



SECTION 2. EXISTING CONDITIONS

Where We Are Today

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Our Natural World
- Our History
- Our Community
- Our Park System Today



OUR NATURAL WORLD

GEOLOGY & HYDROLOGY

Historically, West St. Paul's landscapes were dotted with numerous small lakes and hills. While some of this terrain has been altered due to human development, several small lakes, ponds, and wetlands remain within the city's boundaries. West St. Paul is relatively hilly, offering stunning views of the surrounding region. Many of the city's parks and open spaces are situated near water bodies and wetlands, playing vital roles in maintaining water quality and mitigating flood risks.

- In West St. Paul, there is one primary stream and seven ponds/lakes. Kaposia Creek serves as a significant tributary, originating in West St. Paul.
- The city lies within the Mississippi watershed and is part of the Lower Mississippi River Watershed Management Organization.
- While many flood-prone areas are located in parks and open spaces, flooding can also occur intermittently along sections of Oakdale Avenue, Emerson Avenue, and Robert Street.
- The majority of the city is characterized by clay soil, with some areas containing a higher proportion of organic material. Clay soil can drain slowly, be challenging to work with, and compact easily, which can hinder plant growth, contribute to flooding during heavy rainfall, and increase construction costs. However, it does retain moisture and is relatively rich in nutrients.

BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity refers to the diverse range and quantity of living organisms, encompassing everything from the bacteria found on maple tree roots to the hawk nesting in its branches, as well as the tree itself. Humanity depends on biodiversity for essential resources, including food, products, and medicine, as well as for protection against severe weather and other environmental hazards. It also enriches hobbies, promotes health, and enhances a location's resilience to pests, diseases, and climate change.

The citizen science app iNaturalist, which allows users to document wildlife and plant species, has recorded 944 different species observed in West St. Paul.

CLIMATE

Minnesota has a continental climate, characterized by cold winters and hot, humid summers, which present distinct seasonal challenges. Rising winter temperatures are impacting recreational activities, as exemplified by the brief six-day operational period of ice rinks during the 2023-24 winter season. Warmer winters may reduce the frequency of extreme cold days but increase the number of freeze-thaw cycles, which can impact road conditions and water quality.

Conversely, the growing season is extending, allowing for a broader range of plant species in West St. Paul. However, extreme weather events have led to restrictions on outdoor facilities, event cancellations, and public health issues. Recent droughts and wildfires have raised concerns about air quality, affecting local wildlife, including the iconic walleye.

Moreover, increasingly damaging storms are impacting health, welfare, and finances, necessitating more frequent breaks for staff during summer heat and causing significant property damage.

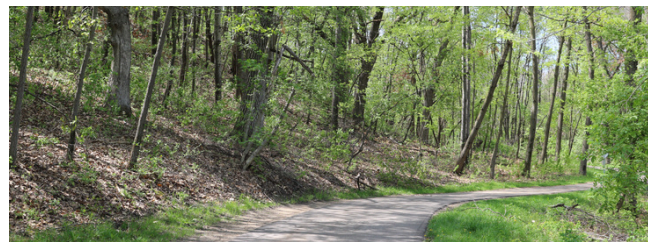
HABITAT

Ecoregions are areas of land and water that contain distinct climates, groups of plant and animal species, and environmental conditions. Considering West St. Paul's unique ecoregions is important for proper environmental management and restoration strategies. Broadly, West St. Paul is in a transitional area between the forested Northwoods and the Corn Belt plains.



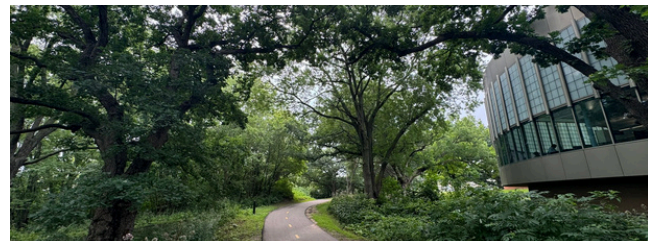
Wetland:

Habitat associated with areas saturated with water most of the year, including marshes, swamps, and pond edges. Mud Lake has a fringe wetland.



Woodland:

Habitat with predominantly large trees, understory shrubs, and ground cover. The endangered butternut can be found in the Garlough Park woodland.



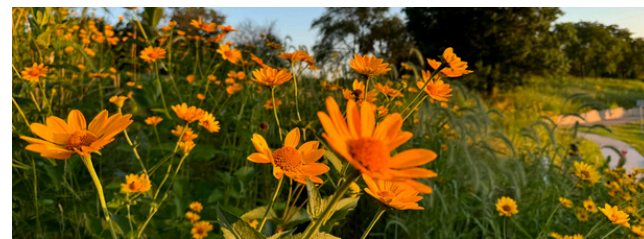
Savanna:

Habitat with mixed woodland and grassland ecosystem. Oak savannas were common in Minnesota before urbanization. Wentworth Library is surrounded by a savanna.



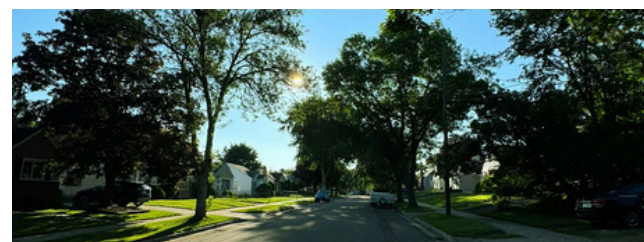
Urban:

Urban development areas, like Robert Street, exhibit high human development with limited natural habitat. However, they can still host some plants and animals. Enhancing natural infrastructure can help mitigate negative impacts on the environment.



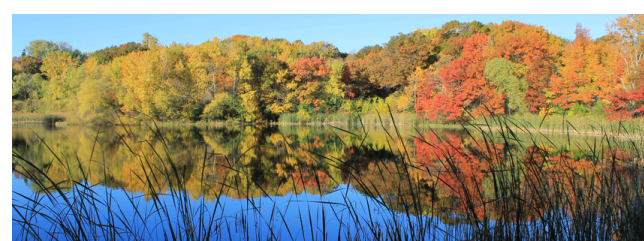
Prairie:

Habitat with large open grassland with some wildflowers and few trees. The Dodge Nature Center has a well-maintained prairie ecosystem that is home to the endangered rusty-patched bumble bee.



Parks and Neighborhoods:

Habitat centered on human activity and development with open spaces and naturalized areas. These areas can still play a critical role in providing food, shelter, and space to grow for plants and animals.



Lacustrine:

Habitat associated with lakes and the species that live and grow in water bodies. Thompson Lake is the largest lacustrine habitat and is home to birds, turtles, fish, and aquatic plants.



“A society grows great when old people plant trees whose shade they shall never sit.”

Greek Proverb

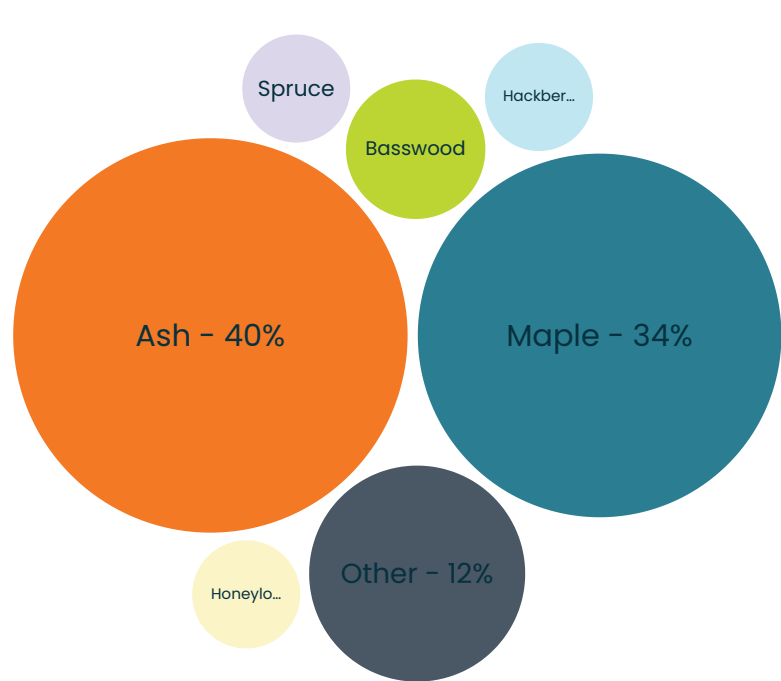


TREES

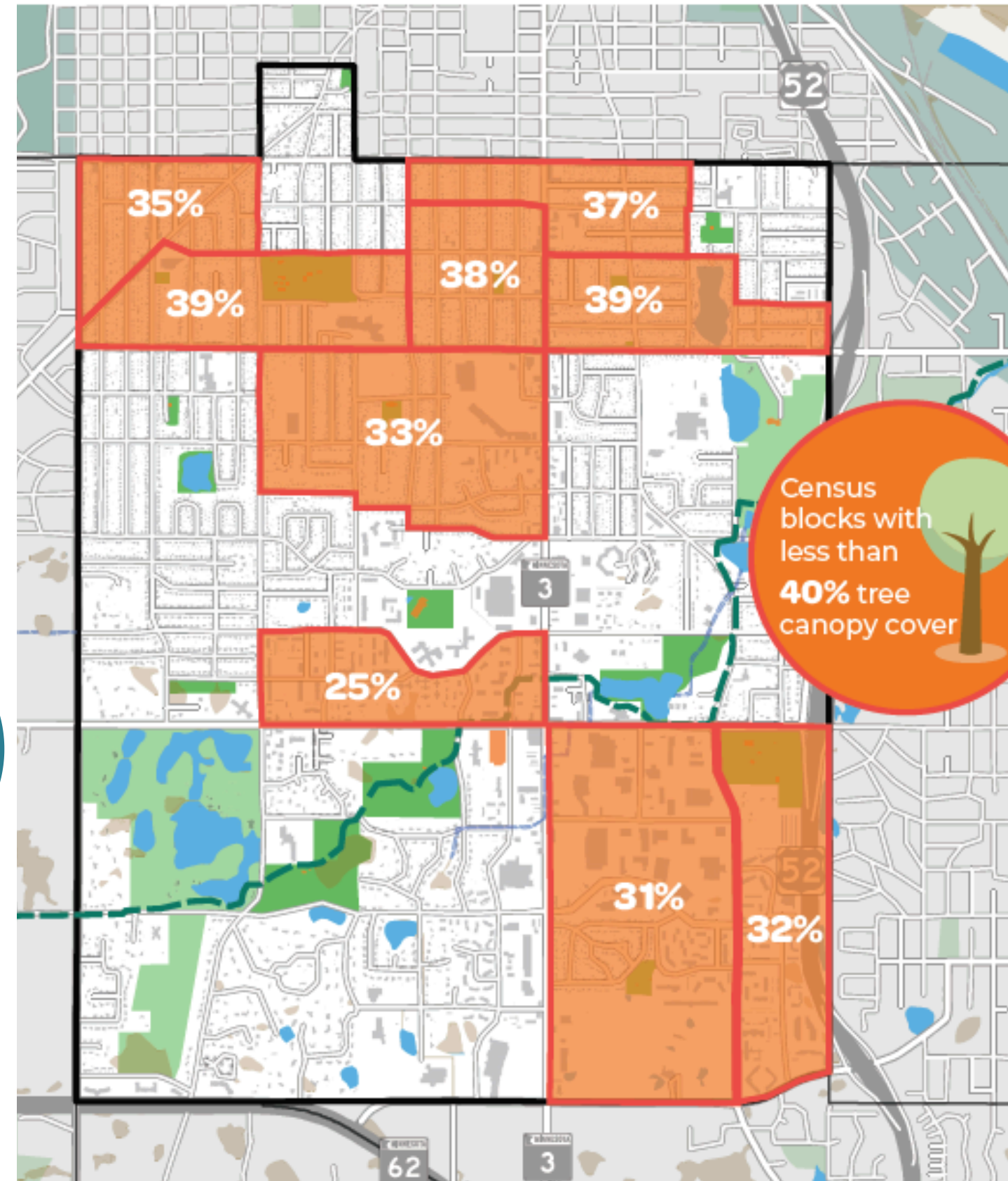
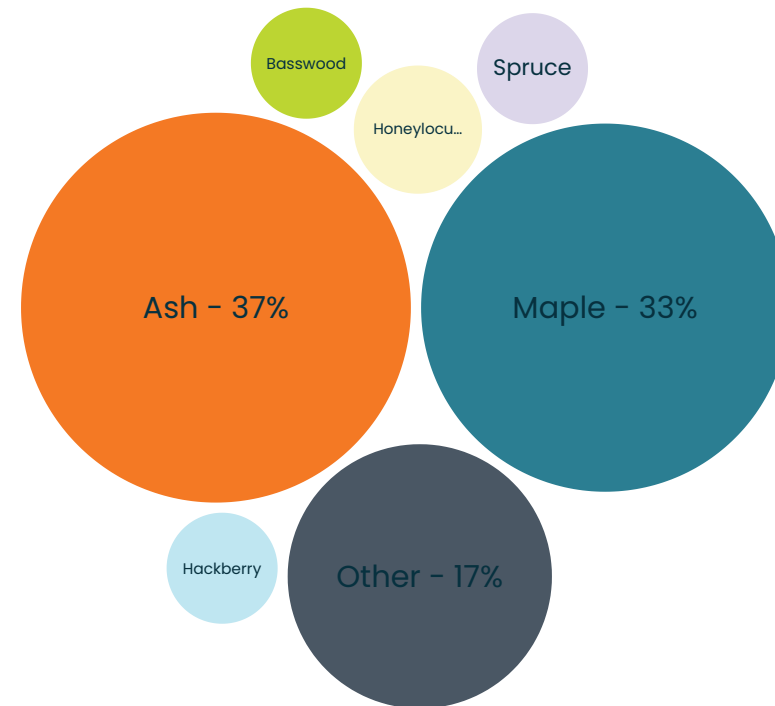
Trees are vital for community health, safety, and recreation, providing shade, wildlife habitats, soil erosion control, and mitigating climate change. The city's tree canopy coverage is at 41%, which is above the surrounding average of 28%, but still has room for improvement. Coverage varies significantly, with some neighborhoods reaching 57% and others dropping to 25%. Nine out of sixteen census tracts have less than 40% coverage, and certain parks face low canopy levels, exacerbating urban heat issues.

In 2014, a comprehensive inventory revealed that among the 3,300 publicly owned street trees in West St. Paul, two out of five were ash trees. The City has treated for the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) to mitigate damage; however, significant tree losses have still occurred, especially on private property. To address future threats, the City is replacing lost trees with diverse species and plans to conduct an updated tree inventory soon.

Public Tree Species Diversification in 2014



Public Tree Species Diversification in 2025



Tree canopy coverage equal to or greater than 40% makes urban areas feel cooler during the heat of day. There are 9 census blocks in West St. Paul that have less than 40% tree canopy cover.

OUR HISTORY

INDIGENOUS SETTLEMENT

The area now known as West St. Paul has been home to indigenous peoples for millennia. Primarily, it was the Dakota Nation tribes who settled along the banks of the Mississippi River. The Native American villages of Kaposia to the east and Mendota to the west bordered the land that is now West St. Paul.

The Dakota originally inhabited this region, gradually moving westward as settlers began to arrive by 1851. Although treaties signed in 1853 officially mandated their removal, some Dakota, including Little Crow's Mdewakanton Sioux, continued to reside in their Kaposia village until late 1853. Notably, the first meeting of the Dakota County Commissioners was held in Kaposia. Ultimately, the Dakota were relocated to the Yellow Medicine reservation, and the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 led to further displacement and significant casualties.

EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT

The initial permanent European settlers to the region that eventually became West St. Paul arrived in 1848, and by 1855, the area had been officially surveyed and mapped.

Numerous early European settlers and prominent figures have had their names immortalized in the city's streets and geographic landmarks, such as Robert Street and Thompson County Park.

Before significant development occurred, agriculture was the primary land use, influenced by the nearby river, rail shipping, and stockyards.

WEST SIDE'S HISPANIC COMMUNITY

The West Side Flats, situated in the lowlands just south of downtown St. Paul, was a vibrant neighborhood for working-class immigrants, housing many of Minnesota's earliest Spanish-speaking residents. This close-knit community acted as a focal point for individuals employed in the railyards, stockyards, and agricultural fields. Although the area often experienced flooding and was demolished by the government for redevelopment in the 1960s, the West Side and West St. Paul continue to be home to numerous Spanish-speaking communities.



Existing Conditions

Did you know?

WEST ST. PAUL - 3RD TIME'S THE CHARM

WSP #1

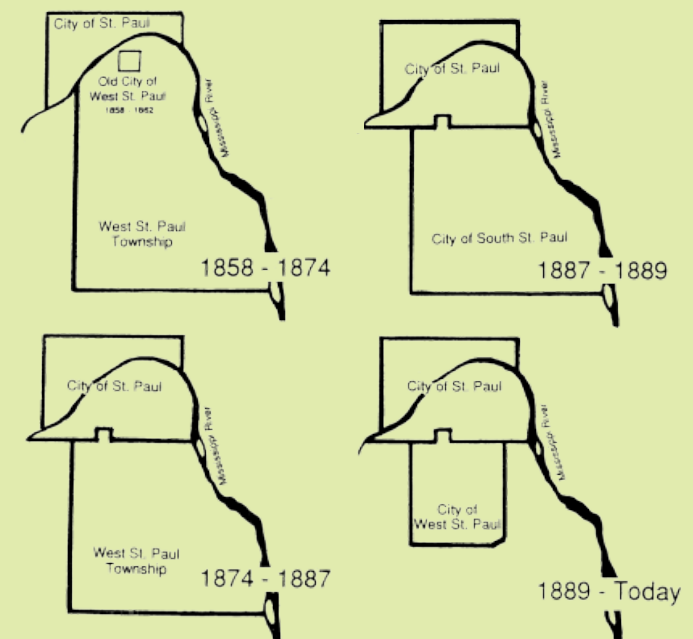
In 1858, the land directly across the river from what is now downtown St. Paul was designated as the original City of West St. Paul. This name likely stemmed from its position on the West Bank of the Mississippi River, rather than its location to the west of the state capital. Unfortunately, this municipality, which had no legal connection to the current West St. Paul, encountered financial difficulties and ceased operations after only four years.

WSP #2

Just two months after the establishment of the City of West St. Paul, West St. Paul Township was created in May 1858. Over time, the township began to decline, initially due to the expansion of St. Paul across the river and later with the establishment of the City of South St. Paul.

WSP #3

As development moved eastward, farmers in the western part of South St. Paul began to feel threatened by the growing community. After losing their representation in the 1888 election, the western farmers appealed to the state legislature for the creation of their own city. As a result, on February 22, 1889, the city we now recognize as West St. Paul was established.

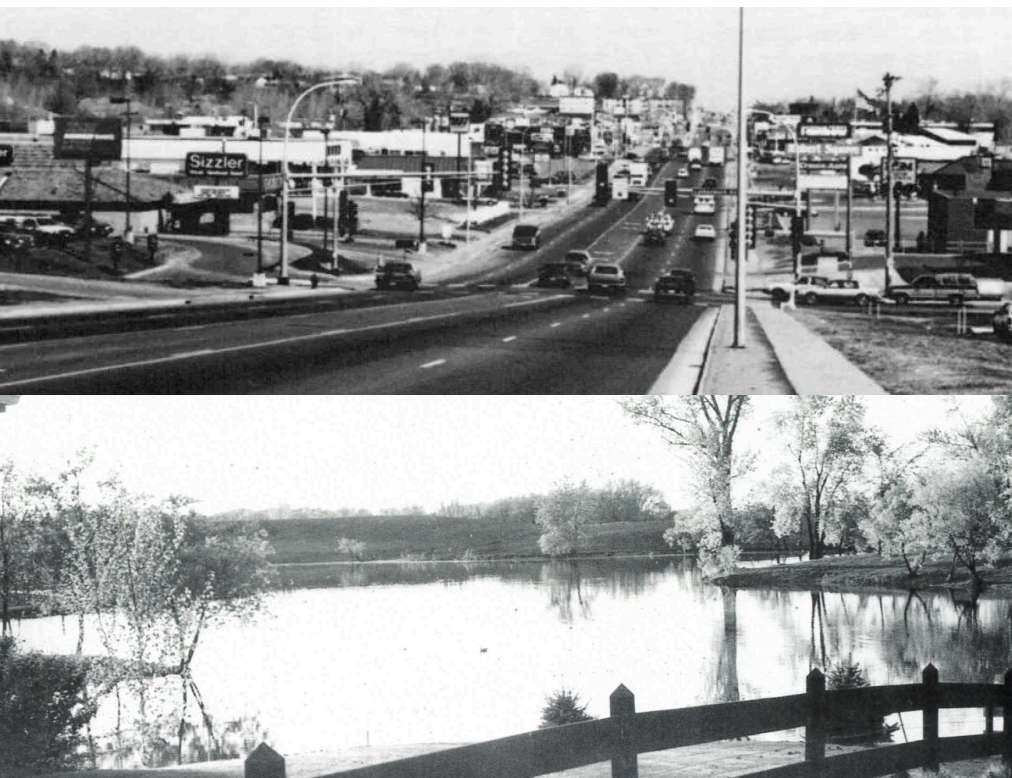


SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT

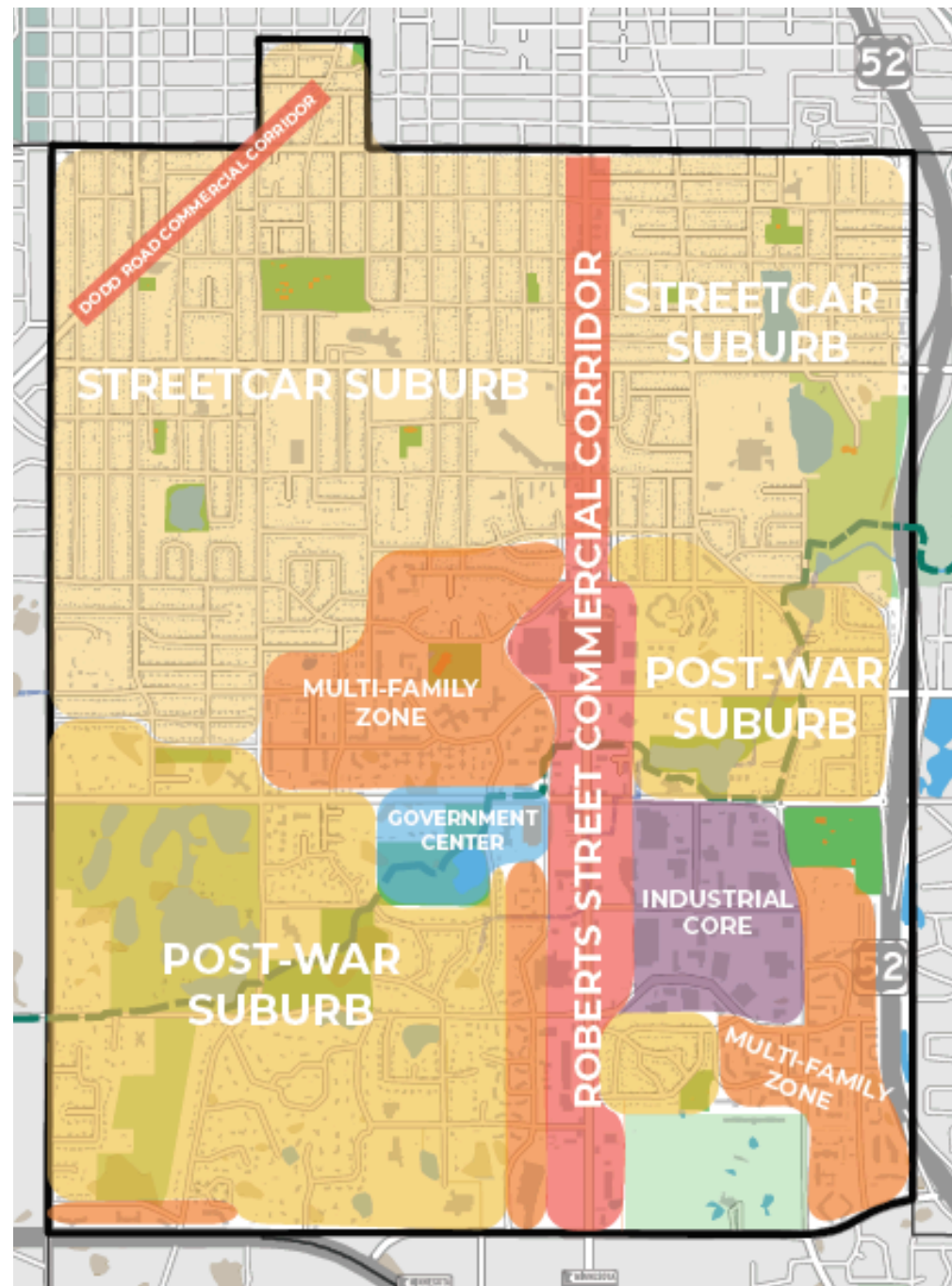
The city's initial growth was relatively slow as development occurred to the north and east. The city's development would begin to grow in earnest with the expansion of the streetcar system, which reached the northern border of Annapolis at Smith, Stryker, and Robert streets. As such, the northern portion of the city is predominantly characterized by a "streetcar suburb" typology, similar to that found in other first-ring suburbs, such as St. Louis Park and Robbinsdale. Single-family homes, small apartment buildings, and commercial nodes were built in a grid fashion with sidewalks allowing for easy walking. Parks in this area are relatively small and provide basic amenities.

The southern portion of the city, developed in the 1960s and 1970s, is a traditional post-war suburb typology, characterized by larger homes and lots, curvilinear streets, and limited pedestrian infrastructure. Parks in this area are larger and include both passive, nature-focused parks and very active, programmed recreational parks. Commercial development along Robert Street is more auto-dominated, featuring big-box stores and strip malls.

The city's more recent development phase has been focused on redevelopment, with higher-density mixed-use buildings and apartments replacing large parking lots and single-story commercial.



Existing Conditions



DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARKS SYSTEM

For the first fifty years of the city's existence, park development was virtually absent, as ample open space and undeveloped land offered plenty of opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. The city's inaugural dedicated parks and natural areas include what are now known as Thompson County Park, Albert Park, and Harmon Park.

As the city expanded, a few small parks were designated for recreation and leisure. Reflecting the norms of that era, these parks were typically small and often comprised remnants of land that were not easily convertible for commercial or residential development.

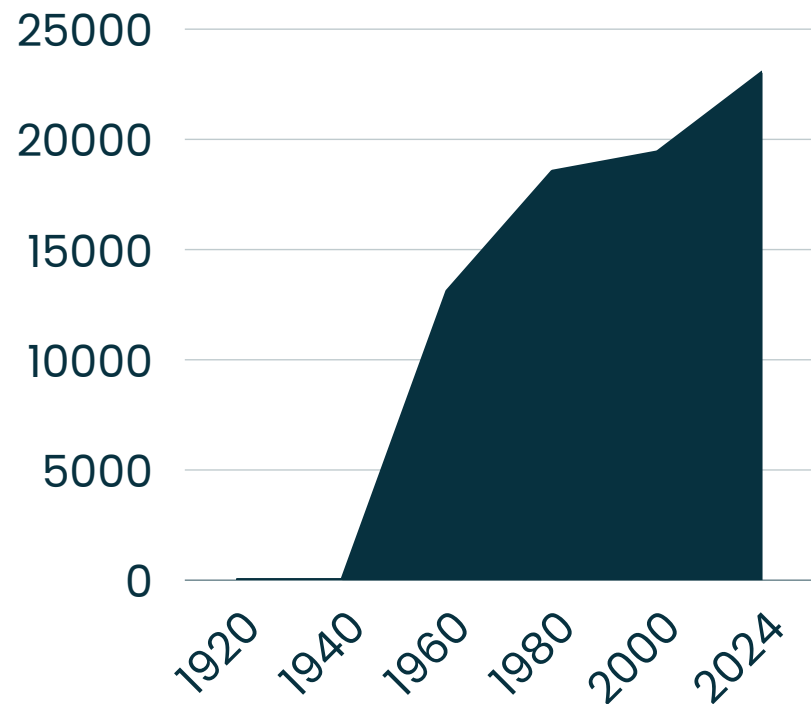
Starting in the 1960s, the city's approach to park planning underwent considerable growth. In 1963, Council Member James Kennedy was appointed as the first chair of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. At that time, professional staff were limited, and individual council members managed departments directly. Kennedy, who led the Parks Department, played a crucial role in the system's expansion. His leadership laid the foundation for the fantastic parks system we enjoy today, which includes Garlough, Weschcke, Haskell, Marthaler, Dodd, Orme, Southview, and Kennedy parks.

By the 1990s, much of the city had been developed, shifting the focus of park planning from creation to reinvestment. Now, as we enter a new era of increased redevelopment, we stand on the brink of an exciting new phase for the parks system.

OUR COMMUNITY

POPULATION

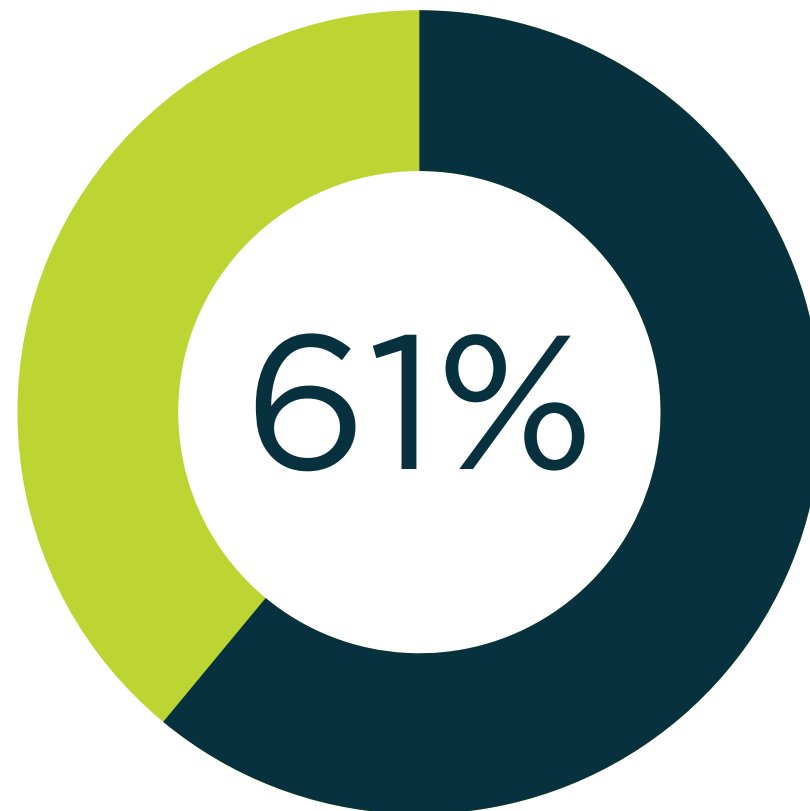
As of 2022, West St. Paul has a population of 21,794. For 40 years, the city's population remained fairly stable. However, beginning in 2015, redevelopment initiatives sparked an increase in the number of residents. The Metropolitan Council forecasts that by 2040, West St. Paul's population could rise to 23,100, which may be a conservative prediction. While we are pleased to welcome our new residents, we recognize the heightened demand that this population growth places on our park system.



TOTAL POPULATION

HOUSING

West St. Paul's housing stock is extremely diverse - from large estates to cozy apartments. The city has a higher rate of rental (nearly 40%) than many of its neighbors and the state (about 30%). At 2.2 people per household, the city also has a lower number of people per household than many of its neighbors and the state (about 2.4 people per household).



HOMEOWNERSHIP

2.2
PERSONS PER
HOUSEHOLD

INCOME & ACCESS

Like its housing, the income of residents varies widely from working class to very wealthy. Generally speaking, West St. Paul is a middle-class and working-class community. The city is seen as an attractive, affordable, and safe place to raise a family on a budget. Our rates of poverty and household income are lower than many of our neighbors and the state.

\$70K
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

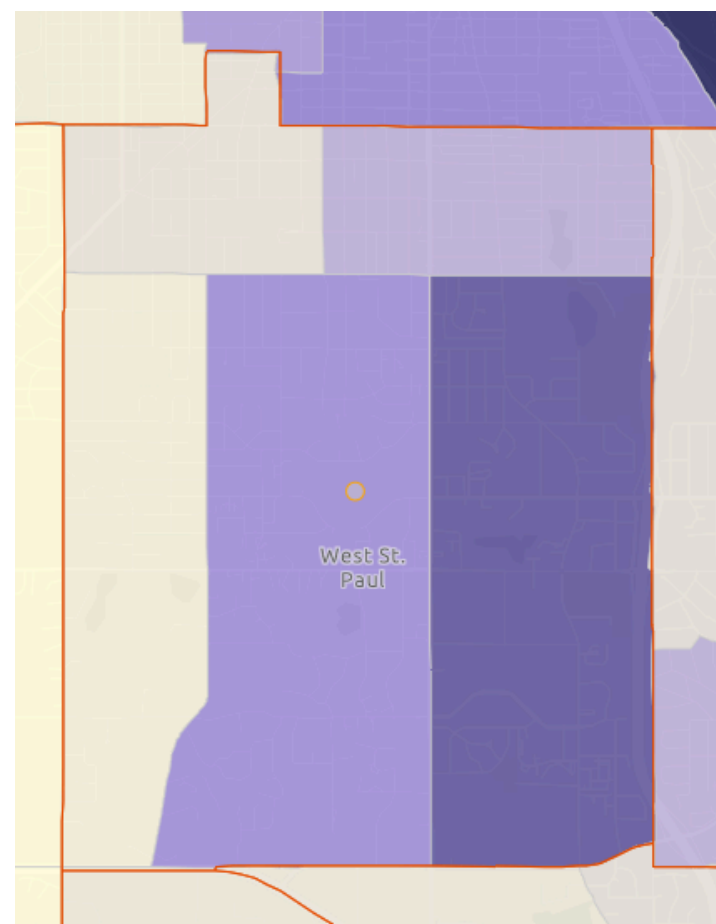
9.6%
PERSONS IN POVERTY

9.6%
DO NOT HAVE A CAR

87%
HOUSEHOLDS WITH ACCESS
TO BROADBAND INTERNET

PHYSICAL HEALTH

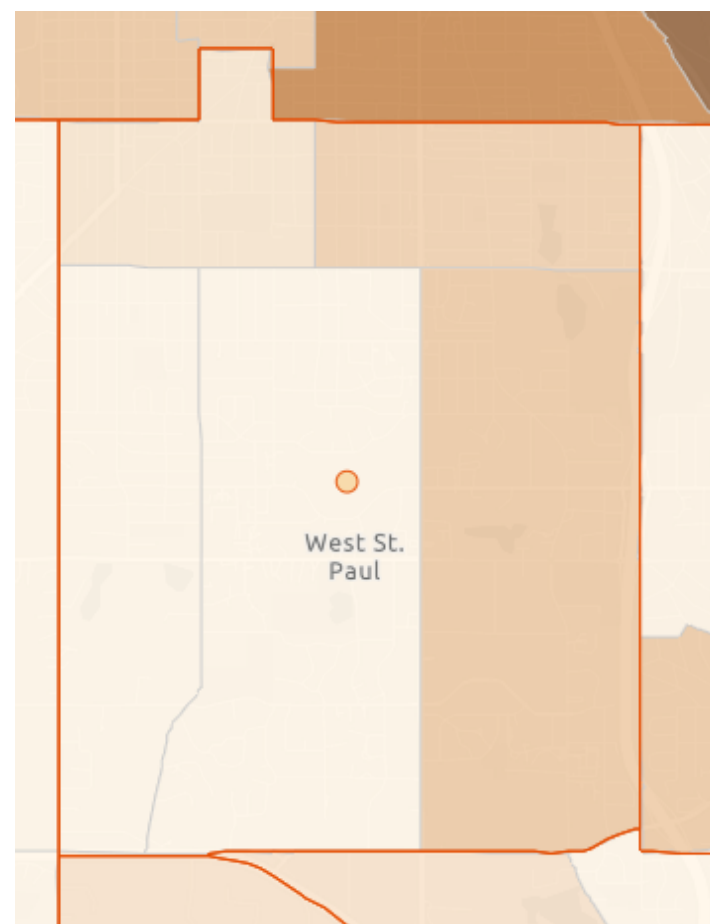
Physical activity plays a crucial role in the overall health and well-being of our residents and community. While West St. Paul is generally healthier than the national average, it still falls short of ideal recommendations, and notable disparities exist within the city. The western part, which is home to many higher-density complexes and lower-income families, has a significantly lower rate of daily exercise compared to the eastern side. This trend is also reflected in the percentage of individuals reporting good overall health, with only 7.9% in the west versus 11.3% in the east, compared to a national average of 11.4%.



Rates of Daily Physical Activity from the Centers for Disease Control. Darker areas highlight less physical activity.

MENTAL HEALTH

Similar to physical health, West St. Paul's mental health status is above average, yet there remains significant potential for enhancement. The same disparities between east and west are evident in mental health as in physical health. Each year, millions of Americans face mental health challenges, and the number of individuals seeking treatment continues to increase. Statistically, one in five Americans will experience a mental health condition annually, with rates being notably higher among younger populations. Factors such as isolation, loneliness, and the use of social media are often cited as contributing factors. Additionally, there has been a rise in suicide and substance abuse rates. Utilizing parks and recreational activities can be an effective method for enhancing mental health.



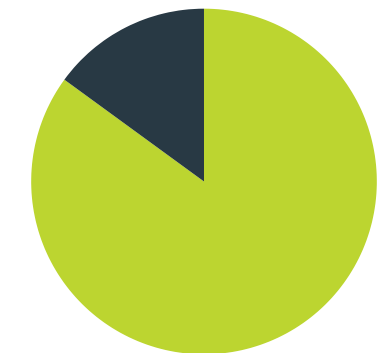
Rates of Mental Health from the Centers for Disease Control. Darker areas highlight higher rates of poor mental health.

LANGUAGE

West St. Paul's diverse population includes a multitude of languages. Residents speak several languages, both as primary and secondary languages. The vast majority of community members speak English or Spanish at home. The percentage of people who primarily speak Spanish has decreased somewhat since 2010, while those who speak Asian and African languages have grown slightly.

Language Other than English

15%



English Only
85%

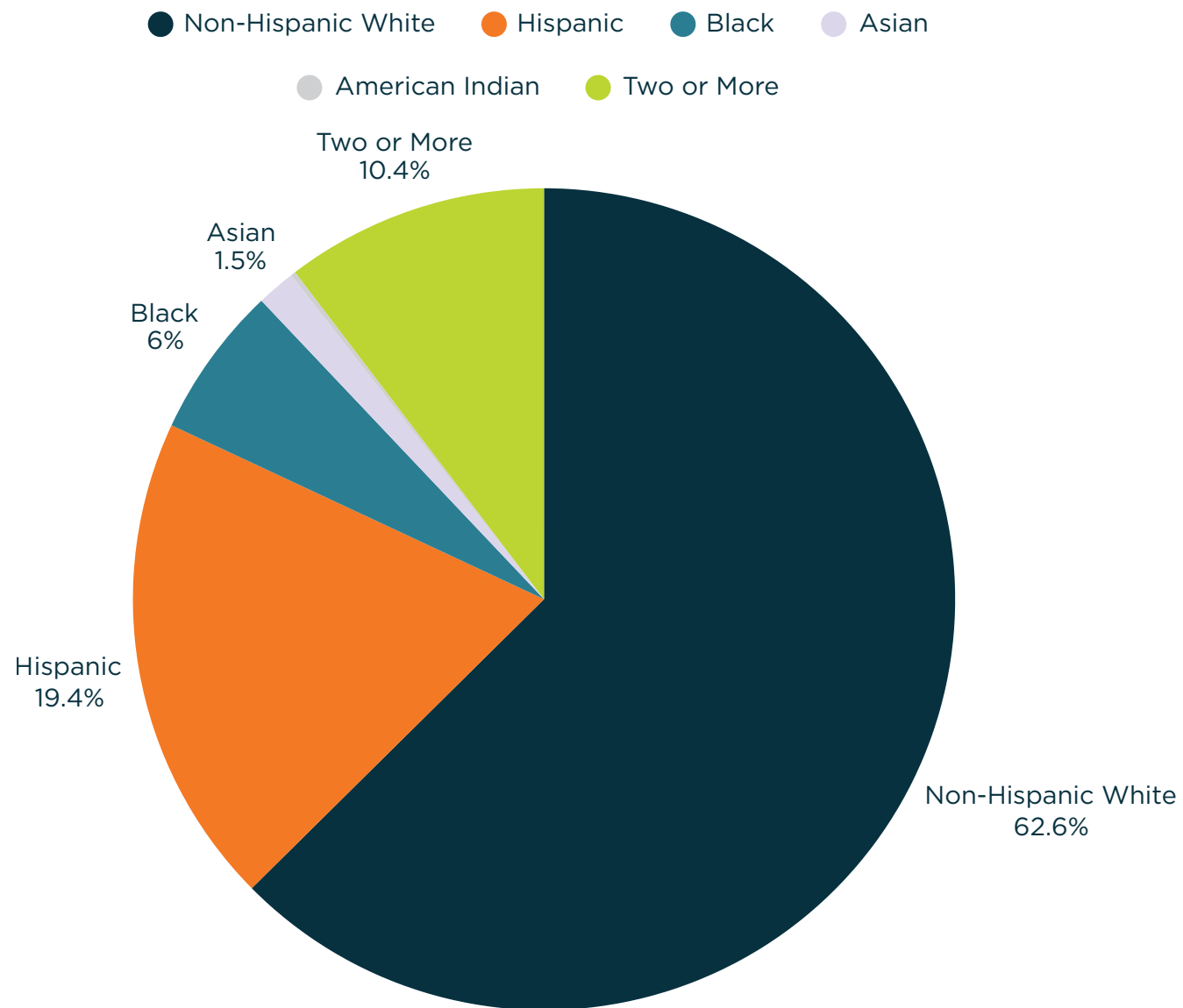
LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME

11%

HOUSEHOLDS WHO SPEAK SPANISH AT HOME

RACE & ETHNICITY

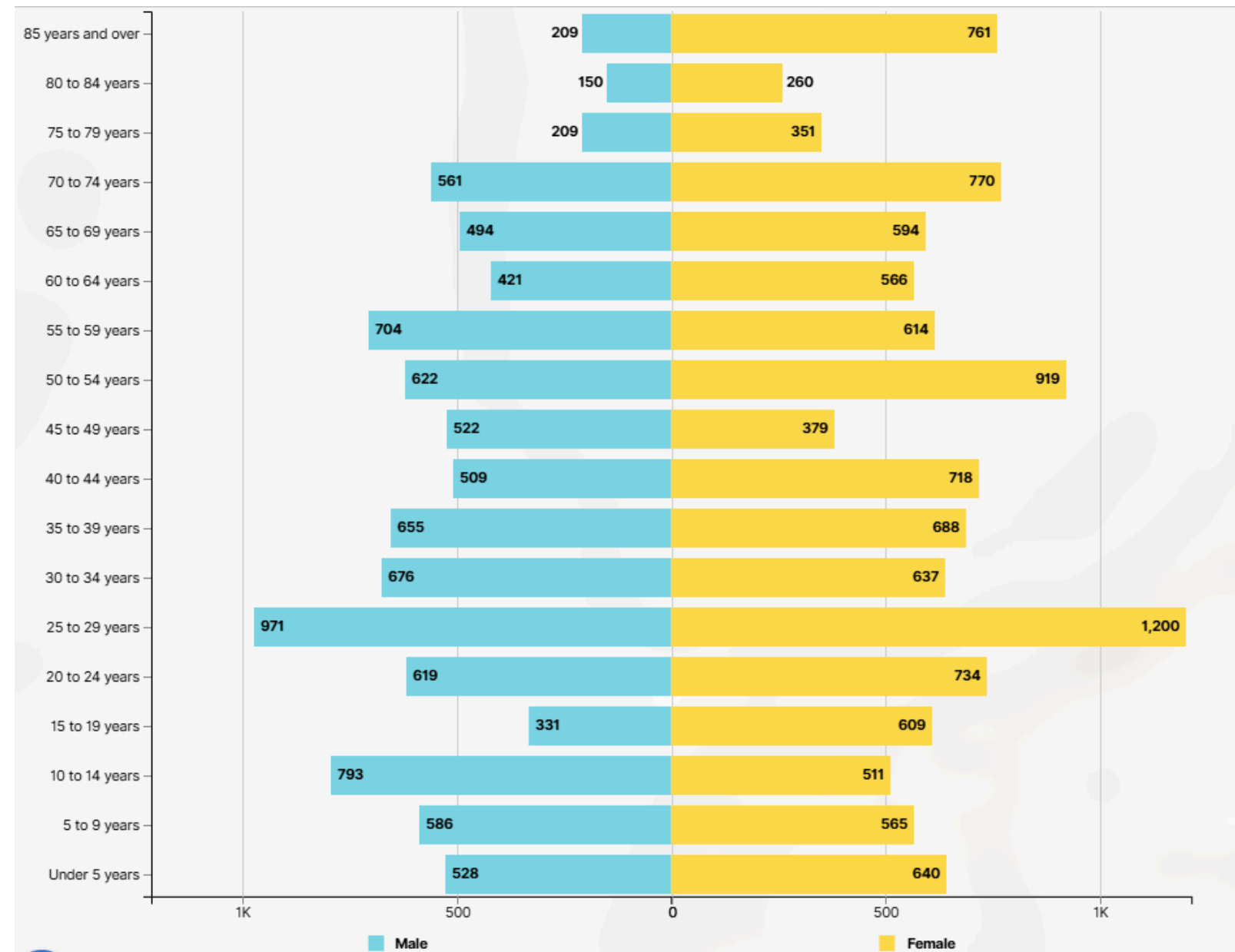
West St. Paul is one of Minnesota's most diverse communities, with a majority White population and about one-third of residents identifying as BIPOC. The largest minority group is Hispanic/Latin, followed by smaller Black, African, and Asian populations. Recent Census data show a slight increase in the White population.



GENERATIONS

As generations evolve, they influence lifestyles and community preferences. Different groups, like Millennials in West St. Paul, seek walkable neighborhoods and diverse activities. It's crucial to assess and adapt to the needs of current and future populations, recognizing that park designs and recreational trends must evolve over time. Celebrating intergenerational interactions is also important.

Interestingly, the city's age cohorts do not show a typical distribution. Several age cohorts are much larger (25-29, 50-54, 70-74, and 85+) than other age cohorts.



OUR PARKS SYSTEM TODAY

SYSTEM OVERVIEW

17

CITY PARKS

4

MAJOR FACILITIES*
THOMPSON ACTIVITY CENTER IS A SHARED FACILITY

12

YEAR-ROUND
PARK STAFF

15%

PERCENT OF CITY
THAT IS PARKLAND

145

ACRES OF CITY PARK LAND

94%

RESIDENTS WITHIN 10
MINUTE WALK OF A PARK

\$4.6M

BUDGET
OPERATING & CAPITAL

\$220

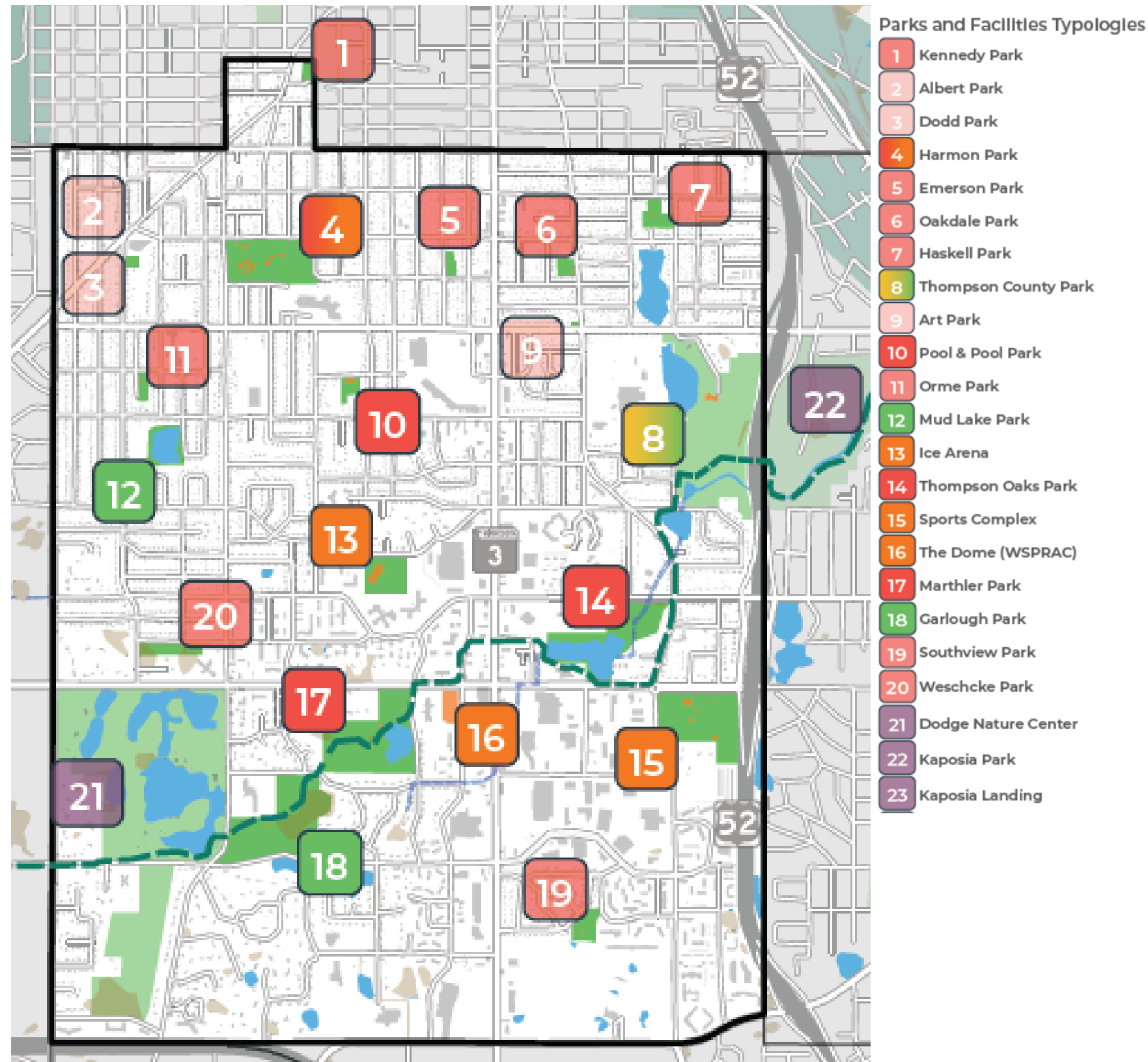
SPENDING PER
RESIDENT



EXISTING PARK AMENITIES

10	Playgrounds	7	Picnic Shelters
6	Warming Houses	6	Skating Rinks
6	Basketball Courts	8	Baseball Fields
4	Nature Areas	3	Soccer / Football Fields
3	Monuments	2	Pavilions
1	Fishing Pier	2	Public Art
1	Volleyball Court	1	Splash Pad
		1	Pool

PARK SYSTEM MAP



PARK TYPOLOGY

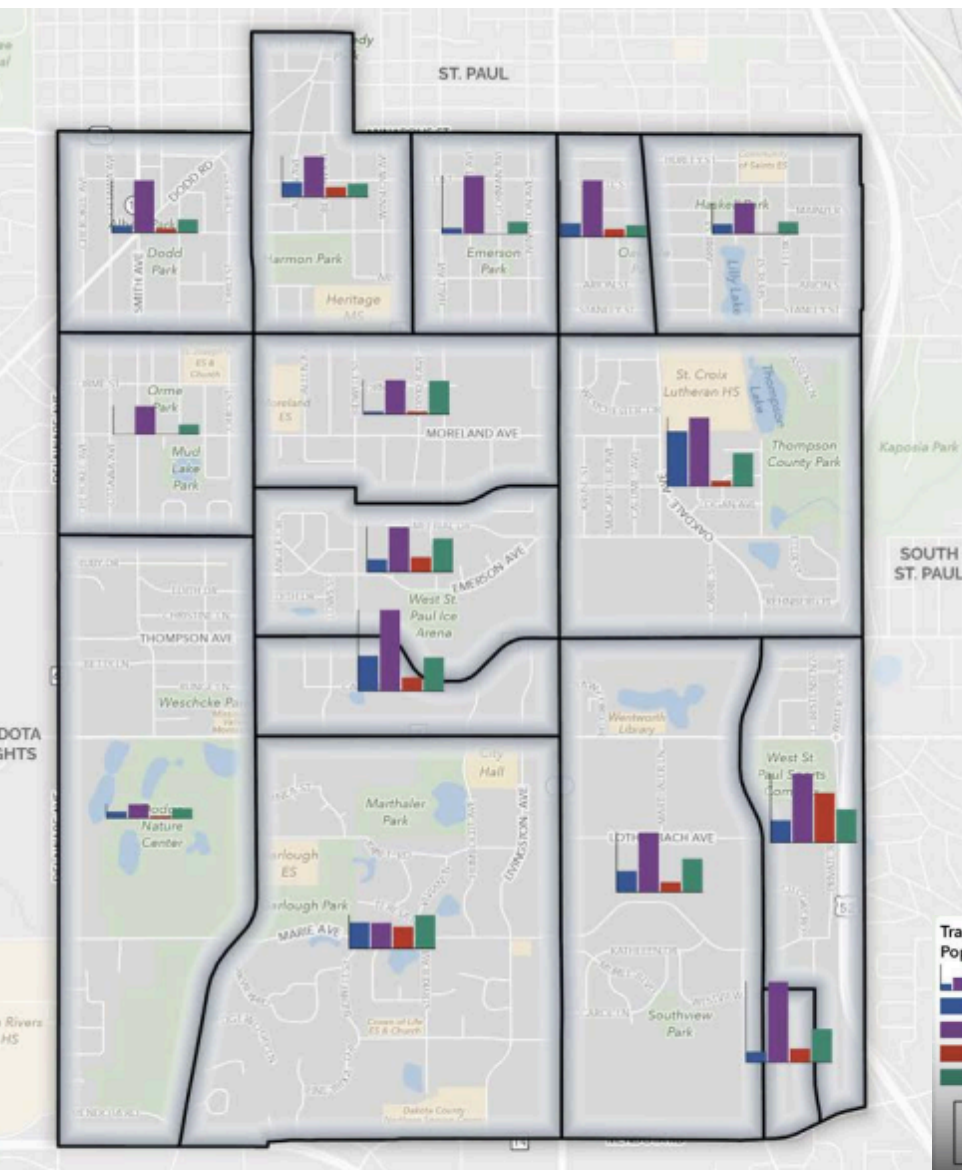
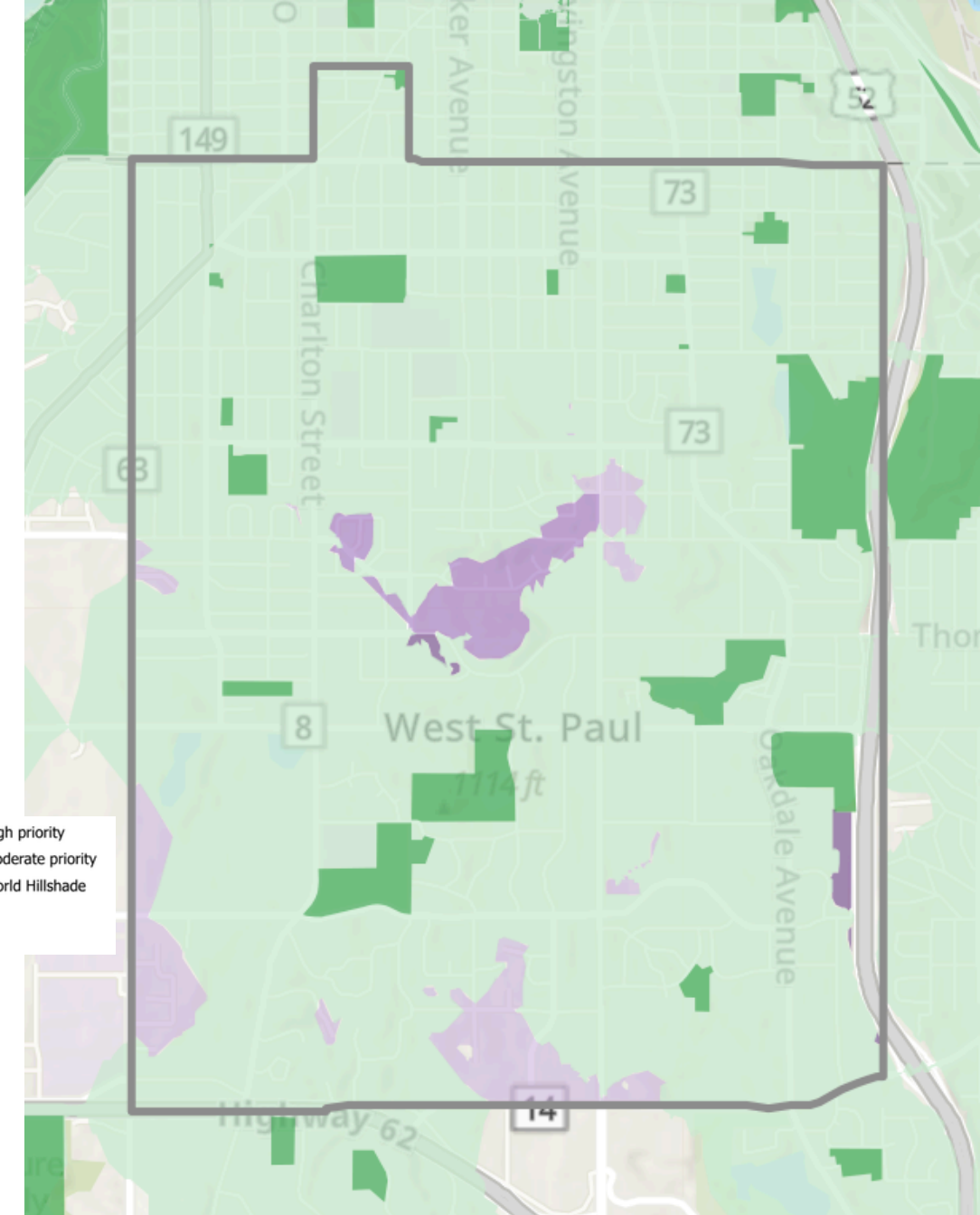
	Description	Size	Service Area	Locations
REGIONAL	Park that serves the entire county, region, or state. May receive funding from Dakota County and/or Met Council.	30 acres or more	Metro area	Thompson County Park
COMMUNITY	A city-wide asset that offers larger recreation and gathering opportunities. Handles larger groups, noise, and maintenance facilities.	2-10 acres	City-wide	Harmon, 150 Thompson, Marthaler, Sports Complex
NEIGHBORHOOD	Typically serves one neighborhood with users needing to cross few busy streets. Likely has a few recreation, gathering, and play options.	2-10 acres	1/2 mile radius, about a 10-minute walk	Kennedy, Haskell, Oakdale, Orme, Weschcke, Southview
POCKET	Serves high-density areas not well served by other parks. Likely focused on one or two gathering uses, not recreation focused	Less than 2 acres	A business node, district, or other unique space	Albert, Dodd, Emerson
PRESERVE	Focus on natural habitats and conservation with minimal, if any, recreational opportunities.			Garlough, Mud Lake Dodge Nature Center
GREENWAY	A linear nature, walking, and bicycling-focused trail that connects multiple parks and destinations.			River-to-River Greenway
SCHOOL	The outdoor green space associated with a learning facilities. Likely includes recreation, play, and open space. Public or semi-public.			Moreland, Garlough, Heritage, private schools
FACILITY	A special use building or facility that meets a particular recreation or leisure need.			Ice Arena, Pool, Dome

PARK ACCESS

Having a park nearby enhances health and well-being, fosters social connections, and boosts property values. According to the national standard set by the Trust for Public Land, all residents should be within a 10-minute walk of a park. West St. Paul boasts excellent park accessibility, particularly when considering the public Dodge Nature Center in the evaluation. With 90% of residents able to reach a park on foot, we are performing admirably. Although it may be challenging to bridge the remaining gaps in access as a fully developed community, it is not impossible. West St. Paul does have two distinct neighborhoods with limited access:

- Apartments near Carmel Ave and Bellows St: This high-density area lacks a public park, although Weschcke and Marthaler Parks are in close proximity. While the apartments offer large, albeit mostly unprogrammed, green spaces, residents still have some outdoor access.
- Single-family homes west of the Dakota County Northern Service Center: These spacious lots are heavily wooded, meaning outdoor access primarily occurs in private yards.

94% RESIDENTS WITHIN A 10-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK



EQUITY ANALYSIS

As one of the state’s most diverse communities, West St. Paul welcomes individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and resources.

Each neighborhood in the city is distinct, characterized by varying development patterns, land uses, histories, and demographics. The First Ward, which encompasses the eastern third of the city, has a higher concentration of low-income individuals and residents of color. As one moves west into the Second and Third Wards, neighborhoods tend to be more affluent and exhibit less racial and ethnic diversity.

The First Ward and the lower Second Ward feature numerous smaller homes and apartments, making them appealing and accessible to many low-income residents, people of color, and those without vehicles or with disabilities.

As we move forward in planning parks, facilities, programs, and events, it’s essential to take into account the unique needs and characteristics of each neighborhood. Additionally, we should consider public safety, health, transportation, and economic development as key elements that influence where, when, and what types of programs, partnerships, and practices are necessary or beneficial.

On the next page, we use data from the Trust for Public Land to understand who lives within a 10-minute walk of each park. While people visit many parks, they are most likely to visit the park within a half-mile of their home.

Population Served

Park	Total Pop.
Harmon	4,584
Kennedy	4,035
Haskell	3,629
Thompson County*	3,544
Art	3,274
Albert	3,227
150 Thompson	3,222
Oakdale	3,180
Emerson	3,128
Poolside	2,953
Dodd	2,936
Orme	2,401
Mud Lake	2,217
Weschcke	2,203
Marthaler	2,147
Garlough	1,997
Sports Complex	1,907
Southview	1,873

Youth

Park	Youth %
Kennedy	29%
Albert	27%
Haskell	27%
Dodd	26%
Emerson	26%
Harmon	26%
Mud Lake	26%
Oakdale	26%
Orme	26%
Southview	26%
Sports Complex	26%
Art	24%
Thompson County*	24%
Poolside	23%
150 Thompson	23%
Weschcke	23%
Marthaler	20%
Garlough	19%

BIPOC Population

Park	BIPOC %
Southview	53%
Sports Complex	47%
Haskell	46%
150 Thompson	46%
Oakdale	44%
Kennedy	43%
Thompson County*	42%
Art	41%
Marthaler	41%
Emerson	40%
Weschcke	38%
Poolside	34%
Harmon	32%
Albert	27%
Dodd	24%
Mud Lake	24%
Orme	24%
Garlough	22%

Low-Income

Park	Low-Income %
Southview	79%
Marthaler	72%
Sports Complex	68%
150 Thompson	67%
Weschcke	61%
Garlough	56%
Oakdale	54%
Thompson County*	53%
Art	52%
Haskell	52%
Emerson	51%
Kennedy	45%
Poolside	43%
Harmon	41%
Albert	37%
Dodd	37%
Mud Lake	35%
Orme	35%

Data represents those living within a 10-minute walk of each park. Source: Trust for Public Land's ParkServe tool

PARTNERS

County Parks & Facilities

THOMPSON COUNTY PARK

Thompson County Park, a 57-acre retreat in West St. Paul, features an accessible playground, picnic areas with views of Thompson Lake, and miles of wooded trails connecting to the River to River Greenway. It includes the Dakota Lodge event center and an Activity Center for senior groups, both of which were built through a collaboration between the county and the city. ISD 197 plays an important role in activating and managing the Activity Center.

The county is considering updates to enhance the park and its amenities, with a focus on creating high-quality outdoor spaces. As long-term partners at this site, the city seeks to foster close collaboration with the county and the school in county-led planning, funding, and operational strategies.

RIVER TO RIVER GREENWAY

The River to River Greenway is a 7.7-mile path connecting Mendota Heights, West St. Paul, and South St. Paul, starting at the Lilydale trailhead and ending at Kaposia Landing. It links various locations, including parks, schools, and commercial areas, while showcasing historical narratives and conservation spaces. The county manages the greenway, collaborating with the city for maintenance and potential future greenway developments. If additional greenways are proposed, the county would serve as a valuable partner in these efforts.

Schools

West St. Paul is part of the West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools (School District 197), which includes eight schools serving over 5,000 students from multiple communities. Within the city, there are three schools:

- Garlough Environmental Magnet School (K-4)
- Moreland Arts & Health Sciences School (K-4)
- Heritage E-STEM Magnet School (5-8)

The city also has several private schools.

TriDistrict Community Education collaborates with local school districts to offer community programs. Schools are crucial for community education, providing programming and outdoor spaces. The city encourages partnerships to enhance recreation and social connections.

Dodge Nature Center

Established in 1967 by Olivia Irvine Dodge, the Dodge Nature Center is one of Minnesota's oldest and largest nature centers, spanning over 460 acres across West St. Paul, Mendota Heights, and Cottage Grove. As a nonprofit, it provides environmental and agricultural experiences through various programs and events.

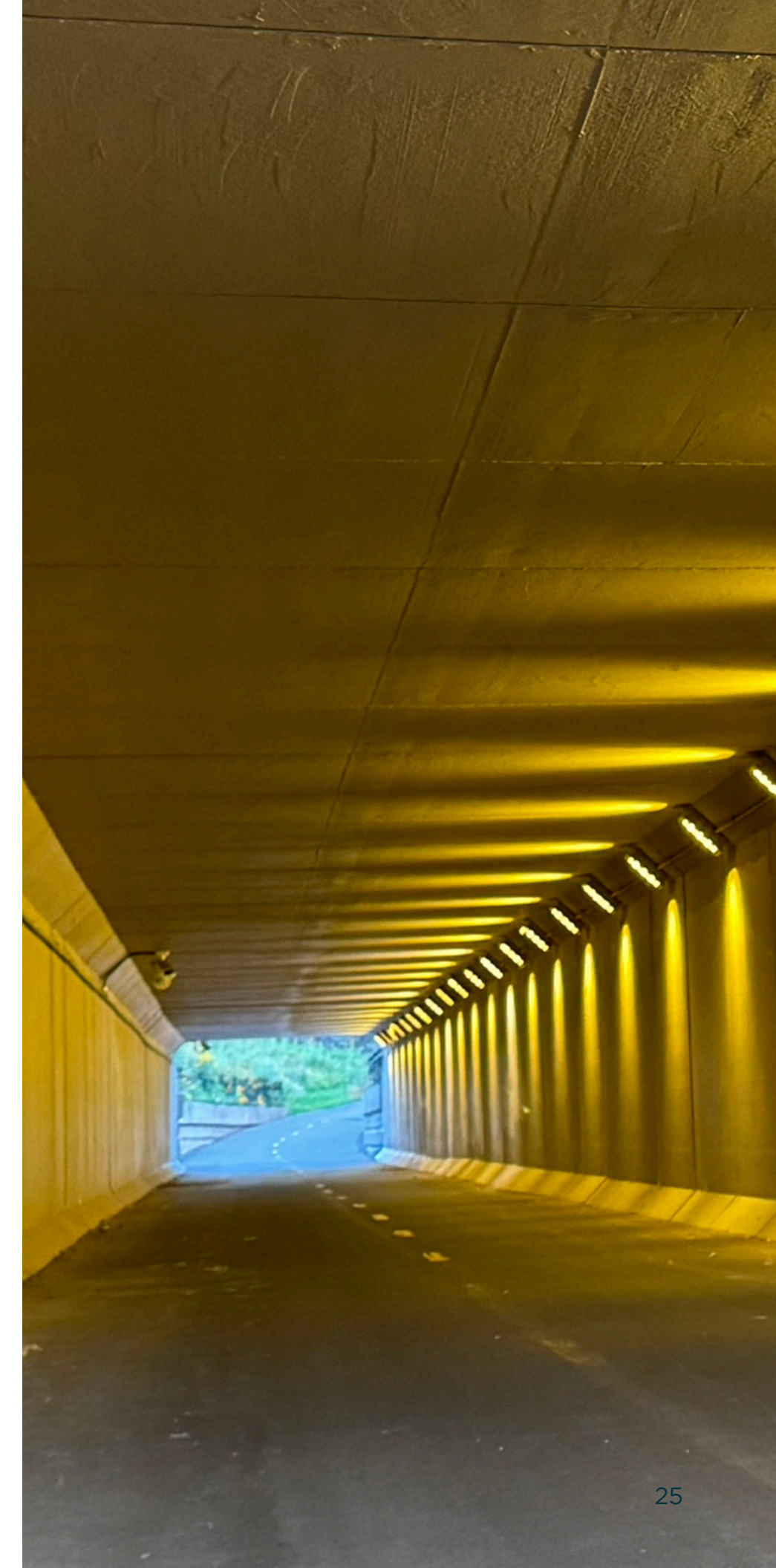
Key features include:

- The Main Property (110 acres): Offers nature programs, hiking trails, a nature preschool, a working farm, raptor mews, and a bee apiary.
- The Marie Property (40 acres): A peaceful area for hiking, showcasing native woodland flowers, but lacks buildings and restrooms.

If the center ever closes, the land would remain publicly accessible, with the city working to maintain public access in collaboration with county partners.

Neighboring Communities

West St. Paul collaborates with nearby cities—St. Paul, South St. Paul, Inver Grove Heights, Sunfish Lake, and Mendota Heights—through formal agreements to share resources and staff. These partnerships help optimize resources and enhance recreational offerings, improving quality of life. The city is eager to collaborate with its neighbors on park system plans and aims to consider regional capital investments to avoid overlapping projects.



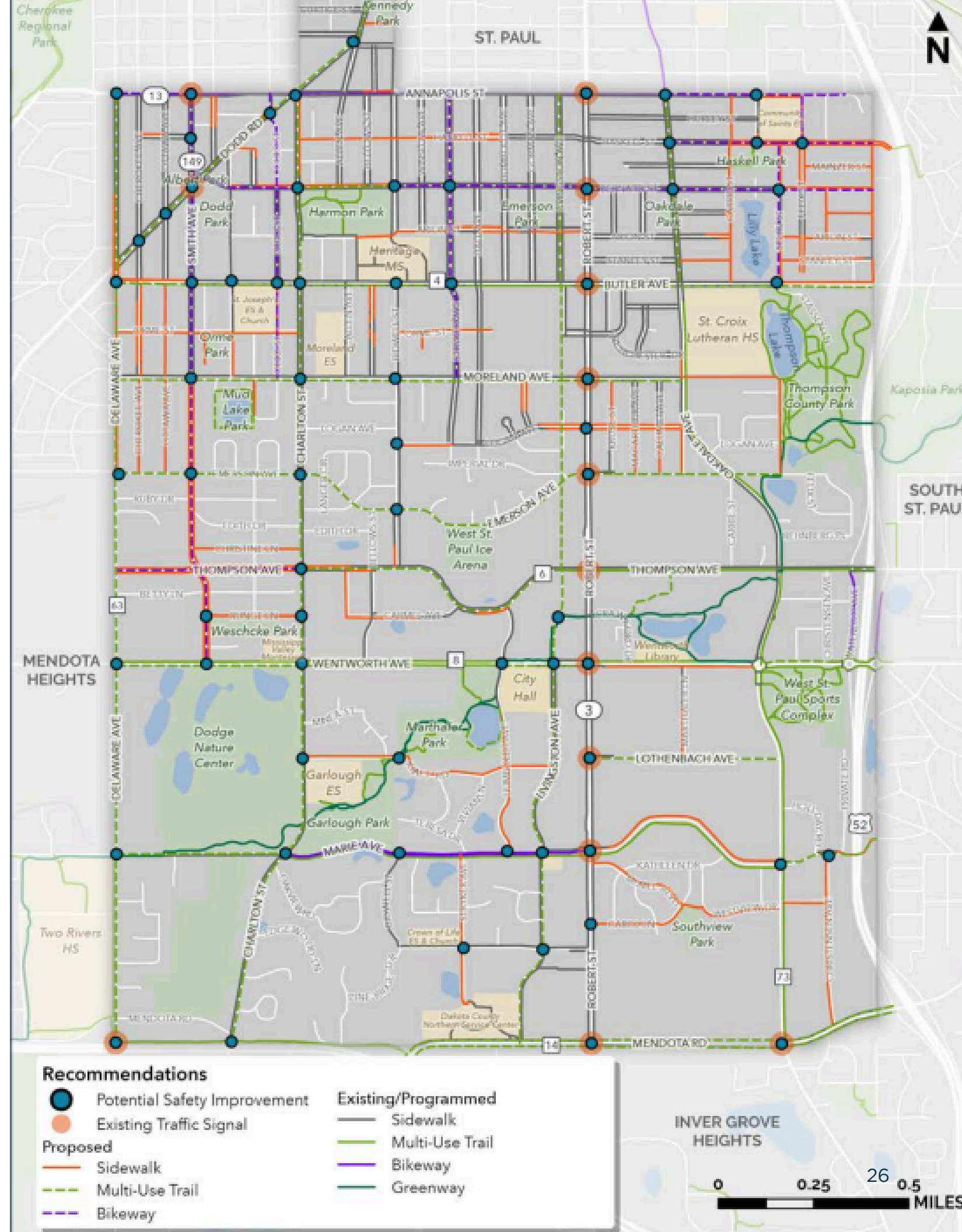
TRAILS & SIDEWALKS

West St. Paul's walkability is one of its greatest assets. The community has expressed a desire to make it even safer and easier to navigate the community using all modes of transportation.

As roads are reconstructed, the city's Complete Streets policy and GO West St. Paul plan call for multi-modal design. Several recent roadway projects have expanded the city's sidewalk and trail network.

Dakota County is working to complete its greenways plan, which includes the development of the River-to-River Greenway.

The map to the right highlights the recommended trail and sidewalk improvement projects as included in the GO West St. Paul plan. As parks are major destinations for those on foot or by bike, we would like to align with these recommendations.



Existing Conditions

RECENT PARK IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

SPORTS COMPLEX

Year: 2012, 2017

A two-phase project expanded the existing park area, increasing it from 19 to 23 acres, and upgraded and refreshed the existing Sports Complex, originally built in 1987, to host most of the community's sporting events.

- Phase 1: Expand the park by developing 4 acres of residential property, adding parking, green space, a new playground, and a picnic area. (2012)
- Phase 2: Redevelop existing park with upgraded irrigation and ball field lighting, 2 new picnic/shade structures, a new plaza/drop-off area and overlaid parking lot and trails. (2017)

DOME

Year: 2012, 2023

The indoor facility opened for use in November 2012. The 110,000-square-foot facility can easily accommodate soccer, football, and baseball practices. After a decade of use, the turf field was replaced in 2023.

HARMON PARK

Year: 2014-2015

Harmon plays host to many large events but lacked adequate facilities. In 2014, the city pursued a major renovation with new and reconfigured ballfields, concessions, and parking. A new warming house and neighborhood building were added for all-season enjoyment. Finally, a new splash pad and playground were built in the northwest corner of the park. Harmon remains one of the busiest parks in the city.

PLAYGROUNDS

Several playgrounds across the system have been upgraded in recent years, including:

- Haskell (2019)
- Marthaler North (2020)
- Emerson (2021)

MARTHALER PARK

Year: 2018-2024

A three-phased project to improve the active and natural areas of Marthaler Park, and advance a vision for a multi-use, community-centered space for play, gatherings, and enjoyment of nature.

- Phase 1: South Marthaler Improvements (2018-2019): stormwater management, playground, basketball, and volleyball
- Phase 2: Expansion of River-to-River Greenway (2021)
- Phase 3: North Marthaler Improvements (2023-2024): new pavilion, playground, stormwater management, fishing pier, and trail

THOMPSON OAKS

Year: 2022-2023

Historically, a creek ran through the site. The creek was diverted to a storm pipe, and for decades, the park near Thompson and Oakdale was home to the city's golf course. The city closed the golf course in 2018 after declining participation. Part of the site was redeveloped for residential use. The city partnered with the county to develop the River to River Greenway, which now runs through the site. With 25% of the city's stormwater collecting on the site for years and decades as construction debris storage, the city was both polluted and critically important to the health of the community's water. A major wetland restoration project was pursued, which includes trails, boardwalk, habitat, and water quality improvements.


ICE ARENA

Year: 2022-2024


Initially built in 1971, the ice arena underwent an expansion in 1997, which included the addition of a lobby, concessions, bathrooms, and offices. In 2022, in partnership with West St. Paul Youth Hockey Association and Two Rivers Hockey Boosters, the city added a dryland practice space and improved locker rooms. In 2024, the parking lot was expanded and improved, including a new drop-off location. The following year, improvements were made to heating, security, technology, roofing, and siding.



PARKS DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW


 Parks, Trails, & Sidewalk Planning

 Parks & Facilities Operations & Maintenance

 Park Activation & Community Events

 Community Engagement

 Recreation Programming

 Recycling & Waste Abatement

 Sustainability & Environment

 Volunteer Engagement

 Arts & Placemaking

PARKS DEPARTMENT DUTIES

Parks, Trails, & Sidewalk Planning

The Parks Department is crucial in planning capital projects, involving activities such as:

- Establishing vision
- Selecting landscape design consultants
- Engaging with the community
- Securing approvals
- Managing budgets
- Supporting construction management
- Organizing grand openings

Post-project, they collaborate with the Public Works Department to maintain spaces. Their leadership in parks, facilities, community engagement, and tree management makes their involvement in planning trails and sidewalks valuable, benefiting the community through effective partnerships.

Facilities Operations & Maintenance

Maintaining beautiful parks necessitates almost daily upkeep and attention.

Currently, a dedicated team comprising full-time, part-time, and seasonal Public Works employees oversees the maintenance of the city's parks. The Ice Arena and Pool are managed by Parks facility staff, while a third party, with support from Parks staff, currently oversees the Dome.

We are immensely grateful for the collaboration and support we receive from athletic associations, adopt-a-park leaders, and community volunteers. These partnerships allow us to enhance our offerings and reduce costs. As we plan for new parks and facilities, we must thoughtfully consider the long-term maintenance and operational needs of these amenities.

Park Activation and Community Events

Our initiatives to infuse energy, programming, and celebrations into our parks add a vibrant layer to the community. Residents have expressed that these events significantly enhance their perception of the city's quality of life and have requested more programming options. For some individuals, factors such as time, finances, interest, or skills may hinder their ability to join a sports team or enroll in a recreation program. Therefore, park activations and community events are essential for their well-being and foster connections with both the system and their neighbors. We have experienced great success with offerings like Movies in the Park, Tour de Rec, and Explore West St. Paul Days, and we eagerly anticipate new opportunities to unite people.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is crucial for the city and the Parks and Recreation department, fostering strong connections with residents. Involving the community in decision-making enhances the relevance and effectiveness of programs, resulting in increased participation and a more vibrant atmosphere.

Key benefits include:

- Building trust and transparency to encourage funding support.
- Identifying and addressing access barriers to create inclusive programs.
- Fostering partnerships with local organizations for enhanced resources and programming.

The Parks Department collaborates with other departments to prioritize community engagement, ensuring responsiveness to needs, promoting inclusivity, and fostering a more dynamic recreational environment for all residents.

Recreation & Programming

West St. Paul Parks and Recreation offers a wide range of year-round recreation and enrichment activities designed to improve health, build connections, and promote an enjoyment of the outdoors. We regularly partner with Mendota Heights, ISD 197, and Dakota County to offer community and recreation programming. Currently, we offer programs for youth, adults, and the broader community, including:

- Ice Skating Lessons
- Sports Skills Camps
- Adaptive Bowling League
- Games
- Musical Theatre Camp
- Special Interest Classes
- Pickleball Lessons
- Bean Bag League
- Harmon Park
- Community Egg Hunt
- Halloween
- Movies in the Park
- Soccer
- Tennis Match Play
- Makers Market
- Lessons
- Kids Garage Sale
- Golf Lessons
- Day Camps
- Bike Rodeo
- Adult Yoga
- Tour de Rec
- T-Ball
- Explore West St. Paul Days
- Pickleball Leagues
- Gymnastics
- Non-School Day Activities
- Playground Programs

930

AVERAGE NUMBER OF REGISTERED PARTICIPANTS

133

AVERAGE NUMBER OF PROGRAMS OFFERED YEARLY



Sustainability & Environment

The Parks Department collaborates with local schools, community groups, and businesses to organize tree planting events, gardens, and sustainability workshops, thereby enhancing West St. Paul's beauty and fostering community pride. It partners with the Environmental Committee to implement eco-friendly practices, such as exploring renewable energy sources and promoting recycling, to foster a resilient community. Additionally, the department focuses on maintaining and expanding green spaces, ensuring accessibility while balancing recreation and ecological preservation, contributing to a vibrant and sustainable environment for future generations.

Recycling & Waste Abatement

West St. Paul is an annual participant in the Dakota County Community Waste Abatement Grant, which funds recycling and reuse initiatives, as well as educational programs. This grant also funds a recycling coordinator position in West St. Paul, which is shared with neighboring communities and housed in the Parks Department.

Activities in this area include:

- annual collections of mattresses, confidential papers for shredding, pumpkins and holiday lights
- educational booths at community events
- swap events to promote reuse of popular materials
- recycling education and assistance for multifamily properties
- local resources for resident questions regarding proper disposal methods

Volunteer Engagement

Volunteers help strengthen the community and the services offered within West St. Paul. Volunteering raises awareness of important social needs, connects communities, and builds friendships.

West St. Paul shares a Volunteer Engagement Manager with the cities of Apple Valley, Inver Grove Heights, and Rosemount. The position is housed in the Parks Department. Volunteer opportunities include:

- Adopt-A-Park, Street, Bus Shelter
- Bluebird Assistants
- Code Enforcement
- Gardening/Landscaping Assistance
- City Events

293

AVERAGE NUMBER OF ANNUAL VOLUNTEERS

2,894

AVERAGE NUMBER OF ANNUAL VOLUNTEER HOURS

Arts & Placemaking

West St. Paul boasts a modest yet expanding collection of arts and placemaking initiatives. Throughout the city, we have gathered enthusiasm for enhancing the area's allure and vibrancy for living, working, and recreation. In our efforts to develop these initiatives, the Parks Department, Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee, and the dedicated volunteer WSP Arts Committee will be vital in establishing processes, promoting projects, and securing necessary funding. As a department, we eagerly anticipate these projects. This plan highlights the countless opportunities we have to further advance arts and placemaking.

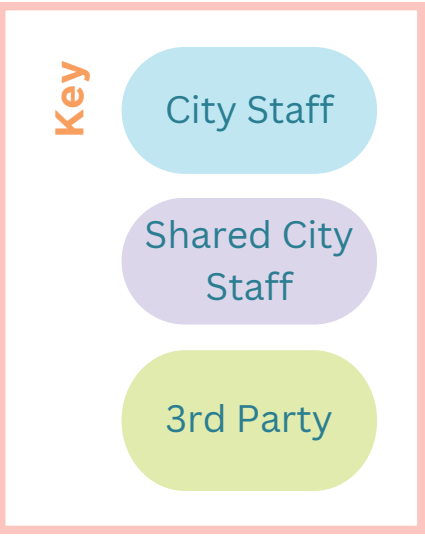
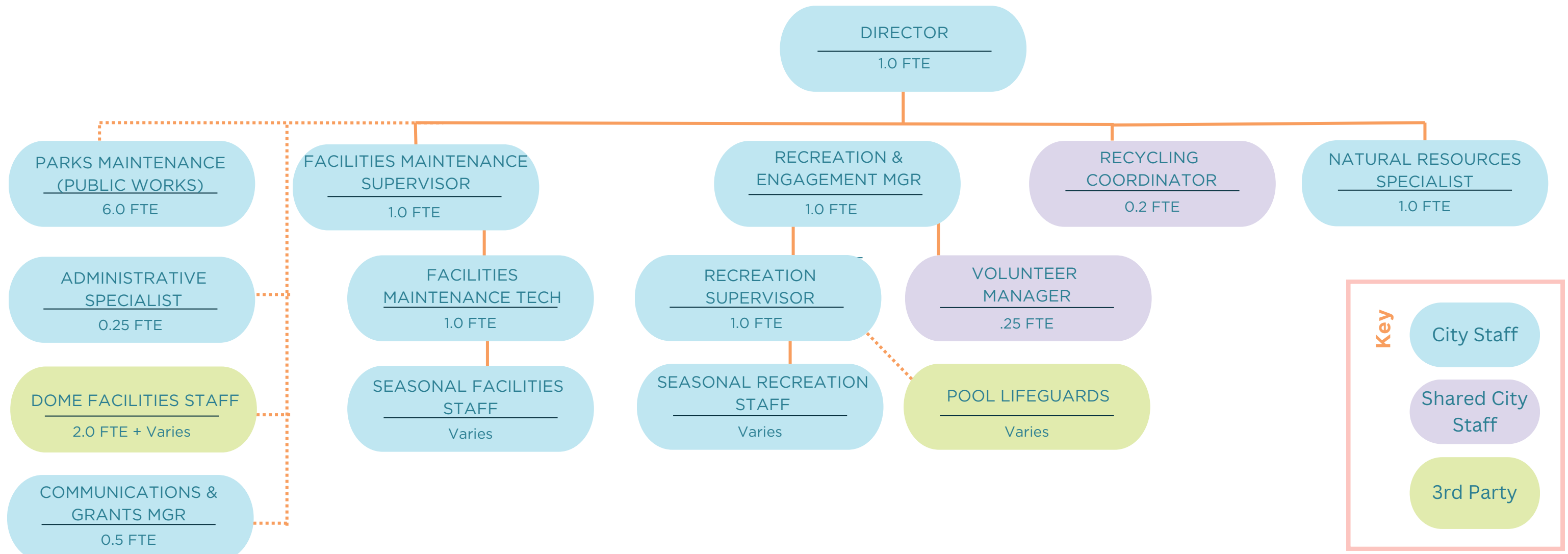


EXISTING STAFFING

The parks system is overseen by a small, dedicated team of experts. Until recently, this division was under the supervision of the Public Works Department. Now functioning as an independent department, the Parks Department has implemented several recent changes and enhancements.

The city employs a combination of full-time, seasonal, shared, and contract staff to effectively manage its various programs and facilities.

- Parks Maintenance: Though still technically part of the Public Works Department, the Parks Department collaborates closely with its maintenance partners.
- Construction Management: Building and construction experts in the Public Works and Community Development departments support the Parks Department with park renovation, trail development, and building upgrades.
- Shared City Positions: The roles of Recycling Coordinator and Volunteer Manager are shared with nearby cities.
- Third-Party Contracts: The city collaborates with the YMCA to provide lifeguards at the pool and with SFDMG to oversee the Dome.
- Safety Coordination: The Parks Department collaborates with local Police and Fire departments to ensure a safe and healthy park environment.
- Collaborative Initiatives: Through partnerships with neighboring cities, Dakota County, schools, and organizations, the city can offer a wider range of programs and events than would be feasible with just West St. Paul staff.



ADVISORY TEAMS & COMMITTEES

Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee

The Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) advises the City Council in matters pertaining to parks, park facilities, recreation, and programming. This work encompasses reviewing park policies, planning park improvement projects, engaging with the community, educating stakeholders, conducting research, and enhancing community events and programs. PRAC consists of nine members from throughout the city. It meets once a month or on an as-needed basis.

Recent work of the committee includes:

- Parks System Plan and associated community engagement
- Marthaler Park design
- 150 Thompson public space
- Park Asset Management Plan and equity-based decision-making tool
- Parks safety and stewardship plan
- Athletic Facility Rental Policy
- Public Space Smoking Policy
- Park Naming Policy and Establishing the names for Art and Poolside parks
- Explore West St. Paul Days

Equity Team

The Equity Team consists of City Councilmembers, city staff, and community stakeholders. The team exists to make the city a healthier, more welcoming, and equitable community. The team reviews and makes recommendations on city operations, policies, and programs from a wide range of topics, including housing, engagement, public safety, human resources, administration, and parks.

Environmental Committee

The Environmental Committee advises the City Council in matters pertaining to the environment and sustainability. This includes reviewing development site plans, developing environmental policies and protocols, engaging with the community, educating stakeholders, conducting research, and enhancing community events and programs. The Environmental Committee consists of nine members from throughout the city. It meets once a month or as needed.

Recent work of the committee includes:

- Parks System Plan and associated community engagement
- Various development site reviews
- Marthaler Park design
- 150 Thompson public space
- Park Assessment Management Plan and equity-based decision-making tool
- Explore West St. Paul Days

Events, Engagement, & Communications Team

With the City Council adopting a strategic priority of improving and expanding community engagement, the Events, Engagement, and Communications (EEC) Team was formed. The team includes representatives from each of the city's departments with the charge of ensuring public touch-points are managed efficiently, effectively, and in a coordinated and standardized manner. The EEC Team is focused on improving engagement with the city's diverse communities, with a particular focus building relationships with:

- Those under 30 years of age
- Renters
- Hispanic/Latino/Spanish-Speaking
- East African
- Neurodivergent/Disability Community

The City's various committees, teams, and partners provide critical perspectives, insights, connections, and volunteer hours. They will be instrumental in implementing the Parks System Plan.

OPERATIONAL PARTNERS

Operating a parks system and providing high-quality recreation programs requires strong partnerships. West St. Paul is no stranger to collaborating with other agencies, jurisdictions, and stakeholders. Through partnerships, the City can offer more programs and access to more facilities than would be possible as an individual organization. For example, the City partners with the YMCA to operate the municipal pool, with surrounding communities to offer the Tour de Rec program, and with the county and school district to operate the Activity Center at Thompson County Park.

As more programs and facilities are introduced, the City will strive to expand its partnerships. We're thankful to our many operational partners, including but not limited to:

- Cities of South St. Paul, Mendota Heights, Inver Grove Heights, Sunfish Lake, Lilydale, Apple Valley, and Rosemount
- Dakota County
- ISD 197
- YMCA
- Athletic Associations
- Nonprofit Partners

BUDGET

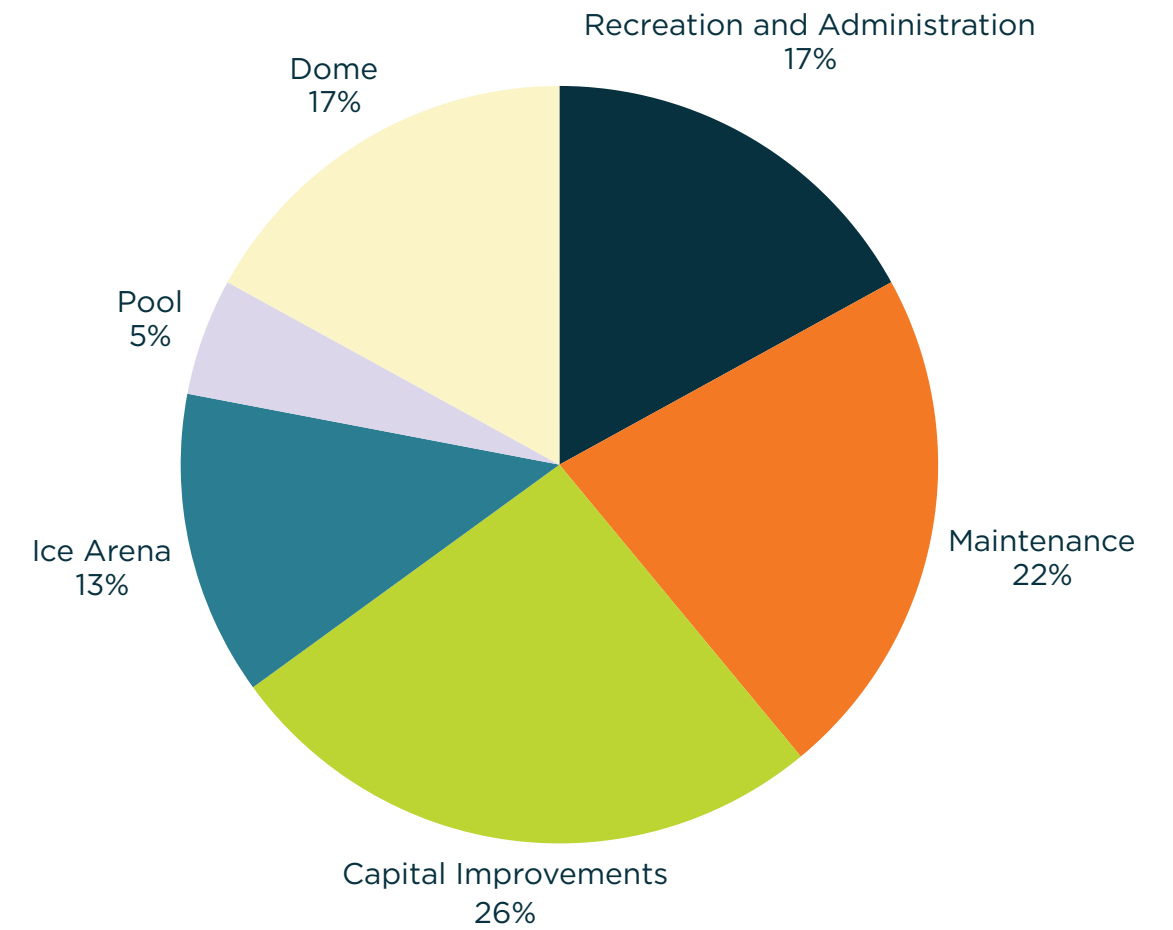
Municipal funding for parks is both dynamic and intricate, encompassing a variety of financial sources and allocations. This funding is essential to cover everything from maintenance of the grounds and facilities to programming, buildings, and overall operations. Running the park system requires a comprehensive toolbox, complete with equipment, facilities, supplies, technology (including hardware and software), communications tools, vehicles, and the necessary utilities and staff to support buildings, programs, and events.

Revenue streams can include local taxes, user fees, state and federal grants, as well as private donations. These funds ensure that parks remain clean, safe, and accessible, while also supporting a range of diverse programs and activities for the community. Additionally, funding supports the upkeep of park infrastructure, such as playgrounds, walking paths, and recreational facilities, ensuring that everyone can enjoy these public spaces.

The parks system is funded through a diverse portfolio of funding and revenue sources, including:

- General tax levy
- User fees and rentals
- Program registrations
- Grants
- Shared agreements
- Sponsorships and donations
- Enterprise fund balances (self-supporting facilities like the arena, dome, and pool)
- Development financing tools (e.g. TIF, park dedication fees)

Approximate Park Budget



I believe in put up or shut up.

Devona Weatherhead
First Woman to Serve on WSP City Council