

Economic Development Authority  
**YEAR-END ACTIVITY**  
**SUMMARY 2020**

# Brooklyn Park: a snapshot

4

## Development activity

6

## Business vitality

8

## Housing

10

## Light rail transit

14

## Workforce development

16

## COVID-19 response

18



# 2020

The year 2020 was a tumultuous year across the globe. In early March, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States led to mandated business closures and shifted citywide staff time, programming, and resources to pandemic response. In addition to continuing to support Economic Development Authority (EDA) strategic priorities and development projects, EDA staff worked to create and implement multiple grant and loan programs to support businesses, residents, and nonprofit organizations during this challenging time.

In March the federal government passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security, or CARES, Act and the city of Brooklyn Park received \$6.2 million to go towards additional costs incurred due to the pandemic. Response programs included: increasing communications through additional emails and a new COVID-19 resident and business resources webpage; distributing personal protective equipment (PPE) across the city; delivering a Brooklyn Park Development Corporation (BPDC) Emergency Deferred Grant Program and a Nonprofit Emergency Grant Program; collaborating with partners such as Hennepin County and TwinWest Chamber of Commerce to provide support to local businesses; and launching a CARES Community Relief Grant Program that successfully distributed almost \$3 million to businesses, nonprofits and residents who were negatively impacted by COVID-19.

In addition to these emergency response programs and activities, work continued on several EDA strategic priorities. Plans for a small business center moved quickly forward with the support of a \$100,000 grant from the Metropolitan Council Livable Communities Demonstration Account Pre-Development Grant Program. Several large housing rehabilitation projects proceeded at Brook Gardens and Brooks Landing, and communications with Aeon on improving the facilities at Huntington Place while maintaining affordability for residents were ongoing throughout the year.

BrookLynk, the City's youth employment program operated in partnership with Brooklyn Center, also adjusted its activities to account for COVID impact. BrookLynk pivoted to a hybrid model to deliver both in-person and online work readiness opportunities. The Get Ready! work readiness training launched online and a new virtual program provided young people in the Brooklyns with the opportunity to participate in a paid skill-building summer program.

METRO Blue Line Extension LRT work reignited when Hennepin County and the Metropolitan Council announced the need to advance the METRO Blue Line Extension Light Rail Transit (BLRT) project without using approximately 8 miles of freight railroad property, as initially planned. This announcement prompted a new phase of community engagement which will extend through 2021.

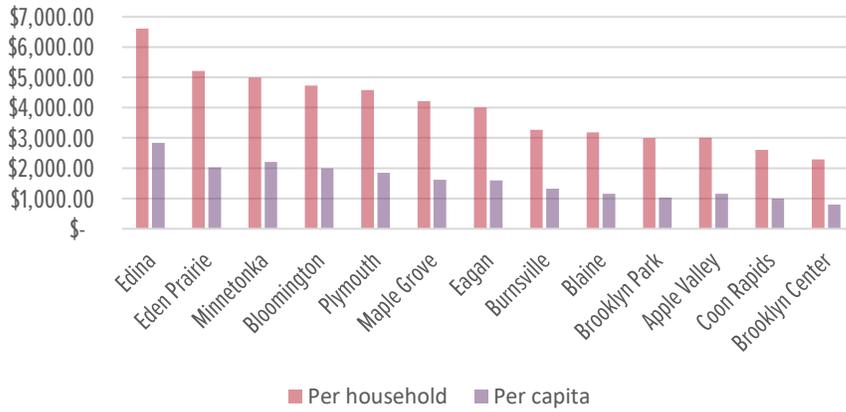
In 2021 the EDA will re-evaluate its strategic priorities and determine what, if any, new directions to take for the next two years.



*2020 EDA Board left to right: Commissioners Terry Parks, Lisa Jacobson, Mark Mata, Susan Pha, President Jeffrey Lunde, and Commissioners Wynfred Russell and Tonja West-Hafner.*

# Brooklyn Park: a snapshot

Tax capacity per household and per capita compared with peer cities (2019)



## Top 10 employers in Brooklyn Park

1. Target (North Campus)–4,000
2. Caterpillar Paving Products–700
3. North Hennepin Community College–610
4. HyVee–500
5. Medtronic–420
6. City of Brooklyn Park–397
7. Integer–395
8. Olympus Surgical Technologies–385
9. GLS Companies–375
10. Cirtec Medical–350

**1,500+**  
businesses

**100**  
restaurants

**83,000+**  
residents  
(over 50% people of color)

Median home sale price increase 2016-2020\*: **58.9%**  
Median rent increase (1-bedroom) 2016-2020: **27.1%**

**484**  
parks and public facilities

**32,461**  
jobs (2019)

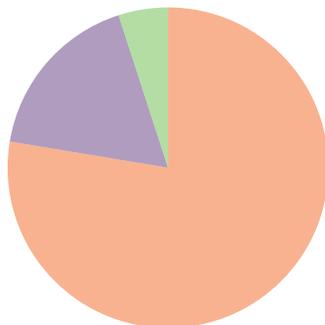
**\$17,051,728**  
grant funds secured since 2018

\*Data from Minneapolis Association of Area Realtors

**~1,000**  
acres undeveloped land

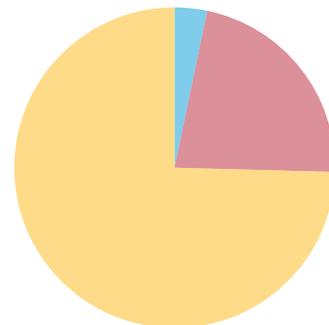
## Grant funding breakdown

Grant type



Competitive Pass Through Entitlement

Funding category



Workforce development Development and redevelopment Infrastructure



# Brooklyn Park

## Economic Development Authority

In 1988, the Brooklyn Park City Council established the Economic Development Authority (EDA) to oversee job creation and preservation, enhance the city's tax base, promote the general welfare of the city's residents and assume primary responsibility for development activities. In 1993 the EDA absorbed the work of the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA), giving the EDA oversight of housing programs, policies and development. The EDA is made up of the seven duly elected and sworn-in members of the City Council and meets every month to discuss projects and initiatives as presented by city staff.

Since its inception the EDA has been integral to a number of projects, including redevelopment of the Village Creek neighborhood, establishment of Northland Business Park, transportation planning and the creation and management of critical housing programs. By striving to maintain and grow relationships with existing and new businesses the EDA also helps to identify and link development and redevelopment opportunities with the proper tools and resources, helping existing businesses grow and prosper while attracting new businesses and industry to the community. BrookLynk, the EDA's employment program for youth who have historically been marginalized from the workplace operated in partnership with Brooklyn Center, equips and connects young professionals with job skills and opportunities in the northwestern suburbs. The EDA also administers housing programs and works to maintain and preserve the existing housing stock in the city by offering a wide range of programs meeting the needs of homeowners, homebuyers, sellers, renters and landlords.

Through its focus on livability, development and redevelopment, the EDA's ultimate goal is to maintain a high quality of life for all Brooklyn Park residents.

# EDA supported development activity

## Mixed-income housing developments

Several large housing developments with an affordability component have been proposed or advanced in 2020. Several of these projects need to secure additional funding sources before groundbreaking, but all received funding support commitment resolutions from the EDA this year.

- **6900 85th Avenue North.** The EDA has worked with North Hennepin Community College (NHCC) and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities to issue a request for qualifications (RFQ) and select Duffy Development Company for a mixed income apartment development and a cooperatively owned day-care on the site. The vision for that location includes two apartment buildings with approximately 75 units each. Duffy has begun hosting community meetings to introduce themselves to the neighborhood.
- **Cornerstone Village.** Bethesda Lutheran Communities is working to secure additional financing for this project, a 130-unit mixed income, multifamily apartment building for seniors and individuals with intellectual or development disabilities. 80 of the units will be available at 30% or 50% of the area median income (AMI).
- **Village North Apartments.** The George North Development Group has secured financing for this project, an 83-unit apartment community with 20% of the units available at 50% AMI. The project includes 10,000 sq feet of commercial space and a commercial kitchen. It is expected to break ground in 2021.

## Commercial and industrial development

Despite the impact from the pandemic, development across the city has remained strong. JunoPacific, Kurita, Cirtec, and more relocated or expanded in the city. Additionally, Brooklyn Park continues to attract a diverse array of restaurants with new businesses such as Miyabi Grill, El Loro, and Sweet Percent Bakery. Several new restaurants constructed buildings and opened in 2020, including Panera, Chick-Fil-A, and KFC.



## Center for Innovation and the Arts

The Center for Innovation and the Arts is a proposed 83,000 square foot collaborative learning and performance space. The Center for Innovation and the Arts project aims to expand the opportunity for NHCC college students to earn arts degrees while also offering a destination for residents of every age in the northwest metro with access to year-round community events and education programs. The facility would be jointly governed by North Hennepin Community College and the City of Brooklyn Park with collaboration from other partners such as school districts and neighboring cities. This year an Advisory Council, whose purpose is to advocate for the project, advise on fundraising efforts, and ensure the project maintains its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, was convened and met quarterly throughout 2020.

## Former library purchase

In September, the Brooklyn Park EDA purchased the empty former library at 8600 Zane Avenue North. Hennepin County operated the facility as a library from 1976 to 2016 and shared its parking with the City of Brooklyn Park Community Activity Center (CAC) through a parking agreement. The EDA purchase of 8600 Zane helps ensure continued adequate parking for the Community Activity Center (CAC) and provides potential reuse or redevelopment opportunities.





### Highway 169 and 101st Avenue North interchange

Improvements to this interchange began in December 2019 and provide increased automobile access to local businesses that rely on Highway 169 to ship products. The interchange officially opened on December 8 with a grand opening planned for spring 2021. This project was funded through support from the EDA and grants from the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

### Ground Breakings, grand openings, and ribbon cuttings

Chick-Fil-A, Cirtec, Dos Hermanos, El Loro, Enterprise Rent-a-car, Glamour African Restaurant, IBEW 292, Kurita, Lupient Nissan, Miyabi Grill, N1 Motion Fitness, Nice African Family Restaurant, Suite Living, Sweet Percent Bakery, Urbana Court

### Summer Blossom

This was the 21st year of the Summer Blossom Garden & Landscape Recognition Program. The purpose of the program is to highlight attractive gardens and landscaping in Brooklyn Park and recognize citizens and businesses that strive to improve the city's landscape. This year's winners are:

## EDA priorities #1 and #2:

*Plan & promote investment in Village Creek*

*Pursue projects in the Opportunity Zone*

Several critical developments in the Village Creek area continue to develop through 2020. Christina's Day Care continues to work with area lenders to secure financing to develop a site located at 7516 Brooklyn Blvd. Despite the delay it is expected to bring over 400 daycare slots to Brooklyn Boulevard, filling a critical community need. The George North Group has secured financing from the Livable Communities Demonstration Fund (LCDA) and the EDA to develop a mixed use building at 7621 Brooklyn Blvd which includes 83 mixed-income units and ground floor retail and a commercial kitchen component. Interest remains high for the vacant lot at the corner of Regent Avenue and Brooklyn Boulevard. Staff continue to explore options to develop sites in the Opportunity Zone, a federal designation to encourage long-term investments in low-income and urban communities which encompasses most of the Village Creek redevelopment area.



**Townhomes winner**  
Rob LeNeau



**Neighborhoods winner**  
Jeannine Kline



**Grand Pirze: District 1**  
Patricia Canby & John Bruhn



**First place: District 2**  
Pam Kessler



**First place: District 3**  
Nancy & Jerry Knoth



**First place: District 4**  
Linda & Terry Menge

# Business vitality

## 9th Annual Business Forward Forum

The 2020 Business Forward Forum took place on December 3. In order to keep staff, presenters, and attendees safe, the Forum was held virtually for the first time ever. This year's event also added a new element: pre-forum sessions on talent development and getting loan ready, which were selected and tailored for business needs. Representatives from the State of Minnesota's Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) and local organizations such as ACER and MCCD presented on these topics to provide resources to Brooklyn Park businesses. For the main event, keynote speaker Hamse Warfa, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Deputy Commissioner of Workforce Development, discussed the State's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and highlighted the State's ongoing commitment to supporting businesses and entrepreneurs as well as the need to implement more talent development programming.

## 2nd Annual Restaurant Week

From September 14-20, more than 30 restaurants in the city offered discounts or participated in an online giveaway for the second annual restaurant week! This year's event reflected a more traditional restaurant week with local restaurants offering discounts to customers. Residents could participate online as well, and social media posts on Facebook and Twitter reached more than 30,000 impressions. Several restaurants, such as Miyabi Grill, Johnny Boy's Pizza and Sweet Basil, received great reviews from visitors who took advantage of the discounts offered this week to explore new places to eat in the city. This year's event was another success, and staff will continue to explore new and fun ways to continue to improve Restaurant Week!



## Loan Program changes

In July, the Brooklyn Park Development Corporation (BPDC) approved changes to two existing loan programs. The goal of the changes to both programs is to increase their flexibility while providing a favorable financing tool for businesses in Brooklyn Park. Both the Small Business Microloan Program and the Revolving Loan Program were restructured to remove barriers to qualifying such as an overreliance on credit and high interest rates. These changes aim to make the programs more accessible to local small business owners who do not otherwise have access to vast amounts of capital. Currently, staff is working with loan processors to determine final underwriting criteria for both loans with the goal of launching the programs in 2021.

## EDA priority #3:

### *Business incubator*

Community members first identified the need for a business incubator project in Brooklyn Park during Metro Blue Line Light Rail Transit (LRT) station area planning process in 2016. Small business centers and incubators can prevent displacement and gentrification while investing in local businesses and the community. With the help of a \$100,000 LCDA grant from the Metropolitan Council, predevelopment work on a small business center in Brooklyn Park made progress in 2020. The project aims to provide technical assistance and affordable commercial space for small businesses and entrepreneurs in the community. Staff has prioritized gathering community input and working with small, locally owned firms to explore cost and design options for an incubator that fits the needs of Brooklyn Park's small business community. To date, staff has entered into contracts with IAG Commercial to provide tenant representation services and assist in negotiating lease space for the center, with an architecture firm called Designs by Melo to provide phase 1 design services, and African Career, Education and Resources INC (ACER) to complete a feasibility study meant to help understanding operational

needs and financial realities related to the center. A steering committee of community members and elected officials has begun convening to give staff feedback and provide input on key project decisions such as space needs, operational models, and overall project vision.

## EDA priority #4:

### *Enhanced restaurant recruitment and marketing*

It was a difficult year for the restaurant industry with mandated closures and fewer customers due to the spread of COVID-19. In response, EDA staff directed many restaurants to apply for loan and grant programs from the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Hennepin County, and the City of Brooklyn Park. Technical assistance was also provided to potential applicants through city staff and community partners such as African Career, Education and Resource (ACER). Additionally, this year was the 2nd annual Brooklyn Park restaurant week. Over 30 restaurants participated by offering a discount and saw increased foot traffic throughout the week.



### Minnesota Investment Fund (MIF) and Job Creation Fund (JCF)

MIF and JCF are programs run through the State of Minnesota’s Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) with the goal of retaining and creating high wage jobs in Minnesota. Brooklyn Park businesses regularly utilize these funds to help fund expansions, relocations and equipment purchases. Most recently, the State of Minnesota officially awarded Brooklyn Park an \$800,000 MIF award to aid Cirtec Medical with its expansion in Brooklyn Park. Cirtec is planning an 85,000 square foot expansion into a building located at 9315 Winnetka Ave N which will allow the company to create 200 new jobs as it builds out its new neuromodulation implant center of excellence.

The City is currently working with a company named Juno Pacific to secure MIF and JCF funding to aid in its move from Anoka to Brooklyn Park. That project is expected to create 130 jobs in the next 5 years. City staff also continue to work with the State of Minnesota to understand how to tailor the programs to better meet the needs of Brooklyn Park businesses and residents.

### Open to Business

The Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers (MCCD) continued to offer business consulting services across the metro area and in Brooklyn Park. Consultation topics include business feasibility and planning, operations and logistic management, financial and record-keeping assistance, and other important topics for business owners. Services were conducted via appointments during COVID. In the second 6 months of 2020, MCCD pivoted to distributing CARES dollars regionally which included deploying funds to Brooklyn Park businesses. MCCD partnered with Hennepin County and the State of Minnesota to distribute COVID related funds and offered technical assistance to small businesses applying to programs such as the Payroll Protection Program (PPP), Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL), and other CARES Act grant and loan opportunities.

### Open to Business in Brooklyn Park: 1st half 2020

- 38 clients served
- 67% women entrepreneurs, 72% minority entrepreneurs and 28% low-income entrepreneurs
- 24 mini grants/emergency loans administered for \$161,700

### Business Forward Advisory Board

The Business Forward Advisory Board (BFAB) represents businesses of different types, sizes and locations within the city and meets monthly to create an even better business climate in Brooklyn Park. This year, BFAB lent their feedback to improve various initiatives such as improving loan program structures, creating networking events, how to connect small businesses with marketing efforts, and how to improve events such as the annual Business Forward Forum and Restaurant Week. Current BFAB members are Jackson George of the Liberian Business Association, Yasmin Hyder of McDonald’s, Sonny Kester of American Family Insurance, Mary Kuria of Customized Accounting Solutions Group, Annette Lund of Diversified Plastics, Curt Medina of Daily Dose Café, Matt Rau of Takeda Pharmaceuticals, Karen Philbin of North Hennepin Community College, Joe Piket of Primrose and Anthony Watts of US Bank. The Council liaison to BFAB is Councilmember Wynfred Russell.

### Black owned business map

Nationwide, Black-owned businesses were among the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. To support shopping at local businesses and celebrate the Black community in Brooklyn Park, a team of EDA and GIS staff launched an online business map. The map shares information with IsoBlack, a startup that aims to highlight Black-owned businesses and events across the Twin Cities, to share stories and encourage residents to shop at local stores. The map is available at <https://arcs.is/KnTer>.



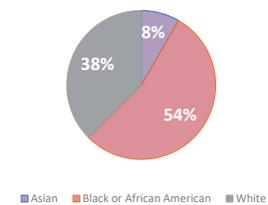
# Housing

## Housing Financial Resources

Homeowner programs were redesigned in 2019 to increase the number of residents making improvements to their homes and to provide needed resources for future homebuyers. The redesigned and revamped programs have been a huge success, with funds for multiple programs expended rapidly. New programs include the Senior Deferred Loan, Down Payment Assistance, Code Correction, and a revised Home Improvement Loan. In 2020, two new programs were added to increase investment in apartment communities. These Rental Rehabilitation Loan Program and Community Engagement and Sustainability Program (CSP) have been in effect since mid-2020. This year also marked significant processing improvements – loan processing time went from 3 months to under 3 weeks.

Senior Deferred Loan Program: 8 loans, \$150,000  
 Down Payment Assistance Program: 12 Loans, \$100,000  
 Home Improvement Loan Program: 6 loans, \$126,000  
 Code Correction Loan Program: 2 Loans Pending  
 Home Energy Squad Enhanced: 100 Home Visits, \$5,000  
 Home Rehab /Emergency Deferred Loan: 19 Loans Closed: \$312,500  
 Rental Rehabilitation Loan: 6 Loans Pending  
 Community Engagement and Sustainability Grant Program: 3 grants, \$60,000

All Down Payment, Home Rehabilitation, and Senior Deferred loans approved by race



## Workshops

EDA staff held several successful workshops to promote housing programs this year.

- **Home Stretch Workshops.** Two were held virtually in partnership with Community Action Partnership of Hennepin County (CAPHC). The workshops were conducted in English, Hmong, and Spanish languages. These workshops focus on teaching attendees about Brooklyn Park's housing programs, the mortgage process, the purchase decision, the closing steps, housing inspections, and approaches to maintaining a home.
- **Life in an HOA: What you need to know to thrive.** Held on December 5, this was part of the annual Homeowner Association training sessions the City provides for residents to build capacity and empower residents to be involved with HOA boards. The meeting this year was held virtually and involved staff support from multiple departments. There were over 70 residents in attendance.
- **Rental assistance event.** On November 17th community engagement, community development, and Hennepin County held their first ever virtual rental assistance event with Riverview Apartments. Staff have held these events once a month at various apartments in the city as part of technical assistance to the residents trying to access financial resources for rental and food assistance.
- **28th Annual Real Estate Forum.** On February 20, the EDA held its 28th successful Forum at Edinburgh USA. The theme was "Brooklyn Park, Your Forever Home" and featured Matt Mullins of Maxfield Research and David Arbit of the Minneapolis Area Association of Realtors as keynote speakers. Attendees had the opportunity to earn continuing education credits from the Minnesota Department of Commerce. 125 registrants attended, representing real estate professionals throughout the region.



## Investment in apartment communities

The EDA prioritizes improving living conditions for all residents and has worked with both property owners and residents to improve the condition of its housing stock for decades. Multifamily housing has been a focus area, and since 2016 the EDA has invested \$6.6 million on direct rehabilitation costs and sponsored over \$30 million in Housing Revenue Bonds for 1,546 units at four apartment communities. Park Haven rehabilitation was completed in 2016 and work continues at Autumn Ridge, Brooks Landing/Brooks Garden and Huntington Place.

### *Huntington Place - 834 units*

Aeon, a Twin Cities-based nonprofit developer and manager of affordable apartment homes, purchased Huntington Place Apartments in January 2020. The EDA approved a loan agreement between Aeon and the EDA for the acquisition and re-habilitation of Huntington Place Apartments in January 2020. Aeon will maintain affordable rents for the long-term. The EDA is contributing a \$5 million loan to fund physical reinvestments into the apartment community with a focus on improving safety and security. Aeon has drawn on \$250,000 of EDA loan funds to date and invested over \$900,000 in building systems and unit improvements.

One significant project completed since taking ownership is the installation of a new camera system. Police and EDA staff worked with Aeon to consult on camera location. Aeon installed 195 exterior cameras and added over 100 interior cameras. Aeon also launched a Community Advisory Taskforce with representation from the City, County, and community and nonprofit organizations in order to provide a forum in which to share knowledge and resource and collaborate on strategic thinking. EDA staff continues to meet regularly with Aeon to coordinate improvement plans and ensure the project remains in compliance with the EDA loan requirements.

### *Brooks Landing and Brook Gardens Rehab Project – 170 units*

These apartment communities are currently undergoing extensive renovations to address critical needs. The \$30 million redevelopment project includes \$47,500 per unit in direct construction and rehabilitation expenses. The project is financed by a \$400,000 housing rehabilitation loan from EDA, conduit revenue obligations totaling \$15 million, and funding from Hennepin County, Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, and other private syndicators.

Landscaping and stormwater retrofitting work was done by Metro Blooms and cost about \$315,000 in grant funds from several partners, including a grant from the EDA's new Community Engagement and Sustainability Program (CSP) to leverage funds from other sources. Metro Blooms worked with residents to redesign their landscape for more sustainable practices and improved quality of outdoor living. This included managing stormwater and creating a more inviting outdoors with amenities chosen by residents. The new design included several raingardens planted with pollinator-friendly plants and a nature play area for children. Resident project stewards, paid equitably for their time, helped with planning, engaging friends and neighbors and organizing events. Through paid work, residents also helped with installation and planting. Residents were co-creators in redesigning more resilient and livable outdoors spaces for their community.

## EDA priority #5:

### *NOAH preservation fund*

In 2019, the EDA set aside \$5 million to preserve naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH) in Brooklyn Park. In January 2020, the EDA approved a \$5 million loan agreement with Aeon for the acquisition, preservation, and rehabilitation of Huntington Place Apartments. The agreement calls for Aeon, the nonprofit organization that purchased Huntington, to make significant physical improvements totaling over \$8 million to the property while maintaining affordability at 50% and 60% of the area median income (AMI). EDA staff and Aeon meet regularly to discuss the property and progress on improvements.



### Autumn Ridge Apartments – 366 units

Residents at Autumn Ridge, Sherman Associates, Metro Blooms, African Career Education and Resource Inc (ACER), and the City of Brooklyn Park have been working together to develop and implement a 3-phased stormwater retrofit plan for the site, in conjunction with a larger site redevelopment project that was concluded in 2019. The first two phases (2018 and 2019) were funded by grants from Hennepin County, Shingle Creek Watershed Management Commission, and Sherman Associates. The third phase of the plan includes the installation of raingardens, native plantings, and sustainable urban forest canopy on site. This phase was funded Hennepin County, Sherman Associates, Metropolitan Council and the City of Brooklyn Park. A focus of education and outreach is training on-site maintenance staff and property management in practices to improve water quality, mitigate localized flooding on site, create pollinator habitat, enhance livability, and provide ongoing education and job training opportunity for facilities and maintenance staff and interested residents. Metro Blooms has led the design development at Autumn Ridge from 2017 through 2020 and will continue this work in 2021. Over the past 3 years, about \$600,000 have been invested in the landscaping and stormwater retrofitting work.



### Brooklyn Avenues for Youth

In 2015, the city of Brooklyn Park funded and constructed a housing facility for youth experiencing homelessness in the community. The facility, Brooklyn Avenues, is a 12-bed shelter and transitional housing program for homeless youth aged 16 to 21 from the northwest suburbs of Hennepin County. The facility is managed and operated by Avenues for Youth, a nonprofit organization based in Minneapolis. Avenues partners with youth experiencing homelessness to achieve their dreams. Upon arrival at Brooklyn Avenues, staff address youths' immediate and crisis needs by providing clean bedrooms and bathrooms, laundry facilities, three nutritious meals per day, clothing, personal hygiene supplies and bus tokens. Youth counselors and case managers provide direct care and guidance for the youth 24 hours per day. This support ranges from cooking meals together, playing games and watching movies in the evening, and having tough conversations. In 2020, Avenues temporarily suspended use of their emergency bed services during the pandemic to limit the number of people in and out of the facility. Avenues also received grant funds for additional food and cleaning expenses and equipment to support distance learning.

### Avenues by the numbers



**110** young people served



**68** used emergency services



**181** day average length of stay

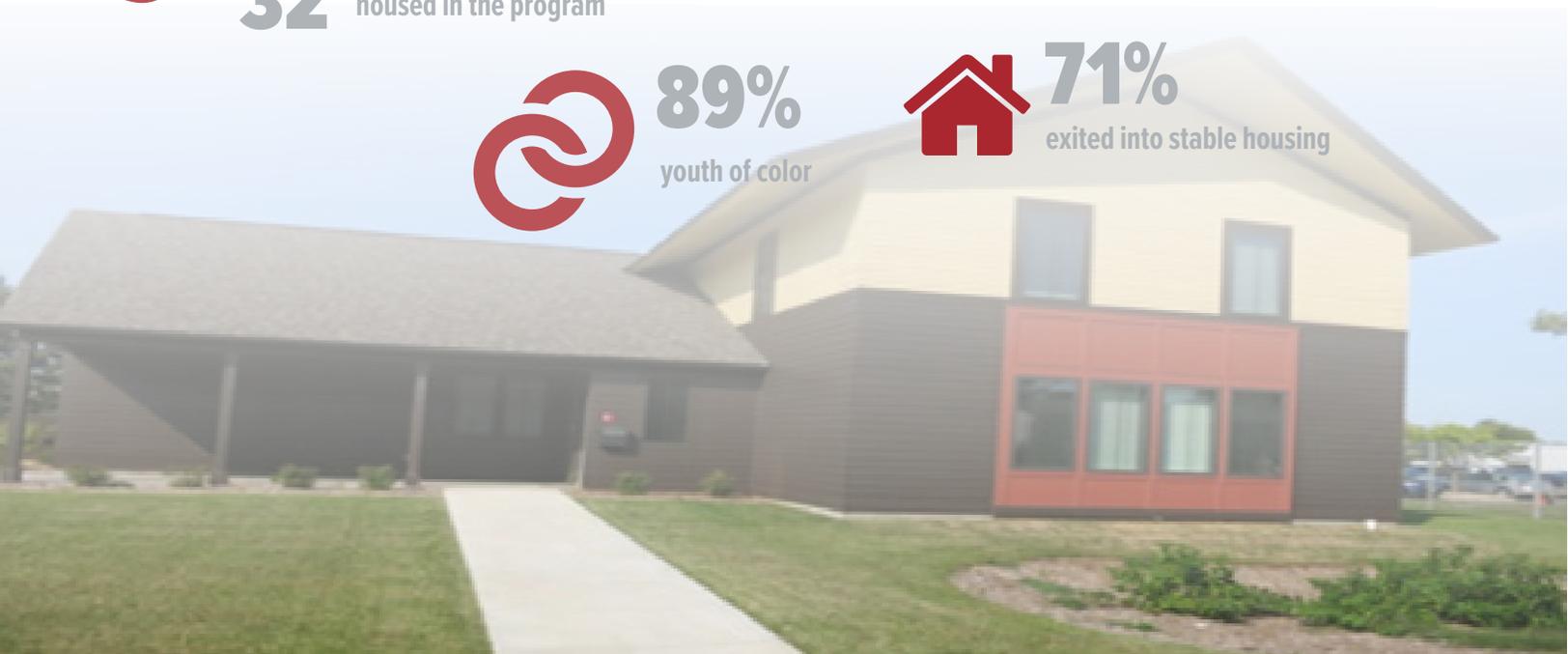
**32** housed in the program



**89%** youth of color



**71%** exited into stable housing





### **Transitional housing**

The City of Brooklyn Park's Economic Development Authority owns a short-term transitional housing facility that works with families experiencing long term homelessness to help them move towards long-term housing stability. Simpson Housing provides families with professional supportive services that include intensive case management, subsidized rental housing through the Hennepin County HOME program and individualized services that focus on life skills, positive parenting, education, and employment. In the last two years the EDA has invested over \$230,000 in capital improvements at the property primarily through Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. In 2020, to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, transitional housing staff implemented no contact notices, social distancing measures, maintenance work for emergencies only, and virtual professional supportive services.

### **Center for Urban and Regional Affairs housing stability research**

The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) at the University of Minnesota was contracted in 2019 to research issues of community building,, renter and management knowledge of rights/responsibilities, and concerns surrounding safetysecurity. In March, the project was put on hold because of restrictions on gatherings due to COVID-19; however, in November, the project re-ignited with remote data collection strategies. The research team conducted interviews and focus groups with residents and apartment managers with support from EDA and City Community Engagement staff. The project is led by Dr. Brittany Lewis and Dr. Shana Riddick and is being funded by the Brooklyn Park Economic Development Authority (EDA), Hennepin County, and Minnesota Housing. The final report for the research project will be published in 2021.

### **Apartment action plan update**

In 2010 the City launched an Apartment Action Plan establishing policies and procedures to ensure long-term sustainability of the city's current and future apartment communities. In consultation with stakeholders including property owners and managers, community organizations and housing advocacy groups, the City updated the strategy in 2018. The Apartment Action Plan 2.0 outlines actions around community engagement and communication, sustainability strategies and enforcement and monitoring of apartment communities. Representatives from across the City departments meet regularly to check in on work progress. In 2020, key efforts within this group included adjusting how inspections worked during COVID-19, designing new procedures to address rental units with repeat violations, and communicating resources to tenants.



# Light Rail Transit

## Moving the Blue Line Extension Forward

In August 2020, the Metropolitan Council and Hennepin County announced the need to advance the METRO Blue Line Extension Light Rail Transit (BLRT) project without using approximately 8 miles of freight railroad property, as initially planned. This new direction will impact different portions of the line in different ways. The southernmost portion of the proposed extension (the blue area in the figure to the right) will be impacted most deeply and extensive community engagement is planned to reimagine this route. The northernmost portion of the proposed line, which includes all five stations in Brooklyn Park, will feel very little to no impact from the new alignment. Though this new direction has a minimal effect on the five planned Brooklyn Park stations, it does alter the project timeline and prompt a renewed focus on community engagement for 2021. The announcement also reinvigorated many of the community action committees around the Blue Line Extension.

## Project principals

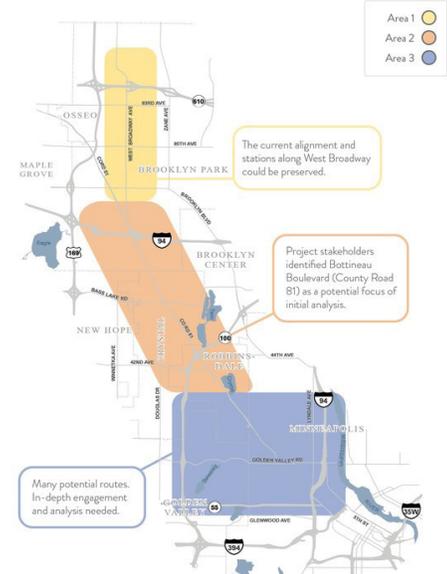
To guide collaborative work moving forward, project partners and stakeholders developed a set of principles that set the scope and guide decision-making and engagement. These principles were reviewed, amended and adopted by the Corridor Management Committee at the December 10, 2020 meeting.

## Community engagement begins again

To shape future engagement in 2021, Hennepin County and the Metropolitan Council worked with Juxtaposition Arts and the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability to develop a community-informed engagement framework. Some initial engagement began in 2020, including:

- An online community survey to provide input on community priorities and help shape future engagement work.
- Opportunities to serve on a voluntary business or community project advisory committee
- Listening sessions began in late 2020/ early 2021 for community members to learn more about the project and give input
- Invite project staff for conversations and presentations to community/neighborhood/business groups

The Metropolitan Council, Hennepin County, and other project partners will continue to explore how to engage communities to communicate about these changes in 2021.





## Plaza Park completed

The Plaza Park, which is located at the intersection of 85th Avenue North and West Broadway Avenue, has been under way for several years. The location is home to exciting potential developments including a future stop on the METRO Blue Line Light Rail Extension and the proposed Center for Innovation and the Arts. The Plaza features several art installations by local artists. The three installations are a Bench Canoe by Mike Klein that encourages friendly conversation, an interactive Robot Park by local artist Nicholas Knutson with a stage and open space for gatherings, and a community-engaged art mural featuring themes of positivity and inclusivity by local artist Geno Okok and several youth from Zanewood Recreation Center. The site also includes a nature based play area that was funded in part by Hennepin County's Transit Oriented Development (TOD) grant. The temporary Plaza Park is a joint effort with dollars and in-kind resources coming from Hennepin County, North Hennepin Community College, the McKnight Foundation-funded Cultivate Program and the City of Brooklyn Park.



## Plaza Park celebration

On Friday, August 21, city leaders and community members celebrated the completion of Plaza Park. Brooklyn Park Mayor Jeffrey Lunde, Hennepin County Commissioner Mike Opat, and North Hennepin Community College (NHCC) President Rolando Garcia spoke at the event and emphasized the site's importance as well as the importance of art engagement along the proposed BLRT extension. Several artists also spoke about their art installations, emphasizing messages of community engagement and unity. The event was open to staff and the public. Approximately 40 people attended, including Council Members Terry Parks and Tonja West-Hafner, and project partners from Hennepin County, NHCC, and Springboard for the Arts. The event was very positive, and we continue to look forward to future developments and programming at the Plaza Park!



# Workforce development

BrookLynk, a youth employment program powered by the cities of Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center, continues to grow! 2020 marked a year of innovation and creativity as the program responded to COVID-19 by pivoting to a hybrid model delivering both in-person and online work readiness opportunities. This year marked the launch of the Get Ready! work readiness training online, increasing access to a high-quality training experience that resulted in more BrookLynk alumni landing jobs than ever before. With the development of new virtual program and committed partners, the BrookLynk team is moving rapidly forward to engage more youth and build programming for 2021.

## Summer programming redesigned

One of the biggest adjustments was to the summer internship program. Due to barriers created by the pandemic, including the loss of most of the summer employer pledges, the program required a full re-design. The speed of this new program development paired with extensive partner collaboration to execute it successfully demonstrated the ability of BrookLynk to quickly adapt to new, challenging employment barriers for young people.

The new internship program consisted of 42 “traditional” internships provided by 7 employer partners coupled with another 78 stipend positions in 6-week online training series. BrookLynk launched the hybrid program to maintain its target annual goal of 120 youth completing a summer internship. The six-week online training series was based on Get Ready! and was designed in partnership with Cummins Power Systems and Boston Scientific as well as several community partners such as Junior Achievement and Best Prep. During the 6-week series youth participated in workshops on topics such as networking and LinkedIn and diversity at work, met professionals from high demand high wage industries such as manufacturing and healthcare, and learned about financial literacy and college planning. This revised internship program resulted in 106 youth completing BrookLynk’s summer internship program.

Two measures of success of the hybrid summer internship program for the 2020 program year was retaining 73% of employer commitment and 44 of this summer’s 106 interns being hired by BrookLynk employer partners.



## Success story

Hawa joined BrookLynk in 2017 as a 10th grader with interest in pursuing a career in health care. Hawa was certain that BrookLynk was the program that would help her to gain new skills, meet new people, and achieve her goals. Hawa excelled as a youth intern attending all trainings and events, taking every opportunity to grow as an emerging professional, and utilized the BrookLynk job coaches for 1:1 support to help her both in and outside of the program. During her second year with BrookLynk she was matched to a summer internship with Boston Scientific, a medical device manufacturer. While interning at Boston Scientific she had the opportunity to work alongside human resource specialists and production managers; building relationships with colleagues that introduced her to new experiences daily. Upon completion of her summer internship she was hired as a training coordinator facilitating new hire orientations, trainer development courses, and performance tracking. In addition to working at Boston Scientific, Hawa is now in her third year at the University of Minnesota studying Health Services Management and continues excel in her work and studies. Additionally, Hawa remains and integral part of BrookLynk as a youth liaison sitting on the programs advisory committee and as a trainer at Get Ready! youth work readiness training.



## BrookLynk Advisory Board

The Board includes representatives from both Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center as well as youth BrookLynk alumni. The 2020 Advisory Board members are:

Curt Boganey, City of Brooklyn Center  
 Elton Dahn, BrookLynk alumni representative  
 Jay Stroebel, City of Brooklyn Park  
 Meg Beekman, City of Brooklyn Center  
 Prad Pathirana, Cummins Corporation  
 Rebecca Gilgen, Brooklyn Bridge Alliance for Youth  
 Angel Young, BrookLynk alumni representative  
 Hawa Doucoure, BrookLynk alumni representative  
 Sue Schmitz, Hennepin Technical College  
 Vicki Erickson, Topline Credit Union  
 Dr. Eda Watts, North Hennepin Community College

## BrookLynk by the numbers



**\$148,000**  
in wages earned by  
youth interns

**300+** participants in the  
alumni network



**224**

youth trained with  
essential job skills



**44**

BrookLynk interns hired by  
BrookLynk employer partners



**120** paid internships  
coordinated

**92%**  
of supervisors  
were satisfied  
with their intern  
match



**99%**  
of youth interns  
were satisfied  
with their  
experience

**Youth  
demographics**

**93%**  
youth of color

**80%**  
qualify for free and  
reduced lunch

**55%**  
first or second  
generation immigrants

**33%**  
of interns live or attend  
school in Brooklyn Center

**67%**  
of interns live or attend  
school in Brooklyn Park

# COVID-19 response

## Business Communications

To communicate quickly and effectively with businesses, the EDA sent weekly emails to a citywide business mailing list, created a webpage for business resources, and worked with Communications to provide updates on social media as necessary. Resources and information changed rapidly, making it critical to send out constant information for Brooklyn Park's business community. Information included training opportunities, technical support resources, loan and grant programs, and changing guidance around gatherings, business closures, and health requirements.

## Brooklyn Park Development Corporation Emergency Deferred Loan Program

One program that was launched immediately after the business closures was BPDC's Emergency Deferred Loan program. This program provided forgivable loans of up to \$7,500 to business with 20 or fewer full time equivalent employers and a gross annual revenue of \$2 million or less. Over 80 businesses applied and 71 met eligibility requirements to received funds. Eligible applicants represented a variety of industries with over half being businesses owned by Brooklyn Park residents, 81% of businesses reporting they are owned in part or in whole by people of color, and about half being owned in part or in whole by women. Payments on the loans are deferred until May 15, 2021. At that time, loans may be eligible for either partial or full forgiveness. BPDC will discuss eligibility criteria for forgiveness and communicate with all businesses that received funds.

## Business Impact Survey

In May, as part of the large Community Impact survey conducted citywide, the EDA reached out to numerous businesses to understand the impact of COVID-19 and how the city could effectively provide supportive services. About 50 businesses responded and provided valuable insight on challenges and needs presented by the crisis. Three major themes rose out of the survey: businesses in Brooklyn Park were willing and eager to provide needed services to the community; the most critical need faced by most businesses and in particular micro businesses was quick access to funding for capital expenses; and businesses require technical assistance to access federal and state loan programs. These results were used to design a grant program and establish regular businesses communications to support the Brooklyn Park business community during this crisis.

## Technical assistance for rental assistance applications

Hennepin County worked to deploy emergency housing assistance funds to residents who were financially harmed by COVID-19. From August through November, EDA staff worked with staff from the City's Community Engagement division to hold technical assistance events at Brooklyn Park apartment communities to help residents fill out Hennepin County applications for rental assistance. Staff were on site at Autumn Ridge, Willows, Eden Park, Riverview, Villa del Coronado, and Pebble Creek to assist with the application process. The EDA also mailed information about the County's program to all rental households in the City.

## Nonprofit emergency grants

Another program that was launched immediately was the Nonprofit Emergency Grant fund to distribute direct services to respond to increased levels of need in Brooklyn Park. Through this program, five nonprofit organizations – Avenues for Youth, Community Emergency Assistance Program (CEAP), Minnesota African Task Force Against Ebola (MATFAE), Organization of Liberians in Minnesota (OLM) and West African Family & Community Services (WAFCS) – received grant funds to provide food, cleaning supplies and rental assistance to Brooklyn Park residents. Over 2,000 residents were served via this program and the grantees were effective in providing culturally specific services and supplies to residents who needed them across Brooklyn Park.



## PPE Distribution

There were multiple collaborative efforts to get health and safety supplies as well as personal protective equipment (PPE) to Brooklyn Park businesses. They include:

- 7,600 bottles of hand sanitizer were provided by Hennepin County in late December to distribute to businesses, organizations, and residents in the community. More than 150 boxes of sanitizer to almost 85 organizations and businesses in hopes to help curb the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 8,700 reusable cloth masks were either received from Hennepin County or purchased with CARES Act dollars. Organizations picked up boxes of sanitizer from City Hall and staff delivered supplies to nearly a dozen organizations and businesses.
- 55,000 masks were distributed to over 300 businesses as a result of collaboration from the State of Minnesota and the Twin West Chamber of Commerce in July. Masks were picked up in City Hall, delivered to businesses, and available for residents to help all comply with the order and keep themselves and their neighbors safe.



## Hennepin County Business District Marketing

A Hennepin County initiative to support 11 business districts, including the Edinburg Centre Business District in Brooklyn Park, with marketing and public space improvements began in mid-2020. Billboards were installed throughout the metro asking consumers to consider shopping and supporting local businesses. The Brooklyn Park specific billboard was placed on I-94E near 41st Avenue North from November through December 6. Digital ads were placed in local publications and posted on social media through the holiday season to encourage local shopping and spending. Mod Co, the designer responsible for the marketing efforts, developed a landing page to highlight the locally owned businesses in the featured areas. The EDA can reuse any marketing collateral on additional business districts in the future.

## CARES Act Community Relief Program

Of the \$6.2 million in CARES funding that was allocated to Brooklyn Park, \$2.75 million went into a Community Relief Grant Program. In just 3 months, EDA staff designed and implemented a program to provide CARES funding to Brooklyn Park households, businesses, nonprofit organizations and schools who were impacted by COVID and could demonstrate eligible expenses according to Federal and State CARES spending guidance.

- **Businesses.** Grants of up to \$10,000 were available to businesses with under 50 employees and \$2 million in annual revenue. 173 businesses applied and 91 were funded for a total of \$903,889. 64% of the businesses funded were owned in part or in whole by a Brooklyn Park resident while 55% were woman-owned and 63% were owned by a person of color.
- **Nonprofit organizations and schools.** 42 nonprofit organizations and schools applied for funding for a wide variety of activities. 30 organizations received \$778,117.94 in funding for an average grant amount of \$26,000. The primary activities funded were services in response to food insecurity, materials to facilitate distance learning, and personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks and sanitizer that were distributed to Brooklyn Park residents.
- **Residents.** 645 residents/households applied and 198 were funded for a total of \$337,752.67. Funding covered expenses such as rent, mortgage or utility assistance, or increased COVID-related expenses. The majority of applications were for essential housing support in the form of rent or mortgage and utility costs (73%). This program served a wide variety of residents from across the city. The average household size of grant recipients was 4.1 with an average of 2 adults and 2.1 minors.
- **Homelessness Prevention Strategy.** To benefit people in the community impacted by COVID-19 and prevent homelessness, Brooklyn Park also provided an allocation of funding directly to property managers/owners, who in turn must credit the overdue accounts of those renters impacted by COVID and issue the renter a notice of good standing. 35 rental properties ranging from single family units to large multifamily housing units participated in the program, and 322 households were granted a total amount of over \$619,000 for rental assistance.

