



# SECTION 3: NEEDS ASSESSMENT & DEMAND

Long-term visioning for the park was identified through a needs assessment process involving public participation through community engagement strategies, including open houses and an online questionnaire, and meetings with technical staff and partnering agencies. The assessment informed the concept development and resulted in recommendations for this Master Plan.

## Trends

### Demographic

The seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area is currently experiencing flat to modest population growth. Overall, the population is aging, as baby-boomers reach senior citizen status (over 65 years). The metro area is also showing an increase in ethnic and racial diversity.

The last major census (2000-2010) indicates that the neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the park are experiencing modest population declines and a decrease in the 65+ age group. The area continues to attract young families with children and is also increasing in ethnic and racial diversity.

### Recreation

Consciousness about health and fitness is an increasing trend, as society becomes more focused on being active. However, time constraints impede the ability to dedicate time for separate exercise, and many are turning to active transportation modes, such as biking and walking to stay fit. This has influenced the trend toward more individual and informal recreation activities such as walking, cycling, running, and yoga.

Conventional, organized group and team sports such as baseball are currently seeing flat to modest growth, while non-traditional recreation such as skateboarding, rock climbing, rugby, lacrosse, ultimate, disc golf, and pickleball are rising in popularity. Though there is desire for more durable, high-quality outdoor recreational facilities, fields, and courts, these increasingly need to accommodate multi-purpose uses.



Cross-country skiing is a popular winter activity



"Desire line" of runners along Cedar Ave



Sand volleyball is proposed as an added new amenity at Lake Nokomis

There is growing demand for more social gathering places and event spaces, as well as rising interest in nature and wildlife-oriented activities, such as birding, fishing, and wildlife viewing.

## Visitor Demand

According to the Metropolitan Council's 2013 Visitation Estimates, Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park receives 1.5 million visits annually. Modest growth in visitation is expected over the life of this Master Plan due to the influx of young families in neighborhoods surrounding the park, implementation of improvement projects to park amenities, and the addition of several new park facilities.

According to the most recent Met Council use data, visitation to all regional parks has grown. MPRB regional parks have continued to draw a significant percentage of visits. In 2013, 33.8% of visits to Metropolitan Regional Parks were within the MPRB system. The percentage is holding steady as visitation numbers continue to rise.

### Overall MPRB System Visits:

Visits per year (in 1,000s)	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Mpls Park & Rec. Board Regional Parks	13,404	15,442	14,113	14,768	15,098	15,224	15,977
Percentage of total visitation to all regional parks	40.6 %	40.1 %	37.1 %	36.1 %	34.3 %	33.2%	33.8%

Metropolitan Council 2013 Regional Parks Use Estimate

### Comparison of 2012 and 2013 Regional Park Visitation:

Agency	2012 (1,000s)	2013 (1,000s)	# Change (1,000s)	% Change
Minneapolis	15,224	15,977	752.7	4.9%

Metropolitan Council 2013 Regional Parks Use Estimate

Use of urban recreational trails both within, and linking to Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park is projected to increase; a trend consistent with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources report, *Ten Year Forecasts—Of Minnesota Adult Outdoor Recreation Activities 2004-2014*, which states that trail activities such as walking, hiking, and bicycling will remain steady or increase over this time period.

# Planning Process

## Community Engagement

The planning process employed multi-faceted community engagement methods to gather input from a variety of groups. A Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) was established at the beginning of the process. Elected officials and Nokomis-Hiawatha area neighborhood organizations were asked to appoint members to the committee. A total of 19 people comprised the group, which met seven times over 4 ½ months to discuss planning concepts, explore alternatives, and provide Master Plan recommendations to the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

Members of the public were invited to attend and participate in CAC meetings which included in their agendas a designated time for public comment. Public attendance at CAC meetings was typically around 20 people. Two community open houses hosted at the Nokomis Community Center also provided opportunities for public input. These open houses introduced the process of master planning and allowed community members to suggest, react to, and comment on proposed improvements for the park. Around 60 people were in attendance at each of the open houses.

Early in the process, an online questionnaire was made available to assess the needs of community participants. More than 900 people responded, and the results shaped the concept alternatives developed for review, along with the subsequent recommendations for the master plan.

Ongoing project information and updates about the Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park Master Plan were made available on the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board website. Gov-delivery and social media also played important roles in keeping the community abreast of the process and opportunities for input. In particular, the four neighborhood organizations near the lake, the non-profit Friends of Lake Nokomis, and the District 5 MPRB Commissioner utilized social media and in-park face-to-face discussions to spread the word about the plan.

In addition to public and community input, the plan has benefitted from the efforts of key staff at the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board who work directly on activities, programming, events, safety, and operations and maintenance of the park on a regular basis. Their input was largely gained through project advisory committee (PAC) meetings and one-on-one meetings with park planning staff.

Several technically-oriented meetings were also held to focus planning around specific issues, such as water quality, transportation, and recreation. Staff from other implementing agencies participated in these meetings and offered continued coordination throughout the planning process, including the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, and Minnehaha Creek Watershed District. The City of Minneapolis Public Works and Engineering also attended the second Community Open House that addressed proposals for transportation and roadway changes in and near the park.

## Formal Public and Governmental Review

The master plan goes through a review and approvals process, a formal public process, and governmental board action. Initial Master Plan recommendations were developed and reviewed through regular meetings of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC). This 19-member committee evaluated the needs assessment and concept alternatives presented by MPRB staff and project consultants. The set of recommendations included here is the result of decisions made with the CAC.



### The Charge of the Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park CAC:

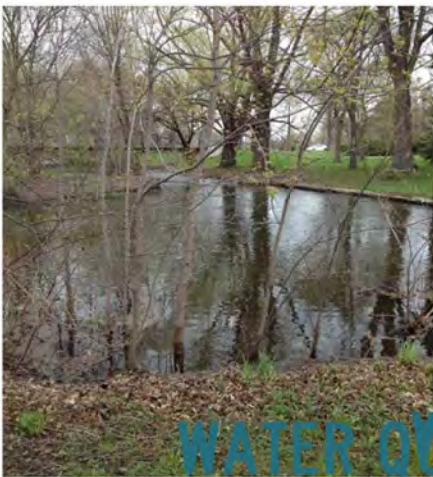
- » Become knowledgeable about the project and its scope
- » Understand and represent the park and recreation needs of the community and park visitors
- » Act as community liaisons for the project
- » Participate in public CAC meetings
- » Advise MPRB staff and consultants throughout the planning process
- » Recommend to the Board of Commissioners a preferred plan, budget, and, if warranted, phasing strategy



*Comments from a community open house*



Participants at the first community open house



A consistently wet area of the park is considered for transition to a permanent stormwater treatment feature



Flooding of trails is a common problem

Before adoption, Master Plans go through a formal approval process with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB). This process is initiated by a 45-day public comment period that begins when the document is made available for community members to review. During this time, a formal review is requested from other implementing agencies as well. Input received about the document is considered for revision at the end of the comment period. The final document is then presented to the MPRB in a public hearing where community members are welcome to bring forward ideas, comments, and concerns about the Master Plan. MPRB members vote to approve the document, or require further revision.

Once the MPRB adopts the Plan, the document becomes the acting plan for guiding improvements for the park. To qualify for regional parks funding, the master plan must also be approved by the Metropolitan Council. After receiving Met Council approval, it serves as a plan for regional park improvements and development, and opens the opportunity for related funding.

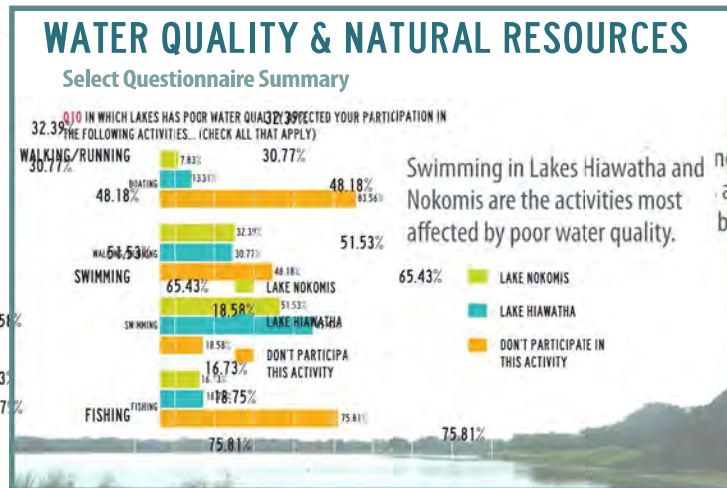
## Needs Assessment Summary

Understanding the needs of park users and neighborhood residents is an essential part of the early master planning process. The needs assessment for Nokomis-Hiawatha was initiated through the CAC, where small groups of CAC and community members worked together to identify issues, conflicts, and current successes within the park. An online questionnaire polling respondents about recreation, trail use, and water quality followed this. Further input from the Project Advisory Committee, community meetings, technical staff, and in-depth site study supplemented the needs assessment. The maps on the following pages were used early in the process to reflect the ideas and input received.

### Natural Resources

The addition of stormwater treatment features, like the constructed wetlands on the south side of Lake Nokomis, have resulted in a noticeable improvement in water clarity in recent years. While this serves as a recognizable success of natural resource efforts in the park, water quality remains one of the highest concerns among park users. Stormwater runoff from Cedar Avenue and surrounding neighborhood streets is a contributing factor to this broader problem.

To address this, the community identified needs that include additional permanent stormwater treatment areas and wetlands, and replacing turf with native plantings and wildlife habitat.



Swimming in Lakes Hiawatha and Nokomis are the activities most affected by poor water quality.

# Natural Resources & Water Quality Input Summary



# Circulation & Connectivity Quality Input Summary



## Circulation & Connectivity

The topic of circulation and connectivity within the park raised more issues and concerns than positive commentary. Locations where multi-modal traffic causes conflicts were the primary concern. Bicycle and pedestrian crossings of Cedar Avenue and Minnehaha Parkway were identified as the most dangerous and one of the biggest issues to address with circulation planning. In the case of the Cedar Avenue crossings, especially the southernmost Cedar/Nokomis Parkway/Edgewater intersections, residents cited traffic speed and frequency as a prime driver of feelings of insecurity and inconvenience. In order to improve the park user experience in this area, it will be necessary to address some transportation concerns. Such a project must be led by the City of Minneapolis and Hennepin County, but must also involve the MPRB. The community has expressed the need and desire to have MPRB involvement in a comprehensive traffic solution, so that the city and county can consider all possible options.

Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park's trail network is certainly one of the highest-valued amenities in the park. Despite the need for surfacing improvements and redesign of conflict areas, many favorable comments were made about the park's trails throughout the needs assessment process.



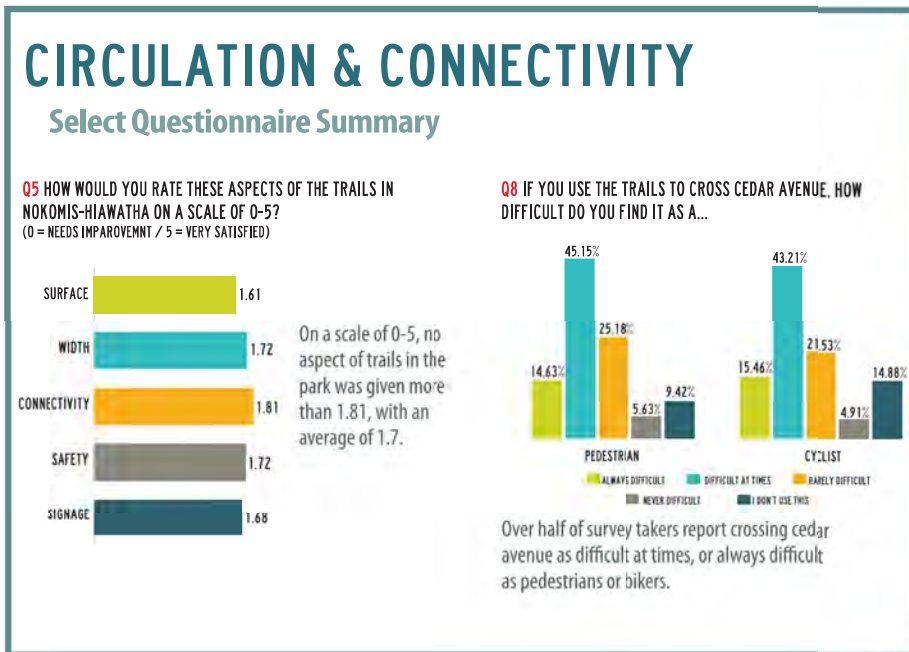
*New crossings will consider marking of dual trail systems*



*Separate bike and pedestrian trails are appreciated by users for the safety and enjoyment of the trail system*



*Locations of needed trails are often apparent where park users travel through grass*





*Pickleball gives tennis courts another use and is rising in popularity*



*Park users identified the need for more portable restrooms throughout the park*



*Users desire a safe and enjoyable environment for running and walking*

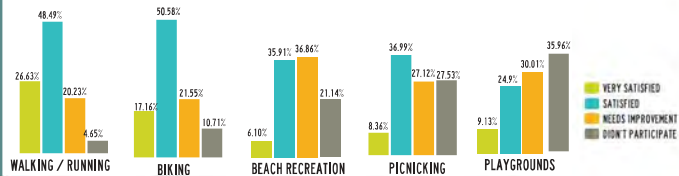
## Recreation

Overall, recreation in the park is seen as a success; however, the need for bathroom facilities and drinking water to better support recreational uses was identified as one of the greatest desires during the needs assessment process. Other suggestions included adding more pickleball courts, canoe launches, sand volleyball, a skate park, and cross-country ski trail access.

### RECREATION

#### Select Questionnaire Summary

Q2 IN WHAT ACTIVITIES HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN THE LAST YEAR AND HOW SATISFIED WERE YOU?



Walking/running, biking, beach use, and picnicking are used by more than 3/4 of all respondents.

Q3 IN WHAT OTHER ACTIVITIES HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN THE LAST YEAR?

There is a high amount of interest in improving opportunities for skateboarding, pickleball, and birding.







*View across Lake Hiawatha of the Minneapolis skyline*

