

1 | PARK SYSTEM PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND



Building new parks—and improving existing parks—is a great way to keep people active. The more parks there are in a community, the more people exercise. People who live closer to parks exercise more. And people who regularly use parks get more exercise than people who don't. – Trust for Public Land 8 Ways That Parks Improve Your Health 2013



THE CRITICAL ROLE OF PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEMS

According to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), parks and recreation systems are known to provide a critical role in transforming cities into vibrant and healthy communities. Parks provide opportunities to improve physical and mental health, a place to meet up with family and/or friends, or opportunities to reconnect with nature. Parks and recreation programs can deliver vital services, such as adult, senior or out-of-school time programs, that can play a critical role in supporting educational advancement and healthy child development. Beyond delivering high-quality recreation opportunities, parks and recreation systems play a critical role in protecting and celebrating the environment through the conservation of public lands, investing in green infrastructure, and advocating for proactive management of land, water, trees, open spaces and wildlife. In doing so, park and recreation systems serve a vital role to enhance and protect the diversity of our natural resource areas, to beautify the built environment, provide close-to-home access to natural places, and create natural connections between neighborhoods.

The 2017 NRPA Americans' Engagement with Parks Survey examines the importance of public parks in the lives of Americans. Some key findings from this survey include:

- » The reasons Americans visit their local park and recreation facilities are as diverse as they are: a place to be with family and friends, to be more physically active, to be closer to nature, to access quality, affordable child care and to learn a new skill or craft.
- » 85 percent of Americans consider high-quality park and recreation amenities an important factor in choosing a new place to live.
- » More than nine in 10 Americans agree that parks and recreation is an important service their local governments deliver.
- » 95 percent of Americans agree that it is important that their local government acts to protect the natural environment, including acquiring, constructing, and maintaining local parks, trails and green spaces.
- » 87 percent of Americans support their local government and park and recreation agency in investing in critical infrastructure that would make their regions more resilient and would improve their community's ability to withstand or recover quickly from natural disasters.



WHY DO WE NEED A PARK SYSTEM PLAN?

Much has changed since the 1997 Ten-Year Park Improvement Plan was implemented. Brooklyn Park is now the sixth largest city in the state of Minnesota, with a population of 81,960 (2016). The City is expected to exceed a population of 95,000 by the year 2030. Brooklyn Park is one of the most diverse cities in Minnesota, with over 50 percent of our population being persons of color, 20 percent born outside of the US, and 25 percent of our residents speaking a language other than English at home. Aside from race/ country of origin, we are also young with a median age of 32. In comparison, our community has changed more rapidly than other communities in the metro and within the state and will most likely continue to do so.

Park programming needs have continued to grow and evolve. New development initiatives, the largest of which

is the planning and future implementation of the Blue Line light rail transit (LRT), are providing economic development opportunities, along with new public open space and enhancements to the public realm. Partnerships with regional park providers, watersheds, community colleges, adjacent cities and school districts, among others, are forming to leverage resources and advancing shared visions within the community. As Brooklyn Park is getting close to being fully developed; now is the time to evaluate if open land needs to be identified for future parks and recreation facilities.

Therefore, to stay relevant to our changing community, it is important to assess the current needs and interests of the community. The System Plan process is built on the priorities identified in the 2012 Parks and Recreation Master Plan and the *Brooklyn Park 2025* Community Plan.

Figure 1 Brooklyn Park 2025 Who We Are Infographic

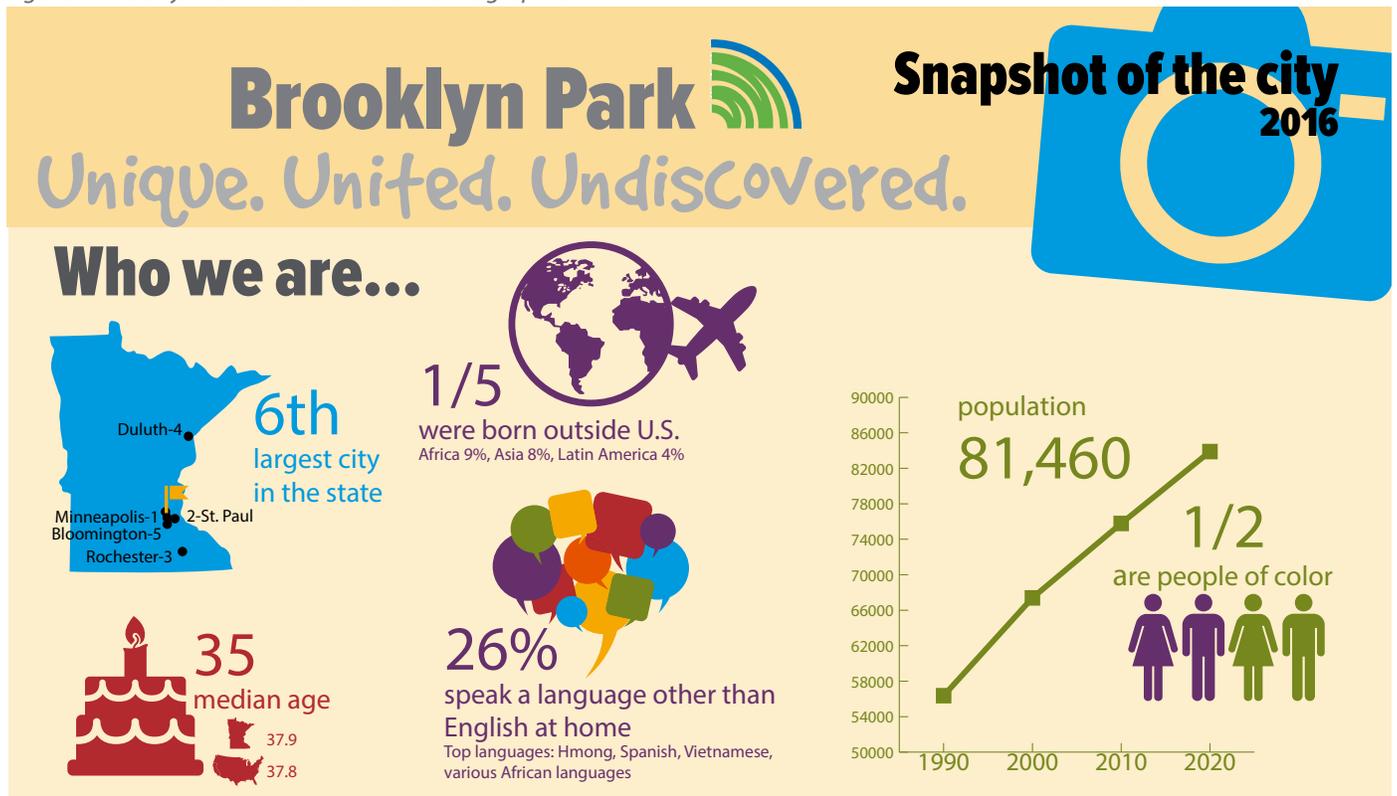
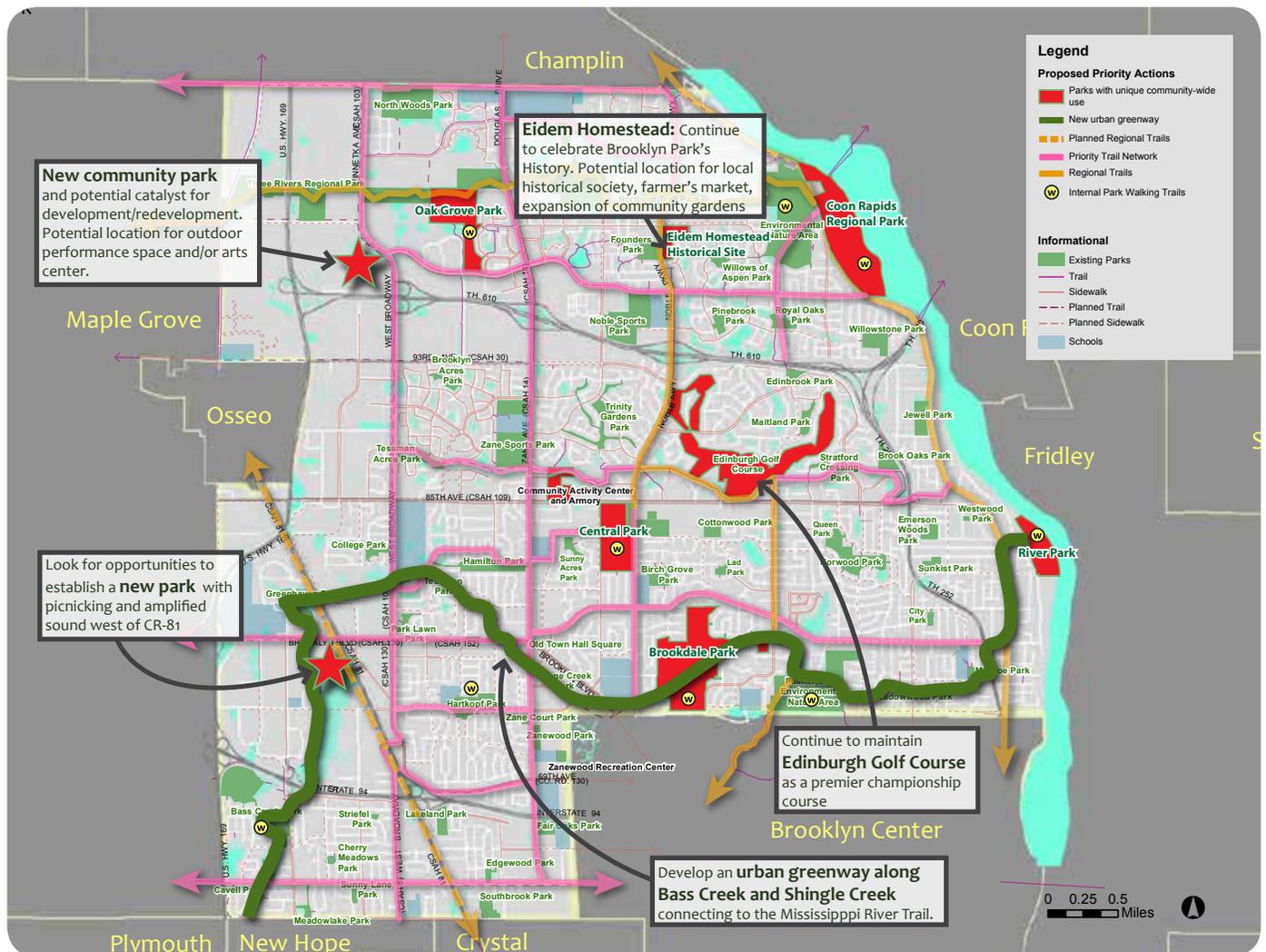


Figure 3 2012 Plan Priorities



“People of all ages have what they need to feel healthy and safe”

How is this goal relevant to the System Plan? Research has shown that physical activity is one of the most important contributors to health and that people who live closer to parks and those who use parks will exercise more.¹ Parks and trails play a strong role in public health by promoting exercise, unity, and family development. Parks and recreation programs provide a place for people to gather and learn new skills. Trail corridors provide critical connectors and are an important alternative transportation mode.

How did this goal drive the System Plan? In order to fully understand the vision and desires of the community, engaging the community in the process was paramount, as we wanted to be sure to hear from as many community

members as possible. Safety emerged as a theme and became a driver in the park system recommendations. All park infrastructure and amenity improvements were considered under the lens of ensuring equitable distribution and access to facilities and services through the community.

The 2012 Recreation and Park Master Plan

In 2012, the City engaged the community to develop a vision for the system of parks and recreation, which resulted in the creation of the 2012 Recreation and Parks Master Plan. The plan focused on an inventory of existing park amenities, changing needs of the community and identified recreation and parks community priorities, which included the following:

- » Create more unique parks

¹ Eight ways that parks improve your health Trust for Public Land Parks + Health brochure

- » Create a more connected trail system with a new greenway in the southern portion of the city
- » Integrate arts into the park system
- » Provide more equitable access to recreation program, parks and facilities
- » Add new specialized facilities such as aquatics and an indoor field house or domed sports field and expand on non-traditional offerings such as skateboard parks, disc golf, outdoor performance spaces, community gardens and dog parks

The 2012 Park Master Plan provided a great overview and direction for the recreation and parks system. However, the plan did not identify where within the parks system the City should reinvest or what specific types of facilities should be developed. For example, the 2012 plan specified the need for specialized facilities, but did not provide details on type of facilities, such as the community-identified need for an aquatic facility and where this should be developed.. To move forward on any of these efforts, the City needed more input about type of amenities and locations within the system these facilities could be accommodated.

What Does This System Plan Include?

This System Plan builds on the information and recommendations of the 2012 Recreation and Parks Master Plan, incorporates *Brooklyn Park 2025* goals, and addresses improvements for the entire system in more detail, including a ten-year outlook for each City park, and special use facilities (including the Community Activity Center, Eidem Homestead Historical Farm, Zanewood Recreation Center) and trail systems. This plan:

- » Reaffirms community priorities and identifies current gaps in the system;
- » Identifies opportunities for development or redevelopment in specific parks;
- » Ensures equitable distribution and access to facilities and services throughout the community;
- » Validates priority trail system enhancements and/or gaps as identified within the currently proposed Brooklyn Park Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan, along with other emerging connectivity needs;
- » Identifies specific areas within the community that would best accommodate expanded facility needs;
- » Identifies specific natural areas within the system to be proactively managed for improving natural resource areas within the park system;
- » Provides a review of all 60 individual parks, including a summary of current use, park facility conditions, and opportunities for park enhancements or redevelopment;
- » Identifies specific properties within the City as in-holdings for future park land acquisition and/or potential park land to sell;
- » Includes specific park concepts for incorporating an aquatics facility;
- » Provides optional concepts depending on possible funding scenarios; and
- » Provides a ten-year reinvestment plan that provides a road map for park system improvements including cost estimates for key improvements.

