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PLANNING PROCESS



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INTRODUCTION

The North Service Area Master Plan is the result of more than 1 ½ years of planning and design by MPRB staff, the community, and hired technical consultants. More than 100 community engagement events were held and several different stages of input garnered thousands of individual comments on park plans, guiding principles, and the planning process itself. At the core of the community engagement was the 19-member Community Advisory Committee (CAC), a group of community members appointed by MPRB Commissioners, City Council Members, and Neighborhood Organizations. The CAC met 10 times as a group. CAC members also created four formal working groups to address specific topics or geographic areas of the plan. Meetings of these working groups were entirely scheduled and led by CAC members, with support from the MPRB project team. They delved in more deeply into their topic

areas and reported back to the full CAC. The working groups were: Parks without Recreation Centers, North Commons, Bassett's Creek Valley, and Shingle Creek (also known as "Create a Community Center"). Many CAC members also connected directly with their networks and neighbors to bring valuable insight to the planning process.

Throughout the process, MPRB staff expended significant efforts to reach out to community members often left out of planning processes, namely people of color. Staff and design team members attended numerous community festivals, both in and outside of parks, and often simply visited parks on busy days to talk with users. Three other efforts were specifically envisioned to involve more north siders in the process and to make the design process itself more transparent: the Community Connectors Program, the Data Jam, and the Design Week.

During the initial phase of engagement, MPRB hired 11 north side individuals and organizations to do engagement of MPRB's behalf. A competitive call garnered 32 responses—each of which were asked to devise a "project" to engage some underserved population. The CAC selected the 11 connectors through lengthy discussion at meeting #2, and thereby decided how approximately \$60,000 of the project budget would be spent. The pool of connectors included neighborhood organizations, churches, media/dance/art organizations, and individual community members. Their projects featured the creation of community arts festivals or picnics to draw people to parks for engagement, door-to-door canvassing, invitations to garden lunches for food and park conversation, engagement with youth around basketball tournaments, and direct conversations in barber shops and nail salons. MPRB staff collaborated with the connectors in

the way and to the degree they wished. Some connectors performed all their own work and submitted final engagement reports, while some created events and invited MPRB staff to perform its standard engagement method. All the gathered input was incorporated into the Data Jam (see below) and provided to park designers. The Community Connector program was the first of its kind at MPRB and is rare in the public sector.

A detailed list of engagement events can be found in the Appendix.

At CAC meeting #4, the CAC and general public participated in MPRB's first ever Data Jam. In an effort to involve the community in not just the gathering of data, but in the interpretation of that data, meeting participants were asked to sift through collected community engagement and demographic data. They developed major topics for both the service area as a whole, and for each individual park. They worked both individually and collectively, having excellent arguments about what the "public" was actually saying.

The results of the Data Jam fed directly into the initial designs of the parks themselves, which were also prepared in a new and different way. In order to diversify the pool of designers involved in the park designs and to open the process to the CAC and public, MPRB hired six landscape architects to come to Minneapolis for one week and help generate initial park designs. These designers were selected for their experience working on parks in underserved communities. They hailed from Minneapolis, Chicago, Pittsburgh, New Orleans, and Houston.

They featured gender and race diversity. They worked with MPRB staff and the lead consultant Confluence (who also brought additional qualified park design staff to the table) during an intense 4 ½ days that involved site visits, a charette-style working environment, and public events. Design week began with CAC #5, at which CAC members presented guidance from the Data Jam and working groups, then sat at tables with the designers and began thinking about park amenities and arrangement. Two days later, MPRB opened the design studio doors for a public walk-through, where community members could see the designers' early ideas and chat again with them about park designs.

The high amount of community engagement events, the Community Connector Program, the Data Jam, and Design Week were all done in an effort to ensure that the planning process was open and equitable, and to perform work in the spirit of a racial equity lens. Community engagement unfolded in three main phases, in concert with the gradual evolution of park plans over 19 months (for a detailed list of engagement events, see the Appendix). The goal throughout the NSAMP process was to go beyond business-as-usual for community engagement. Of course there is always room for improvement. Of course the sheer population of the NSAMP and existing MPRB resources could not ensure every resident would be directly contacted. However, the extensive engagement associated with the NSAMP garnered input and dialog from a broad cross-section of the community. The NSAMP is the result of input that spans ranges of age, gender, economic status, race and ethnicity, and historic involvement with park planning.

Most important, the planning process and park

designs changed over the course of the project in response to the community's voice. The NSAMP process unfolded slowly and deliberately over more than a year and a half, repeatedly asking the community to weigh in at each stage: at the initial visioning, on the community engagement data themselves, on early hand-sketched designs, at the stage of design refinement, and even on this very document, which changed between the public comment draft and this final version.

Though a park planning process cannot solve the deeply entrenched institutional bias that exists throughout government systems, it can recognize that such bias does exist. It can do its part to make decisions that set the stage for eliminating that bias in areas where MPRB has jurisdiction. MPRB recognizes the importance of the commitment to the NSAMP process many community members have made—especially at a time of heightened tension and dialog around race—and the agency is indebted for that service.

The NSAMP is a significant step forward in ensuring that racial and other bias is eliminated. It envisions a neighborhood park system that meets the needs of the changing community. It aligns park plans with community needs and invests in areas where those needs are greatest. It does not assume the parks will be remade just as they are now. It remakes the parks in the image of the new present and future Minneapolis.



PROJECT PROCESS

The NSAMP process unfolded in six distinct stages. The following is a brief stage-by-stage overview of the project.

1. EARLY CONNECTIONS & THE CAC

At the inception of the project, MPRB staff met with multiple community service organizations and neighborhood organizations in the North Service Area. The purpose of these meetings was to make groups outside the normal planning processes aware of the NSAMP and to also ask for help in broadening the applicant pool for the CAC. In addition, MPRB staff attended park events during this start-up phase, to gather input and encourage CAC applications.

MPRB staff worked closely with appointers on the CAC composition, to ensure broad representation. The NSAMP CAC when seated was representative of the demographics of the area. It must be noted here that, as with any CAC, attendance was never perfect. MPRB recognizes that the multiple evening meetings demanded by the current CAC process can disproportionately affect those with lower incomes, single parents, and those with atypical work schedules. MPRB will continue to work on improving access to CAC meetings, including continued consideration of altered meeting times, always providing food during dinner-time meetings, and bringing individual CAC members up to speed after the fact when they

2. INVENTORY, ANALYSIS, & DATA

Somewhat outside the CAC and community engagement process, MPRB and its consultant team prepared an inventory and analysis of park assets, with descriptions of condition and quality, and also a demographic analysis of the service area. These documents were presented during CAC #3 and were included in the Data Jam.

3. VISIONING & PHASE 1 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

MPRB staff, consultants, community connectors, and CAC members attended nearly 100 events during the summer of 2017, both in the parks and elsewhere. No park designs were presented. Rather, the engagement activities were designed to get people thinking generally about what the park system as a whole should be and what they would like to change or preserve in their local park. As a result of this engagement, the design team produced summaries of responses associated with each park. The analysis was organized so that responses could be sorted by event, by park, and by geographic area of the service area. This information was included in the Data Jam and provided critical insight as the design team began drawing the first initial park plans. Also during this phase, MPRB planning staff and consultants met with each recreation center leader as well as with an MPRB team from across the organization.

4. INITIAL PARK CONCEPTS & PHASE 2 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Based on the extensive phase 1 input and the Data Jam in CAC #4, the expanded design team prepared the initial park concepts. During Design Week, the design team reviewed all the community engagement to date and hand-sketched one or two different concept ideas for each park. The team refined these sketches over the course of several weeks and then brought them back out to the community. The designs were intended to spur community discussion, test different ideas, and then be significantly revised in a later stage. The team also produced maps and charts showing the service area-wide facility mix for each of the concepts.

The initial concepts were brought out to the community in four open houses scattered throughout the north side. The open house set-up was such that community members could gather around the different designs and discuss them with neighbors, at times even drawing new solutions right on the initial sketches. MPRB also met with some stakeholder groups during this process, and revisited all the designs with recreation center leaders, who understand best the daily use of the park. In addition, the initial concepts were available on line with an accompanying survey.

All input—on-line, open house, stakeholder, recreation center staff, etc.—was entered into MPRB’s on-line survey system to generate detailed summaries for each park and ideas for the service area as a whole. The input from this stage is included in the Appendix, while the general input themes are included in the park packet for each park, in Chapter 4.

5. PREFERRED CONCEPTS & PHASE 3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Based on input about the initial concepts, the design team met again in a workshop to discuss revision of the designs. Each park was considered individually and in the context of the service area as a whole, with the draft guiding principles (see Chapter 3) also driving decision-making. The team produced a single “preferred concept” for each park, which was drawn more formally in CAD for easy alteration. The service-area wide maps and charts were updated to reflect the preferred concepts.

In CAC #6, members and the general public participated in additional activities to hone in on some key questions that arose out of the community

engagement, most notably around the possibility of four “big moves” that seemed to be emerging through the community engagement. This meeting provided final guidance for the design team in preparing the preferred concepts.

Community engagement around the preferred concepts centered on the CAC. The preferred concepts were discussed in meetings 7 through 10—meetings that regularly attracted between 20 and 30 members of the general public in addition to the CAC members. CAC #7 featured a process of sorting the parks into those that the CAC felt were in the realm of consensus toward recommendation and those that required further discussion. The general public had an opportunity to speak about each park in turn as it was raised to the floor (see Appendix for CAC meeting notes showing the details of the discussion). CAC #8 began the discussion of the “non-consensus” parks. CAC #10 was the final meeting, with the CAC recommending the overall guiding principles, guiding principles for North Commons implementation, and the designs of all parks to the MPRB Commissioners. Concurrent to CAC #7-10, workgroups reconvened to discuss the preferred concepts and bring broader community perspective to the CAC. The CAC did request further exploration of certain elements of Bryn Mawr and Bassett’s Creek Parks and to use the public comment period on the NSAMP document as a way to explore these alternate designs and the public reaction to them.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT ON THE NSAMP DOCUMENT & FINAL APPROVAL

At the conclusion of the CAC process, MPRB staff and consultants prepared the draft NSAMP document and provided it to the community for formal public comment. The document was made available on line and in print at all north side recreation centers. Surveys were made available on line or printed in all recreation centers.

After the 45-day comment period, MPRB staff tabulated comments, made necessary changes to the document to reflect that input, and brought the final NSAMP document before the Board of Commissioners for approval with a public hearing.

RECOMMENDATION + ADOPTION

APPROVED FEBRUARY 6, 2019

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