



10 Minute Walk Campaign Partnership Fund St. Paul District Councils Cohort

**THE
TRUST
FOR
PUBLIC
LAND**

St. Paul's Parks and Green Space

Recognized as one of the best park systems in America, St. Paul's park system consists of 179 parks and open spaces, the Como Park Zoo and Conservatory, 25 city-owned recreation centers, more than 100 miles of trails, an indoor and two outdoor aquatic facilities, a public beach, a variety of sports facilities, municipal golf courses, and Great River Passage.

And while the city's park system is highly regarded and well-loved, we know room for improvement remains, especially when it comes to serving communities of color and low-income communities, improving park use, and addressing issues of park quality..

For the last 10 years, the Twin Cities have ranked in the top three on the ParkScore index, the annual ranking of park systems in the 100 most-populated U.S. cities. In 2021, St. Paul was ranked as America's second best park system.

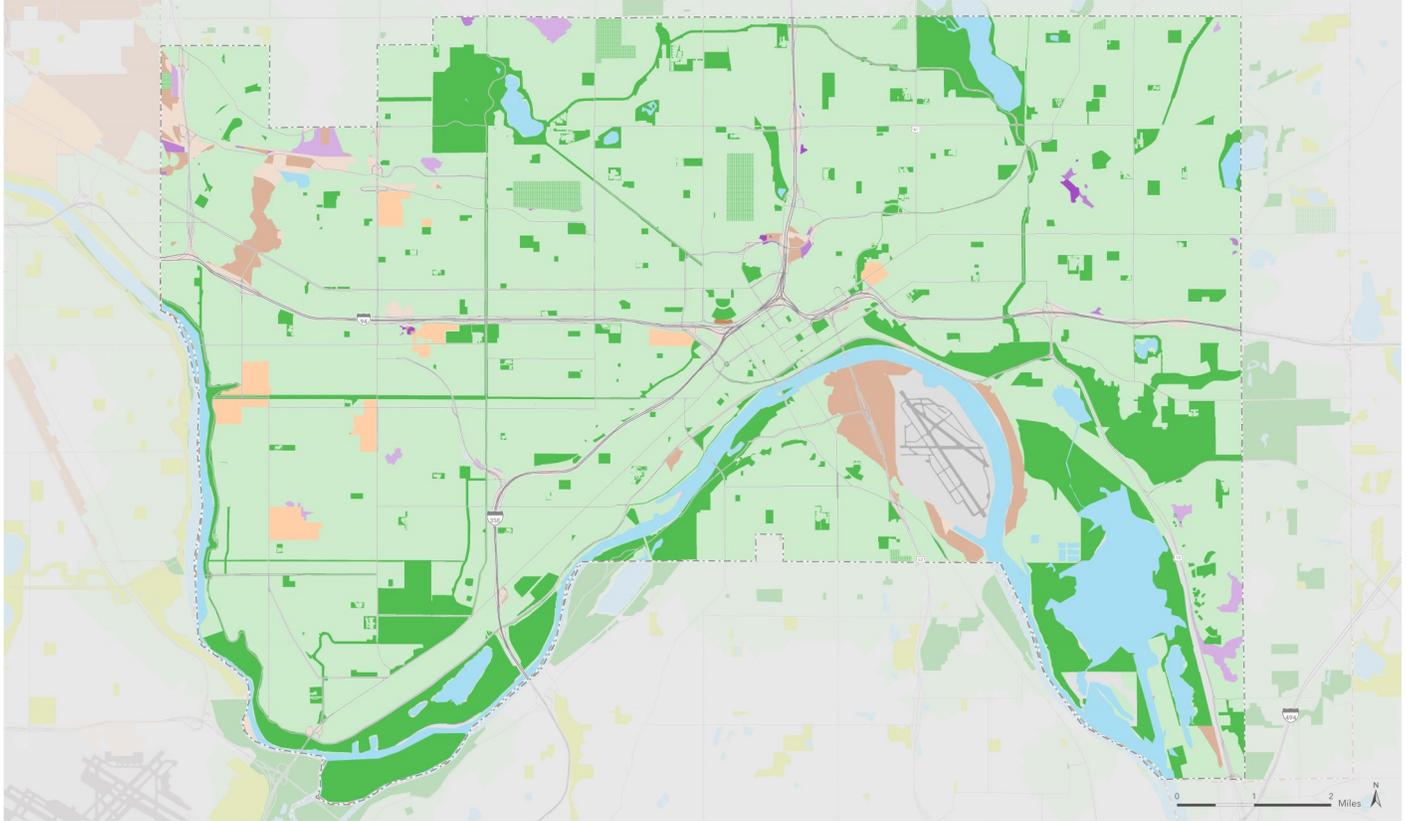
This year, Trust for Public Land (TPL) researchers took a deeper dive into analyzing who does and doesn't have access to parks and uncovered some troubling findings. Across the 100 cities ranked in the ParkScore index, neighborhoods where the majority of residents identify as Black, Hispanic and Latinx, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Asian American and Pacific Islander, have 44% less park acreage than predominantly white neighborhoods,. Similar inequities exist between low-income and high-income communities.

That pattern is reflected here in the Twin Cities as well. In St. Paul, residents of low-income neighborhoods have access to 35% less park space than residents in high-income neighborhoods, and neighborhoods of color have access to 30% less park space per capita than residents in predominantly white neighborhoods.

Clearly, it's not right or fair that residents of our cities don't have equitable access to close-to-home parks and the benefits the outdoors provide. The good news is our park departments have long recognized these disparities and are dedicated to addressing them, alongside organizations like ours. In St. Paul, park officials have focused investments in areas that have been historically underserved or are experiencing rapid population growth, with the creation of Frogtown Park and Farm, Trout Brook Nature Sanctuary, and Midway Peace Park.

Twin Cities park advocates are working together to fix this problem, but we need all the help we can get. We need to engage advocates in the areas of housing, education, and wealth creation to truly build an equitable coalition of allies. With the data from ParkScore to pinpoint where park investments are most needed and information from the district councils' work engaging underrepresented communities, as outlined in this report, we are poised with a wealth of information to guide decisionmaking, programs, and investments.

Our parks provide space for rest and relaxation, community building and conversation, health and healing. Our parks provided us critical outdoor space during the Covid-19 pandemic and cooling spaces during ever-increasing heat events. Parks are critical to our region's success, and provide an opportunity to make us even stronger. Now is the time to double down on public support for our park systems.



2021 ParkScore® index: Access

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

The Access category of the ParkScore® index awards points based on the percentage of the population within a 10-minute walk of a public park. This analysis is provided via the ParkServe® mapping application, which identifies the population living within a 10-minute walk of a park by creating dynamic 1/2-mile service areas (10-minute walking distance) for all public parks. In this analysis, service areas use the street network to determine walkable distance (streets such as highways, freeways, and interstates are considered barriers).

In St. Paul, 99% of the population lives within a 10-minute walk of a park. Among the remaining 3,347 people without access to a nearby park, The Trust for Public Land suggests where to prioritize the development of new parks to reduce this gap. This prioritization is based on a comprehensive index of six equally-weighted demographic

and environmental metrics:

- Population density*
- Density of low income households (households with income less than 75% of the urban area median income; less than \$50,000 in St. Paul)*
- Density of people of color*
- Community health (a combined index based on the rate of poor mental health and low physical activity from the 2020 CDC PLACES census tract dataset)
- Urban heat islands (surface temperature at least 1.25 degrees greater than city mean surface temperature from The Trust for Public Land, based on Landsat 8 satellite imagery)
- Pollution burden (air toxics respiratory hazard index from 2020 EPA EJScreen)

*Based on 2020 Forecast block groups provided by ESRI

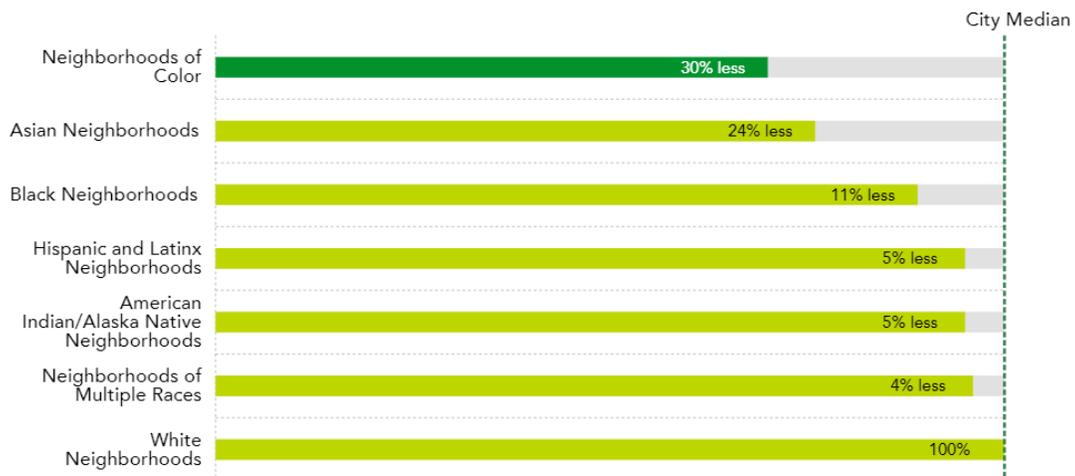
- Very high priority
- High priority
- Moderate priority
- Park with public access (light green)
- Other park or open space (yellow-green)
- 10-minute walk (half-mile) service area of park with public access (light green)
- Cemetery
- University
- Military
- Industrial
- Vacant zero population area
- City boundary
- County boundary

Special thanks to the following data providers: St. Paul, Esri, OSM, CDC, EPA. Information on this map is provided for purposes of discussion and visualization only. Map created by The Trust for Public Land on May 5, 2021. The Trust for Public Land and The Trust for Public Land logo are federally registered marks of The Trust for Public Land. Copyright © 2021 The Trust for Public Land. www.tpl.org



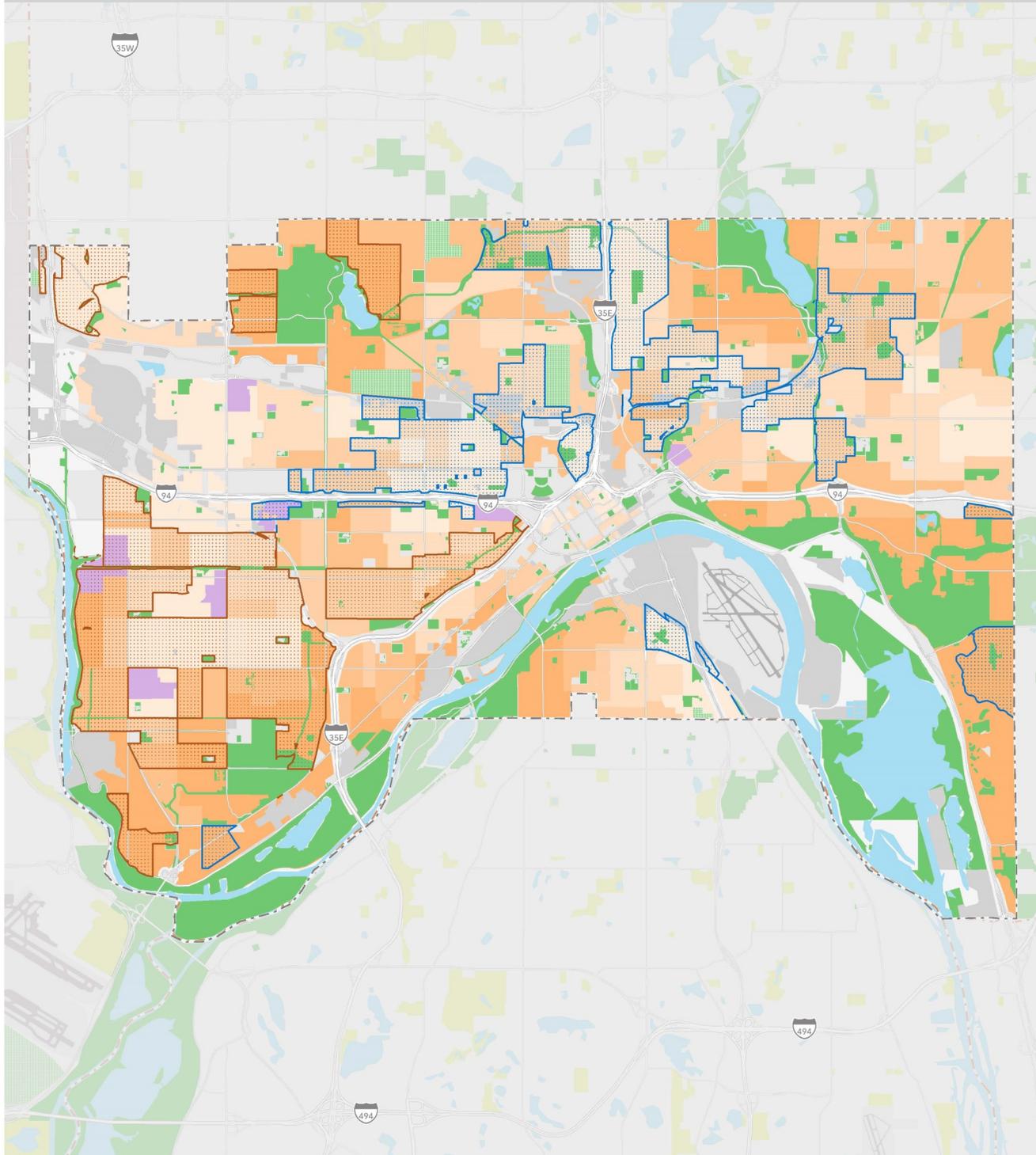
Astoundingly, 99% of St. Paulites have a park within a 10-minute walk of home. A feat few cities can claim. Unfortunately, our analysis shows the allocation of park space in neighborhoods of color to be 30% less than white neighborhoods.

PARK SPACE PER PERSON BY RACE/ETHNICITY RELATIVE TO CITY MEDIAN



Race

Block Group with higher % of people of color Block Group with higher % white population



2021 ParkScore® index: **Equity**

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

The Equity category of the ParkScore® index awards points in part based on the difference in nearby park space between neighborhoods in a city:

- On a per person basis, ratio of nearby public park space between communities of color and white communities
- On a per person basis, ratio of nearby public park space between low-income communities and high-income communities

Nearby park space per person effectively measures the available park space within a 10-minute walk of a micro-neighborhood, identified as those with the highest concentrations (top 20% of all census block groups in a city) of people of color or white population and high-income or low-income households. Households with income less than 75% of city median income (less than \$50,000 in St. Paul) are

considered low-income; households with income greater than \$100,000 in St. Paul

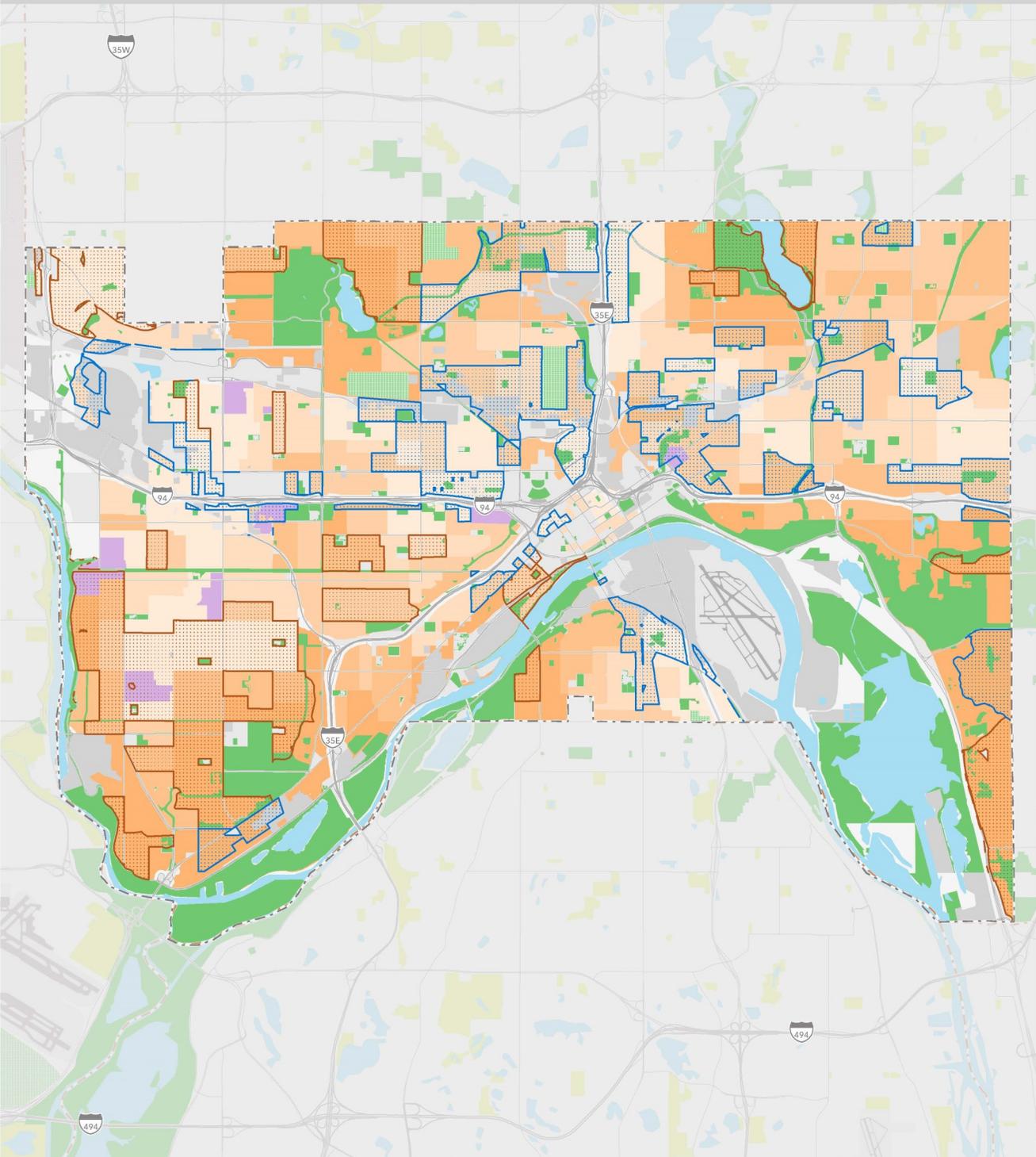
In St. Paul, neighborhoods of color have less nearby park space than white neighborhoods, and low-income neighborhoods have less nearby park space than high-income neighborhoods.

The metrics for people of color reflect each group: Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous or Alaska Natives, American Indian or Alaska Natives, Pacific Islanders, multiple races, and other races.

Demographic profiles are based on 2020 Census data.

Income

Block Group with higher % of **low-income** households
 Block Group with higher % of **high-income** households



- Park with public access
(Might include only partial representation of a park with public access along the city's border)
- Other park or open space
- Cemetery
- University
- Military
- Industrial
- Vacant zero population area
- City boundary
- County boundary
- Park acres per person**
- Very high
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very low

Income greater than 125% of city median
) are high-income.

have 30% less park space than white
neighborhoods have 35% less than high-income

of the Census-designated race/ethnicity
and Native American, Asian Americans,
or communities of color.

Forecast block groups provided by Esri.

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About The Trust for Public Land

From helping raise funds for conservation; to protecting and restoring natural spaces; to collaborating with communities to plan, design, and create parks, playgrounds, gardens, and trails; The Trust for Public Land works with communities to ensure that development happens for them, and not to them.

A national nonprofit headquartered in San Francisco, The Trust for Public Land creates parks and protects land for people. With field offices in over 20 states, including its Minnesota-based team located in St. Paul, we have both a national and local presence.

OUR MISSION

The Trust for Public Land creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come.

WHAT WE DO

Our Initiatives



LANDS



PARKS



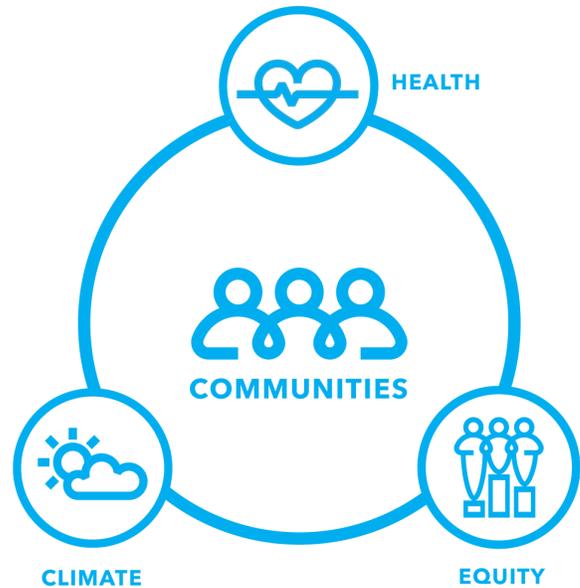
SCHOOLYARDS



TRAILS

WHY WE DO IT

Our Commitments to Community



10 Minute Walk

The research is clear: parks boost well-being entire neighborhoods. And great parks foster community, where everyone is welcome.

The Trust for Public Land is inspiring and enabling action to ensure that 100% of cities in America – large and small – have safe access to a quality park or green space within a 10-minute walk of home by 2050.

Together, with our partners at the National Recreation and Park Association and the Urban Land Institute, we're building a nationwide movement to improve access to parks and green spaces, while transforming communities, and getting people to the places where they can recreate, relax, and celebrate.

10 Minute Walk works with local leaders to raise awareness around the importance of parks and green space for improving the health of cities, and to make parks top of mind for the people who are planning the future of cities. The campaign has gained support and commitments from almost 300 mayors and dozens of nonprofits that are doing critical work in local communities to advance the campaign's goal. In Minnesota, eight mayors have signed the pledge, including Mayor Melvin Carter of St. Paul.

Partnership Fund

The 10 Minute Walk Campaign *Partnership Fund* is a three-year initiative supported by the JPB Foundation to bolster local efforts to ensure that 100% of people in U.S. cities have safe, easy access to a park. To date, 10 Minute Walk has awarded almost \$2.4 million to nonprofits and city leaders in more than 50 cities across the country.

In 2019, the 10 Minute Walk team announced funding for the second round of *Partnership Fund* support, committing nearly \$400,000 in funding to twelve non-profits. Including:

- The Fairmont Greenway Task Force, Boston, MA
- Recess Cleveland, Cleveland, OH
- 29 Pieces, Dallas, TX
- The Kansas City Museum, Kansas City, MO
- Hope Communities, Minneapolis, MN
- The Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation, Philadelphia, PA
- The Ibero-American Development Corporation, Rochester, NY
- Five District Councils, St. Paul, MN



Visit 10minutewalk.org for more information

Partnership Fund District Council Cohort

Through the support of the 10 Minute Walk *Partnership Fund*, The Trust for Public Land was able to support the work of five district councils via pass-through funding. Each district council was re-granted \$10,000, which could be allocated towards staff time, engagement activities, small park improvements, and other expenses such as office supplies, printing, and travel.

Given the initial success of the cohort's work, The Trust for Public Land was able to secure funding from the McNeely Foundation to expand the cohort's reach on the East Side of St. Paul. The district councils participating in the cohort, include:

- District 1 – Southeast Community Council (formerly known as Battle Creek-Highwood)
- District 2 – Greater Eastside Community Council (McNeely Foundation)
- District 3– West Side Community Organization
- District 6 – North End Neighborhood Organization
- District 11 – Hamline-Midway Coalition
- District 13 – Union Park District Council

About St. Paul's District Councils

St. Paul has had a formal structure of neighborhood organizations to engage residents and collaborate with city government since 1975--one of the first in the nation. These organizations are known as district councils because they are resident groups that engage and represent the people living in one of the city's 17 planning districts. Each district council is a 501(c)(3) non-profit with a voluntary, unpaid board of directors composed of members elected by their neighbors.

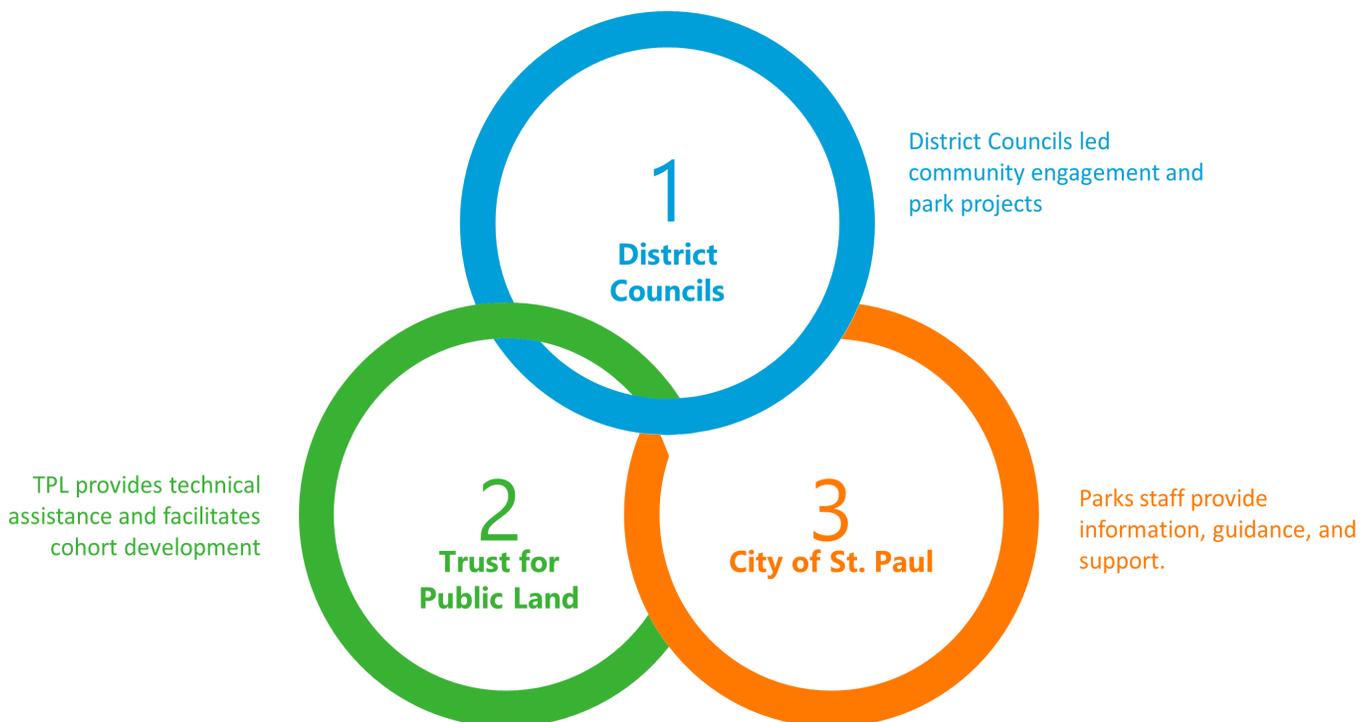
District councils are involved in work to improve the physical, social, and economic structures in their neighborhood. Their work is centered around developing district plans, which following review, are adopted as part of the city's Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan guides development of the city, and sets the direction for policies, budgets, programs, and investments. Beyond neighborhood planning, district councils set their own priorities and objectives, however many focus their efforts on:

- Reviewing community development proposals
- Advocating for park and recreation center improvements
- Coordinating community gardens and neighborhood beautification projects
- Promoting environmental action through volunteering and advocacy
- Organizing block clubs and working with the police department and other city agencies to improve public safety

Program Goals

Together, the six district councils, City of St. Paul staff, and The Trust for Public Land identified a set of program goals that would engage residents, specifically communities of color and low-income community, and advance neighborhood and city-wide park efforts.

- Provide district councils the resources, time, and space to build their capacity around park issues
- Conduct intentional outreach to marginalized and underrepresented communities
- Empower community members to be advocates for parks and green space
- Map and assess existing park infrastructure
- Build awareness of park amenities and programming
- Analyze park usage
- Identify barriers to park use
- Participate in cohort meetings to share information, collaborate, and cross-pollinate projects
- Foster direct communication and partnership with park staff and elected officials.
- Influence park policy to better meet the needs of community members, particularly marginalized populations.
- Raise awareness of the need for dedicated park improvement funding and city-wide park system master planning.



Cohort Activities and Success

Centering the cohort's goals, each district council pursued projects and priorities pertinent to local needs. Some district councils focused their efforts on education and park activation while others advanced park improvement projects, with most pursuing a mix of actions and activities.



Park Projects

Small park improvements and facility upgrades



Stewardship

Community-supported care and activation



Engagement

Listening to community priorities, needs, and concerns



Planning

Efforts to envision park creation and renovation



Awareness

Activities to increase awareness of opportunities



Education

Community outreach, learning, and instruction



Organizational Development

Capacity building and organizational change



Youth participate in the West Side Community Organization's "Growing Resilience" program.



Hmong dance troupe performing at Ames Lake celebration in Greater East Side community.

Community Feedback

Through one-on-one conversations, surveys, community events, and small focus group, the district councils engaged hundreds of community members, including many from under-represented communities. Across the city, it is abundantly clear that St. Paulites love their parks. During a difficult year, parks and open spaces provided a much-needed space for recreation, physically distanced and safe gathering, respite, recovery, and rejuvenation. In all corners of the city, residents expressed barriers to park use. Across districts, we've identified ten common themes or issues raised by community members that serve as barriers to increased use and appreciation of parks and open spaces.



Public Safety

Real and perceived threats to safety



Maintenance

Consistent and equitable care



Design

A careful mix of amenities



Accessibility

Safe, multimodal access

-  **Involvement** Engaging residents in park issues
-  **Activation** Programming and education at parks
-  **Awareness** Information-sharing
-  **Stewardship** Supporting park champions
-  **Year-Round Use** Ensuring usability in winter
-  **Trust & Healing** Addressing racism and trauma

Public Safety

The real and perceived threat to personal safety was a top concern of those engaged, across neighborhoods, by people of all races and ethnicities, and especially women. Park design, lack of maintenance, and specific instances of crime within park spaces were highlighted. Many noted feeling unsafe after dark and the recent uptick in citywide crime. Proper lighting, open sightlines, regular trash pick-up, and the quick cleaning of graffiti were mentioned as opportunities to increase safety and the perception of a cared-for space.

Maintenance

As mentioned above, proper maintenance significantly contributed to park use. In addition to spaces being perceived as threats to public safety, many noted the hazardous nature of equipment, trails, and courts in poor condition. There was strong support for maintaining existing facilities, exploring low-maintenance improvements, and the desire to support the city's maintenance efforts through volunteer stewardship.

Design

As demographics, preferences, and needs change, so has people's perceptions of park spaces. Generally, we heard a strong desire for additional passive park amenities such as walking paths, gathering spaces, gardens, dog parks, benches, and picnic tables. Of high note was the need for year-round, publicly accessible bathrooms.

Accessibility

Ninety-nine percent of St. Paul residents have a park within a ten-minute walk of home, a feat not many cities have reached. Unfortunately, not everyone feels safe walking or biking to neighborhood parks. Our engagement found most people accessing park spaces on foot, following by car. Improvements to pedestrian safety through improved crosswalks, lighting, reduced speed, traffic calming, and proper enforcement would encourage additional park use.

Involvement

Many community members expressed a desire to better connect with park spaces and the community, but a lack of free time and awareness of opportunities limits people's abilities to connect. People would like to be involved in planning new park spaces and renovation projects but often don't find out about projects until construction begins. The district councils and other organizations, like The Trust for Public Land, are well-poised to support proactive engagement and planning efforts.

Activation

People like to be around other people. After a year of pandemic-related distancing and limited

group recreation, community members yearned for opportunities to connect, gather, and celebrate. More activities, especially outside of organized sports, are desired.

Awareness

One silver lining of the pandemic is the increased use of park spaces and greater exploration of the city. Many community members noted their lack of awareness of parks and recreation opportunities – even in their own backyard. Navigating the cross-jurisdictional ownership of park spaces (city, county, regional, state), multiple websites, and maps is confusing.

Stewardship

The growing recognition of limited public resources coupled with a desire to connect with neighbors has many people interested in created or supporting stewardship or “friends of” groups. Resources to support such groups, including clarity on city processes, would help foster community engagement and leverage untapped resources.

Year-Round Use

St. Paul’s parks are well-used in the warmer months, but as temperatures drop and snow flies, park use drops. Many noted the lack of trail snow removal and accessibility of bathrooms as a major barrier to winter use. Park design should consider gathering spaces, wind barriers, affordable equipment and winter gear rental, and the integration of color and “winter interest” to improve winter use.

Trust and Healing

And finally, we must acknowledge the painful history of our park spaces. Whether forced removal and urban development, racist policing, or neighborhood tensions, the community identified the need to tell history and stories, come together to acknowledge trauma and heal pain, and chart an anti-racist, welcoming future.

Needing Somewhere to “Go”

Community members, especially women, parents, and people of color, named the lack of public restrooms in parks served as a barrier to park use. Many noted that time in parks is often cut short when restrooms are not available. Others noted the inconsistent availability of bathrooms due to seasonality, time of day, or day of week. Additionally, district councils heard about the need for drinking fountains, however this need was less of a priority than bathroom facilities.

We acknowledge the difficulty in funding year-round facilities and proper maintenance. And St. Paul is not alone in this predicament as The Trust for Public Land and its partners face similar issues across the country. That being said, The Trust for Public Land and the district councils offer their support in collaborative exploration of sustainable solutions to the issue.

District 1 —

Southeast Community Organization

As it's name suggests, District 1 is located in the city's southeast corner. Southeast consists of four distinct neighborhoods—Eastview, Conway, Battle Creek, and Highwood—and one uninhabited area known as Pig's Eye. Physically the largest district council in the city, the area is home to lower population density, industry, railroads, and infrastructure. It's hills and bluffs are home to many parks include many city and regional parks. The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area is home to more than 1,000 acres of protected water and open space.

Park Projects

- Community gardens: Received funds from Ramsey County to improve operations and increase water-use efficiency at neighborhood community gardens

Stewardship

- Burns Avenue Overlook: Met with MnDOT to discuss management and safety issues
- Clean up of junk and hazardous materials at nature preserve

Engagement

- Conducted community survey

Planning

- Battle Creek Master Plan: Participated in community feedback session and met with county staff. Encouraged park planners to install crosswalk and pedestrian-activated traffic control signal for improved safety and access
- Pig's Eye Park: Participated in planning meetings. District council environment committee provided feedback
- Boys Totem Town: Provided feedback and engaged community in discussions for the future of county-owned land
- Shared 10 Minute Walk and urban heat island maps with county parks planners, who committed to using the data to inform project planning
- Point Douglas Regional Trail: Met with parks staff to discuss project
- Conway Park: Encouraging city to install benches

Awareness

- Highlighted area parks and amenities through Facebook Live park walkthrough tours
- Held contest and drawing to encourage park visitation

Organizational Development

- Created and launched new Environment Committee to provide input and guidance on park and green space projects

District 2 — Greater Eastside Community Council

District 2, in the city's northeast corner, is the most populated district council. The Greater Eastside is home to urban and suburban style areas with neighborhoods developed over the span of nearly 100 years. Mostly a bedroom community, the district council is home to the White Bear Lake commercial corridor, many schools, and three lakes. In the very northeast corner of the district council lies the former Hillcrest golf course. The 112-acre property and location of the highest point in the city is slated for redevelopment in the coming years.

Park Projects

- Ames Lake public art project and nature walk.: Supported project and dedication event with multicultural dance troupes.
- Lake Phalen Food Truck Park: Supported the grand opening of the weekly event

Engagement

- Conducted community survey

Planning

- Hayden Heights Recreation Center: Supporting community coalition and visioning for the future of recreation center
- Hillcrest Redevelopment: Participating in community meetings related to the redevelopment of the 112-acre former private golf course. Two master plan scenarios released in spring of 2021 include passive park space, active park space, and stormwater management. Hosting a series of community workshops through the summer and fall of 2021.
- 1409 E. 7th Street: Staying abreast of potential redevelopment opportunity

Awareness

- Highlighted area parks and amenities through Facebook Live park walkthrough tours
- Held contest and drawing to encourage park visitation
- Hosted kite flying event at Hayden Heights

District 3 — West Side Community Organization

The West Side, located in the city's south, includes river flats, rolling hills, and the curvature of the Mississippi River. Home to the city's airport, industry, retail, residential, and parks and open space, the West Side is a mix of uses. Working to address inequity, climate change, and gentrification and displacement, the West Side is a leader in neighborhood planning. The district is home to many neighborhood parks, bluffs, caves, and the Cherokee Regional Park located along the banks of the Mississippi River.

Stewardship

- Coordinated youth-led park clean-up for Earth Day
- Supported gardening at vacant lots
- Conducted food share and seed distribution events
- Garden of Good Hearts: Supported continued improvements at informal park space (privately owned but open to the public) that includes flower garden and gathering space

Engagement

- Conducted community survey
- "Recreation as Resistance" event at Lilydale Park. The park has an unfortunate past of police brutality, so the event focused on community healing.
- One-on-one community conversations and focus groups

Awareness

- Multilingual park awareness videos
- Created and distributed park maps
- Parks BINGO to encourage exploration
- Pedal Power small group bike rides to explore community spaces

Education

- Held bird walks in neighborhood parks

We also realized the ways in which parks have traditionally been 'marketed to' or indicated as welcoming to white people, but that many Black, Indigenous, and People of Color feel unwelcome there and thus may not use the spaces even if they have access to them. For this reason, we feel compelled to continue working on park access as an environmental justice issue.

- West Side Community Organization

District 6 — North End Neighborhood Organization

The North End is a historic neighborhood located north of the state capitol and centered around Rice Street, the commercial and civic heart of the area and one of Minnesota's oldest streets. The racially diverse district is home to two industrial areas, two cemeteries, and two railroad lines. In addition to many neighborhood parks, the North End is served by Wheelock Parkway, the Trout Creek Trail, and natural park spaces like the Trout Brook Nature Sanctuary, Will Reserve, and Marydale Park.

Park Projects

- Roy Wilkins Park: Secured \$160,000 in city Capital Improvement Budget funds for new lighting and benches. NENO also led the process of renaming the former Lewis Park to honor the legacy of civil rights icon Roy Wilkins, who grew up in the North End
- Trout Brook Nature Sanctuary: New park benches will be installed in summer of 2021 through the support of AARP. Through community conversations, identified the need for garbage cans, doggie bag stations and drinking fountains
- Willow Reserve: Working with partners on site restoration and new amenities
- Lyton Park: Secured funding for fencing repair from the city's Capital Improvement Budget

Stewardship

- Supporting the development of stewardship groups at Marydale, Roy Wilkins/Lewis Park, and Trout Brook Nature Sanctuary, under the umbrella Friends of North End Parks. NENO staff have supported community meetings and provided stewardship participants with hats and yard signs.
- Park clean-up events

Engagement

- Conducted targeted outreach to the community's Karen population
- Conducted community survey
- Return of Marydale Festival in 2021

Planning

- Neighborhood Plan: NENO will incorporate information received from conversations, connecting with neighbors, and survey results in the next Large Area Plan update.

Awareness

- Shared information on parks and recreation in the district council's newsletters, website, social media, and mailings

Organizational Development

- Integrated parks and recreation into organization's 2021 work plan

District 11 — Hamline Midway Coalition

The Hamline Midway neighborhood is located halfway between the downtowns of St. Paul and Minneapolis, and while the neighborhood is largely residential, it is home to many large and small retailers, light industry, and wholesale businesses. The neighborhood also contains Minnesota's first institution for higher learning, Hamline University. District 11 is served by a handful of neighborhood parks, schoolyards, and open space.

Projects

- Hamline Park: Supported efforts to assist encampment of those experiencing homelessness with food distribution and health support
- Newell Park: Worked with residents to explore options for an ice rink
- Tree planting: Supporting neighborhood tree planting projects

Stewardship

- Seed saving events at Pierce Butler Meadows, a prairie restoration in the heart of the neighborhood's industrial area
- Hosted virtual "adopt a drain" events
- Highlighted the work being done by a group of residents at Horton Park, a nature arboretum in the neighborhood

Engagement

- Hosted the mobile nature arts kiosk, which is centered on outreach to youth

Planning

- Hamline Park: Partnered with community members and city staff to plan park restoration. Helped secure additional funding to improve seating, add a public art component, and improve landscaping.

Awareness

- Created interactive map of all parks and green spaces in the community

Education

- Hosted urban foraging workshops

Organizational Development

- Partnership Fund work helped to define the district council's role in better supporting resident-led initiatives related to parks and nature
- Identified the need to support and supplement the city's park engagement process

District 13 — Union Park District Council

Three neighborhoods—Merriam Park, Snelling-Hamline, and Lexington-Hamline merged to form Union Park. Serving as home to Allianz Field, Concordia College, the University of St. Thomas, and the Town & Country Club, Union Park is home to many institutions. The newly opened Midway Peace Park in the neighborhood’s northeast corner helped to close one of the city’s last remaining park poor areas. The area around the new MLS soccer stadium and Midway Shopping Center is slated for major redevelopment in the coming years.

Stewardship

- Supporting the development of the Friends of Midway Peace Park. Co-hosted grand opening celebration attended by 500 people.

Engagement

- Supporting Environment and Parks Committee
- Hosting the Ice Cream, Peanut Butter, and Jam community celebration

Planning

- Advancing conversations about possible skate park at Merriam Park



Opportunities and Next Steps

Over the course of the year-long program, staff from the six district councils, the City of St. Paul parks and recreation staff, and The Trust for Public Land, met to discuss program activities, share information, and explore opportunities. Collectively, the cohort identified a number of action steps to leverage the work of the program, improve city and community processes, and drive better park outcomes in the city. These action items are separated into short-, medium-, and long-term initiatives. This list is intended as a starting point and to catalyze conversation.

Short-Term

1. Sustain and Grow the Cohort

The cohort of six district councils provides a strong foundation for park-centered collaboration between community, city, and nonprofit leaders. While Partnership Fund resources have concluded, the group expressed interest in continuing to meet. Additionally, the cohort expressed an interest in expanding conversations to the other eleven district councils. The Trust for Public Land will continue to pursue funding to support this important work and offers to “host” cohort meetings as needed. We encourage the continued support and involvement of city staff in cohort discussion and welcome funding sources.

2. Support Park Stewardship

Parks thrive when they are loved, cared for, and championed by the surrounding community. And there’s no doubt that St. Paulites love their parks. But with community need far exceeding existing public resources, the city and its parks would benefit from a system of strong community-led stewardship or “friends of” groups. These groups can support park maintenance, programming, safety, fundraising, and communication efforts. While some stewardship groups currently exist within St. Paul, it would behoove residents and city staff if a streamlined and structured system was created that provided resident volunteers the support necessary to establish and maintain successful park champion groups while leveraging city resources and avoiding potential conflicts. With additional resources, The Trust for Public Land could serve as a supportive non-government organization helping groups establish themselves.

Mid-Term

1. Improve Engagement and Communication

Over the years, the city and district councils have made efforts to improve community engagement and communications. We applaud and encourage the continued efforts to reach residents, especially

BIPOC and low-income communities. We encourage stronger collaboration and communication between city and community leaders as well as the exploration of new ways to engage people in conversations about their parks. One particular issue raised was the sharing of information related to capital and park improvement projects. District councils welcome the sharing of information well in advance – even years in some cases – and offer their support in engaging community in park project discussions.

The cohort found there to be opportunities to increase awareness of parks and programming as well. The development of cross-jurisdictional maps and online resources could help residents navigate various levels of government. Our groups found some hesitancy to explore new parks out of fear of getting lost, not knowing where to park, or not being able to locate a restroom facility. We recommend reviewing and updating park webpages to provide clear and accessible information.

2. Seek Policy and Planning Solutions

The last update to the city’s park system plan was over a decade ago. Much has changed in the city and the cohort agrees its time for a new parks plan - one that addresses the concerns outlined in this report and that continues to engage underrepresented communities in conversations about the future of the park system. TPL and district council partners are poised to support the development of a new parks plan and encourage the mayor and city council to support funding the project.

Additionally, we encourage the city to pursue policies, ordinances, and practices that will address the concerns outlined in this report. One such example identified by the cohort was the city’s Capital Improvement Budget process, a unique process that encourages resident-driven ideas, but that has requirements that can be off-putting or difficult for residents to complete.

Finally, we encourage the city to consider adoption of a Complete Parks policy. A framework similar to the Complete Streets model, the policy would explicitly commit the city to supporting a high-quality system that meets the needs of all users.

3. Connect Parks and Recreation Commission to Community

The Parks and Recreation Commission is an important sounding board and community voice in the civic process. The cohort is thankful for the commitment and work of the volunteers, and offers its thoughts to improve accessibility, transparency, and visibility of the commission.

Long-Term

1. Advance Park Improvements

The city’s ranking as the #2 park system in America, according to TPL’s annual ParkScore ranking, is no small feat. To maintain and improve upon its status and provide higher quality parks and recreation programming, the cohort strongly encourages the city pursue park improvements,

renovations, expansions, and creation. Again, TPL and the district councils offer their support in advancing important park projects.

2. Pursue New Funding Sources

We know that existing funding will not support current and future needs of the city’s park system. The city must consider options to diversify revenue, including the exploration of a resident-supported ballot initiative. Across America, communities of all shapes, geographies, and political leanings are supporting their park systems at the polls.

The Trust for Public Land has helped dozens of communities across the country secure millions of dollars in new parks funding. Locally, TPL has partnered with the cities of Brooklyn Park and Rochester in getting voter-approval of funding initiatives. Additionally, TPL supported the legislative approval of equitable park funding for neighborhood park improvements within the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board system.

Home to more than 121,000 residents, the Partnership Fund cohort represents 40% of St. Paul’s population.

District Council	Total Population	Communities of Color	Living in Poverty	Housing Cost Burdened
D1 Southeast	23,256	61%	17.8%	35.5%
D2 Greater East Side	30,932	67.1%	20.3%	34.8%
D3 West Side	14,442	53.5%	20.6%	32.3%
D6 North End	24,117	73.7%	28.6%	43%
D11 Hamline Midway	12,389	29%	16.7%	28.6%
D13 Union Park	16,150	27%	17.2%	33.6%

Minneapolis Parks and Power

Parks and Power, a program of Hope Community, advocates for racial justice and systems change with a focus on the Minneapolis park system. The long-term community organizing campaign has been putting pressure on the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board (MPRB) to actualize and operationalize the agency's stated commitment to racial equity in the policies, practices, and processes affecting the Minneapolis park system. The program has worked to address park issues, increase accessibility and transparency of information, increase participation in public policy and budgeting, and advocated for issues like policing reform and support to those experiencing homelessness.

In 2020, Parks and Power was funded through the Partnership Fund to increase the participation of marginalized communities in the MPRB budgeting process. Several disruptions during the year required the program to significantly rethink and adapt planned activities to respond to emergent conditions in Minneapolis parks.

Activities included:

- Partnering with several local mutual aid efforts to give community members masks in the parks and worked to get parks to serve as sites for community Covid-19 testing
- Leveraged relationships with the MPRB to get a portable bathroom at Peavey Park
- Built organic relationship with organizers and neighbors who created the Minneapolis Sanctuary Movement, and together, hosted numerous phone actions and in-person actions to demand that the MPRB not evict unsheltered people from community parks.
- Throughout these activities, Parks and Power organizers continued to share educational information about the MPRB.

More information about Parks and Power can be found:

- <https://hope-community.org/learn-lead-act/art-policy-power/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/parksandpower/>

The Trust for Public Land and Your Neighborhood Park

Our team at The Trust for Public Land is here to help support your park, trail, or schoolyard project. We support community groups seeking to create or renovate green spaces, develop stewardship groups, or address barriers to park use such as park design, safety, programming, or transportation. We encourage you to reach out to our team to discuss opportunities to improve green spaces in your neighborhood. As a collaborative partner, The Trust for Public Land can play many roles in supporting your project, including:

- Convener
- Facilitator
- Project manager
- Thought partner
- Researcher
- Technical assistance provider
- Fundraiser
- And more

HOW WE DO IT

Our Tool Kit



**PUBLIC LAND FOR
PUBLIC GOOD**



ADVOCACY



**PARK CREATION AND
TRANSFORMATION**



**DATA AND
INSIGHT**



**FUNDING AND
LEVERAGE**

For more information:

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tpl.org/our-work/community-powered-parks-twin-cities

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- Alec Armon, Community Project Coordinator, Hamline Midway Coalition
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Photographs provided by Ellie Leonardsmith, Lisa Theis, and Eric Weiss.