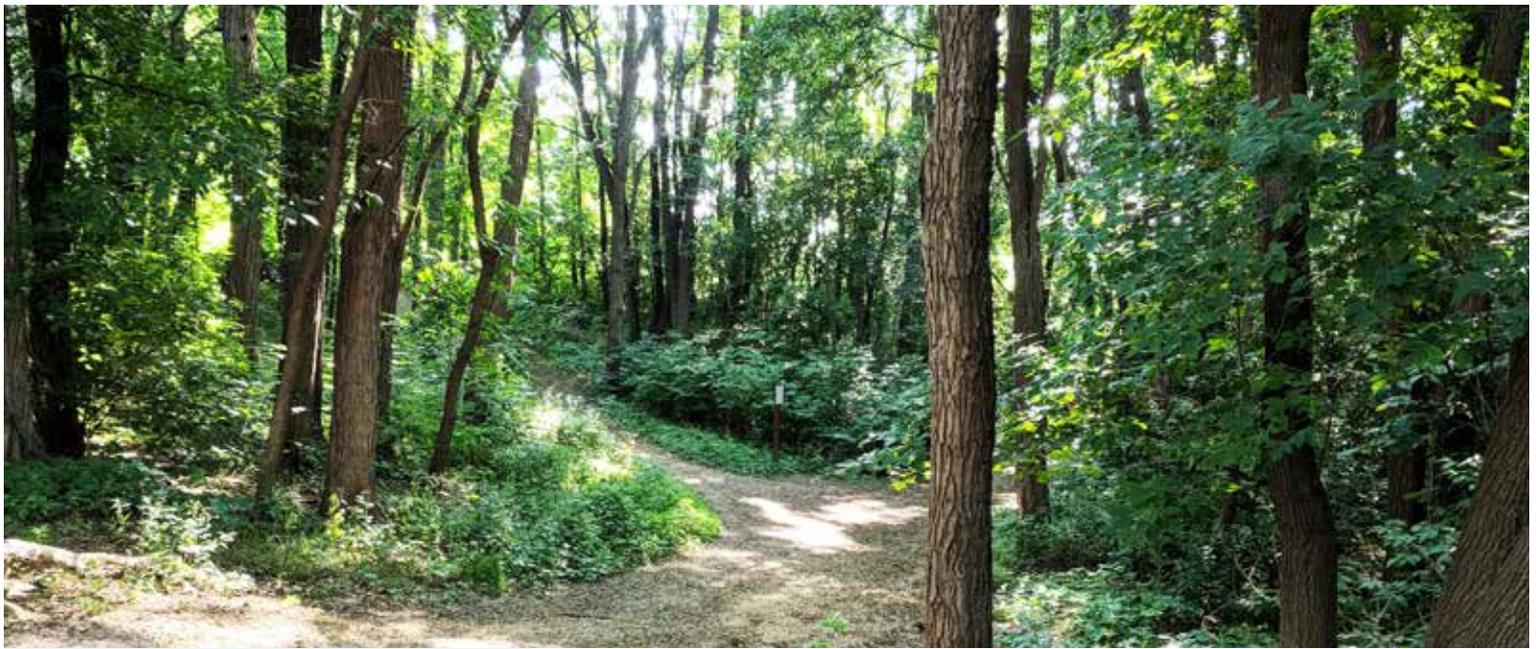


THOMPSON COUNTY PARK MASTER PLAN



JANUARY 2020





Acknowledgements:

Dakota County Board of Commissioners:

Mike Slavik

Kathleen A. Gaylord

Thomas A. Egan

Joe Atkins

Liz Workman

Mary Liz Holberg

Chris Gerlach

Dakota County Planning Commission

Mike Greco

Jerry Rich

Timothy Tabor

Lori Hansen

Jill Smith

Greg Oxley

Amy Hunting

Barry Graham

Ram Singh

Christopher Ross

Nate Reitz

James Guttman

Anthony Nelson

Donald Post

Dakota County Staff Project Team

Lil Leatham

Joe Walton

Steve Sullivan

Kurt Chatfield

Beth Landahl

Jeff Bransford

Tom Lewanski

Autumn Hubbell

Katie Pata

Anna Ferris

This plan was adopted by the Dakota County Board on January 21, 2020.

CONTENTS

01 INTRODUCTION	5	07 IMPLEMENTATION	103
Overview	5	Overview	103
Role in the Region	6	Phasing, Priorities, and Costs Estimates	103
Planning Context	7	Additional Studies	108
2018 Thompson County Park Master Planning Process	11	Natural Resources Stewardship - Working with Adjacent Landowners	112
02 CONTEXT	13	Interpretation Implementation Plan	112
Overview	13	Public Awareness, Outreach, and Marketing	114
Park Context	14	Public Services, Utilities, and Impacts	114
Demographics	18	Sustainability, Solid Waste Management, and Energy	115
Cultural and Historic Context	24	Park Ordinances	116
03 EXISTING CONDITIONS	31	Park Access	116
Overview	31	Parking	116
Existing Park Conditions	31	Visitor Services	117
Known Cultural Resources	35	Business and Operations Analysis	118
Natural Resources Overview	36	Financial Analysis	120
Water Resources	41	08 APPENDIX A DEMOGRAPHICS & MARKET ANALYSIS	123
Issues and Opportunities	42	Demographics	123
04 COMMUNITY OUTREACH	47	Trends Analysis	142
Overview	47	09 APPENDIX B CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES	151
Phase 1 Community Engagement Summary	48	Cultural Resources	151
Phase 2 Community Engagement Summary	50	10 APPENDIX C COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	157
Phase 3 Community Engagement Summary	55	Phase 1 Community Engagement	157
05 VISION & GUIDING PRINCIPLES	57	Individual Event Summaries	160
Overview	57	Survey Monkey	164
Vision Statement	57	Pop-Up Events	185
Guiding Principles	57	Phase 2 Community Engagement	197
06 MASTER PLAN	59	Phase 3 Community Engagement	266
Overview	59		
Park Development Concept Plan	59		
The Master Plan	62		
Community Engagement	74		
Accessibility	80		
Natural Resources Management	85		
Interpretation	89		

This page intentionally left blank.



01 | INTRODUCTION

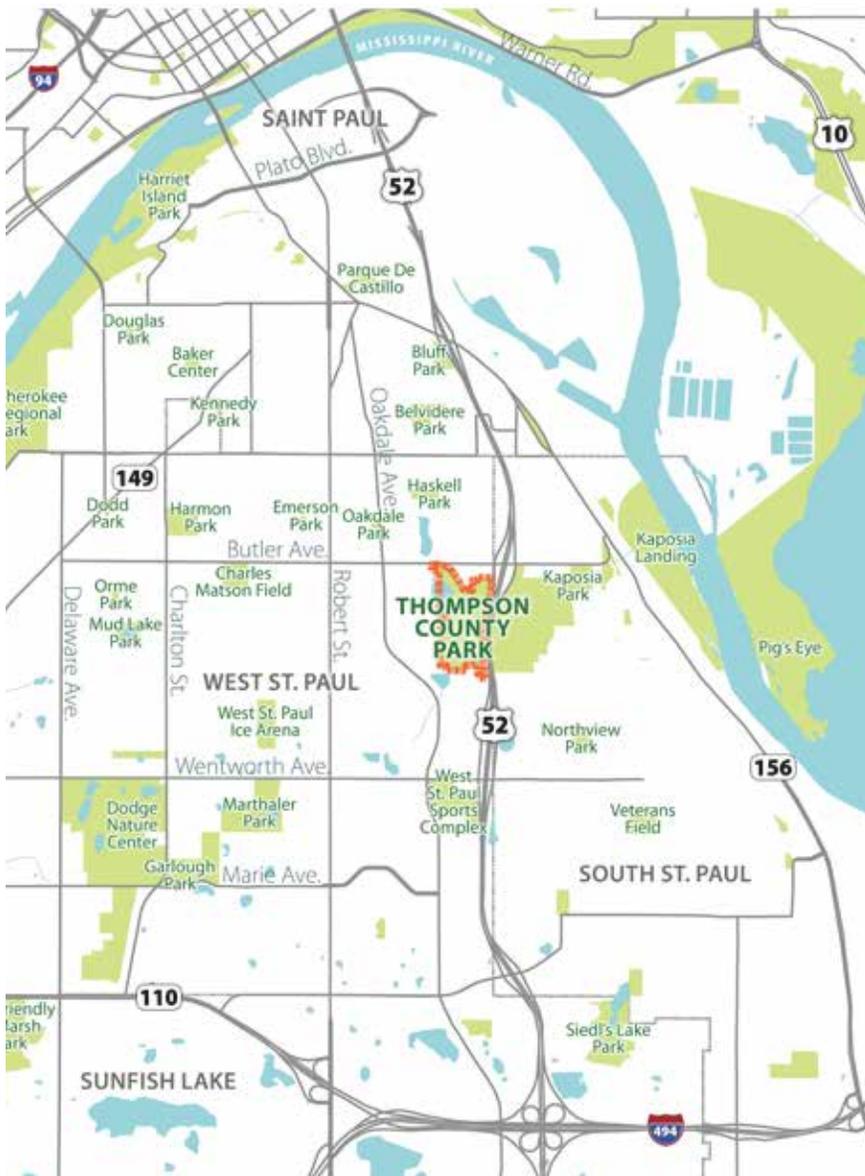


Figure 1.1 | Context map

Overview

Thompson County Park is located on the northern border of Dakota County in West St. Paul, adjacent to U.S. Highway 52. The 58-acre park is connected to South St. Paul’s Kaposia Park and Kaposia Landing by the River to River Greenway. The park offers visitors a variety of habitats to explore, from hilly savanna to shady woodlands. Scenic trails, including one around Thompson Lake, combine with park amenities like a playground and picnic shelter to make Thompson County Park a popular destination for residents and visitors. The Thompson Park Center is busy every day of the week with programs catered to active older adults and also hosts weddings, banquets, and meetings.

The Goals of this Master Plan are to:

- » Guide improvement and management of the park
- » Preserve and enhance the park’s natural resources
- » Provide recreational amenities that meet residents’ needs
- » Connect visitors to the park’s natural, cultural, and recreational resources



Role in the Region

Thompson County Park is one of seven parks and park reserves in the Dakota County system. It is one of only two parks to not be regionally designated by the Metropolitan Council (Dakota Woods Dog Park is the other). Thompson County Park serves the outdoor recreational needs of the more than 50,000 residents who live in the northern portion of Dakota County.

Dakota County Parks' Mission

The Dakota County Parks Department's mission statement is "to enrich lives by providing high-quality recreation and education opportunities in harmony with natural resource preservation and stewardship." Dakota County's parks tradition emphasizes protection of large tracts of high-quality resource lands and providing nature-based recreation and outdoor education.



Figure 1.2 | Regional context map

Planning Context

Previous Park Master Plans

Thompson County Park has undergone two past planning processes that have guided its development over time. The 1989 master plan proposed a bridge linking Thompson County Park to Kaposia Park with the North Urban Regional Trail (now the River to River Greenway) that has since been constructed. That first plan also proposed a Senior Center that was constructed in the fall of 2001. A fishing pier, play equipment, and a loop trail around Thompson Lake all were results of the 1989 master plan.

In 2004 -2005, the park went through a second master planning process that explored natural and cultural resource recommendations and proposed expanded educational programming. The plan resulted in the construction of a realigned entry drive, a new picnic pavilion with restrooms, and water quality pond in the northwest corner of the park. Other suggested improvements, such as a new play area and outdoor event space, were never realized and were revisited as a part of the 2019 master planning effort.

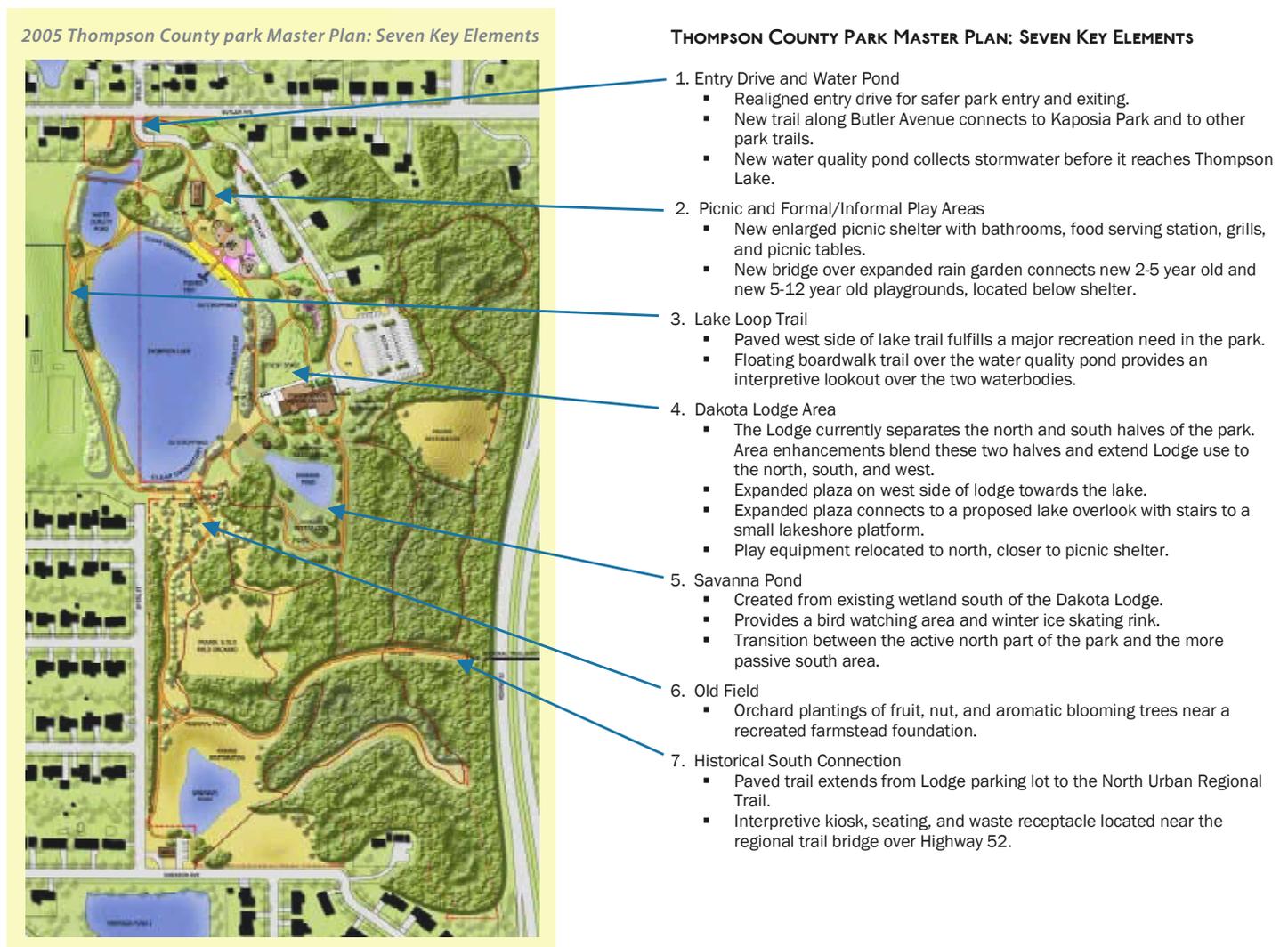
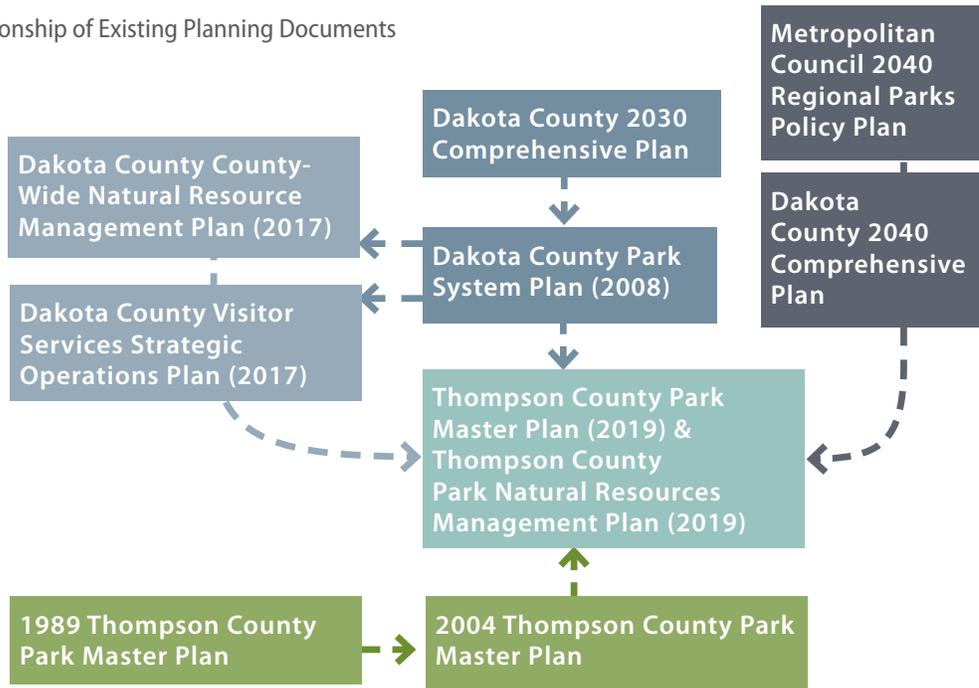


Figure 1.3 | 2005 Thompson County Park Master Plan

Figure 1.4 Relationship of Existing Planning Documents



The Dakota County Park System Plan

As part of its 2030 Comprehensive Plan update, the Dakota County Park System Plan was updated in 2008. The vision for the park system is for:

- » Great Places: Enhance Dakota County’s parks by ensuring that they include the basic popular amenities that the public expects as well as innovative, thought-provoking, or singular activities that relate to each park as a unique place.
- » Connected Places: Establish a countywide network of city and regional greenways for recreation, transportation, habitat, and water quality.
- » Protected Places: Strategically protect resource areas to preserve natural processes and system function.

The 2008 Dakota County Park System Plan described Thompson Park’s theme as an:

“Urban oasis for all seasons that provides a stage for community life and celebration. Highly designed, pastoral landscape in active park areas transitions to woodland.”

Initiatives from the 2008 Dakota County Park System Plan related to Thompson County Park borrow strongly from the 2004 master plan and include:

- » An expanded event and social area near the Dakota Lodge
- » A skating pond
- » An art walk with symbolic farm ruins

Dakota County Park Visitor Services Plan

The 2017 Visitor Services Plan summarizes several important considerations about Thompson Park and its visitors. The area surrounding Thompson County Park is more densely populated than any other Dakota County Park, and serves the largest range of ages. The plan proposes several initiatives that pertain to Thompson County Park:

- » Building relationships between schools and the park system by expanding outdoor education programming beyond Lebanon Hills and into Thompson Park
- » Incorporating engaging, self-guided interpretation along Greenways like the River to River Greenway
- » Offering bicycle rental or allowing dockless bike share along the Greenway
- » Adding one to two new County-organized events per year at the Park (including a multicultural event)
- » Promoting picnicking
- » Enhancing outreach to all communities, including multicultural ones
- » Encouraging volunteerism in outdoor education programming, natural resources stewardship, citizen science, and other areas
- » Assessing and optimizing fees and rental processes at Dakota Lodge
- » Evaluating the potential for concessions as part of future expansion at Thompson Park Center

Dakota County Natural Resource Management System Plan

The 2017 Dakota County Natural Resource Management System Plan makes recommendations about the use of County lands for the purpose of preserving and improving natural resources. Thompson County Park offers visitors access to multiple habitat types, though natural areas have no biodiversity significance or rare natural features. Nearly 90% of the park is natural or semi-natural vegetation, which is unusual for a park surrounded by urban development. The plan outlines how natural areas along regional greenways like the River to River Greenway could be enhanced and used to improve water quality and wildlife habitat. The plan cites runoff from off-site and altered forest as major issues within the park.

Thompson Lake is identified as a critical resource for the park, as it enhances recreational use and offers scenic views. Improving water quality is listed as a critical long-term park goal, as it would provide additional recreational value and benefits to visitors. A project to remove polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) from lake sediments in Thompson Lake was completed in 2019. The project includes a restored wetland and a forebay at the lake's inlet that will help to reduce phosphorus levels in order to rehabilitate the lake.



Dakota County, Minnesota Comprehensive Plan DC2040

Transportation
Parks
Land Use and Natural
Resources
Mississippi River
Corridor Critical Area



DRAFT, April 1, 2018

The Dakota County 2040 Comprehensive Plan

Dakota County's 2040 Comprehensive Plan incorporates the description of Thompson County Park in the 2008 Park System Plan. Changed, however, are the park system goals and objectives, which now include:

- » Adding natural resource-compatible park recreation
- » Implementing the 2017 Natural Resources Management Plan
- » Providing park operations and services using the 2017 Parks Visitor Service Plan
- » Increasing volunteerism in the park system

River to River Greenway Master Plan (2015)

The River to River Greenway connects the Mississippi River at Lilydale, just downstream of its confluence with the Minnesota River, through Thompson County Park and on to the Mississippi River at South St. Paul. The River to River Greenway Master plan identifies Thompson County Park as one of four trailheads along the eight-mile greenway trail.





2018 Thompson County Park Master Planning Process

In 2018 and 2019, Dakota County updated the 2005 Thompson County Master Plan and created a new Natural Resource Management Plan for the park. The County hired a park planning consultant, Hoisington Koegler Group, Inc., along with Barr Engineering, PROS Consulting, and 106 Group, to develop the master plan.

The goals of the planning process are:

- » Understanding the potential market for park visitors and what visitors desire in the park experience
- » Integration of natural resources management, recreation development, visitor services, and interpretation into a cohesive vision and action plan for the park
- » Creation of a framework for integrating cultural and natural resources interpretation, both personal and self-guided, into all aspects of the park experience
- » Development of a business and operational analysis that positions master plan recommendations for implementation over the next ten years
- » Development of a guide for natural resources management in all areas of the park, including areas with recreational facilities, with five to ten year implementation horizons
- » Engaging existing park stakeholders, potential partners, existing park visitors, and potential park visitors in the planning process

Project process

The planning process occurred in four phases during 2018–2019

1. Organization (spring–summer 2018)
2. Research, Findings, and Vision (summer–fall 2018)
3. Park Concepts (fall 2018–spring 2019)
4. Plan Development and Approvals (summer 2019–winter 2020)

Input from the public was sought in summer 2018, spring 2019, and summer–winter 2019 (Appendix C).



2018 site tour



2018 site tour



2018 site tour



Community engagement

This page intentionally left blank.



02 | CONTEXT



Overview

Located in the southeast corner of the seven-county Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area, the Dakota County Park System serves over 400,000 county residents plus regional visitors. With more than 5,000 acres and a fast-growing network of greenways, Dakota County's nature-based recreation system helps to meet the needs of Minnesota's third-most populous county.

This chapter explores Thompson County Park's location within the region, describes some of the broader demographics and trends that will help to shape its future, and details the cultural and historical significance of the area's past.





Park Context

Location

Thompson Park is one of two Dakota County parks to not be regionally designated by the Metropolitan Council (Dakota Woods Dog Park is the other). This area of the County is fully developed and is considered urban, which differs from the mostly rural context of Dakota County's other parks.

The 58-acre park is nestled into a West St. Paul neighborhood of single-family houses to the north, west, and south. Across Thompson Lake, at the park's northwest edge, lies St. Croix Lutheran Academy, which serves students in grades 6-12. St. Croix Lutheran has granted Dakota County an easement in order to continue a walking loop around the lake. To the east, U.S. Highway 52 forms a barrier that is crossed by the River to River Greenway's pedestrian/bike bridge leading to Kaposia Park, Kaposia Landing, and the Mississippi River.

Kaposia Park Connection

While Thompson County Park and South St. Paul's Kaposia Park are separated by US Highway 52, they are connected east-west by both Butler Ave and the River to River Greenway pedestrian bridge extending over US Highway 52. These connections help link the parks across a busy highway. Amenities such as softball, tennis, disc golf, and horseshoes that are offered at Kaposia Park but are not available at Thompson give locals nearby access to those amenities while allowing Thompson to focus on other programming opportunities. Both parks boast beautiful forested areas, walking/biking trails, close proximity to nearby residents, and rental facilities. Both parks are also considered destinations for travelers on the River to River Greenway, encouraging users to stop and explore.

River to River Greenway Connection

The River to River Greenway travels east-west through the southern end of Thompson County Park. One existing paved trail branches off the greenway coaxing users to detour north to the paved Thompson Lake loop and the Thompson Activity Center where users can find bike loops, restrooms, and clean drinking water amenities. Visitors who are just passing through on the southern trail connection will experience existing Oak Savanna restoration in progress and dense forests before reaching the pedestrian bridge and neighboring Kaposia Park to the west or the residential neighborhood to the east. Thompson County Park is one of four trailheads along the River to River Greenway.



Figure 2.1 Dakota County Parks, Trails, and Open Space Map

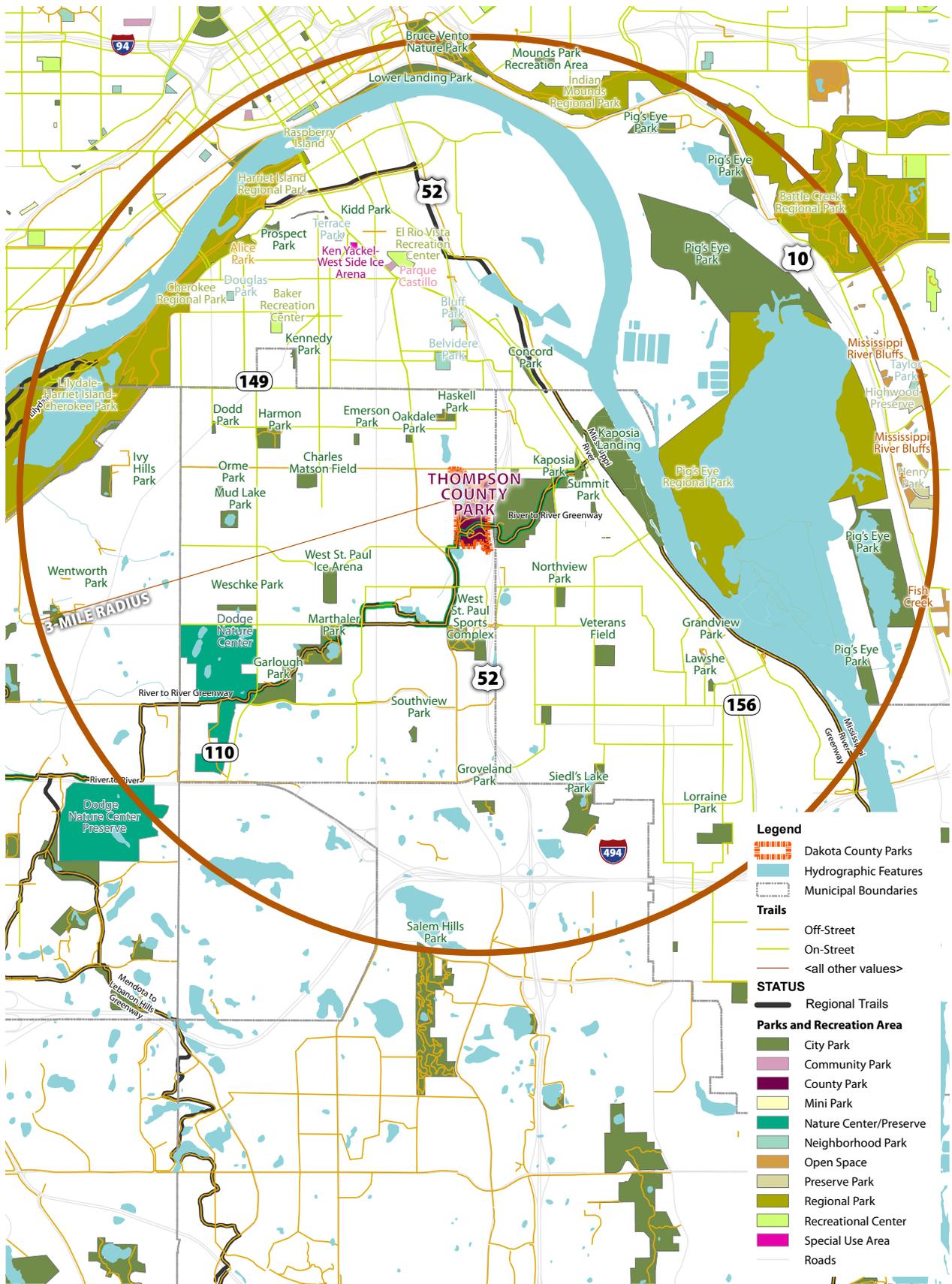


Figure 2.2 Local Parks and Recreation Context

Recreational Context

Thompson County Park provides a range of recreational activities and programs to its visitors. Most uniquely, the Thompson Park Activity Center, operated by ISD 197 and West St. Paul, offers a wide array of programs geared toward adults 55+ that are limited in availability elsewhere in a three-mile vicinity. The park's other amenities are similar to nearby community and city parks, with the exception of fishing, snowshoeing, and geocaching, which are available at just a couple of other facilities. The three-mile radius surrounding Thompson County Park has a number of recreation types that are not well-represented, and, of these, the following may be a fit for the park:



Paddle Sports



Water Play



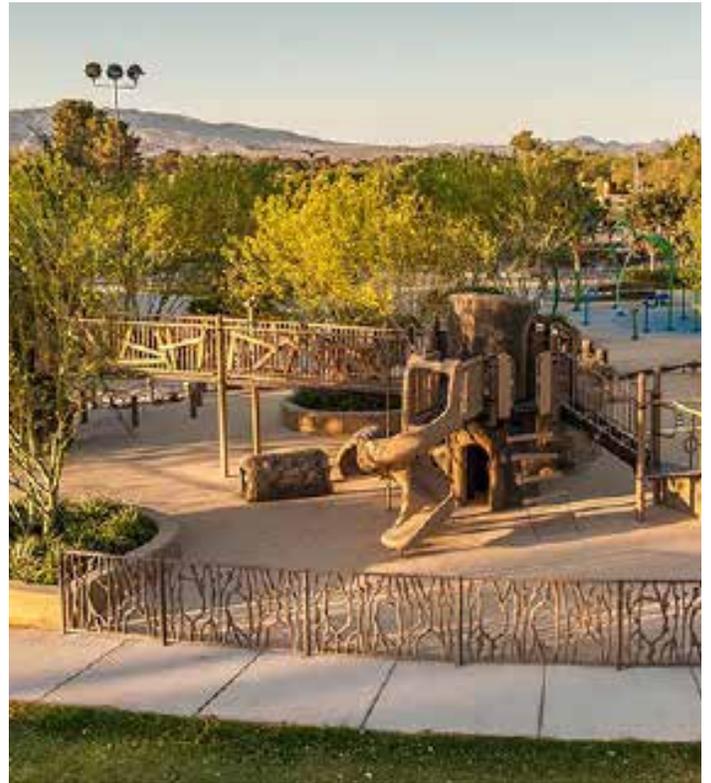
Nature/Adventure
Playground

Recreation Areas		Mini Parks	Recreation Centers	Community and City Parks	Kaposia Park	Kaposia Landing	Thompson County Park	Cherokee Regional Park	Pig's Eye Regional Park	Battle Creek Regional Park	Lilydale-Harriet Island-Cherokee Park	Indian Mounds Regional Park	Dodge Nature Center and Preserve
Acres		<3 acres	5-10 acres	0.5-100 acres	85 acres	87 acres	58.1 acres	100 acres	900 acres	1,840 acres	636 acres	111 acres	344 acres
Passive Recreation	Greenspace	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Nature Observation				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Geocaching						X			X	X		
	Community Garden		X	X									X
	Picnicking			X	X		X	X		X	X	X	
	Paddle Sports										X		
	Fishing						X		X		X		
	Hunting												
Trails	Hiking/Walking		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
	Mountain Biking									X			
	Cross-country Skiing									X			X
	Skijoring/ Dogsledding												
	Snowshoeing						X			X			X
	Horseback Riding												
Lodging	Biking			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
	Tent Camping												
	RV Camping												
Education	Camper Cabins												
	Community Center		X	X			X						
	Nature Center												X
Active Recreation	Swimming			X									
	Splash Pad/Water Play									X			
	Traditional Playground		X	X	X		X	X			X	X	
	Ice Climbing										X		
	Nature/Adventure Playground									X			
	Sledding		X							X			
	Skating			X	X					X			
	Archery								X				X
	Disc Golf			X	X								
	Horseshoes			X			X						
	Dog Park			X		X				X			
	Volleyball			X	X								
	Athletic Fields & Courts		X	X	X	X		X			X	X	

Table 2.1 Recreational Context



Paddle Sports



Nature/Adventure Playground



Water Play



Ripples and Pools

Demographics

The Demographic Analysis provides an understanding of service area populations for Thompson Park. For purposes of this analysis, two service areas were created for Thompson Park: a 16-square-mile “neighborhood” service area and a 134-square-mile “expanded” service area as shown in Figure 2.5. The analyses are reflective of the total population and its key characteristics such as age segments, income levels, race, and ethnicity for each service area. The full Demographic and Trends Analysis Report is available in Appendix A.

Neighborhood Service Area

The “neighborhood” service area’s population has experienced a slight growing trend in recent years and is currently estimated at 55,582 individuals. Projecting ahead, the total population is expected to continue to grow over the next 15 years. Based on predictions through 2033, the service area is expected to have 60,905 residents living within 24,560 households. With a 9.6% growth over the next 15 years, park and recreation services must continue to grow to keep up with the population.

Evaluating the population by age segments, the “neighborhood” service area exhibits a fairly balanced distribution among the major age segments. This is significant because providing access to services and programs will need to be focused on multiple age segments simultaneously. This also may be challenging because age segments have different likings toward activities.

The overall age composition of the population within the service area is projected to undergo an aging trend. While most of the younger age segments are expected to remain the same or experience slight decreases in population percentage,

those who are 55 and older are projected to continue increasing over the next 15 years, making up 34.6% of the population by 2033. This is assumed to be a consequence of a vast amount of the Baby Boomer generation shifting into the senior age segment. Given the differences in how the active adults (55 and older) participate in park programming, the County should evaluate park experiences that would cater to active adults who are 55–64, 65–74, and 75+ age segments.

RACE CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS ACCORDING TO CENSUS DATA

- » American Indian: This includes a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment
- » Asian: This includes a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam
- » Black: This includes a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa
- » Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: This includes a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands
- » White: This includes a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa
- » Hispanic or Latino: This is an ethnic distinction, a subset of a race as defined by the Federal Government; this includes a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race

In analyzing race, the “neighborhood” service area’s current populations are predominately White Alone. The 2018 estimates show that 70% of the service area’s population falls into the White Alone category, while the Black Alone category (9%) represents the largest minority. The predictions for 2033 expect that the service area’s population by race will change in that White Alone will decrease by 11% while Black Alone will increase by 5% and the Asian segment will grow by 3%. In addition, based on the 2018 estimate, those of Latinx/Latino/Hispanic origin represent 22% of the service area’s total population. The Latinx/Latino/Hispanic population is expected to experience an increase of 7% to 29% by 2033. The slightly diversifying population means the County should continue to provide traditional and non-traditional programming and services while seeking to identify emerging activities.

The “neighborhood” service area’s per capita and median household income levels are below county, state and national averages. It is recommended, therefore, that the County prioritize providing offerings that are first class with exceptional customer service while

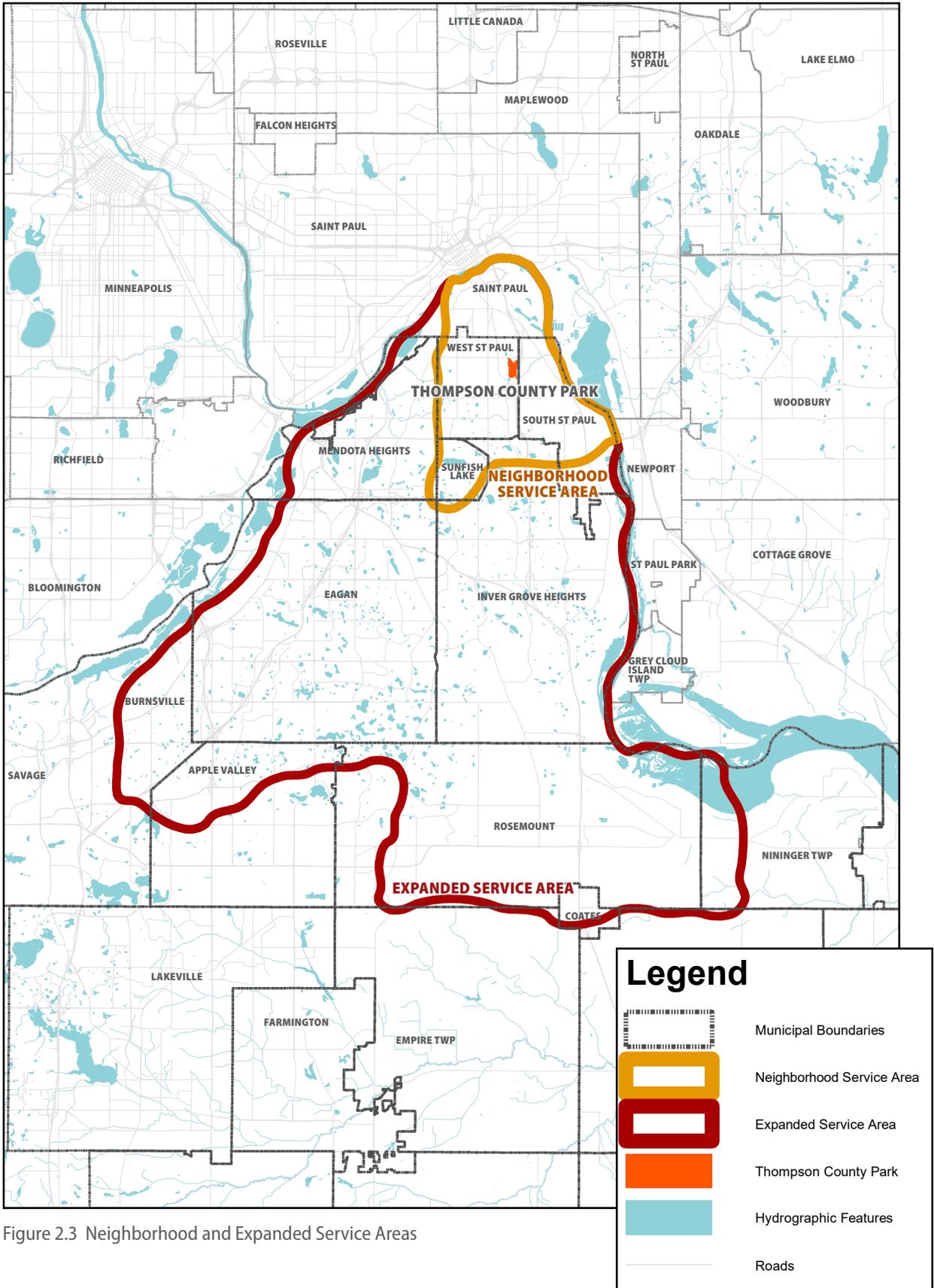


Figure 2.3 Neighborhood and Expanded Service Areas

de-emphasizing the need to create revenue generation.

Expanded Service Area

The “expanded” service area is similar to the “neighborhood” service area in that the population has been growing in recent years and is expected to continue to grow through 2033. In 2018, the “expanded” service area had a population of 215,643 people. It is expected to rise to more than 240,000 residents in the next 15 years. Also similar, the “expanded” service area exhibits a fairly balanced distribution among the major age segments with the largest segment being the 55+ with 28.8% of the population.

While the “expanded” and “neighborhood” service areas are similar in their age distributions, the “expanded” service area is not as diverse as the “neighborhood” service area around Thompson Park. Even with the slight difference in diversity, the County will still want to focus on providing traditional and non-traditional programming and service offering and seeking to identify emerging activities.

In contrast to the “neighborhood” service area, per capita and median household income levels in the “expanded” service area are above county, state, and national averages. While for both the “neighborhood” and “expanded” service area it will be important to provide first-class offerings, the higher income for the “expanded” service area creates opportunity for the County to create a target marketing program for this service area aimed specifically at revenue producing programs and services (e.g. facility rentals of Dakota Lodge, shelter reservations, fee-base programming).

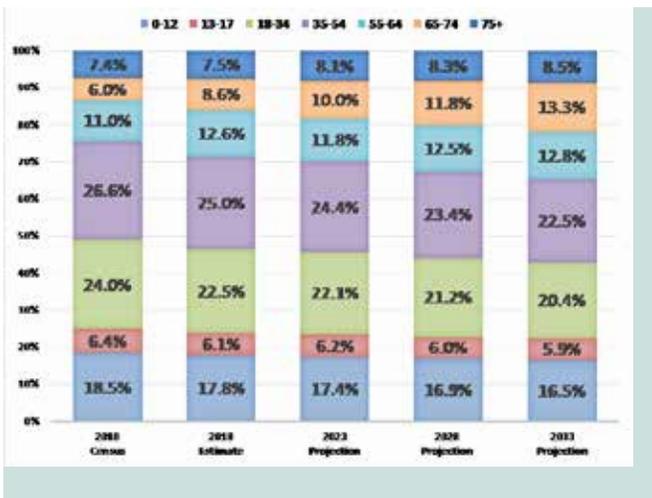


Figure 2.4 Neighborhood Service Area Population by Age Segment

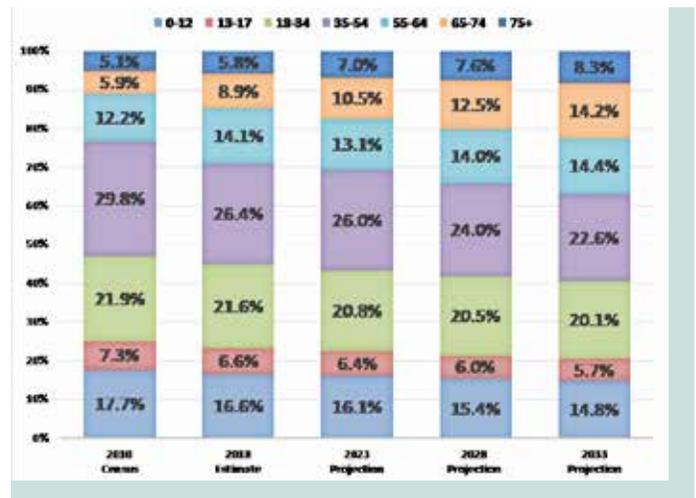


Figure 2.5 Expanded Service Area Population by Age Segment



Figure 2.6 Neighborhood Service Area Population by Race

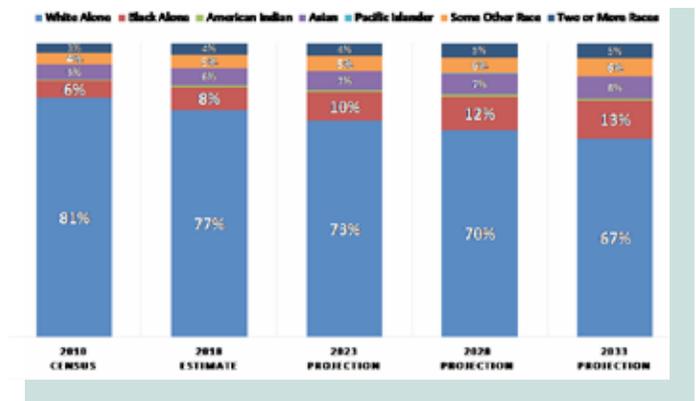


Figure 2.7 Expanded Service Area Population by Race

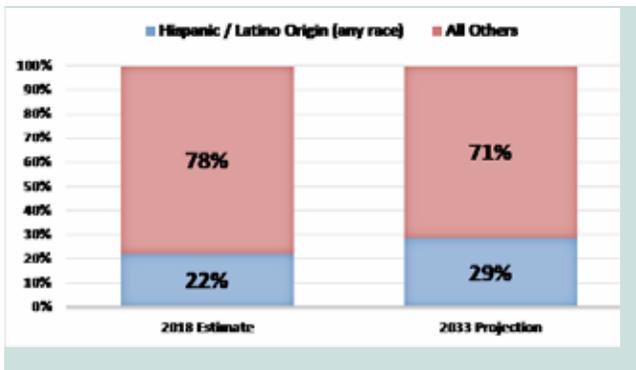


Figure 2.8 Neighborhood Service Area Hispanic Population

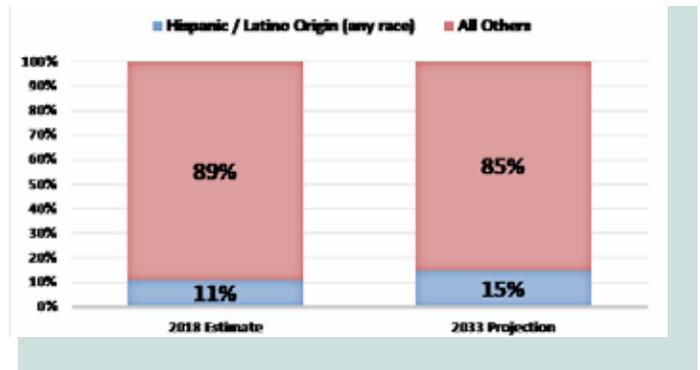


Figure 2.9 Expanded Service Area Hispanic Population

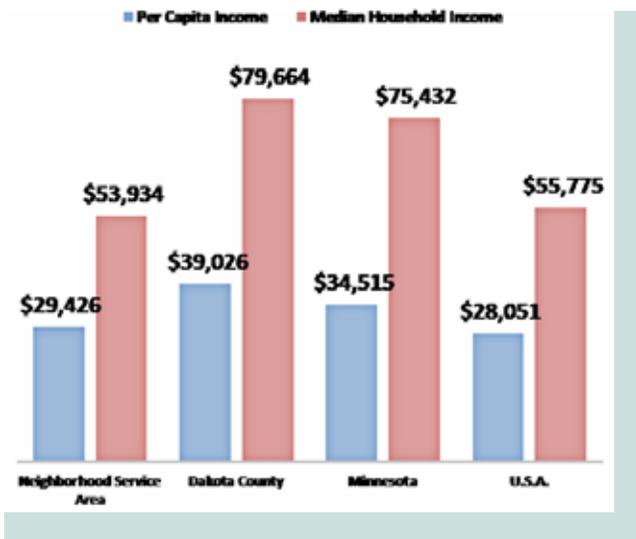


Figure 2.10 Neighborhood Service Area Income

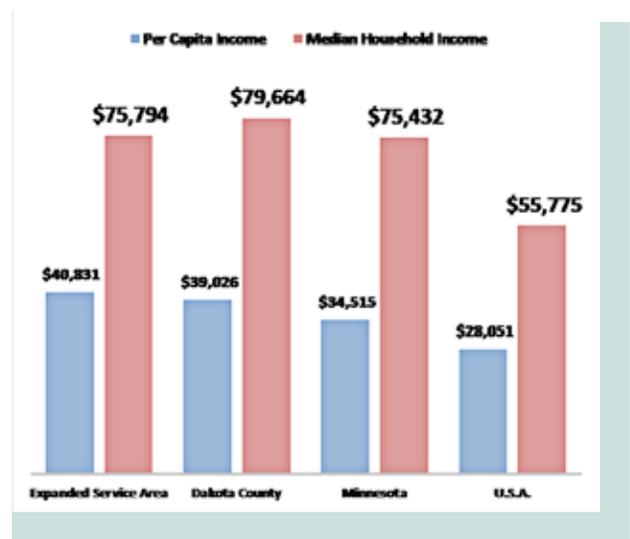


Figure 2.11 Expanded Service Area Income

Trends Analysis

The Trends Analysis provides an understanding of national, regional, and local recreational trends. This analysis examines participation trends, activity levels, and programming trends. It is important to note that all trends are based on current and/or historical patterns and participation rates. The complete Trends Analysis, including methodology for the analysis, can be found in the appendix.

National Trends

General Fitness

The Sports & Fitness Industry Association's (SFIA) Sports, Fitness & Recreational Activities Topline Participation Report 2018 was utilized in evaluating trends. The report groups trends into the categories of general sports, general fitness, and outdoor/adventure recreation. For Thompson Park, the most relevant participatory trends are those in the general fitness category and in the outdoor/adventure recreation category. Activities in these categories were also found to be the most common activities across all generations. An analysis of activity level by generation shows that as people age, there is a decrease in healthy activity rates.

Overall, national participatory trends in fitness have experienced strong growth in recent years. Many of these activities have become popular due to an increased interest among Americans in improving their health and enhancing quality of life by engaging in an active lifestyle. These activities also have very few barriers to entry, which provides a variety of options that are relatively inexpensive to participate in and can be performed by most individuals.

The most popular fitness activity, by far, is Fitness Walking, which had about 110.8 million participants in 2017, increasing 2.7% from the previous year. Other leading fitness activities based on total number of participants include Treadmill (52.9 million), Free Weights (52.2 million), Running/Jogging (50.7 million), Weight/Resistance Machines (36.2 million), and Stationary Cycling (36.0 million).

Over the last five years, the activities growing most rapidly have been Non-Traditional/Off-Road Triathlons (74.7%), Trail Running (57.6%), and Aerobics (32.7%). Over the same time frame, the activities that have undergone the most decline include Boot Camps Style Cross Training (-11.3%),

Stretching (-7.5%), and Weight/Resistance Machines (-6.9%).

In the last year, activities with the largest gains in participation were Triathlon Non-Traditional/Off Road (10.1%), Running/Jogging (7.1%), and Trail Running (6.6%). In 2016-2017, the activities that had the most decline in participation were Traditional/Road Triathlon (-8.9%), Cardio Kickboxing (-3.0%), and Calisthenics/Bodyweight Exercise (-2.6%).

Outdoor/Adventure Recreation

Results from the SFIA report demonstrate a contrast of growth and decline in participation regarding outdoor/adventure recreation activities. Much like the general fitness activities, these activities encourage an active lifestyle, can be performed individually or within a group, and are not as limited by time constraints.

In 2017, the most popular activities, in terms of total participants, from the outdoor/adventure recreation category include Day Hiking (44.9 million), Road Bicycling (38.8 million), Freshwater Fishing (38.3 million), and Camping within a quarter mile of Vehicle/Home (26.2 million).

In 2012-2017, BMX Bicycling (83.4%), Adventure Racing (56.3%), Backpacking Overnight (38.3%), and Day Hiking (30.1%) underwent the largest increases in participation. Similarly, in the last year, activities growing most rapidly include BMX Bicycling (10.0%), Backpacking Overnight (8.1%), and Day Hiking (6.6%).

The five-year trend shows activities declining most rapidly were In-Line Roller Skating (-20.7%), Camping within a quarter mile of Home/Vehicle (-16.5%), and Birdwatching (-9.2%). More recently, activities experiencing the largest declines were Adventure Racing (-15.7%), Traditional Climbing (-9.4%), and In-Line Roller Skating (-2.1%).

National Participatory Trends - General Fitness					
Activity	Participation Levels			% Change	
	2012	2016	2017	5-Year Trend	1-Year Trend
Fitness Walking	114,029	107,895	110,805	-2.8%	2.7%
Treadmill	50,839	51,872	52,966	4.2%	2.1%
Free Weights (Dumbbells/Hand Weights)	N/A	51,513	52,217	N/A	1.4%
Running/Jogging	51,450	47,384	50,770	-1.3%	7.1%
Weight/Resistant Machines	38,999	35,768	36,291	-6.9%	1.5%
Stationary Cycling (Recumbent/Upright)	35,987	36,118	36,035	0.1%	-0.2%
Stretching	35,873	33,771	33,195	-7.5%	-1.7%
Elliptical Motion Trainer*	28,560	32,218	32,283	13.0%	0.2%
Free Weights (Barbells)	26,688	26,473	27,444	2.8%	3.7%
Yoga	23,253	26,268	27,354	17.6%	4.1%
Calisthenics/Bodyweight Exercise	N/A	25,110	24,454	N/A	-2.6%
Choreographed Exercise	N/A	21,839	22,616	N/A	3.6%
Aerobics (High Impact)	16,178	21,390	21,476	32.7%	0.4%
Stair Climbing Machine	12,979	15,079	14,948	15.2%	-0.9%
Cross-Training Style Workout	N/A	12,914	13,622	N/A	5.5%
Stationary Cycling (Group)	8,477	8,937	9,409	11.0%	5.3%
Trail Running	5,806	8,582	9,149	57.6%	6.6%
Pilates Training	8,519	8,893	9,047	6.2%	1.7%
Cardio Kickboxing	6,725	6,899	6,693	-0.5%	-3.0%
Boot Camp Style Cross-Training	7,496	6,583	6,651	-11.3%	1.0%
Martial Arts	5,075	5,745	5,838	15.0%	1.6%
Boxing for Fitness	4,831	5,175	5,157	6.7%	-0.3%
Tai Chi	3,203	3,706	3,787	18.2%	2.2%
Barre	N/A	3,329	3,436	N/A	3.2%
Triathlon (Traditional/Road)	1,789	2,374	2,162	20.8%	-8.9%
Triathlon (Non-Traditional/Off Road)	1,075	1,705	1,878	74.7%	10.1%

NOTE: Participation figures are in 000's for the US population ages 6 and over

Legend:	Large Increase (greater than 25%)	Moderate Increase (0% to 25%)	Moderate Decrease (0% to -25%)	Large Decrease (less than -25%)
----------------	--------------------------------------	----------------------------------	-----------------------------------	------------------------------------

*Cardio Cross Trainer is merged to Elliptical Motion Trainer

Table 2.2 General Fitness National Participatory Trends

National Participatory Trends - Outdoor / Adventure Recreation					
Activity	Participation Levels			% Change	
	2012	2016	2017	5-Year Trend	1-Year Trend
Hiking (Day)	34,519	42,128	44,900	30.1%	6.6%
Bicycling (Road)	39,790	38,365	38,866	-2.3%	1.3%
Fishing (Freshwater)	39,002	38,121	38,346	-1.7%	0.6%
Camping (<1/4 Mile of Vehicle/Home)	31,454	26,467	26,262	-16.5%	-0.8%
Camping (Recreational Vehicle)	15,903	15,855	16,159	1.6%	1.9%
Fishing (Saltwater)	12,000	12,266	13,062	8.9%	6.5%
Birdwatching (>1/4 mile of Vehicle/Home)	13,535	11,589	12,296	-9.2%	6.1%
Backpacking Overnight	7,933	10,151	10,975	38.3%	8.1%
Bicycling (Mountain)	7,265	8,615	8,609	18.5%	-0.1%
Archery	7,173	7,903	7,769	8.3%	-1.7%
Fishing (Fly)	5,848	6,456	6,791	16.1%	5.2%
Skateboarding	6,227	6,442	6,382	2.5%	-0.9%
Roller Skating, In-Line	6,647	5,381	5,268	-20.7%	-2.1%
Bicycling (BMX)	1,861	3,104	3,413	83.4%	10.0%
Adventure Racing	1,618	2,999	2,529	56.3%	-15.7%
Climbing (Traditional/Ice/Mountaineering)	2,189	2,790	2,527	15.4%	-9.4%

NOTE: Participation figures are in 000's for the US population ages 6 and over

Legend:	Large Increase (greater than 25%)	Moderate Increase (0% to 25%)	Moderate Decrease (0% to -25%)	Large Decrease (less than -25%)
----------------	--------------------------------------	----------------------------------	-----------------------------------	------------------------------------

Table 2.3 Outdoor/Adventure Recreation National Participatory Trends



Cultural and Historic Context

The Thompson County Park area has a rich and extensive history, stretching back over 10,000 years when the earliest American Indian tribes lived in this region. In more recent history, the Dakota village of Kaposia was established around 1750 on the east bank of the Mississippi River and moved to the west bank, about a mile east of the modern-day park site, in 1826. Dakota County was established in 1849, prompting Euro-American settlement. With the forced removal of Dakota from the area in the mid-1850s, Euro-Americans arrived in increasing numbers to farm the land. Political and financial disagreements resulted in several municipal boundary changes until the City of West St. Paul with its present-day boundaries was officially established in 1889. Farming and industry continued to develop into the early 1900s along with the establishment of recreational parks, including a city park at the location of present day Thompson Park in 1929. Since Thompson County Park was established in 1976, several initiatives have enhanced the recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors.



This section provides an overview of park area history, including cultural resources that have been identified within Thompson County Park. Additional information about cultural resources in the park can be found in Appendix B, including applicable legislative requirements regarding cultural resource preservation and an overview of previous cultural resources investigations in the park. The cultural context of the site, and the stories they evoke, informed the interpretive theme and subthemes (see the Interpretive Plan section) as one way of engaging visitors with a meaningful park experience.

Figure 2.12 | Several farmsteads were located within the area that is now the park in 1945



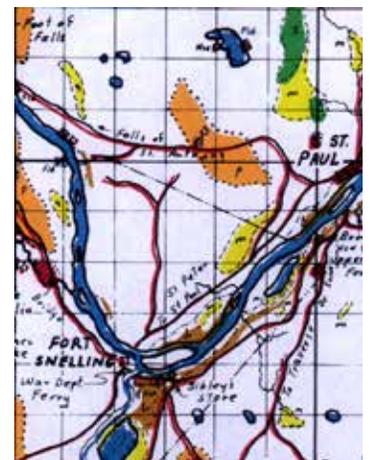
Eastman Painting of Kaposia 1846-1848

Overview of Area History

The earliest American Indian tribes in what is now Dakota County, ancestors of many tribes with strong connections to this same area today, lived in this region following the retreat of glaciers during the early Holocene Epoch at least 12,000 years ago. They lived in mobile groups and were skilled hunters, knowledgeable regarding the plants and animals that flourished in the Upper Midwest in the wake of the glaciers. Around 5,000 years ago, the climate of southern Minnesota, including Dakota County, gradually became moister and cooler, resulting in the extinction of the big game animals such as mammoths that had been abundant during the Holocene. During this time, American Indian tribes began utilizing copper deposits in the Upper Midwest to create tools, clothing, and ceremonial items. Hunting of big game animals continued, with focus now on the bison and other large grazing animals that lived on the Plains. The bow and arrow were soon added to hunters' arsenal, which also included spears and atlatls (a spear thrower). Gradually, communities increased in size and, as they moved around less frequently, began to create ceramics. Ceramic would have been less practical for their more mobile ancestors due to the weight of fired clay vessels. The pottery that American Indians fashioned was excellent for cooking and storage and exhibited a variety of decorations that varied among the communities.

Within southeastern Minnesota, American Indian communities began growing corn approximately 2,000 years ago, in addition to the harvest and cultivation of a plethora of local plants. Corn soon became an important part of their diet, along with wild rice, bison, and other local flora. Ceramic technology continued to evolve, with ground shells being utilized for temper in addition to grit, and new designs were incorporated into local ceramic symbology. In the mid-1600s, the first Europeans arrived in the area around Dakota County. They included French missionaries and fur traders during the mid-to-late 1600s, followed by British, and later American, traders and explorers in the early 1800s.

Tribes living in southeastern Minnesota during the early 1600s include the loway, Otoe, and Dakota. The former two tribes eventually moved south and west into Iowa and Nebraska. The Dakota maintained a strong presence in their homeland in this region of Minnesota until treaties, war, disease, and forced removal diminished their numbers in the mid-to-late 1800s. Following forced removal of Dakota populations to reservations in South Dakota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Canada in the mid-1850s and then again in the 1860s during the aftermath of the U.S.-Dakota War, settlement of the area now known as West St. Paul by Euro-American immigrants increased rapidly.



Road to Kaposia Map by Trygg, 1964



Cetan Wakuwa Mani (He Who Walks Pursuing a Hawk)

Kaposia Village

The area surrounding present-day Thompson County Park has a long history of American Indian habitation. Kaposia Village was established around 1750 by a band of Mdewakanton Dakota led by a succession of sons whose Dakota names were originally translated into English as “Little Crow” by early Euro-Americans in the area. The actual name of the first recorded Little Crow was Thaóyate Dúta (His Red People/Nation), and he was succeeded by Cetan Wakuwa Mani (He Who Walks Pursuing a Hawk), then Wakinyan Tanka (Big Thunder), then the namesake of the first “Little Crow,” Thaóyate Dúta. Continued use of the area by American Indians, specifically the Dakota, is also indicated by Trygg’s map of the area as it appeared in the 1850s, which shows a road leading from the Mississippi River to Kaposia Village, labeled “Rd. to Kaposia”. This road was located north and east of Thompson County Park.

In the early 1800s, the village was home to about 400 residents. Originally located on the east bank of the Mississippi River, the village relocated to the west bank, in present-day South St. Paul, after the east bank was flooded in 1826. Missionaries arrived at the village in 1834, and, as of 1849, the village contained tepees for winter dwelling, bark houses for summer dwelling, and frame houses for the missionaries. As of 1851, the village was home to about 300 residents.

The activities of its residents were not confined to the village. A ravine known today as Simon’s Ravine extends into the southern portion of Thompson County Park and is believed to have been a hunting ground for the Kaposia villagers. The Dakota left Kaposia Village in 1853 after the ratification of the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux resulted in their relocation to the Redwood Agency Reservation on the Minnesota River. Following the relocation, the Dakota visited their former home each winter until the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, after which the Dakota were exiled from Minnesota.

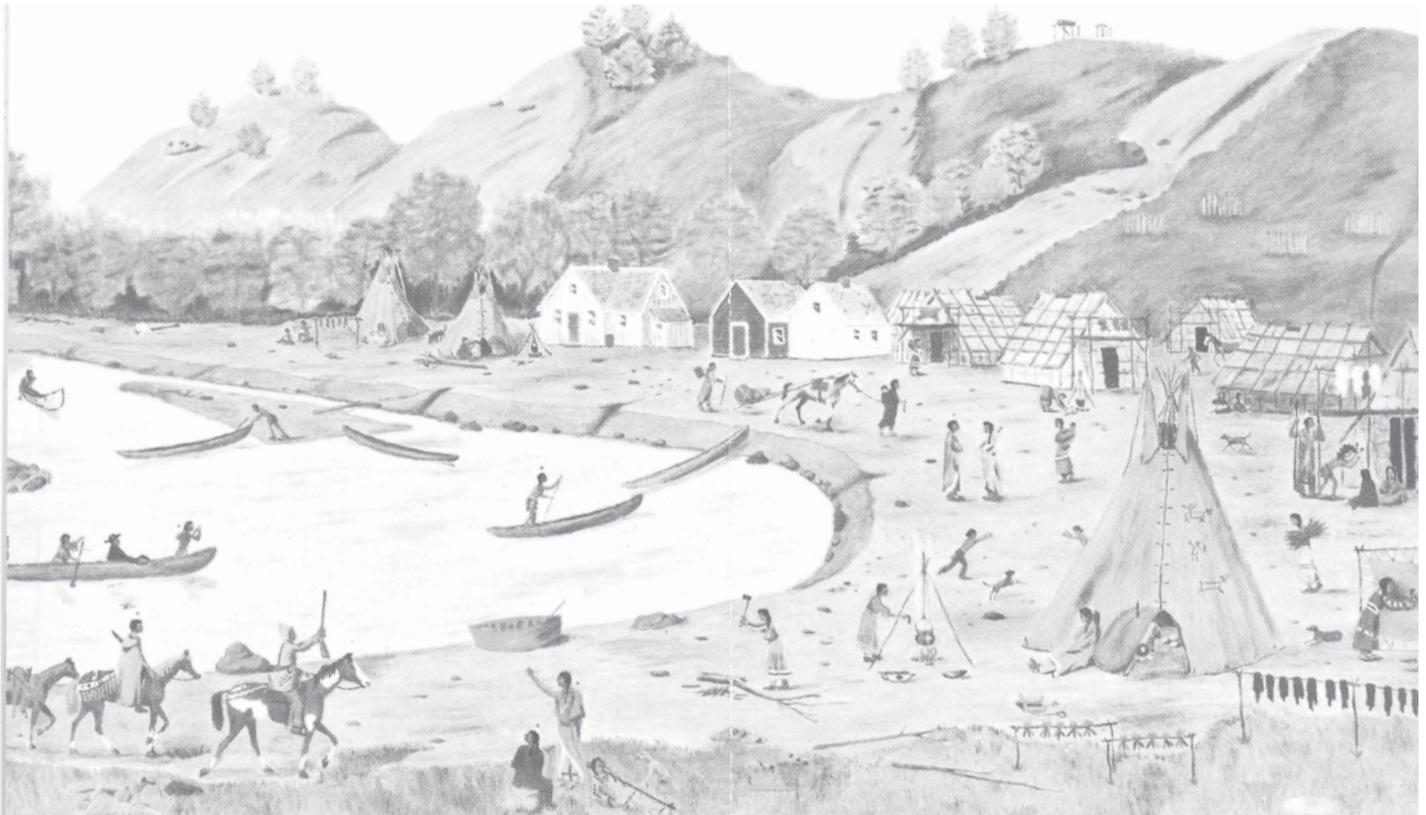
Early History of Dakota County and West St. Paul

Dakota County was established by the first territorial legislature on October 27, 1849. The first meeting of the Commissioners of Dakota County took place at Kaposia on July 4, 1853. In 1851-1852, Euro-Americans began to permanently settle in the area that is now the City of West St. Paul, in the northern part of Dakota County. Dakota County land was well-suited for farming and the early settlers were attracted by the “rich beauty of the land”. Agriculture was the basis of the West St. Paul economy for the next 100 years, with hundreds of early farmers making trips to St. Paul daily to sell their goods and produce at the St. Paul Farmer’s Market, giving West St. Paul the nickname of “the breadbasket of St. Paul.”

When the City of West St. Paul was originally created in 1858, it was part of Dakota County, north of today’s City of West St. Paul. West St. Paul township, located to the south of the original City of West St. Paul, was also established as part of Dakota County during that year. Financial troubles plagued the City of West St. Paul, whose charter was repealed four years later, and the original City was subsumed into West St. Paul township as part of Dakota County. Late in 1874, however, in response to a fight for ownership of the Wabasha Street Bridge crossing, the original City of West St. Paul was annexed by Ramsey County and became a part of the City of St. Paul; today, it is known as the West Side neighborhood of St. Paul.

In 1885, the Great Western Railroad (later Chicago Great Western Railway) came to the west bank of the Mississippi, and successful industrial ventures began springing up along the riverfront in the eastern part of West St. Paul township. At the same time, the farmers in the western part of the township continued to find success providing the urban St. Paulites with food and other agricultural products. Wanting to take advantage of the tax dollars and various privileges that would come with the formation of a city, the farmers and the industrialists banded together to establish, as historian Lois Glewwe puts it, “a viable municipality within the metropolitan area of Minnesota.” In January 1887, the Minnesota State Legislature approved the City of South St. Paul, and it encompassed all of West St. Paul township, including what is now Thompson County Park, as well as portions of today’s Sunfish Lake and Inver Grove Heights.

It was not long before the interests of the farmers and the industrialists began to diverge. City officials representing these groups disagreed on the cost and location of the new city hall, how tax dollars should be spent, and whether the town’s financial future lay in the railroad and building up industrial facilities or in farming the land. Eventually, several of the former leaders from West St. Paul township, many having been ousted from the city council, gathered to find a means to keep their interests alive. Their decision was to request that James W. McGrath, their local representative in the Minnesota State Legislature, fight for the approval of a new city to be created from the western portion of South St. Paul. Approval was granted in 1889, and the new City of West St. Paul was born. It included the lands of the future Thompson County Park at the new city’s eastern border and an area known as the “Forty Farms” because it contained the original forty farms of West St. Paul township (present-day City of West St. Paul).



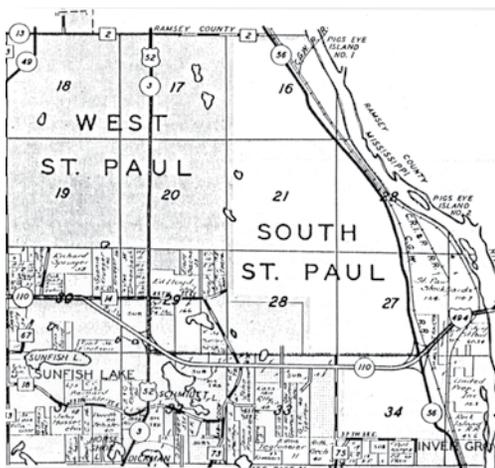
Painting of Kaposia by Fred Lawshe



1870 Map of West St. Paul City and Township



1874 Map of West St. Paul Township



West St. Paul and South St. Paul Post-1889

Early Landowners

According to the 1879 plat map, the area in which Thompson County Park is located was owned by two men. The east half was owned by "Altee Allen." Currently, the only Allen known to have lived near the Forty Farms area was Colonel Alvarez Allen, who came to the Twin Cities area in 1851. It is unknown whether he or one of his relations was the owner of this farm in 1879. The west half was owned by the Thompson family. Thompson Lake and Thompson County Park are named for William Thompson, one of the first Euro-American settlers in West St. Paul. Thompson arrived in West St. Paul in 1851 and also owned land over a mile west of the lake, between Butler and Moreland Avenues, in the vicinity of modern-day Ohio Street. William, a grocer who served the Minnesota territory as Constable, Assessor, and Poundmaster from 1868-1878, married his wife Elizabeth in 1871; three years later, they had a child whom they named Andrew. In 1879, another son, named William, followed. A plat map dating to that year shows the owner of the land currently occupied by Thompson County Park as "A. Thompson." The land was likely owned by William Thompson but listed in his son's name. A plat map from 1890 more definitively lists William as the landowner.

Around 1895, Ernest and Etta Kraushaar came to West St. Paul and founded a dairy and vegetable farm in the location of the former Allen farm, in the eastern half of present-day Thompson County Park. The land had been platted during the 1880s as the Lawton Garden Lots (1883), Schmitt's Subdivision (1886), and Summit Park Addition (1888). However, as of 1896, the only buildings in the area were located at the Kraushaar farm. These seven buildings were spread over three lots. In 1913, Ernest and Etta's son, Henry, began farming to the north of his parents' farm at the corner of Butler and Merrill (now Stassen Lane) Avenues. A few years later he made the switch to raising sheep. According to Lois Glewwe, a local historian, "Men from the [South St. Paul] stockyards would drive the herd, led by a nanny goat, north on Concord Street and then up through Simon's [sic] Ravine (now Kaposia Park) to the farm in West St. Paul." This path would have taken the herd right through Thompson County Park, as the ravine is located at the south end of the present-day Thompson County Park.

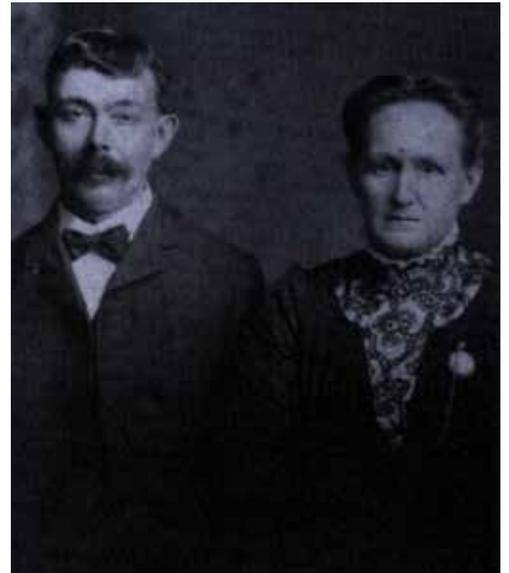
Because agriculture was so profitable in West St. Paul, the demand for garden lots in the city was high. Landowners frequently divided portions of their large farms into lots and sold them to market gardeners. It is likely that the Lawton Garden Lots were used in this manner. Throughout the 1960s, the future park remained in hayfield and small gardens, while urban development grew up all around it.

History of Thompson County Park

In 1924, East Coast philanthropist William E. Harmon established a fund of \$100,000 to build playgrounds in 50 cities across the country. West St. Paul was the seventh city chosen for one of the \$2,000 grants. The City used the

grant to create Harmon Park at Bernard Street and Allen Avenue in 1925. Thompson Lake, which is West St. Paul's largest lake, became the site of the city's second major park in 1929. The park was established as a recreational park by the West St. Paul Commercial Club, which subsequently moved its old clubhouse to the park to use as a pavilion. The club worked to promote the park as a local gathering space for concerts, picnics, parades, and more. The lake provided ice blocks in winter and was a popular swimming hole in the summer. In 1964, the club sold the six-acre property to the City of West St. Paul, which was planning to connect the park with the nearby Kaposia Park, in South St. Paul. Kaposia Park was established in 1937 as a Works Progress Administration project during the Great Depression. Simon's Ravine runs generally southwest-northeast through this park. The plan to connect Thompson and Kaposia Parks fell through due to issues with watershed rights and property negotiation. In 1971, the City of West St. Paul indicated that it was willing to donate the six-acre Thompson Park to Dakota County. In 1974, the Dakota County board voted to buy 62 acres to combine with the already procured six-acre Thompson Park and develop a county park. It became official in 1976, and trails were added in the early 1980s.

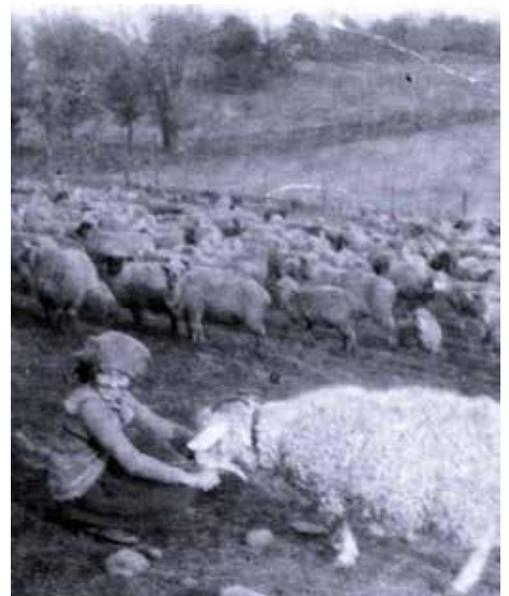
In 1989, the Dakota County Board approved a development plan to upgrade facilities at the park in several stages. The first phase included physical improvements to Thompson Lake—dredging the lake, installing an aeration system, building a fishing pier, and stocking the lake with game fish—and the establishment of a day camping area. The second phase included construction of a swimming beach and activity/event center. The third phase included construction of flower gardens, terraces, and decks, along with additional trails. The North Urban Regional Trail (NURT, today called the River to River Greenway) was planned around 2002 to run from Big Rivers Regional Trail in Lilydale to Concord Avenue and the Mississippi River Greenway in South St. Paul, thereby connecting Lilydale, Mendota Heights, West St. Paul, and South St. Paul. The eight-mile trail crosses U.S. Highway 52, which was constructed in 1934, to connect Thompson County Park with Kaposia Park.



Ernest and Etta Kraushaar

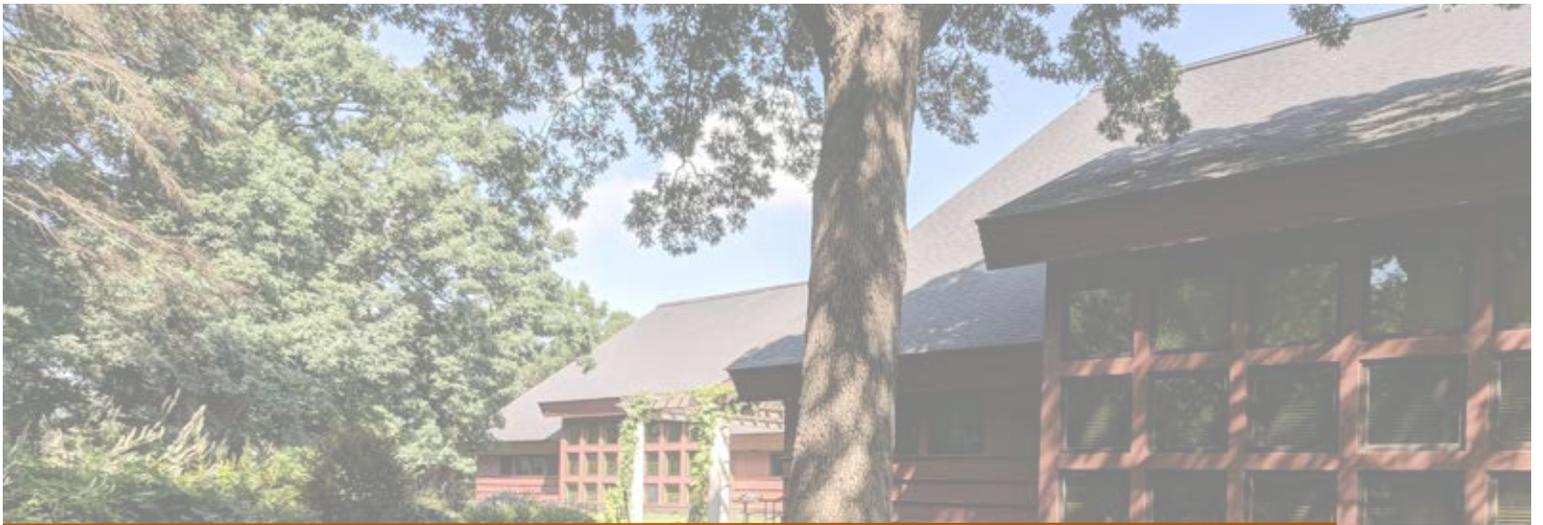


Henry Kraushaar's Market Delivery Wagon



Henry Kraushaar's daughter Viola and her sheep herd, 1920

This page intentionally left blank.



03 | EXISTING CONDITIONS



Overview

Thompson County Park is composed of a variety of cultural, historic, and natural resources, in addition to the recreational amenities and programming that it offers. This chapter dives into the existing conditions at Thompson County Park and begins to define the issues and opportunities that form the basis of planned improvements at the park.



Existing Park Conditions

At just over 58 acres, Thompson is one of Dakota County's smallest parks. However, as the park is tucked into the most populous area of the County, it is well-used by many local residents and was visited by 108,153 users in 2017. Thompson Lake is a big draw for visitors, who enjoy walking around the shoreline and fishing from the pier. In addition to experiencing the lake, visitors can stroll through scenic woodland and savanna landscapes along 1.3 miles of hiking trails and 1.3 miles of paved trails. The trails are open for snowshoeing and hiking in the winter months. The River to River Greenway allows visitors to explore beyond the park's borders and provides access to the Mississippi River Greenway.

Thompson Park Center, which houses Dakota Lodge and Thompson Park Activity Center, is located in the park. Thompson Park Center is operated in partnership with the City of West St. Paul and Independent School District 197.

Dakota Lodge, operated by Dakota County, consists of a 200-person capacity lodge that can be rented for weddings, meetings, banquets, retreats, and other events. A catering kitchen, A/V equipment, and WiFi are all provided, while a large stone fireplace, lake view terrace, and air conditioning make for an attractive and comfortable experience.

THOMPSON COUNTY PARK

General Information

Park Size:

58.1 acres

Thompson Lake Water Surface Area:

8 acres

Shoreline:

0.54 mile

Thompson Lake Depth:

9 feet

Park Topographic Change:

76 feet

Access points:

- » Stassen Lane off of Butler Avenue E
- » Emerson Avenue and Sperl Street
- » Sperl Street and Moreland Circle
- » The River to River Greenway

Partnerships:

- » ISD 197 and the City of West St. Paul partner in operation of the Thompson Park Center which houses the Dakota Lodge and Thompson Activity Center
- » Dakota County has an easement from St. Croix Lutheran School for the trail that extends around Thompson Lake



Figure 3.1 | Existing Conditions

Thompson Park Activity Center (TPAC) is operated by the City of West St. Paul and Independent School District 197 and serves adults 55+ Monday-Friday from 9 am to 4 pm with educational classes, social activities, and opportunities for recreation. Thompson Park Activity Center is an attraction which brings seniors to the park on an almost daily basis, providing a unique opportunity to make Thompson County Park a model for how to serve this growing population.

Thompson County Park's recreational amenities include:

- » A playground
- » The North Shelter, a handicap-accessible, reservable picnic shelter that can host gatherings of up to 190 people and includes:
 - A serving kitchen with fridge, freezer, and sinks
 - Electricity
 - Drinking fountain (May-September)
 - 24 picnic tables
 - 4 charcoal grills
 - Restrooms
- » A fishing pier
- » 1.3 miles of hiking trails and 1.3 miles of paved trails in a natural setting.
- » The River to River Greenway which connects across U.S. Highway 52 to Kaposia Park



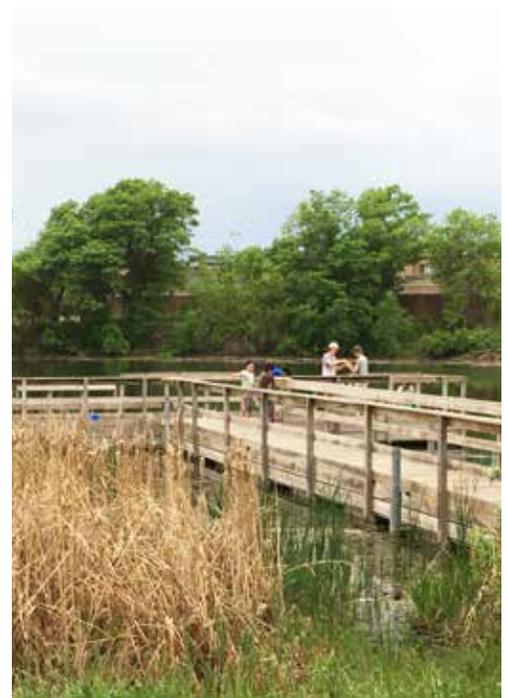
Playground



North Shelter



Dakota Lodge



Fishing Pier



River to River Greenway



River to River Greenway

The eight-mile River to River Greenway trail, which connects the Mississippi River at Lilydale to the Mississippi River at Kaposia Landing in South St. Paul, travels through Thompson County Park. Thompson County Park is identified as one of four trailheads along the eight-mile trail. Today, the trail is somewhat disconnected from trail support facilities such as parking, drinking water, picnic opportunities, and restrooms, all of which are currently located at Thompson Park Center.



Existing Outdoor Education

Currently there are two outdoor recreation-based events offered at Thompson County Park each year, the annual Take a Kid Fishing Day and Trails by Candlelight in the winter.

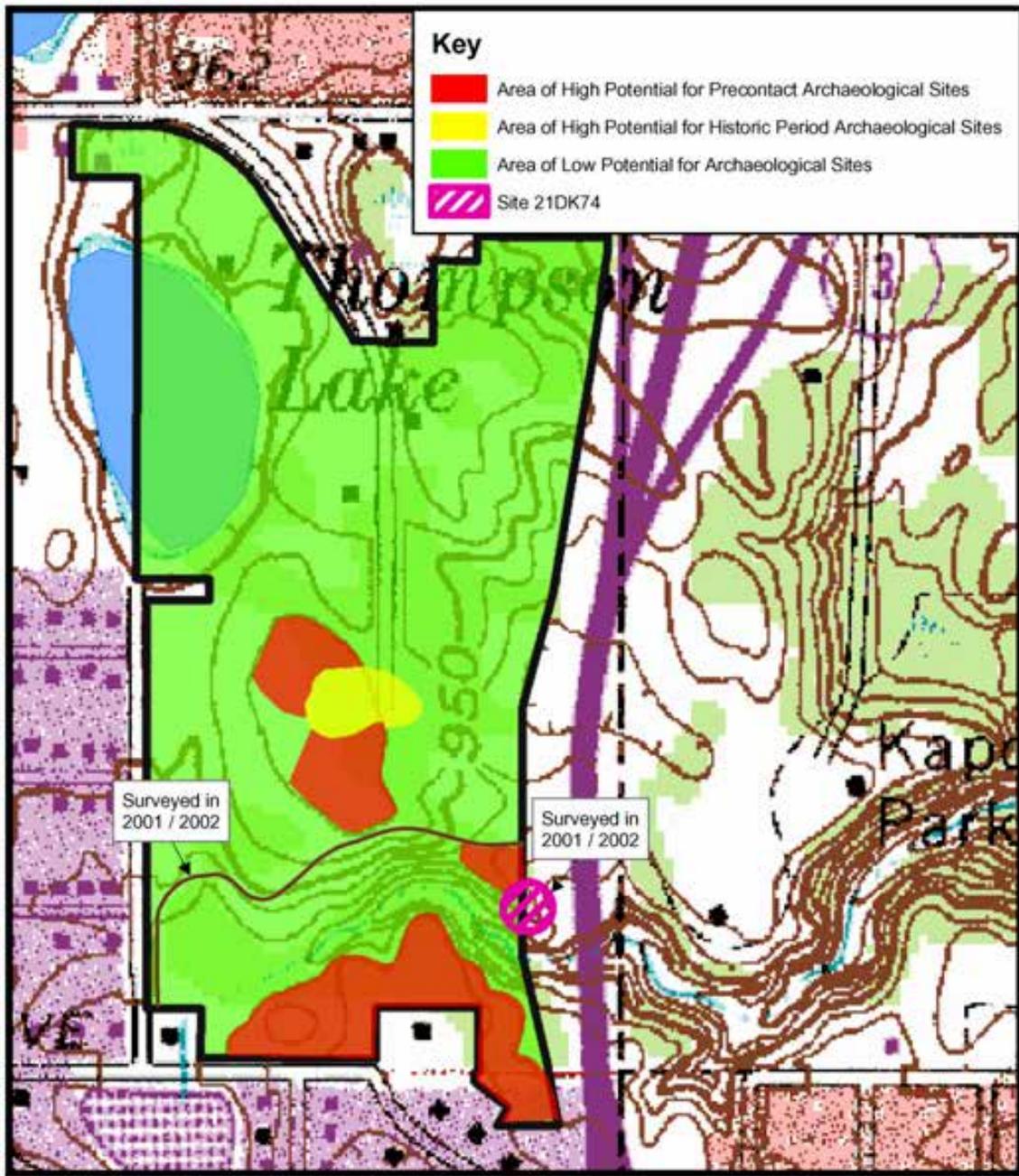
The park also hosts a variety of classes and programming that take advantage of the outdoors; however, few of these offerings actually focus on natural resource-based topics or outdoor education specifically. The TPAC has garden and birding clubs; a science discovery group; watercolor, art, and photography instructional classes; and a walking group that benefit from access to the park.



Take a Kid Fishing

Known Cultural Resources

Cultural resources identified in Thompson County Park include an archaeological site consisting of a lithic scatter near the southeast corner of the park identified as Simon's Ravine I. Simon's Ravine is named for John and Anna Simon, early settlers who acquired the property in 1878 that later became Kaposia Park. No architectural history properties have been identified, and no traditional cultural properties have been formally recorded within the park.



Source: USGS Quadrangles, 7.5 Minute Series, St. Paul East, Minnesota 100 (1967)

Dakota County Parks Master Plans
Archaeological Assessment
Dakota County, Minnesota

Thompson County Park
Assessment Results

0 0.06 0.12 0.18 Miles



Figure 1

Figure 3.2 | Thompson County Park Archeological Assessment



An oak savanna in Anoka County has similar appearance to what Thompson County Park looked like prior to European Settlement.



Natural Resources Overview

Natural Resources History

The land that is Thompson County Park has been altered through time due to human development. Prior to European settlement, an oak savanna plant community blanketed its slightly rolling topography. Oak savannas are described as scattered trees and groves of oaks of scrubby form with some shrub thickets. This community thrived on the sandy loam soils of the park. These were productive soils, and settlers in the late 1800s cleared the trees and thickets to plant gardens, row crops, and to graze cattle. Native plants were almost completely eliminated from the land. With increasing pressure to urbanize, farming ceased in the 1970s, and the site became the park. The fields were abandoned and allowed to colonize with opportunistic vegetation—much of which was not indigenous. Since that time, the site has evolved into a low diversity forest of mostly non-native and weedy trees. The herbaceous vegetative layer distinctly lacks the beautiful array of wildflowers and grasses that in a native condition would cover the ground.

The head of Simon's Ravine occupies the southern end of the park. Prior to 1970, the ravine stretched down to the Mississippi River. The construction of U.S. Highway 52 severed this ecological connection, ending the free movement of plants and animals in and out of the park and to and from the river. Today the undeveloped area of the park is an island of low-quality vegetation within a matrix of urban development. Without the connection to the river, this detached island does not provide adequate habitat for many species of mammals, reptiles, and amphibians but has become home to a diversity of songbirds. To date, Dakota County has restored 3.1 acres of savanna in the western portion of the park.

Plant Community Types

Plant community types within the park today were mapped based on the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS) survey previously conducted by Dakota County staff. This 2005 study mapped land cover by plant community and percent impervious cover (e.g. buildings, roads, parking lots).

Today, for this current natural resources management plan, County staff ecologists and consulting ecologists field-checked and updated the data that describes the plant communities. A description of the plant communities of the park follow. Figure 3.3 illustrates the distribution of plant communities within the park.



Figure 3.3 | Plant communities

Old Field

Open, herbaceous-dominated areas within the park are former fields that have not yet been colonized by trees. Non-native grasses such as smooth brome, reed canary grass, and Kentucky bluegrass dominate along with broadleaved, weedy species such as Canada goldenrod, leafy spurge, and stinging nettle. Plant diversity is low compared to native prairies. The size of the old fields in the park have been slowly shrinking as trees and shrubs encroach on the edge of these open areas. Eventually, if left unmanaged, these former old fields will succeed to degraded deciduous forest. The old field plant community provides marginal wildlife habitat because of the lack of plant diversity.

Degraded Native Forest

A few native oak trees persisted through agricultural times and comprise the canopy of the plant community called Degraded Native Forest by the MLCCS system. Bur oaks dominate this community in the park with basswood, American elm, and box elder as subdominants. Ironwoods occasion the mid-story, but common buckthorn dominates. The forest floor contains a low diversity consisting primarily of common herbaceous weed species (burdock, garlic mustard, reed canary grass, woodbine, and raspberry) but does include a few native species such as sweet



Old field in the southeastern section of the park.



Degraded deciduous forest



Casual trails near the shoreline result in erosion

cically, jewelweed, white snakeroot, and Pennsylvania sedge—all species that can withstand cattle overgrazing and earthworm invasion. These areas are ranked as medium ecological quality (defined below). They have formed from disturbed conditions (grazing) and contain a fair amount of buckthorn. Garlic mustard, a very aggressive, introduced herbaceous forest plant, has invaded throughout the park.

Degraded Deciduous Forest (former old field)

Since becoming a park, this young forest has formed on abandoned farm fields. Few native oaks have colonized these areas, likely because deer and rabbits heavily browse oak seedlings, and because buckthorn and earthworms suppress oak seedling growth. The forest canopy is almost exclusively comprised of box elder and black walnut. A grove of black locust (considered an invasive tree) occurs just south of the Dakota Lodge. Other tree species include silver maple, Siberian elm, green ash, black cherry, and hackberry. Large-sized common buckthorn and Tartarian honeysuckle were removed from the park in February of 2018. These species comprised a thicket in the woodland prior to their removal. The cut stumps, re-sprouts, and seedlings still exist; without additional management, these invasive species will grow again to fill in the shrub layer. The buckthorn dominated understory is accompanied by a non-native herbaceous layer including species such as catmint, motherwort, creeping Charlie, burdock, and garlic mustard. This weedy forest is of low ecological value.

Shoreline

The shoreline of Thompson Lake has been disturbed over time by several factors including bounce of the lake water level, invasive plant establishment, and trampling by people. Efforts to restore the shoreline have paid off. Improvements should be continued to reduce erosion, to introduce native plant diversity, and to control invasive species. Narrowleaf cattail and reed canary grass dominate the shoreline communities, driving down plant diversity and degrading wildlife habitat.

Developed

The northern portion of the park has been developed for peoples' active use. Lawn extends between buildings, parking lots, and recreational areas. The turf is managed with herbicides and fertilizer. Raingardens have been installed to capture runoff from the parking lots in order to clean runoff before reaching Thompson Lake. Due to lack of weeding, these raingardens have become overrun with thistle, reed canary grass, and other aggressive weedy plants. The biodiversity and habitat value of developed areas is very low. In spite of this, songbirds are found throughout this area, especially during migration in spring and fall.

Ecological Quality

A valuation of park ecological quality was based upon plant community integrity and the history of the site. Few native oak savanna plant species have survived the historic farming of the site, resulting in a legacy of degraded communities today which consist of an array of non-native, native, and invasive plant species growing upon disturbed soils. Nutrient cycles and hydrologic cycles were altered through agriculture, although they have had time to stabilize, but today are altered by urban landcover.

Ecological quality was assessed, and each plant community type shown in figure 3.4 was given a high, medium, or low ecological quality rating based on the following criteria:



Area of native shoreline vegetation as the result of restoration efforts



Figure 3.4 | Ecological quality

High

Sites with little or no human disturbance, important to preserve. Less than 5% of the site covered with invasive plant species. Most natural processes are occurring, including disturbances such as fire or flooding, if appropriate. There is little or no evidence of human disturbances such as logging, grazing, or soil compaction.

Medium

Sites with at least 50% of the vegetation native species. Invasive species occupy between 5% and 40% of the site. Some human disturbance may be seen.

Low

Sites with a clear history of human disturbance occupied with greater than 40% invasive species. Natural processes are disturbed such as altered soils through tilling or compaction, fire suppression, and altered hydrology.



Wildlife

A variety of urban wildlife inhabit the park. White-tail deer are the dominant large animal impacting the park through extensive browsing. Fox, rabbit, squirrel, woodchuck and raccoon have also been observed in the park. It is likely that nocturnal animals such as bats and owls are utilizing different niches within the park. Species such as wild turkey and mallard have utilized resources within the park to raise their young. A total of 71 bird species, of which 51 are Neotropical migratory birds, have been observed in the park within the last four years (eBird, 2018). Waterfowl species observed at the park include the Canada goose, wood duck, mallard, and hooded merganser. There were 47 passerine, 4 woodpecker, and 1 hummingbird species observed since 2014 within the park. Hawks and eagles such as the bald eagle, Cooper's hawk, broad-winged hawk, and red-tailed hawk frequently are observed. Various other types of birds such as pigeons and doves, loons, grebes, wading birds, cormorants, pelicans, and kingfishers have been observed at the park.

Fish Survey Results

Based on the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) Thompson Lake stocking report, the latest stocking of fish occurred in 2017 with 100 adult channel catfish. Other species listed by MNDNR in Thompson Lake include largemouth bass, bluegill, green sunfish, golden shiner, black crappie, and black bullhead. Bluegill adults have been continuously stocked from 2008–2016.



Water Resources

Thompson Lake

The watershed of Thompson Lake is 169 acres comprised of mixed urban land uses (residential, commercial, and institutional). The inflows to Thompson Lake are primarily from stormwater. The outflow located at the south end of the lake is controlled by an adjustable outlet structure. At normal lake level, a uniform low flow is allowed to pass through the outlet structure; at higher lake levels (due to storm events), higher flows are passed over the outlet structure. All lake outflows pass through a 42" storm sewer to Emerson Pond at the southwestern corner of the park. The Thompson Lake outflow discharges through Emerson Pond to a pipe that runs under Simon's Ravine and Highway 52 and eventually to the Mississippi River.

Erosion is occurring along the southeastern bank of Thompson Lake near Dakota Lodge due to heavy use by anglers. Vegetation that holds bank soil in place has been trampled and is slowly washing into the lake adding sediment and phosphorus to the lake.

In 2014, Thompson Lake was on the MPCA's 2014 Impaired Waters list for recreational use due to excessive nutrients and salts. A watershed restoration and protection strategies (WRAPS) study and total maximum daily load (TMDL) developed from 2012 to 2014 identified watershed runoff as the primary source of phosphorus to the lake; the TMDL identified a phosphorus waste load reduction of 30% necessary to achieve MPCA water quality standards.

A system of stormwater pre-treatment wetlands and a forebay structure was installed at the north end of the lake within Thompson Park in 2019. The project will treat stormwater runoff prior to discharge into Thompson Lake, thereby reducing phosphorus concentrations in the lake, which will result in improved lake clarity and lead to removal from the Impaired Waters list. The project includes construction of a series of upland stormwater settling and infiltration areas that will treat runoff from 83% of the watershed (145 acres). The project will include sediment forebays at storm sewer outfalls, a stormwater wetland/pond, and a stormwater reuse irrigation system that draws water from the wetland and irrigates nearby parkland. Water quality modeling indicates that the proposed project will reduce phosphorus loading to the lake by 39%, achieving the waste load reduction identified in the TMDL. The project will provide additional public benefits including native habitat enhancement, education opportunities, trail improvements, and improved aesthetics.

Emerson Pond

Emerson pond occupies the southwestern corner of the park and treats stormwater runoff from the urban watershed, as well as water overflowing from Thompson Lake. Currently, water overflowing from Thompson Lake is piped underground to the pond. The pond was designed with steep, deep slopes to properly accommodate the stormwater. These slopes are covered with degraded forest comprised mostly of non-native and invasive species. It provides some habitat value to songbirds and waterfowl but has little value to people.



Issues and Opportunities

The following list of issues and opportunities was assembled from the community engagement process, demographic and recreation trends, assessment of existing conditions, Dakota County Staff, key stakeholders, and the general public.

Issues

Access, Circulation, and Wayfinding

- » There is confusion regarding Thompson Park's location as it is not on Thompson Avenue, a street in West St. Paul less than a mile to the south of the park.
- » Other than at the main entrance on Butler, entrances into the park are not clearly identifiable or welcoming.
- » There is limited public transit to the park.
- » The pedestrian and bicycle network on the streets connecting nearby residents to the park is incomplete. Sidewalks and bicycle facilities on Butler are missing.
- » Visitors are confused about the purpose of and access to the different parts of Thompson Park Center, Dakota Lodge, and the Thompson Activity Center.
- » Parking is limited, particularly in the main lot during business hours. Parking can support events if they occur after Thompson Park Activity Center hours.
- » Wayfinding is limited, particularly in the natural area of the park.

Natural Resources

- » The natural resources of the park have low biodiversity and are degraded.
- » There is poor water quality in Thompson Lake.
- » There is no water access for either swimming or paddling on Thompson Lake.
- » Highway noise from U.S. Highway 52 diminishes the natural setting.

Social Gathering

- » There are limited public gathering spaces if the picnic shelter and Dakota Lodge are rented.
- » The gathering area for parents near the playground is small.
- » The park's urban location makes it a convenient location for special events and programs, but the current park facilities do not fully support these uses.

- » Dakota Lodge is popular for wedding rentals, but the park does not function well for indoor or outdoor ceremonies.

Recreation

- » The playground does not function as well as it could. The equipment gets hot, trash receptacles are frequently full, the play area lacks accessible equipment, there are not enough picnic tables within view, and it is disconnected from the shelter, which is challenging for group events.
- » The lake loop trail lacks benches and lighting which would make it more accessible to more people.
- » Aside from natural surface trails, there are no facilities on the south end of the park.
- » Poor lake water quality limits recreation use.

Education

- » The outdoor education or interpretation offered is limited.

Park Use

- » Dakota Lodge is available for rental, but is not accessible to the general public for park orientation, warming, restrooms, or water. Volunteers at Thompson Park Activity Center often field park related questions.
- » A perceived lack of safety in the south end of the park may limit use and exploration.
- » There is a clear divide between the developed and the natural areas of the park. Many park visitors are not aware of the natural areas and trails.
- » The River to River Greenway is visually disconnected from the parking area and trailhead support facilities.

Demographics

- » Though the demographics of the surrounding community include a higher percentage of Latinx/Latino/Hispanics, South Asian Indians, African Americans, Vietnamese, and Somalis than Dakota County overall, these demographic groups are

underrepresented in Thompson County Park visitorship. The County needs to continue to build relationships with these groups and strive to diversify offerings to meet their needs and interests.

- » The surrounding community has relatively even percentages of older adults, adults, youth, and children. The park will need to appeal to all ages, which can be challenging as different age segments have different preferences.
- » Incomes in the surrounding community are lower than Dakota County overall. This may limit the County's ability to generate revenues.
- » Many parts of the park are not accessible to people living with disabilities and older adults.



Existing berm in parking lot near Dakota Lodge



Recent water quality project

Opportunities

Retain Natural Resources as Foundational

- » Continue to restore and expand savanna habitat.
- » Continue to remove invasive species like buckthorn and garlic mustard.
- » Maintain the quality of native forest where it still exists.
- » Offer educational natural resource programming in this park, where the already disturbed environment allows access that would be damaging in a more pristine ecological setting.
- » Address highway noise with landscape buffering or a sound wall along U.S. Highway 52.

Increase Interaction with Thompson Lake

- » Continue to restore shoreline habitat. Give consideration to how to improve visual connections to the lake.
- » Increase fishing access.
- » Improve the visual connection from Thompson Park Center, the playground, and other adjacent facilities.
- » Provide opportunities to increase lake recreation such as fishing and non-motorized boating.
- » Offer rental equipment (e.g. fishing poles, paddle boards, kayaks, canoe)
- » Explore daylighting of the lake outlet.

Utilize the Entire Park

- » Consider transitioning the degraded deciduous forest to another habitat type or adding recreation.
- » Ensure the park provides a year-round experience.
- » Implement safety improvements in the parking lot, at park access points, and within the natural areas.
- » Add restrooms on the park's south end.
- » Expand the recreational offerings to provide more for visitors to do during their visit.
- » Improve park accessibility and inclusiveness.
- » Make the play area more inclusive, expanding opportunities for different types of play, and improve its day-to-day function.
- » Expand picnic amenities (shelters, grills, picnic tables) throughout the park.
- » Allow greater public access and use of Dakota Lodge, including visitor orientation.

- » Expand the Thompson Park Center to include a bigger room for exercise classes, small interview space, and a modified registration window. Create an indoor-outdoor experience.
- » Explore expanding recreation offerings, especially those that are not available nearby (including water play, nature/adventure playground, archery, paddle sports, or swimming).
- » Offer equipment rental (fishing poles, snowshoes, paddle boards, kayaks/ canoes, geocaching gps, bike-share).

Ensure the Park Serves the Community

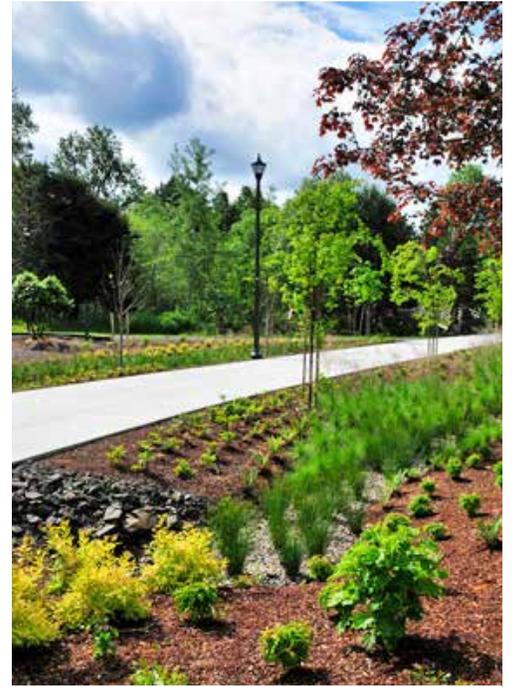
- » Continue to offer nearby residents, who may have few opportunities to experience natural areas due to the urban context, a great place to learn about and experience the outdoors in a low-risk, approachable setting.
- » Establish strong connections to underrepresented communities.
- » Provide facilities that better support special events such as music and movies in the park. There is parking to support events if they occur when the Thompson Park Activity Center is not open, and there are nearby options for overflow parking for special events.
- » Improve physical and psychological accessibility within the park on multiple fronts by providing multi-lingual signage, inclusive programming, and ADA trails with adequate seating.
- » Promote cross-generational programming in partnership with the Thompson Park Activity Center (e.g. grandparent-grandkid programs).
- » Explore the land's history through interactive and educational interpretation and programming. Recognize the park as part of Dakota Homeland by incorporating Dakota place names and language into the park.
- » Pursue opportunities to integrate the arts into the park and its programs as a vehicle for cultural and natural resource interpretation.
- » Open Thompson Park Center to more public use.

Contribute to Regional Systems

- » Improve the park's function as a trailhead for the River to River Greenway. Consider how Thompson Park Center can provide information about both the River to River Greenway and the greenway system.
- » Implement clear signage and access to the River to River Greenway from Thompson Park's entrance.
- » Provide beneficial habitat in Thompson County Park that complements and adds value to the River to River Greenway's function as an ecological corridor.
- » Collaborate with the City of West St. Paul and the Lower Mississippi River Watershed Management to improve the greater watershed and reduce impacts of the watershed on Thompson Park and Lake.
- » Further park connections and partnerships with St. Croix Lutheran and South St. Paul's Kaposia Park.
- » Improve and integrate the park's ecological habitats with the larger greenway extending to the Mississippi River.

Increase Collaboration and Expand Partnerships

- » Incorporate more volunteer opportunities into program offerings at the Thompson Park Activity Center, especially for citizen science, restoration, and vegetation management.
- » Work with the parks and recreation department in the City of South St. Paul in order to ensure complementary recreation offerings and amenities at Kaposia Park and cross-promote the parks.
- » Expand use of Dakota Lodge during the week by marketing to community groups.
- » Expand community programming like music or movies in the park and cultural celebrations.
- » Continue to expand partnerships with community organizations to develop new programming, events, and recreational opportunities.
- » Strengthen partnership with St. Croix Lutheran for science and outdoor education programming and parking for special events.



Opportunity for improved circulation



High-quality oak forest

This page intentionally left blank.



04 | COMMUNITY OUTREACH



Overview

The overall goal of community engagement for the master planning process was to reach a range of representative stakeholders to build awareness and support for future investment in Thompson County Park. Specific objectives included:

- » Identifying what would make the park relevant and fun for both current park users and those who are interested in park experiences but do not visit the park today.
- » Assessing park needs for recreation, interpretation, visitor services, natural resource restoration, and natural resource management.
- » Testing ideas for park sense of setting and overall aesthetic.
- » Assessing opportunities to build on the park's role as a community place, not just a place for recreation. The existing partnership with the City of West St. Paul and ISD 197 already established the Thompson Park Center as a community place.
- » Building new and strengthening existing relationships with stakeholders, project partners, and residents.

To achieve the project objectives, the planning process developed targeted engagement activities for those who actively use Thompson County Park as well as County residents who may only occasionally visit county parks and may not have visited Thompson County Park. It is also important to actively engage those demographic groups under-represented in Dakota County Parks. These groups, as identified in the 2017 Parks Visitor Services Plan, include older adults, foreign-born Latinx/Latino/Hispanics, South Asian Indians, Youth, African Americans, Vietnamese, People Living with Disabilities, Somalis, and US-Born Latinx/Latino/Hispanics.



Outreach at Safe Summer Nights in West St. Paul's Southview Park

2017 VISITORS SERVICES PLAN

During 2016, as part of the County's Visitor Park Services Plan process, dialogues were held with Hispanic/Latinx, Somali, Vietnamese, Indian/South Asian, and African American community members, youth, seniors, and persons living with disabilities. Key findings included:

- » There is a lack of awareness among under-represented populations about the Dakota County Park system.
- » Under-represented populations have interest in new and additional types of amenities and activities.
- » Safety and signage improvements would be helpful.
- » Many feel that accessibility improvements would increase use.
- » There is an interest in making the rental of park facilities more affordable.

The approach for community engagement for the master planning process was based on the following principles:

- » **Make it Fun and Easy.** Make engagement convenient, interactive, thoughtful, and valuable to all parties. Whenever possible, the County should seek opportunities to meet people on their terms, going beyond a traditional community meeting.
- » **Include Everyone.** Provide opportunities for all interested parties to participate and be heard regardless of race, income, religion, gender, age (including youth and seniors). Reach and engage diverse populations of the area, especially those typically underrepresented in Dakota County Parks and planning/engagement processes.
- » **Speak their Language.** Make engagement activities and materials inclusive, written in plain language, and translated into multiple languages, as appropriate (e.g., Spanish, Hmong, Somali).
- » **Build relationships.** Set the stage for developing long-term relationships with underrepresented populations. Build partnerships based on common goals with cities, agencies, and non-profit organizations.

Promotion of Planning Process

A variety of marketing and outreach methods were employed to contact potential park users and interested parties. The County's website hosted a page with information about the park master plan; flyers were posted and sent out; there was outreach to those who had rented the lodge in the past for special events; a letter was sent to those living nearest to the park; press releases included opportunities for public engagement; and social media and email were used to alert Dakota County residents about the planning process.

1 Phase 1 Community Engagement Summary

Community engagement events for the first phase of the Thompson County Park Master Plan were held in June through October 2018. The purpose of the events was to engage a representative cross section of Dakota County residents, park users, and stakeholder organizations to collect meaningful input, build consensus, and generate interest for the park master planning process. The project team was especially mindful of reaching out to those who may live around the park but are not park users.

In total, there were more than a dozen engagement activities with nearly 1,000 people engaged. Events were conducted using various formats including pop-ups at existing community events, individual and agency meetings, stakeholder meetings, and emails and phone calls. Two online questionnaires were also conducted: a general questionnaire was conducted on Social Pinpoint in English and Spanish, and a Survey Monkey questionnaire was sent to past renters of the North Picnic Shelter and Dakota Lodge.



Take a Kid Fishing at Thompson County Park brought more than 350 kids and their parents/grandparents from throughout Dakota County.

In addition to participating in local events, information about the planning process was distributed to residents in West St. Paul, South St. Paul, and Inver Grove Heights. Approximately 700 flyers were distributed to be included in block party packets for the August 2018 Night to Unite. A letter was also sent to approximately 500 residents who live around the park.

Key Themes

Below is a summary of the key themes from the Phase 1 engagement events. This summary encompasses the questionnaire results, stakeholder meetings, one-on-one conversations with staff, and input from the pop-up events. A full summary of each engagement event is found in Appendix C Community Engagement.

Overall, the community outreach indicates that Thompson County Park is well loved. The setting, mixture of activities, and shelter/lodge rental bring a wide range of people to the park. Regular park users, as may be indicated from the Social Pinpoint results, likely come on a weekly to monthly basis. Outside of events and programming at the Activity Center, draws of Thompson County Park include walking/hiking, being in nature, picnicking, and using the playground. While Thompson County Park is nestled in a urban neighborhood, the majority of park users still come via car rather than on foot or bike. The following are major themes heard from input:

Retention and improvement of the natural areas

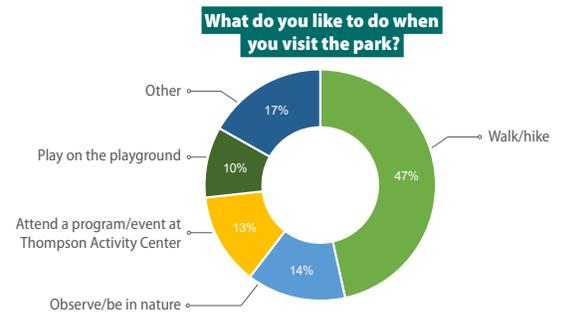
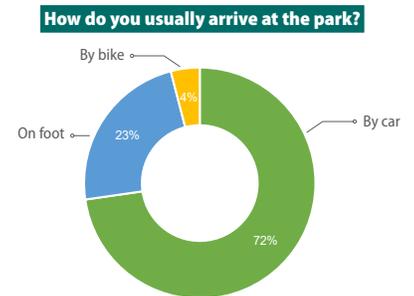
The natural areas were cited as an amenity to preserve, maintain, and improve. This includes water quality in Thompson Lake, as well as the southern half of the park.

Recreational use of the lake

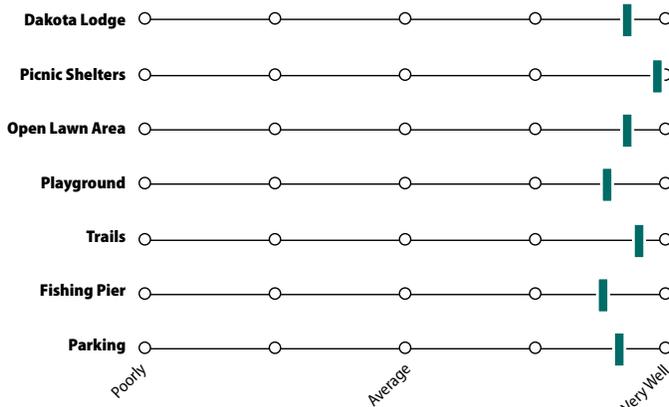
People were interested in expanded use of the lake through additional fishing opportunities and small craft rental of paddleboards or kayaks.

Expanded recreation

Users would like more to do at the park. Examples of the types of activities suggested include splash pad or mister, nature ninja course, nature play area, zipline, rock wall, outdoor workout stations, and community garden.



How well do each of the facilities work for your group?





Comments identified on Social Pinpoint ranged throughout the park.

Visitor amenities

Input identified a number of wishes to improve the park experience, including more picnic tables and BBQs, shade for the playground, small craft rental, equipment check-out for geocaching or lawn games, trail markers, wayfinding, benches, water fountains, port-a-potties, and nature interpretation.

Focus on accessibility

Many of the conversations in the first phase identified opportunities for improved accessibility. This is likely the results of many factors, including the Activity Center’s focus on programs for adults 55+, the relatively flat topography in north end of the park, and the park’s currently strong role for community gathering. An accessibility and inclusion walk provided a lot of detailed information in the areas of trails, parking, restrooms, playground, seating, shade, wayfinding, events, and maintenance.

Expanded winter use

A few expressed a desire for groomed ski trails and snowshoe rental so there could be more use of the park in the winter.

More events

Input indicates an interest in more intergenerational events, family events, and events designed for those with special needs.

Park maintenance improvements

Some identified an overall need for park clean-up. Others suggested improvements that would assist with maintaining the park’s appearance such as dog waste stations and more recycling and trash receptacles.



Community open house at Dakota Lodge.

2 Phase 2 Community Engagement Summary

Community engagement events for the second phase of the Thompson County Park Master Plan were held from the end of January through March 2019. There were over a dozen engagement activities and meetings involving stakeholders, current and potential users, students, academic groups, agency partners, and often underrepresented demographic groups such as members of the Dakota Sioux Indian communities, individuals with disabilities, teens, and Latinx/Latino/Hispanics. The purpose of the second phase of community engagement was to seek input on draft concepts that proposed new programming, amenities, and natural resource investment within Thompson park. The feedback received was used to inform a preferred master plan that would include improvements that would be inviting to all potential and future users of the Park. In addition to an online questionnaire, events included a community open house at Dakota Lodge, pop-up events with materials in both English and Spanish, individual and agency meetings, stakeholder meetings, and meetings with student groups.

Key Themes

Below is a summary of the key themes from the Phase 2 community feedback. This summary encompasses the questionnaire results, meetings with stakeholders, staff, community members, and student groups. A full summary of each engagement event can be found in Appendix C. Overall, the community outreach indicates that there was a lot of interest generated in the programs and amenities proposed in each concept and that there are many items to consider when moving forward with a preferred master plan draft. Much of the feedback received confirmed that Thompson's existing users are diverse, from young children, extended families, students, and a 55+ community that may have conflicting input on activities that they would enjoy seeing implemented. One example is that many wish to see the park remain as natural as possible, encouraging younger users to explore and enjoy the park's natural resources, while younger user groups expressed great interest in the activity centers and features like play areas or hammock groves. Much of the commentary expressed that individuals see a lot of value in increasing the park's potential for educational purposes.

Natural Resources

The concept of not only improving the park's already existing natural resources but expanding them was sought after in engagement activities. As much as potential users of this space crave new programming, they also feel the importance of finding a balance between having more activities and preserving natural resources. They commended the expansion of the Savanna, expressed their desires to keep the wooded areas as natural as possible, wanted better care for the park's lakes and ponds, and voiced approval of the idea of managing invasive species throughout the park. Wildlife viewing was expressed as one of the main reasons for visiting, and enhancing natural resources brought excitement for the possibility to expand animal habitat.

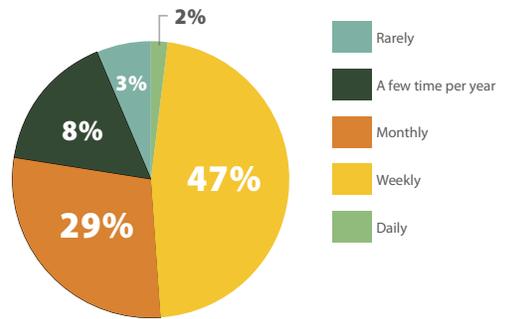
Core Habitat

Users of all age groups expressed interest in items they considered useful for viewing wildlife. The shore fishing areas, piers, observation tower, pollinator promenade, ravine bridge, and savanna restoration showcase were all listed as proposed features that would increase their chances of experiencing wildlife. The land bridge and savanna restoration areas were identified as great features to encourage ground nesting birds or habitat connections. Forward-thinking improvements to benefit the connection of nature in a city environment through the possibility of a land bridge between Thompson County Park and Kaposia Park and expanded savanna were commended.

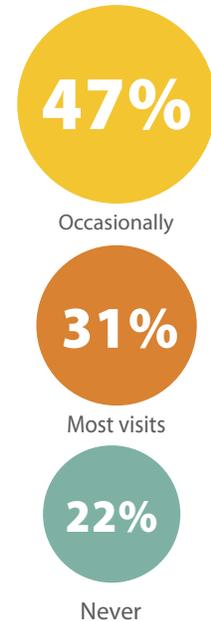
More to do in the park

There was excitement generated around the idea of equipment rentals within Thompson park, especially among younger users and students. Popular ideas among users were hammocks, not in a grove, but spread throughout the park in multiple areas, and food trucks for extended stays. Play areas, gathering areas (picnic shelters), and the sledding hill were generally well-received.

How often do you visit the park?



How often do you currently visit the southern part of the park?



POPULAR THEMES OF TOP IMPROVEMENTS

- » Fishing
- » More nature and inclusive play
- » Sledding hill
- » Water feature
- » Lake restoration and water quality improvement
- » Lake access
- » Equipment rentals
- » Habitat restoration and preservation
- » Improved access and greenway connection
- » Enhanced picnicking and social gathering spaces
- » Trails
- » More to do at the park, more events, more destinations
- » Dog-friendliness
- » Better wayfinding and bilingual wayfinding
- » Four-season activities
- » Education, art, classes, tours

Participants were asked to list their top 3 improvement priorities that would increase their use and enjoyment of Thompson County Park.

Gathering

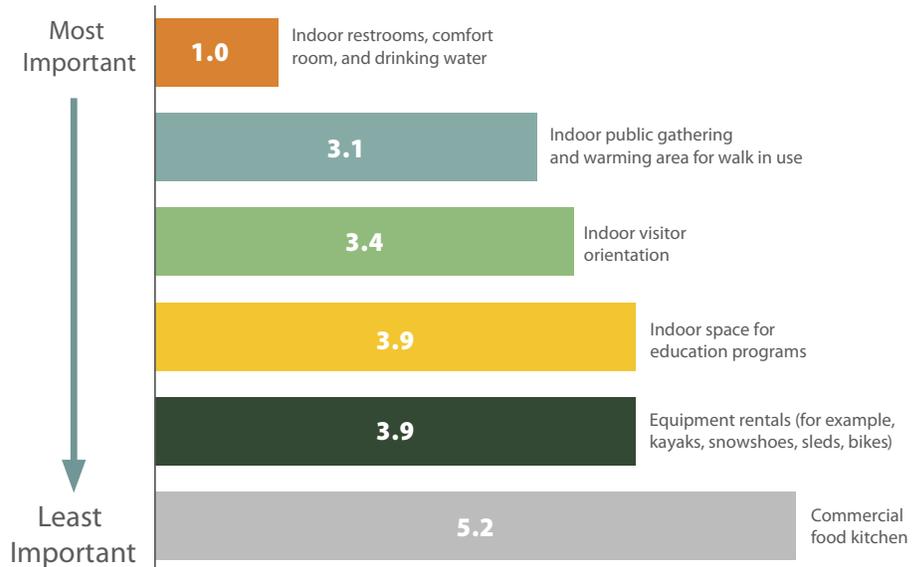
Adding smaller shelters as well as additional picnic tables and grills for drop in use (and no reservation fee) was a popular idea. These facilities would support smaller group gatherings and spontaneous gatherings and would encourage people to spend more time in the park.

Dakota Lodge

There was expressed interest in having the Dakota Lodge available for greater public purpose through expanded uses like park orientation, warming, public rest rooms and drinking fountains, facility rentals, and environmental classes or school use. Some comments mentioned that Dakota Lodge was difficult to rent during the day but would make a great space for classes and field trips. Features such as the entry plaza were highly desired to clarify lodge access and direction for visitors, but there was also reservation about that area having too much activity.

The social pinpoint questionnaire asked participants to rank visitor services that they would like to see implemented at Dakota Lodge by items that were most to least important for their future visits. The results can be seen in the chart below.

The master plan is exploring the idea of expanding visitor services at Thompson County Park. Rank the following in order of importance to you. (The average rank across all respondents is provided below)



Interpretation and Educational Value

There is an overwhelming desire for Thompson Park to be highlighted for its beautiful natural resources and its potential contribution to science and education, which is not being offered at many parks in the area. Comments that the park would make a great 'outdoor lab' and be used for classes and clubs was a conversation that appeared often throughout the engagement process. The desire to have plant identification labels, multi-lingual educational signage, an indoor/outdoor classroom set-up, and better access to the lake and wetland for student use represents the desire of users to come to Thompson to enjoy its natural beauty and learn more about the surrounding environment. There was a lot of enthusiasm expressed for natural play and play in nature as something that is growing in popularity and will be a feature that differentiates Thompson from other parks. Features such as the savanna restoration, pollinator promenade, and the proposed daylighted water feature were generally very well received. The Dakota County Public Art Advisory Committee is interested in further exploring how public art can be integrated into interpretation in the park.

Cultural Significance

Meetings with Tribal Historic Preservation Officers from the Dakota Sioux Indian Communities revealed the need to introduce the now absent Native American narrative. Interpretation should focus on recognizing that the park is part of Dakota Homeland (rather than focusing on a specific date or place). The most effective interpretation would connect native people to the landscape. Opportunities included art created by Native American artists, educational signage that interacts with history and science school curriculums, introducing the cultural significant native plants, and developing programs/permits for harvesting, and fishing.

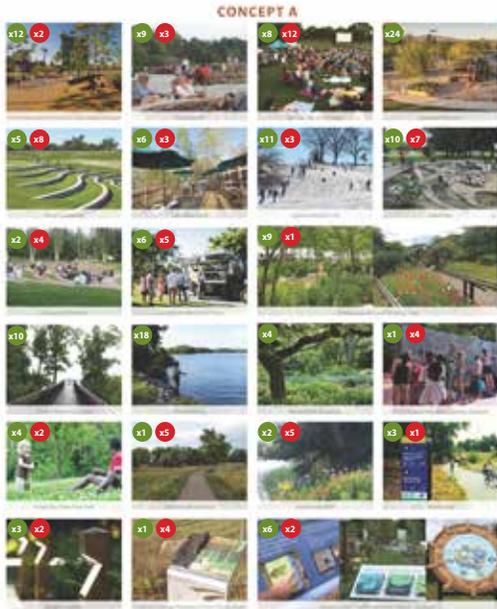
The park was also encouraged to explore activities and amenities such as food trucks, music, colorfully designed spaces, hammocking (an activity important to the Latinx/Latino/Hispanic culture), and multilingual signage to appeal to a more diverse audience of users.

Desire for Connection

Enthusiasm was generated through this process for better connections within the park and better access to the park. Many like the idea of expanding parks use to the southern portions, highlighting the history of Simon's Ravine, and inviting exploration with a combination of natural surface and paved trails that will serve many different user groups and abilities. Positive feedback was received regarding the enhanced connection to Kaposia Park as well as a more defined connection to the River to River Greenway and proposed trailhead. The need for improved wayfinding to guide users within the park and to the park from the neighborhoods was stressed by many participants. Several people who do not drive (who are too young or are disabled or do not have a car) mentioned difficulty getting to the park due of lack to transit service and the incomplete sidewalk and trail networks leading to the park.



Comments identified on Social Pinpoint ranged throughout the park



Participants voted on precedent imagery for each of the two concepts at open house events.

Accessibility

Additional paved trails would make the southern portion of the park more accessible to more park visitors. Many of the exiting paved trails in the northern portion of the park, while meeting minimum ADA Standards, are difficult for older adults and those with disabilities because of steep slopes. Trail access from Dakota Lodge to the playground and from the parking area to the North Shelter were specifically mentioned as locations where railings are needed. Making sure items like the fishing pier are safe and ADA accessible are important to visitors who have mobility challenges. Consensus is that there is a large need for accessible playgrounds in West St. Paul, as well as elements like benches with arms along the trails for resting. In addition, care when designing restrooms, the addition of a comfort room to Dakota Lodge, and care when designing wayfinding to meet needs of people with cognitive disabilities were mentioned.

Parking

A vast amount of the input received centered around whether or not there was a need for expanded parking or if current parking would be able to provide for new programs and uses being proposed in the concepts. Many who provided input felt that current parking was sufficient when there was not an event taking place at the Dakota Lodge and are concerned about reducing natural resources for more paved space that may be underutilized. Other feedback stated that parking was a current issue and that additional uses would increase parking problems. Adding a road and parking in the center of the park as shown in Concept B was a cause for concern for many regarding safety for users. However, others were interested in the proposed play areas in Concept B, thinking that it would add convenience for those uses and encourage further exploration of the southern part of the park. St. Croix Lutheran is willing to collaborate on overflow parking for events but only with the use of a shuttle system which may help mitigate the issue.

Lighting and Safety

Another conversation surrounding the concepts was the need to enhance the feeling of safety and security within the park with the use of lighting. Many comments were received regarding concern for light pollution, while others would feel more comforted and encouraged to use the park in the evening with the addition of lighting along the paths. It was also suggested that lighting could help prevent the vandalism of items such as educational signs or hammock groves that are being proposed.

Facilities Management

Many comments and concerns about litter in the park, vandalism of proposed signs, and existing issues with snow plowing areas or keeping trails clean appeared throughout a number of comments, as did the desire for trail and park amenities like restrooms, drinking fountains, and dog waste disposal stations.

3 Phase 3 Community Engagement Summary

Community engagement events for the third phase of the Thompson County Park Master Plan were held from the end of August through early December 2019. The purpose of the 3rd phase of the community engagement process was to solicit input on the ten-year and long-term draft master plans, as well as collect feedback on the Natural Resources Management Plan for Thompson County Park. There were over a dozen community outreach events to collect input from a wide variety of sources. Phase 3 included outreach to students, families, youth, service men and women, inclusive groups, and stakeholders by means of meetings, events, open houses with bilingual materials, and an online survey.

Discussion and questions focused on surveying the strength of the concepts and how well they aligned with the needs and priorities of current and potential park users. What concerns, if any, did respondents have with the draft plans? Which proposed improvements should be made a high priority for implementation? Are there any ideas that are not currently included in the draft master plan that the public feels should be considered for Thompson?

Key Themes

Below is a summary of the key themes from the Phase 3 engagement events. The summary encompasses the survey results, stakeholder meetings, conversations with staff, open house input, and other feedback received throughout the process. A full summary of each engagement event can be found in Appendix C Community Engagement.

Overall, phase 3 was met with a lot of enthusiasm and support for both the Natural Resource Management Plan and the ten-year and long-term Master Plans. Those surveyed expressed excitement to see change take place and updates that will make Thompson a more educational and inclusive experience for all visitors.

Activity prioritization differed from group to group (i.e. parents and families prioritized a new playground and more child-friendly activities, while a public arts group prioritized implementing more activities related to art and more places for public art within Thompson.) A few key themes, such as lake activation, remained highly anticipated by numerous groups that were surveyed. Many of the concerns received centred around the existing parking problems, cost of implementation, and span of the implementation timeline.

Recreational use of the lake

Shore fishing, fishing piers, and canoe/kayak rentals with inclusive equipment scored very high as a top priority among different outreach groups. The shore fishing locations and additional fishing pier with accompanying interpretive opportunities received a lot of positive feedback, as did the natural resource management plan's goals to improve lake water quality and fish habitat.



Interacting with staff at a community engagement event

More Events

The proposed amphitheater, open play lawn for movies and music in the park, and use of Dakota Lodge for activity rental space were all highly-supported ideas within the master plan. Numerous visitors implied that they had been to an event of some sort at Thompson Park in the past and find it to be a great venue for gatherings. More places for community events or space for family gatherings and rentals have been a constant topic of discussion throughout the master planning process and the ideas expressed in the master plans were well-received by numerous groups. The open play lawn and expanded parking areas provide 'flex space' that could serve multiple purposes and open the park up to new events desired by the community, such as markets or community campouts.

Focus on Accessibility

Top priorities listed by respondents placed accessibility for play features, trails, and parking very high on the list of approved and desired items within the master plan. As a park that serves a wide variety of individuals in both age and ability, including a strong senior community presence, Thompson has the opportunity to fill a much-needed gap for those with cognitive and physical disabilities within the surrounding community. Providing safety measures such as lighting along the lake loop at night and improved lighting of proposed amenities was well-received to help keep the park safe and secure for guests in the evenings.

More to do in the park

Rental equipment, hammocking, and a lighted sledding hill scored very high in respondent's priorities for the park despite differences in demographics. These activities seem to draw support from all age groups, appealing to families and youth alike, providing innovative and unique experiences for users all year long.

Natural Resources

With its sloping topography, culturally and historically significant locations, and variety of walking trails, Thompson is known for its variety of plant communities and wildlife viewing. Finding the balance between activating space for visitor use and enhancing the park's natural spaces has been an ongoing conversation and concern for many who love to visit Thompson today. Although many of the top priorities expressed throughout phase three were activity-related, votes for forest regeneration and pollinator habitat, as well as activities that encourage guests to interact and explore nature were not far behind. Online comments received regarding the Natural Resources Management Plan show great enthusiasm for restoring the landscape to as native as possible, while keeping select areas secluded for nature to thrive.

Parking constraints

Parking is a topic that was mentioned as a top concern by groups within phase three of the community engagement process, and has been heard by many throughout the planning process. Respondents are worried that the existing expanded parking areas will not be enough to supply the enhanced activity areas proposed in the master plans.



05 | VISION & GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Overview

The Vision Statement and Guiding Principles set the stage for the future of the park. The Vision describes what the park will be in the future, while the Guiding Principles suggest how the park will achieve that vision. The Vision Statement and Guiding Principles were developed with input from the Planning Commission, stakeholders, and the public. The Guiding Principles were used as part of the prioritization process to identify what should occur within Five-Years, Ten-Years, and over the Long-Term.



Vision Statement

Thompson County Park is an urban oasis that inspires people to participate in vibrant and healthy activities, is responsive to the community, and encourages people to discover nature.



Guiding Principles

- ✓ Create a welcoming and safe environment
- ✓ Provide activity and purpose year round
- ✓ Promote social gathering
- ✓ Connect the community to the park
- ✓ Enhance the lake as a focal point
- ✓ Improve natural systems within the park and beyond the park's boundaries
- ✓ Inspire learning
- ✓ Expand and strengthen partnerships
- ✓ Implement strategies for ongoing community feedback
- ✓ Reduce barriers to park access and use

This page intentionally left blank.



06 | MASTER PLAN



Overview

This chapter walks through the preferred concept for Thompson County Park and the specific physical and programming improvements that will be implemented during the first ten years of the park's transformation. A long-term master plan graphic and the ten-year master plan graphic are accompanied by precedent imagery to help visualize the elements being proposed. A series of framework diagrams focus on different areas of the park with a description of each area that provides additional details on the programming, natural resources, and interpretation improvements proposed.



Park Development Concept Plan

This chapter will focus primarily on improvements to Thompson County Park over the next ten years within the framework of the long-term master plan. While the long-term master plan showcases the park at full recreation development, the ten-year master plan shows the amount of improvement that can reasonably be expected over the life of this document. These calculations are based on past funding levels, but unexpected funding opportunities could potentially provide the resources needed to move these bigger ideas ahead of schedule.

The master plan graphic has been divided into five different focus areas for this chapter:

- » **The Northwest Area:** Encompassing Thompson Lake, the existing north shelter, event lawn, and playground.
- » **The Northeast Area:** Encompassing Thompson Park Center, the existing parking lot, and natural wooded areas in close proximity to US Highway 52.
- » **The Central Area:** Encompassing existing paved and natural trail systems, savanna restoration, areas of existing archeological significance, and the wooded area north of the River to River Greenway.
- » **The South Area:** Encompassing Simon's Ravine, an existing retention pond, neighborhood gateway, and oak forest.
- » **The Greenway Area:** Encompassing the existing River to River Greenway and exploring connections to Thompson Park Center.

Each focus area graphic is paired with a summary sidebar to highlight physical and programming improvements included in the ten-year and long-term master plans, as well as proposed natural resources and interpretive elements.

LONG-TERM MASTER PLAN



Figure 6.1 Thompson County Park master plan: long-term master plan

TEN-YEAR MASTER PLAN



Figure 6.2 Thompson County Park master plan: ten-year master plan



The Master Plan

The concept for Thompson County Park includes an extended trail system featuring ADA-compliant paved trails, natural surface trails, event spaces, enhanced picnicking and gathering opportunities, a variety of inclusive play and exploration options, expanded visitor services, a better connection to the River to River greenway, programming in the southern portion of the park, and more welcoming park entrances.

Several key elements proposed within the ten-year period that improve the park's overall design and the consistency of its circulation and character are:

- » Neighborhood gateways for visitors arriving on foot or by bike will better connect the park to the surrounding community. A new paved trail at the main Butler Avenue entrance will connect to the existing sidewalk, and a completed trail segment will provide connection to nearby Kaposia Park. Additional gateways along Emerson Ave E. and Sperl St. provide a clear and welcoming neighborhood entry experience. Formal plantings and improved wayfinding will define the entrances and support multiple modes of transportation by clarifying bike routes and orienting visitors as they move through the park.
- » Winding along Thompson Lake and Thompson Park Center, a broad, landscaped path functions as an entry promenade welcoming visitors and guiding them through the front end of the park. This route through the Northwest Area provides access to the North Picnic Shelter, Thompson Park Center, play lawn, picnic areas, sensory garden, nature-themed inclusive playground, and the new amphitheater.
- » An expanded trail system with improved wayfinding gives visitors the opportunity to customize their experience with multiple loop and distance options. An existing 1.3 miles of natural surface trails is expanded to 1.6 miles. An existing 1.3 miles of paved trails expands to nearly 2.3 miles of ADA-accessible trails that will allow visitors of all abilities to gain a full experience of the park's most exciting features.
- » A lighted lake loop with convenient seating offers a sense of security for evening visitors without disturbing the natural setting.
- » The master plan proposes multiple locations that may be ideal for incorporating public art installations within the park. Actual locations may vary as each area is developed.
- » Enhanced water access includes shore fishing opportunities, improvements to the existing pier and a new pier, watercraft rentals, and a paddle launch.



A campus-like, expanded paved trail with formal plantings guides visitors from the main entrance at Butler along the lake to Dakota Lodge.

- » The concept maintains 83% of the park in a natural, undeveloped state, including 38 acres of restored habitat to encourage native biodiversity and support wildlife viewing and educational opportunities. Restoration plans include expanding existing savanna restoration efforts, forest and oak forest regeneration, shoreline restoration along Thompson Lake, and the continued management of invasive species throughout the park. The incorporation of an ecosystem exploration loop showcasing the park's various habitats will highlight these restoration efforts and provide an educational experience.
- » Enhanced formal and informal gathering spaces throughout the park include a group fire pit, outdoor classroom, an event lawn, first-come first-served small picnic shelters, hammocking areas, plazas with movable seating, and a formal amphitheater that doubles as a reservable gathering space.
- » A large nature-themed inclusive playground in the north activity area between the Dakota Activity Center and the proposed open play lawn, a sledding hill, and a potential daylighted water feature all encourage exploration and play throughout the park.

- » Expansion of parking near Thompson Park Center is designed to better accommodate events while supporting the daily use of the park. A separate bus lane is placed away from vehicular traffic to keep traffic moving smoothly. Food truck parking along the north side of Thompson Park Center allows access during events while keeping pedestrians safe. A sidewalk extension along the southern expansion promotes safe and easy access to the entry plaza, sledding hill/group fire pit, and the building without walking through the lot. The proposed expanded lot incorporates a new maintenance shed and compost drop-off site at its northeast corner. New stormwater treatment highlights the County's commitment to environmental health and providing educational or interpretive opportunities.
- » The desire for greater public access to Thompson Park Center was expressed by the community during the planning process. This plan recommends improvements to the exterior spaces near the building and, as a next step, conducting a Space and Program Study for the building to evaluate needs, building program changes, and the scope of needed future improvements.
- » The master plan envisions Thompson County Park as a northern information center for the greenway system. Improvements are recommended to support this use. A paved trail leads users north to the Thompson Park Center trailhead from the Greenway Gateway, connecting trail users to parking, restrooms, water, picnicking, and orientation.

Long-term Changes:

Major improvements within the long-term phasing period include:

- » A final expansion of the linear plaza from the existing North Shelter to Butler Ave. E will complete the proposed linear plaza in the northwest activity area, helping to guide visitors to the central and southern portions of the park.
- » A sound wall along the east border of the park will help to block traffic noise from the nearby highway, reinstating a peaceful atmosphere to the eastern portions for the park.
- » Public art installations and plantings in the pollinator promenade will provide a natural buffer from local street noise and enhance visitor experience.
- » A land bridge connecting Thompson County Park to Kaposia Park via the River to River Greenway will transform the existing pedestrian bridge into an extended park experience that buffers users from highway traffic while allowing for the safe passage of people and wildlife.
- » Thompson Park Center will be renovated for greater public access.
- » The Park's central area will include development of a historic farmstead. Proposed activities include a silo-themed observation tower offering views from 100 to 110 feet, picnicking, hammocking, and an interpretive playground.

The framework diagrams on the following pages expand on the phasing of proposed features and zoom in on the details of each use area. Please note that the location of public art within the diagrams symbolizes potential future locations for installations only; actual locations may vary as areas are developed. Summary sidebars list the items to be included in the ten-year and long-term master plan timelines and highlight the accompanying natural resources and interpretive features within each activity area.



A proposed community event lawn for music/movies in the park



Figure 6.3 | Northwest: ten-year master plan

Five-year Development

- » Entries and wayfinding phase 1 - plantings and wayfinding signage at north entrance
- » Lighted ADA lake loop, including storywalk stations and benches
- » Improved water access phase 1 with shore fishing, new pier, existing pier improvements, informal water access, and interpretation at piers
- » Inclusive nature-themed playground with integrated interpretation and adjacent linear plaza
- » Picnicking with small, non-reservable picnic shelters (10-20 people), picnic tables, hammocking, and adjacent linear plaza

Ten-year Development

- » Entries and wayfinding phase 2 with enhanced plantings at entry
- » Improved water access phase 2 with paddle input and boat storage
- » Play lawn improvements with picnic shelter, outdoor classroom seating, screen, improved lawn, plantings, and adjacent linear plaza
- » Sensory garden with plantings, public art, and interpretation
- » Connection along Butler to South St. Paul's Kaposia Park

Long-term Development

- » Linear plaza phase 3 from Butler to North Picnic Shelter

Natural Resources:

- » Shoreline restoration
- » Lawn with mature trees
- » Stormwater management
- » See pages 82-85 for more information

Interpretation:

- » Interpretive elements will inform the design of the storywalk stops, fishing piers, lake access points, inclusive play area, and sensory garden
- » See pages 88-101 for more information

Northwest

Improved Entry and Linear Plaza

Formal plantings, improved park signage, and views of Thompson Lake help to welcome visitors to the park at the Butler Ave park entrance. A new paved trail that connects to the existing sidewalk weaves through plantings that showcase plants significant to the area's Native American communities.

The existing paved portion of the lake loop is relocated, widened, and enhanced with plantings to create a more defined primary trail that guides visitors into the central portion of the park. The width of this trail helps to accommodate users on foot, bike, or other means comfortably without fear of collision. The path offers views of Thompson Lake, and access to the north picnic shelter, play lawn, sensory garden, nature-themed inclusive playground, Thompson Park Center, and new amphitheater.

Thompson Lake

A paved, ADA-accessible trail loop extends around Thompson Lake. Bollard lighting illuminates the path after dusk, maintaining visibility for those enjoying an evening stroll, while preventing light pollution. A new pier is proposed on the southwest shore of the lake, which acts as a focal point, drawing visitors to explore the other side. Both piers will feature interpretive elements to educate visitors on lake health and the water quality and habitat benefits it provides. Interpretive storywalk stops along the lake loop offer seating opportunities and educational/interpretive signage. Shoreline restoration is protected by emphasizing defined areas for lake access, including shore fishing, a paddle input, and a lake access area.

Playground, Picnicking, and Sensory Garden

The areas sandwiched between the Thompson Activity Center and proposed open play lawn will comprise of a nature-themed inclusive playground (which replaces the existing structure), a sensory garden, and small picnicking opportunities. These elements are proposed to be integrated and dispersed throughout the space to create one large area of play and exploration.

The inclusive playground elements are designed to better integrate play opportunities for those with visible and invisible disabilities. They encourage the community to move and play together with a variety of sliding, swinging, and climbing opportunities. Picnicking is enhanced with small shelters, picnic tables, and hammocking opportunities. Sensory garden features will include texturally stimulating surfaces, fragrant blooms, edible plants, the soothing sound of water, and pops of color that provide year-round interest for an accessible stroll or adjacent picnicking.

Play Lawn

Comprised of a mixture of low-growing flowering plants and turf grasses, this low-maintenance lawn accommodates open play and lawn games while functioning as food for pollinators. The lawn will continue to accommodate daily informal and drop-in use as well as formal events such as Take a Kid Fishing (500 attendees) and Arts in the Park (850 attendees). A removable stage or screen can be set up for events such as movies in the park or performances. Seat walls built into the hillside north of the lawn provide additional seating and can function as an outdoor classroom. A small, non-reservable picnic shelter south of the lawn encourages small gatherings. A raingarden along the lawn's south and west edges provides an ornamental border and helps to manage runoff before it reaches the lake. An arts-inspired 'play-share' structure allows guests to borrow popular lawn games such as bags, bocce, and croquet, encouraging longer stays and fun and games with other guests among different groups of people.



Bollard lighting



Outdoor classroom/seating area



Sensory Garden



Figure 6.4 | Northeast: ten-year master plan

Five-year Development

- » Greenway improvements with trail connection between Thompson Park Center and River to River Greenway
- » Sledding hill with picnic shelter, picnic tables, fire pit, trail, lighting, and natural surface trails
- » Lakeside Plaza improvements
- » Thompson Park Center space and program study
- » Parking lot improvements including additional spaces, removal of berm, maintenance shed, stormwater treatment, and reconfigured natural surface trails and compost area
- » Amphitheater with integrated interpretation and trail connections

Ten-year Development

- » Small picnic shelter adjacent to Thompson Lake
- » Thompson Park Center trailhead plaza
- » Thompson Park Center: renovation for great public access phase 1 based on study
- » Thompson Park Center exterior gathering phase 2: food truck and vendor access and parking

Long-term Development

- » Thompson Park Center: renovation for greater public access phase 2 based on study
- » Sound wall

Natural Resources:

- » Oak forest regeneration
- » Oak savanna restoration
- » Parking lot stormwater management
- » Lawn with mature tree near Thompson Park Center
- » See pages 84-87 for more information

Interpretation:

- » Interpretive features will inform the design of the amphitheater, fire pit, trail loops, and trailhead plaza
- » See pages 88-101 for more information

Northeast

Sledding Hill with Group Fire Pit

The group fire pit and lighted sledding hill encourages visitors to enjoy the park in festive comfort in winter. Surrounded by bench seating located at the top of the proposed sledding hill, the fire pit offers a place to gather. Slope grading will be done to create a sledding hill that is similar to the family sledding area at Lebanon Hills Regional Park.

Lakeside Plaza

This plaza space features an outdoor fireplace, a variety of seating for gathering, and views of Thompson Lake. With a prime location along the main entry trail adjacent to the Lodge, food truck and vendor access and parking, and steps from the proposed amphitheater, the Lakeside Plaza caters to both events/rentals and more casual park use and special events.

Thompson Park Center Improvements

The master planning process and the adopted Visitor Services Plan identified a need for improved visitor services and building enhancements to better serve existing and future park and facility visitors, park staff, the outdoor education program, and Thompson Activity center visitors. It is recommended that a Space and Program Study be completed to further evaluate the needs, recommend improvements, and outline an implementation plan for the Thompson Park Center. Public feedback received to date has suggested there is an opportunity to maximize utilization of the Thompson Park Center by increasing the level of service providing:

- » General park visitor access for orientation, information, and comfort similar to a visitor center and trailhead (restrooms, drinking water, vending)
- » Public programming and interpretation (drop-in/informal, outreach, partnership, and scheduled programs)
- » Equipment rental support (watercraft, bike, snowshoes, and play)
- » Greater support for event rentals

Forest Regeneration and Forest Loop Trail

The northeast portion of the park includes restoration of the oak forest, which has been degraded by oak wilt and invasive species. The existing natural surface trail will be maintained to provide a forest walking experience.

Parking Lot Improvements

Parking lot improvements include removing the existing berm to allow for the reconfiguration of the parking lot near Thompson Park Center. The design separates bus and vehicular traffic and improves sidewalk connections to parking stalls in order to aid accessibility and keep pedestrians safe. A food truck parking area with access from the lot runs between the building and the inclusive playground, allowing for easy access from either venue during events. Two parking expansions add valuable parking spaces. New median plantings and stormwater treatment areas help to shade the lot and treat runoff.

Maintenance Shed

A 1,000 square-foot maintenance shed and compost drop-off area are tucked away in the northeast corner.

Amphitheater

The proposed amphitheater will have a signature design informed by interpretation. It is located to take advantage of existing grades and proximity to Dakota Lodge. Features include seating for nearly 300 guests, seating for those with disabilities, ADA access from the Lake Loop and the Lodge, and a drivable hard surface trail for vendor access. When amphitheater events are not being held, the stage area functions as a large reservable picnic shelter.

Orientation Plaza

The orientation plaza stretches in all directions to greet guests arriving from all areas of the park. Benches, bike loops, orientation signage, and an interpretive element welcome visitors and invite them to explore the park, check out Thompson Park Center, and gather together in the plaza area.

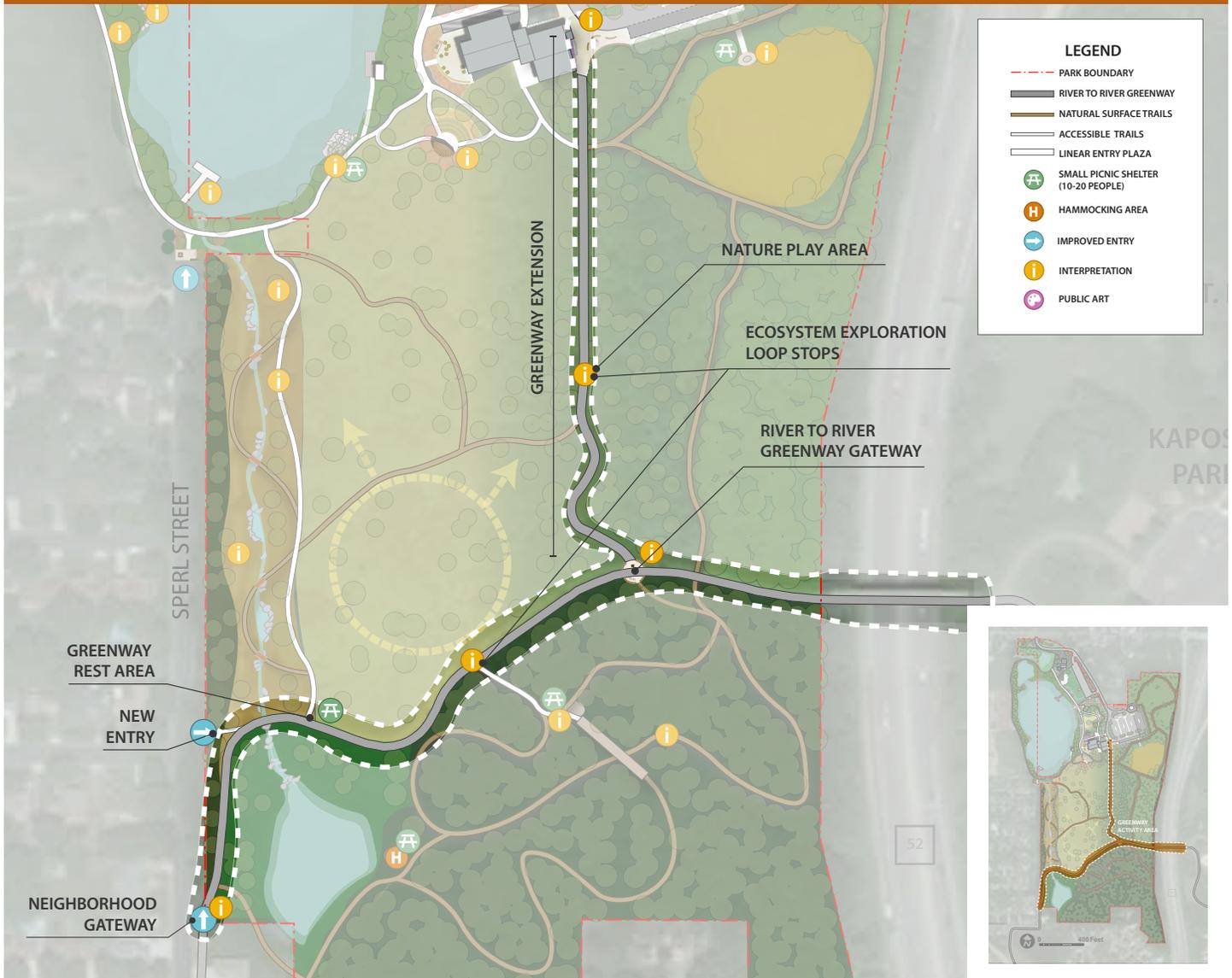


Figure 6.5 | Greenway: ten-year master plan

Five-year Development

- » Entries and wayfinding phase 1 including plantings and wayfinding signage at the new entry on Sperl St. and neighborhood gateway

Ten-year Development

- » Trail extension to Thompson Park Center
- » Greenway gateway with wayfinding, seating, and interpretation
- » Greenway rest area with picnic shelter, wayfinding, bike loops, interpretation, trail to neighborhood, and cascading water feature

Long-term Development

- » Land Bridge

Interpretation:

- » Interpretive elements will inform the design of the ecosystem exploration loop stop on the north greenway extension, at the south neighborhood gateway, and at the River to River Greenway Gateway.
- » The greenway rest area and the greenway itself also provide opportunities for future interpretation.
- » See pages 88-101 for more information

Greenway

Dakota County's River to River Greenway runs through the southern portion of Thompson County Park and is traveled by thousands of users every year. Providing better connectivity to Thompson Park Center and greenway support facilities, such as orientation, restrooms, parking, water, bike rentals, strengthens the Park's role as a northern hub for Dakota County's growing greenway trail network. Improvements are recommended to allow Thompson County Park to better function as a trailhead.

River to River Greenway Gateway

A small plaza with seating and wayfinding encourages visitors to travel north along the paved trail connection to visit the trailhead at Thompson Park Center where users can find water and restroom amenities and learn more about the visitor services, rentals, and programming offered at Thompson County Park and greenway system.

Park Entrance and Neighborhood Gateway

A proposed neighborhood gateway will include orientation information, bike loops, and seating at a small picnic shelter where visitors can rest and enjoy the nearby cascading water feature. The water feature is meant to serve aesthetic purposes only and is not a play feature, and physical access to it will be deterred by the design. The daylighted water feature that flows along the Pollinator Promenade enters the south retention pond by means of an engineered cascade that takes advantage of the pond's steep slopes. This feature, amplified after a rainfall, allows visitors to hear and enjoy the sounds of flowing water as they pass by on the Greenway, relax in the nearby hammocking area, or picnic along the trail.

Nature Play

A small nature play area comprised of loose parts encourages kids to connect, play, and learn in nature. Integrated into the ecosystem exploration loop stop, this feature is a great opportunity for interpretation and helps to activate the central area of the park.



Neighborhood Gateway



Dakota Lodge trailhead information



The River to River Greenway Gateway would include bike parking, seating, and orientation signage



Ecosystem Exploration Loop interpretation



Figure 6.6 | Central: ten-year master plan

Five-year Development

- » Entries and wayfinding phase 1 including plantings and wayfinding for the west entry on the north end of Sperl St.
- » Daylighted stream feasibility study
- » Pollinator promenade phase 1 including trail, picnic tables, ecosystem exploration loop stops, plantings, and natural surface trails
- » Daylighted stream in pollinator promenade

Long-term Development

- » Historic farmstead interpretation with 110' observation tower, picnic shelter, hammocking, interpretation, public art, and accessible trails
- » Pollinator promenade phase 2: additional plantings and public art
- » Infill buffer planting between pollinator promenade and neighborhood
- » Sound wall

Natural Resources:

- » Oak savanna restoration
- » Pollinator promenade
- » Mixed hardwood regeneration
- » Infill buffer planting
- » See pages 84-87 for more information

Interpretation:

- » Interpretive elements will inform the design of the pollinator promenade, daylighted stream, and historic farmstead area
- » See pages 88-101 for more information

Central

Pollinator Promenade with Possible Daylighted Water Feature

Natural surface weave through pollinator-friendly plant materials in restored Oak Savanna. From the pathways, visitors can enjoy formalized gardens that provide an up-close look at a variety of plant species and observe pollinators hard at work. Botanical markers with labels will provide information about individual plants in these areas. Further from pathways, the landscape starts to become a naturalized prairie of informal plantings and native wildflowers that provide color and habitat space away from daily traffic, surrounding the space with pops of color while supporting a more natural setting. Scattered seating and interpretive signage create a pleasant setting for visitors to view, interact with, and learn about the important role that pollinators play in our world.

As an enhancement to the pollinator promenade, the master plan recommends that a portion of the existing underlying stormwater pipe running north-south from Thompson Lake be daylighted to create a “stream” with ripples and interactive pools for visitors to enjoy. A feasibility study of daylighting the stream is recommended as part of the five-year implementation plan. If the study determines the stream is feasible, the water will be a central design feature and a wonderful sensory addition to the promenade, drawing in more wildlife for visitors to view and helping surrounding plantings to thrive. Small foot bridges would be used along the natural surface paths to cross areas of water. It is intended that the daylighted water feature be designed to meet aesthetic needs for the park, while a high capacity volume system be retained underground to ensure stormwater needs are met.

Forest Regeneration and Natural Surface Trail

In this area a mixed hardwood forest will gradually be introduced to replace the existing degraded woodland. Small clearings will be created and appropriate hardwoods will be planted within the clearings. A natural surface trail will weave through the forested area.



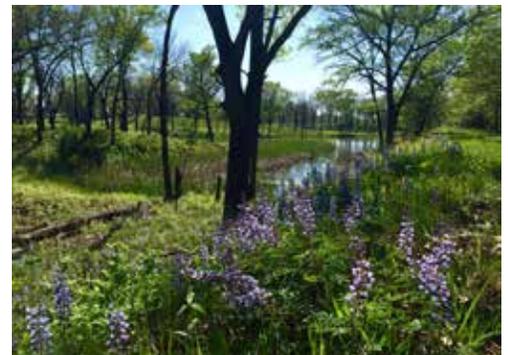
Savanna restoration



Ecosystem exploration loop educational signage



Pollinator promenade: Formalized plantings near pathways and seating



Pollinator promenade: Further from the path, informal plantings



Figure 6.7 | South: ten-year master plan

Five-year Development

- » Pond picnicking with picnic shelter and natural surface trails

Ten-year Development

- » Simon's Ravine overlook with overlook, picnic shelter, picnic tables, natural surface trail, interpretation, and wayfinding
- » Simon's Ravine bridge including bridge, natural surface trails, and wayfinding

Long-term Development

- » Sound wall

Natural Resources:

- » Oak forest restoration
- » Mixed hardwood regeneration
- » Management of invasives
- » Lawn
- » See pages 84-87 for more information

Interpretation:

- » Interpretive elements will inform the design of the overlook and bridge at Simon's Ravine
- » See pages 88-101 for more information

South

Pond Picnicking

Explorers in the south end of the park are able to enjoy a respite at the picnicking area at the southeast corner of Emerson Pond. A small picnic shelter and hammocking area support informal gatherings.

Simon's Ravine Overlook and Bridge

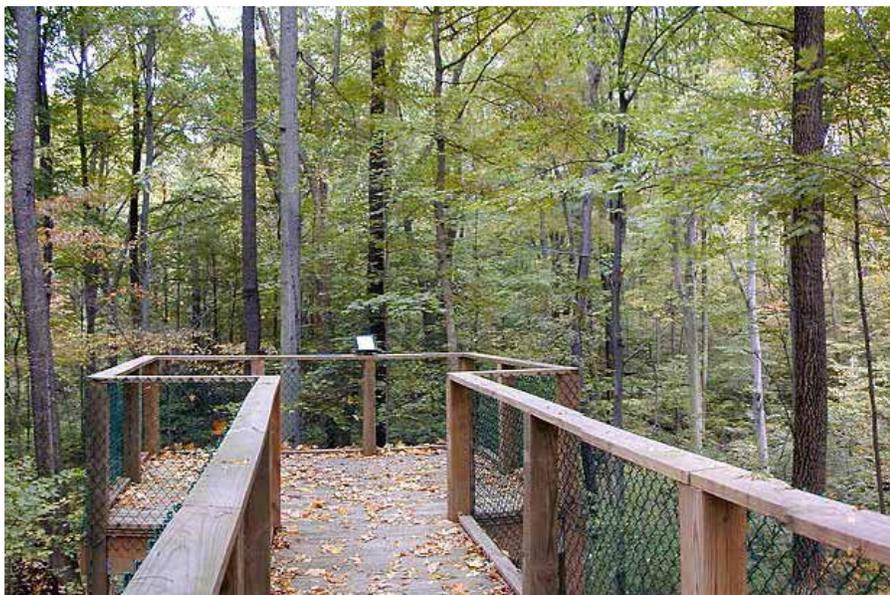
A paved, ADA-accessible trail segment provides access to a new viewing platform overlooking historic Simon's Ravine. Here, visitors can learn about the history of the area, its connection to the Mississippi River, and its significance to Native American cultures and early settlers. Branching off of the paved path, a completed natural surface trail loop further explores the ravine's unique topography and high quality oak forest. The loop extends across the ravine on a bridge and connects to Emerson Pond and a neighborhood park entrance to the southwest. A small picnic shelter adjacent to the overlook offers an informal gathering space for guests to take a break.



Oak forest regeneration



Natural surface trail loop



Simon's Ravine Overlook



Invasive species management

Community Engagement

The master plan was directly shaped by the community input and feedback received by outreach that was held throughout the process. Through pop-up events, stakeholder meetings, online surveys, and open houses, the input of past and present users of Thompson County Park was invaluable to shaping the activities and programs incorporated into the master plan. The outreach was designed to gather feedback from a variety of different age, race, and gender groups about how they currently use the park, how they would like to use the park in the future, and what programs or activities could be incorporated to encourage more frequent visits.

Recurring key themes that were expressed throughout the process were:

Core Habitat

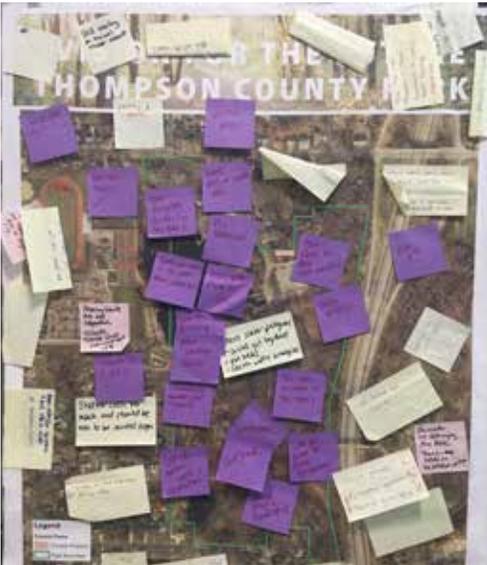
A vast majority of visitors use Thompson park as an opportunity to escape the city bustle and explore natural landscapes and view wildlife. Many expressed a desire to keep the park as natural as possible, challenging the master plan to seek a balance between activating spaces for human exploration and preserving Thompson's unique natural resources.

Water Access

Thompson Lake is a favorite feature of the park, and providing greater access to this asset was a common desire. The master plan proposes an additional fishing pier, shore fishing locations, a paddle input, a boat house, a lighted lake loop, and water craft equipment rentals at Dakota Lodge to get visitors close to the water in more ways.

More To do in the Park

Many of the groups and individuals surveyed asked that there be more opportunities for families to gather and play in the park. The desire to come together for a community movie or music performance, provide more places for children to play and learn, or offer unique experiences and activities not commonly found in surrounding parks was strong. These ideas are expressed in the master plan with formal and informal gathering, picnic, and hammocking spaces, multiple play and exploration opportunities, and unique features such as the silo-themed observation tower or the Ravine bridge and overlook. The Master Plan responds to the community-expressed desire for greater public access to Dakota Loge for orientation, winter warming, general comfort, greater use of rental facilities, outdoor education, and equipment rentals by recommending a follow-up Thompson Park Center space and program study and implementation plan. Four-season interest and expanding on potential winter-use were also explored, giving way to a lighted sledding hill with group fire pit area and seasonal trail maintenance catered to activities like hiking and snowshoeing.



Engagement Boards at Safe Summer Nights 2018



Engagement Boards at Safe Summer Nights 2018



Crafts and activities at Take a Kid Fishing 2018

Parking and Community Connection

Current and past users expressed the desire for expanded parking and safer, more convenient routes for traveling to the park by walking, biking, or transit. Transit users showed concern regarding the lack of a dedicated and easily-identifiable drop-off zone for local shuttles. The proposed ten-year and long-term master plans incorporate suggested parking expansions, dedicated drop off space, better pedestrian and bicycle connections to the park, and needed circulation improvements.

Incorporating Culture

Thompson County Park has a rich history and culturally significant site features such as Simon's Ravine and the historic farmstead. The master plan proposes numerous interpretive and educational opportunities to educate users about the park's unique history and proposes that items be expressed in multiple languages to celebrate the area's unique cultural context and user groups.

Accessibility

Existing conditions and amenities limit the usability of the park for members of the community who live with cognitive or physical disabilities. This master plan strives to incorporate accessible features in the areas of trails, parking, restrooms, playgrounds, seating, shade, wayfinding, events, and maintenance practices.

Other concerns for lighting and safety measures, better maintenance practices, and improved amenities and facilities are addressed in chapter seven of this master plan document. Throughout the engagement process, it became clear that Thompson County Park is a well-loved and celebrated location in West Saint Paul and that its current and future users see immense potential for the services and memories it can provide to them and their families with future development.



Open house at Dakota Lodge 2018

 WINTER USE

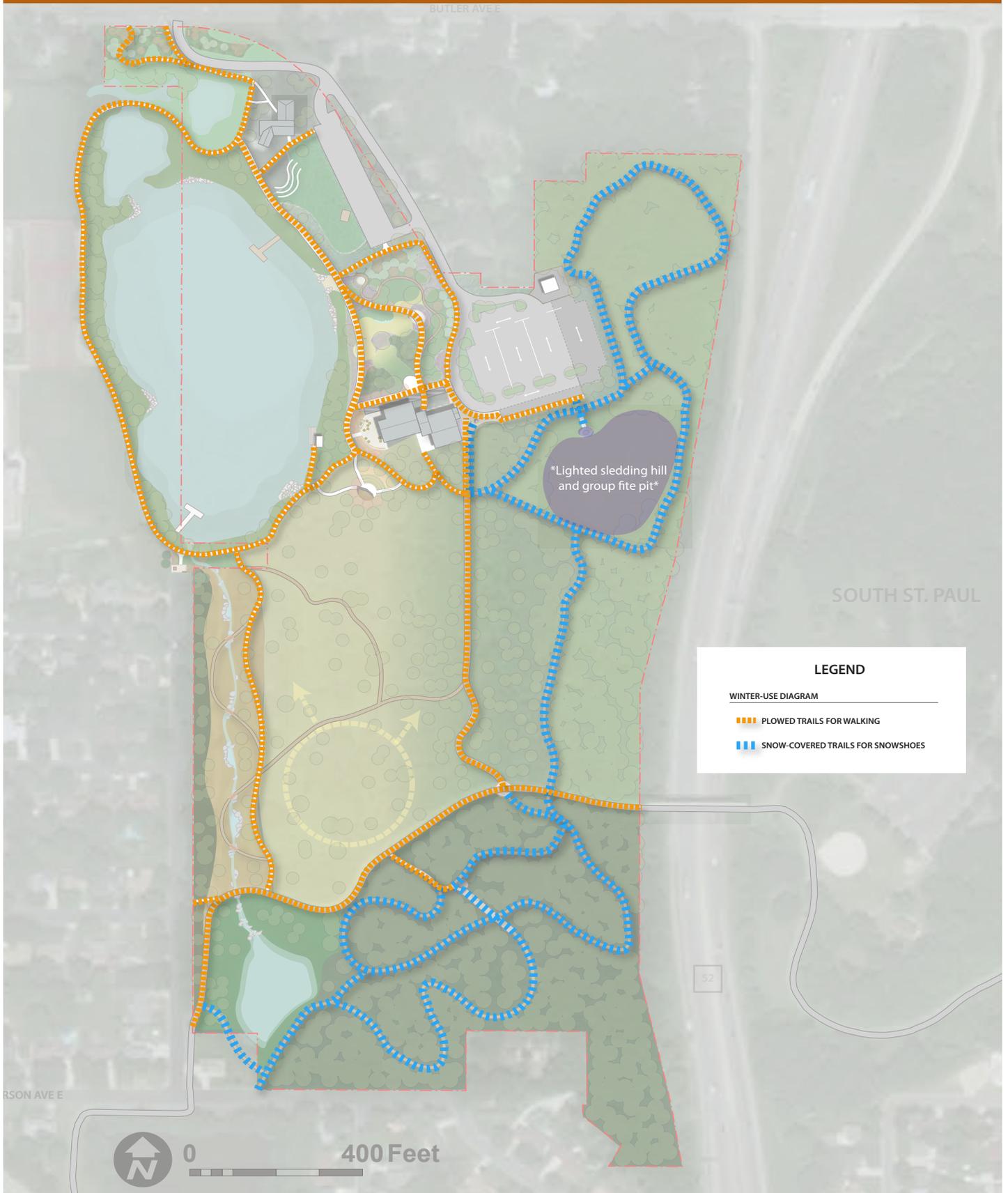


Figure 6.8 | Winter use diagram: ten-year master plan



Winter Use

Thompson County Park is open year-round and currently holds multiple events throughout the season to keep park visitors engaged throughout the winter months. The existing paved trail around the lake and the River to River Greenway in the southern portion have been maintained in the past for walking and biking through the snowy season, while natural surface trails are usually left for snowshoers to enjoy.

With the ten-year master plan, new programming is proposed to expand winter-use from its current state to offer more activities for visitors, and enhance the experience of rental facilities for holding events within the park:

- » The sledding hill and group fire pit add a much-needed winter amenity within reach of West Saint Paul and neighboring residences.
- » Thompson Park Center will be open in the winter for warming and restrooms.
- » Expanded trail systems and loops extend the range of the park that can be explored for snowshoeing.
- » Continued maintenance of ADA paved trails throughout the season allow for safe winter walking and outdoor exercise for all visitors including those with mobility impairments.
- » The outdoor fireplace at the lakeside plaza extends the rentable space within Dakota Lodge outdoors for winter events, giving guests a warm outdoor space to gather and view the frozen Thompson Lake. Also, the group fire pit's proximity to Dakota Lodge gives it potential rental ability for events.



PARK WAYFINDING



LEGEND

WAYFINDING DIAGRAM

-  VEHICLE WAYFINDING
-  PARK MONUMENT SIGNS
-  INFORMATION KIOSKS
-  DIRECTIONAL SIGNS

Figure 6.9 | Wayfinding diagram: ten-year master plan



Wayfinding

Wayfinding is an important component of park design that orients commuters and visitors, provides park identity, and helps to ensure that visitors have a safe and enjoyable experience. The need to improve wayfinding was a common theme in community input. Suggestions included wayfinding in multiple languages, more information about what to expect on the trails, and use of universal symbols and colors.

Park Monument Signs

Identity signs should be located at every major vehicular entrance into the park and comply with park branding efforts. They should convey a strong sense of quality and character with choice of materials, welcoming visitors and clearly identifying where guests begin to enter or leave the park boundary.

Vehicular Directional Signs

Vehicular directional signs should be located at all major intersections along roadways within the park (or where drivers will have to make a 'choice' in direction). Vehicular signs should comply with park branding efforts and notify visitors of major parking areas, street parking, exits/entrances, additional parking when lots are full, and nearby major amenities/programming that could inform their decision to park within a certain area.

Information Kiosks

Kiosks should be located at all secondary park entrances and intersections within Thompson Park. They should comply with park branding efforts and contribute to the identity of the park with the use of consistent materials. Kiosks should include a map that marks the precise location of the kiosk within the park area. Labels and icons depicting important amenities and programming should be clear on the map and labeled within a legend. Other possible displays include winter and summer use diagrams, park policies, historical or educational information, and information regarding the River to River Greenway.

Directional Signs

Directional signs should comply with park branding efforts and be located at the intersections of all paved and natural surface trails and trail loops. They should depict if a trail is accessible and point visitors within the direction of any programs or amenities that are nearby or along the way. Trail signs should also show users the approximate length and time to complete by walking, biking, or traveling by wheelchair.



Information kiosk example image



Directional sign example image



Trail sign example image

Accessibility

Given the context of Thompson County Park and the diversity of users, inclusivity and accessibility details were a large priority within the master planning process. Steep slopes and minimal trail systems have created a barrier for many users in the park's past. This master plan strives to address existing issues and identify strategies to create a more welcoming environment that gives all users the opportunity to receive a full and supportive experience with each visit.

The park lies in West Saint Paul and caters to a diverse community of age and demographic groups. It is frequented by elderly community members and their caregivers, large and small family groups, students, transit riders, greenway users, and people of many different physical or mental abilities. With a limited number of play, parking, and trail options, the existing conditions do not allow visitors to fully experience all that Thompson Park has to offer.



Example of accessible trail wayfinding



Accessible trail example

In September of 2018, an accessibility and inclusion focus group met for a tour of Thompson Park. Attendees identified existing conditions that required attention and opportunities that would help to create a more welcoming environment for users with physical and cognitive disabilities. This input was used throughout the planning process in the development of the concepts and master plan.

Trails:

Existing trail conditions include a small system of natural surface and paved trails that provide limited seating, destinations, and route options. Currently, there are not enough loops to offer a variety for visitors, and paved trails do not travel far enough within the park to offer the full experience to those with physical limitations.

The master plan strives to:

- » Work with the site's steep topography to get ADA trails more places within the park.
- » Expand the extents of ADA-accessible paved trails to allow visitors with physical limitations to explore and be involved in all programming and viewing opportunities within the park.
- » Create a series of intuitive loops within each portion of the park to allow visitors to create custom routes that cater to their physical abilities, time, and preferences.
- » Improve wayfinding and signage with clear symbology, colors, and the use of multiple languages clearly labeled and defining trail information. Trail signs should include information regarding distances and connections, and whether a trail is or is not recommended for those with physical challenges and destinations you can reach.
- » Provide a variety of both paved and natural surface trails.
- » Widen trails to accommodate traffic with a variety of transportation modes in mind.
- » Provide additional bike or other non-motor vehicle parking options to accommodate greenway users who may want to stop and explore.



Accessible trail wayfinding example

- » Create new entry trails from the surrounding neighborhoods to allow for easier access and a more welcoming atmosphere.
- » Insert bollard lighting around a fully-paved lake loop to address safety concerns.
- » Create a proposed linear plaza in the northwest area of the park to accommodate larger groups and create a more welcoming atmosphere.

Roads & Parking

Input in the process communicated that existing parking conditions are confusing. There is no lane striping, no dedicated bus drop-off area, and a hidden parking area that causes confusion.

A re-worked parking lot near the Thompson Activity Center strives to:

- » Provide clear wayfinding and signage so visitors are aware of which parking destination better fits their agenda.
- » Emphasis and special consideration for accessible vehicle spaces are recommended upon parking lot implementation.
- » Clearly marked lane and stall striping help to clarify circulation.
- » Removal of the existing berm allows for clear site lines and connection.
- » A designated bus drop-off lane provides a more welcoming experience for visitors arriving by transit.
- » Paved sidewalks running the length of the southern parking lot expansion provide a safe solution for guests traveling to the lodge.



Accessible parking example



Accessible playground example

Play

Many of the existing destinations within the park do not provide enough accessibility to visitors with cognitive or mobile disabilities. The existing playground, picnicking options, fishing pier, and education elements could be improved to highlight Thompson Park as a destination for all.

The master plan strives to create a welcoming environment through the following recommendations:

- » Provide interpretation throughout the park that use a variety of guided, self-guided, and integrated items. Multisensory elements highlight the history, landscapes, and unique features that sets Thompson Park apart from other local destinations.
- » Reprogram Dakota Lodge to provide greater public access. This will help to provide a climate-controlled environment for guests to relax and escape the hustle and bustle of the park.
- » Make accessibility improvements to both the existing and proposed fishing piers.
- » Integrate an ADA-accessible trail, plantings, picnicking/hammocking opportunities, and water play into the proposed sensory garden to stimulate the senses.
- » Create a paved trail loop, with interpretive elements, to the Simon's Ravine bridge and overlook.
- » Invite kids and adults of all abilities to play together in a safe and secure environment with a new inclusive nature-themed playground. Play elements for sliding, climbing, twirling, and swinging are recommended for the play area. A resilient base surface is recommended for improved mobility.
- » Make sensory kits with items such as noise-canceling headphones available.



Accessible amenities labeling

Amenities and Services

Currently, Thompson Park opens its doors to offer clean and inviting amenities year-round to guests. The master plan makes a number of recommendations to make these services more accessible to all users.

- » Improved signs and wayfinding that clearly communicate the location or distance to amenities and services are recommended.
- » The master plan strives to accommodate seating and picnicking needs within Thompson Park. Tables with wheelchair space, moveable chairs, a variety of seating along the trails, and different sized shelters to accommodate large or small gatherings are recommended.
- » A phased study of Dakota Lodge for future programming and additions could include items such as family restrooms with adult changing stations and larger handicap stalls with seating and room for caregivers.
- » Rentals from Dakota Lodge should include adaptive equipment.
- » Details such as automatic hand soap dispensers and labeling should be considered.
- » More drinking fountains along the proposed trails, with levers, multiple heights, and a pet station are recommended.

Maintenance

Proper maintenance is recommended to keep the park enjoyable for all users in all areas of the park.

- » Trails should be kept clear of debris or objects that could hinder the safety of all modes of transportation.
- » Planters and gardens should be pruned and trained to give a welcoming and cared-for appearance.
- » Trash from lakes, streams, and ponds should be removed regularly.
- » Sanitation of restrooms and drinking facilities is especially important for guests who may live with an autoimmune disorder.
- » Maintenance staff should adhere to correct practices such as putting out signs or closing off unsafe areas within the park when work is being conducted.



Adult changing station



Accessible drinking fountain



Safe maintenance practices

NATURAL RESOURCES PLAN

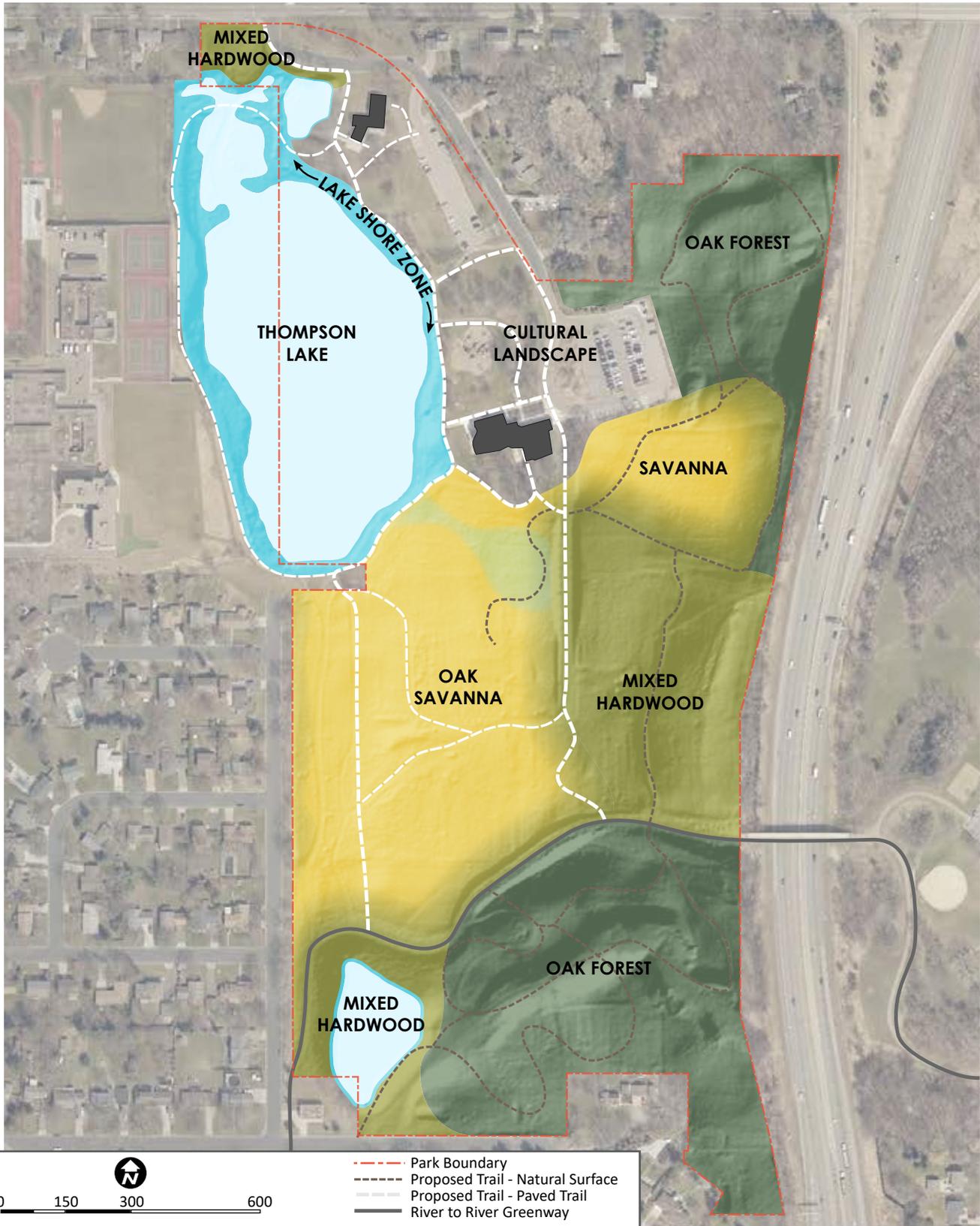


Figure 6.10 | Natural resources diagram: ten-year master plan

Natural Resources Management

Integrated with the master planning process, a Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP) was prepared. The NRMP identifies the long-term vision for natural resources and recommends an implementation strategy to achieve that vision. This natural resources section seeks to provide an overview of the direction set forth in the NRMP.

The purpose of regenerating native plant communities at Thompson Park is to:

- » Allow people to experience the natural heritage of the area
- » Demonstrate the native plant community regeneration process
- » Provide habitat for native plants, birds, insects, mammals, amphibians and reptiles.

Surrounded by a complex urban landscape of disturbed soils and non-native plant species, Thompson Park acts as an island of natural open space in the midst of a busy city setting. A long history of agricultural practices resulted in the severe degradation of the site, altering soil conditions that support very little native plant growth. Restoring native plant communities to the park will take thoughtful planning and diligent management. The effort to restore Thompson Park to environmental health will be a long and difficult commitment, especially with our ever-changing climate. Warmer winters are resulting in increased precipitation, while warmer summers and future droughts are predicted.

Climate changes are currently, and will increasingly, influence the evolution of the plant communities within the park. An adaptive management approach is recommended to combat these changing extremes and allows for adjusted management over time. With this approach, Dakota County can help nudge the plant community in the direction of an assemblage of native or 'near native' species so that it does not degrade with exotic weeds.

The following pages will provide some additional information regarding what the NRMP strives to achieve and an example of strategies that Dakota County can take to accomplish these items. For further information about natural resources management, the NRMP should be consulted.

Overall Park Management Goals

- » Regenerate a landscape that contains a mosaic of upland plant communities across a continuum from oak forest to oak savanna.
 - *Manage the ground layer to achieve perennial, native or climate adaptive native species at a part to continuous cover density.*
 - *Achieve a forest structure with complete canopy, open midstory, and a continuous ground cover of native plants.*
- » Increase native plant diversity.
 - *Remove all non-native trees.*
 - *Plant trees that are native to MN mesic forests.*
 - *Manage the ground layer by planting native herbaceous species.*
 - *Prevent erosion and increase diversity by planting native herbaceous species.*
- » Control invasive plant species to a maximum cover of 5 percent.
- » Prevent new non-native species encroachment.
 - *Aggressively manage invasive species new to the area.*
- » Manage deer to animal populations.
- » Reduce erosion.
- » Improve lake water quality.
- » Implement organic lawn care practices.
 - *Introduce fire as a management tool.*
- » Create an adaptive management plan that can be flexible within a changing climate
 - *Consider introducing climate adaptive plant species native to northern Iowa, southwestern Wisconsin, and Southeastern Minnesota.*
- » Create and enhance wildlife habitats within the park.
 - *Introduce plantings that attract birds, insects, mammal, amphibian, and reptiles.*
 - *Provide sources of food and water that can support native wildlife populations.*

Steps to Regeneration

Oak Forest



Strategy:

To manage the oak forest to regenerate the native mesic oak forest. To preserve and regenerate existing oaks. To facilitate the introduction of certain/select more southerly forest species adaptive to a warming climate. To establish a diverse and resilient native plant mid- and understory.

Steps:

- » Stop the spread of oak wilt.
- » Manage emerald ash borer through removal of dead trees.
- » Extend the field of view for park user safety, i.e., keep buckthorn under control.
- » Promote the growth of plant species that provide food, cover, and nesting habitat for songbirds; strive to meet all requirements of their life cycle.

Oak Savanna



Strategy:

To establish and maintain an open oak savanna plant community similar to what existed on the site prior to European settlement. To establish a diversity of native plants that thrive under the management conditions that provide habitat for a diversity of wildlife, especially birds and insects. To facilitate the introduction of select savanna species as a preparation for climate change.

Steps:

- » Allow canopy trees to occupy no more than 10-20% aerial coverage (herbaceous vegetation will dominate this community type).
- » Establish a diversity of native herbaceous plants. Short grasses, sedges and forbs are preferred.
- » Minimize the extent of shrub establishment to develop an open landscape safe for the park users.
- » Plant trees native to the MN oak savanna, primarily bur oak.
- » Introduce grazing/browsing as a management tool (e.g., goats).

Disturbed Woodland



Strategy:

To manage the woodland to provide songbird cover and feeding habitat, along with nesting potential. To transition the woodland to a dominance of native trees, or climate adaptive 'near-native' trees, to establish a diverse native plant mid and understory.

Steps:

- » Plant trees native to MN mesic forests.
- » Phaseout the removal of non-native and softwood canopy trees.
- » Promote the growth of plant species that provide food and cover for songbirds.
- » Manage the ground layer to achieve perennial, native, or climate adaptive native cover at near 100 percent density.
- » Extend the field of view for park user safety, i.e., control buckthorn.

Lake Shoreline



Strategy:

To manage the shoreline to stabilize eroding slopes and to establish/preserve native habitat. To establish diverse native plant communities within the littoral zone and up through the upland buffer community.

Steps:

- » Stabilize shoreline with native plants or structural practices as necessary.
- » Establish a diversity of native herbaceous plant species.
- » Selectively plant appropriate native woody plant species.
- » Retain a minimum 30-foot native plant buffer from the ordinary high water line of the lake to the lawns.

Strategy:

- » Minimize or eliminate mowing in areas that are not frequently used by park visitors.
- » Eliminate or minimize the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
- » When necessary, fertilize with organic fertilizers.
- » Promote a diversity of lawn species, including pollinator species such as violets and clover.

Strategy:

- » Eliminate lawn mower damage to tree bark by placing a wood mulch buffer of approximately 18 inches around each tree.
- » Prevent the spread of damaging insects and diseases by inspecting the trees each spring and fall.
- » Prevent excessive wind damage by regularly pruning (at least every five years).

Lawns



To manage lawns organically and to nurture a diversity of lawn species including pollinator species (e.g., bee lawn).

Steps:

Mature Trees within Lawns



To preserve mature trees growing in the lawns by implementing good stewardship practices.

Steps:

Stormwater Management Facilities



Strategy:

To manage stormwater facilities to efficiently function to treat stormwater while having a neat appearance and supporting a diversity of plant species.

Steps:

- » Achieve stable soils (no erosion within basins).
- » Promote the growth of dense native vegetation.
- » Integrate with surrounding habitat.
- » Regularly remove sediment from pre-treatment devices.

INTERPRETATION PLAN



Figure 6.11 | Interpretation locations diagram: ten-year master plan

Interpretation

Dakota County Parks' outdoor education program interprets the natural, recreational, and cultural resources of the parks system and broader community through engaging, relevant, and equitable experiences, both guided and self-guided, to inspire future generations and create stewards of our parks and resources.

This plan describes the key resources in Thompson County Park, whether they are natural, recreational, or cultural, identifies key locations, and suggests methods to interpret these resources for park visitors. The County's outdoor education program will bring resources to life through various methods including guided opportunities, such as programming and events, self-guided experiences, and interpretation informing and integrated into landscape and building design. The methods and representative examples are included for inspiration; but as park development is undertaken, the interpretation may evolve.

Interpretation seeks to connect visitors to a place or a resource. It is an experience more than a sign, a story more than conveying facts. Interpretation answers the questions: "So what?" and "Why should I care?" Interpretation forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in a resource and place. The Thompson County Park master planning process considered the place-specific historical, cultural, and natural resources to be interpreted and the demographics of the people who use the Park to develop relevant messages and integrate those messages in the visitor's Park experience. The methods and representative examples are included for inspiration but not to be taken literally. In order to fully explore the ways that interpretation can inform the design of future park improvements, preparing a full interpretive plan is recommended. The interpretive plan will provide specific recommendations for self-guided, guided, and integrated interpretation within the park.

The goal for interpretation at Thompson County Park is to

"Foster the wellbeing of social and natural communities through intergenerational play, gathering, and exploration."

This interpretive framework builds on the themes in the previous Park master plan and input from Dakota County staff, community stakeholders, and the project team. It also takes into consideration the Dakota County Parks' mission and vision and the vision statement and guiding principles related to the overall Park experience.

Interpretation helps to organize the visitor experience by identifying a theme and supporting subthemes. A theme is the key message of all interpretation at a site. It may or may not appear in writing, exhibits, and programming, but all interpretive efforts should fall within the scope of the interpretive theme. A theme provides organizational structure and clarity to the main message that visitors encounter when they visit the Park. After their experience, visitors should be able to summarize the main point of interpretation in one sentence—this is the interpretive theme.

A theme is different from a topic in that it expresses a complete idea or message. A topic is a broad general category, such as recreation, gatherings, or natural resources. A theme should answer the question, "So what?" It should tell visitors why a specific topic is important.

Interpretive Theme

The interpretive theme for Thompson County Park was developed through research, on-site assessment, and staff and stakeholder collaboration.

“At Thompson County Park, people connect with nature and each other through recreation, exploration, and social gatherings, building a strong and resilient community that is committed to stewardship and sustainability.”

Subthemes

Subthemes support the theme and further organize the park experience. Potential storylines and specific methods for guided and self-guided interpretation will be further developed in a future project phase.



Social Gathering: Find community here.

Gather with family and friends. Connect with known and new communities. People come here for events and gatherings throughout the year. Here, we honor the past, celebrate the present, and look toward our shared future.



Water Resources: Follow the flow.

Water connects us all through pipes, streams, rivers, and lakes. Rainwater and snow melt flow from our homes and neighborhoods to the Mississippi River, recharging drinking water supplies and sustaining ecosystems along the way. Here, we learn how to protect water quality and why it is important.



Natural Resources: Leave a sustaining legacy.

Here, people learn to be environmental stewards. Because of its size, location, and history, this urban park provides opportunities for birdwatching, nature walks, and habitat restoration. Apply the lessons learned here at home and in your community.



Healthy Lifestyle: Play in the park.

Here, people of all ages can bike and hike, sled and skate, paddle and play. Cast a line, spot a bird, watch a concert. Whether with a group or on your own, Thompson County Park offers a variety of active and passive recreational opportunities year-round.



Cultural History: You are part of a bigger story.

Here, we are in Dakota Homeland. We are part of a bigger story. People have been here, in this place, for thousands of years. What is now a park was once a farm, a home, and a haven.

Interpretive Media

Selecting the most appropriate media is both an art and a science. There is often more than one way to achieve a goal. For each situation, it is important to consider:

- » Message: What do you want to convey?
- » Audience: Who do you want to tell it to?
- » Resources: What is available to connect the message with the audience?

A variety of interpretive media are recommended for Thompson County Park.



Guided Interpretation

Interpretive Programs are regularly scheduled activities such as classes, talks, tours, or workshops. They are led by a trained interpreter and developed with specific themes, goals, objectives, and outcomes in mind. Interpretive programs can be presented in a variety of formats with the goal being visitor inspiration rather than education.

Special Events are typically activities that are scheduled on an annual or one-time basis.



Self-Guided Interpretation

Graphic Panels are place-specific interpretive signs that briefly and simply “caption the landscape.” They describe what people are seeing and why they should care about it. Interpretive signs use compelling images and clear, evocative language to appeal to a wide range of visitors.



Multisensory Elements

Multisensory elements could include the following:

- *Interactive Signs include an element (e.g., small panels to lift, slide, spin, or flip) to encourage visitors to engage with the story. Flipbooks can mimic bird books for identification, a lift can reveal the answer to a question, and spinners can be a playful way to present interpretive messages.*
- *Audio Posts provide on-site interpretive and accessibility-related auditory experiences. With the touch of a button or turn of a crank, visitors can hear sounds of nature, audio descriptions, or other sound-specific stories.*
- *Tactile Elements add a rich layer to the interpretive experience, attracting tactile learners and promoting accessibility for people with no or low vision. Tactile maps can show a historic landscape, leaf outlines can help with plant identification, and foot and paw prints can show what animals call the park home.*



Integrated Interpretation

Integrated Landscape Elements promote a holistic park experience and provide surprises in the landscape that support interpretive messaging. In this case, the interpretation should inform the design program and form. Hopscotch or dance steps in a sidewalk can encourage movement, an oversized frame can direct people to a unique view, and bas relief sculpture in structures or furniture can reinforce the special features of the park.

The following pages are organized by subtheme and link messaging and audience through a specific type of interpretive media.

i SOCIAL GATHERING



Figure 6.12 | Interpretation locations diagram: ten-year master plan



Social Gathering: *Find Community Here*

Gather with family and friends. Connect with known and new communities. People come here for events and gatherings throughout the year. Here, we honor the past, celebrate the present, and look forward to our shared future.

Key Messaging:

- » Thompson County Park is part of the fabric of the northern Dakota County community, a place for all groups to gather and feel welcome.
- » Communities can take many forms. Thompson County Park and the plants and animals that live here are part of a watershed community, an ecosystem community, and a network of green spaces.
- » Biological communities depend on human communities, and human communities depend on biological ones; life is interdependent.

Self-Guided Interpretation	Guided Interpretation	Integrated Interpretation
Graphic Panels and Multisensory Elements	Programs and Events	Landscape and Structure Design
<p><i>Entry Plaza</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Graphic panels in multiple languages (e.g., Dakota, English, and Spanish) welcome visitors and encourage park exploration. Motion triggered audio adds a “welcome” in several languages. <p><i>Neighborhood (South) Entry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Orientation panels welcome visitors and include interpretive information about social gathering over time. 	<p><i>Community Events</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Inclusive programs and events celebrate the community and provide ways for new users to discover the park. <p><i>Public Programs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Environmental education programs focus on understanding ecosystem and watershed connections. » The Group Fit Pit provides a gathering place for public programs built on the interpretive theme and subthemes. 	<p><i>Entry Plaza</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Plaza design features light-and-shadow displays with welcoming text and patterns. <p><i>Neighborhood (South) Entry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Neighborhood entry design includes light-and-shadow displays with welcoming text and patterns. <p><i>Amphitheater</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Integrated interpretation connects visitors with the plants and animals they could see at the park.



Amphitheater



South neighborhood entry

i WATER RESOURCES



Figure 6.13 | Interpretation locations diagram: ten-year master plan



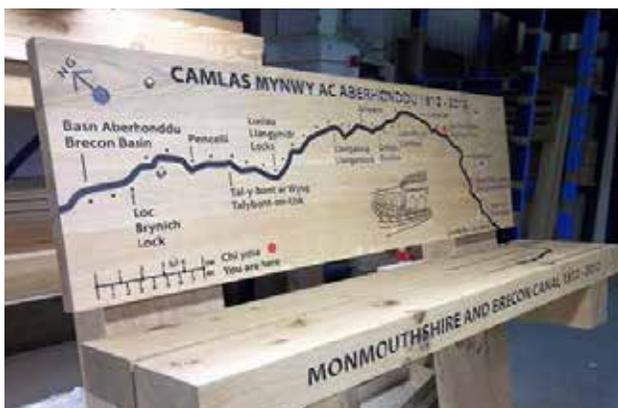
Water Resources: *Follow the Flow*

Water connects us all through pipes, streams, rivers, and lakes. Rainwater and snow melt flow from our home and neighborhoods to the Mississippi River, recharging drinking water supplies and sustaining ecosystems along the way. Here we learn how to protect water quality and why it is important.

Key Messaging:

- » Keeping our water clean is important for the wellness of our waterways and the plants, animals, and humans that depend on them.
- » Communities can help keep water clean by focusing on their yards and homes, businesses, schools, and green spaces.
- » Watersheds are networks of connected waterways, from the rain water that falls in backyards to Thompson Lake to the Mississippi River.

Self-Guided Interpretation	Guided Interpretation	Integrated Interpretation
<h3>Graphic Panels and Multisensory Elements</h3>	<h3>Programs and Events</h3>	<h3>Landscape and Structure Design</h3>
<p><i>Fishing Piers and Shore Fishing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Pier design includes engaging interpretation, such as fish sculptures, to connect people to the fish found in Thompson Lake. » Pier design includes engaging interpretation that describes the watershed and the people/water connection. It could answer common questions, such as “is the water safe to drink, swim in, and fish from?” 	<p><i>Community Events</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Inclusive events connect the public to fishing and water quality. <p><i>Public Programs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Fishing and family fishing programs to introduce residents to fishing. » Sustainable living classes to educate residents (e.g. rain garden, shoreline restoration, etc.). 	<p><i>Daylighted Water Feature</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Water feature design could include etched outlines or tactiles of native water plants integrated into the edge. <p><i>Sensory Garden</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Garden design includes rain gardens with interpretation that shares the importance of plants for water filtration and wetland health. <p><i>Shoreline Restoration</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Shoreline restoration will demonstrate to visitors the importance of vegetation for wetland health.



Bench at fishing pier



Fishing pier

i NATURAL RESOURCES

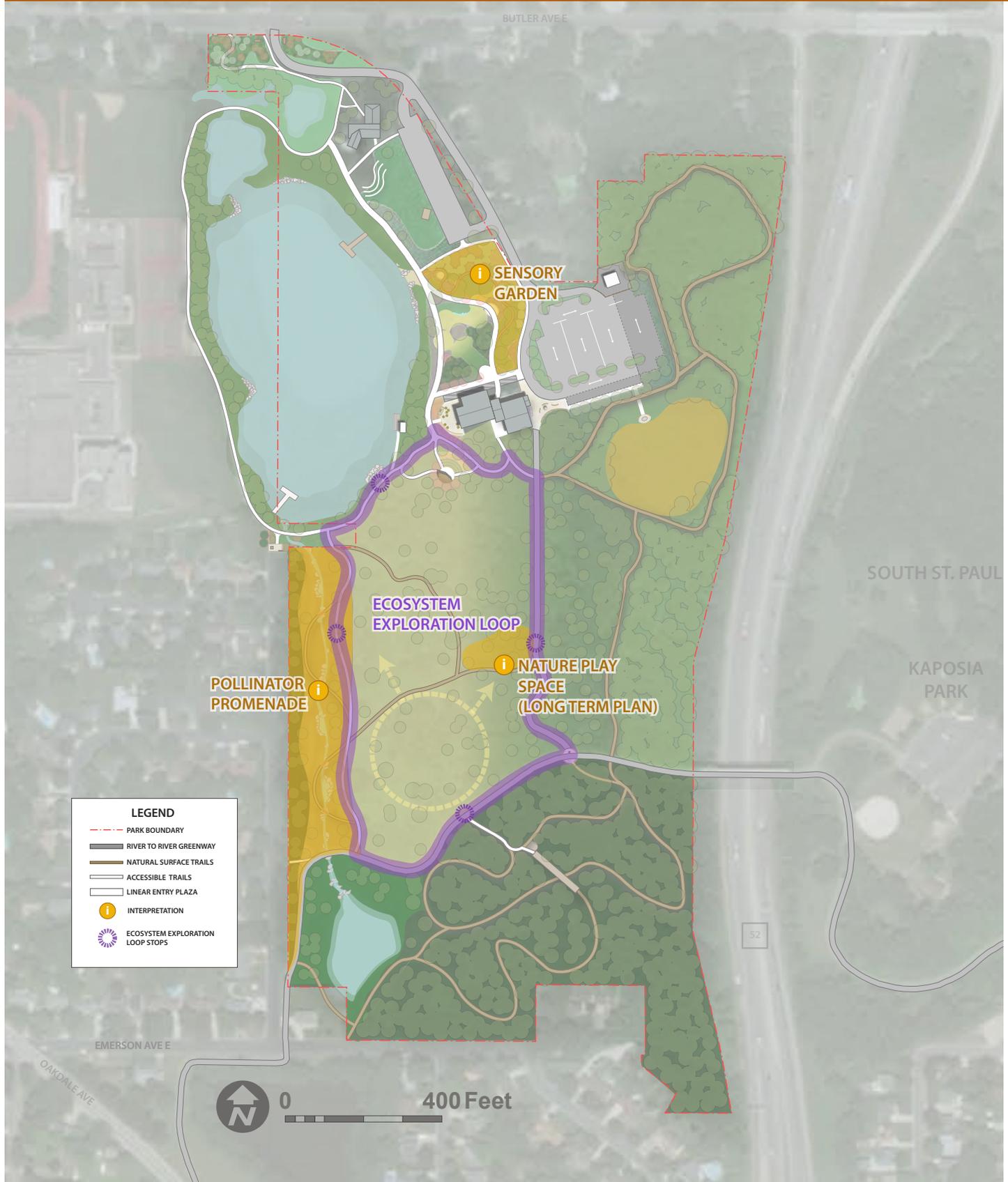


Figure 6.14 | Interpretation locations diagram: ten-year master plan



Natural Resources: *Leave a Sustaining Legacy*

Here, people learn to be environmental stewards. Because of its size, location, and history, this urban park provides opportunities for bird-watching, nature walks, and habitat restoration. Apply the lessons learned here at home and in your community.

Key Messaging:

- » Thompson County Park was once covered in an oak savannah. Dakota County is working towards restoring the park to these ecosystems to allow for our native plants and animals to thrive.
- » Homeowners can amplify the work being done in parks by planting native plants, which provide food and habitat for animals, including pollinators.
- » Planting native plants can be scaled to backyards, from manicured settings to restoring an entire yard to prairie. Plantings can be playful and beautiful, as Thompson County Park’s sensory garden demonstrates.
- » Dakota County provides opportunities to connect and build relationships with the natural resources of this park and the broader region through programs, interpretation, and play.

Self-Guided Interpretation	Guided Interpretation	Integrated Interpretation
Graphic Panels and Multisensory Elements	Programs and Events	Landscape and Structure Design
<p><i>Ecosystem Exploration Loop</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Stops along the ecosystem loop interpret restoration efforts and defining characteristics of distinct ecosystems along the trail. <p><i>Pollinator Promenade</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Graphic panels and engaging elements identify pollinators and describe the importance of pollinators and how visitors can attract and support pollinator habitat in their own backyard. 	<p><i>Public Programs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Inclusive programs will meet the community where they are in terms of understanding ecosystems, their importance, and removing barriers to awareness and appreciation. 	<p><i>Ecosystem Exploration Loop</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Artful interpretation such as impressions, sculpture, or silhouettes are integrated into the loop design. <p><i>Sensory Garden</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Garden design includes demonstration areas and interpretation to encourage planting native plants. <p><i>Nature Play Space</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The design of the space will connect children and adults with natural resources they can see in the park.



Pollinator promenade



Pollinator promenade

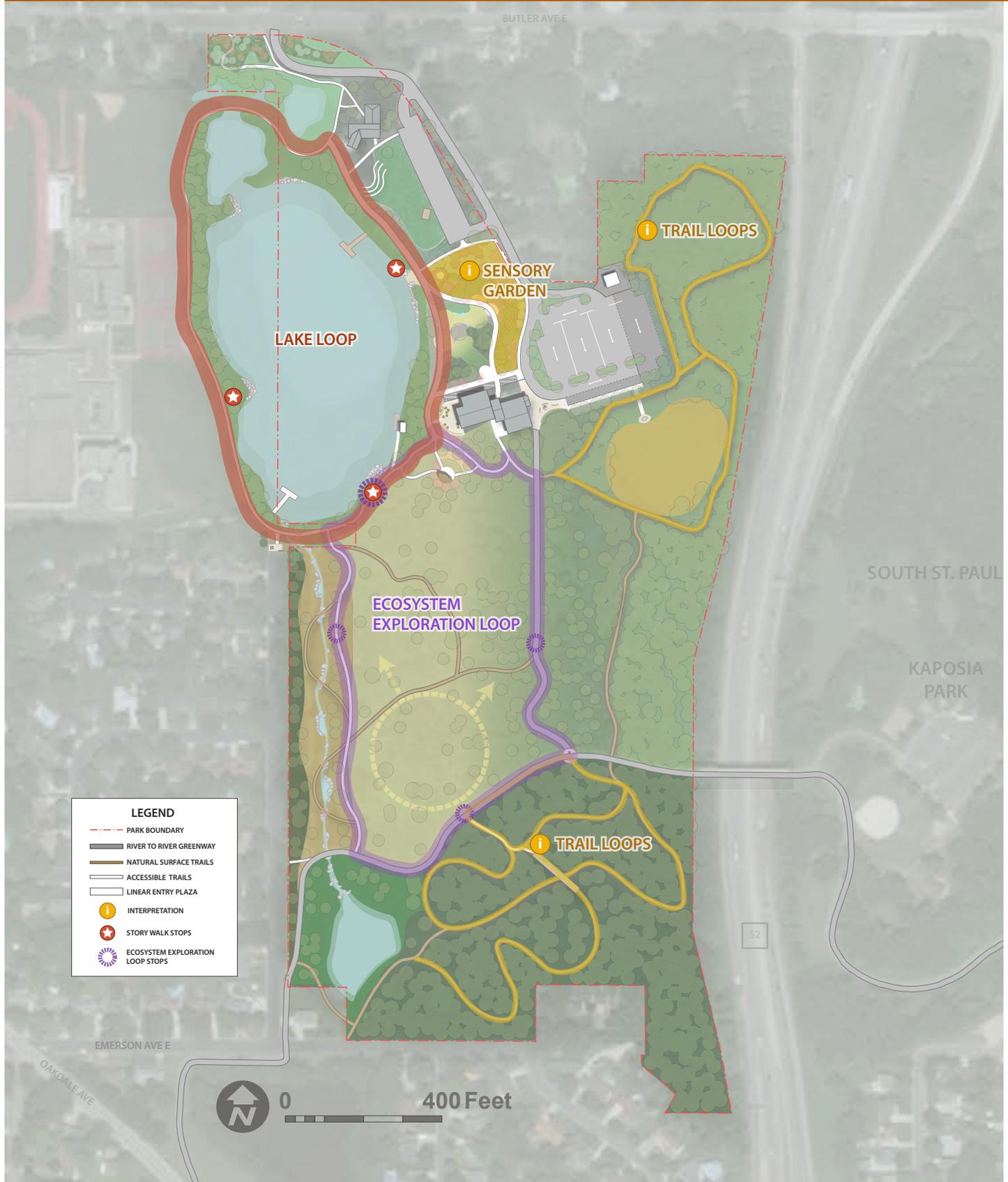


Figure 6.15 | Interpretation locations diagram: ten-year master plan



Healthy Lifestyle: *Play in the Park*

Here, people of all ages can bike and hike, sled and skate, paddle and play, cast a line, spot a bird, and watch a concert. Whether with a group or on their own, Thompson County Park offers visitors a variety of active and passive recreational opportunities year-round.

Key Messaging:

- » Thompson County Park is focused on community and individual wellness.
- » Dakota County Parks supports wellness in our community by connecting people to recreational opportunities and skill-based programming.
- » Spending time in Thompson County Park provides opportunities to focus on mindfulness and mental wellness.

Self-Guided Interpretation	Guided Interpretation	Integrated Interpretation
<h3>Graphic Panels and Multisensory Elements</h3> <p><i>Lake Loop</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Interactive signs in multiple languages express the human/nature connection through a progressive storywalk. <p><i>Ecosystem Exploration Loop</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Small plant identifier panels share plant names. 	<h3>Programs and Events</h3> <p><i>Public Programs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Introductory classes are offered for recreational activities such as bicycling and fishing. » Programs focus on the mental wellness (e.g., mindfulness, yoga, nature bathing). 	<h3>Landscape and Structure Design</h3> <p><i>Trail loops</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » In-trail markers encourage a variety of simple activities for different audiences, such as stretching, touching toes, and lunges to support healthy living. Suggestions could include mindfulness activities such as listening for nature sounds or quiet meditation. <p><i>Sensory Garden</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The garden inspires sensory exploration.



Sensory Garden



Trail Loops



Ecosystem Exploration Loop

i CULTURAL HISTORY

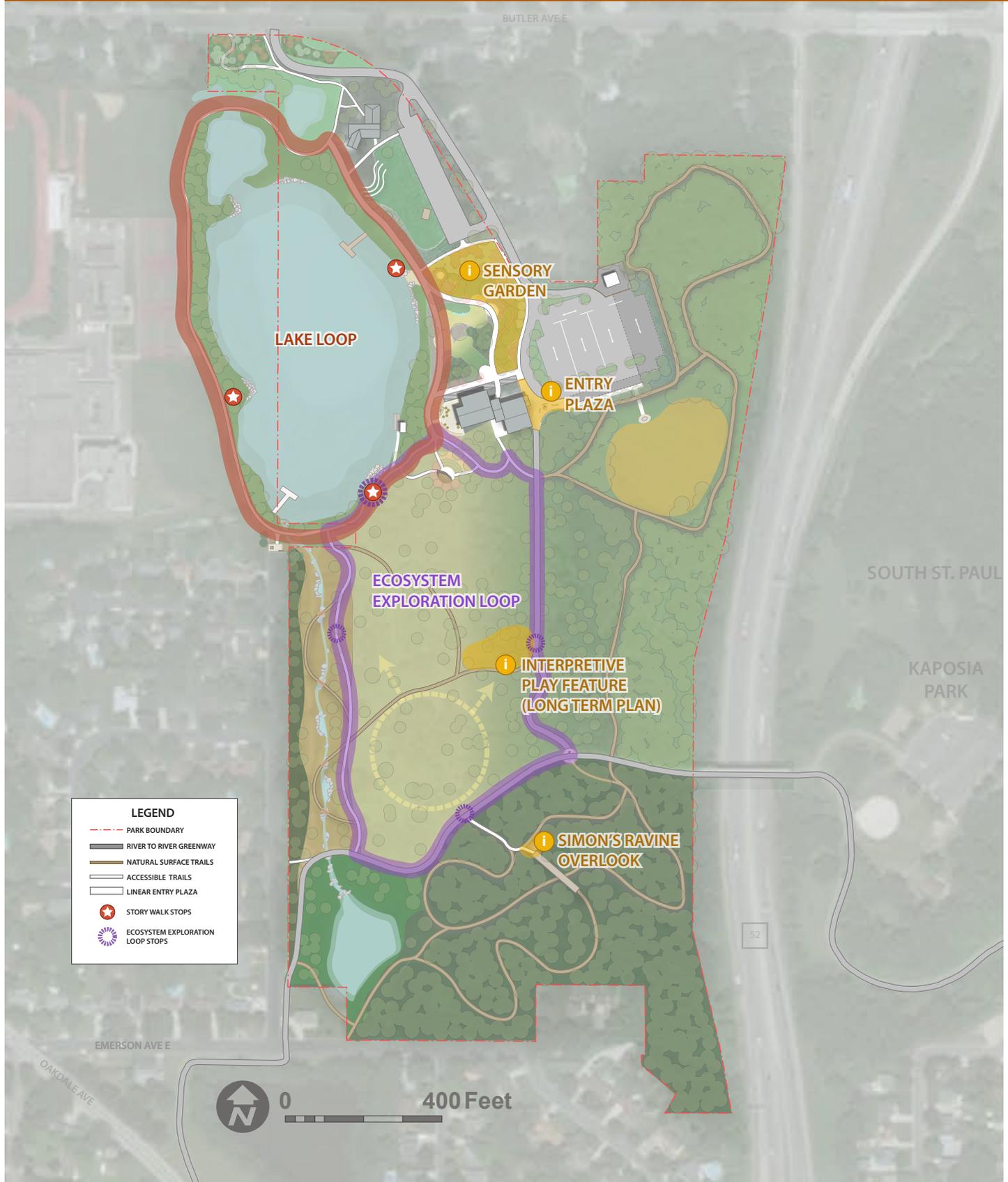


Figure 6.16 | Interpretation locations diagram: ten-year master plan



Cultural History: *We are All Related*

Here, we are in Dakota Homeland. We are part of a bigger story. People have been here, in this place, for thousands of years. What is now a park was once a farm, home, and haven.

Key Messaging:

- » Thompson County Park is part of the Dakota Homeland.
- » Visitors to Thompson County Park are connected in a myriad of ways in a variety of communities. The park provides opportunities to connect with other visitors in the past, present, and future.
- » Thompson County Park has been constantly changing as land that was once oak savannah became farmland, then parkland, and is now being restored.

Self-Guided Interpretation

Graphic Panels and Multisensory Elements

Lake Loop/Storywalk Stops

- » Interactive signs in multiple languages, including Dakota, express the human/nature connection through a progressive storywalk.

Simon's Ravine Overlook

- » A graphic panel in multiple languages, including Dakota, describe the park and surrounding area as part of Dakota Homeland and its connection to the Mississippi River. A bronze tactile of the landscape shows the ravine in a broader context and its connection with the Mississippi River. An audio post supplements other interpretation with contemporary Dakota people bringing the language back to the landscape.

Guided Interpretation

Programs and Events

Public Programs

- » Program about native plants and their traditional uses could be offered. Inclusive programming could include modern day uses and connections to backyard gardens from many cultures.
- » Programs about gardening and cultural connections to ornamental or vegetable gardening could be offered.



Simon's Ravine Overlook



Interpretive Play

Integrated Interpretation

Landscape and Structure Design

Entry Plaza

- » Visitors are encouraged to share their park experience with others on a chalk board or other interactive exhibit.

Interpretive Play Feature

- » Near the ruins of an old farmstead, young visitors are encouraged to connect with the history of the park as farmland through farm-themed interpretive play feature.

Ecosystem Exploration Loop

- » Loop design includes engaging interpretation in multiple languages (e.g., Dakota, Spanish, and English) to share plant names and cultural significance.

This page intentionally left blank.



07 | IMPLEMENTATION



Overview

The purpose of the Implementation chapter is to describe in detail how the master plan will be accomplished. The following sections identify actions and resources that are needed. General Dakota County park system policies and operations directions are included or referenced as they apply to the park.



Phasing, Priorities, and Costs Estimates

Park improvements have been prioritized into three categories: five-year, ten-year, and long-term. The prioritization was created by County staff, revised by the Planning Commission, and confirmed by the County Board. The prioritization process considered a number of factors, consistency with the park vision and guiding principles, level of community support, benefit-to-cost ratio, cost, and estimated future operations and maintenance cost.

Park improvements identified in the master plan have been grouped into 36 projects, and planning level cost estimates were prepared in 2019 dollars. Although park improvements have been designated as five-year, ten-year, or long-term, it is feasible that any park development may be constructed as opportunities or funding become available. Priorities and cost estimates are shown in Figure 7.1 and included in Table 7.1. The cost estimate table also indicates what projects have interpretive elements included in the cost. In cases where interpretation will inform and be integrated into project design, interpretive elements will be 5% to 30% of the project cost. A full interpretive plan for the park is recommended as a next step further develop the design for elements with interpretation and estimated costs. Cost estimates are based on a combination of past practice, work done in other park systems, and expert opinion. Refined cost estimates will be established in the future as individual projects move into more detailed design prior to construction. Cost estimates should be considered as preliminary, as many variables can influence the actual cost of projects. In addition, cost estimates may be adjusted at the conclusion of the Thompson Park Center Space and Program Study and the Daylighted Stream Feasibility Study.



PHASING PLAN



Figure 7.1 | Phasing diagram: long-term master plan

PRIORITY ORDER	DESCRIPTION	PROJECT COST	INTERPRETIVE FEATURES	COMMUNITY SUPPORT
FIVE-YEAR				
1	Shoreline Restoration	\$270,000	Interpretive signs	High
2	Natural Resources Phase 1: throughout park (assumes additional \$100,000 of external funding)	\$160,000	Interpretive signs	High
3	Entries and Wayfinding Phase 1 (plantings at north, west, and south entries and wayfinding signage)	\$260,000		High
4	Complete ADA Lake Loop (lighting, story walk stops, benches)	\$209,000	Story walk interpretive stops	Medium
5	Greenway Improvements (extended trail, gateway, wayfinding, bike loop, interpretation, ecosystem stops, nature play)	\$280,000	Interpretive ecosystem exploration trail	Medium
6	Improved Water Access Phase 1 (shore fishing, new pier, existing pier improvements, informal water access, interpretation at piers)	\$247,000	Interpretation informs project design	High
7	Inclusive Nature Themed Playground with integrated interpretation and adjacent linear plaza	\$1,162,000	Interpretation informs project design	High
8	Picnicking (picnic shelter, picnic tables, hammocking, lawn, plantings) and adjacent linear plaza	\$312,000	Interpretation informs project design	High
9	Sledding Hill (picnic shelter, picnic tables, fire pit, trail, lighting, natural surface trail)	\$222,000	Interpretation informs project design	High
10	Pond Picnicking (picnic shelter and natural surface trails)	\$46,000		Low
11	Thompson Park Center Space and Program Study	\$50,000		High
12	Daylighted Stream Feasibility Study	\$30,000		Medium
13	Parking Lot Improvements Phase 1 (parking reconfiguration with removal of berm and new spaces, stormwater, and reconfigured natural surface trail)	\$538,000	Interpretive signs	High
14	Thompson Park Center Exterior Gathering (lakeside plaza)	\$130,000	Interpretation informs project design	High
15	Parking Lot Improvements Phase 2 (maintenance shed)	\$130,000	Interpretive signs	High
16	Amphitheater (amphitheater, integrated interpretation, trail connections, picnic shelter near lake)	\$582,000	Interpretation informs project design	High
17	Pollinator Promenade Phase 1 (trail, picnic tables, ecosystem stop, plantings, natural surface trails)	\$654,000	Interpretation informs project design	Medium
18	Daylighted Stream*	\$540,000	Interpretation informs project design	Medium
			5-YEAR SUBTOTAL: \$5,822,000	

*Estimated cost will be refined after studies are complete

PRIORITY ORDER	DESCRIPTION	PROJECT COST	PORTION OF PROJECT COST DEDICATED TO INTERPRETATION	COMMUNITY SUPPORT
TEN-YEAR				
19	Natural Resources Phase 2: throughout park (assumes additional \$100,000 of external funding)	\$160,000	Interpretive signs	High
20	Entries and Wayfinding Phase 2 (enhanced planting at north and wayfinding)	\$215,000		High
21	Neighborhood Gateway (picnic shelter, wayfinding, bike loops, interpretation, trail to neighborhood, cascade water feature)	\$83,000	Interpretation informs project design	Low
22	Improved Water Access Phase 2 (paddle input, boat storage)	\$397,000		High
23	Thompson Park Center/Trailhead Plaza	\$260,000	Interpretation informs project design	High
24	Thompson Park Center: renovation for greater public access Phase 1*	\$524,000	Interpretation informs project design	High
25	Play Lawn Improvements (picnic shelter, outdoor classroom seating, screen, art-inspired storage unit for lawn games, improved lawn and plantings) and adjacent linear plaza	\$721,000	Interpretation informs project design	Medium
26	Sensory Garden (plantings, public art, and interpretation)	\$228,000	Interpretation informs project design	Medium
27	Ravine Overlook (overlook, picnic shelter, picnic tables, natural surface trail, interpretation)	\$141,000	Interpretation informs project design	Low
28	Ravine Bridge (bridge and natural surface trails)	\$196,000	Interpretation informs project design	Low
29	Thompson Park Center Exterior Gathering Phase 2 (food truck and vendor access)	\$4,000		Medium
30	Natural Resources Phase 3: Throughout park (assumes additional \$57,500 of external funding)	\$89,500	Interpretive signs	High
TEN-YEAR SUBTOTAL: \$3,018,500				
LONG-TERM				
31	Farmstead Interpretation (observation tower, picnic shelter, hammocking, interpretation, public art, accessible trails, and farmstead interpretative playground)	\$2,352,000	Interpretation informs project design	Medium
32	Linear Plaza Phase 3: from Butler to North Picnic Shelter	\$154,000		Low
33	Pollinator Promenade Phase 2 (additional plantings and public art)	\$423,000	Interpretation informs project design	Medium
34	Thompson Park Center: renovation for greater public access Phase 2*	\$3,900,000	Interpretation informs project design	High
35	Infill buffer planting between Pollinator Promenade and neighborhood	\$265,000		Low
36	Land bridge	\$5,200,000	Interpretation informs project design	Medium
37	Sound wall	\$1,300,000	Interpretation informs project design	Medium
LONG-TERM SUBTOTAL: \$13,594,000				

*Estimated cost will be refined after studies are complete

Table 7.1 Phasing

PHASE	TOTAL COST
Five-year Improvements	\$5,822,000
Ten-year improvements	\$3,018,500
Long-term Improvements	\$13,594,000
TOTAL IMPROVEMENTS	\$22,434,500

Table 7.2 Capital Improvement Costs

Parks Capital Improvement Budget

The five year Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) provides for acquisition, greenway and parks improvements, and planning. The 2018-2022 Parks Capital Improvement Budget totals \$20,882,823 providing for acquisition, greenway and park improvements, and planning for the entire County Parks and Open Space system. Approximately half of the CIP Budget is derived from the County, and half comes from outside sources, including grants from other agencies. Because Thompson Park is a County Park and is not part of the Regional System, the majority of funding for capital improvements within the park will likely be derived from the County.



2018 site tour

✓ Additional Studies

The master planning process identified a few areas where additional study is recommended to evaluate feasibility, cost, and phasing to ensure improvements best serve the needs of Thompson Park users. These include a Program and Space Study for Thompson Park Center and a Feasibility Study for the Daylighted Stream. Additional design and evaluation will also be needed for the Observation Tower recommended as part of the Farmstead Interpretation area. It is also recommended that Dakota County Staff continue to engage appropriate representatives of County and state agencies pertaining to the long-term investments in a sound wall and land bridge. Additional information about each of these areas is provided in the following pages.

Thompson Park Center

Thompson Park Center, located in the center of the park, houses both Dakota Lodge and Thompson Park Activity Center. In the master planning process, a number of building needs were identified to better serve informal park users, facility renters, and the seniors participating in educational, social, and recreational activities. The master planning process recommends in the five-year master plan the completion of a Space and Program Study to clarify the facility needs and identify recommendations for interior and exterior improvements. The study should address implementation and include a business plan. It is anticipated that the study would specifically explore how Thompson Park Center can better:



1. Provide public amenities to visitors such as restrooms, air conditioning, drinking water, seating, and shelter from weather.
2. Evaluate if the building can function as a warming house for winter activities or if a separate warming house structure is needed in the park.
3. Serve as a trailhead for the River to River Greenway users.
4. Offer orientation and information about park services and events.
5. Provide a reprieve from the normal hustle and bustle of the environment for guests with cognitive disabilities who need access to a quiet, calm space.
6. Offer year-round rental services of lawn games, watercraft, bicycles, adaptive equipment, snowshoes, and sleds to make visitor experiences more inclusive.
7. Provide a rental facility for public and private events that offers different size spaces, connections to the lake, and modern amenities.
8. Meet the needs of the Thompson Park Activity Center, through, for example, as additional space, circulation improvements between the entrance and the front desk, and connections to the outside.

Example image of orientation and information about park services



Daylighted stream example image

Daylighted Stream

A daylighted stream is proposed within the pollinator promenade in the ten-year master plan. The stream is envisioned to be a low-medium flow of water through a flowering prairie, weaving through a natural setting of rocks and boulders that creates pools in some areas where visitors can interact with the water. Beginning at Thompson Lake, the stream is intended to run the length of the pollinator promenade and outlet into the retention pond in the southern end of the park by means of a cascading water feature. The stream is intended to supplement, not replace, the existing stormwater pipe from Thompson Lake. The purposes of the daylighted stream are:

1. Create a sensory experience within Thompson Park where visitors can safely interact with water.
2. Peak the interest of greenway users, encouraging them to explore the park and all of its programming.
3. Activate the central and southern portions of the park by providing a new habitat and water feature for visitors to explore.
4. Create a new water source for wildlife. The pollinator stream will help to provide and support for plant and animal life within the pollinator promenade habitat, giving visitors more opportunity to observe and learn about nature in Thompson Park.

It is recommended in the five-year master plan that a feasibility study be conducted to assess whether and how a daylighted stream could be constructed in the pollinator promenade.



View of Thompson Lake at 120 feet



Potential view from proposed observation tower at 120 feet



Potential view from proposed observation tower at 120 feet

Observation Tower

An observation tower is proposed within the long-term master plan. The tower will be a signature feature for visitors, allowing them to enjoy the beautiful surroundings and views that Thompson Park’s unique topography and context have to offer. The purposes of the observation tower are:

1. Provide a unique destination to help activate the central area of the park and attract visitors to Thompson Park.
2. Give visitors a unique experience, allowing them to climb to varying heights to view the beauty of West St. Paul, South St. Paul, and the Mississippi River valley with the help of Thompson Park’s varying topography. At 100’-110’ feet tall, visitors will be able to view areas of downtown Minneapolis and Saint Paul, the Saint Paul Cathedral, Mississippi River, and Kaposia Park.
3. Provide a location for interpretation and programming.

The observation tower is recommended as part of the Farmstead Interpretation area. In the near term, a feasibility study for the tower is recommended to determine the design of the tower so that it can offer the views desired, incorporate interpretation, and provide a safe experience that can be used by visitors without staffing. If, based on additional study, the tower is feasible, the feature could be considered for implementation within the ten-year time frame.

Land Bridge

A land bridge across U.S. Highway 52 in the location of the current River to River Greenway bridge is recommended in the long-term master plan. The Land bridge is envisioned as a lid over the highway (50’-300’) that would support trail use and vegetation. A variation that also could be explored is to keep the current bridge in its current location and to build the new land bridge to the north, creating a loop trail between Thompson County Park and South St. Paul’s Kaposia Park. The purposes of the land bridge are:

1. Provide a more seamless park experience between Thompson County Park and Kaposia Park, effectively joining the two parks into one larger park that spans two communities.
2. Enhance the River to River Greenway’s eight-mile east-west non-motorized transportation corridor linking the park to the Mississippi River Greenway and the Minnesota River Greenway, with connections to downtown Minneapolis and Saint Paul.
3. Increase habitat connectivity.
4. Help curb air pollution and mitigate noise pollution in Kaposia and Thompson Parks, improving the visitor experience and the habitat value of both parks. Added vegetation on the bridge will sequester carbon.

Near-term actions to position the land-bridge for future implementation include:

- » Conduct a study to define the vision for the land bridge and assess

feasibility.

- » Coordinate with MnDOT regarding timing of future Highway 52 improvement projects.
- » Coordinate with MnDOT Office of Community Connections, which works with communities on highway lid projects.
- » Incorporate the land bridge concept into future adopted comprehensive, park, and trail plans for Dakota County, West St. Paul, and South St. Paul.

Sound Wall

A sound wall is recommended as part of the long-term master plan, however its timing would likely be related to the timing of future US Highway 52 improvements. Given the park's location directly adjacent to a busy state highway, implementation of a sound wall will provide a physical barrier that separates the two environments, as well as providing separation for nearby residential homes. The purposes of the sound wall are:

1. Provide a physical and visual barrier between the park and state highway, enhancing the experience for visitors within the park.
2. Block the noise of traffic from entering the park atmosphere, especially for visitors enjoying the natural surface trails along the east side of the park.
3. Help to physically define the boundaries of Thompson park.
4. Shield animals and wildlife away from the dangers of entering the highway from the natural park space, keeping the animals, vehicles, and individuals safe from potential collision.

Near-term actions to position the land-bridge for future implementation include:

- » Coordinate with MnDOT regarding timing of future US



Proposed sound wall example image

Highway 52 improvement projects.

- » Incorporate the sound wall into future adopted comprehensive, park, and trail plans for Dakota County, West St. Paul, and South St. Paul.

Regional Park Designation

Thompson County Park is one of only two components of Dakota County's Park System that is not part of the Regional Park System. At 58 acres, the park is smaller than the Metropolitan Council's Regional Park System regional park typical size of 200 to 500 acres. Thompson County Park is, however, located immediately adjacent to Kaposia Park (85 acres). Thompson is also connected via the River to River Greenway to Simon's Ravine Nature Park (1.2 acres) and Kaposia Landing Park (87 acres). In 2012, the Metropolitan Council looked at visitor origins at the three parks and found that over 80% of visitors were local visits and therefore the parks did not meet the 40% regional distribution visitation criteria for regional designation. Given planned improvements in Thompson Park, as well as recent investments in Kaposia Landing, future exploration should occur into whether the combined parks could be regionally designated. While in the past it was concluded that the parks did not serve a regional function, investments by Dakota County and South St. Paul will continue to change the features and amenities, thus changing the service areas of the parks.

Interpretive Plan

While this Master Plan includes an interpretive framework, preparing a full interpretive plan is recommended. The interpretive plan will inform design of park improvements and how to best fully integrate interpretation into all aspects of the visitor experience.



Natural Resources Stewardship - Working with Adjacent Landowners

Compared to the natural areas in other Dakota County regional parks, those of Thompson Park are significantly smaller. In other parks, the typical restoration phase is the acreage of all Thompson Park natural areas combined. Thus, at Thompson Park there are two options for restoration timing: 1) restore them all at once, and 2) phase implementation.

Option one would provide a tremendous boost to the ecological quality and diversity of the park. However, because it would involve the removal of many weedy trees, public reaction might be significantly negative. The second, phased approach is depicted in Figure 3-5 as follows:

Phase 1: Starting within the ecological core of the park, a significant effort can be undertaken to “anchor in the park” a diversity of quality habitats from shoreline to savanna to oak forest. This would establish significant habitat for plants, songbirds and pollinator species. Upon completion of the establishment of native plants within the Phase 1 area, efforts can move to the next phase. Before moving to the next phase of implementation, funds must be secured to maintain the first phase restoration. If adequate funding is not available to maintain any phase of work, restoration of the next phase should not proceed.

Phase 2: Phase 2 adds a concentric ring of habitat around the Phase 1 core and serves both to expand habitat and to create a protective buffer around the ecological core. Phase 2 efforts would ideally be done all at once, but budget constraints may require this, and all phases, to be broken into smaller projects.

Phase 3: This phase comprises an effort to restore the northern oak forest that has been degraded by oak wilt, buckthorn, garlic mustard, and other invasive species. It is a priority because of its proximity to the cultural area of the park. The oak savanna restoration included in this phase will create a habitat connection to the ecological core.

Phase 4: Here a mixed hardwood forest is planned to gradually replace the existing degraded woodland. To avoid rapid canopy opening, this will take many years by slowly creating small clearings of trees and planting appropriate hardwoods. Park managers may choose to begin the creation of these small clearings in tandem with Phase 1 in order to get a jump on this long process.

There are a number of private residences bordering the park that contain some habitat values. County staff will reach out to these land owners and explore opportunities to inform and protect quality natural resources both in and adjacent to the park.



Interpretation Implementation Plan

The interpretive plan section provides recommendations for enhancing the visitor experience and achieving goals for interpretation at Thompson County Park. In order to bridge the gap between the interpretive framework presented in this plan and interpretive features informing design, it is recommended that a full interpretative plan be completed for the park prior to implementing park improvements. It is envisioned that interpretation of the area and park history, natural resources, and cultural context inform the design of all park improvements. Successful and sustainable interpretation requires an ongoing process of planning, implementation, and evaluation. The County should evaluate its progress toward achieving its goals annually by identifying what actions were completed related to the interpretive recommendations in this plan and how much time and money were invested to complete the action.

Implementation Priority by Element Type

The priority for implementation of interpretive elements is based on park development by area or structure. For example, as Dakota County Parks develops the southern part of the park, the interpretive elements located there should also be developed. As an alternative approach, implementation could be staged to build support and increase visitorship before all development is realized. For example, developing the welcome plaza or lake loop interpretive elements would raise awareness of park amenities and opportunities and link the park to regional trails.

Guided Interpretation

Interpretive Programs are regularly scheduled activities such as classes, talks, tours, or workshops. These items should be scheduled as events occur, course agendas are made, or new course ideas are created according to proposed areas of the park that they utilize become built.

Self-Guided Interpretation

Mobile:

The mobile tours could be developed immediately to build support for the park and share its stories about cultural and natural history. The mobile elements (i.e., audio tours and augmented reality) are not linked to new physical structures, so they can be developed separately from physical park development.

Graphic Panels (Interactive Signs and Tactile Elements):

Graphic panels and associated other elements, such as tactiles, should be developed as the park area in which they are located is developed.

Audio Posts:

Audio Posts provide onsite interpretive and accessibility-related auditory experiences. These items should be developed as the park area where they are located is developed.

Integrated Interpretation

Integrated Landscape Elements promote a holistic park experience and provide surprises in the landscape that support interpretive messaging. Integrated elements, such as view frames, should be implemented as the location or locations that suit them best is developed.

Cultural Resources Stewardship

Cultural resources identified in Thompson County Park include an archaeological site designated Simon's Ravine I which consisted of a lithic scatter near the southeast corner of the park. Simon's Ravine is named for John and Anna Simon, early EuroAmerican settlers who in 1878 acquired the property that later became Kaposia Park. No architectural history properties have been identified, and no traditional cultural properties have been formally recorded within the park.

The histories and stories of the land where the Park sits are also important components of its culture and history. Stewardship of the Park's cultural resources, including those that have not yet been identified, should include compliance with federal and state laws regarding management of cultural resources (see Legislative Requirements, Appendix B), as well as adherence to the recommendations regarding cultural resources outlined below. Stewardship of the Park's histories and stories will involve preserving and expressing these "hidden" histories through interpretation.

Ground-Disturbing Activities within Thompson County Park

If any ground-disturbing activities are planned within an area of the Park, the potential of that area to contain archaeological resources should be assessed. Portions of that Park that have been previously disturbed or previously subjected to archaeological survey may be assessed as possessing low potential to contain archaeological resources. If any area is identified as possessing medium or high potential for unrecorded archaeological resources, plans for the proposed activity should be submitted to the OSA and SHPO for review. Consultation with OSA and SHPO may result in a recommendation for archaeological reconnaissance survey in advance of ground-disturbance. Appropriate survey methodology for areas characterized by medium to high potential to contain archaeological resources may include pedestrian survey and sampling of landforms via ground probes and shovel testing. Areas characterized by high potential to contain archaeological resources may warrant intensified survey including closer-interval shovel testing.

A desktop analysis did not reveal the presence of any unidentified architectural history properties on Park-owned land within the Thompson County Park boundaries. However, if any unrecorded cultural resources, including architectural history properties, are identified in the course of reconnaissance survey, they should be documented and evaluated by a qualified professional for potential eligibility for listing in the NRHP.

If any cultural resources are found to be potentially eligible for listing in the NRHP, the OSA and/or SHPO should be consulted regarding appropriate next steps regarding the cultural resource.



Park event ad example image



Stormwater BMP example image

Public Awareness, Outreach, and Marketing

Dakota County publicizes its park system through a semi-annual County newsletter that is mailed to every household in the county, the County's website, a listserv with more than 3,500 subscribers, a Facebook page with over 7,000 likes, limited advertising for fee-based rentals, and news releases. Research conducted for the 2008 Park System Plan found that many County residents were unaware of the park system and its services. In response, Dakota County Communications developed a marketing strategy and brand for parks to raise awareness and recognition of the system. The "Forever Wild" brand distinguishes Dakota County's parks as a unique system. Dakota County prepares an internal parks communications plan each year to ensure that the public has access to timely updates on parks-related topics and major events. In 2019, Dakota County Parks established a Parks Outreach Coordinator position to focus on building relationship and community outreach. Additionally, in 2019, Dakota County will be developing a comprehensive Parks Awareness and Promotion Plan with the goals of building awareness of the park system services and increasing use. Implementation of the Plan will begin in 2020.

Because Thompson County Park is in one of most racially and ethnically diverse areas of the County, in-person outreach, word of mouth, and advertisement in Spanish will continue to be important to making residents aware of park events and amenities.

Public Services, Utilities, and Impacts

The following public services exist at the park and may be expanded during future development to serve park users and facilities.

Water

Water is currently available at Thompson Park Center and the North Picnic Shelter. Extension of water into the southern portion of the park would enable the installation of drinking fountains to better serve park and River to River Greenway visitors.

Stormwater

Stormwater management ponds placed in the parking lot near Dakota Lodge and on the open play lawn help to address stormwater runoff, water quality, and groundwater recharge within the park.

Maintaining healthy ecological buffers around the park to help slow stormwater runoff, control erosion, capture micro-nutrients, and infiltrate surface water before it reaches the park's water bodies. Implementation of a healthy shoreline buffer around Thomspson lake will add to the current forebay efforts to keep pollutants from the local watershed from contaminating the lake environment.

It is important to continue to cooperate with cities and the watershed district to address stormwater before it enters the park.

Sustainability, Solid Waste Management, and Energy

Dakota County has increased the sustainability of its operations, facilities, and services.

Design of Visitor Facilities, Trails, and Transportation

Design of Thompson Park Center improvements should consider similar elements to other County facilities, such as the Lebanon Hills Visitors Center which includes energy conservation features, a green roof that reduces stormwater runoff, and recycled materials in building finishes and structural elements.

Given its urban location, it is anticipated that visitors will arrive by foot, bicycle, and car. The park is located on the River to River Greenway Trail and improvements proposed will strengthen visitors association of the park with the greenway.

Waste Management

Dakota County's 2012 Solid Waste Master Plan seeks to increase recycling and diversion of organic waste from landfills. The County provides labeled recycling containers in all of its parks and promotes "green events" with compostable materials and service ware to reduce waste. The master plan proposes a new compost drop-off facility be located in the parking lot for easy use. Dakota County also uses recycled tear-off shingles in hot-mix asphalt for trail paving projects. In securing waste hauling services for its own facilities, Dakota County has developed and used resource management contracts to promote handling waste at higher levels of the waste management hierarchy.

Energy

Dakota County's 2009 Energy Management Plan adopted the following principles for its own operations:

1. Reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions from buildings through design, construction, operations, and user habits.
2. Reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions in transportation through transportation fuel alternatives, fleet-related business practices, and transportation system design and use.
3. Manage waste, land, and water to conserve energy and sequester carbon.
4. Increase renewable energy use to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reliance on fossil fuels.
5. Inform, advocate, and anticipate the future with others to collectively conserve energy, transition to renewable resources, and sequester carbon.



Compost station example image



Dual-function toilet handles example image



Park Ordinances

Dakota County Ordinance Number 107, the Park Ordinance, controls the public use and enjoyment of the County park system. The ordinance was last revised on June 3, 1997, and incorporates pertinent Minnesota statutes. It addresses the following issues:

- » Regulation of Public Use
- » Regulation of General Conduct
- » Regulations Pertaining to General Parkland Operation
- » Protection of Property, Structures, and Natural Resources
- » Regulation of Recreational Activity
- » Regulation of Motorized Vehicles, Traffic, and Parking



Park Access

Located in a densely populated portion of the county, most visitors arrive at Thompson County Park via private automobile. There is an opportunity to increase access to the park via transit, walking, and biking travel modes. Master Plan recommendations support this by strengthening the connection between the River to River Greenway and the park, improving entrances from the surrounding neighborhood, and recommending pedestrian and bicycle facilities along Butler Avenue.

Transit or shuttle access to Thompson County Park would be particularly beneficial for neighboring residents and seniors at the Thompson Activity Center. While there is a circulator in West St. Paul, service is limited and there currently is not a stop at Thompson Park. The County should continue to explore options for a stop to be added or for new partnerships with local organizations to provide shuttle services to the park on weekends. This would be especially beneficial on weekends where park special events such as Take a Kid Fishing occur.



Parking

It is anticipated that many users, particularly for events and private rentals, will continue to travel to the park by private vehicle. The Master Plan recommends expanding the parking lot near Dakota Lodge by 25 spaces to meet additional parking demand that will be generated by park improvements, as well as to address the desire for additional spaces close to Thompson Park. Informed by design development for parking needs and improvements, the existing lot will be reconfigured to address concerns regarding circulation. It is anticipated that peak times for new park uses, such as the amphitheater, will likely occur during the evenings and weekends when Thompson Park Activity Center is closed. In these cases, awareness of parking capacity and the scheduling of multiple simultaneous events at Thompson Park Center and the Amphitheater will be important.

For some events it may be appropriate to employ remote parking strategies by using nearby parking lots at Kaposia Park, St. Croix Lutheran, or Signal Hills Shopping Center. Enhanced wayfinding for events like runs or walks where the nearby parking lots are used may be sufficient to direct most participants. Events with an attendee mix with a broader range of abilities or events requiring more parking than nearby lots can accommodate may require the use of a shuttle service. Use of remote parking could be a strategy that is also explored in regards to private rentals.



Visitor Services

Visitor services envisioned for Thompson County Park are foundationally rooted in the goals of the Dakota County 2017 Visitor Services Plan which are summarized in the Introduction Chapter of the Master Plan.

- » Promote the park to increase visitation and utilization of reservation facilities
- » Enhance outreach to all communities, including multicultural outreach
- » Improve program cultural fluency to draw visitors from diverse backgrounds
- » Introduce limited outdoor education programming
- » Introduce a multi-cultural event and seek partnerships with other community organizations to hold events at Thompson County Park
- » Improve the facility rental process and increase facility use
- » Expand volunteer opportunities (adopt a park, stewardship, events)

Outdoor Education

Outdoor education helps visitors interpret the natural sciences and history underlying their park experiences and plays an important role in building awareness of and appreciation for the natural world. Education on outdoor recreation builds self-confidences in one's skills and abilities and introduces new visitors to a park. Future outdoor education at Thompson County Park can include environmental education programs, outdoor education programs, and cultural education programs.

Events

Events can temporarily activate a park, transforming it into a unique community. The benefits of events include welcoming new visitors to parks, enhancing the sense of community value as a good place to live, and raising awareness of parks, natural places, culture, and recreation.

Facility Rentals

Rental facilities, including picnic shelters and the Dakota Lodge, provide a natural setting for family and group events, support an extended visit in a natural setting, and can introduce new visitors to parks.

Equipment Rentals

Offering rental equipment for visitors can introduce them to new ways to enjoy the outdoors with a chance to "try it without buying it" and can also support a spontaneous decision to try an activity while in the park. Equipment rental envisioned for Thompson County park includes bicycles, water craft, lawn games, snowshoes, sleds, and fishing equipment.

Volunteerism

Volunteerism engages people who want to support their parks with meaningful work and can help build a shared sense of community centered on parks. Volunteerism also can help introduce new people to the park system, and important work is accomplished though engaging dedicated volunteers.



Outdoor educational programs



Business and Operations Analysis

The Business and Operations Analysis estimates the staffing requirements and annual operational costs required to operate the park in the future as improvements envisioned in this Master Plan are completed. It is intended to increase Dakota County's understanding of the costs associated with maintaining park assets recommended in the Master Plan to provide the highest level of experiences for park visitors.

Thompson Park is currently managed and maintained by Dakota County by utilizing a combination of Dakota County Staff and third party contractors. For the purposes of this analysis, operations are organized into six categories:

1. Visitor Services: activities associated with picnic shelter and Dakota Lodge reservations, events, and programs.
2. Partnerships: the current partnership agreement with the City of West St. Paul for the operation of Thompson Park Center.
3. Ground Maintenance: general maintenance of all grounds (for example, mowing and snow removal) and outdoor facilities such as the fishing pier, playground, picnic shelter, and trails.
4. Building Maintenance: maintenance of Thompson Park Center.
5. Natural Resources Management: management of all natural areas in the park and Thompson Lake.
6. Law enforcement: patrol of the park to ensure visitor safety.

In keeping with the phasing presented in the Master Plan, it is expected that capital improvements will be completed in two phases: within five years and within ten years. To align with near-term funding allocated to Thompson County Park in the Dakota County Capital Improvement Program (CIP), improvements within the first five years have further been prioritized into Phase 1A (within the first three years and noted as high priority five years on the capital cost estimate on page 116) and Phase 1B (completed within five years, as noted on page 117). All staff and financial projections are for a 'typical year' after capital improvements within the phase are completed and are being operated.

Business and Operations Analysis Assumptions

In order to estimate additional costs (including staff costs) and revenues associated with the improvements recommended in the master plan and estimated staffing needs, a financial model was developed. The model is based on the following assumptions.

Phase 1A

- » All capital improvements operational within the five-year plan and noted as high priority (page 105)
- » A 15% increase in reservations of the north picnic shelter with the following occupancy rates (April - October): 50% occupancy Friday–Sunday and 10% occupancy Monday–Thursday
- » A 10% increase in reservation of space at Dakota Lodge including meetings and events due to increased marketing and outreach efforts.
- » Continued oversight of the partnership agreement development and oversight for Outdoor Education and utilization of Dakota Lodge

Phase 1B

- » All capital improvements complete within the five-year plan (page 105)
- » Increase of 100% in picnic shelters reservations over Phase 1A levels due to the addition of a second shelter with the following occupancy rates: 50% occupancy Friday–Sunday and 10% occupancy Monday–Thursday
- » Increase of 15% in reservation of space at Dakota Lodge over Phase 1A levels including meetings and events due to increased marketing and outreach efforts
- » Six events centering around the completion of the amphitheater to be held annually at Thompson Park

Phase 2

- » All capital improvements complete within the ten-year plan (page 106)
- » Increase of 10% in reservations of the shelter over Phase 1B levels with the following occupancy rates: 60% occupancy Friday–Sunday and 20% occupancy Monday–Thursday.
- » Dakota Lodge improvements would result in the following potential level of service expansion:
 - *Year-round weekend public access to Dakota Lodge, Friday–Sunday: 9am–5pm*
 - *Weekday public access provided through partnerships and volunteers, offering general public access for park information, trailhead and visitor center functions, wayfinding, and general hospitality and comfort*
- » Increase of 10% in reservation of space at Dakota Lodge including meetings and events
- » Equipment rental including but not limited to watercraft and snowshoes
- » Sponsorship and donation revenue of \$25,000 annually

Staffing

As Thompson County Park is improved, additional staffing will be needed to maintain the park’s buildings and grounds in alignment with current maintenance standards and to offer visitor services goals outlined in the County Wide Visitor Services Plan. To operate the park, staff will be needed to:

- » Maintain the park grounds and buildings. This effort will ensure a high-quality and consistent experience for visitors to Thompson Park. It is assumed that grounds and building maintenance will be performed by Dakota County Parks staff.
- » Oversee the maintenance work and programs and services performed by third party contractors. It is assumed that third-party contractors will provide support for natural resources and lake management.
- » Manage the increase in reservations of shelters and the Lodge and the facilitation of meetings, events and programs. Within Phase 2, it is assumed that visitor services will be expanded at Dakota Lodge to allow for weekend public use of the facility.
- » Advance the Visitor Services Plan goals for Outreach and Outdoor Education through community outreach, programming and events.
- » Increase law enforcement as park use increases to ensure visitor safety.

Volunteers will support natural resource and grounds maintenance on a project by project basis.

As shown in the table below, additional staff will be needed for operation of the improvements in each phase. It is estimated that the following staffing increases will be needed:

- » Phase 1A: An increase of .22 Full Time Employee (FTE) over 2019 FTE levels will be required for the operation of the park to support increases in rentals, reservations, and programs.
- » Phase 1B: An increase of 7.1 FTE over Phase 1A FTE levels will be required for the operation of the park to support additional increase in rentals, reservations, and programs, additional grounds maintenance required with new park improvements, and additional law enforcement as a result of increased park use.
- » Phase 2: An increase of 1.22 FTE over Phase 1B FTE levels will be required for the operation of the park to support increases in rentals, reservations, and programs and additional grounds maintenance required with new park improvements.
- » Post improvement competition: An additional 2.15 FTE over 2019 FTE levels will be required to operate the park.

Function	Current FTE	FTE Estimate Phase 1A (1-3 years)	FTE Estimate Phase 1B (3-5 years)	FTE Estimate Phase 2 (6-10 years)	Net Increase Over Current FTE Levels
Visitor Services	0.78	1.0	1.25	1.97	1.19
WSP Partnership	0.00	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Building Maintenance	0.10	0.10	0.25	0.5	0.4
Grounds Maintenance	2.00	2.00	2.25	2.5	0.5
Natural Resource Management	0.76	0.76	0.76	0.76	0.00
Law Enforcement	0.19	0.19	0.25	0.25	0.06
TOTAL	3.83	4.05	4.76	5.98	2.15

Table 7.3 Operations and Maintenance Summary

Financial Analysis

Table 7.4 summarizes a “typical year” of each of the operational phases following the implementation of the Thompson Park Master Plan based on the operational and staffing assumptions outlined above.

Note that pricing is assumed to remain consistent with the current adopted fee schedule, current operating costs are based on 2018 dollars, and operating inputs are based on 2019 dollars and do not assume any inflationary growth. In addition, costs associated with all staff increases are included within the analysis.

Phase 1A

With an increase in reservation and rental income, the overall cost recovery (35%) of Thompson Park Phase 1A is expected to be slightly more than the current cost recovery rate of 29%.

Table 7.4 summarizes the revenue and expenditures for a typical year following the completion of Phase 1A improvements.

- » Revenues for a typical year upon completion of Phase 1A are projected to have an annual increase of 37% over current annual revenue levels due to an increase in reservations for Dakota Lodge and the North Picnic Shelter.
- » Expenditures for a typical year upon completion of Phase 1A are projected to increase by 2% annually over current annual expenditure levels due in large part to a \$12,000 increase in natural resource management costs and \$9,000 in Visitor Services expenditures.
- » Overall operations of Thompson Park after the completion of Phase 1A are projected to require an annual subsidy of (\$273,462.00) a 7% increase over the current annual subsidy level of (\$268,857.00).

Phase 1B

Due to an increase in revenue producing facilities (second picnic shelter, amphitheater), it is anticipated that the overall cost recovery estimate for Thompson Park after completion of the Phase 1B improvements will remain the same as Phase 1A (35%).

Table 7.4 summarizes the revenue and expenditures for a typical year following the completion of Phase 1B improvements.

- » Revenues over the three-year operational period upon completion of Phase 1B are projected to have an annual increase of 14% over Phase 1A revenue levels.
- » Expenditures over the three-year operational period upon completion of Phase 1B are projected to have an annual increase of 13% over Phase 1A expenditure levels due in large part to a \$35,000 increase in grounds maintenance costs.
- » Overall operations of Thompson Park after the completion of Phase 1B are projected to require an annual subsidy of \$309,300; **a 13% increase over the Phase 1A annual subsidy level and a 15% increase over the current annual subsidy level.**

Phase 2

Due to the projected increase in utilization of the park and Dakota Lodge and an increase in visitor services and programs (e.g., equipment rental), it is anticipated that the overall cost recovery goal for Thompson Park after completion of the Phase 2 improvements will reach 42%, a 7% increase over Phase 1B and a 13% increase over the current cost recovery level.

Table 7.4 summarizes the revenue and expenditures for a typical year following the completion of Phase 2 improvements.

Pro Forma Revenues and Expenditures				
	Current	Phase 1A	Phase 1B	Phase 2
Revenues				
Visitors Services	\$94,932.00	\$13,500.00	\$151,000.00	\$186,450.00
City of West Saint Paul	\$135,000.00	\$13,500.00	\$13,500.00	\$13,500.00
Donations and Sponsorships	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$5,000.00	\$25,000.00
Total	\$108,432.00	\$148,500.00	\$169,500.00	\$224,950.00
Expenditures				
Visitor Services	\$37,089.00	\$46,000.00	\$53,000.00	\$80,000.00
City of West Saint Paul	\$4,500.00	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00
Building Maintenance	\$68,167.00	\$69,000.00	\$80,000.00	\$97,500.00
Grounds Maintenance	\$178,885.00	\$199,616.00	\$235,000.00	\$259,000.00
Natural Resource Management	\$68,648.00	\$80,346.00	\$83,800.00	\$70,000.00
Law Enforcement	\$20,000.00	\$22,000.00	\$22,000.00	\$24,000.00
Total	\$377,289.00	\$421,962.00	\$478,800.00	\$535,500.00
Net Subsidy	(\$268,857.00)	(\$273,462.00)	(\$309,300.00)	(\$310,550.00)
Total Cost Recovery	29%	35%	35%	42%

- » Revenues over the five-year operational period upon completion of Phase 2 are projected to have an annual increase of approximately 33% over Phase 1B revenue levels.
- » Expenditures over the five-year operational period upon completion of Phase 2 are projected to have an annual increase of 12% over Phase 1B expenditure levels.
- » It is anticipated that costs associated with Natural Resource Management will decrease after all restored areas are fully established.
- » Overall operations of Thompson Park after the completion of Phase 2 are projected to require an annual subsidy of \$310,550; this is in-line with the Phase 1 subsidy level and a 16% increase over the current annual subsidy level.

Table 7.4 Pro Forma Revenues and Expenditures



JANUARY 2020

**THOMPSON COUNTY PARK
MASTERPLAN**

