



Board Meeting date: September 6, 2023  
Milestone Update 1: June 3, 2025  
Date of Board Approval (for CAC's only): TBD

**Staff Lead:** Emma Pachuta

**Department or Division:** Strategic Planning

**Project Name:** East Phillips Open Spaces Plan

**Engagement Level:** Consult, Involve, or Partner (See Engagement Assessment attached)

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This plan serves as a guide for the community engagement process for the *East Phillips Open Spaces Plan*. 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 *Involve* category of community engagement for which MPRB is required to obtain stakeholder feedback on project, initiative, or program analysis, alternatives, or decisions. This CE Plan was used with a GARE Racial Equity Tool Kit framework.

**Key Stakeholders should be engaged in the creation of this plan. This is to be filled out before the CE Plan is submitted to the Board as a P+C. Please explain how they were engaged:**

MPRB staff have received feedback about level of partnership interest, timeline, and type of focused engagement MPRB should implement from the following community partners:

- East Phillips Improvement Coalition
- Little Earth Residents Association
- The Boys and Girls Club
- Banyan Community

Additional community partners will be identified as the process moves forward.

This plan will also be informed by agency partners that are working on projects within the East Phillips neighborhood:

- Hennepin County
- City of Minneapolis
- Mississippi Watershed Management Organization (MWMO)

Engagement will respond and adapt to community and partner feedback throughout the process.

## 1. Project Description

### 1a. Project Overview:

The East Phillips Open Spaces Plan will create a vision and design for MPRB's East Phillips and Cedar Avenue Field parks in the East Phillips neighborhood. MPRB also anticipates this plan will look beyond MPRB parkland and may include some private properties and/or public right-of-way adjacent to the parks to create a more comprehensive and intersectional vision for these parks.

### **MPRB Park Planning History**

In 2016, MPRB adopted the South Service Area Master Plan (SSAMP), which planned 26 of the 30 neighborhood parks in south Minneapolis. The borders of the park planning area stretched from I-35W on the west to the eastern city limit and is bounded on the north by the I-94/I-35W loop around downtown.

During the SSAMP planning process, East Phillips Park was one of four parks that did not get planned at that time. The narrative in SSAMP explains: *“East Phillips Park is considered a “special case” in the SSAMP process. No park plan has yet been created for this park. Because this park recently underwent a master planning process that concluded in 2010 with implementation of many facilities in the park, it was considered by the community to be too soon to master plan it again. Therefore, no master plan is included in the SSAMP. Instead, a full master plan for the park will be performed at which time the first major asset in the park needs replacement... replacement of that asset will trigger a community-engaged master plan to create a new vision for the entire park. That plan will then be amended into the SSAMP.”*

Existing East Phillips Park amenities include a rec center, softball and baseball fields, basketball court, picnic area, playground space, indoor and outdoor bathrooms, and wading pool.

A park plan for Cedar Field Avenue Park was also not initially included in the adopted SSAMP document, due to challenges with achieving adequate community engagement. However, a separate planning process immediately following SSAMP did create a plan for Cedar Field, which was then amended into the SSAMP document. The vision includes retaining and upgrading the playground, basketball court, and multi-use diamond court, plus added new elements such as a formalized outdoor gathering space, interactive water feature, a picnic shelter, linear skate park, and volleyball court.

CIP funding is now available at both parks in the East Phillips neighborhood which has spurred this recent planning process. This park planning process is intended to be added as an amendment to the existing South Service Area Master Plan (SSAMP).

Since 2016, MPRB staff have received feedback from community members, specifically staff who work with Native youth at Little Earth, that the design for Cedar Field Avenue proposed in 2016 may not adequately address to needs of Native youth or the ongoing safety issues that Little Earth residents experience in and around the park.

Additionally, MPRB staff have also learned that even though East Phillips Park and Cedar Field Park are one block away from each other, some residents don't necessarily see both parks as being welcoming or accessible to them, so they only visit one park or the other.

For these reasons, MPRB staff believe it is important to revisit the park planning conversation for Cedar Field Park and surrounding areas at the same time we plan East Phillips Park to ensure Native youth voices are adequately represented in the final design. It will be important for both park designs to speak and align with each other as they are only one block apart from one another but provide very different resources in the community and are often used by different demographics in the neighborhood.

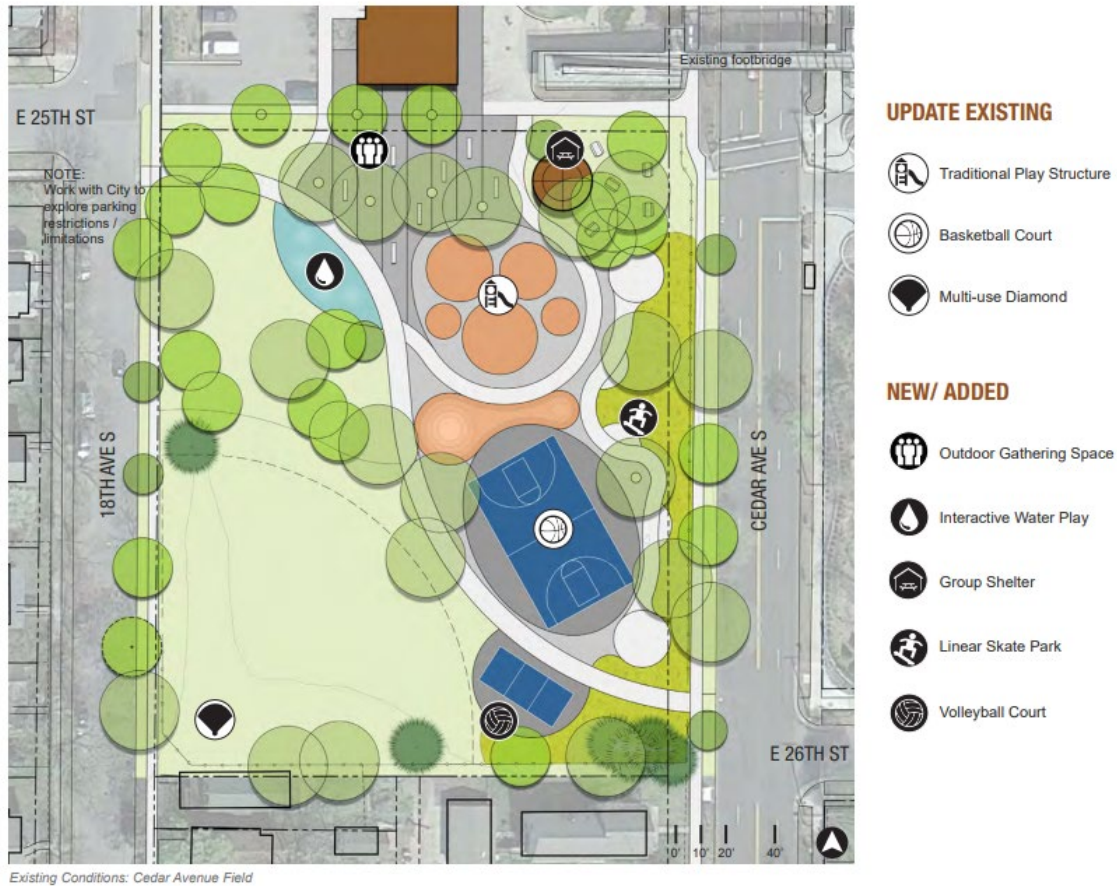


Figure 1: Cedar Avenue Park Design from 2016 SSAMP

### Community Partnership Opportunities

As part of looking more broadly at community issues and priorities, the planning process will include collaborations with a number of community partners that represent different demographics and voices in the neighborhood.

One important partnership to note is with the Little Earth community. MPRB staff anticipates that the private open spaces within the Little Earth community area will be included within planning process conversations. Because MPRB and Little Earth are in the early stages of confirming scope/roles/collaboration, how Little Earth chooses to partner with the planning process may evolve over time depending on their feedback and capacity. This Community Engagement Plan will be updated if/when a formal agreement is put in place with Little Earth to ensure that the narrative accurately reflects this work.

Discussions around recreation and open space needs in the East Phillips neighborhood are complex. Multiple jurisdictions of roadways link and divide the open spaces in the neighborhood, and a mosaic of open space ownership can make serving residents a multi-party effort. Furthermore, common Native perspectives on land “ownership” teach that we should not necessarily stop planning at the boundary of a single park or jurisdiction, but instead work across all land to best serve the community. For these reasons and others, MPRB staff believe it will be impossible to authentically engage the community and effectively plan the two MPRB parks in this area without including adjacent green spaces at Little Earth and potentially other adjacent private and public spaces, including roadway corridors. Staff will be working closely and intentionally with residents, community organizations, and partner agencies to understand the best way to unpack the topics that community wants to address.

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

### **Comprehensive Plan**

#### **Goal 1: Foster belonging and equity**

- Strategy 5: Identify and remove barriers to park access as a way of fostering economic, psychological, social, and cultural resilience for new and current park users
- Strategy 14: Elevate voices of those most impacted by health disparities and environmental injustice to inform policies, programming, activities and services in parks

#### **Goal 3: Provide core services with care**

- Strategy 11: Design and implement parks that are welcoming, climate resilient, ecologically healthy, playful, beautiful and safe as they age
- Strategy 20: Prevent violence and mitigate impacts on public health, perceptions on safety and safety in the park system through multiple models of community safety and hard reduction

### **1c. Project Timeline:**

**Summer 2023/Fall 2023: Park Plan start-up:** Preliminary conversations with community partners to assess upcoming issues, landscape analysis, identify engagement strategies, identify consultants for project, complete/update boundary and topographic surveys for both parks.

**Fall 2023-Summer 2024: Discovery and Assessment:** work closely with the project team, community partners, and groups to research, assess, map, and begin to understand physical and social conditions for the park and recreation needs. Engage community about the vision for these parks.

**Summer 2024-Winter 2024: Park Planning:** Initiate park planning design iterations for the public for East Phillips Park and Cedar Field Park. Staff will rely heavily on input from the general public, as well as engage significantly with established neighborhood organizations and service and outreach providers that work with diverse populations.

**Park Plan Approval: Spring 2025:** This will include a public comment period and final approval by the board of directors.

**1d. Project Funding:**

<u>Capital Sources</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
NPP20	\$300,000	none

**2. Project Data:**

**2a. What are the boundaries of the community engagement area?** (For regional facilities include neighborhoods adjacent to the park and city/regional boundaries)

Both parks are located in the eastern portion of the East Phillips neighborhood, so residents and partners within the neighborhood will be our primary focus. Adjacent Phillips communities, such as Phillips West, Midtown Phillips, Ventura Village, and residents on the western portion of the Seward neighborhood may be engaged through secondary channels and in-person park engagement.

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

As of 2020, there were over 22,000 residents living in the neighborhood.

Regional race and ethnicity (Met Council 2020):

- White 21.5%
- Of color 73.5%
  - *Black or African American alone* 41.4%
  - *American Indian and Alaskan Native alone* 5.1%
  - *Asian or Pacific Islander alone* 2%
  - *Two or more races* 4.3%
- Hispanic or Latino (of any race) 24.8%

Over 34% of the East Phillips population is under 18 years old, which is double the average amount of youth in most Minneapolis neighborhoods. For this reason, it will be crucial to engage youth sufficiently during the engagement process. Additionally, less than 9% of the neighborhood population is over 65 which is in line with the average in the city of Minneapolis.

Almost 15% of residents in the neighborhood were not born in the United States, which is about twice the statewide average of 8%. Providing communications in languages that represent the community will also be an important factor in engaging with the neighborhood. Languages that have already been identified include Spanish and Somaali.

Projections tell us that communities of color, youth, and seniors will double in current demographic percentages by 2040 (Thrive MSP 2040), confirming how integral it is for MPRB to include a diversity of voices within the park planning processes.

**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:**

As previously mentioned, the East Phillips Open Spaces Plan will be an amendment to the South Service Area Master Plan that was adopted in 2016. This document created a 20 to 30-year vision for the parks in South Minneapolis and outlined a park plan for 26 of the 30 neighborhood parks in the area. The plan also guides capital expenditures under the 20-Year Neighborhood Park Plan for funding (NPP-20). The SSAMP guides the development, rehabilitation, and operations of neighborhood parks and the document is based on broad public engagement and recommendations of an appointed Community Advisory Committee (CAC).

A number of local community and agency projects and issues may also inform the MPRB work, such as the redesign of adjacent city and county streets, safety concerns outside of the park boundaries, and other community topics.

We will refer to other city and national trends and data as is relevant for the project.

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

We do not have data about which demographics use each park in the neighborhood, so we will have to rely on the information that we learn while completing engagement in the neighborhood.

Listening and building authentic relationships will be integral to the success of this work. MPRB has begun having initial conversations with community partners and it will be important to continue to show up, build trust, and respond to feedback throughout the process.

**3. Community Engagement:**

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, initiatives and projects.
- 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.

<b>Project Stakeholder</b> <i>(students, ethnic communities, neighborhood groups, community leaders)</i>	<b>Outreach: How will you reach out to the stakeholder?</b> <i>(i.e. go to parks, neighborhood listserv, engage with cultural media)</i>	<b>Engagement: How will they participate?</b> <i>(i. e. online survey, focus group, community open house, intercept survey)</i>	<b>Reflecting Back: How will stakeholder groups be reflected back to about the project progress or outcomes?</b> <i>(Posted on project website, ribbon cutting, e-blast, site visit, celebration)</i>
Current park users, which can include youth, cultural communities, organizations,	Attend community events, present to neighborhood organizations, neighborhood listservs, flyering in the neighborhood	Online/paper survey, community open house, attend existing community events, focus groups	Website, direct email, GovDeliveries, news articles, flyers at community nodes
Local neighborhood organizations and community groups such as: Little Earth, EPIC, places of worship	Attend community events, neighborhood listservs	Online survey, possible community open house,	Website, direct email, GovDeliveries, news articles
MPRB staff who work in the East Phillips neighborhood	Connect with Service Area Manager to identify best process	Focus group, invite to attend community events	Direct email

Park Users	Go to parks/park events, MPRB listservs, social media	Online survey, in person survey at park events	Website, Gov deliveries, news articles
Non-park users	Connect with neighborhood groups to share through their networks	Focus group, online survey,	Website, Gov deliveries, news articles
Cultural communities	Community partners with focused constituents	Experiential event/conversation(s) at Cedar-Isles, online survey	Direct communication with partners
Seniors/elders and disability community	Community partners with focused constituents	Experiential event/conversation(s) at Cedar-Isles, online survey	Direct communication with partners
Renters	Community partners with focused constituents	Experiential event/conversation(s) at Cedar-Isles, online survey	Direct communication with partners
Youth	Park-based youth programming	Experiential event/conversation(s) at Cedar-Isles, online survey	Share out with youth programming staff to share with groups

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

**3a. Advisory Committees:**

<b>Technical Advisory Committee:</b> This roster is a list of agencies and groups that are on the TAC
City of Minneapolis
Hennepin County
Mississippi Watershed Management Organization

<b>Project Advisory Committee:</b> This roster is a list of MPRB departments and divisions that are on the PAC
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Community Outreach
Strategic Planning
Design and Project Management
Forestry
Environmental Management
Recreation
Asset Management
Youth programming
Communications
Public Safety

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

Under the MPRB Community Engagement Policy, this project would require a CAC, being that the project will create a new vision plan for a park. However, staff strongly recommend that the park planning process proceed without a CAC within the context of this project. We believe that implementing a CAC process would be inequitable in the context of this neighborhood's demographic reality and the profound challenges community members here are currently facing.

MPRB CAC processes require residents to donate dozens of hours of their personal time over the course of several months or even years, to be able to contribute to the decision-making of the planning process. Many of the CAC meetings run for 2-3 hours at a time and take place during the evening timeslot. This type of advisory committee structure can work for some people, but it often creates unintentional barriers for people to participate from underrepresented demographics, such as single parents, people who do not have access to a vehicle, people who do not work a 9-5 job, people who do not speak English as their first language, people who rent, etc. Additionally, CAC members on average lean whiter and wealthier than the city of Minneapolis average, even for projects in areas with large BIPOC populations.

As outlined in the demographics in 2b, almost 3 in 4 residents identify as people of color in the neighborhood and 1/3 of residents are living under the poverty line. Many East Phillips residents are facing pressing economic and social issues on a daily basis and MPRB staff are concerned that if a CAC is seated, it will not accurately reflect the demographics of this community.

MPRB staff believe, in consultation with community partners, that the best way for the community to advise the MPRB on this project is for MPRB to work to build trust and authentic relationships with the residents and organizations in the neighborhood by “meeting them where they’re at.” This could mean attending their organization’s meetings on their own time, showing up at their events, and taking the least amount of emotional energy away from the other issues that are impacting their community on a daily basis. We will take the community’s lead on how they would like to advise on this project.

Staff understand that this is a departure from the adopted CE Policy. We do not make this recommendation lightly, but we feel this is the best option based on our real-world experience of CAC processes. We are concerned that a seated CAC cannot feasibly represent the East Phillips community and would therefore overwhelm, through its recommendation power, the day-to-day, event-by-event, conversation-by-conversation engagement we plan to do.

Functionally, then, it is staff that will propose and recommend the final concepts based on that engagement. A 45-day comment period would still take place, as a final vetting of the visions, before they are considered by the Board of Commissioners for adoption.

#### **4. Analysis:**

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

Do you currently visit both parks?

If yes, what activities/programs do you participate in at both parks?

If no, what activities to participate in at one of the parks? Is there a reason why you do not visit both parks?

What sort of activities would you like to see at East Phillips?

What sort of activities would you like to see at Cedar Field Park?

What gaps or issues currently exist that you would like MPRB to address? What are the opportunities for improvement at both parks?

Additional questions will be asked of Little Earth residents about their property in relation to services, green space, and parkland.

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

Ensuring that we are being inclusive with the voices that are represented throughout the process will help the Park Board develop a plan for both parks that elevates underrepresented voices and takes everyone's needs and interests into consideration.

**4c. Identify one or more key project milestones when project evaluation will be performed**  
(i.e. Draft design review, draft policy review, project mid-point)

**Milestone #1:** Complete Discovery & Assessment (Summer 2024)

**Milestone #2:** Completion of Cedar Avenue Field Concept Plan (Summer 2025)

**Milestone #3:** Completion of East Phillips Park Concept Plan

**Possible Milestone #4:** *If MPRB and Little Earth enter into a formal MOU or agreement for the planning work for Little Earth's property, the CE Plan will also be updated to accurately reflect the partnership at that time.*

**5. Evaluation Summary:**

*The rest be completed at one or more project milestones, and at the completion of the project, program, or initiative.*

**5a. Who was engaged during the process?** (i.e. demographic info from online survey participants, the CAC, and community engagement whenever possible. Refer back to Section 2 in the CE Plan and how your engagement reflects the diversity of the community in the engagement area.)

**Milestone 1 Reflection: June 2025**

Between Fall 2023-Fall 2024, MPRB staff worked to build relationships with residents and local organizations within the East Phillips neighborhood to implement engagement for Cedar Avenue Field Park and East Phillips Park. The project also consulted directly with MPRB's Indigenous Park Liaison, Carrie Day Aspinwall, who grew up in the neighborhood and was able to help build relationships, advise on community engagement, and weigh in on strategy for the project.

Since there was not a CAC for this project, staff determined that working closely with residents and local organizations would be the key to ensuring local voices were adequately represented through the design process.

Community engagement was completed through a number of avenues, including:

- Funding local organizations to collaborate and/or lead engagement events to gather feedback from various demographics
- Hosting and collaborating on events in partnership with local organizations

- Hosting pop-up events at Cedar Avenue Field Park and East Phillips Park during tournaments, events, and average days at the parks
- Attending events in the East Phillips and, at times, in the Phillips neighborhood
- Door-knocking in the community
- Distributing online and paper surveys at community hubs
- Joining local talk radio to speak about the project

Organizations that staff partnered with for the Vision & Discovery phase include:

- Little Earth Residents Association (LERA)
- Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI)
- Little Earth Protectors
- American Indian Movement (AIM)
- East Phillips Improvement Coalition (EPIC)
- Midtown Greenway Coalition (MGC)
- Boys & Girls Club
- Native Roots Radio
- Somali Public Radio
- Banyan Community

Working in partnership with local organizations and through consulting with MPRB's Indigenous Parks Liaison allowed staff the ability to work directly with a number of community leaders and engage with hundreds of residents who use one or both parks.

MPRB staff quickly learned that the demographics are different between who regularly uses each park. Cedar Avenue Field Park seems to be seen as the "town square" for Little Earth; many non-Native park users also commented on this. Little Earth's housing units sit adjacent to the park on the north and east sides; their residents use this park daily and they regularly host recreational and cultural events at the park. East Phillips Park generally hosts a broader audience of residents, with folks from the local community, including Somali, Latinx, Native and other neighbors regularly participating in programming and events the park. Events at East Phillips Park often required MPRB to consider Spanish, Somali, and English to be able communicate with all users in the park, while it was often sufficient to have English represented at Cedar Avenue Field Park to engage with all users. East Phillips also hosts athletic tournaments that draw in users from across the city and region.

Due to Cedar Avenue Field Park's smaller audience, MPRB staff felt comfortable wrapping up the Vision & Discovery Phase for Cedar Avenue Field Park in August 2024, feeling confident that we

had engaged a larger percentage of people who both use or would like to use the park in the future.

Because of the broader audience of users for East Phillips Park, MPRB staff decided to spend additional time working with community partners to ensure we engaged all of the demographics and users before wrapping up engagement. Engagement for East Phillips Park wrapped up in October 2024.

Because there are different audiences for each park and due to the additional time needed to engage with East Phillips Park users, the East Phillips Open Spaces project team decided to separate the planning process and complete the design of each park separately at timelines that worked within the capacity of community stakeholders. It is anticipated that Cedar Avenue Field Park will be brought for approval of the concept this summer and East Phillips Park will be brought for approval this fall/winter.

Additionally, during Phase 1 of engagement, MPRB also participated in regular conversations with Hennepin County regarding the reconstruction of Cedar Avenue and Mississippi Watershed Management Organization (MWMO) on a feasibility study to assess opportunities for water quality improvements at both parks and the surrounding properties.

### **Milestone #2 Completion of Cedar Avenue Field Park Concept Plan**

MPRB released three initial concepts for Cedar Avenue Field Park in Winter 2024. A critical insight gained during this period was the significant safety challenges at Cedar Avenue Field Park, necessitating a design approach that prioritized user safety while simultaneously fostering a welcoming environment. Additionally, it became clear that “Indigenizing” the park was a priority for both Little Earth residents and non-Native residents who use the park and live in the neighborhood.

MPRB continued to partner with community stakeholders from the Vision and Discovery Phase to gather feedback with different park audiences and implement strategies including:

- Funding local organizations to collaborate and/or lead engagement events, ensuring feedback was gathered from diverse demographics.
- Hosting and collaborating on events in partnership with local organizations, including specific community collaborator lunches, dedicated elder conversations, and a Little Earth Open House.
- Hosting pop-up events at Cedar Avenue Field Park
- Direct door-knocking in the surrounding community to reach residents who might not otherwise participate.
- Distributing online and paper surveys at various community hubs.

Working with these groups and in ongoing consultation with MPRB's Indigenous Parks Liaison allowed staff to have meaningful conversations with hundreds of community members whose input directly informed the development of a preferred design concept. Primary engagement was with all ages and demographics within the Little Earth community along with residents that live within a 2-3 block radius of the park. Secondary audience included the broader East Phillips neighborhood.

**5b. How did the engagement inform the project outcome?** (i.e. public tabulation and amendments following a public comment period)

**Milestone #1:** The feedback from community stakeholders and residents informed MPRB's decision to separate the park planning process of Cedar Avenue Field Park and East Phillips Park. MPRB is currently moving both processes forward, and it is anticipated that the Cedar Avenue Field Park process will be completed ahead of the East Phillips Park.

During the Vision and Discovery Phase, staff received feedback from some Little Earth residents regarding "land back": one request came from several Little Earth residents for Cedar Avenue Field Park to be transferred over to the Little Earth Residents Association. Staff also received three separate proposals from separate Indigenous groups for "land back" at East Phillips Park to be used for a tiny village to support Native community members struggling with homelessness and drug addiction in place of the park itself. None of the proposals identified which organization/tribe/community member to transfer the land to.

Since the request for "land back" at Cedar Field came up consistently from residents, and because the request outlined a future land holder, MPRB staff reached out the Little Earth Residents Association (LERA) board to inquire whether they would like to have further conversations about this request: they did. Carrie Day Aspinwall, the MPRB Indigenous Parks Liaison, and project manager Emma Pachuta attended several LERA board meetings flushing out the concept of "land back" at Cedar Field: identifying what the term meant to them, walking through MPRB policies and procedures, discussing how the land would be used in the future, sharing park costs associated with the site, asking questions about how amenities would be maintained, etc. Ultimately, LERA and MPRB staff determined that it would be in the best interest of all parties (LERA, MPRB, the public) for MPRB to continue to own and operate the park and its amenities at this point in time, and that MPRB/LERA would identify ways for close collaboration, which would include co-management of the proposed new building, or agreements that could outline joint programming, management of gardens, etc.

For the "land back" requests for East Phillips Park, outside of the three proposals that were received by MPRB, the idea of changing the use of the park to be used for tiny villages did not

come up in regular conversation amongst park users and residents over the course of the Vision and Discovery engagement phase. When the topic did come up, the general feedback was that many supported the vision of building a tiny village to support Native community members struggling with addiction, however, few thought that the best location for this resource was at the East Phillips Park site. Many noted that the park was a much loved and used amenity in the community and that the community would like to keep it as a park.

Due to the feedback received from the “land back” conversations about each park, neither concept proposes a change in use or change in ownership of the park sites at this current time.

**Milestone #2 Design:** While there was generally consensus about most of the design and amenities proposed within the final concept, one area where there was \*not\* consensus was the request to add a gymnasium at Cedar Avenue Field Park. The request for a gym primarily came from older youth (17-25) and youth workers in the Little Earth network; the case they made was that there was a strong need for indoor youth programming to support Native youth during colder months and that the park was the best place to add a gym to do this. Currently, Little Earth and the Boys and Girls Club use a single room in the Little Earth offices to house youth programming for both younger youth (5-12) and older youth (13-25) and it is a cramped space to accommodate everyone.

MPRB staff hosted conversations with youth workers, youth, Little Earth staff, community leaders, and residents about the idea of adding a gym on-site. MPRB staff also spoke with staff internally to learn about the opportunities and challenges of adding a second gym within one block of East Phillips Cultural Center. Ultimately, the MPRB project team decided not to add a gym on site for a few reasons:

- **There are already two gyms within 2 blocks of Cedar Avenue Field, one at East Phillips Park and one at Little Earth.** Both gyms currently do have barriers for Little Earth youth to be able to access them, however, there are longer-term plans to address barriers at both locations:
  - o **East Phillips Cultural Center Gym:** For programming at East Phillips Cultural Center, the current model has a “grandfathered in” and then “first come, first serve” sign-up method to reserve the gym, which means that groups who used the gym the previous year get first dibs to sign up the following year. After that, it is a first come, first serve sign up, which means that some leagues and groups may sign out the gym weeks in advance making it near impossible for Little Earth youth to come over and play an adhoc game last-minute or have the “best” times during the evenings to play. This has created a feeling of unwelcome and barrier to access for Little Earth. Recreation staff are willing to work with Little

Earth staff to identify opportunities to break down barriers for Little Earth youth to play for future seasons.

- **Little Earth gym:** The gym housed at Little Earth is both smaller than a full-sized basketball court and also houses many events for Little Earth residents, which has prevented LE youth from being able to regularly use this gym for basketball. There is a long-term plan by the Little Earth executive staff to rehabilitate the gymnasium, which will help address some of the current barriers for using it as a gym currently.
- **There is limited space at the park:** Cedar Avenue Field Park is 2-acre neighborhood park that currently operates as a “town square”, hosting large-and small-scale Native-led events. Adding a gymnasium would not only take up 1/4 to 1/3 of the park, it would also greatly change what other amenities and programming that could be offered at the park. There was overwhelming feedback from residents that residents valued the green space that Cedar Avenue Field Park provides along with the fact that Native residents had a strong preference to continue large-scale events at the park. Adding a large building on site would drastically change how outdoor events could be held on-site.

While staff did not propose a gymnasium at Cedar Avenue Field Park, the design *was* informed by the youth feedback and a number of amenities have been proposed that aim to support older youth, including:

- A smaller, programmable building with indoor restrooms
- A skate spot
- A full-sized basketball court
- A water feature for all ages

#### Questions 5c-5i to be answered during Milestone 2

#### **5c. How did the project and engagement fulfill a goal or strategy in the MPRB Comprehensive Plan?**

The East Phillips Open Spaces Plan and its community engagement efforts align closely with several goals and strategies outlined in the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's (MPRB) Comprehensive Plan, *Parks for All*. These alignments underscore MPRB's commitment to fostering belonging, equity, and cultural inclusivity in park planning and development.

#### Goal 1: Foster Belonging and Equity

- Strategy 1.11: *Cultivate long-term relationships with community members, leaders, artists, and community and cultural organizations to inform design, community engagement, and programming of parks.*

MPRB'S Indigenous Parks Liaison, Carrie Day, was critical in forming, strengthening, and maintaining relationships with community members. Thanks to Carrie Day's efforts and connections in the community, MPRB planning staff was successful. MPRB's engagement in the East Phillips neighborhood exemplifies relationship building through the many partnerships with local organizations such as the Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI) and the Little Earth Residents Association (LERA). These partnerships facilitated culturally specific engagement and youth workshops, ensuring that park designs reflect the values and needs of the community.

- *Strategy 1.23: Share narratives and elevate voices beyond dominant cultural contexts through public art, memorial collections, creative placemaking, and cultural programs that reflect the diverse history and current cultural context of our city and park lands.*

The community engagement process actively involved diverse community members, specifically Native, Latino/x, and East African residents, providing them with a platform to share their perspectives and ideas. This work aligns with Strategy 1.23 emphasis on amplifying underrepresented voices and integrating their narratives into park development.

Goal 3: Provide Core Services with Care

- *Strategy 3.12: Increase Park staff, safety, programming, operations, and design capacity to meet increased demands of park system expansion, including new park acquisition, development, new facilities, increased programs, increased events, and to support the implementation of the comprehensive plan.*

The input gathered from East Phillips residents directly shaped MPRB's ability to enhance safety and design capabilities. For example, community feedback on desired amenities like water play, multi-purpose building, basketball court, multi-age play areas, and culturally important design elements (such as the Pow-Wow Lawn and Arbor) provided a guide for park development and new facilities.

The identification of significant safety challenges by residents directly informed the need for increased lighting, fencing, and operational adjustments to ensure a secure environment for park users. Similarly, requests for specific events (Pow-Wows) and winter programming guided the design ensuring the park evolves to meet the community's diverse recreational and cultural needs.

**5d. Please describe any new or innovative engagement methods used during the process:** See Section 5a. that outlines the engagement methods. Staff used a number of "tried and true" engagement methods, however, the close partnerships that were utilized during this project may qualify as "unique" or "new" in how we made decisions together with the community without having a formal CAC for the project.

**5e. What recommendations do you have for future engagement around this topic, park, or area?**

Future engagement efforts in the East Phillips neighborhood should prioritize cultural responsiveness and flexibility to meet the evolving needs of the community. Based on our experience, we recommend the following:

- **Sustain Relationships with Trusted Community Partners:** Build on the strong partnerships formed with organizations like the East Phillips Improvement Coalition (EPIC), the Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI), and Little Earth Residents Association, Midtown Greenway Coalition, and more local groups. These organizations have deep roots in the neighborhood and can continue to serve as bridges between MPRB and residents.
- **Center Youth Voices:** Given that over one-third of East Phillips residents are under 18, engagement strategies should prioritize youth lead initiatives and input. Youth workshops and creative, hands-on activities helped inform the project and should be expanded in future planning.
- **Maintain Culturally Specific Engagement Approaches:** Tailored outreach—such as culturally focused focus groups, multilingual materials, and trusted community leaders—is vital in engaging underrepresented communities. These strategies should be institutionalized for future engagement efforts.
- **Be Present:** Consistent presence at community events, seasonal pop-ups, and informal gatherings builds visibility and trust. MPRB staff learned the importance of trust building and recommend future engagement should be a process that moves at the “speed of trust”
- **Allow Time and Space for Flexibility:** Community needs and capacity shift in response to local events and challenges. Engagement timelines should remain adaptable and respectful of what’s happening in the broader neighborhood context.
- **Close the Loop with Community Feedback:** Ensure that residents clearly see how their input is being used to shape decisions. Transparent follow-up builds trust and encourages continued involvement in future MPRB engagement.

By implementing these recommendations, future engagement around East Phillips Park, Cedar Avenue Field Park, and the surrounding area should continue to foster equity and inclusion.

#### **5f. What, if any, were the unintended outcomes of your CE Plan?**

When the community experienced challenges or urgent events—such as safety concerns, local crises, or losses—MPRB paused engagement activities out of respect for community capacity and to avoid adding pressure during difficult times. While these pauses temporarily delayed the projects timeline, they ultimately strengthened community trust and reinforced MPRB's commitment to centering residents' needs in the planning process.

#### **5g. Were there any barriers to successful implementation of your CE Plan?**

Staff believe that the CE Plan was implemented successfully, however, we learned that even if our project was proceeding forward well, if issues arose between the community and other

departments/decisions by MPRB, our program would also have to pause until the issues between community and MPRB were addressed. Community members experiences all of MPRB decision-making as one agency and our project was no exception. This speaks to the importance of relationship-building and community dialogue on all issues that impact community to ensure that MPRB is able to build good relationships.

**5h. Were you adequately resourced, including staff support, expertise, and funding?**

Yes, the project was adequately resourced with a well-rounded team, which was essential to the success of the engagement process. The full project team brought diverse expertise and capacity to support sustained, responsive community engagement over an extended timeline.

A key asset was MPRB's Indigenous Parks Liaison, Carrie Day, whose role was instrumental in building and strengthening relationships with Native residents in the East Phillips neighborhood. Her cultural knowledge and trusted presence helped ensure that engagement with the Native community was respectful, relevant, and meaningful. Having additional representation from the neighborhood, from different cultures, and from different departments has been an invaluable resource on this project.

Overall, the combination of staff support, subject matter expertise, and sufficient funding allowed MPRB to carry out a thoughtful and community-centered engagement process that reflected the needs and values of the East Phillips neighborhood.

**5i. If applicable, how can this project, program, or initiative, or MPRB continue to partner and deepen relationships with underrepresented communities?**

Hiring and supporting staff who reflect the communities being served—such as MPRB's Indigenous Parks Liaison—is essential for culturally responsive engagement. Expanding this model by creating additional culturally specific liaison roles or community navigator positions would further deepen trust and engagement with underrepresented communities.