

DOWNTOWN SERVICE AREA MASTER PLAN



Minneapolis
Park & Recreation Board



November 2017



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LHB, Inc.

MIG

SRF Consulting Group



Minneapolis
Park & Recreation Board



Acknowledgements

The Downtown Service Area Master Plan (DSAMP) is the result of dedicated and ongoing collaboration among residents, visitors, and workers of downtown Minneapolis. The Plan was shaped by those who served on the appointed Steering Committee (SC), Technical Advisory Committee, downtown neighborhoods, community service organizations, and members of the public (downtown residents, visitors, and workers). MPRB Planning division staff thanks all these individuals for their contributions to the plan.

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1 Planning Framework

Introduction and Purpose
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PLANNING FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Neighborhood Parks

Minneapolis is home to a park system that puts 94% of people within a quarter of a mile of a park. The neighborhood parks are a critical piece of that puzzle, something early superintendent Theodore Wirth knew when he started securing land for them and designing them in the 1910s and 1920s. The earliest visions for neighborhood parks were as squares of green within the rapidly developing city. Following the lessons from the city parks movement that gave rise to landmarks like Boston's Emerald Necklace and New York's Central Park, Minneapolis' parks were to be the city's green lungs—places of health and respite, available to all people but meant especially for those who could not otherwise access green space for recreation and relaxation.

Today neighborhood parks are commonly an integral part of a neighborhood and represent the place where people come together. Beginning in the late 1960s, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) built recreation centers across the city, and redesigned the neighborhood parks around them.

Playgrounds, wading pools, and ball diamonds provided active recreation opportunities.

In Downtown Minneapolis the neighborhood park, where it is available, serves a wider audience by providing park and recreation opportunities for workers and visitors in addition to residents.

An Evolving Downtown

Since around 2009, population growth in center cities has remained close to that of outer-ring suburbs—typically within several tenths of a percent. This reverses a decades-long trend of significantly higher growth in suburbs. In fact, between 2011 and 2013, it was statistically even. Urban growth is being driven by an increase in children born to parents who are older on average than any previous generation (and who are more likely to live in the city), an increase in empty nesters moving back to the city from the suburbs, and an increase in immigrants who have come to the city for many reasons who are all seeking to make a new life for themselves and their own children.

In Minneapolis, urban growth is especially visible downtown, as the population has grown to 35,000

with a city-defined goal of 70,000. This growth is accompanied by construction of new housing units as well as the conversion of former warehouses to apartments and condominiums.

The historic industrial nature of significant areas of today's downtown resulted in less development of parks within the downtown area. Today, however, city leaders are envisioning a vibrant downtown that competes successfully for new residents, visitors, and workers, while supporting the existing population. This vision includes dynamic parks and open spaces. This plan builds on this momentum of this vision and previous plans to provide direction on park development and creation over the next 25 years.

Why Plan Now?

Minneapolis today is more diverse in terms of age, race, ethnicity, and recreational needs than ever before. The population of downtown continues to grow with residential properties replacing surface parking lots and warehouses being converted into living spaces. Minneapolis has long planned, designed, and redesigned its parks. This Service Area Master Plan, however, provides an opportunity for the downtown park system to be redesigned or

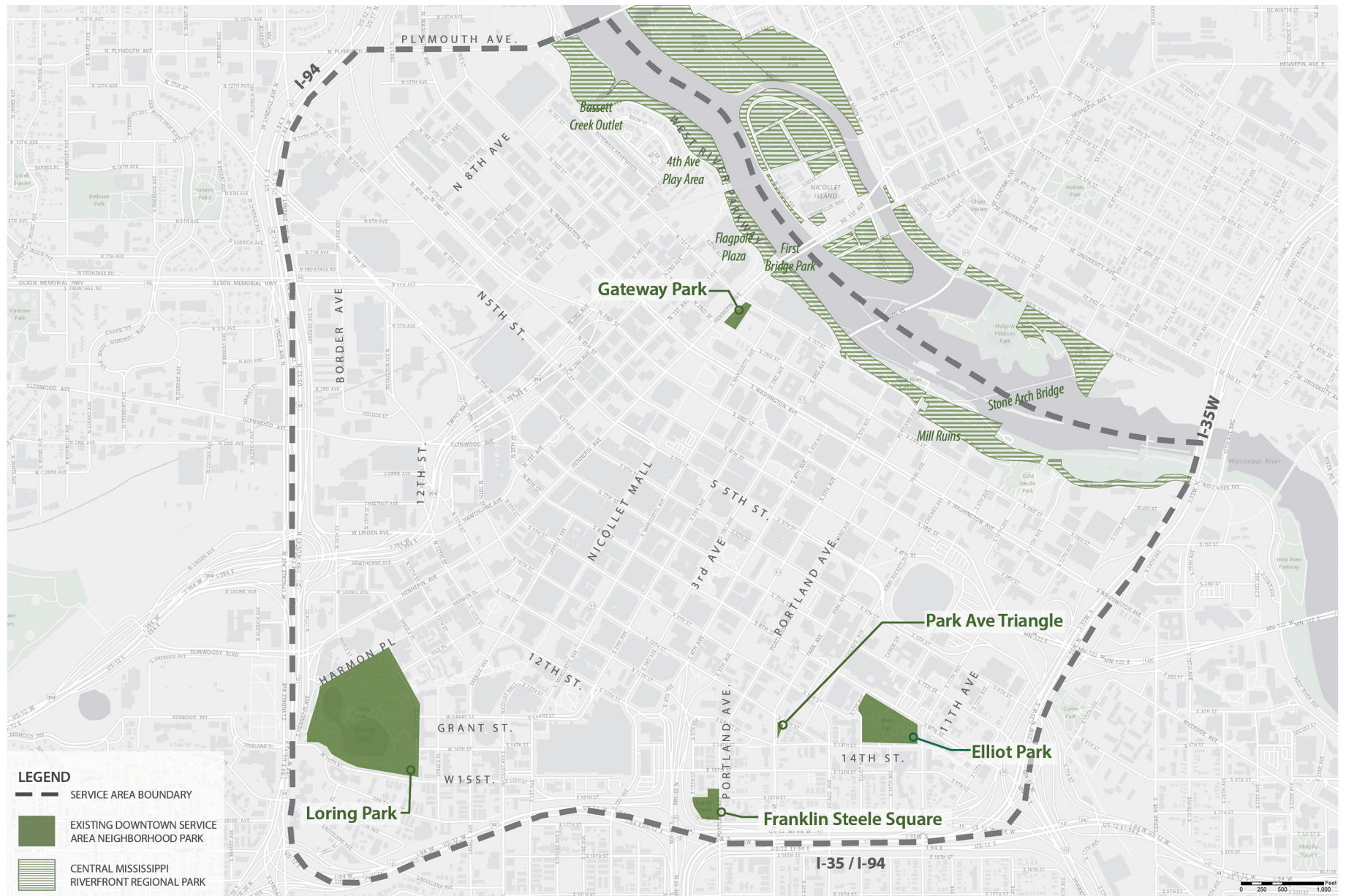


Figure 1.1 Downtown Service Area Existing Parks

envisioned for the first time, comprehensively, with an eye to what can exist in each park and also how those parks work together. As available space for parks and open space dwindles downtown, comprehensive park planning is essential to shaping the quality of life for downtown residents, as well as the whole of Minneapolis that seeks to enjoy its downtown.

Purpose of the Plan

The Downtown Service Area Master Plan (DSAMP) sets the vision for park and recreation development and improvements in downtown Minneapolis; it guides the establishment of a new, urban model for service delivery, maintenance, funding, and operation of parks in downtown Minneapolis. Figure 1.1 shows a map of the existing neighborhood park properties that are included in this plan. This plan also includes new park recommendations to serve the growing downtown population. This Downtown Service Area Master Plan is one of five plans that will collectively design or redesign every neighborhood park in Minneapolis.

This is a vision that will span decades. The physical transformation of the parks will happen gradually over time, project by project, like puzzle pieces

fitting into place to form the overall design that is set forth in this plan. This vision will guide capital improvements to reconstruct or build new facilities in existing and proposed parks. It will allow the MPRB to leverage additional financial resources by inspiring and then directing outside philanthropy and grant funding. This vision will—like the parks themselves—bring the community together to build the future of downtown Minneapolis’ neighborhood parks

On April 29, 2016, an historic agreement was reached between MPRB and the City of Minneapolis to fund neighborhood parks in Minneapolis at significantly increased levels until 2037. This agreement demonstrates the importance the Minneapolis community places on its neighborhood parks, and addresses a long-simmering need to accelerate maintenance, rehabilitation, and reconstruction of aging park assets. Instead of using this additional funding to merely put back what currently exists, the DSAMP and the other Service Area Master Plans are asking the community what it wants and then providing guidance for spending. That is the most important reason for this planning effort: to ensure MPRB uses its increased funding on things that are important to the people.

A community-driven park system will be a well-used park system. A well-used park system can combat physical, mental, and societal ills—by bringing people together for active recreation, relaxation, companionship, or solitude. Now is the next legacy moment for Minneapolis parks.

PROJECT APPROACH

A unique approach was taken with DSAMP to root decision-making about what to put in parks from two angles. One angle is to deeply understand the downtown park audiences and their interests. This could be thought of as a market-based strategy similar to the way retailers determine what to put on their shelves. The other angle is to keep sight of the big vision for downtown Minneapolis and understand how to implement parks that support that vision. Where the angles intersect is in park landscapes: a melding of facilities, design, and activities that support the interests of park users and the vision for the city.

The DSAMP project approach has been comprehensive and multi-faceted, examining demographics, recreation needs, condition of current assets, best practices in urban parks and recreation,

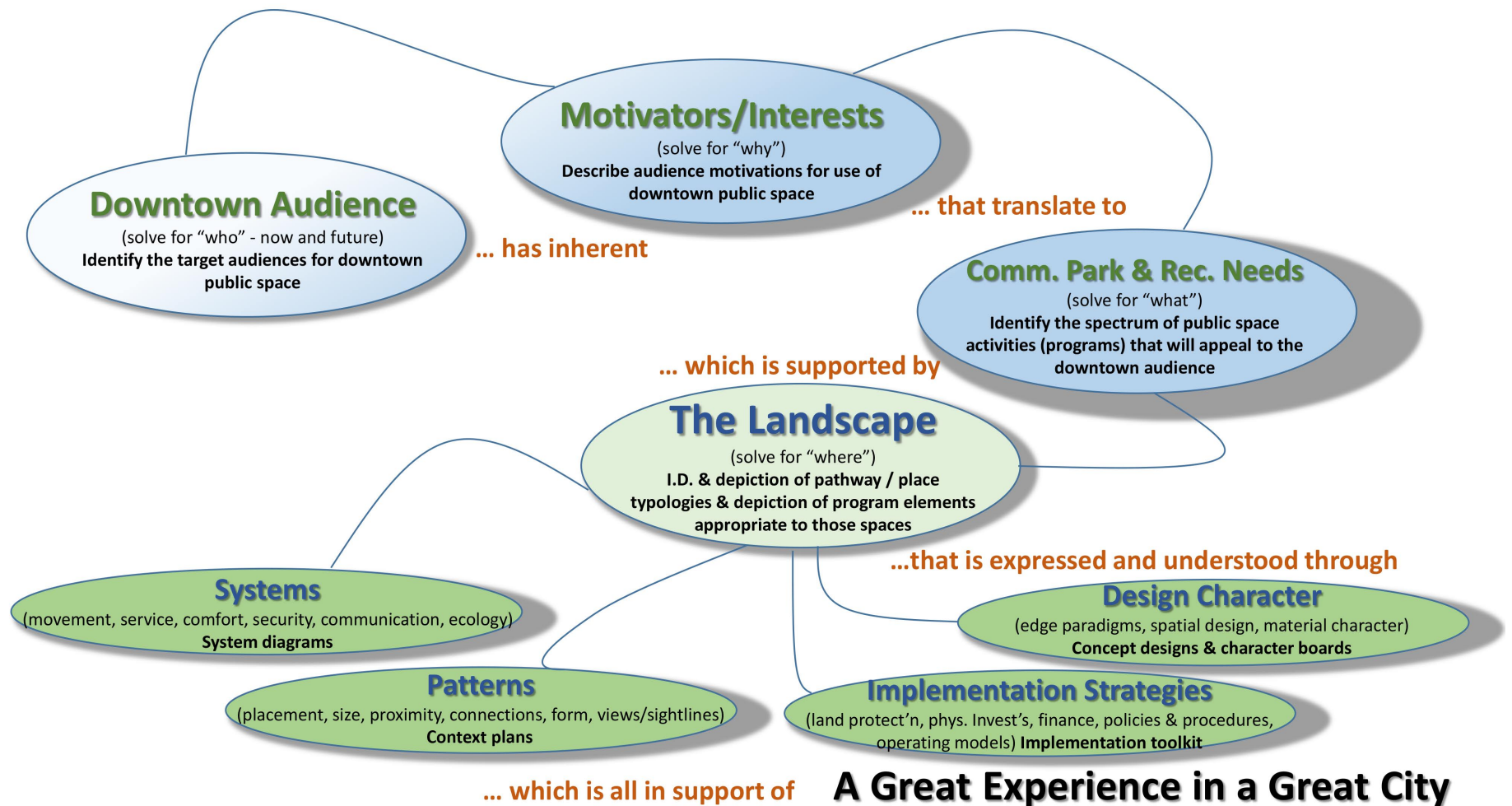


Figure 1.2 Project Approach Diagram

and existing service gaps. Community engagement was woven throughout the project approach.

Throughout the document the project approach diagram (Figure 1.2) will be referenced, where appropriate, to depict how the information collected connects to these facets.

MINNEAPOLIS PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) oversees parks in the City of Minneapolis. The MPRB is a diverse system spanning approximately 6,790 acres of parkland and water and 179 park properties including:

- » the 55-mile Grand Rounds National Scenic Byway;
- » 200+ miles of biking and walking paths;
- » 22 water bodies (lakes and ponds);
- » 12 formal gardens;
- » 7 golf courses;
- » 160 neighborhood parks;
- » and 49 recreation centers;
- » regional parks.

Together these properties annually receive an estimated 21 million visits.

The MPRB provides administration, planning development, maintenance, and police protection for parks and recreational facilities in the system.

Mission Statement

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board shall permanently preserve, protect, maintain, improve, and enhance its natural resources, parkland, and recreational opportunities for current and future generations.

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board exists to provide places and recreation opportunities for all people to gather, celebrate, contemplate, and engage in activities that promote health, well-being, community, and the environment.

Vision Statement

In 2020, the Minneapolis Park System is a premier destination that welcomes and captivates residents and visitors. The Park System and its beauty are part of daily life and shape the character of Minneapolis. Natural, cultural, artistic, historical, and recreational resources cultivate outstanding experiences, health,

enjoyment, fun, and learning for all people. The Park System is sustainable, well-maintained and safe, and meets the needs of individuals, families, and communities. The focus on preserving land continues, with a strong emphasis on connecting people to the land and each other. Aware of its value to their lives, residents are proud stewards and supporters of an extraordinary park and recreation system.

As a renowned and award winning park and recreation system, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board delivers:

Vision Theme 1: *Urban forests, natural areas, and waters that endure and captivate*

Goals

- » Sound management techniques provide healthy, diverse, and sustainable natural resources.
- » Healthy boulevard trees connect all city residents to their park system.
- » Residents and visitors enjoy and understand the natural environment.
- » People and the environment benefit from the expansion and protection of natural resources.
- » Knowledgeable stewards and partners generously support the system's natural resources.

Vision Theme 2: *Recreation that inspires personal growth, healthy lifestyles, and a sense of community*

Goals

- » People play, learn, and develop a greater capacity to enjoy life.
- » Residents, visitors, and workers enjoy opportunities to improve health and fitness.
- » People connect through parks and recreation.
- » Volunteers make a vital difference to people, parks, and the community.
- » Parks provide a center for community living.

Vision Theme 3: *Dynamic parks that shape city character and meet diverse community needs*

Goals

- » Parks shape an evolving city.
- » Park facility renewal and development respects history and focuses on sustainability, accessibility, flexibility, and beauty.
- » Focused land management supports current and future generations.
- » Financially independent and sustainable parks prosper.
- » Through outreach and research, park and recreation services are relevant today and tomorrow.
- » Easily accessible information supports enjoyment and use of the park and recreation system.

Vision Theme 4: *A safe place to play, celebrate, contemplate, and recreate*

Goals

- » Positive recreation experiences and welcoming parks prevent crime.
- » Residents, park visitors, and staff make safe choices in the parks.
- » Intervention and communication reduce safety concerns.
- » Parks are safe and welcoming by design.
- » Communities, public and private partners, and staff cooperate to promote safety.

VALUES

We apply the following values to all of our work:

- » **Sustainability:** *Meet current park and recreation needs without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs by balancing environmental, economic, and equity concerns.*
- » **Visionary Leadership:** *Respect the vision and leadership that built the park and recreation system and recognize the need for ongoing leadership in achieving excellence.*
- » **Safety:** *Work safely to support a thriving work environment and an outstanding park experience for visitors.*
- » **Responsiveness and Innovation:** *Anticipate and thoughtfully respond to the diverse needs of the city's communities, continually seeking ways to better deliver park and recreation services.*
- » **Independence and Focus:** *Independence allows the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board to focus on providing and obtaining the resources necessary to accomplish its mission and form effective, responsible partnerships.*

PRINCIPLES

We consider the following principles when making decisions that have a district or system-wide impact:

- » **Identified Community Need and Demographics:** *Emphasis will be placed on researching community needs and demographics when considering program and facility delivery.*
- » **Quality versus Quantity:** *The amenities provided to meet the park and recreation needs of communities will be high quality and provided at a sustainable level. Amenities that have completed their useful life-cycle, especially those with a blighted appearance, will be removed and, as funding becomes available, replaced with new amenities.*
- » **Embracing Technology:** *Decision-making will embrace technology to better serve the community.*
- » **Fostering a New Face for Partnerships:** *Nontraditional partners that provide new opportunities for residents and are consistent with the organization's mission will be encouraged.*
- » **Focusing on the Activity, Then the Infrastructure:** *After evaluation of what the Park Board currently provides, the status of other service providers, and existing infrastructure, infrastructure will be provided to meet the service goals for that activity. Service goals for an activity will be based on demographics of an area, identified community needs, and the identified target audience for the activity.*
- » **Sustainable Rate:** *A sustainable park system will be supported by decisions that provide services at a sustainable rate, such as providing infrastructure that can be reasonably maintained, setting realistic program and service delivery targets, or modifying land management techniques to increase efficiency.*

DOCUMENT OVERVIEW

Defining A Service Area Master Plan

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board identified five service areas (South, Downtown, Southwest, North, and Northeast) in which it delivers park and recreation services to Minneapolis residents and park visitors (Figure 1.3). A Service Area Master Plan illustrates the future design of each neighborhood park within a specific service area based on community park and recreation needs. It may also identify areas of the service area that may be deficient in park resources and pose strategies for resolving or eliminating those deficiencies.

A Service Area Master Plan:

- » Takes a complete look at all outdoor park assets: fields, playgrounds, paths, etc. Buildings are not included in Service Area Master Plans. They are the focus of a planning initiative for recreation centers across the city known as RecQuest;
- » Sets a vision for operations, management, and improvements;
- » Creates improvement plans for each neighborhood park;
- » Sets priorities and estimates budgets; and
- » Guides decisions on capital improvements, land acquisition, and development of new parks.

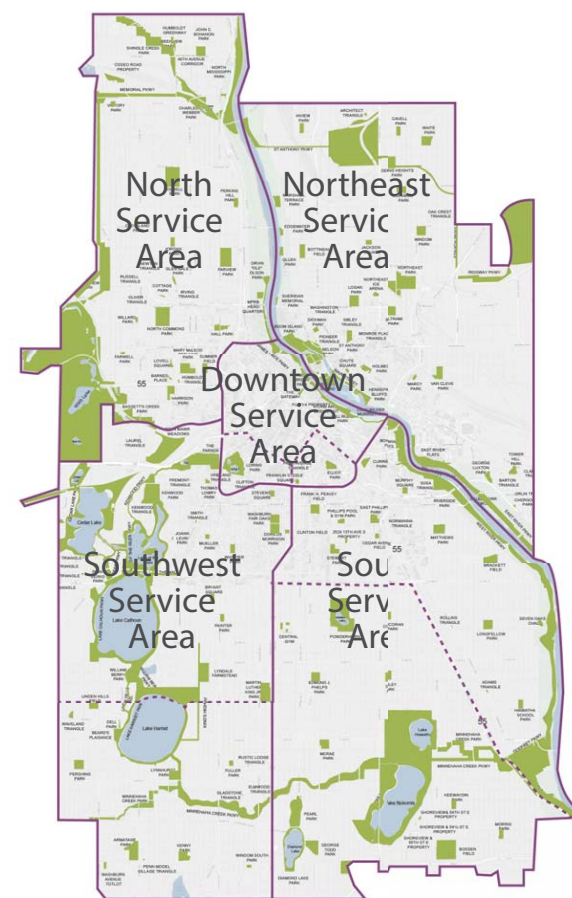


Figure 1.3 MPRB Service Areas



This Document Has Six Chapters

1. Introduction and Planning Framework

(This is the current chapter)

2. Planning Process

This chapter documents how MPRB and the community arrived at this plan. It provides key background information on demographics, recreation trends, and the service area itself. It discusses the various stages of the planning process and the community engagement undertaken at each stage.

3. Service Area Vision

This chapter is a look at the service area as a whole. It explains the “constellations” that guide the plan and the recommendations provided by the project’s Steering Committee.

4. Neighborhood Park Plans

This chapter includes the designs for each neighborhood park in the Downtown Service Area. It features a packet of information for each park, including cost estimates.

5. Operations & Partnerships

This chapter includes an overview of operational and staffing structure for the Downtown Service Area (DSA). It also provides guidance on partnerships.

6. Implementation

This chapter speaks to future park planners, designers, and community advocates. It provides guidance on using this planning document for capital planning, detailed design, and park dedication expenditures. It discusses how to track progress and ensure accountability to the public.

Appendix

Additional information will be included in the appendix to the final document, including public comments on the draft plan.



Living Document

MPRB intends that this will be a living document, referenced regularly by all departments for everything from capital planning to detailed park designs to placement of new trees in parks. The document will exist as a complete, stand-alone book, but the material contained in it will also be disseminated in various formats throughout the organization, to ensure its principles are followed and its resources are utilized:

- » The park plan “packets” can be separated and placed into Planning Division files associated with each park. Project managers will have these packets as resources close at hand whenever they begin a project in a downtown service area park.
- » The implementation tracking spreadsheet allows for regular input by park planners, to facilitate easy updates to the Board and public on progress.
- » The cost estimates shown in this document can be placed as active spreadsheets in each Planning Division park file, as a resource to project managers when they begin projects.
- » The “using this document” and “amending this plan” section in Chapter 6 can become

internal MPRB procedures filed with the Deputy Superintendent, along with all other procedures and policies.

The park plan packets can be linked to Downtown Service Area park pages on the MPRB website. Visitors to a park’s webpage will not only be able to see what is offered in the park now, but also see what is planned in the future.



RELATED PLANNING EFFORTS

Several other present and future planning efforts are related to the Downtown Service Area Master Plan. These include:

Pathways to Places

The DSAMP was created in concert with the City of Minneapolis Department of Community Planning & Economic Development's (CPED's) creation of the Downtown Public Realm Framework Plan (DPRFP).

The DPRFP is a thematic plan guiding policy to inform and coordinate the work of public and private entities that shape and invest in the public realm. It is focused on guiding the enhancement of priority streets and public spaces. It is intended to inform and guide outcomes in capital planning, site plan review, and

public/private partnership toward the coordinated enhancement of the public realm.

Together, the MPRB and the CPED formed a partnership to create the joint *Pathways to Places* initiative with the shared goals to improve greening and pedestrian experience and to reshape how public space is planned and maintained in downtown Minneapolis.

The two final documents are related, but each was written and developed separately for consideration by their respective elected bodies. The documents support and build on each other's key recommendations to achieve the common goals of *Pathways to Places*.

Closing the Gap: Investing in Our Neighborhood Parks, 2016

Closing the Gap: Investing in our Neighborhood Parks was an initiative of the MPRB Superintendent and Commissioners to share information about the current condition and service level of Minneapolis' neighborhood parks, and gather information about investment priorities for replacement, operation, and maintenance of existing park assets. It looked at the impacts that the age of the system and deferred maintenance has had on neighborhood parks in Minneapolis.



RecQuest

RecQuest is a comprehensive planning, design, community engagement, and recreation program evaluation and needs assessment for Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board recreation centers. The plan developed from the assessment will serve the next 25-30 years of capital investments for recreation centers, and is an opportunity to tailor recreation center facilities and programs to meet the current and projected needs of communities across the city.



South Service Area Master Plan + Other Service Areas

The South Service Area Master Plan (SSAMP) was initiated at the same time as the DSAMP. The South Service Area is bounded by the southern and eastern city limits, I-35W, and the I-35W/I-94 downtown loop. There are 32 park properties in the South Service Area. The goals and process of SSAMP parallel those of DSAMP.

Future service area master plans will prepare neighborhood park plans at a similar level of detail as those contained in this document.

Future Service Area Master Plans:

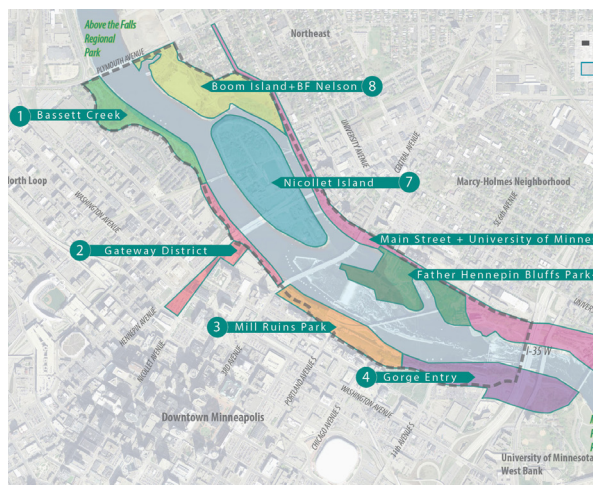
- North (2018)
- Northeast/Southeast (2019)
- Southwest (2018)



Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park Master Plan, 2015

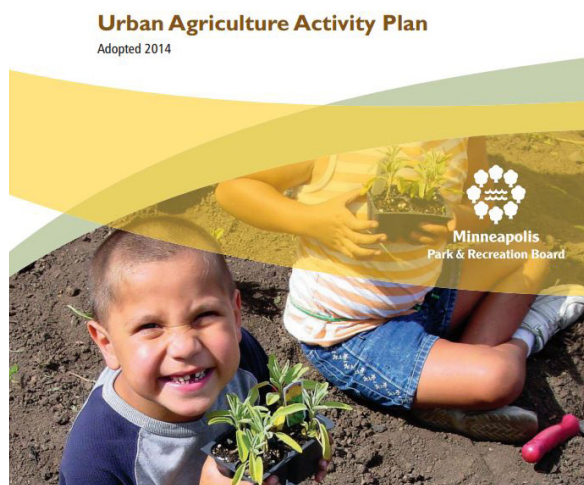
Many of the larger, natural resource-based parks in Minneapolis are regional parks. This includes the Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park in the Downtown Service Area. Per Metropolitan Council funding requirements, regional parks are master planned individually. Though existing facilities within the Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park boundary are shown on many of the DSAMP maps, it is the regional park master plan that governs future investment in this park.

The CMRRP Master Plan proposes a vision, guiding principles, and formative design moves and supporting initiatives for Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park. This regional park, located in the heart of Minneapolis, encompasses approximately 350 acres of riverfront along the Mississippi River,



and runs through the historic Mill District and the downtown Minneapolis core. The purpose of the Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park Master Plan is to provide guidance on the redevelopment and enhancement of existing facilities and resources, as well as the acquisition of additional property and expansion of the regional park boundary.

- » Connections to the river and access to the regional park are critical issues for people living, working, and visiting downtown Minneapolis.
- » Key components that have influenced the DSAMP design process are expansion of the Bassett Creek outlet area, a proposed pedestrian connection along 8th Avenue North to the North Loop neighborhood, strengthened connections between the riverfront and Gateway Park, incorporating a plan for the new Water Works Park, strengthened pedestrian and bicycle connections along both sides of the river and nearby neighborhoods.



Activity Plans

Activity Plans are topical resource guides that shape and are shaped by service area master planning. They look at specific types of use (such as urban agriculture, skate parks, or court sports). They make recommendations for level of service, provide design standards and guidelines, and create task lists for improving delivery of an activity system-wide.

During the DSAMP process, one activity plan had been completed—the Urban Agriculture Plan. The Urban Agriculture Plan guided the DSAMP relative to the placement and opportunities for urban agriculture areas. The DSAMP implements a key feature of the Urban Agriculture Plan by officially designating urban agriculture areas on park plans.



One other activity plan—for skate parks—was near completion during the DSAMP process, but had not been officially adopted. Some of the draft recommendations from that plan were considered, such as geographic distribution of skate parks. This will become a more important resource as the downtown parks plans are implemented.

MPRB Comprehensive Plan

The 2007–2020 Comprehensive Plan guides all decision making at MPRB. As such, many key principles of the plan are reflected in the DSAMP. However, the Service Area Master Plans can also be seen as a look forward to the next revision of the Comprehensive Plan, as they are an important documentation of community desires around neighborhood parks.



Past Planning Efforts

Past planning efforts undertaken by multiple agencies, from the Downtown Council to neighborhood associations, provide a rich base of resources for DSAMP to build upon.

Elliot Park Master Plan, 2003, City of Minneapolis

- » The Master Plan for the Elliot Park neighborhood suggests that the City and its neighborhoods are organized around inseparable systems (layers) that interact with one another: housing, parks, transit, commercial uses, and infrastructure are all essential parts of the whole, including: Patterns of Development; Patterns of Movement; Design of the Public Realm and The Social/Cultural Mosaic.



- » The layered approach includes recommendations for the Neighborhood Commons Initiative which would link a series of public greens and pedestrian scale spaces where diverse communities can gather and interact.

Intersections, Downtown 2025 Plan, 2011, Minneapolis Downtown Council

- » This plan by the Minneapolis Downtown Council proposes the following goals for Downtown Minneapolis: double Downtown's residential population; transform Nicollet into a 'must-see' destination; build Gateway Park; create a consistently compelling Downtown experience; establish a Downtown sports district that includes a new Vikings Stadium; lead the nation in transportation options; create and sustain green infrastructure, and showcase the riverfront; connect to the University of Minnesota; end street homelessness; and launch a festival of ideas and civic engagement.



- » The plan identifies strengths and weaknesses of Downtown, proposes major opportunity sites, and includes a checklist for how to achieve and measure the goals it has set. The plan covers a range of issues related to improved livability and economic and social potential of Downtown Minneapolis, making it relevant to the DSAMP planning process.



Loring Park Neighborhood Master Plan, 2013, City of Minneapolis

- » This extensive plan covers cultural assets and economic vitality, land use and built form, historic resource protection, the public realm, sustainability, and an implementation plan for the Loring Park neighborhood in Minneapolis.
- » Improving the visual, physical, and psychological connection between Loring Park, Nicollet Mall, the Loring Greenway, the Convention Center, and the Sculpture Garden are plan priorities. Specific recommendations relate to walkability and parks, including improving pedestrian connections across Hennepin/Lyndale, and connecting to the North Loop District and Elliot Park neighborhoods.



Loring Park Master Plan, 1996, MPRB

- » Commonly known as the “Balmori Plan,” it focuses on the park itself.
- » Many aspects of the plan have been realized including new pathways, pond restoration, renovation of historic structures, and gardens.
- » Elements still not realized include newly designed park entrances along the eastern edge of the park, a new Berger Fountain Plaza, and addition of more public art.
- » Some improvements from this plan are old and need attention, including invasive species along the pond edge;
- » Friends of Loring Park support a sidewalk along Willow between Yale and Grant.



North Loop Small Area Plan, 2010, City of Minneapolis

- » This plan is a policy document produced by the City of Minneapolis to guide North Loop neighborhood development over a 20-year time span. The plan is meant to provide more detail and to address areas of the North Loop neighborhood that were not covered in the Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan (2003).
- » The plan includes a relevant discussion of future open/green space in the North Loop, including the greening of major corridors such as Washington Avenue, 7th Street, and the potential for creating a new connection along 8th Avenue.