsville – Natural Resources Manager, Natural Resource Specialist, Technician, and Forester (4 staff) Technician
- St. Louis Park – Natural Resources Manager, City Forester, Seasonal Forestry Technician, Weed Inspector

Many duties of the positions mentioned above are currently provided to some extent by Park Maintenance staff as a part of their regular duties. Defining a position specific to natural resources and focusing staff on these elements will prioritize natural resources work and clarify organizational relationships. This position would be responsible for organizing operations activities, communications, coordination, grant pursuit, and resource allocation. A major goal of the position would be to provide a point of contact around Bloomington’s natural resources, to create a more cohesive unit working together towards common goals and strategies. Additionally, they would provide leadership, coordination, and collaboration with city staff across departments.

There is significant accommodation, prioritization, and coordination with other agencies and interest groups that needs to occur for effective natural resources management. These communications and responsibilities are occurring with multiple staff across different departments in the City. There is a real need to establish a position that defines natural resource management leadership and facilitates effective cross-departmental as well as inter-agency collaboration and communication.

ACCESS AND PRESERVATION BALANCE

Throughout engagement activities for the PSMP consistent messages were heard – Bloomington residents want more access to natural areas. There are areas in the City where access to natural areas is exceptional, and other sectors where natural areas and access to nature are highly limited. The northeast part of the City has lower access to natural areas than most other portions of

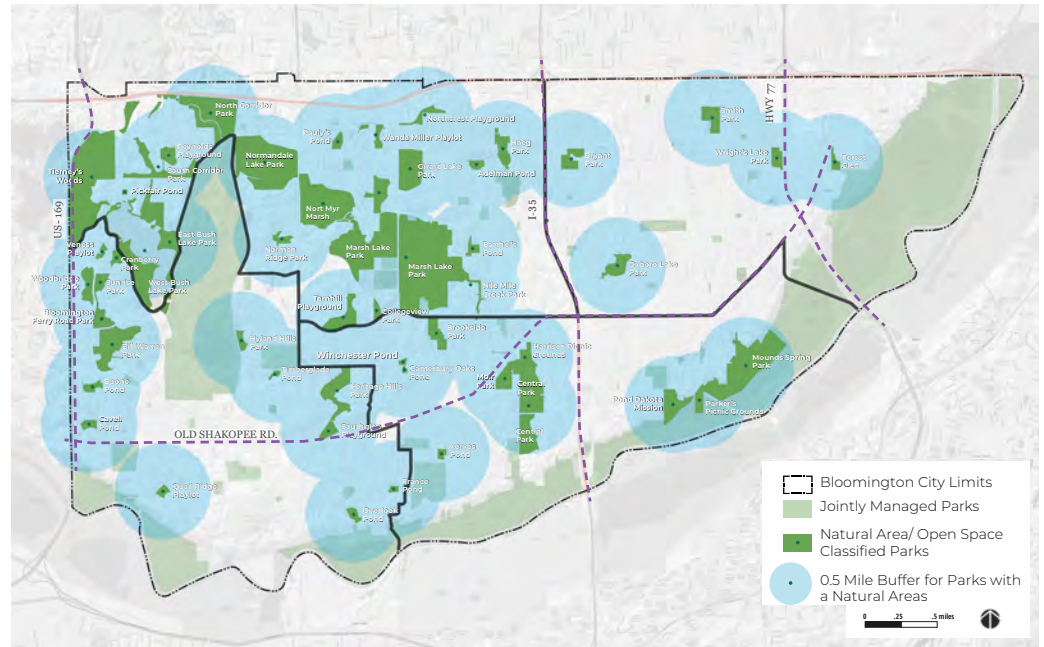


Figure 2-5: Natural Areas within 1/2 mile of residents (excluding Hyland and Minnesota River Valley)

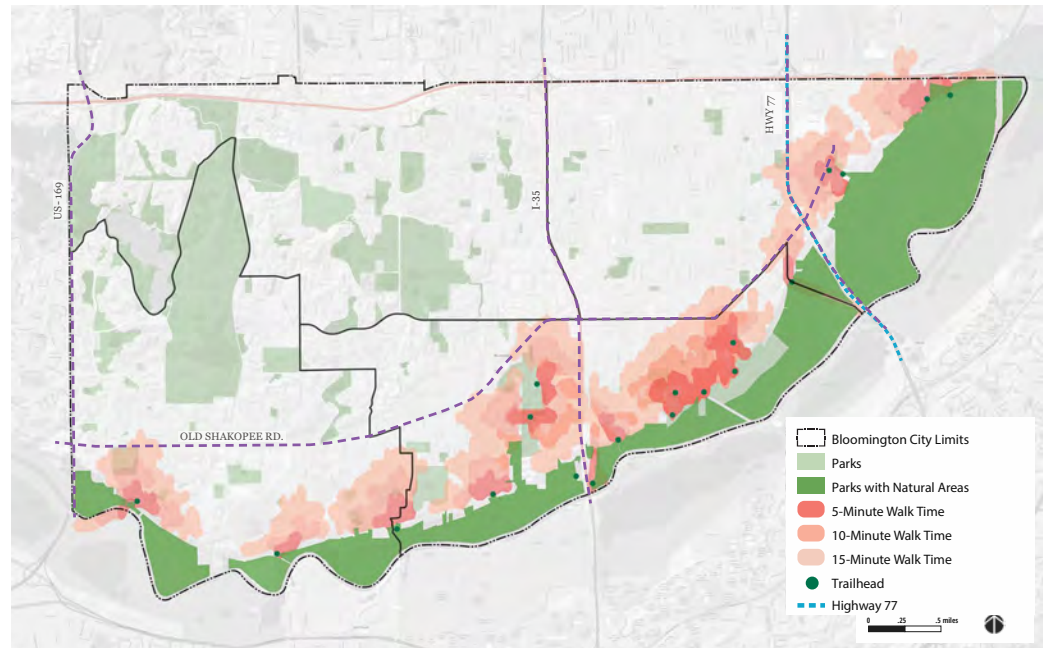


Figure 2-6: Walking time analysis to trailheads for the Minnesota River Valley

the City, with the exception of South Loop District. Natural areas and open space park facilities are much more likely to be outside a half-mile radius for residents in this portion of the City (Figure 2-5) and while there is good access opportunities to the River Valley on the south-eastern side of the City, Highway 77 makes access more difficult for northern residents west of 77 (Figure 2-6). Providing a more equitable balance of natural areas in this portion of the City will need to occur through neighborhood and community parks, or other land-holders due to the fully developed nature of the city-grid. The scale of natural areas east of I-35W are not likely to be similar to the natural areas on the west side of Bloomington, but finding opportunities to connect to nature and natural areas of any scale is still important to residents.

Natural surface hiking trails and trails in nature were identified as a priority need for Bloomington. Additionally, there is desire for additional mountain biking experiences in the City. Bloomington is a leader in natural surface trails compared to the benchmark communities and has high-quality trails in the Minnesota River Valley and Hyland Park Reserve. These natural surface trails are unique features in the Metropolitan area and should be nurtured and built upon. There is currently no plan for management, design, or expansion opportunities in the City for natural surface trails. These trails represent a significantly affordable recreation opportunity for the City that residents have clearly articulated they desire more of. Addressing the network of existing facilities as well as new opportunities is worthy of additional study, planning, and coordination with other agencies. Not all natural areas are appropriate for these trails, because they do have the potential to degrade the quality of the natural areas they are in.

The population of Bloomington is expected to increase over time and become more dense, increasing pressure on natural surface trails and natural areas. This increased traffic can potentially degrade the environment and trail experience. When asked in a survey about the balance of preservation of natural areas versus access and utilization that might degrade their quality, over half of the respondents indicated a desire for an approach that balances best practices, research, budgets, and recreation needs. A future Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP) could address this tension and identify high quality natural areas to be protected, and provide goals and strategies to help achieve the balance residents desire. Some of the access and

preservation balance issues the NRMP should also address include:

- Degradation of natural areas - Increasing access to natural resource areas can reduce the quality of that resource. Trails invite users into natural areas that can be inadvertent vectors for undesirable species spread. Trail corridors can fragment existing patches of a natural area and disrupt habitat, movement, and behaviors of wildlife. To address this, the City should consider identifying high quality and rare species areas that should be protected, and restrict recreational activities in those areas. Most natural areas in Bloomington are degraded and this won't be a widespread issue. The NRMP should make recommendations on protection of high quality areas that emerged in community engagement including:
 - » Tierney Woods and Corridor Park in Northwest Bloomington. These areas were identified by mountain bikers as locations for potential trails. Other residents replied that trails would degrade the resource and the areas should be protected. This issue will only heighten as mountain biking increases in popularity.
 - » Nine Mile Creek in Central Park – The creek in portions of Moir/ Central park is accessible to the public and there is evidence of high usage and activity on the river banks. This spot is an inviting and popular location to interact with the creek and the riverbanks show signs of erosion and overuse.



CONCLUSION

Natural resources are a foundational element to Bloomington's park system. Bloomington's built environment continues to negatively impact the City's natural resources by fragmenting habitat corridors and patches, increasing pressure from erosion and hydrology changes, and accelerating undesirable flora species spread. Additionally, energy use in buildings and driving gasoline-fueled vehicles produce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change. Climate change in Bloomington means warmer winters, increased rainfall, and the likelihood of more summer heat waves. These changes can make it difficult for native plants and wildlife to thrive. The key issues that need to be addressed to provide effective preservation and restoration of natural areas throughout Bloomington include:

- Prioritizing Resources
- Leadership and Collaboration
- Access and Preservation

See 'Priority Park Elements' in Section 03 – The Parks Bloomington Needs for recommendations on what the Parks Department can do to strengthen the role of natural resources in the Park System. Several of the recommendations have been introduced in this section.



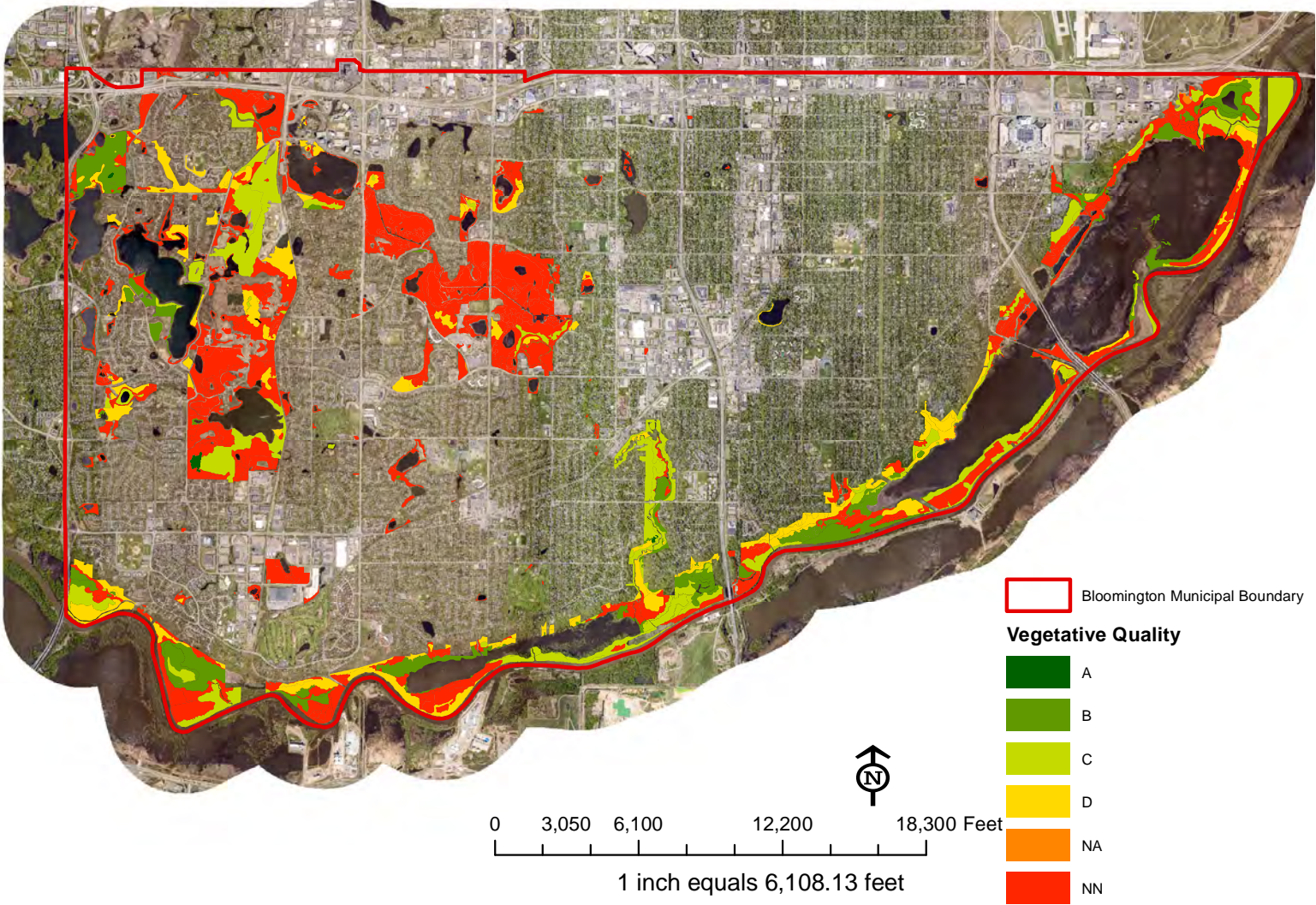


Figure 2-7: Public Open Space Restoration Prioritization. Source: City of Bloomington

PRIORITY PARK ELEMENT 02 | PARK NEEDS (LEVEL OF SERVICE)

Bloomington’s park system was primarily built in the 1960’s-70’s with money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LAWCON) program and through Park Dedication. LAWCON was enacted by Congress in 1964 “to strengthen the health and vitality of the citizens of the United States” through planning, acquisition, and development of land and water outdoor recreation facilities. Parks built with LAWCON dollars often followed a similar template that included popular recreation facilities at the time such as softball fields and tennis courts. Bloomington’s recreational amenities have not changed significantly from that time, and do not reflect current demographics and recreation trends. The consultants and staff analyzed the Level of Service of the existing park system in order to update the park system to better match current recreation trends with the City’s demographics.

Level of Service (LOS) standards are guidelines that define service areas based on population that support investment decisions related to parks, facilities and amenities. LOS standards can and will change over time as recreation trends, demographics, and economics of a community evolve.

The consultants evaluated park facility standards using a combination of resources. These resources included market trends, demographic data, recreation activity participation rates, community and stakeholder input, National Recreation and Park Association PRORAGIS data, the community survey, and general observations. This information allowed standards to be customized to Bloomington.

The inventory of parks, trails, and facilities fully available to the public from all public agencies should be considered when discussing a community’s LOS. However, facilities provided by private businesses, clubs, homeowner associations, apartment complexes, etc. are typically excluded from this analysis because they do not offer the same unrestricted degree of access as public amenities. While the school district serving Bloomington residents contribute a great deal of field use and gym space, the focus of this evaluation was specific to parks, facilities, and amenities that came under the responsibility of the City.



These LOS standards should be viewed as a guide. The standards are to be coupled with community input and understanding of system needs of the community. By applying these standards to the population of Bloomington, gaps or surpluses in park and facility types are revealed.

2020 Estimated Population	88,812
2025 Estimated Population	91,997

Notes:
Population is based on Bloomington City limits

Level of Service Standards - Bloomington, MN

Current Inventory					Current LOS			Recommended Standard			Current Needs		Five-Year Need Forecast		
Item	Bloomington	Other Providers	Three Rivers Park District	Total Inventory	Service Level Based on Current Population			Recommended Service Levels for Study Area			Assessment	Additional Need	Assessment	Additional Need	
PARKLAND															
Neighborhood Parks	184.73	-	-	184.73	2.08	acres per	1,000	2.25	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	15 Acres	Need Exists	22 Acres	
Community Parks	294.60	-	-	294.60	3.32	acres per	1,000	3.50	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	16 Acres	Need Exists	27 Acres	
Regional Parks	912.25	-	2,611.00	3,523.25	39.67	acres per	1,000	39.75	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	7 Acres	Need Exists	134 Acres	
Special Use Parks	179.32	16.85	-	196.17	2.21	acres per	1,000	2.00	acres per	1,000	Meets Standard	- Acres	Meets Standard	- Acres	
Total Developed Park Acres	1,571	17	2,611	4,199	47	acres per	1,000	48	acres per	1,000	Need Exists	20 Acres	Need Exists	171 Acres	
Natural Areas/Open Space	1,179.68	4,146.00	-	5,325.68	59.97	acres per	1,000		acres per	1,000	Meets Standard	- Acres	Meets Standard	- Acres	
School/Church Grounds	-	124.90	-	124.90	1.41	acres per	1,000		acres per	1,000	Meets Standard	- Acres	Meets Standard	- Acres	
Total Park Acres	2,751	4,288	2,611	9,649	109	acres per	1,000	48	acres per	1,000	Meets Standard	- Acres	Meets Standard	- Acres	
TRAILS															
Paved Trails	41.81	1.70	10.50	54.01	0.61	miles per	1,000	0.50	miles per	1,000	Meets Standard	- Miles	Meets Standard	- Miles	
Unpaved Trails	43.93	13.00	7.50	64.43	0.73	miles per	1,000	0.20	miles per	1,000	Meets Standard	- Miles	Meets Standard	- Miles	
OUTDOOR FACILITIES															
Shelters/Pavilions	23	-	-	23	1	site per	3,861	1	site per	10,000	Meets Standard	- Sites	Meets Standard	- Sites	
Baseball Fields	12	-	-	12	1	field per	7,401	1	field per	5,000	Need Exists	6 Fields	Need Exists	6 Fields	
Softball Fields	51	19	-	70	1	field per	1,269	1	field per	5,000	Meets Standard	- Fields	Meets Standard	- Fields	
MultiPurpose Fields	32	13	-	45	1	field per	1,974	1	field per	4,000	Meets Standard	- Fields	Meets Standard	- Fields	
Basketball Courts	42	-	-	42	1	court per	2,115	1	court per	2,500	Meets Standard	- Courts	Meets Standard	- Courts	
Tennis Courts	49	23	-	72	1	court per	1,234	1	court per	2,500	Meets Standard	- Courts	Meets Standard	- Courts	
Pickleball Courts	8	-	-	8	1	court per	11,102	1	court per	10,000	Need Exists	1 Courts	Need Exists	1 Courts	
Volleyball Courts	10	-	-	10	1	court per	8,881	1	court per	10,000	Meets Standard	- Courts	Meets Standard	- Courts	
Playgrounds	43	14	-	57	1	site per	1,558	1	site per	2,500	Meets Standard	- Sites	Meets Standard	- Sites	
Dog Parks	2	-	-	2	1	site per	44,406	1	site per	40,000	Need Exists	0 Sites	Need Exists	0 Sites	
Skate Park	1	-	-	1	1	site per	88,812	1	site per	40,000	Need Exists	1 Sites	Need Exists	1 Sites	
Splash Pad	1	-	-	1	1	site per	88,812	1	site per	20,000	Need Exists	3 Sites	Need Exists	4 Sites	
Outdoor Pool	1	-	-	1	1	site per	88,812	1	site per	40,000	Need Exists	1 Sites	Need Exists	1 Sites	
Outdoor Ice Rink	20	-	-	20	1	site per	4,441	1	site per	20,000	Meets Standard	- Sites	Meets Standard	- Sites	
INDOOR FACILITIES															
Indoor Recreation Space (S..F)	1	-	-	1	0.00	SF per person		1.50	SF per person		Need Exists	133,217 Sq. Ft.	Need Exists	137,995 Sq. Ft.	
Indoor Aquatic Space (S.F.)	-	-	-	-	-	SF per person		0.50	SF per person		Need Exists	44,406 Sq. Ft.	Need Exists	45,999 Sq. Ft.	

Figure 2-8: Level of Standard (LOS) Summary Table

KEY PARK NEEDS (LEVEL OF SERVICE) ISSUES:

- Several needs have been identified by the quantitative LOS inventory including:

FACILITY	ADDITIONAL NEED:
Indoor Recreation Space	137,995 Sq. Ft.
Indoor Aquatic Space	45,999 Sq. Ft.
Total Park Acreage	171 Acres
Baseball Fields	6
Pickleball Courts	1
Dog Parks	1
Skate Parks	1
Splash Pads	4
Outdoor Pool	1

- The Park system is over-served with several amenities. This is indicative of an outdated system that needs to be updated. The most over-served amenities in the system include:

FACILITY	STANDARD	BLOOMINGTON
Softball Fields	18	70
Tennis Courts	36	72
Playgrounds	36	43
Outdoor Ice Rinks	4-5	20

- Park descriptions and design principles for neighborhood parks and community parks need updating to focus on experiences not just amenities.
- Many park facilities, equipment, and amenities are outdated, not used or need replaced.
- Many parks need updated site park plans to maximize use, experiences and value to the community.
- Access to the regional park systems within the City needs to be enhanced since they are limited.
- Capital improvement monies for parks has been limited to enhance outdated equipment, update facilities and serve a wider group of users.
- Restrooms in parks need a complete strategy to support a positive user experience.

CONCLUSION:

The Level of Service Study identified needs in the system and provided quantitative verification that Bloomington is over-served with some park facilities and under-served with others. Bloomington's LOS is indicative of a system that has not been updated over time. There are experiential issues with this in that the recreation trends and demographics have changed, but there are also financial issues with Bloomington's LOS. Many of the park's facilities are likely old and in need of replacement, some amenities are not as popular as they once were and are likely not receiving enough use to justify the cost.

Section 04 describes an approach to the City's LOS that achieve an appropriate balance of parks, recreation facilities, programs and experiences in each service area where land use patterns are allowed to support equitable access to parks, trails, sports facilities and recreation amenities.



PRIORITY PARK ELEMENT 03 | TRAILS AND MOBILITY

Bloomington's transportation network is fully developed and is essentially complete. This system was originally developed to prioritize motorized vehicles over pedestrians and cyclists and this legacy persists today. The primary trail and mobility planning that has been completed is focused on improving and renovating the existing network versus planning new trails. Significant effort has gone toward closing gaps in the pedestrian and cyclist system. The City has been working to establish a safe, convenient, and interconnected bicycle and pedestrian network through various planning and construction efforts. Trails and Mobility have been a significant issue for residents and decision makers in the past and are being addressed through a variety of planning efforts. These plans contain significant overlap and provide an excellent base for the analysis and recommendations of this Parks System Master Plan (PSMP).

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS STUDIES

Bloomington's Park System will be improved by implementing the recommendations and actions recommended in the 2016 Alternative Transportation Plan (ATP) and Bloomington's Comprehensive Plan (Forward 2040), as well as the Minnesota River Valley Strategic Plan. Connecting residents safely to parks and existing off-road trails is critical to

the Park System. Increasing pedestrian and bicycle access to all the City's services and amenities is an issue of equity. Parks are an essential city service and require safe, effective infrastructure for residents to access. The PSMP supports the recommendations of the studies and plans described above and will focus on trails and mobility issues and opportunities that are more specific to city parkland throughout this section.

ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN -2016

The Alternative Transportation Plan was updated in 2016 and provides a framework for prioritization of implementation of the City's goals to meet the needs of individuals and families living, working, and recreating in Bloomington through strategic investments in multi-modal transportation features. That study identified the challenges of integrating better bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure throughout Bloomington. Those challenges include:

- Surface street characteristics – lack of continuity and connectiveness
- Street use speeds – multiple lanes of auto traffic traveling at high speeds are typical throughout the City
- Limited regional connection – outside city connections are unrealized

- Lack of end trip facilities – lack of infrastructure such as parking racks, lockers, changing spaces, etc.
- Lack of right-of-way – retrofits of existing streetscapes difficult due to spatial constraints

Hennepin County also identified regional challenges to establishing a bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure that apply to Bloomington and other suburbs developed with an auto-oriented pattern (Adopted from the Hennepin County 2040 Bicycle Transportation Plan):

- Sidewalk Gaps – piecemeal development of infrastructure is often separated and not continuous, especially at municipal boundaries
- Freeway interchanges – significant barriers to crossing due to extensive multi-lane on and off ramps, travel lanes, large commercial land uses, and general lack of walkways
- Left and right turn lanes – turn lanes are common throughout the county and give priority to cars turning across pedestrian crosswalks are dangerous and intimidating
- Turning radii and right turn lanes – large turning radii designed for vehicle passing is a dangerous situation for pedestrians without protection from traffic
- Park and ride facilities – typically located in vehicular accessible locations but not in bike or pedestrian friendly areas or connections provided

The ATP engaged the community and discovered a number of significant resident identified challenges. Some of the items identified in the 2016 study have been addressed by the City including addressing infrastructure on France Avenue. However, a number of issues raised in ATP engagement still showed up in the Project bloom! engagement and analysis efforts including:

- Lack of sidewalks, trails, and on-street bike lanes
- Condition and design of sidewalk – poor conditions, 4' width, and maintenance challenges
- Traffic volumes and speed of roadways
- Highway crossings
- Missing connections between trails and park and recreation areas
- Limited trails and trail loops within city parks
- Access to natural surface/ nature trails

Specific Bicycle and Pedestrian Issues were identified in Project bloom!

The top 5 comments that were engaged with were focused on bicycle and pedestrian issues:

- Trail connection to reach West Bush Lake Park from Venness Rd. (14 likes)
- Bike trail or facility along Old Shakopee Road to connect Bloomington. Crossing should be more bike and pedestrian friendly (14 likes)
- Allow parking on south end of Normandale Blvd. to allow access to River Valley trails (Multiple comments, 13 likes)
- E. Bush Lake Road path was underwater for significant periods (12 likes)
- Minnesota River Valley Trail climate change and flooding studies impacts prior to additional construction (12 likes, 1 dislike)
 - » Multiple comments about flooding, erosion, and inaccessibility due to standing water at multiple points in the Minnesota River Valley

FORWARD 2040

Forward 2040, Bloomington’s Comprehensive Plan, integrates recommendations of the ATPs into the Transportation Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. This section also highlights the success of transportation projects in Bloomington over the last decade. Many of these success stories include bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Bloomington Public Works has been implementing a ‘Complete Streets’ approach that has been making significant improvements to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure through the following:

- Collector Streets Program – analyzing and retrofitting existing right of ways to reconfigure geometry, striping bikeways, and making other improvements to the existing network
- Neighborhood Traffic Calming Policy and Procedure for Local Streets – a resident driven program to reduce traffic speeds through traffic calming devices
- Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Ordinance – requires non-residential owners to complete a TDM and incentives the inclusion of services and facilities to reduce single occupancy vehicle trip



MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY STRATEGIC PLAN

The Minnesota River Valley Strategic Plan focuses on trails and trail connections to the River Valley that are owned by the City of Bloomington. The plan analyzes the issues and opportunities of the River Valley, develops a vision and mission, and provides a framework for strategic actions to achieve that vision and mission. The plan's Vision Statement:

- To enhance awareness, appreciation, and enjoyment of the Minnesota River Valley by ensuring that City-owned land in the River Valley is used and managed in a manner that balances resource preservation with appropriate access and utilization.

Four broad-based goals were identified for addressing the opportunities and challenges within the River Valley. The goals are not prioritized but they all work together to achieve the Vision identified above:

- Enhance access to recreational opportunities in the River Valley
- Increase awareness and understanding of the River Valley environment
- Improve utilization of land and resources in the River Valley
- Ensure protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources in the River Valley

Trails and mobility were addressed in the Strategic Plan through discussion of the existing uses, a State Trail discussion, signage and wayfinding, operations and maintenance of trail facilities, and trailhead facilities that provide the link between the City and the River Valley for most users. The PSMP supports the Strategic Plan recommendations.

KEY TRAILS AND MOBILITY ISSUES:

A number of issues and opportunities relating to Trails and Mobility were identified throughout the course of the PSMP. Park tours, analysis, staff feedback and extensive community engagement identified the following key issues:

- Residents are not able to access off-road trails and regional trail facilities from their neighborhoods with exception of a few neighborhoods along the Minnesota River Valley or near Hyland Park.
- Greenways and trails are not linked together in the City to existing parks and other regional park systems such as Three Rivers Park District and Minnesota River Valley Parks. Linking greenways and trails would provide residents access to other regional park systems freely without safety issues crossing heavily trafficked streets (See Figure 2-9)
- Internal loop trails only exist in some larger community and regional parks but are generally not found in most parks.
- Street access trails are limited in the City.
- Lack of sidewalks, trails, and on-street bike lanes in many parts of the City still exist

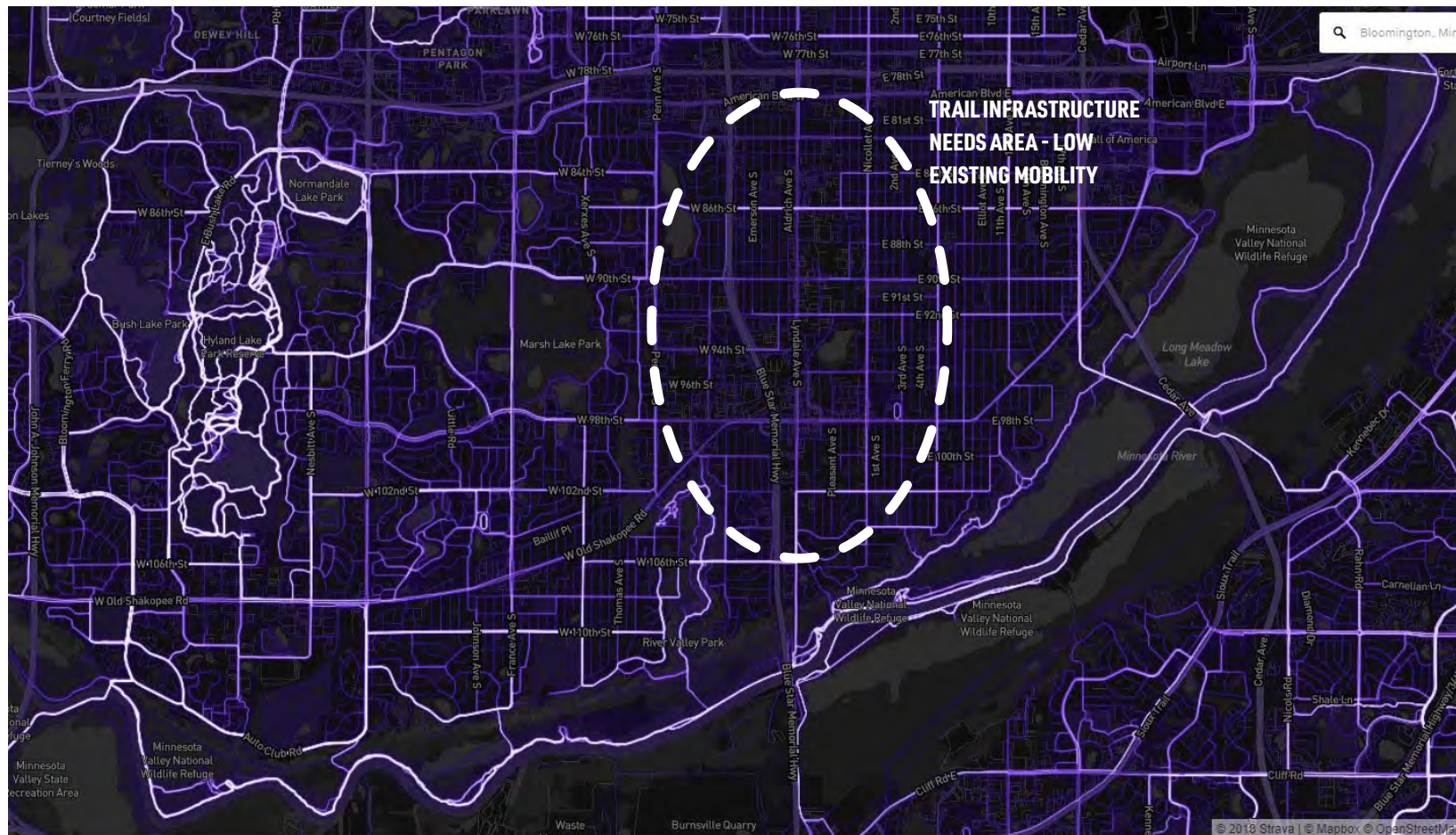


Figure 2-9: Bicycle/ pedestrian infrastructure gaps. Source: Strava

- Condition and design of existing sidewalks throughout the City
 - » Generally poor condition for older walkways
 - » 4' width in many areas is insufficient
 - » Maintenance challenges identified with snow removal
- Traffic volumes and speed of roadways that need to be crossed is dangerous and intimidating to most riders.
- Interstate and Highway crossings are significant physical and visual barriers and do not have adequate bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure
- Access to natural surface/ nature trails is one of the most identified need by residents

TRAILS AND MOBILITY CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS:

Bloomington residents want more trails. Off road, on-street, natural surface trails for hiking and mountain bike, and internal loop trails have all been recommended though engagement on project bloom! and in the statistically valid survey. Because the City is fully developed there are challenges with retrofitting improved pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure into the established, auto centric, network. However, staff continues to plan and implement trail and mobility improvements as recommended in the ATP and Forward 2040 plans.

The PSMP fully supports this ongoing work as a critical component to linking the City to parks. City-wide trail and mobility improvements will only increase safer access to parks for a wider range of residents. See section 04 for recommendations on supporting this ongoing work and strengthening the trails and mobility opportunities that are focused more on parks.



Narrow existing sidewalks - approx. 4' wide



PRIORITY PARK ELEMENT 04 | EQUITY

Parks and recreation are an essential service in Bloomington. The benefits of access to quality parks, open space and recreation opportunities have been well studied. Research continues to highlight and uncover key connections between parks and community health. Property values, air quality, mental health, crime rates, physical activity levels, community identity, and combating chronic diseases are a few of the societal challenges that are all improved through access to the outdoors and to parks. The evidence is clear that these benefits are inclusive across racial and economic boundaries. Additionally, access to parks has been shown to have positive effects on individuals with diagnoses of ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and other social, communication, and developmental disabilities. However, these benefits are not equally accessible and inclusive to everyone in Bloomington.

This section will highlight these inequities and provide a framework to address them moving forward. The Parks Department can be a pioneer in addressing inequities within Bloomington. Parks are inherently a democratic element in city life and the mission has always been to serve all residents within the City. This section will address how that balance has been lost and strategies to reestablish equity so that the park system can be fully inclusive and work for all residents. An important piece of this puzzle is how park system equity is grounded in the City of Bloomington's overarching strategies and policies to address racial equity.

CITY OF BLOOMINGTON EQUITY AND INCLUSION FRAMEWORK

In September of 2016, the Council adopted a strategic plan that includes equity and inclusion as a key priority. In December of 2017, the City Council adopted a Racial Equity Vision Statement that reads:

“The City of Bloomington will act courageously to advance racial equity. We will be a vibrant, safe, and healthy place where people of all races thrive.”

In October 2019, the City hired a racial equity coordinator to integrate racial equity principles into all operations, projects, and services of the City through the application and integration of best practices, training and development of City staff, and tracking and measurement of outcomes.

In October 2020, the City Council unanimously adopted a Racial Equity Business Plan. The plan provides goals, strategies, and performance measures that will drive future racial equity work.

In addition to adopting a racial equity business plan the City has been making progress in the following areas:

- **Recruiting and hiring a more diverse workforce.** Of the more than 100 individuals hired for full-time City positions since January 2016, 24% identify themselves as persons of color. Having a workforce that reflects the community the City serves builds connections, enhances trust and expands perspectives, which ultimately results in better service to all residents.
- **Hosting a series of training sessions for staff and Council.** Training is designed to help City staff and Council members recognize institutional and systemic barriers to services and opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC communities).
- **Updating of job descriptions is underway.** Key objectives of the citywide update include removing unwarranted barriers to entry and incorporating racial equity as a core competency required of all staff.
- **Conducting a series of department-specific, safe-space discussions.** These facilitated discussions allowed staff to share thoughts and feelings in reaction to the death of George Floyd, and the resulting protests and civil unrest.
- **Committed to addressing racism as a public health crisis.** The City Council adopted a resolution declaring racism as a public health crisis in Bloomington. The resolution acknowledges that racism is a threat to the health and well-being of the city's Black, Indigenous and People of Color communities. The resolutions outline a number of commitments that support addressing the root causes of disparities in the underlying social determinates of health.
- **Initiated Department Racial Equity Action Teams.** These are staff driven teams that will advance racial equity work from the unique perspectives of individual departments or divisions.
- **Centering racial equity in our decision-making process.** We understand that when racial equity is not explicitly brought into operations and decision-making, racial inequities are likely to be perpetuated. The City Racial Equity Action Team utilizes racial equity impact assessments to systematically examine how different racial and ethnic groups will likely be affected by a proposed action or decision.

The Parks Department is actively engaged in many of the Equity and Inclusion efforts described above and desires to integrate an equity-based approach into their typical work. Utilizing an equity-based approach to creating and managing parks, trails, and recreational programs will assist staff in ensuring that all residents are served with parks facilities and programs that they desire and need to increase their quality of life. Parks should reflect the neighborhoods and people that surround and use them. An equity-based approach will give residents a role in the process to re-make their parks and ensure that their voices are continuously heard.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY EQUITY?

A common understanding and definition of Equity in Parks and Recreation is important. The National Recreation and Park Association's definition of Equitable Park and Recreation Access is:

The just and fair quantity, proximity and connections to quality parks and green space, recreation facilities, as well as programs that are safe, inclusive, culturally relevant and welcoming to everyone.

When people have just and fair access, our health and social wellbeing improve, and our communities can protect and better recover from environmental, social and economic challenges.

An important consideration of equity is the distinction from equality. Equity and equality are often used interchangeably, but they mean different things. Equality ensures everyone receives the equal amount of investment. Equity is about ensuring everyone receives the appropriate investment to meet their needs. This is an important distinction for Bloomington's parks moving forward. Significant investment in the park system will be required to update parks to meet modern needs of Bloomington's residents. Parks throughout the City are outdated and have been historically underfunded. Both larger scale Community Facilities and Neighborhood Parks need updates and improvements. Replacement of deteriorating facilities is appropriate in some neighborhoods but not in others. A park focused example of the distinction of Equity and Equality focuses on the replacement of tennis courts:



Figure 2-10: Equity - Equality Comparison (NRPA)

- An equality focus would make sure the tennis courts were repaired and revitalized in all parts of the City to ensure things are equal.
- An Equity focus first asks whether a neighborhood needs a tennis court. Some neighborhoods might answer yes, while some neighborhoods would answer no. An Equity centric approach would focus on understanding what that neighborhood needs and modifying the reinvestment to satisfy those needs.

ADDRESS EQUITY THROUGH TWO LENSES

The PSMP examines the role of equity in parks by looking at the issue through 2 lenses, Citywide and Neighborhood:

- *The Citywide lens* looks at the whole of the City to understand the big picture needs. This lens also recognizes important geographic patterns, barriers, and relationships across the City.
- *The Neighborhood lens* zooms in further on certain areas of the City and recognizes that neighborhoods are unique and have different needs and wants based on city infrastructure, demographics, history, and demographics.

WHO HAS ACCESS TO THE PARKS?

Access to parks and programs is a critical component of equity. Discrepancies in the amount of park space available to residents has been a good indicator of a particular neighborhoods income levels, racial make up, and other key indicators of equity. Bloomington has great access to parks overall. Over 87% of residents are within walking distance of a park. This is a strong foundation to build a park system upon as it provides the opportunity for park access to most residents.

However, that level of access becomes more skewed as parts of the City are compared against other areas. Historically there has been a friendly rivalry between East and West Bloomington. This rivalry was brought up throughout the engagement process and a general sentiment was that there was a disparity between access to parkland between the East and West side of Bloomington. This impression was validated with a high-level inventory of parkland and amenities across Bloomington.



Citywide Lens Analysis

Looking through the citywide lens a few key elements stand out that significantly affect the level of equity in Bloomington Parks:

- Bloomington has great access throughout the City to parks and open space. 87% of all residents are within a 5-10 min. walk from a neighborhood, community, or regional park. This percentage remains high for all age ranges and racial backgrounds.
- There are significant barriers that physically divide the City. Interstate 35W is one of the largest.
- A majority of the natural areas, wetlands, and creek features are in the western, central, and southern parts of the City.

Neighborhood Lens Analysis

In order to examine the issues of equity more closely, the consultant team and staff created Service Areas to be able to collect data, analyze more closely, and compare Service Areas to one another. The Service Areas are based on Bloomington's Council Districts with the exception of a modification around Bryant Park. Bryant Park was changed from Service Area 3 to 4 due to the logistics of 35W as a barrier and keeping the Park consistent with the neighborhood most likely to access it. 2.6 displays the Service Areas with a walking analysis to the City's playgrounds. This map highlights the excellent general spread of parks and access throughout the City. Key findings of the Service Area analysis include:

- While distribution of parkland is great throughout the City, the amount of parkland in each Service Area is not equal. Service Area 4 has significantly less neighborhood and community parkland per population than the other service areas (regional parks not included).
 - » Service Area 1 = 29.59 acres/ 1,000 people
 - » Service Area 2 = 19.22 acres/ 1,000 people
 - » Service Area 3 = 66.86 acres/ 1,000 people
 - » Service Area 4 = 6.49 acres/ 1,000 people
- Service Area 4 has a number of aspects that signify an equity issue is present.
 - » Highest density – Top 8 parks in the system with the most population living near them.
 - » Highest amount of poverty – 8 of the top 10 parks with the most number of black groups with 10% or more below the poverty line

PARK	POPULATION UNDER 18
COOKS PLAYLOT	1,535
SMITH PARK	1,433
EFFA PLAYLOT	1,142
MAPLEWOOD PARK	1,027
VALLEY VIEW PLAYFIELD	1,003
CEDARCREST PARK	773
WRIGHTS LAKE PARK	731
HOHAG PLAYLOT	723
COUNTRYSIDE PARK	722
RHODES PLAYLOT	681

PARK	HOUSEHOLD INCOME
RIVER RIDGE PLAYGROUND	\$50,903
SMITH PARK	\$53,935
COOKS PLAYLOT	\$54,782
VANDERBIE PARK	\$56,130
PLEASANT PLAYLOT	\$56,733
WRIGHT'S LAKE PARK	\$56,828
HARRISON PICNIC GROUNDS	\$57,148
FENLASON PARK	\$57,661
EFFA PLAYLOT	\$58,120
VALLEY VIEW PLAYFIELD	\$58,583

PARK	MINORITY POPULATIONS
COOKS PLAYLOT	57
SMITH PARK	54.5
RIVER RIDGE PLAYGROUND	49.2
WRIGHT'S LAKE PLAYGROUND	47.8
CEDARCREST PLAYGROUND	41.2
EFFA PLAYGROUND	40.8
FENLASON PARK	37.8
BRYANT PARK	36.3
VALLEY VIEW PARK	35.9
MCANDREW'S PLAYLOT	35.3

Figure 2-11: Neighborhood Characteristics Applied to Parks

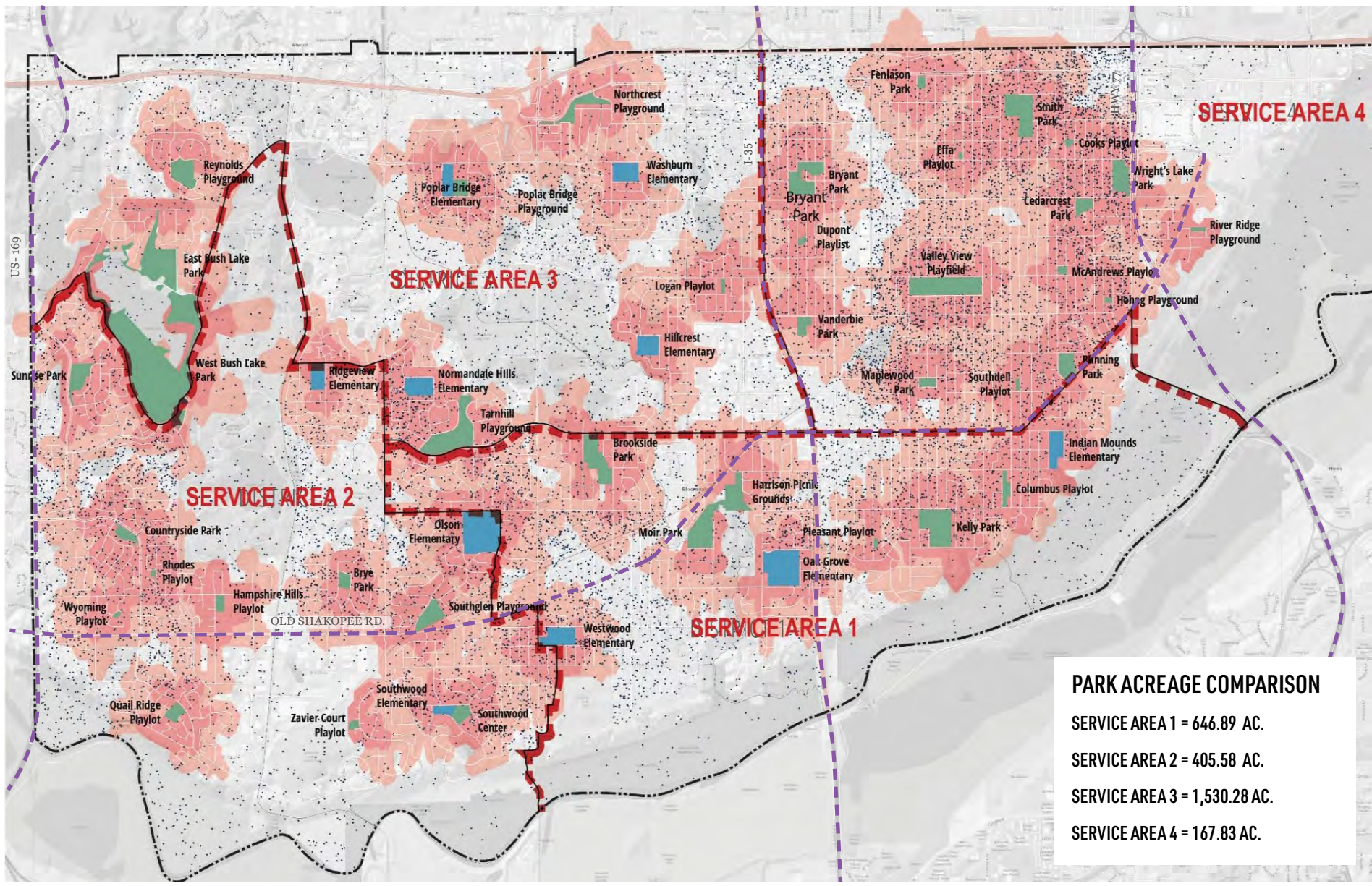


Figure 2-12: Park and School Property Accessibility and Population

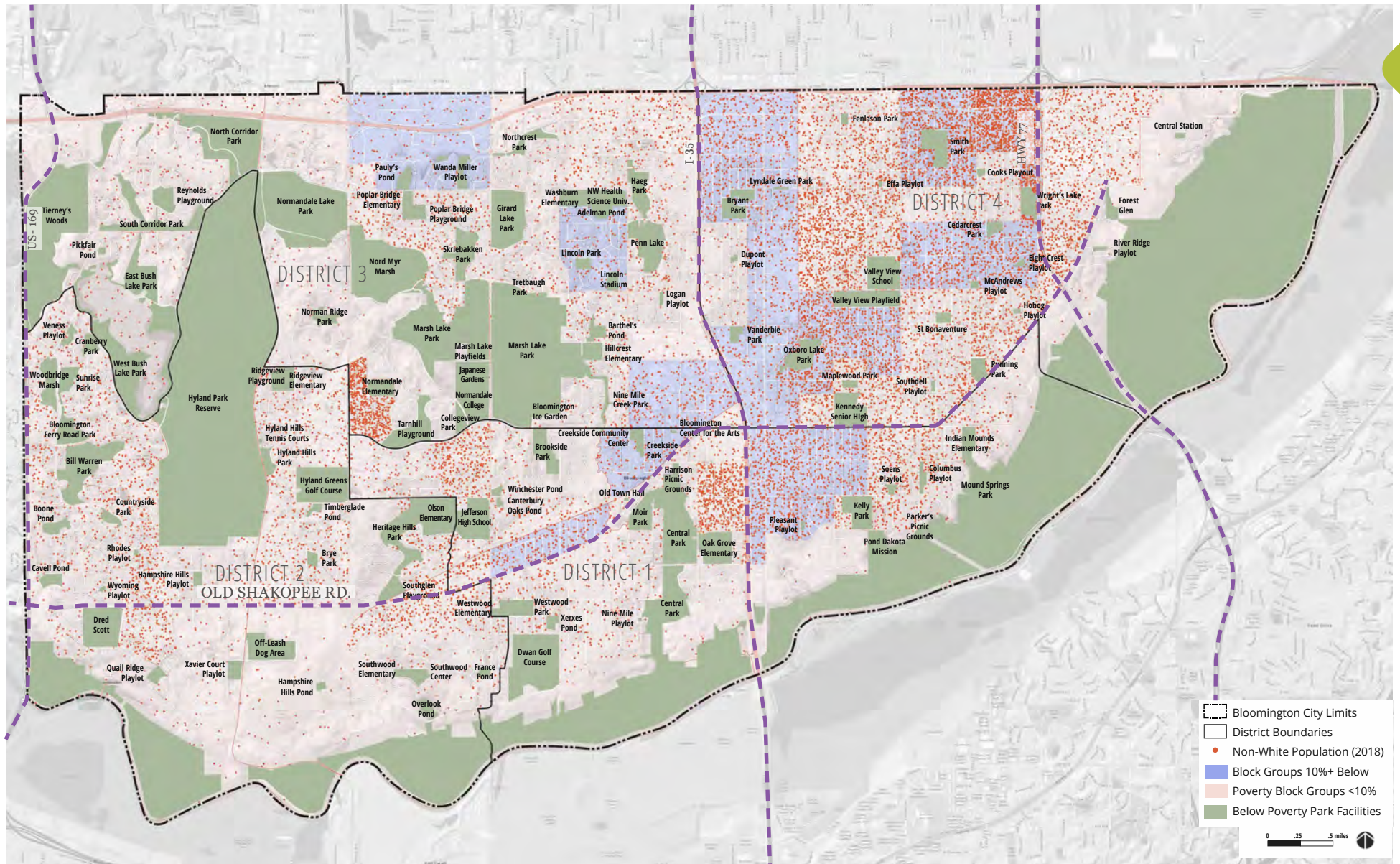


Figure 2-13: Demographics, Income, and Park Access

- » Highest Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) – Top 11 parks with highest number BIPOC living near
- » Highest Density of children – 9 of the top 10 parks with the most kids living near.
- » Natural area proximity is less for a majority of Service Area 4 residents.

EQUITY ANALYSIS CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Bloomington has an excellent framework the park system based on good overall access distributed throughout the City. However, there is a discrepancy between Service Areas when comparing them. Service Area 4 has less parkland per person and has total populations much higher than other Service Areas in key areas such as; children under 18, household income, and minority populations. In order to address these issues, Section 03 provides recommendations and a framework for addressing Equity. The recommendations are framed by proposing and answering four key questions:

- Who has access to parks?
- Who designs the parks?
- Who decides what programs and services will be offered at parks?
- What dollars are allocated to which parks?

These questions were developed by Glenn Harris, president of the non-profit racial justice organization Race Forward. The questions help frame how Bloomington Parks and Recreation can be successful in understanding and advancing racial and economic equity within their communities.



PARK ELEMENT 05 | SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability has been a City Council identified strategic priority of the City of Bloomington since 2016. The City was named a Minnesota GreenStep 5 City in 2021. Bloomington created the Sustainability Commission to advise City Council, staff, and the Bloomington community on policies, practices, procedures and proposals that relate to the sustainable use and management of environmental resources that include air, water, energy, land and ecological resources, and waste. Bloomington's sustainability work is focused around four key areas: Energy and Carbon, Water Conservation, Ecological Land Stewardship, and Solid Waste. Parks affect and can be affected by all four areas. Many elements of ecological land stewardship are described in the Natural Resources Priority.

KEY SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES:

- Existing park buildings are old and constructed before sustainability was a priority of the City. Many warming houses and facilities buildings are inefficient and wasteful compared to today's standards regarding energy, water consumption, etc..
- Extensive turf lawns require significant ongoing maintenance with the use of fertilizers, herbicides, water, and gasoline engines for mowing.
- A lack of urban forest inventory makes it impossible to track benefits and identify gaps of the ecosystem services of the urban canopy. Canopy diversity can't be tracked and planned for.
- Many parks, especially Community Parks, are car dependent and include large parking lots with impervious surfaces. These impervious surfaces can contribute to surface water pollution with the traditional stormwater management system in place.
- Climate change trends expected in Bloomington include (from Metropolitan Council's Climate Vulnerability Assessment):
 - » Warming winters – affecting ice conditions and skating season. Fewer cold extremes to control insect populations that could impact park trees.
 - » Extreme rainfall – continued increase in frequency and magnitude. Storm damage more likely and increased flooding in rivers and creeks.
 - » Heat waves – increases in severity, coverage, and duration will affect vegetation and park visitors; especially those without access to reliable air conditioning.
 - » Drought – Increased severity, coverage, and duration will affect park vegetation.

GOAL:

Support the ongoing work of the Sustainability Commission by making the park system more sustainable and resilient to the effects of climate change.

SUSTAINABILITY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- All new park building facilities, and major park renovations, should follow the City of Bloomington's current Sustainability Policies and recommendations, and work towards the goals outlined in Bloomington's Energy Action Plan (2018).
- Identify areas of parks that can reduce actively maintained turf.
- Develop an urban forest inventory database to track the existing forest and plan for improvements.
- Improve the trail network to parks in order to reduce the number of car visits.
- Integrate Green Infrastructure into parks to manage stormwater runoff generated from rainfall.
- Partner with City Engineering and Nine Mile Creek Watershed District to use park land for stormwater quantity and quality control efforts in neighborhoods. Recreational needs should always be accounted for and protected so that valuable park land isn't taken for a one-use stormwater volume practice.
- Continue to develop education campaigns through parks. Consider a 'Seeing Yellow' campaign or similar to educate residents on benefits of minimizing chemical inputs and allowing some areas of parks to receive less maintenance – even if that means more dandelion growth. Similarly, pollinator lawn mixes contain clover and other non-traditional lawn species that may be considered weeds, but that have significant environmental value.
- Develop a park resilience action plan to anticipate effects due to climate change and begin to adapt.

INITIATIVE 06 | ARTS AND PLACEMAKING

Arts groups within the City are active, prevalent, and effective at spreading imaginative artistic endeavors throughout the City. The Bloomington Center for the Arts is an impressive facility that hosts eight art organizations and has space for City and community arts activities as well as for private rentals. Arts groups in the City are highly organized, successful, and self-sufficient.

Arts groups have a proven positive financial impact on the City. A February 2021 report by Creative Minnesota, Minnesota Citizens for the Arts, and the City of Bloomington revealed a significant impact on the social, cultural, and economic base of the nonprofit arts and culture sector in the City of Bloomington. The total economic impact from 25 arts organizations and their audiences was over \$12 million, with almost half of those organizations have spending budgets of less than \$25,000. As the report states, “this is an incredible contribution to local service providers, retailers, restaurants, and the overall economy.”

Simply put, the arts organizations in the City are extraordinary and are experts in spearheading creative placemaking efforts. One of these initiatives is Creative Placemaking in South Loop, which aims to engage the community and artists in making artistic place-based improvements that improve the character and social fabric of a place.



Center for the Arts at Bloomington Civic Plaza. Image courtesy of City of Bloomington and Creative Placemaking in South Loop.

KEY ARTS AND PLACEMAKING ISSUES:

- The public loves art. Art is an attractive, pleasing addition to the public realm, and generates a sense of place and surprise.
- Art and placemaking help to tell the stories of a place, finding a more creative way to engage people in education and experience relating to the natural and cultural world around us.
- Arts groups in Bloomington are doing a great job at public art and placemaking, and generate impressive revenue in the City.

GOAL:

Implement more arts and placemaking initiatives into community parks using a prioritization tool for currently under-served parks for artistic installation, as well as new park plans.

ARTS AND PLACEMAKING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Parks department to work with arts & placemaking groups and organizations more often, relying on these successful groups for their expertise in creative placemaking.
- Arts & placemaking groups to be more involved in community engagement efforts throughout the City, to add a unique and creative element to engagement initiatives, but to also improve the connection between the community and public arts.
- Make plans for more creative placemaking within parks, especially community parks and new park plans, prioritizing service area 4.



“Wright’s Lake Park Community Mural” art mural installation by GoodSpace. Image courtesy of City of Bloomington and Creative Placemaking in South Loop.



Creative Placemaking in South Loop informational flyer with project locations. Image courtesy of City of Bloomington and Creative Placemaking in South Loop.



“Augmented Reality” art installation by artists Nancy Musinguzi & Adam Davis-McGee. Image courtesy of City of Bloomington and Creative Placemaking in South Loop.



“Convergence” art installation by artist James Brenner. Image courtesy of City of Bloomington and Creative Placemaking in South Loop.



INITIATIVE 07 | CORE SERVICES - EXPANDING USER BASE

Provide additional Health, Fitness, Environmental Educational, Recreational, Sports and Special Event Experiences in parks.

KEY CORE SERVICES ISSUES:

- A lack of indoor program space exists in the Department's efforts to provide programs to the community.
- Core programs are lacking for environmental education, outdoor adventure, fitness and wellness, and winter programs primarily because there is a lack of indoor program space in the city.
- Currently the City pays for school access by renting program space. However, the schools do not pay for park access space and this arrangement needs to be addressed.
- The Department is primarily a facility provider for other program groups who provide services in the community (except for senior programs) versus a facility and program provider in the same space.
- Partnership equity needs to be addressed as it applies to all types of partnerships where the City is currently involved.
- Pricing of programs and space is an issue that needs to be addressed in the system. The city is subsidizing many services beyond what is considered best practices.
- The true cost of service is not tracked in the system. A method needs to be established to determine the classification of the service and cost recovery goals desired. Most pricing of services is below market rates supplied by other public providers in the region.
- Business plans do not exist for revenue producing facilities such as the Bloomington Ice Garden (BIG), Bloomington Aquatic Facilities and the Golf Courses.

GOAL:

Enhance the value of recreation services by enhancing existing recreation facilities and building new facilities to support the existing and new core programs desired by the community in the most cost-effective manner.

CORE SERVICES RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Identify gaps in programs provided for existing core and non-core programs according to the Needs Assessment completed for this Master Plan. Find new ways to provide new core programs desired by the community and where and how to deliver them to the community. These could include fitness and wellness, outdoor adventure, environmental education and winter programs.
- Develop a true cost of service for all existing and new programs to classify them as core essential, important and value added.
- Develop a new pricing policy that incorporates the classification of programs, cost of service and cost recovery goal that will support operational costs based on a public and private good for the service.
- Teach and train the staff to track the cost of service, price services based on classification and how to communicate the price of programs to the community.
- Update the school district partnership agreements to make it fair and equitable and include a yearly review process.
- Enhance pricing for golf, sports for youth and adults, ice related programs and facility uses, and aquatic related programs because they are undervalued for the quality of the experience.
- Prioritize locations of new recreation facilities in the City to ensure equity of access for the whole community.
- Find dedicated funding sources for recreation facilities in the City. Develop new facilities and update existing facilities over the next five years to maximize their value to citizens of the park and recreation system.
- Develop feasibility and business plans during the inception of all new and renovated recreation facilities to maximize the cost recovery capabilities and operational costs.
- Add a new updated clubhouse to the golf course at Dwan Golf Course.
- Address the removal of non-productive facilities in all parks. i.e. warming houses.
- Provide a replacement for Creekside Community Center Provide indoor recreation space to satisfy existing and future needs. 133,217 sf is currently needed.
- Improvements to BIG – apply for state bond funding. Make improvements BIG to maintain it's status as a premier Ice Facility in the Twin Cities.
- New facilities – referendum/ funding to redevelop and provide new facilities. Provide new facilities to update the park system and meet needs.
- Blanketed permitting of sports fields is an issue that needs to be addressed.

INITIATIVE 08 | ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Create a new organizational structure that provides the best customer experience and cost management for the future of the Department.

KEY ISSUES:

- Change the budget methodology to bring more transparency and accountability to council and the public regarding parks maintenance activities. This recommendation is being implemented in the 2022 budget.
- The Director should have total control over park related priorities of the department that involves directing the public works staff in duties required in park maintenance. Due to organizational efficiencies staff is committed to improving communication and coordination
- When the community complains to the Director of Parks and Recreation on park related matters, they don't have direct authority to resolve the issue because there is no direct oversight of public works staff to direct them to resolve the problem.
- The director does not have approval for capital improvements needed in park, what is provided or the quality of the improvements.
- Lack of transparency between services charged by other departments creates uncertainty that BPRD is providing the highest level of cost-effectiveness.
- There are key positions in the department that are missing and should be considered; i.e. a business development office to manage earned income opportunities, partnership equity, pricing of services, grant research and pursuit, tracking data on the park, program and facility use and tracking key performance indicators.
- Depending on what new core programs are provided to the community and added to the park and recreation department, they will also require additional program staff to oversee these services.
- The system of internal service charges in the city negatively impacts the department's ability to have efficient cost recovery

GOAL:

Create an organizational structure that allows the Department to thrive, be accountable for all finances associated with parks and recreation and deliver on the standards they are capable of delivering.



ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Develop a maintenance management plan for the Department and train public works maintenance employees on how to deliver on the expectations of the plan.
- Develop an operating budget with the public works director so the parks and recreation director will have full control of all costs and revenues that will deliver the highest level of the parks' quality to the community. Establish a full review process after one year.
- All park and recreation capital improvement planning will include the park and recreation director and key public works staff members in the planning, design, construction, furniture fixtures details and equipment requirements for the improved space.
- Continued collaboration and open communication between Maintenance Superintendent and Parks and Recreation Department is critical to the successful collaboration between Parks and Recreation Department and Park Maintenance Division.
- A business development emphasis should be included to manage earned income opportunities, partnership equity, naming rights, pricing of services, grant research and pursuit, tracking data on park programs and facility use, as well as tracking key performance indicators.
- The Recreation Coordinator position should be made full-time to expand on community engagement and volunteer efforts associated with Racial Equity initiatives and park planning.
- Supervision of Recreation Division to shift from Parks and Recreation Director to Deputy Director to allow for more direct coordination between Parks and Recreation Director and Maintenance Superintendent and Park Maintenance Division.
- Add Natural Resource Management duties to the Assistant Maintenance Superintendent – Park Maintenance position

to oversee Natural Resources management. Assistant Maintenance superintendent currently supervises Park Maintenance and Facilities Maintenance Divisions. The Facilities Division should no longer fall under the span and control of the Assistant Maintenance Superintendent – Park Maintenance.

- The span and control of the two Parks Supervisor positions is larger than industry standards and an additional Supervisor position should be added.
- Parks and Recreation staff to participate in the hiring process for park maintenance positions. Park Maintenance Division to participate in all Parks and Recreation Department full-time hires.
- Current Staff Levels are currently not adequate to complete recommendations in the PSMP. The following recommendations are needed to achieve recommendations:
 - » Increase staff capacity for Natural Resources Management. Examine internal job descriptions to shift capacity.
 - » Increase staff capacity for Community Engagement efforts.
 - » Increase staff capacity for Project Management of CIP projects.
 - » Increase staff capacity for Park Supervisor Staff

INITIATIVE 09 | ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUDGET ENHANCEMENT

Promote economic development and establish a budget that matches the expectations of the community for parks and recreation.

KEY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUDGET ENHANCEMENT ISSUES:

- The Parks and Recreation Department is not viewed as an economic tool by the City but is viewed as more of a “spending” department.
- The Staff does not track the cost per experience or revenue per experience details.
- The parks and recreation department has never done an economic impact report on the value of parks and recreation to the City of Bloomington.
- A need exists to evaluate new economic impacts from a future connected trails system, development of multi-generational community centers, special event space, ice related facilities, general open space and natural area space, as well as regional programs that are equitably distributed and serve residents and visitors.
- Well designed and maintained parks are not assessed to the value they bring to a community.
- Lack of dedicated funding source for capital improvements keeps the agency from having a balance approach to land, facilities and programs.
- The department does not have a park foundation to help support the financial elements of the park system.
- The department does not collect program and facility data in a concise manner because several software programs are used for program registration, permits and facility usage.
- Partnership equity is not measured adequately.
- CAPRA Standards are not in place
- No customer service plan is in place.
- Land dedication fees have been reduced as new development has decreased. As redevelopment occurs, dedication fees should be used to ensure adequate park space is provided for increases in density.
- There have been very few new site master plans for park sites over the last 25 years which has limited the number of new experiences that could have been incorporated into those specific parks.

GOAL:

Demonstrate the Economic Value of Parks as Part of the Budget Process each year.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Develop an Economic Impact Plan for the department every five years to focus on the approximate value of homes near parks and greenways.
- The Parks and Recreation staff needs to track cost and revenue per amenity and program.
- Consider development of a parks foundation to help raise funds for the department as well as create advocacy for the department.
- Pursue CAPRA standards as a framework for excellence.
- Seek a dedicated funding source for capital improvements for the department to update parks, develop new community center facilities, build trails and greenways and improve existing infrastructure.
- Re-master plan two or three parks a year and update them to achieve enhanced experiences needed in the neighborhoods they serve.
- Capital improvements in parks should include an equity lens for prioritization.
- Over the next three years, develop a data pack the department will use to track and demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness that can be shared with key leaders of the City.

INITIATIVE 10 | POLICY UPDATES

Create updated policies that provide the maximum flexibility for the Director to operate efficiently and effectively to achieve the Vision for the Master Plan.



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KEY POLICY ISSUES:

- Partnerships are not equitable with schools and sports associations.
- Pricing policies are non-existent and need to be addressed.
- Land use policies are not consistent.
- Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) policies are not in place and need to be addressed.
- Earned income and financial polices need to be evaluated to demonstrate how earned income can be created and used to support operational and capital costs.
- Donations policies are outdated and need to be revised.
- Administrative costs and policies need to be addressed to ensure accurate accountability.
- The naming rights policy is not effective and needs a new update.

GOAL:

Establish equitable and fair polices for the management of partnerships, pricing, land use and development, earned income, administrative costs and EDI to operate in the most efficient and effective manner.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Establish and or update existing partnership polices for public/public partnerships, public/not-for-profit partnerships and public/private partnerships.
- Implement written partnership agreements that bind each partner in an accountable manner. Review and update these agreements on a yearly basis.
- All partnership obligations will determine the true cost of each partner's investment in the partnership. This will assure there is non-equitable spending by one partner over another partner that may lead to entitlement.
- Pricing policies will be established based on a classification of what is core essential, important and value-added services as well as the level of public and private good that exists. These policies will also outline the cost benefit of the service provided.
- Not-for-profit partnerships will be established to support the end goal of the Department financially and ensure all costs / revenues are fair and responsible for the outcomes desired by each partner.
- Staffing policies and costs will be driven by what is most efficient for the City.
- Organizational policies will be determined by best practices in the industry regarding personnel, work culture, training, and safety of staff.
- Asset management policies will be based on efficiency and effectiveness of the resources to ensure wise use of taxpayer dollars.
- Develop an acquisition/ sale/ lease for parkland policy to describe how decisions are made. The focus should be on a no-net loss of parkland throughout the City.
- Provide an updated donations policy to ensure consistency across the park system.
- Policies written will follow as closely as possible to CAPRA Standards.
- A new naming policy will be updated based on best practices in the industry as it applies to parks and recreation facilities, programs and amenities.

INITIATIVE 11 | EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Key Performance Metrics will be created maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department by assessing the level of outcomes desired and those achieved.



KEY EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS ISSUES:

- Currently the City does not have key performance metrics to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness of their work.
- The Staff is not trained to develop and track performance metrics.
- There is nominal data to track the efficiency of park and facility management and maintenance, program tracking facility use and staff efficiency tracking.
- Customer feedback tracking is minimal and needs to be modified.
- Resource spending across the City for areas like capital improvements and facility developments is a metric that needs to be revised.
- No one person is responsible for tracking data for the agency.
- Replacing low use facilities hasn't been done in the past. This has created an unnecessary expense to the park system.
- The department operates from an effort-based culture instead of an outcome-based culture. The Director would like this to change in order to move the agency forward.
- A cost benefit analysis has not been included in the review process for projects and services. This limits positive change to occur in the department.

GOAL:

The Department will become an outcome based driven organization that tracks efficiency and effectiveness in all of the services they provide.

EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Department should determine five performance metrics for each division in 2021-2022 and add two additional metrics over the next five years. These metrics will demonstrate overall efficiency and effectiveness and the impact of their work.
- The Staff will be trained to write and track key performance metrics for each division and report their results quarterly to the director.
- One person will be responsible for working with the division managers to track their performance metrics and assist them in writing and reporting the results properly.
- Based on establish metrics, low performing areas of the system will be opted out for change or eliminated to achieve maximum efficiency.
- A cost benefit analysis will be developed to track programs, facilities, marketing and maintenance expenditures. This method will be changed as needed.
- Business plans will be created for revenue producing facilities. These plans may be for the golf course, BIG, aquatic centers and other revenue producing facilities.
- Marketing and communication materials should be tracked for cost benefit analysis. Changes will need to be made to direct the staff how to invest in the most cost-effective tools. These materials should appeal to the largest segment of audiences and encourage them to use the parks and recreation facilities as well as the services available to them. Parks should continue to try and connect with under-served populations and adjust strategies as necessary. Translations and more focused efforts may be needed to connect.

INITIATIVE 12 | CULTURAL RESOURCES

For thousands of years, people have been called to the Minnesota valley in modern-day Bloomington for its bounty of arable land, navigable waters, natural resources, unique beauty, and spiritual significance. Bloomington is rich with cultural resources that span generations and are intertwined with the Minnesota River Valley and surrounding areas of the Twin Cities.



Seth Eastman's 1847 watercolor painting depicts the view across the Minnesota River Valley, with the modern day location of Bloomington.

SETTLEMENT HISTORY OF THE AREA

People have lived in the Minnesota River valley area for over 12,000 years, as documented by archaeologists and cultural accounts. Many groups native to this region have called this place home over those thousands of years. Archaeological traces of their civilizations and cultures remain. From cultural relics of day-to-day life such as clay pottery, beads and jewelry, tools, and other items, to the physical manifestation of ceremony in the shape of burial mounds overlooking the Minnesota River (Dakota: Mnísota Wakpá) indicate modern day Bloomington, the City is host to an epoch of culture



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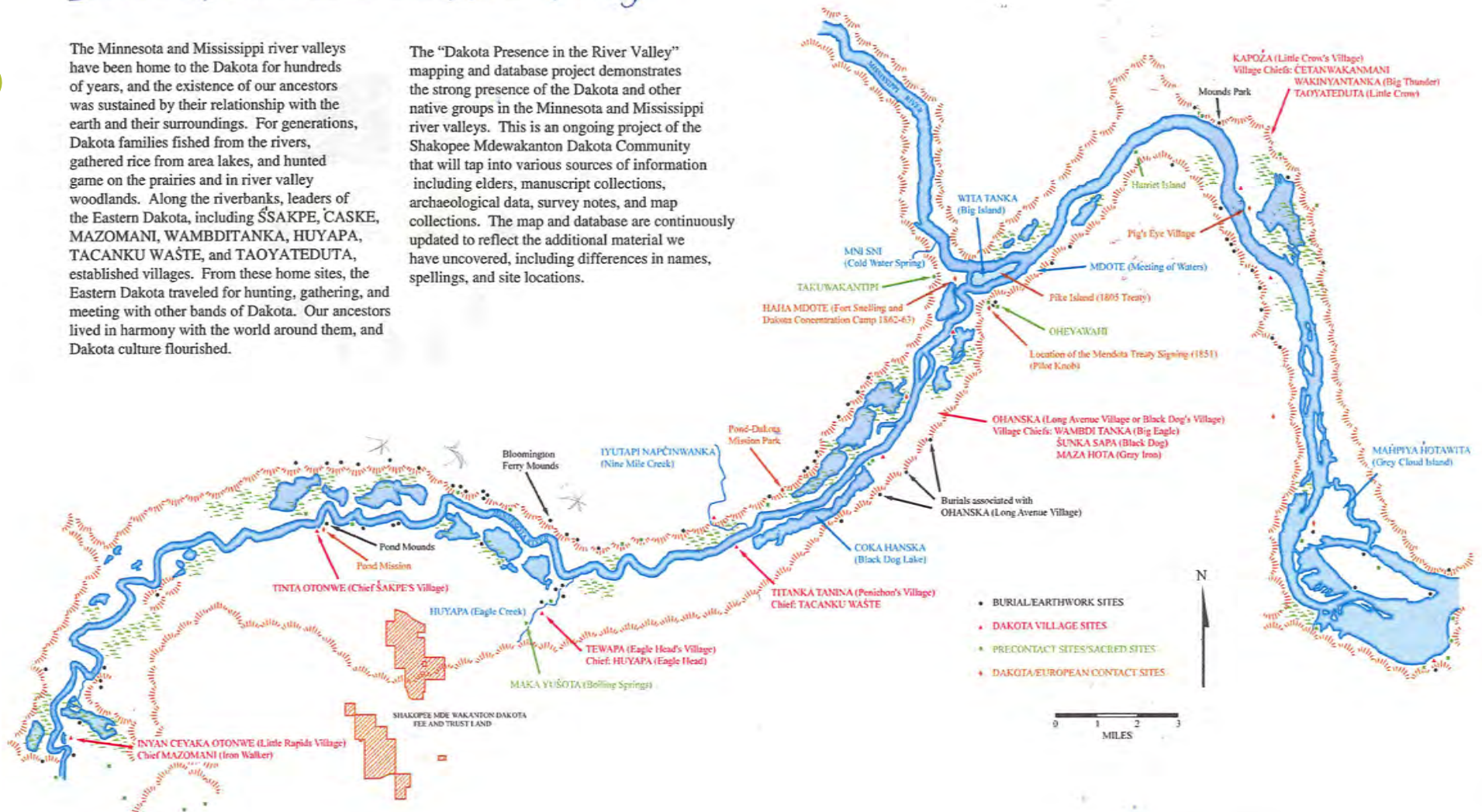
and identity that is still to be further understood. With the knowledge that we have from archaeological studies and from members of today's Native tribes communicating their stories through generations, these cultural resources should be treated with respect and care. From the mid-1600s, the Dakota people began to migrate to this region, as the Minnesota River Valley is considered by many Dakota people to be their spiritual home. A map of cultural resources along the Minnesota River Valley, including Bloomington, can be found on the following page. The Dakota established settlements on the terraces of Mnísota Wakpá at Oak Grove along what is now called Long Meadow Lake under the leadership of Chief Cloud Man around 1840. They migrated to this area to be closer to their spiritual home, to secure territory, and have a more direct relationship with European traders. Another large village, Penasha's Village, existed at this time at the mouth of Nine Mile Creek (He Who Fears Nothing). This village was one of the largest Dakota villages at this time. Villages Good Road and Kahbodaka were also near Cloud Man's village.

The indigenous people of this region harvested crops on the land, inhabited villages in various locations, and constructed burial mounds throughout the river corridor. These burial mounds are sacred cemeteries where the remains and artifacts of generations rest.

Dakota Presence in the River Valley

The Minnesota and Mississippi river valleys have been home to the Dakota for hundreds of years, and the existence of our ancestors was sustained by their relationship with the earth and their surroundings. For generations, Dakota families fished from the rivers, gathered rice from area lakes, and hunted game on the prairies and in river valley woodlands. Along the riverbanks, leaders of the Eastern Dakota, including ŠŠAKPE, CASKE, MAZOMANI, WAMBĐITANKA, HUYAPA, TACANKU WAŠTE, and TAOYATEDUTA, established villages. From these home sites, the Eastern Dakota traveled for hunting, gathering, and meeting with other bands of Dakota. Our ancestors lived in harmony with the world around them, and Dakota culture flourished.

The “Dakota Presence in the River Valley” mapping and database project demonstrates the strong presence of the Dakota and other native groups in the Minnesota and Mississippi river valleys. This is an ongoing project of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Dakota Community that will tap into various sources of information including elders, manuscript collections, archaeological data, survey notes, and map collections. The map and database are continuously updated to reflect the additional material we have uncovered, including differences in names, spellings, and site locations.



For more information about the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux (Dakota) Community, please visit www.shakopeedakota.org or contact the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux (Dakota) Community, Cultural Resources Department, 2330 Sioux Trail NW, Prior Lake, MN 55372, E-mail: culturalresources@shakopeedakota.org.



© 2003 Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux (Dakota) Community
 Printed for Big River Journey Program, National Park Service
 For additional classroom resources, please visit the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux (Dakota) Community web site: www.shakopeedakota.org.

Figure 2-14: Dakota Presence in the River Valley cultural map courtesy of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community.

NATIVE-EUROPEAN RELATIONSHIPS

In 1843, the area begins to change as Peter and Louisa Quinn build their home near the Oak Grove village as the first European settlers of the area, drawn to the area to farm the land with the Dakota people. Shortly after the Quinn's arrival, the missionaries Samuel and Gideon Hollister Pond arrived to continue their work with and recording the language of the Dakota people. They established Oak Grove Mission, a log cabin where the Pond family held educational classes and church services.

The relationship between the Pond family and the Dakota people is significant, as the Pond family were sympathetic supporters of the Dakota people and found it important to document their language as an extension of their missionary work.

The 1851 Treaty of Mendota and Traverse des Sioux effectively displaced all Native settlements and villages west of the Mississippi River, including those in the Bloomington area. These treaties, along with other treaties and political and humanitarian crisis between the Dakota people and the white settlers, led to the 1862 U.S. - Dakota war. The result of this conflict led to the majority of Dakota people being forced to leave their spiritual home.

20TH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

At this time, European settlers begin to exponentially move into areas along the Minnesota River Valley, which was an important conduit for transportation and trade. People settling in this area establish it as an agricultural hub and key stop for commerce.

The Township of Bloomington was established in the same year the State of Minnesota was admitted to the Union, 1858. The turn of the 20th century marked a rapid increase in the population of Bloomington as expansion of the Twin Cities core grew outward. A century after Minnesota became a state, the City of Bloomington was incorporated in 1960. Post-WWII Bloomington continued to see booming growth with quick-build single family homes expanding throughout the City for the growing population welcoming the Baby Boomer generation.



Early-to-mid 20th century residential expansion in Bloomington. Land was advertised in acres to prospective new residents of the Township. Image(s) credit: Bloomington Historical Society



TODAY'S CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Cultural resources can be found as tangible relics, monuments, landscapes, and structures throughout Bloomington. The cultural resources found on the map on the following page have been identified in the City of Bloomington's 2018 MN River Valley Natural and Cultural Systems Plan. In this master plan, a handful of these resources are explored in further depth for the purposes of better understanding the connection between cultural resources and the improvement of parks and open spaces within the City.

Burial Mounds

Archaeological investigations have revealed sites in Bloomington that span several periods of Native peoples presence in the River Valley. These burial mounds date to over 12,000 years old beginning with the Woodland Period peoples, and were used as recently as the mid-19th century. Today, various sites along the river bluffs feature these historic mounds, many located near Long Meadow Lake. The presence of mounds commands reverence of the riverfront, with appropriate and compatible park programming required in this area to ensure respect and protection of the mounds. Any parks improvements or additions/expansions of the parks system in this area should be done in close coordination with archaeologists, historians, and the Mdewakanton Sioux community.



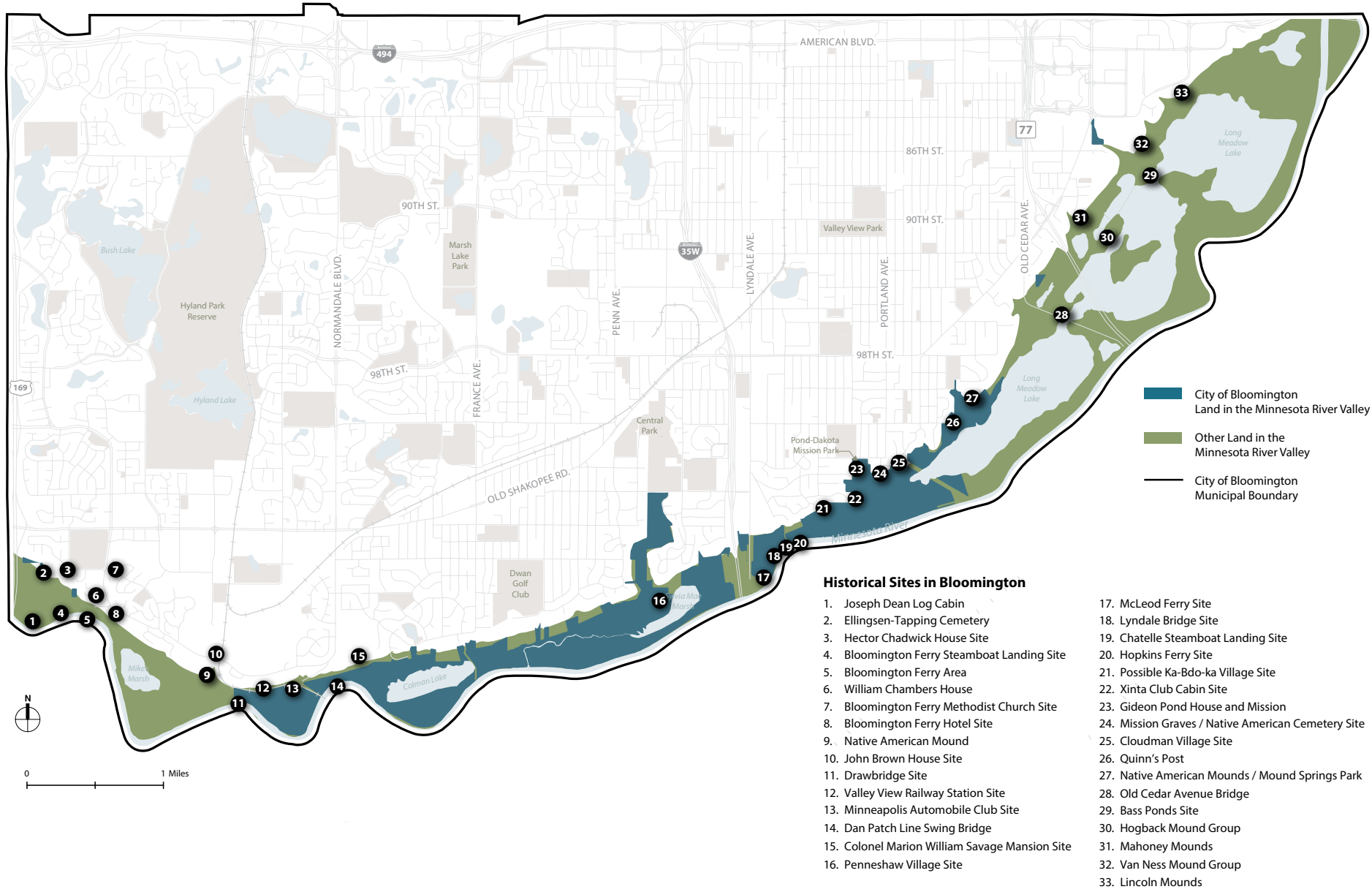


Figure 2-15: Bloomington Cultural Resource Map from the 2018 MN River Valley Natural and Cultural Systems Plan (City of Bloomington).

Pond-Dakota Mission Park

Now located in present-day Pond-Dakota Mission Park, visitors curious about Bloomington's rich history of the Dakota people and their relationship with the Ponds can visit the Oak Grove Mission house and the 1856 Gideon and Agnes Pond House to learn more about the life and times of the Pond brothers' missionary work, Dakota life, and the Minnesota River Valley. Maintained as a museum by the City of Bloomington, the Pond House was home to four generations of Pond descendants over 140 years. The City purchased the property in 1975 and completed a full restoration of the brick house in 1995. As a popular regional attraction as a historical destination and gateway to the riverfront trail system, this park helps transport visitors to the time when Native peoples and European settlers first inhabited this area together.

The Working Riverfront

Many relics are still standing or visible along the riverfront that tell the story of the working river. Trailheads and access to areas where the Bloomington Ferry Steamboat, Hopkins Ferry, McLeod and Schwyzer ferry, and others



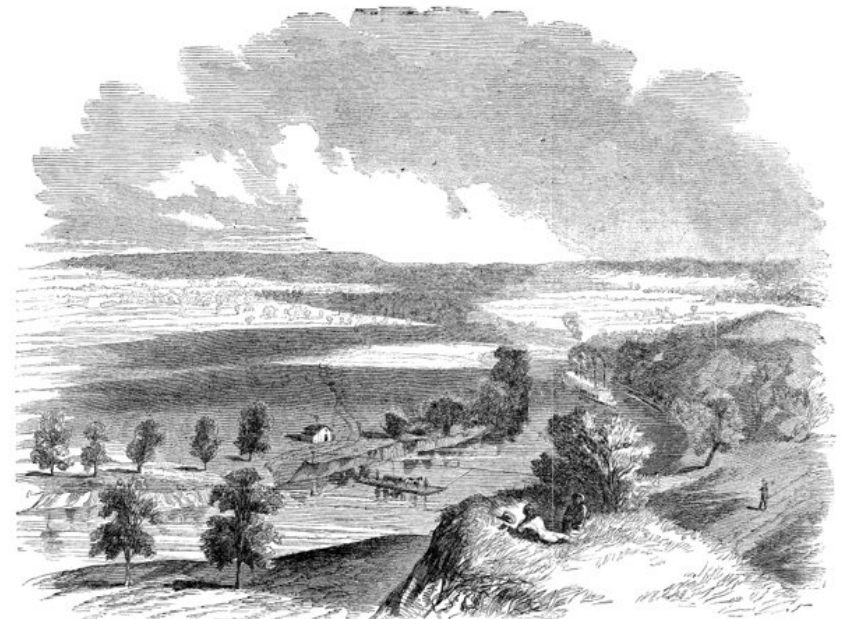
The Gideon and Agnes Pond house located in Pond-Dakota Mission Park.

operated immerses parks and trail users in the pre-highway bridge era of transport in the City and region. These ferries were instrumental in the economic development of the City, by transporting goods and people across the river.

More to Explore

More sites such as homes of significant figures from the City's past, significant and interesting commercial and municipal buildings, mills, railway stations, and other types of sites and structures still stand as educational and experiential moments in the City. Other cultural resources within the City are invisible; lost to time and exist as a place of spiritual recognition, loss, celebration, or memory. All of these cultural resources tell important stories that we would be remiss to lose or forget.

The Minnesota River Valley Natural and Cultural Systems Plan identifies several known/existing archaeological surveys that further detail cultural resources in the City, as well as a table identifying likely areas of yet unknown cultural resources.



Edwin Whitefield sketch of the MN river valley in Bloomington illustrating a ferry crossing the river.

CONNECTING BLOOMINGTON'S CULTURAL RESOURCES TO THE GREATER RIVER VALLEY REGION

Cultural amenities and resources in Bloomington serve to connect the residents of Bloomington and visitors from the greater region to our shared past; how this landscape has been shaped by people of various cultures, and how those cultures intersected to create the quilt of respected sites that the City continues to preserve to this day. These sites tell not only the local story of how the City came to be, but the role this area played in shaping the landscape and development of the river valley throughout the region.

There are other plans focused on the river corridor that the City should take into considering future planning efforts for sites that feature cultural resources or are located along the riverfront in the City.

Dakota County Minnesota River Greenway Interpretive Plan

This plan describes a vision for enhancing and engaging trail visitors in historical, natural, and cultural resources along the Dakota County side of the Minnesota River Valley by creating a series of experiences over the stretch of a 17-mile trail. A series of interpretive themes based on natural history and Native history in the river valley, this plan lays out concepts for nodes where visitors can learn, rest, view, and be immersed in the environment.

Dakota County Mississippi River Trail Interpretive Plan

Though this plan is focused on the Mississippi River side of Dakota County, the prevailing themes of interpretation, storytelling, and reverence of place and history ring similar to the cultural context of the Bloomington frontage along the Minnesota River. This plan emphasizes signage and wayfinding to make connections along the Mississippi River south of Kaposia all the way to Hastings with the use of historical storytelling signage, artistic expression, and inspiring the big picture story of history in this region over time.

Great River Passage Master & Interpretive Plan

This St. Paul River Gorge-focused master plan identifies important interpretive messages to be implemented in a variety of ways that links the stories of the St. Paul River Gorge with the experiential resources.

Shakopee Riverfront Cultural Trail Visitor Experience Plan



Park visitors on a walk through a Bloomington park. Image courtesy of City of Bloomington.

Still in draft form, this plan maps the connections, feel, education opportunities, and overall experience along the culturally significant riverfront in Shakopee. Though focused in Shakopee, this plan considers the greater connections up and down the Minnesota River to the greater cultural resources and experiences visitors can enjoy.

Dakota Memory Map

Though not a planning document, this web-based map tells stories of the cultural landscape of the river valley and greater Twin Cities area from the perspective of the Dakota people. This multi-media immersive experience is a first hand account of the impact this spiritual place has for the Dakota people today.

City of Bloomington's Minnesota River Valley Natural & Cultural Resources Systems Plan

This City of Bloomington has developed a natural and cultural systems plan that outlines analysis, management approach, opportunities for improvement of the visitor experience in regard to these systems. This plan serves as a baseline for future improvements of parks and trail systems in the City.

KEY ISSUES:

- People have inhabited the River Valley area that is now Bloomington for thousands of years. Remnants of these cultures are still present in many parts of the City, particularly along the riverfront.
- The intersection of Native culture and European settler culture is an important aspect in the history of the development of the City.
- Historical structures that tell the story of commerce, culture, transportation, and notable people in the City throughout its history are attractive features to visitors and residents, and have a regional draw.
- The City already invests in the preservation of many of these cultural resources
- Telling the story of the visible and no-longer visible cultural resources in public spaces, park spaces, and along trails will help people better understand the complex and lengthy history of the City in the context of the river valley region.
- There are multiple other efforts to interpret cultural resources along the Minnesota River and Mississippi River for the purposes of visitor experience that echo similar themes of cultural resource preservation and celebration.

GOAL:

The City of Bloomington protects and celebrates the existence of cultural resources within the City and river corridor region. Any new park or trail developments or improvements should consider cultural resources in the planning efforts, including consultation with specialists and cultural resource professionals.



Bloomington Ferry crossing the Minnesota River ca. 1854. Image courtesy City of Bloomington.

CULTURAL RESOURCES RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure the City of Bloomington Minnesota River Valley Natural & Cultural Systems Plan is up to date, referenced, and implemented by design and planning professionals making decisions within the City on trails and open space, especially including these select goals outlined in the 2018 plan:
 - » Ensure protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources,
 - » Increase awareness and understanding of the River Valley environment
- Enhance story-telling and cultural connection through interpretive methods that reinforce sense of place and foster education, reflection, observation, and reverence.
- Ensure funding is at appropriate levels to properly maintain and to the preserve cultural resources throughout the City. This includes incremental review of structures and regular maintenance of trail systems, natural areas, and signage.
- As resources become available, expand cultural resource programming and amenities, prioritizing areas of the City and riverfront that need the most maintenance attention as identified by City maintenance personnel, cultural resource specialists, or stakeholders.
- Consider tying riverfront cultural resources in the City to the greater region's efforts in interpretive planning. This includes:
 - » Consulting with stakeholder groups such as historical organizations, landholders, Native tribes, and park and trail users,
 - » Organizing with outside groups current undergoing river valley interpretive efforts.
- Consider expanding the Minnesota River Valley Natural & Cultural Systems Plan to include specific strategies to mitigate loss and damage of cultural resources due to the impacts of climate change, floods, development, and other threats.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

This Program Assessment of the services offered by the City's Parks and Recreation Department ("Department") offers an in-depth perspective of program and service offerings and helps identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities regarding programming. The assessment also assists in identifying core programs, program gaps within the community, key system-wide issues, areas of improvement, and future programs and services for residents and visitors.

The consulting team based these program findings and comments from a review of information provided by the Department including program descriptions, financial data, website content, and discussions with staff. This report addresses the program offerings from a systems perspective for the entire portfolio of programs.

The full program assessment can be found in the Appendix.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

Below are some overall observations that stood out when analyzing the program assessment sheet:

- Overall, the **program descriptions** effectively communicate the key benefits and goals of each Core Program Area.
- **Age segment distribution** is good, but needs to be annually monitored to ensure program distribution aligns with community demographics.
- **Program lifecycles:** Approximately 5% of the system's current programs are categorized in the Introduction Stage; while 8% of programs fall into the Decline Stage. A complete description of Lifecycle Stages can be found in Section 1.3.2.
- The City's **volunteer program** allows residents and organizations to easily get involved and give back to the community through various volunteer opportunities, special events, programs, etc.
- From a **marketing and promotions** standpoint, the staff utilizes a variety of marketing methods when promoting their programs including: printed and online program guides, the City's website, flyers/brochures, direct mail, email blasts, road sign marquees, SMS, online newsletters, in-facility signage, QR codes, and various



social media channels (primarily City accounts) as a part of the marketing mix.

- The Department would benefit from identifying marketing Return on Investment (ROI) for all marketing initiatives
- Opportunity to increase the number of cross-promotions

Currently, **customer feedback methods** are rather limited. Moving forward, it is highly recommended that the Department begins incorporating user feedback, on a more consistent basis, as a key performance measure that can be tracked over time. Specifically, pre/post-program evaluations and lost customer surveys are highly recommended feedback tools that should be considered moving forward.

- **Pricing strategies** are varied across the board. Currently, the most frequently used approaches include: residency rates, market competition rates, and customer's ability to pay. These are good practices and must be continued. In addition, it is essential to understand current cost of service in order to determine ideal cost recovery goals.
- **Financial performance measures** such as cost recovery goals are not currently being utilized. Moving forward, it is recommended for staff to begin tracking cost recovery for all Core Program Areas. When doing so, the staff should factor in all direct and indirect costs pertaining to programming. A focus on developing consistent earned income opportunities would be beneficial to the Department's overall quest for greater fiscal sustainability.

CORE PROGRAM AREAS

To help achieve the mission, it is important to identify Core Program Areas based on current and future needs to create a sense of focus around specific program areas of greatest importance to the community. Public recreation is challenged by the premise of being all things to all people. The philosophy of the Core Program Area is to assist staff, policy makers, and the public to focus on what is most important. Program areas are considered as Core if they meet a majority of the following categories:

- The program area has been provided for a long period of time (over 4-5 years) and/or is expected by the community.
- The program area consumes a relatively large portion (5% or more) of the agency's overall budget.
- The program area is offered 3-4 seasons per year.
- The program area has wide demographic appeal.
- There is a tiered level of skill development available within the program area's offerings.
- There is full-time staff responsible for the program area.
- There are facilities designed specifically to support the program area.
- The agency controls a significant percentage (20% or more) of the local market.

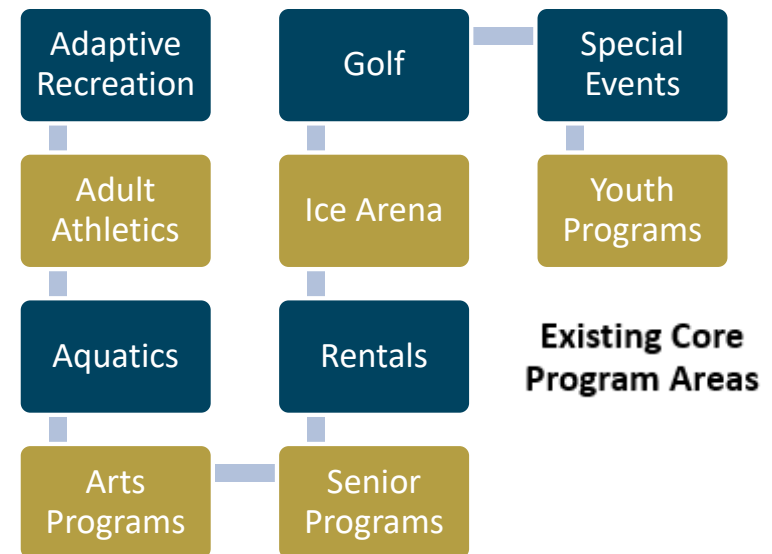
EXISTING CORE PROGRAM AREAS

In consultation with Department staff, the planning team identified ten Core Program Areas currently being offered.

1. Adaptive Recreation
2. Adult Athletics
3. Aquatics
4. Arts Programs
5. Golf
6. Ice Arena
7. Rentals
8. Senior Programs
9. Special Events
10. Youth Programs

CORE PROGRAM AREA RECOMMENDATIONS

These existing core program areas provide a generally well-rounded and diverse array of programs that could serve the community at present. Based upon the observations of the planning team, demographic and recreation trends information, Department staff should evaluate Core Program Areas and individual programs, ideally on an annual basis, to ensure offerings are relevant to evolving demographics and trends in the local community. After reviewing the Statistically-Valid Community Survey, potential program areas that could become their own standalone Core Program Areas are Fitness/Health & Wellness and Nature/Environmental Education. Both of these program areas received a very high Priority Investment Rating (PIR) base on resident responses as well as a strong household need. See full program assessment for survey results.



See the Full Program Assessment in the Appendix for a full description, goals, and list of programs for each existing Core Program Area.

PROGRAM STRATEGY ANALYSIS

The consultant team analyzed Bloomington’s existing Programs by assessing age segment analysis, program lifecycle, program classification, cost of service & cost recover, and pricing.

02

Age Segment Analysis						
Core Program Area	Preschool (5 & Under)	Elementary (6-12)	Teens (13-17)	Adult (18+)	Senior (55+)	All Ages Programs
Adaptive Recreation		S	P	P	P	
Adult Athletics				P	S	
Aquatics	P	P	P	P	P	P
Arts Programs		P	P	P	P	P
Golf	S	S	P	P	P	P
Ice Arena	S	P	P	S	S	S
Rentals	S	P	P	P	P	P
Senior Programs					P	
Special Events	P	P	P	P	P	P
Youth Programs	P	P	P			

Figure 2-16: Age Segment Analysis Table

The Age Segment Analysis depicts each Core Program Area and the most prominent age segments they serve. Recognizing that many Core Program Areas serve multiple age segments, Primary (noted with a ‘P’) and Secondary (noted with an ‘S’) markets are identified.

Lifecycle	Description	Actual Programs Distribution		Recommended Distribution
Introduction	New Programs: modest participation	5%	41%	50%-60% Total
Take-Off	Rapid participation growth	7%		
Growth	Moderate, but consistent participation growth	29%		
Mature	Slow participation growth	20%	20%	40%
Saturation	Minimal to no participation growth: extreme competition	32%	40%	0-10% Total
Decline	Declining participation	8%		

Figure 2-17: Program Lifecycle Distribution Table

The Lifecycle Analysis depicts a skewed program distribution. Approximately 41% of all programs fall within the beginning stages (Introduction, Take-Off, & Growth). It is recommended to have 50-60% of all programs within these beginning stages because it provides the Department an avenue to energize its programmatic offerings.

Bloomington Program Classification Distribution		
Essential	Important	Value-Added
3%	38%	59%

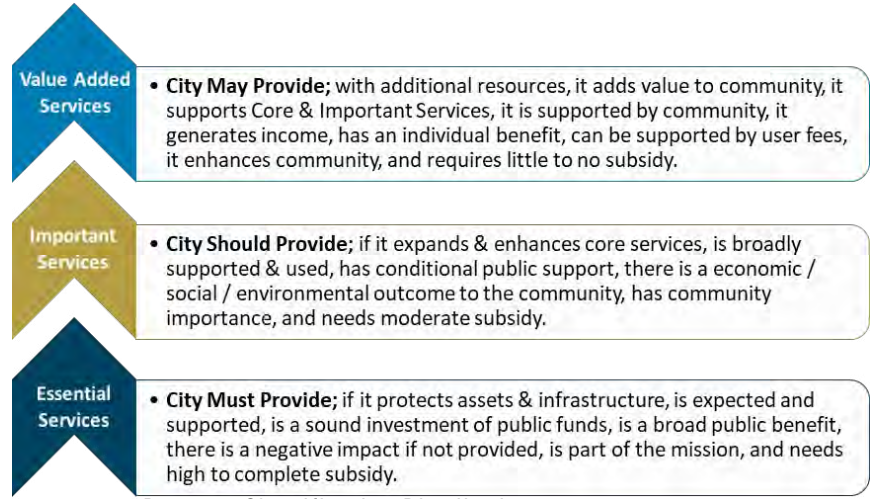


Figure 2-18: Program Classification Distribution

With assistance from City staff, a classification of programs and services was conducted for all of the recreation programs offered by the Department. The results presented in this table represent the current classification of recreation program services. A full program list organized by core area can be found in the full Program Assessment in the Appendix.

Core Program Area	Pricing Strategies									
	Age Segment	Family/ Household Status	Residency	Weekday/ Weekend	Prime / Non-Prime Time	Group Discounts	By Location	By Competition (Market Rate)	By Cost Recovery Goals	By Customer's Ability to Pay
Adaptive Recreation										X
Adult Athletics			X					X	X	
Aquatics	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
Arts Programs						X	X	X	X	X
Golf			X					X	X	
Ice Arena					X			X	X	
Rentals				X			X	X		X
Senior Programs			X					X		X
Special Events			X			X	X		X	X
Youth Programs	X		X					X		X

Figure 2-19: Pricing Strategies

This table details pricing methods currently in place by each Core Program Area and additional areas for strategies to implement over time.

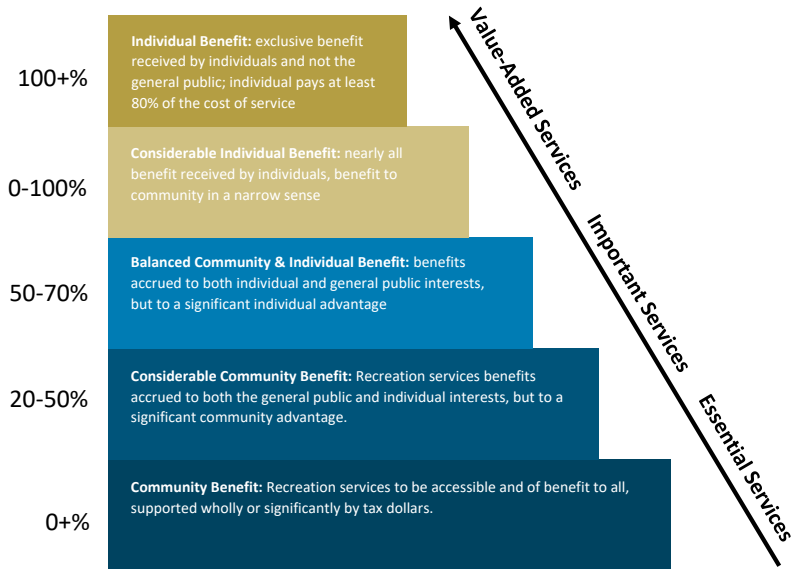


Figure 2-20: Cost Recovery Model for Sustainable Services

As the Department continues to evolve to better meet the community’s needs, there could be an added benefit to managing the services if they all were classified according to the Cost Recovery Model for Sustainable Services.

Cost Recovery Goal by Core Program Area			
Core Program Area	Best Practice in Cost Recovery	Core Program Area	Best Practice in Cost Recovery
Adaptive Recreation	0%-25%	Ice Arena	25%-75%
Adult Athletics	25%-75%	Rentals	100%+
Aquatics	50%-100%	Senior Programs	25%-50%
Arts Programs	25%-75%	Special Events	0%-25%
Golf	75%-100%+	Youth Programs	25%-75%

Figure 2-21: Cost Recovery Goal By Core Program Area

Cost recovery targets can vary based on the Core Program Area, and even at the program level within a Core Program Area. Several variables can influence the cost recovery target, including lifecycle stage, demographic served, and perhaps most important, program classification. These are best practices for Core Program Areas. Programs within each Core Program Area will vary in price and subsidy level. The program mix within each Core Program Area will determine the cost recovery capabilities.

PROGRAM STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

In general, the Department program staff should continue the cycle of evaluating programs on both individual merit as well as the program mix as a whole. This can be completed at one time on an annual basis, or in batches at key seasonal points of the year, as long as each program is checked once per year. The following tools and strategies can help facilitate this evaluation process:

MINI BUSINESS PLANS

The planning team recommends that Mini Business Plans (2-3 pages) for each Core Program Area be updated on a yearly basis. These plans should evaluate the Core Program Area based on meeting the outcomes desired for participants, cost recovery, percentage of the market and business controls, cost of service, pricing strategy for the next year, and marketing strategies that are to be implemented. If developed regularly and consistently, they can be effective tools for budget construction and justification processes in addition to marketing and communication tools.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT & DECISION-MAKING MATRIX

When developing program plans and strategies, it is useful to consider all of the Core Program Areas and individual program analysis discussed in this Program Assessment. Lifecycle, Age Segment, Classification, and Cost Recovery Goals should all be tracked, and this information along with the latest demographic trends and community input should be factors that lead to program decision-making. Community input can help staff focus in on specific program areas to develop new opportunities in what group of citizens to target including the best marketing methods to use.

A simple, easy-to-use tool similar to Figure 2-16 will help compare programs and prioritize resources using multiple data points, rather than relying solely on cost recovery. In addition, this analysis will help staff make an informed, objective case to the public when a program in decline, but beloved by a few, is retired. If the program/service is determined to have strong priority, appropriate cost recovery, good age segment appeal, good partnership potential, and strong market conditions the next step is to determine the marketing methods.

PROGRAM EVALUATION CYCLE (WITH LIFECYCLE STAGES)

Using the Age Segment and Lifecycle analysis, and other established criteria, program staff should evaluate programs on an annual basis to determine program mix. This can be incorporated into the Program Operating/Business Plan process. A diagram of the program evaluation cycle and program lifecycle is found in Figure 2-22. During the Introductory Stages, program staff should establish program goals, design program scenarios and components, and develop the program operating/business plan. Regular program evaluations will help determine the future of a program.

If participation levels are still growing, continue to provide the program. When participation growth is slowing (or non-existent) or competition increases, staff should look at modifying the program to re-energize the customers to participate. When program participation is consistently declining, staff should terminate the program and replace it with a new program based on the public's priority ranking and/or in activity areas that are trending nationally/regionally/locally, while taking into consideration the anticipated local participation percentage.

Mini Business Plan Examples

Marketing & Promotion Methods			
Program Idea (Name or Concept): _____			
Marketing Methods	Content Developed	Contact Information	Start Date
Activity Guide			
Website			
Newspaper Article			
Radio			
Social Media			
Flyers - Public Places			
Newspaper Ad			
Email Notification			
Event Website			
School Flyer/Newsletter			
Television			
Digital Sign			
Friends & Neighbors Groups			
Staff Promotion @ Events			

Internal Factors			
Priority Ranking:	High	Medium	Low
Program Area:	Core	Non-core	
Classification	Essential	Important	Discretionary
Cost Recovery Range	0-40%	60-80%	80+%
Age Segment	Primary	Secondary	

Sponsorship/Partnership				
Potential Partnerships	Monetary	Volunteers	Partner Skill	Location/Space
Potential Sponsors	Monetary	Volunteers	Sponsor Skill	Location/Space

Market Competition			
Number of Competitors	_____		
Competitiveness	High	Medium	Low
Growth Potential	High	Low	

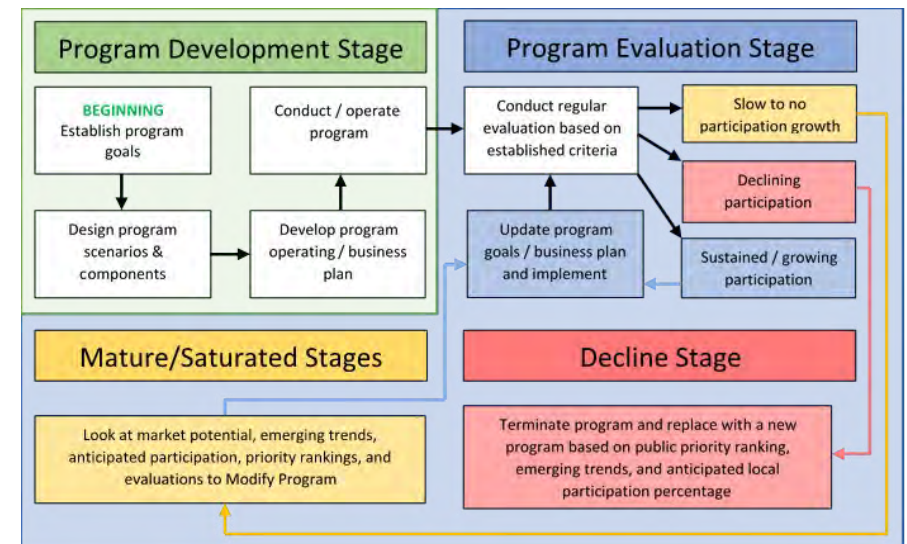


Figure 2-22: Evaluation Cycle with Program Lifecycle Logic Matrix

PROGRAM STRATEGY ANALYSIS

The consultant team analyzed Bloomington's existing Programs by assessing age segment analysis, program lifecycle, program classification, cost of service & cost recover, and pricing.

PROGRAM STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

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MARKETING, VOLUNTEERS, AND PARTNERSHIPS

The Department follows a marketing plan which currently communicates with residents through printed and online program guides, the City's website, flyers/brochures, direct mail, email blasts, road sign marquees, SMS, online newsletters, in-facility signage, QR codes, and various social media channels (primarily City accounts).

Effective communication strategies require striking an appropriate balance between the content with the volume of messaging while utilizing the "right" methods of delivery. The Department uses a variety of delivery methods for promoting programs. It is imperative to continue updating the Department's Marketing Plan annually to provide information for community needs, demographics, and recreation trends.

An effective marketing plan must build upon and integrate with supporting plans and directly align with organization priorities. The plan should also provide specific guidance as to how the Department's identity and brand is to be consistently portrayed across the multiple methods and deliverables used for communication.

BEST PRACTICES IN VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

In developing a volunteer policy, some best practices that the Department should be aware of include:

- Involve volunteers in cross-training to expose them to various organizational functions and increase their skill. This can also increase their utility, allowing for more flexibility in making work assignments, and can increase their appreciation and understanding of the Department.
- Ensure the Volunteer Coordinator (a designated program staff member with volunteer management responsibility) and associated staff stay fully informed about the strategic direction of the agency overall, including strategic initiatives for all divisions. Periodically identify, evaluate, or revise specific tactics the volunteer services program should undertake to support the larger organizational mission.
- A key part of maintaining the desirability of volunteerism in the agency is developing a good reward and recognition system. The consultant team recommends using tactics similar to those found in frequent flier programs, wherein volunteers can use their volunteer

hours to obtain benefits, such as early registration at programs, or discounted pricing at certain programs, rentals or events, or any other City function. Identify and summarize volunteer recognition policies in a Volunteer Policy document.

- Regularly update volunteer position descriptions. Include an overview of the volunteer position lifecycle in the Volunteer Manual, including the procedure for creating a new position.
- Add end-of-lifecycle process steps to the Volunteer Manual to ensure that there is formal documentation of resignation or termination of volunteers. Also include ways to monitor and track reasons for resignation/termination and perform exit interviews with outgoing volunteers when able.

In addition to number of volunteers and volunteer hours, categorization and tracking volunteerism by type and extent of work, is important:

- Regular volunteers: Those volunteers whose work is considered to be continuous, provided their work performance is satisfactory and there is a continuing need for their services.
- Special event volunteers: Volunteers who help out with a particular event with no expectation that they will return after the event is complete.
- Episodic volunteers: Volunteers who help out with a particular project type on a recurring or irregular basis with no expectation that they will return for other duties.
- Volunteer interns: Volunteers who have committed to work for the agency to fulfill a specific higher-level educational learning requirement.
- Community service volunteers: Volunteers who are volunteering over a specified period of time to fulfill a community service requirement.

The Department should continue to encourage employees to volunteer in the community. Exposure of staff to the community in different roles (including those not related to parks and recreation) will raise awareness of the agency and its volunteer program. It also helps staff understand the role and expectations of a volunteer if they can experience it for themselves.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATION RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure the marketing plan includes the components and strategies identified in this section.
- Establish priority segments to target in terms of new program/service development and communication tactics.
- Establish and review regularly performance measures for marketing; performance measures can be tracked through increased use of customer surveys as well as some web-based metrics.
- Leverage relationships with partners to enhance marketing efforts through cross-promotion that include defined measurable outcomes.

PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommended policies and practices for public/private partnerships that may include businesses, private groups, private associations, or individuals who desire to make a profit from use of the Department's facilities or programs are detailed below. These can also apply to partnerships where a private party wishes to develop a facility on park property, to provide a service on publicly-owned property, or who has a contract with the agency to provide a task or service on the agency's behalf at public facilities. These unique partnership principles are as follows:

- Upon entering into an agreement with a private business, group, association or individual, the Department staff and political leadership must recognize that they must allow the private entity to meet their financial objectives within reasonable parameters that protect the mission, goals and integrity of the Department.
- As an outcome of the partnership, the Department must receive a designated fee that may include a percentage of gross revenue dollars less sales tax on a regular basis, as outlined in the contract agreement.
- The working agreement of the partnership must establish a set of measurable outcomes to be achieved, as well as the tracking method of how those outcomes will be monitored by the agency. The outcomes will include standards of quality, financial reports, customer satisfaction, payments to the agency, and overall coordination with the Department for the services rendered.
- Depending on the level of investment made by the private contractor, the partnership agreement can be limited to months, a year or multiple years.
- If applicable, the private contractor will provide a working management plan annually that they will follow to ensure the

outcomes desired by the Department. The management plan can and will be negotiated, if necessary. Monitoring of the management plan will be the responsibility of both partners. The agency must allow the contractor to operate freely in their best interest, as long as the outcomes are achieved and the terms of the partnership agreement are adhered to.

- The private contractor cannot lobby agency advisory or governing boards for renewal of a contract. Any such action will be cause for termination. All negotiations must be with the Department Director or their designee.
- The agency has the right to advertise for private contracted partnership services or negotiate on an individual basis with a bid process based on the professional level of the service to be provided.
- If conflicts arise between both partners, the highest-ranking officers from both sides will try to resolve the issue before going to each partner's legal counsels. If none can be achieved, the partnership shall be dissolved.

VOLUNTEER AND PARTNERSHIP RECOMMENDATIONS

The planning team recommends the following regarding volunteers and partnerships:

ESTABLISH FORMAL VOLUNTEER AND PARTNERSHIP POLICIES AND AGREEMENTS

Following the best practices listed above, continue developing volunteer and partner policies and agreements which are tailored to the different types of volunteers and partnerships the Department encounters. A volunteer program should be created that defines opportunities, responsibilities, decision-making processes, and defines job descriptions. Additionally, begin compiling a list/database of all partner organizations. This will help with managing partnerships and overall assist in having good relationships with partners. Lastly, ensure background checks for all volunteers working with all programs are being conducted thoroughly.

COVID IMPACTS

The global pandemic has underscored that close-to-home parks and trails are crucial to a community's quality of life and well-being. During this crisis, when stay-at-home orders and closures of workplaces, schools, and businesses confined many to their homes, people turned to parks and trails like never before—for fresh air, exercise, entertainment, meditation, a sense of peace. Research shows that parkland is, indeed, a potent force for our well-being; numerous scientific studies show the benefits of access to nature on mental, physical and emotional health.

But when a crises like a pandemic or a sharp drop in the economy occurs, our parks and public lands face extraordinary pressures. With a drop in all forms of tax revenue caused by these events, often park systems are the first to suffer budget cuts and re-allocation. Our cities have to protect our park systems from these budget cuts, and there is firm evidence to support them in defending continued support of maintaining and investing in our parks.

Parks and open spaces are essential infrastructure, every bit as critical as roads and utilities. As we emerge from a crisis like the pandemic, or face future crises, we must nurture our community's newfound appreciation for the outdoors through continued and new investments that provide this vital benefit for everyone.

Through public engagement and using data analysis to target what types of investment in parks, trails, and open spaces will bring the greatest return to the community, and by leveraging other park and recreation opportunities like schoolyards, regional parks, and privately owned facilities to double as public space when schools are closed or demand and use is high, we can ensure that everyone has access to the healthful benefits of nature close-to-home.

MINNESOTA MOBILITY TRENDS COMPARED TO BASELINE* - MAY 2020

Transit Stations	-39%	
Retail & Recreation	-35%	
Workplaces	-29%	
Grocery & Pharmacy		+2%
Residential		+9%
Parks		+112%

MINNESOTA MOBILITY TRENDS COMPARED TO BASELINE* - MAY 2021

Transit Stations	-28%	
Retail & Recreation	-6%	
Workplaces	-29%	
Grocery & Pharmacy		+2%
Residential		+8%
Parks		+95%

HENNEPIN COUNTY MOBILITY TRENDS COMPARED TO BASELINE* - MAY 2021

Transit Stations	-38%	
Retail & Recreation	-17%	
Workplaces	-42%	
Grocery & Pharmacy	-14%	
Residential		+12%
Parks		+93%

Source: COVID-19 Community Mobility Reports. *The baseline is the median value, for the corresponding day of the week, during the 5-week period Jan 3–Feb 6, 2020.

Figure 2-23: COVID-19 Community Mobility Trends Reports

WHAT WE LEARNED

As pandemics have the potential to again strain our communities in years to come, access to the outdoors is more important than ever. The challenges and changes that a pandemic poses to Bloomington's parks and open spaces include:

PARKS AND GENERAL HEALTH

Parks are widely recognized as critical for health and wellness, reducing anxiety, stress, and depression and improving physical and mental health; well-being improvements that are even more necessary during a public health emergency.

PARKS AND USAGE

During periods of quarantine, parks and public land experience very high usage. Parks are proving to be an essential part of how we cope and recover from a crisis by helping relieve the burden of social distancing and providing residents a place to restore and socialize.

PARKS AND POLICY

As we re-imagine park policy, equitable access and distribution is becoming a driving factor in decision-making. Like most everything, public parks are plagued by issues of inequity, both in access to park space and amenities provided with parks across diverse communities.

PARKS AND INVESTMENT

Park systems are essential infrastructure within the City. Decisions made moving forward will determine how the outdoors can become more accessible and equitable and further benefit the health of communities. It is essential to not only maintain the existing park system but to invest in and continually improve and provide new amenities to a growing and changing population of park users.

PARKS AND THE FUTURE

The pandemic highlights that within our community, access to the outdoors is not equal for all. With the data to pinpoint where park and park improvement are most needed, it is essential to transform the outlook for equity across the system.



ENGAGEMENT ADAPTATION

The pandemic introduced new challenges and opportunities as stay-at-home mandates were put in place, social distancing protocols were adopted, and public facilities were forced to temporarily close. The core components of traditionally successful community engagement practices had the rug pulled out from beneath them. For some time, people couldn't gather and feel the energy and presence of their neighbors as new plans were discussed and thoughts were freely shared.

But humans are resilient and quickly adapt. Successful community engagement methods were explored and proved as fruitful as traditional methods, including:

- Virtual recorded meetings, where city staff present projects to the public, answer questions, allow for discourse, and post the session for those who couldn't attend to view at their leisure and follow up with city staff afterward via email or using online tools,
- Online tools that allow residents to engage with maps and surveys that allow for subjective place-specific comments to be posted, often prompting dialogue amongst residents. Bloomington created a website for engagement with residents, Let's Talk Bloomington, which successfully gathers input and provides a place for virtual conversation among residents on new or planned projects,
- Mobile engagement can bring the tools for conversation to the community. Pop up events in parks and open spaces can create a safe environment to allow for social distancing in an open-air setting while providing in-person engagement.

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