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**Staff Lead:** Emma Pachuta/Michael Jones

**Department or Division:** Planning

**Project Name:** Elliot Park Playground and Park Improvements Planning Process

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

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This plan serves as a guide for the community engagement process for the *Elliot Park Playground and Park Improvements 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 *consult* 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. Please explain who was engaged:**

Staff plans to work with the Elliot Park Neighborhood Inc. (EPNI) to engage with and identify stakeholders as the project moves forward. The Elliot Park Coalition will also be engaged and includes:

- EPNI
- East Town Business Partnership (ETBP)
- North Central University (NCU)
- Catholic Charities – Twin Cities
- Hennepin County Medical Center (HCMC)
- Hope Community Church
- Aeon
- Bethlehem Baptist Church
- Minneapolis Police Department (MPD)
- MPRB Park Police and Rec staff

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

This plan may also be informed by agency partners whose jurisdiction overlaps with or is adjacent to Elliot Park, including:

- City of Minneapolis
- Metro Transit

- Hennepin County

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

## 1. Project Description

### 1a. Project Overview:

The Elliot Park Playground and Park Improvements planning work will build upon the vision outlined for Elliot Park within the 2017-approved Downtown Service Area Master Plan. A Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was created and made final recommendations on the plan at that time.

The scope of the project includes specific funding for playground improvements and funding to support additional improvements on the east side of the park. Based on the existing safety concerns at the park that have risen over the last couple of years, staff anticipate improvements will focus on ways to activate the park and increase safety for park users, and community engagement will ultimately inform what improvements move prioritized.



*Elliot Park Engagement and Project Area Scope*

The park sits adjacent to two high-traffic streets to the north and east (Olson Memorial Hwy and 11<sup>th</sup> Ave S respectively), 9<sup>th</sup>/Elliot Ave. S to the west, and E 14<sup>th</sup> Street to the south. The location of this

neighborhood park is unique to many other neighborhood parks in the MPRB system as it's located within the downtown urban core, is situated adjacent to high traffic streets and a high number of institutional and civic buildings located on adjacent blocks. Neighboring businesses include North Central University, Catholic Charities, and several hospital buildings. Unlike many neighborhood parks that primarily serve neighboring residents, this park serves both residents and visitors from these different institutions alike.

The Elliot Park Plan outlined in DSAMP proposed retaining the athletic field, skatepark, and basketball court and proposed a number of improvements to the east side of the park that include:

- An addition to the rec center
- A community garden
- Moving the playground and wading pool closer to the rec center
- Providing an “activity space” in place of the former playground

**Elliot Park Proposed Plan**



Figure 1.29 Elliot Park Proposed Plan

Since DSAMP’s adoption in 2017, improvements have been made to the athletic field and skatepark on the west side of the park. These amenities have positively activated the space and are well used and loved by park users.

In recent years, Elliot Park has experienced an increase in crime and drug use on the east side of the park. It is now one of the parks with the highest crime rates in the MPRB system. These increased crime rates have unfortunately deterred many park users from visiting the east side of the park, which is why this area will be the focus of MPRB staff's engagement now that CIP funding is available.

MPRB staff will use the 2017 Elliot Park plan as the foundation for the improvements and will work to engage residents and park users about their concerns and ideas for how to improve safety and activation on the east side of the park, including the playground improvements.

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

**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 of safety and safety in the park system through multiple models of community safety and harm reductions.

**Goal 5: Expand focus on health equity**

- Strategy 1: Increase safety at parks through multiple strategies, specifically:
  - o Master planning and design;
  - o Activation, including by partners;
  - o Lighting that balances safety and light pollution;
  - o Security cameras, with consideration of the balance between safety and identity protection;
  - o Enhanced technology for crime prevention, intervention and investigation;
  - o Culturally sensitive practices;
  - o Staff visibility at parks; and
  - o Response and intervention plans for mental health crises in parks.

**1c. Project Timeline:**

Winter 2023: Initial project scoping

Spring 2023-Summer: Community engagement with stakeholder and residents

Summer 2023: Determination of priority improvements for current funding

**1d. Project Funding:**

<u>Capital Sources</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Neighborhood Capital Levy	\$250,000	none
NPP20	\$1,493,000	none
Neighborhood Capital Levy (Playground Improvements)	\$390,000	none
TOTAL	\$2,133,000	

It’s possible that Park Dedication may also be used if additional funding is needed for improvements, but that would be determined in partnership with EPNI. Discussions about this have not taken place at this point in time.

**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.)*

Elliot Park exists entirely inside the Elliot neighborhood. The focus of community engagement will consist of residents and businesses within the boundaries of the neighborhood.

**2b. What are the demographics of the community engagement area?** *(Please refer to percentages of the population when possible and note the sources of the data.)*

As of 2020, there were over 7,500 residents living in the neighborhood.

Regional race and ethnicity (Met Council 2020):

- White 56.9%
- Of color 41.4%
  - Black or African American alone 27.1%
  - American Indian and Alaskan Native alone suppressed\*
  - Asian or Pacific Islander alone 5.7%
  - Two or more races 3.4%
- Hispanic or Latino (of any race) 5.0%

*\*Data suppression is used whenever there is chance that the information contained in a publicly available report could be used to reveal or infer the identities of specific individuals*

About 8% of the Elliot Neighborhood population is under 18 years old, whereas 77% of the residents are between the ages of 18-64. The average percentage of residents under the age of 18 in Minneapolis is ~25%, do there are a lot less youth who live in Elliot Park than other neighborhoods.

Almost 17% 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 Somali as there is a high population of East African residents living near the park.

About 78% of residents in the neighborhood live in a renter-occupied housing development. To be able to reach renters, it will be critical to connect with landlords and rental associations and community partners to ensure we connect with tenants.

Projections tell us that communities of color, youth, and seniors will double in current demographic percentages by 2040 (Thrive MSP 2040). Alongside the demographics of the neighborhood, this shift confirms 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:** *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.*

As outlined in the Project Overview, staff will use the Elliot Park plan adopted the 2017 Downtown Service Area Master Plan (DSAMP) as a starting point for engagement and improvement prioritization.

Staff have completed initial conversations with recreation staff and park police to acquire crime data and observations about the issues at hand. Planning staff have also begun having one-to-ones with community stakeholders and participating in bi-monthly Eliot Park Coalition meetings. A scoping document has been created by staff and is available by request.

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

Based on preliminary conversations, it's clear that there are differing perspectives from stakeholders about why crime has increased in the last few years and what solutions are needed to improve safety for park visitors. Listening and building authentic relationships will be integral to the success of this work. 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, 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.

<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	Attend community meetings and events, neighborhood listservs	Online survey, possible community open house	Website, direct email, GovDeliveries, news articles
MPRB staff who work in the Elliot neighborhood	Connect with Rec Director 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	online survey	Direct communication with partners
Seniors/elders and disability community	Community partners with focused constituents	online survey	Direct communication with partners

Renters	Community partners with focused constituents	online survey	Direct communication with partners
Youth	Park-based youth programming	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:**

**3b. Advisory Committees:** Staff do not anticipate hosting a formal TAC for this work, but will reach out to adjacent agency partners as appropriate including:

<b>Technical Advisory Committee:</b> This roster is a list of agencies and groups that are on the TAC
The City of Minneapolis
Metro Transit
Hennepin County

<b>Project Advisory Committee:</b> This roster is a list of MPRB departments and divisions that are on the PAC
Community Connections and Violence Prevention
Strategic Planning
Design and Project Management
Forestry
Environmental Management
Recreation
Asset Management
Communications
Park Police

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

*If yes, complete 3d-3g. If no, please delete 3d-3g from the CE Plan.* No, as previously mentioned, this work will be completed using the template from the 2017 DSAMP, which already had a formal CAC to advise on the final design.



#### 4. Analysis:

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

Do you currently visit Elliot Park?

- If yes, what activities/programs do you participate at the park?
- If no, is there a reason why you do not visit the park?

Do you feel safe when visiting Elliot Park?

- Why or why not?
- What could MPRB do help you feel safer when visiting the park?

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

What gaps or issues currently exist that you would like the MPRB to address?

What are the opportunities for improvement at Elliot Park?

##### 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 Elliot Park 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 Engagement for upcoming Improvements (Summer 2024)

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

**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.*)

MPRB staff began relationship building by joining EPNI Elliot Park Coalition meetings to learn about the community's concerns around safety. Planning staff also met with CCVP, Park Police, Rec, and other agencies/departments who had experiences and feedback to share regarding the current safety situation.

MPRB staff implemented two rounds of engagement. The first phase was a Visioning phase, completed from January 2024 – July 2024. During Phase 1, MPRB staff hosted, collaborated, and attended over two dozen engagement events, which included partner meetings, safety forums, tree planting events, bi-weekly Coffee in the Park events, and large community events like the Summer BBQ and Jazz in the Park. Staff also worked with community partners, such as Aeon, Augustana, and Catholic Charities to host focused conversations with their stakeholders. Focused audiences that MPRB spoke with included: youth, elders/seniors, residents where English is not their first language, students, people who live in the neighborhood, people who visit the park.

During Phase 1, Planning staff also supported a number of temporary safety strategies that were requested by park police and community, such as adding additional lighting to the park perimeter, adding signage prohibiting alcohol in the park, and a temporary art installation on the storage container at Elliot Park. These improvements were intended to help change the current culture of illicit activity at the park and also to respond to the community concerns even before the construction began.

Over the course of Phase 1, planning staff spoke with hundreds of community members. The top themes that were identified during engagement included:

- A Need for Increased Safety: many people reported that regardless of adding new amenities, if there continued to be illicit activity in the park, they would not visit the park
- Support/Desire for Increased Programming: Many people reported a desire for more events and ways to positively interact with the park
- Desire for Public Art at the Park: Many reported a desire
- Support for 2017 DSAMP changes: most residents generally supported what was already shown in the approved plan from the 2017 Downtown Service Area Master Plan.

Three design options were then released in late August, which kicked off Phase 2 engagement. The three design options strongly aligned with the feedback heard from community during Phase 1, including addressing safety concerns through a number of different design and program options. One item that MPRB staff did not include in the three designs, but which came up a number of times during engagement, was a desire to add a dog park at this location. MPRB staff chose not to include a dog park at this location for two reasons: 1. There is a dog park located a few blocks away from this location already and 2. Staff learned from elders in the Somali community, who make up a sizable demographic of the residents in the neighborhood, that adding a dog park would keep them away and create a park that they would not feel welcome at due to cultural differences and fear of dogs.

Phase 2 feedback was collected between late August and early October by hosting, collaborating, and attending similar events and meetings as Phase 1. A final design was released in late October at the Elliot Park Community Safety Forum.

**5b. How did the engagement inform the project outcome?** *(i.e. public tabulation and amendments following a public comment period)* The engagement with coalition partners and residents strongly informed the project outcomes.

**5c. Please describe any new or innovative engagement methods used during the process:** We collaborated with a number of partners, like Catholic Charities, Aeon, and Augustana, to host conversations with non-English speaking residents, folks who have experienced homelessness and/or drug addiction, and elders. Without these partnerships, it would have been difficult to have had in depth conversations with any of these demographics.

Implementing temporary safety strategies was also something that was a new strategy for staff working on this project.

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

Partners were integral to completing engagement in Elliot Park. Staff learned that it was very difficult to get people to turn out for a standard open house or event hosted by MPRB in the Elliot Park neighborhood. The best way to engage was to meet people where they were at by showing up at their place of residence and having a community partner help market the event.

**5e. What, if any, were the unintended outcomes of your CE Plan? N/A**

**5g. Were there any barriers to successful implementation of your CE Plan?** Our engagement took longer than anticipated due to the need to work with partners and host events at their locations.

**5h. Were you adequately resourced, including staff support, expertise, and funding?** Yes. Having CCVP staff as a resource was invaluable on this project.

**5i. If applicable, how can this project, program, or initiative, or MPRB continue to partner and deepen relationships with underrepresented communities?** Even after planning staff wrap up the construction work, it will be important for rec staff, park police, CCVP, and other long-term department partners to continue to show up in the neighborhood. Currently, all listed departments have been great resources with continued presence in the community.