

Executive Summary

Prepared for:

The City of Minneapolis

Prepared by:

The Smitten Group

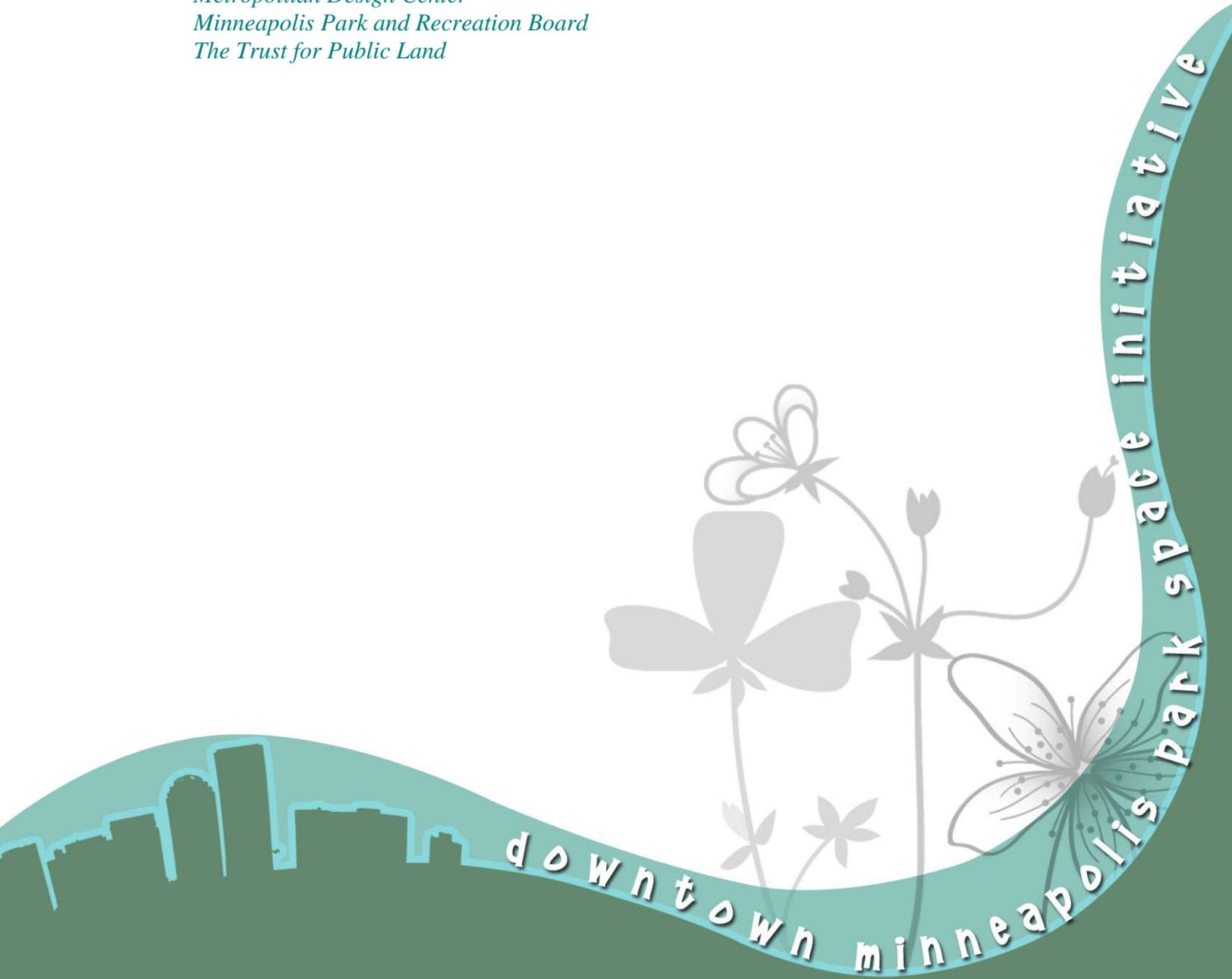
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Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

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Almost every major successful city in America has a downtown signature park that serves as a central public gathering place, a point of local pride, and a reflection of the city's public heart. The City of Minneapolis has a variety of downtown park spaces that serve its residents, visitors, and workforce and relate to a downtown park space network. However, the City recognizes the importance of better understanding how these downtown open spaces and future parks can better succeed and be financially viable. Through funding from The McKnight Foundation, the City is providing the following report which seeks to outline the general framework and analyze central variables for public and private entities that inform downtown park spaces decisions. Report deliverables fall into the three categories of Existing Conditions, Best Practices, and New Methodology and Local Application.

Existing Conditions

Inventory of Existing Spaces

An inventory of existing park spaces in downtown Minneapolis identified 58 locations where private or public open spaces are accessible to the public. These spaces were photographed and described. This inventory also offers a qualitative analysis of the spaces for size, ownership, type, maintenance level, and additional features such as tables or kiosks. The results are illustrated in a map and summarized in a spreadsheet.

Assessment of Related Downtown Conditions

A series of maps help illustrate the pre-existing transit and park, demographic, and economic conditions that inform any discussion about a future downtown park. The Existing Open Space System map outlines the locations of transit paths and parks. Two maps illustrate the density of residents and workers. Three

additional maps identify underutilized land as indicated by surface parking or vacant land, ratio of land value to building value, and estimated market value.

Best Practices

Successful Downtown Park Characteristics

To better inform the discussion of what a successful park might have, four case studies of successful downtown parks were reviewed. Portland's Pioneer Courthouse Square, Boston's Post Office Square, New York City's Bryant Park, and Detroit's Campus Martius Park offer examples of characteristics that Minneapolis might desire in a signature park as well as in existing Downtown open spaces. Successful park features can be categorized into areas such as Entertainment and Arts; Rest and Relaxation; Art and History; Education; Recreation; Attractive Logistics; Transportation; Seasonal and Evening Offerings; and Whimsy.

Funding Methods, Management Structures, and Costs Scenarios

Should the city of Minneapolis decide to create a new downtown park, a series of different approaches exist for funding the creation and maintenance of such a park. In addition, there are multiple models for managing the park. A report was prepared describing the expected costs, and potential funding sources of creating a signature park, as well as management costs and structure options.

New Methodology and Local Application

Establishment and Application of Site Selection Criteria

In order to objectively assess over 200 blocks in downtown for their appropriateness for park land, ten different criteria were defined. These blocks were then evaluated for nearby worker and resident densities; land boundaries and size; location relative to other parks; mix of adjacent

uses; proximity of supportive uses; pedestrian, transit and open space connectivity; visibility; microclimate; nearby architectural quality; appealing sight lines; and property values. This selection process identified three downtown blocks that are appropriate for further study.

Analysis of Economic Feasibility

To better discuss the economic impact of a new downtown park, a model was developed that would mimic the effect that a new park would have on tax revenues. While the conversion of any commercial or residential property into park land would mean the loss of tax revenue from that specific property, the resulting increase in property values and potential leasing rates for nearby parcels would likely compensate for that loss.