



SECTION 5.

ACTION PLAN

How We Achieve Our Vision

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Action Plan Overview
- System-wide Goals

Action Plan Overview

DREAMING BIG

The System Plan is our opportunity to think and dream big. It's our chance to outline a new path for our community's parks and the well-being of future generations. Not all dreams come true, but by dreaming, we might be able to spark change!

RECOMMENDATIONS

The vision set forth in the Parks System Plan will be implemented through a set of recommendations and strategies over the course of the next decade.

1. VISION ELEMENTS
2. SYSTEM-WIDE INITIATIVES
3. PARK IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Shoot for the moon, and if you miss you'll be among the stars.

RECOMMENDATION CATEGORIES

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Recommendations to improve or continue best practices and customer-oriented, transparent operations.

BIG IDEAS

Recommendations that may be a change in direction or have broad impacts to the entire system, and may take time to implement.

CATALYTIC PROJECTS

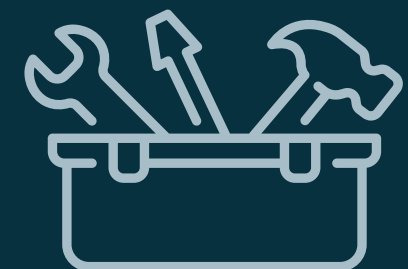
Recommendations that have the potential for a domino effect. Due to catalytic nature, we may want to invest sooner rather than later.

BOLD AMBITIONS

Recommendations that may be difficult to achieve but that we'll include to inspire. We'll explore when the timing is right.

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLBOX

Unique ideas, problems, and needs require unique approaches. We'll use a large set of tools to implement the recommendations set forth in the plan.



- Projects
- Plans
- Programs
- Policies
- Protocols
- Partnerships
- Public Engagement
- Promotion & Education

System-Wide Goals & Initiatives



ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Operate with transparency, efficiency, and a focus on impact



SYSTEMS THINKING

Plan, invest, and operate the parks as a coordinated, cohesive, and unified system



BELONGING

Foster a strong sense of community, uniqueness, and inclusion



ACCESSIBILITY

Provide comprehensive amenities and safe connections that increase park equity, access, and use



RECREATION & PROGRAMMING

Support play, well-being, and growth for all ages



NATURAL ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Assemble a greener community and address climate change



STEWARDSHIP

Maintain and operate a great park system



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Invest in staff and their professional growth



FINANCIAL VALUE

Operate the parks system in a manner that is financially sustainable and of high value to the community

GOAL 1

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Operate with transparency, efficiency, and a focus on impact

1A. Emphasize good governance values and practices

- **Community-Centered Work:** Adopt a user- and community-centered approach to planning, operations, and communications
- **Make Information Accessible:** Utilize traditional and new communications resources and tools to ensure transparency in public meetings, boards, commissions, and city council activities, design processes, and vendor selection
- **Department of Excellence:** Strive to achieve the highest industry standards for parks and recreation and local government agencies (e.g., Pursue accreditation with the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program and Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies)
- **Annual Progress Report:** Create and disseminate an annual progress report highlighting the accomplishments, progress, and future implementation needs
- **A Living Document:** Update this plan, as necessary, to adjust for changing circumstances, community desires, budgets, and facility needs
- **Update Zoning:** Revise the zoning map and code to incorporate a new parks zoning district that will better manage and regulate the city's open space

1B. Support and leverage the City's Boards and Commissions

- **(Re)Define Committee Roles:** Evaluate and define the role of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, Environmental Committee, Planning Commission, and Equity Team in supporting parks and recreation efforts.
- **Support Onboarding:** Develop an onboarding process and mentorship program
- **Recruit Committee Members:** Actively recruit new members for boards and commissions, especially from underrepresented communities, perspectives, and skillsets
- **Beyond the Board Room:** Engage members in conducting research and community engagement efforts
- **Cross-Committee Conversations:** Facilitate coordinated conversations between boards, commissions, and the City Council
- **Work Planning:** Establish a cycle of committee strategic planning and work plan development
- **Committee Development:** Provide educational opportunities for elected and appointed officials to keep them informed about trends, issues, ethics, rules and regulations, and best practices

1C. Coordinate with community partners

- **Partner Analysis:** Conduct a gap analysis of our community partnerships to assess partnership opportunities
- **Partner Relationships:** Foster new and improved relationships with community organizations, neighboring communities, the county, and other government agencies
- **Project Collaboration:** Coordinate with partners on long-term capital improvements and programs, and explore opportunities to reduce redundancies and share facilities
- **Community Projects:** Consider supporting partner initiatives such as Safe Routes to Schools, green schoolyards, regional trails, and community gardens
- **Coalition Membership:** Join coalitions and initiatives advocating for park-positive legislation and funding at the regional, state, and federal levels
- **Formalizing Agreements:** Develop a transparent, values-based, and reciprocal process for formalizing partnerships, lease agreements, and joint-use or shared facility opportunities with organizations, agencies,

GOAL 2 SYSTEMS THINKING

Plan, invest, and operate the parks as a coordinated, cohesive, and unified system

2A. Apply a goal-oriented approach to park design and investments

- **Park Assessments:** Establish a process to assess existing park conditions, understand neighborhood and community priorities, and enhance park improvement projects.
- **Complete Parks Policy:** Adopt a Complete Parks Policy to promote design excellence. Including standards and guidelines that address aesthetics, architectural and construction quality, functional use, and durability to create inspiring, welcoming, climate-resilient, ecologically-healthy, playful, beautiful, and safe parks.
- **Access Through Innovation:** Expand park access and use by leveraging new technologies, innovations, best practices, multi-functional design, strategic land acquisition, and redevelopment

2B. Strategically distribute facilities and programs within the context of a community-wide system

- **Addressing Disparities:** Address disparities and gaps in parks and amenities, particularly in high-priority areas and areas projected for growth
- **Collaborative Coordination:** Coordinate with public and private partners to meet system goals, reduce redundancies, and expand access through co-location and joint use
- **Data-Driven Decisions:** Utilize technology, level of service analysis, and park audits to capture additional usage and need data
- **Community-Centric Projects:** Consider park projects that highlight the unique activities, history, and natural assets of the surrounding neighborhood
- **Facility Evaluation:** Assess the feasibility of decommissioning outdated, underutilized, and duplicative facilities while enhancing the overall quality and utilization of the remaining similar facilities.
- **Balanced Programming:** Ensure a balanced geographic distribution of programming options to reduce duplication, meet neighborhood needs, and provide a mix of programmed and non-programmed times and spaces

2C. Leverage the catalytic power of parks to drive land and economic development

- **Parks as Economic Drivers:** Collaborate with the Community Development Department to use parks as drivers for redevelopment and economic growth
- **Privately Owned Public Space:** Encourage the establishment of privately owned public spaces, creative streetscapes, and engaging building facades. Seek additional public recreational benefits through zoning, development reviews, and regulatory processes.
- **Private Greening:** Explore partnerships that aim to provide parkland and green spaces in underutilized areas. Consider innovative temporary installations or pop-up events to activate these spaces.
- **Robert Street Spaces:** Leverage the Robert Street Bus Rapid Transit line and private redevelopment to bring new green spaces to the corridor.
- **Support Businesses:** Showcase and partner with local businesses and entrepreneurs at parks, events, and concessions.

GOAL 3 BELONGING

Foster a strong sense of community, uniqueness, and inclusion

3A. Develop an identity and community image that is 'Uniquely West St. Paul'

- **Park Branding:** Enhance the branding of park signage, staff uniforms, vehicles, equipment, and documents to build public awareness and visibility of the department
- **Telling Our History:** Collect and share the city's history in a creative way that resonates with today's park users
- **Park Naming:** Update the park naming policy to guide the naming of new parks and outline a thoughtful process for evaluating park renaming requests
- **WSP Weird:** Embrace the idea of 'West St. Paul Weird' by promoting and celebrating the whimsical, quirky, and unique aspects of our community

3B. Strengthen public events and experiences

- **Spaces for Connection:** Develop innovative spaces, events, and programs that encourage connection
- **Inclusive Events:** Offer inclusive, free, and fun public events that benefit the broader community
- **Varied Programs:** Provide a diverse range of programs tailored to families, youth, and adults
- **Formalizing Partnerships:** When values and mission align, consider partnering with community-oriented organizations to enhance and support community events or programs
- **Quality Emphasis:** Focus on the quality and impact of public events and programs rather than maximizing quantity. Evaluate public events and experiences to ensure they align with community demands and needs, and provide new programs with sufficient time to develop.
- **Advancing Third Places:** Develop a 'Third Place' strategy to promote and enhance community gathering spaces

WHAT IF WE GOT A LITTLE WEIRD?



Baltimore added eyeballs to two harbor trash collectors transforming eyesores into the now beloved Mr. and Mrs Trashwheel.



Downtown Lemont in Illinois rebranded with an effort to celebrate local culture and resident go-getter, known as Lemonsters. The effort includes new mascots, public art, and a parade.



The Lawn on D in Boston is an accessible "adult playground" that features swings, playground equipment and other fun activities sized for adults.



New York City's Home for Retired Park Animals is a place for old play equipment to find a new life and quirky celebration.



It's a uhh... a long story, but Estes Park, Colorado celebrates "Frozen Dead Guy Days" every year with plenty of frigid and freaky fun activities.



Little Debbie Park was built on land donated by the family of the snackmaker. To celebrate, the park includes several snack-themed art installations.



Montrose, Minnesota's annual beauty pageant includes a unique theme, dance, and costume. The winner is paraded through town on a massive swan float.

GOAL 3 BELONGING

Foster a strong sense of community, uniqueness, and inclusion

3C. Celebrate West St. Paul's diversity

- **Understand Barriers:** Partner with diverse communities to better understand barriers to participation, park access, and sense of belonging
- **Building Community Connections:** Provide a wide variety of programs, activities, and events to promote social, multigenerational and cross-cultural interaction and create shared community experiences that bring diverse residents together
- **Community Event Support:** Continue supporting events that celebrate the city's diversity, such as Latine Heritage Days and Pride
- **Department Values:** Foster an organizational culture that values inclusion for staff and park users, recognizes the value of diversity, is respectful and welcoming of people from all backgrounds, and works to remove barriers to involvement
- **Welcoming Messages:** Create and share messages, stories, and park projects that emphasize the expectation that all communities are welcome in our parks

3D. Recognize parks as a unique venue to support and celebrate the arts

- **Art Strategy:** Develop a formal Arts Strategic Plan to guide the growth and integration of various art forms within the community
- **Art is Essential:** Promote creativity, arts, and culture in parks as essential components of a vibrant and modern park system
- **Artists as Community Builders:** Explore opportunities to partner with artists on projects, programs, plans, and engagement
- **Performance Spaces:** Create new spaces that allow for artistic performance and exhibition

3E. Develop a robust engagement strategy and prioritize input for the development of park projects, programs, and events

- **Develop a Comprehensive Engagement Plan:** Create a proactive approach to ensure community members and stakeholders are involved from the earliest stages of park planning, and that information is consistently shared throughout the project's duration
- **Enhance Staff Skills:** Build the capacity of parks staff to continuously engage with community stakeholders and convene those with different priorities for the parks
- **Conduct Regular Community Meetings:** Aim to hold park activations/community meetings at each park on a semi-regular basis to gather and provide feedback regarding programming and park development
- **Value Diverse Forms of Engagement:** Recognize and appreciate all types of community involvement, whether it's in-person, online, or written. Strive to balance feedback with data and align with the values and goals outlined in this and other city-adopted plans.
- **Improve Data Collection and Analysis:** Enhance processes for collecting and analyzing data. Consider using market surveys, community polls, and anonymized cell phone data to gain better insights into park usage, priorities, and community preferences.

GOAL 3

BELONGING

Foster a strong sense of community, uniqueness, and inclusion

3F. Leverage public spaces to build community connections and community health

- **Bring People Together:** Utilize parks and recreation to address the loneliness epidemic. Build social capital and trust by using the parks to bring people together for small gatherings and encourage neighborhood celebrations.
- **Reduce Smoking:** Continue to discourage smoking in public spaces
- **Consider Health Outcomes:** Develop relationships with healthcare providers and public health agencies and explore programs and projects that address health improvement, reduce toxic stress, and work to combat chronic and preventable diseases
- **Support the Homeless:** Strengthen relationships with experts and partner organizations, including government agencies and community organizations, who can provide services for those experiencing homelessness
- **Safe Materials:** Remain knowledgeable and implement best practices around safe and non-toxic material options for amenities like playgrounds and artificial turf
- **Food Access:** Expand access to healthy foods in programming, events, education, partnerships, and site design

GOAL 4

ACCESSIBILITY

Provide comprehensive amenities and safe connections that increase park equity, access, and use

4A. Create strong connections between the transportation and park systems so that people can easily and safely access the parks by foot, bike, wheel, transit, or car

- **System Navigation:** Guide and direct visitors to our parks by developing new park signage and community wayfinding systems
- **Greenways:** Connect the parks through the creation of a network of greenways
- **Pedestrian-First Access:** Enhance pedestrian access to parks by implementing the Complete Streets policy, the Bike and Pedestrian Plan, and making infrastructure improvements. These improvements include completing trail and sidewalk gaps, traffic calming measures, regular maintenance, strategies for crash reduction, education, and enforcement.
- **Walking Loops:** Encourage walking through the creation of walking loops within parks and neighborhoods

4B. Make the parks welcoming and accessible to people with diverse abilities

- **Partner with Disability Experts:** Collaborate with individuals of varying abilities to assess current park facilities and to plan for future improvements
- **Accessible Playground:** Add a dedicated all-abilities playground to the park system
- **Consider All Age Groups:** Develop an Age-Friendly Strategy Plan to address the needs of seniors and youth

GOAL 4 ACCESSIBILITY

Provide comprehensive amenities and safe connections that increase park equity, access, and use

4C. Enhance communication efforts to improve access to information

- **Update Communications Collateral:** Regularly update the city's website, park materials, and other public-facing resources to ensure they are easy to understand, accessible, and user-friendly. This includes resources such as maps, brochures, handouts, volunteer recruitment materials, park safety information, and policies.
- **Welcoming Tone:** Manage parks communication in a creative and fun manner that celebrates the diversity of languages and cultures in West St. Paul, educates the community on critical issues, emphasizes the values and goals outlined in this plan, and brings joy
- **Strategic Communications:** Develop new marketing strategies that consider outreach to diverse racial and ethnic communities
- **Leverage Technology:** Use technology to expand access to information, including the use of QR codes and dynamic signage. Expand access to fast and reliable public Wi-Fi in certain parks and public spaces.
- **Facility Use:** Clearly communicate permitting guidance for athletic and community facilities to ensure easy, safe, and equitable access

4D. Work to expand places to “go”

- **Longer Portable Bathroom Seasons:** Increase the seasonal duration of portable bathroom availability, particularly in frequently visited parks
- **Offer Plumbed Bathrooms:** When feasible, offer plumbed bathrooms at key facilities while ensuring they are safe and sanitary
- **Reduce Vandalism:** Employ design solutions to minimize bathroom vandalism and misuse
- **Universal Access:** Enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of bathrooms by offering standalone gender-neutral bathrooms and changing facilities

4E. Celebrate the parks as year-round destinations

- **Creative Multi-Season Design:** Extend seasonal use through creative and multi-functional design solutions
- **Finishing Touches:** Incorporate landscaping, lighting, and experiences that provide year-round visual interest and habitat
- **Designing for Weather Protection:** Add amenities that provide shade, wind block, and relief from extreme temperatures
- **Adapt Programming to Climate Change:** Adjust programming and operations to accommodate a changing and uncertain climate, particularly warming winters
- **Indoor Activities:** Continue to offer and expand indoor athletics and recreation offerings
- **Winter Maintenance:** Maintain winter services that balance accessibility with safety

GOAL 5 RECREATION & PROGRAMMING

Support play, well-being, and growth for all ages

5A. Continue to support athletic programming and related facilities

- **Equitable Athletics:** Ensure equitable support of athletics throughout the system by fostering partnerships, supporting sports leagues, and implementing city-led programs
- **Access to Facilities:** Expand the use of all athletic and concessions facilities in a manner that is fair and accessible to all user groups. Engage with regular permit holders and others to encourage the use of facilities during non-peak hours, thereby expanding capacity.
- **Innovative Facility Use:** Be open to creative use of athletic facilities for new and expanding sports, games, and activities
- **Hosting Major Events:** Continue to seek opportunities to host major sports competitions, tournaments, and events, and consider facility upgrades that might attract additional usage

5B. Enhance capacity to expand high-quality educational and programming opportunities

- **Expand Program Offerings:** Increase the diversity and responsiveness of programming to meet the needs of the community, including more programming opportunities for:
 - Community-wide events, festivals and programs
 - Environment and water quality education
 - Art and engagement
 - Culturally relevant programs
 - Building social capital and community connections
 - Improving physical and mental health
- **Increase Capacity:** Explore ways to expand the number of spots available for high-demand programs
- **Assess Programs:** Through a sustainability and equity lens, establish a process to assess existing and potential recreation programs

5C. Expand affordable play and recreation programs, especially in high-priority population neighborhoods

- **Safe Parks Programming:** Explore tailored programming to address safety concerns and promote positivity in parks
- **Scholarship Program Use:** Increase the use of the recreation scholarship program to increase access for those with limited financial means
- **Adaptive Recreation:** Continue developing adaptive sports programs
- **Recreation Center Study:** Assess the possibility of a recreation center in a high-priority park

GOAL 6 NATURAL ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Assemble a greener
community and
address climate change

6A. Implement management protocols that protect and enhance the natural environment

- **Nature in All Parks:** Provide a natural experience at each park in the system
- **Environmental Offerings:** Incorporate nature-based education, programming, and amenities into the park system
- **Natural Resources Management Plan:** Develop a Natural Resources Management Plan, in partnership with other relevant government agencies, that lays out strategies to protect, maintain, and enhance our natural lands
- **Asset Protection:** Prioritize the preservation of historic, cultural, scenic, and natural resources in park development and improvement projects
- **New Green Spaces:** Work to expand access to natural spaces, particularly in the northern half of the city, through creative improvement projects and land acquisition
- **Limit Chemical Use:** Pursue efforts that employ strategic and limited use of chemicals and pesticides

6B. Expand natural habitats and safeguard our biodiversity

- **Promoting Biodiversity:** Reduce high-maintenance turf grass and impervious surfaces
- **Green Pathways:** Enhance and support habitat connectivity and reduce habitat fragmentation by providing habitat spaces for wildlife to move in and around West St. Paul
- **Invasive Management:** Work with partners to continue managing and strategically removing invasive species, such as buckthorn and garlic mustard
- **Habitat-Friendly Design:** Strive to make park buildings and facilities habitat-friendly, including landscaping, bird-friendly design, lighting modifications, and other practices

6C. Protect the City's ground and surface waters

- **Water Monitoring:** Continue water quality monitoring
- **Environmentally-Friendly Infrastructure:** Install and integrate green and blue infrastructure into the park system
- **Water Access:** Expand access to water bodies
- **Ecosystem Development:** Improve terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems near water bodies

6D. Invest in and increase the tree canopy

- **Update Tree Inventory:** Work with partners to conduct an updated public tree inventory, inclusive of all trees in parks, boulevards, and public facilities
- **Tree Action Plan:** Develop a Tree Action Plan that tracks tree-related data, maps a strategy and budget for action, and prepares the City for grant opportunities
- **Combat Tree Pests and Diseases:** Combat Emerald Ash Borer and other pests and invasive species
- **Tree Removal and Replacement:** Establish a climate- and equity-focused tree removal and replacement policy that enhances resilience through species diversification and strategic tree planting to combat urban

GOAL 6

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Assemble a greener community and address climate change

6E. Build momentum for the City's efforts to address climate change and advance sustainable practices

- **Climate Action Plan:** Plan for a changing climate by developing a data-centered Climate Change Action Plan
- **Emergency Response:** Enhance emergency operations, disaster resiliency planning, and park policies and protocols that consider safety and maintenance needs before, during, and after emergencies
- **Addressing Heat:** Mitigate the impact of urban heat and summer sun on park users in park design, planning, programming, and management practices.
- **Waste Management:** Continue to promote Minnesota's Waste Hierarchy while providing education and opportunities for reuse and recycling.
- **Natural Resource Staffing:** Develop a Green Team and consider hiring a Natural Resources Manager
- **GreenStep Cities Program:** Complete the GreenStep Cities program and maintain Step 5 status
- **Climate Mitigation:** Reduce greenhouse gas and carbon emissions and increase renewable energy production in park operations and facilities

GOAL 7

STEWARDSHIP

Maintain and operate a great park system

7A. Prioritize excellence in the daily maintenance and operations of the parks system

- **Asset Management:** Develop a Park Inventory and Asset Management System
- **Maintenance Strategy:** Create a Maintenance Strategy that includes biannual condition assessments and maintenance plans for all capital improvement projects
- **Fleet and Equipment:** Invest in the city's infrastructure, including staff, equipment, fleet, and facilities, to enhance productivity. Evaluate all equipment replacement options, focusing on sustainability and technological advancements.
- **Facility Operations:** Establish standard operating procedures to ensure coordinated management of the pool, dome, ice arena, and other future large facilities

7B. Utilize community members and volunteers to make the parks system shine

- **Next Generation Leaders:** Inspire the next generation of park stewards through education, volunteering, and outreach
- **Volunteer Opportunities:** Organize and promote inclusive volunteer opportunities throughout the year, such as cleanups or community days
- **Park Stewards:** Continue to support and expand the Adopt-A-Park program. In addition to maintenance activities, encourage "friends" groups to activate park spaces and bring neighbors together for social connection.
- **Athletic Partnerships:** Partner with athletic associations and other facility users to maintain and support the upkeep of facilities

GOAL 7 STEWARDSHIP

Maintain and operate a
great park system

7C. Improve park safety and reduce vandalism through infrastructure investments, design, programming, and partnerships

- **Enhance Communication and Partnership:** Expand partnership and coordination with the Police Department, school district, and community partners to establish a regular line of communication for sharing information
- **Proactive Programming:** Develop and seek funding for a Park Ambassador Initiative for high-use parks such as Harmon, Sports Complex, and the future park at 150 Thompson
- **Crime Prevention:** Utilize Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and other tools to assess the built environment and map strategies to improve lighting, sightlines, and other design tools to improve the perception of safety and reduce opportunities for crime
- **Security Cameras:** Continue installation of security cameras in parks with higher traffic and incidences of crime
- **Incident Policies and Protocols:** Update policies and procedures that guide park staff when responding to disruptive or violent incidents at parks or facilities
- **Corrective Actions:** When appropriate, pursue corrective action for acts of vandalism or other negative actions through restorative justice and community service, but reserve and utilize legal recourse for certain circumstances
- **Professional Development:** Provide training on public health and human rights issues in the parks, such as substance use, mental health crises, and human trafficking, so that staff and volunteers can recognize and navigate complex issues and know where to access resources

“
Too many people think, “What can I
do?” All of us can do something.

Olivia Dodge,
Founder of Dodge Nature Center

”

GOAL 8

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Invest in staff and their professional growth

8A. Develop and implement a workforce growth and professional development strategy

- **Right-Size Staffing Levels:** Increase the number of park staff to meet growing and changing demands on the parks system
- **Staff Development:** Support the ongoing professional development of team members
- **Staff Involvement and Network Development:** Encourage staff to serve on committees, task forces, and professional organizations to influence policy, direct resources, and build networks
- **Seasonal Staff Training:** Streamline and improve the training process for seasonal staff

8B. Utilize a wide variety of tools to improve recruitment and retention

- **Recruitment Partners:** Market open positions to underserved communities, stay-at-home parents, retirees, residents, and city residents.
- **Seasonal Staff Retention:** Explore tools to retain seasonal staff year-over-year
- **Applicant Considerations:** Modernize the hiring and interview process
- **Career Pathways:** Develop internships, mentorships, and apprenticeships that bring new people to the profession and support on-the-job training
- **Two-Way Feedback:** Foster practices that support two-way feedback between supervisors and employees
- **Succession Planning:** Proactively plan for retirements and vacancies
- **Welcoming Workplace:** Create welcoming and safe workspaces

8C. Foster a strong sense of camaraderie and collaboration amongst team members

- **Recognition:** Recognize outstanding work, commitment, and creativity
- **Team Growth:** Develop and build team camaraderie
- **Team Communication:** Open lines of communication, advance projects, and develop rapport
- **Leveraging Skills and Passions:** Lean into staff's passions, priorities, expertise, networks, and desired areas of growth when assigning projects and advancing initiatives

GOAL 9 FINANCIAL VALUE

Operate the parks system in a manner that is financially sustainable and of high value to the community

9A. Explore methods to improve and streamline the budgeting process

- **Equity-Based Decision-making:** Utilize the Equity Decision-making Framework and other tools to inform budget decisions and prioritize investments
- **Budget Education:** Increase public education and awareness of budget needs, costs, and processes
- **Multi-pronged Budget:** Create flexible funding and budgeting that prioritizes essential agency aspects while supporting innovation and in-time flexibility
- **Budget Evaluation:** Evaluate the true costs of capital projects and programs, including long-term maintenance needs, partnership impacts, capacity, and environmental impacts

9B. Explore and enhance opportunities for revenue generation

- **Business Development Plan:** Create a business development plan to promote, market, and facilitate creative and community-centered use of the parks
- **Revenue Generation:** Expand user-base to maximize facility rentals and program registrations
- **Philanthropic Partners:** Develop relationships with a fundraising nonprofit, philanthropic, and grant-giving partners to advance community projects and programs
- **Lease Agreements:** Center public benefit in lease agreements of concessions and facilities

9C. Make historic and critical investments in the park system

- **Capital Improvement Planning:** Annually evaluate facility and program needs to improve budgeting and investments
- **Project Prioritization:** Sequence capital projects to prioritize transformative changes, enhance safety, support high-need populations, reinvest in key projects and beloved facilities, and advance innovative ideas as appropriate
- **Increased Grants and Financial Support Advocacy:** Advocate for the increase of funding sources from regional, state, and federal agencies and philanthropic partners for local parks

9D. Be a leader in the field by increasing operational efficiency, enhancing the user experience, and providing gold-standard customer care

- **Right-size Program Costs:** Maintain low participant costs, and reduce participation costs for low-income participants through scholarships.
- **Registration:** Improve participant registration and payment options in order to increase access, reduce costs, and improve usability
- **Civil Steward Model:** Strive to meet community member needs and provide excellent customer service

Park Projects Overview

Cost Estimates

- \$ - low or no cost, under \$25,000
- \$\$ - \$25,000-75,000
- \$\$\$ - \$75,000-150,000
- \$\$\$\$ - \$150,000-250,000
- \$\$\$\$\$ - \$250,000 - 500,000
- \$\$\$\$\$\$ - \$500,000 - 1M
- \$M - \$1M+

Timeline Guidance

- Near-Term: 1-3 years
- Mid-Term: 4-6 years
- Long-Term: 7+ years
- Rolling: Implement as part of broader park renovation projects
- Ongoing: Implement or begin efforts ASAP and then on a continued basis
- Continue: Existing efforts or practices that should be continued or expanded
- Sustained Commitment: A commitment to a resource-intensive project or initiative that requires time and careful planning, expecting long-term benefits despite few immediate returns.
- Funding Dependent: Implement if and when funding becomes available

ATHLETICS

- Flexible, multi-season spaces
- More volleyball and soccer to accommodate growing diversity
- Divest from some warming houses, ice rinks, and one baseball field
- Revitalized basketball, tennis, and pickleball courts

PASSIVE & PLAY

- Better signage and pathways to parks and within neighborhoods
- New dog park at Sports Complex
- More picnic shelters
- Creative playground design
- A universal playground at Sports Complex
- Plan for the future of the pool

NATURE

- Increased efforts to combat Emerald Ash Borer and increase the tree canopy
- Low maintenance gardens and landscaping to soften parks
- Community gardens
- Environment and sustainability education

COMMUNITY

- Convert the Sports Complex horseshoe pavilion into a multi-use gathering space
- New park plazas and amphitheater
- Art and placemaking strategy
- More indoor classroom and gathering space

Proposed Projects: Athletics

EMPHASIZE FLEXIBLE, MULTI-SEASON SPACES



CATEGORY: Big Idea
TIMELINE: Rolling
LOCATION: City-wide
COST: \$\$\$\$ per Project

Residents of West St. Paul participate in a wide range of sports. Unfortunately, athletic facilities require a significant amount of space, and West St. Paul's park system is smaller than those of many neighboring and peer cities. To successfully offer a wide range of athletic facilities while maintaining space for community gatherings, nature, and passive recreation, we will seek creative solutions. The best opportunities exist where space could be used differently with the changing of the seasons, such as the example above, where a hockey rink can serve multiple other sports in the warmer months. Combining facilities could save land and money for other needs.

INCREASE VOLLEYBALL & SOCCER TO SUPPORT GROWING DIVERSITY.



CATEGORY: Big Idea
TIMELINE: Rolling
LOCATION: City-wide
COST: \$\$\$ per Project

Since the development of the park system primarily in the 1960s and 70s, the city's demographics have changed and diversified. To better serve a diverse population, we can diversify park amenities and offerings. Two sports popular with our Hispanic/Latino, East African, and Asian populations, but where our peer cities outpace us are soccer and volleyball. The latter has been extremely popular at Marthaler Park, but it is the only volleyball court in the system. We should add both to different parks in the system, including varieties like futsal and grass volleyball. Because these games are often played by large groups and families, supportive shelters, tables, and waste receptacles should be conveniently located nearby.

DECOMMISSION UNDERUSED FACILITIES



CATEGORY: Good Governance
TIMELINE: Rolling
LOCATION: Dodd, Southview, Sports Complex, Weschcke
COST: Project Dependent

One thing is constant - change. We can respond to the combination of climate change (warmer winters), changing recreational participation (reduced involvement in team sports, fewer people playing hockey and baseball), and heightened park priorities (community gathering, art, nature, etc.) by strategically utilizing our park land in new and different ways. We propose a significant reduction in the number of warming houses and outdoor ice rinks, freeing up land for other uses. And, like many cities, we propose a slight reduction in the number of baseball fields.

Proposed Projects: Athletics

UPDATE TENNIS & PICKLEBALL COURTS



CATEGORY: Big Idea
TIMELINE: Rolling
LOCATION: Emerson, Haskell, Marthaler, Weschcke
COST: \$\$\$\$ per Project

Twenty-five years ago, when the city last updated its Parks System Plan, most people had never heard of pickleball. Now, it's taking the country by storm and is extremely popular. Tennis has experienced steady growth, with a notable surge since the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the city's courts are showing their age and require investment. We propose that courts be updated as part of larger park renovation projects. We also recommend expanding pickleball at Emerson from two to four courts and introducing shared pickleball-tennis courts at Marthaler.

REVITALIZE BASKETBALL



CATEGORY: Big Idea
TIMELINE: Rolling
LOCATION: Emerson, Haskell, Oakdale, Southview, Weschcke
COST: \$\$\$ per Project

Years ago, many of the city's full-court basketball courts were removed. This leaves many residents without a popular sport, an opportunity for exercise, and a community builder. West St. Paul should revive full-court basketball and renovate and improve its existing courts. We should also consider new and fun ways to play, including a bankshot court, which includes several hoops at various levels and configurations - think of the best game of 'horse' ever!

MODERNIZE THE ICE ARENA AND DOME



CATEGORY: Bold Ambition
TIMELINE: Funding Dependent
LOCATION: Ice Arena and Dome
COST: Project Dependent, \$M minimum

The Ice Arena and Dome provide important year-round access to sports teams, individuals, spectators, and learners. Users note that both facilities have facility needs, including mechanical and structural needs. We would like to see both facilities used for more events, tournaments, and gatherings. To make the lobbies more inviting, both facilities should be modernized with a fresh look. Completing these projects, which would require another significant investment, may be challenging or impossible without external funding, especially when considered in the context of the overarching goals of this plan.

Proposed Projects: Passive & Play

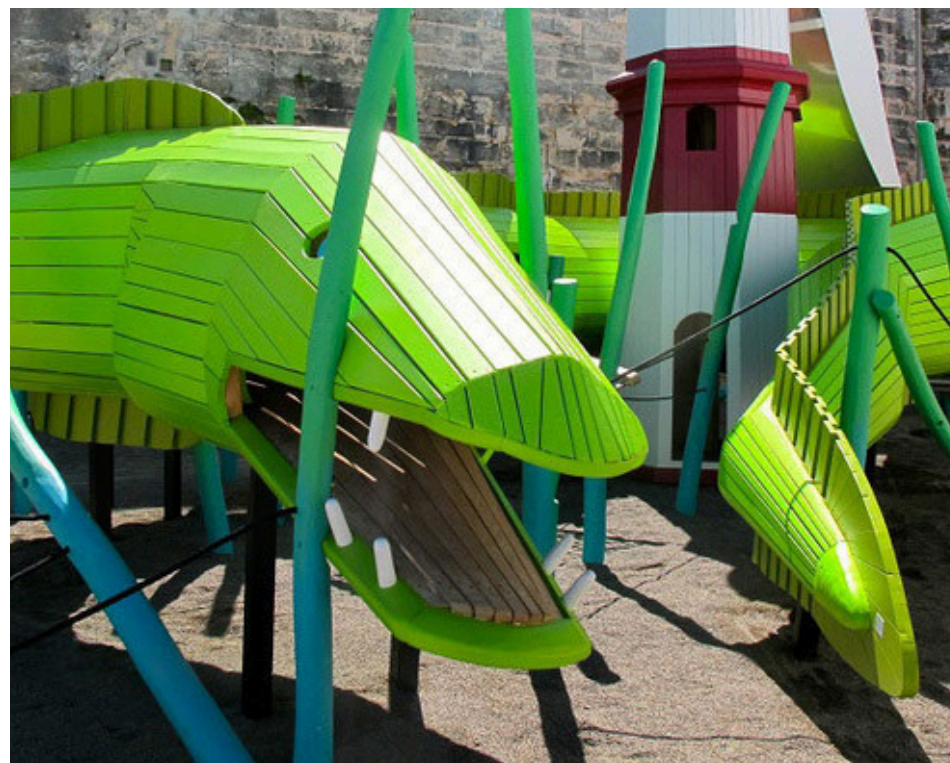
MORE AND UPDATED PICNIC SHELTERS



CATEGORY: Big Idea
TIMELINE: Rolling
LOCATION: City-wide
COST: \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$ per Project

The city's existing picnic shelters and pavilions are heavily used, with growing demand for rented space. As the weather changes with heavier storms and higher summer temperatures, the picnic shelters provide important cover and shade for park visitors, program participants, and staff. Several parks lack shelters, so as larger park projects are pursued, we propose considering a range of shelter types and sizes. One note of caution: the impact of users not cleaning up after themselves takes a considerable amount of staff time. The entire community will need to do its part to maintain these spaces as clean, safe, and healthy as possible.

CONSIDER CREATIVE PLAYGROUND DESIGN



CATEGORY: Big Idea
TIMELINE: Rolling
LOCATION: City-wide
COST: \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$ per Project

The jungle gym, invented in 1920, has evolved with the times and advancements in available technology. Gone are the towering wood structures and metal slides of the 1970s and 80s. And now people seem generally bored with the overly cautious designs of safety-first playgrounds. Thankfully, today's playground designs offer a cornucopia of options, with considerations for sensory needs, all ages play, creativity and art, and local priorities. As playgrounds are updated, we should consider a range of playground designs, which will help differentiate individual parks, offer new types of play, and set West St. Paul apart from other park systems.

INCORPORATE BETTER SIGNAGE & WAYFINDING



CATEGORY: Good Governance
TIMELINE: Rolling
LOCATION: City-wide
COST: \$\$\$\$\$ City-wide

West St. Paul has many amenities that people may not be aware of. Too often, we hear things like, "We didn't even know the city had a pool!" We can build awareness through several avenues, including improved maps, brochures, and a stronger online presence. We can also build awareness - and improve navigation - through improved signage. First, we propose modernizing the park's monument signs. Second, we propose wayfinding or directional signage throughout the community to help people reach their desired destinations or encourage them to explore. The Parks Department will develop park sign design standards that are consistent with the city's brand.

Proposed Projects: Passive & Play

EXPLORE A DOG PARK AT SPORTS COMPLEX



CATEGORY: Big Idea
TIMELINE: Mid-term
LOCATION: Sports Complex
COST: \$\$\$

The American birthrate has been in steady decline for nearly two decades, recently reaching its lowest point in nearly 50 years. The number of households with pets has, on the other hand, experienced significant growth. And a somewhat stunning stat - more households have a dog (53%) than a child (40%). While a handful of apartment complexes have dog runs, the city lacks a dedicated dog park. With limited land and the need to minimize impacts to neighbors, we have few options for a dog park. One possibility is turning a baseball field at the Sports Complex into a dog park. Baseball use has declined, and the space is already fenced.

Action Plan

EXPAND ACCESSIBLE PLAY



CATEGORY: Catalytic Project
TIMELINE: Long-term
LOCATION: Sports Complex
COST: \$\$\$\$\$

For far too long, far too many people have had to watch others play from the sidelines. Thankfully, playground designers and accessibility advocates have partnered to create new equipment and better designs for all users. Accessible, or universal, playgrounds increase play opportunities for individuals with different physical and cognitive abilities, helping to foster a more inclusive and welcoming community. With proposed or existing accessible playgrounds at Somerset School and Thompson County Park, we propose building a new accessible playground further south at the Sports Complex. What'll warm your heart? When conducting engagement, kids of all ages and abilities were huge fans of a new accessible playground!

DEVELOP ALL AGES SPACES



CATEGORY: Catalytic Project
TIMELINE: Near-term
LOCATION: 150 Thompson, Albert-Dodd, Sports Complex, city-wide
COST: \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$ per Project

What if it wasn't weird to see an adult giggling on a swing? What if we encouraged grandparents to enjoy the slide? What if we had a spot where teens could chill? Several new and existing parks could be great locations for new all-ages play spaces, with the new parks at 150 Thompson and Albert-Dodd in particular being notable examples. The renovation of the Horseshoe Pavilion and accessible playground at the Sports Complex presents another great opportunity to introduce an all-ages play space.

Proposed Projects: Passive & Play

PLAN FOR BASIC AMENITIES & SOMEWHERE TO 'GO'



CATEGORY: Good Governance
TIMELINE: Ongoing
LOCATION:
COST: \$-\$\$\$\$ per Project

It's a gorgeous day, you packed up the kids and five minutes into your time at the park, you hear it. "I have to go to the bathroom." There's no bathroom on site, so you're forced to scramble home or to the closest gas station. We should work to offer plumbed or seasonal bathroom facilities at each of the city's larger parks. Plumbed bathrooms should be reserved for community parks, while seasonal bathrooms can reasonably serve neighborhood parks. Bathrooms present a maintenance need and may be vulnerable to vandalism, so caution will be necessary to ensure that safe and healthy facilities are maintained.

DEVELOP A NATURE PLAYGROUND



CATEGORY: Catalytic Project
TIMELINE: Near-term
LOCATION: Kennedy, Garlough and/or Weschcke Park
COST: \$-\$\$\$\$ per Project

Many of us have stories of playing in fields and forests, making stick forts, splashing in creeks, and searching for bugs. This early connection to nature can spark life-long stewardship of parks and the environment, and it builds capacity for creativity, exploration, and play. But not everyone has easy access to natural spaces, and play isn't encouraged in those spaces that are easily accessible. Through a nature playground, we can offer a unique type of play where people of all ages can reconnect to the earth.

CONSIDER WINTER RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES



CATEGORY: Good Governance
TIMELINE: Rolling and ongoing
LOCATION: City-wide
COST: \$-\$\$\$ per Project

Minnesota winters can be long and isolating. However, with the right gear, a good attitude, and some creativity, winter can be quite enjoyable. We already offer several winter amenities and programs, but there's always room for more, including new games, more locations, and quirky events. A bit of caution and consideration will be necessary, as winter weather is changing, snow is less reliable, and not everyone can afford winter gear.

Proposed Projects: Nature

PROTECT & INCREASE THE TREE CANOPY



CATEGORY: Big Idea
TIMELINE: Ongoing
LOCATION: City-wide
COST: \$M City-wide

Emerald ash borer (EAB) has been devastating to West St. Paul's tree canopy. With 40% of the city's public trees under threat (or lost), we'll be fighting the invasive bug and its impacts for years to come. We should continue our first line of defense—treatment—as it has shown promise. Next, we should remove dead and dying trees to remove potential hazards. Finally, we should plant trees, using a variety of species, to recover what was lost and then to exceed the canopy we had before EAB.

SOFTEN PARK AESTHETICS WITH LANDSCAPING



CATEGORY: Good Governance
TIMELINE: Rolling and Ongoing
LOCATION: City-wide
COST: \$-\$\$\$\$ per Project

The community regularly shared the opinion that many of the city's parks could use 'softening.' Too many of our parks are too formulaic, with a mix of amenities but little to make them feel like welcoming, natural spaces. Grass areas can be transformed into small gardens, tree groves, or pollinator lawns. Landscaping can be used to buffer parks from busy streets, add shade, or provide beauty. Both humans and the natural environment will benefit.

BUILD COMMUNITY GARDENS



CATEGORY: Big Idea
TIMELINE: Rolling
LOCATION: Southview, Orme
COST: \$-\$\$ per Project

The ability to grow your own food is exceptionally rewarding. To do that in community with others, even more so. West St. Paul is one of the few metro area cities without a public community garden, and with such a high percentage of residents renting their homes, offering space for growing food is a logical endeavor.

Proposed Projects: Nature

EXPAND ENVIRONMENTAL & SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION



CATEGORY: Good Governance
TIMELINE: Rolling
LOCATION: City-wide
COST: \$ per project

The community demonstrated a strong interest in utilizing our parks for habitat restoration and access to nature. As we pursue projects, it will be important to make information and education easily accessible. By installing interpretive signs, updating websites, and employing creative storytelling, we can foster interest and understanding in how environmentally friendly projects operate and why they are important.

PROTECT OUR WATER BODIES



CATEGORY: Good Governance
TIMELINE: Rolling and ongoing
LOCATION: City-wide
COST: \$-\$-\$-\$-\$-\$ per project

West St. Paul, situated uphill from two major rivers and home to several bodies of water, has a responsibility to protect its water resources. Already, the city has adopted practices and implemented projects—both public and private—that work to improve water quality and mitigate significant rain events, but more can be done. While our park space is limited, we can also enhance the aesthetics of our parks through landscaping efforts, as well as with bioswales, rain gardens, and other green-blue infrastructure.

ADD A WHIMSY GARDEN

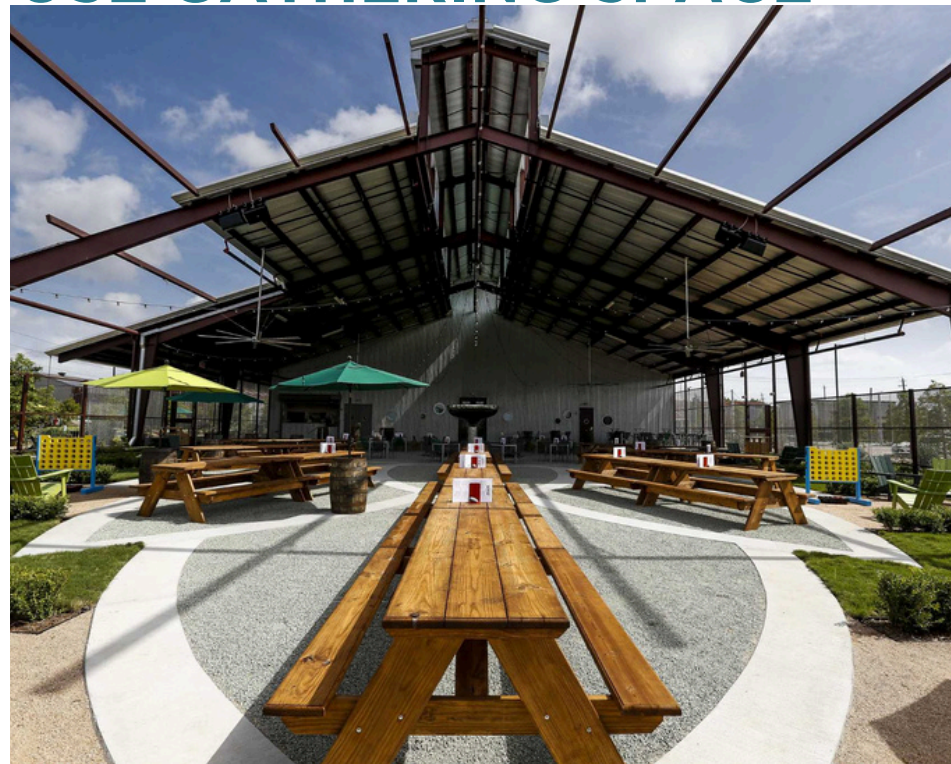


CATEGORY: Bold Ambition
TIMELINE: Funding Dependent
LOCATION: To be determined, possibly Kennedy, Orme, Sports Complex or 150 Thompson
COST: \$\$-\$-\$-\$-\$

Earlier, we spoke about the desire for more gardens and landscaping. But what if we took it one step further with a garden space unique to any other. What if we drew on inspiration from Dr. Seuss and planted a garden with the oddest, weirdest, and most fun plants, art, and gathering space you can imagine? The ball-like alliums, the mysterious smokebush, massive sunflowers, winter-resilient brittle prickly pear cactus, and carnivorous pitcher plants.

Proposed Projects: Community

CONVERT THE HORSESHOE PAVILION INTO A MULTI-USE GATHERING SPACE



CATEGORY: Catalytic Project
TIMELINE: Mid-term
LOCATION: Sports Complex
COST: \$\$\$\$\$

The Sports Complex Horseshoe Pavilion is the largest structure in the park system and a true asset. Horseshoe participation has been declining for years, while the need for gathering space has drastically increased. Unfortunately, the design of the pavilion, as a horseshoe pavilion, limits its versatility for other purposes. The pavilion, especially its flooring, requires investment. As we make improvements to the facility, we'll reimagine the space as a multipurpose community asset. The newly refurbished pavilion will be able to host events, gatherings, and celebrations - and could make an excellent beer garden. To bring life to the space, we can add yard games and gardens in the open space to the north of the pavilion.

Action Plan

PURSUE PARK-CENTERED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



CATEGORY: Catalytic Project
TIMELINE: Near-term
LOCATION: Smith-Dodd and 150 Thompson
COST: \$M per Project

As a fully developed first-ring suburb, West St. Paul will reinvent itself through redevelopment. Nationally, communities of all types have found success in park-centered redevelopment, where plazas, play spaces, and trails anchor mixed-use buildings. Offices and job centers have also found success in raising employee wellness by amplifying the quality of nearby public spaces. The Parks Department will work closely with Planning and Public Works to coordinate redevelopment in a cohesive, strategic manner. Two opportunities present themselves immediately at Smith-Dodd and 150 Thompson. Both projects will feature new park spaces that will differ from other parks in the city, with a greater emphasis on socializing, lingering, and the arts.

ADOPT AN ART & PLACEMAKING EVERYWHERE STRATEGY



CATEGORY: Big Idea
TIMELINE: Rolling
LOCATION: City-Wide
COST: \$-\$\$\$\$ per Project

A primary goal of the community is to differentiate West St. Paul's parks from those of other communities. While some communities emphasize large sporting events or natural preserves, West St. Paul can creatively emphasize the arts. Our best bet is to integrate art into other projects and system needs. Adding art to the surface of a basketball court in need of repair can be a win-win. Working with neighborhood kids to design the art and a community artist to create the art is an excellent way to build social capital.

Proposed Projects: Community

BUILD MORE INDOOR CLASSROOM & GATHERING SPACES



CATEGORY: Big Idea
TIMELINE: Near- to long-term
LOCATION: Haskell, Southview, or 150 Thompson
COST: \$M

Our parks are fantastic spaces for recreation and the outdoors, but the reality is our winters are cold, and a changing climate heightens the need for weather-safe spaces. Public input highlighted the need for indoor gathering and recreation space. User data from the Harmon Neighborhood Center and Thompson Activity Center showcase the regular and consistent use of our indoor community spaces. The dome and ice arena, as specialized spaces, are also routinely booked to capacity. As parks are renovated, we should consider the possibility of neighborhood center facilities. Haskell, Southview, and 150 Thompson present great equity-focused opportunities.

PARTNER TO ENSURE SAFE ROUTES TO PARKS



CATEGORY: Good Governance
TIMELINE: Rolling
LOCATION: City-wide
COST: Project dependent

Access to green space ties directly to a person's health and well-being—a connection now widely supported by evidence and accepted by policymakers. Today, ensuring access to green space for all people is a value that should be shared by every resident, community group, and government official. As we develop Safe Routes to Parks, we should consider the parks, park access points, and the infrastructure within a 10-minute walk of the parks. Safe Routes are supported by policy, enforcement, education, partnership, analysis, and infrastructure.

GET CREATIVE WITH GREEN LOOPS



CATEGORY: Big Idea
TIMELINE: Rolling
LOCATION: City-wide
COST: Project dependent

In addition to the spot enhancements listed previously, we could create several pathway loops to make it easier and safer to navigate the park system. Much like the River-to-River greenway now provides a multi-city east-west connection, these West St. Paul-focused green loops could provide connections to parks, shops, and schools. Loops could include additional infrastructure (as shown to the left) and wayfinding signage. Painting crosswalks and critical intersections with art. This could be a relatively simple, lower-cost option that would add color, art, and community involvement while slowing traffic and helping folks explore the community.

Proposed Projects: Community

EXPLORE A RECREATION CENTER & COMMUNITY HUB



CATEGORY: Bold Ambition
TIMELINE: As funding is available
LOCATION: To be determined
COST: \$M

West St. Paul's park system is missing indoor recreation and enrichment facilities. The absence of the YMCA as a communal gathering place continues to resonate, prompting many residents to advocate for a community or recreation center. While establishing a large community center may not be feasible due to the city's size, financial constraints, and limited land, a smaller recreation center featuring a gym, classrooms, and indoor play areas could be a viable alternative. Additionally, exploring a community hub model that combines recreational and enrichment spaces with various community services could be beneficial. Although this model relies on strong partnerships, it has the potential to attract grant funding and thereby enhance its overall impact.

Action Plan

UPDATE THE POOL



CATEGORY: Bold Ambition
TIMELINE: Funding Dependent
LOCATION: Pool
COST: \$M

West St. Paul has a long history of community aquatics. The City's community pool opened in the 1950s with major reinvestment in 1999. The pool facility remains popular, with the 2023 season being one of its busiest in recent memory. However, the facility is showing its age, and we recognize that without additional investment, it will lose popularity, safety issues will arise, and maintenance concerns will escalate. The facility is nearing an inflection point - either investment will be needed to update the existing facility's infrastructure, investments can be made to explore a new layout with expanded amenities and additional programming at the existing location, the pool could be relocated, or closed. With input from the community, the city and its consultant will study and explore options for the pool's future.

And when we're done, we're not gonna be like a regular first-ring parks system, we'll be a cool first-ring parks system.