

Community Engagement Plan



Date of Board P+C: 10-23-2024

Date of Board Approval (for CAC's only):

Date of Most Recent Update: 11-18-2025

Please fill out this form if your project, program, or initiative includes community engagement beyond the "Inform" level. All Community Engagement Plans should be filed as Petitions and Communications with the MPRB Board of Commissioners and submitted to the MPRB Engagement Portal on SharePoint (<https://minneapolisparcs.sharepoint.com/planning/SitePages/Home.aspx>.)

Staff Lead: Colleen O'Dell

Department or Division: Strategic Planning

Project Name: Soo Line Garden – MPRB Response to Environmental Conditions

Engagement Level: Consult

This plan serves as a guide for the community engagement process for the Soo Line Garden project. The plan may be modified as circumstance warrants during project duration. Substantial modifications are to be communicated to stakeholders and the MPRB Board of Commissioners.

As required by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board Community Engagement Policy, this project requires a Community Engagement Plan because the project falls under the Partner category of community engagement for which MPRB is required to partner with stakeholders in each aspect of decision making in order to develop and implement collaborative project, program, or initiative solutions. This CE Plan was created with a GARE Racial Equity Tool Kit framework.

Key Stakeholders should be engaged in the creation of this plan. Please explain who was engaged:

Soo Line Community Gardeners
Whittier Alliance and neighborhood residents
Whittier International School
Midtown Greenway users

1. **Project Description**

1a. Project Overview: This project will evaluate and address contaminated soils at the Soo Line site, in cooperation with the MN Pollution Control Agency. Project staff will seek Hennepin County ERF funding for the project. After voluntary clean-up activities are completed, staff will work with gardeners, community members, Braun Intertec, and Aune Fernandez Landscape Architecture to engage stakeholders, create a concept design, and complete construction. Concept design will be done in a manner which prioritizes the natural, organic character of the site and its use as a community garden and public park space.

Soo Line Gardens, located between Garfield Avenue South and Harriet Avenue South and immediately north of the Midtown Greenway, has existed as a part of the Minneapolis park system since its conveyance to MPRB by Hennepin County through a tax forfeiture process in 2010. It had previously been used as a community garden under Hennepin County's jurisdiction since 1991. Because the garden use predates the

MPRB's Community Garden Policy, it is referred to as a "legacy" garden and operates under an annual permit issued through Environmental Stewardship. Before the site was a garden, it was occupied by railroad uses and grain elevators, both of which would have used petroleum products and other hazardous substances in their operation. Recent soil investigations conducted by Landmark Environmental indicate contamination remains, now at levels that exceed MPCA thresholds.

1b. MPRB Outcomes *(What goals, strategies, or values in the MPRB Comprehensive Plan does this project, program, or initiative relate to?):*

Goal 1: Foster Belonging and equity

14: Elevate voices of those most impacted by health disparities and environmental injustice to inform policies, programming, activities and services in parks.

15: Embed accessibility and universal design as a fundamental aspect of programming, design of park spaces and facilities, and when making temporary changes to park infrastructure and programming

21: Empower community to design, create, maintain, program, and steward safe and welcoming parks.

Goal 2: Steward a continuum of nature and recreation

2: Support the preservation, management, and increase in acreage of natural and naturalized areas for ecosystem benefits and for public benefit.

4: Create, interpret and program nature-based experiences, including but not limited to environmental education, community gardens, and bird watching, across the city, especially in parts of the city that don't have access to regional parks, to foster stewardship of nature, joy, and to introduce new users to the park system.

Goal 3: Provide core services with care

11: Design and implement parks that are welcoming, climate resilient, ecologically healthy, playful, beautiful, and safe as they age.

Goal 4: Work from our strengths and determine our role in partnerships

5: Seek partnerships and sponsorships to support citywide volunteerism, events, projects, programs, and facilities and to increase MPRB's ability to manage, program, design, and activate parks.

Goal 5: Expand focus on health equity

13: Expand healthy food access recognizing parks as an important community food hub through increased programming, spaces, and staffing to support healthy food access and nutrition security, community gardening, food hubs, food entrepreneurship, foraging zones, traditional foodways, and food skill building, prioritizing areas where access to food growing space is limited.

1c. Project Timeline:

Summer/Fall 2024 – Engagement and Pre-Design

MPRB closes garden in March due to soil contamination. MPRB and SLG establish alternative temporary garden sites. MPRB and Braun enroll garden in MPCA voluntary clean-up program, prepare and submit a Response Action Plan/Construction Contingency Plan (RAP/CCP) to MPCA for approval.

Fall 2024/Winter 2025 – Design, Engagement, and ERF Grant Application

Spring 2025 – Permitting, Approvals, Bidding

Spring/Summer 2025 – Remediation and Construction

Summer 2025 – Opening

1d. Project Funding

<u>Capital Sources</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Hennepin County ERF Grant	\$750,000 (est)	
Park Dedication Funds	\$370,000	
<u>Supplemental Sources</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Total:	\$1,120,000	

2. Project Data:

2a. What are the boundaries of the community engagement area?

West 26th St to the north, Pillsbury Ave to the east, West 32nd St to the south, and Bryant Ave So to the west. The Soo Line Garden site is located in the Whittier neighborhood. Adjacent neighborhoods include Lyndale, Lowry Hill East, and South Uptown.

2b. What are the demographics of the community engagement area?

	Whittier	Lyndale	Lowry Hill East	South Uptown
Population	14,483	7,251	9,298	6,075
Age				
Age under 18 yrs	12.6%	18.6%	3.2%	5.0%
Age 18-24 years	20.9%	11.3%	21.5%	19.7%
Age 25-64 years	14.2%	63.0%	69.1%	62.1%
Age 65+	2.7%	6.1%	4.0%	12.2%
Race				
White	52.8%	54.7%	62.8%	74.2%
Black	23.3%	34.0%	15.2%	6.4%
American Indian & Alaskan Native	0.9%	suppressed	suppressed	suppressed
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.5%	1.8%	6.9%	3.6%
Two or more races	5.7%	3.5%	suppressed	6.5%
Hispanic or Latino	13.6%	17.1%	7.7%	8.7%
Housing				
Renter-occupied	81.0%	61.6%	83.9%	69.0%
Owner-occupied	11.3%	31.3%	12.2%	27.6%
Households with children under age 18	10.5%	20.6%	4.7%	7.2%
Language other than English spoken	23.7%	31.4%	16.8%	suppressed

Foreign-born residents	17.5%	20.3%	12.8%	6.9%
Population with a disability	11.9%	13.3%	6.0%	11.0%
Median household income	\$53,719	\$66,235	\$67,847	\$76,791
Population below poverty level	25.7%	21.1%	7.9%	13.1%
Cost-burdened households	42.8%	35.6%	31.9%	32.4%
Households without a vehicle	22.9%	18.3%	17.0%	13.1%
Workers who do not drive to their workplace	45.1%	32.7%	41.2%	40.6%

Data source: 2020 census and 2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimate, MNCompass.

Note: some categories may not total 100% due to suppression of missing or unreliable data.

2c. List any key findings or excerpts from relevant plans or policies that are informing this project, program or initiative, especially if community was engaged in the policy or plan: *The purpose of community research is to collect data that will best inform specific project decisions or strategic direction and support the policy goals of effective community engagement. Research completed in advance of and during project development may include review of previously completed directives or mandates, activity plans, master plans, community studies, industry trends and historical and demographic data. MPRB staff is responsible for determining the research data necessary to support and document decision-making for a project and building off prior community engaged planning, policy, and design.*

This project will primarily be informed by the MPRB Southwest Service Area Master Plan (SWSAMP) which outlines guiding principles for community park spaces, the Community Gardening Policy, and the Ecological System Plan.

2d. What are the data gaps? What additional research needs to be done to understand the project stakeholders and project scope?

Understanding permitting requirements for any improvements, especially stormwater-related and contamination remediation-related requirements.

3. Community Engagement:

3a. Identify Project Stakeholders

The MPRB supports the use of a variety of techniques to interact with and obtain information from stakeholders. Outreach and research tools and methods can be applied for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to the following:

- a. Evaluate success and measure community impact of existing programs, services or facilities.
- b. Gain stakeholder insight and perspective regarding development of a new program, service or facility.
- c. Proactively identify or explore park and recreation trends or ideas.
- d. Determine essential services to be provided for a community or park area.
- e. Query stakeholders when proposing or revising policy.
- f. Resolve persistent conflicts or problems.
- g. Educate or inform the public on proposed changes, projects, programs, and initiatives.
- h. Reflect on projects, programs, and initiatives after adoption by the Board or report on how community input has been integrated.
- i. Learn the history of local context and community.

Project Stakeholder <i>(students, ethnic communities, neighborhood groups, community leaders)</i>	Outreach: How will you reach out to the stakeholder? <i>(i.e. go to parks, neighborhood listserv, engage with cultural media)</i>	Engagement: How will they participate? <i>(i. e. online survey, focus group, community open house, intercept survey)</i>	Reflecting Back: How will stakeholder groups be reflected back to about the project progress or outcomes? <i>(Posted on project website, ribbon cutting, e-blast, site visit, celebration)</i>
Whittier Neighborhood Association & Residents	Email, neighborhood meetings and events, org listserv	Open houses, survey, community meetings and events	Post on project website, updates via email, celebration
Soo Line Community Gardeners	Email, community meetings and events, org listserv	Open houses, survey, community meetings and events	Post on project website, updates via email, celebration
Whittier International School	Email, school meetings events and listserv	Open houses, survey, school meetings and events	Post on project website, updates via email
Midtown Greenway Coalition	Email, community meetings and events, Midtown Greenway Coalition listserv	Open houses, survey, community meetings and events	Post on project website & partner websites, updates via email
Cyclist and Pedestrian Users of Midtown Greenway	Email, community meetings, Mpls Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committees	Open houses, survey, community meetings and events	Post on project website & partner websites, updates via email
Disability Community Members	Email, community meetings, Mpls Advisory Committee on People with Disabilities	Open houses, survey, community and online meetings and events	Post on project website & partner websites, updates via email
Lyn-Lake Business Association	Email, community meetings and events, org listserv	Open houses, survey, community meetings and events	Post on project website, updates via email, celebration

If needed, describe the outreach, engagement, or reflection methods you will use that are referenced above:

3b. Advisory Committees:

Technical Advisory Committee: This roster is a list of agencies and groups that are on the TAC
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
Midtown Greenway Coalition
Hennepin County
City of Minneapolis

Project Advisory Committee: This roster is a list of MPRB departments and divisions that are on the PAC
Planning
Asset Management
Forestry
Horticulture
Environmental Management
Park Police
Communications

3c. Will a Community Advisory Committee be required for this project, program, or initiative? Y/N

No.

4. Analysis:

4a. What questions will you be asking community to respond to in your outreach and engagement?

Do you use this site? How would you like to use this site?

What do you consider compatible uses at this site?

Do you have any concerns regarding this project?

Are there other improvements that could be made to increase use, safety, and viability of this site?

4b. How will your community engagement outreach, engagement, and methods make MPRB a more equitable system?

The methods proposed will not only target established neighborhood groups, but will also work to meet current and potential park stakeholders where they are at - at the park and out and about in the neighborhood. We will work to intercept these users to get feedback from demographics present. We will also consider communications in multiple languages. We will also partner with the school to reach students and their families.

4c. Identify one or more key project milestones when project evaluation will be performed.

Design development, Schematic Design, 100% Construction Drawings, Substantial completion, Project as-built drawings.

5. Evaluation Summary: *To be completed at one or more project milestones as identified in 4c.*

5a. Who was engaged during the process? Project staff held multiple public meetings with stakeholder groups listed in the CE Plan, including: Whittier Neighborhood Association and residents through board meetings and community events such as Open Streets; Soo Line gardeners through direct meetings; Whittier International School, Midtown Greenway Coalition, and Lynn Lake business association through GovDelivery posts and email; cyclist and pedestrian users through presentations to the Mpls Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committees, and disability community members through presentations to the Mpls Advisory Committee on People with Disabilities. PAC members also reviewed designs.

5b. How did the engagement inform the project outcome? (i.e. public tabulation and amendments following a public comment period) Design consultants prepared multiple draft concept plans which were altered and updated in response to several rounds of community feedback. The final design incorporated input from the disability community in particular.

5c. Please describe any new or innovative engagement methods used during the process: In addition to presenting at bicycle, pedestrian, and disability advisory councils, staff participated in several existing community based events to bring information on the project to people where they already gathered. This included the Whittier Community Dinner, the Whittier Really Really Free Market, and the Nicollet and Lyndale Open Streets events.

5d. What recommendations do you have for future engagement around this topic, park, or area? Continue to balance input from gardeners, disabled users, cyclists, and pedestrians as well as neighbors.

5e. What, if any, were the unintended outcomes of your CE Plan? Unexpected discovery of soil contamination in 2024 refocused project goal on a temporary solution first, to be followed by an updated long-range concept plan at a later time.

5g. Were there any barriers to successful implementation of your CE Plan? Unexpected discovery of soil contamination required a change in focus.

5h. Were you adequately resourced, including staff support, expertise, and funding? The project was not awarded a Hennepin County Environmental Remediation Fund grant. A temporary solution was funded from multiple sources, however fundraising will need to be done to implement the long-range concept plan.

5i. If applicable, how can this project, program, or initiative, or MPRB continue to partner and deepen relationships with underrepresented communities? Connect with the many different communities already present in Whittier neighborhood, as well as users of the Midtown Greenway.