

7. Open Space & Parks

Minneapolis will cooperate with other jurisdictions, public agencies, and the private sector to provide open space, green space, and recreational facilities to meet the short and long-term needs of the community and enhance the quality of life for city residents.



The plaza at the Hennepin County Government Center in downtown Minneapolis (left), and Peavey Plaza (above), jointly owned by the City and the Minnesota Orchestra, are popular gathering spots. Their water features, benches and trees are attractive venues for concerts or lunch with friends. Peavey Plaza Photographed by PD Larsen

Minneapolis is known throughout the country as a city with a high quality of life. One of the reasons for this is the abundance of open spaces and parks. Minneapolis has sparkling lakes, a dynamic riverfront, quiet creeks and gushing waterfalls all linked by the [Grand Rounds National Scenic Byway](#). In addition, a multitude of neighborhood parks provide important gathering and recreation space. Several parks and trails in Minneapolis are also part of the premier Regional Parks System. Envisioned 125 years ago, the [Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board](#) (MPRB) managed park system delights Minneapolis' residents and visitors.

Minneapolis residents also benefit from the presence of other open spaces such as school facilities, greenways, gardens, and plazas. Open spaces and parks make up a collection of formal and informal landscapes used in numerous ways by a diversity of residents.

This chapter addresses the full spectrum of open spaces and parks found in Minneapolis and ones that could be created in the future to enhance the quality of

life of its residents. As the city continues to grow, it must support the parks system while enhancing other open spaces and public gathering spots in order to:

- Enhance the health of its citizens
- Provide opportunities for education
- Ensure access to recreational opportunities for a wide range of residents
- Preserve and enhance ecological functions
- Preserve historic resources and feature public art
- Strengthen the beauty and quality of the city's built form
- Support economic development and tourism, and
- Serve as catalysts for unique partnerships that improve the city.

Parks and Recreation Governance

The governance of the parks and recreational areas in Minneapolis is unlike most other municipalities in the United States. The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board is legally separate from the City. The MPRB has nine elected officials (Board of Commissioners), who serve four-year terms. It is the Board, rather than the City, which is responsible for maintaining and developing the Minneapolis park system and planting and maintaining boulevard trees. The Mayor recommends the tax levies and budget for the Park Board, and the City Council and Mayor approve the allocations of local government aid from the state for Park Board operations. The budget considers funding for ongoing operations and maintenance and the development of new park amenities.

Over the years, the Minneapolis park system has grown from a few city parks to a large, nationally recognized park system of more than 6,400 acres of land and water, including over 182 park properties throughout the city and 49 year-round staffed recreation centers (see Map 7.2 Existing regional parks and trails).

The MPRB serves the nearly 400,000 Minneapolis residents, offering recreational, environmental and other park programs and services for all ages. The Minneapolis park system also serves as a regional resource with seven parks and three trails also being part of the Regional Parks System (see Map 7.2 Existing regional parks and trails and Map 7.3 Planned regional park expansions from Park Board).

This chapter strives to set goals and objectives that allow the City of Minneapolis and the MPRB to work both collaboratively and independently to protect, enhance, and create a variety of open spaces and recreational opportunities for the citizens of

Minneapolis. This chapter also guides other potential future partnerships and supports the development of open spaces such as plazas and gardens by a variety of groups.



The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board manages the park system, recreation programming, and cares for street trees in Minneapolis.

This chapter first outlines visions and goals created by the MPRB through its comprehensive plan process. The [MPRB Comprehensive Plan](#) defines a vision for the park system which is alert to the needs of the community and integral to a thriving city. Key elements of the plan are summarized below.

Additionally, this chapter presents policies created by the City of Minneapolis within its larger comprehensive plan update process. These policies are intended to support and expand upon the MPRB vision and goals to ensure that all open spaces are valued and seen as a unique set of spaces that greatly enhance our city and quality of life. These policies are presented in the “Additional Open Spaces” section of the chapter.

The MPRB Comprehensive Plan

The MPRB Comprehensive Plan outlines several issues that currently affect the park and recreation system and present both challenges and opportunities in the future. These include:

- The Built City: Unlike the late 1800s when the park system was created, Minneapolis is now a fully developed urban city. Most new development

occurs on previously developed land. Few parcels remain that are suitable for parkland, and land costs are high. At the same time, demand on the parks is expected to grow.

- **Demographic Shifts:** Changes in the city's population include a higher percentage of individuals living alone; fewer households with children; and broader racial and ethnic diversity. This changes the nature of the demand for parks and recreation facilities.
- **Environmental Pressures:** Due to invasive species, tree disease, and pollution, the management of natural areas, trees, and water bodies requires a new level of investment of both time and finances.
- **Regional Connections and Pressures:** The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board is one of ten implementing agencies that provide regional parks for the 3.1 million people that live in the metropolitan area. The Minneapolis park system receives the highest number of regional park visits per year. As regional development and growth continues, the demand on the Minneapolis park system's regional parks and trails is expected to grow. Additionally, several watersheds and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area span across the Minneapolis Parks System.
- **Signs of the Times:** Local, state, national, and world events shape the perceptions and needs of city residents and park visitors. Key factors include: emergency preparedness, rising operational and material costs; environmental changes, and an increase in the appeal of public and private partnerships.
- **Heritage and Historic Preservation:** As the park system ages, its features gain historic importance. This provides opportunities for greater historic interpretation and programming, but can also mean increased costs. Historic preservation will need to be considered in the early stages of planning alterations to park facilities.
- **New Recreation Trends:** Recreation is shaped by a number of factors such as demographics and the introduction of new activities. This presents new needs and preferences.

The MPRB Comprehensive Plan outlines a vision statement and four vision themes that will guide future development, operations, and maintenance of the Minneapolis park system to 2020:

- Urban forests, natural areas, and waters that endure and captivate
- Recreation that inspires personal growth, healthy lifestyles, and a sense of community

- Dynamic parks that shape city character and meet diverse community needs
- A safe place to play, celebrate, contemplate, and recreate

Each of these themes is supported by a series of goals and strategies. While all of the goals and strategies are key to maintaining and improving parks and recreation, the MPRB comprehensive plan theme of “Dynamic parks that shape the city character and meet diverse community needs” speaks most directly to future park needs.

Strategies for creating future parks include:

- Continuing to expand physical access to the Mississippi River in a manner that is aesthetically compatible with the riverfront and sensitive to the environment, giving priority to implementing the [Above the Falls Master Plan](#).
- Providing a well-maintained, safe, and continuous trail system, giving priority to completing the “missing link” of the Grand Rounds Parkway, and providing trail connection in northeast Minneapolis.
- Balancing the distribution of premier park and recreation features across the city, giving priority to adding features to north and northeast Minneapolis.
- Developing and/or implementing park plans to acquire parkland and build amenities in current or projected growth areas of the city: Bassett Creek Valley, Hiawatha LRT Corridor, Downtown, Southeast Minneapolis Industrial, Midtown Greenway Corridor, Upper River, Northeast Industrial, North Loop, and Central Riverfront.
- Ensuring easy park access for all residents by providing parks within an easy walk from their homes (no more than six blocks) and achieving a ratio of .01 acres of parkland per household.
- Working with the City of Minneapolis and other entities to identify and support multi-mode transportation corridors between parks, with preference given to routes that encourage non-motorized linkages between parks.

Additional Open Spaces

Well designed, accessible open spaces provide health benefits by offering amenities for exercise and peaceful areas to enjoy. They can provide environmental benefits by supporting plant and animal life and by improving natural systems degraded by urban land uses. Open spaces can educate by revealing history or providing a

window into understanding the natural environment. Open spaces also offer areas for human interaction, food production, and an element of beauty in our daily lives.

The city contains numerous open spaces which are not official parks or recreation areas, yet are important elements in the built environment. For example, the city has



Opportunities exist to exist to add and enhance open spaces throughout the city.

approximately 60 community gardens which

are a focal point for neighborhoods and community food systems. Locally grown and distributed food is an important to human and ecological health. Other examples include the Midtown Greenway; plazas; pocket parks; cultural and historic landscapes such as cemeteries; as well as corporate and college campuses and school spaces.

Providing new types of outdoor amenities will allow the city to continue to transform into a sustainable and functional environment. The development and design of new open spaces should respond to the changing demographics and an ever-changing built environment. Future possibilities exist to give the city the equivalent of a central square; provide green infrastructure such as green roofs, bioswales, and rain gardens; develop high quality open space as part of new developments; and to better preserve the city's existing open spaces.

Safety, Community Health, and Recreation

When people feel safe and can pursue healthy activities such as recreation and relaxation, there are direct benefits to the overall health of the population. Improving and expanding open space can provide opportunities for exercise, recreation, socializing, relaxation, and production of locally grown foods.

Policy 7.1: Promote the physical and mental health of residents and visitors by recognizing that safe outdoor amenities and spaces support exercise, play, relaxation and socializing.

7.1.1 Ensure that adjacent land uses contribute to the safety and ambiance of parks and open spaces.

- 7.1.2 Ensure safety in open spaces by encouraging Crime Prevention through Environmental Design strategies.
- 7.1.3 Provide safe pedestrian and bike routes to open spaces and parks.
- 7.1.4 Ensure open spaces provide peaceful, meditative, and relaxing areas as well as social, recreational, and exercise opportunities.



Community gardens contribute to community sustainability and community health by providing locally-grown foods to residents and a pleasant form of activity and recreation. They are also a form of open space.

- 7.1.5 Provide equipment, programming, and other resources when possible that promote the physical and mental health of citizens.
- 7.1.6 Support the creation and improvement of community gardens and food markets which sell locally and regionally grown foods.
- 7.1.7 Where appropriate, support the planting of edible fruit and vegetable plants.
- 7.1.8 Encourage the development of open spaces that provide amenities for year round use.

Education

The benefits of open spaces and parks can not be realized if people are unaware of all of the opportunities that exist to use and enjoy these spaces. Open spaces and parks allow residents to learn more about their natural environment, the benefits open space, and what can be done to both enjoy and protect these resources.

Policy 7.2: Provide residents and visitors information about recreational locations, events, programs and educational opportunities.

- 7.2.1 Coordinate with other agencies to help promote educational and recreational events and programs being held in open spaces and parks.
- 7.2.2 Educate residents, developers, businesses, and visitors about the variety of open spaces and the benefits they provide.
- 7.2.3 Promote educational events for residents, businesses, and developers which include opportunities to learn how they can protect and enhance the Minneapolis' natural environment.
- 7.2.4 Provide opportunities for people to learn about the natural environment, geography, history, design and other elements found in open spaces through a variety of interpretive tools.
- 7.2.5 Evaluate the needs of users in order to provide effective signage, kiosks, and other way-finding tools to make people aware of open spaces.

Equity and Equal Access



Clear signage and lighting make open spaces more accessible

Access to resources can be affected by the number, location, size, and quality of facilities, the level of comfort and the ease of traveling to a place, and an individual's physical ability.

Improving access to open spaces and parks for underserved areas and populations is an important priority for the city. In addition, existing facilities must be preserved and enhanced so they are available for future generations.

Policy 7.3: Maintain and improve the accessibility of open spaces and parks to all residents.

- 7.3.1 Ensure that access to the city's lakes, streams and the Mississippi River continues to be maintained for the benefit of present and future citizens of Minneapolis.
- 7.3.2 Encourage the development of a broad array of recreation facilities and opportunities in response to a diverse range of resident interests.
- 7.3.3 Support the development of additional publicly accessed open spaces in underserved areas.
- 7.3.4 Encourage the equitable spatial distribution of community gardens and food markets to provide all Minneapolis communities with access to healthy, locally grown food.
- 7.3.5 Promote designs that ensure access to open space for people with a range of abilities.
- 7.3.6 Ensure that in all areas of the city people feel safe so that they are comfortable using parks and open spaces.

Ecology

Open space can maintain and improve the natural environment. In an urban environment such as Minneapolis, it is important to improve ecological functions of the natural environment.

Policy 7.4: Work to restore and preserve ecosystem functions in green open space areas.

- 7.4.1 Consider the impacts of open space on connectivity and habitat fragmentation when acquiring, altering, or disposing of land.
- 7.4.2 Support the acquisition and retention of land which performs important ecosystem functions.
- 7.4.3 Identify ecological impacts on open spaces and parks caused by urban uses, for example stormwater runoff, and work to mitigate these impacts in order to advance environmental and human health.
- 7.4.4 Encourage the protection, conservation and maintenance of the environment in the design and operation of open spaces.
- 7.4.5 Increase the use of green infrastructure to decrease the city's impact on the natural environment.

7.4.6 Encourage planting of appropriate vegetation for this climate and environment.



Native plants are more resistant to drought and harsh climatic conditions.

Art and Historic Resources

Open spaces frequently contain important historic and artistic features. For example, cemeteries inform visitors about the lives of past generations and often contain artistic architectural features. Many parks, plazas, and public gardens contain art, sculptures, fountains, and other features. Even landscapes themselves can be historic or a form of art.



Cemeteries can be historic landscapes, including water and artistic features such as sculptures. Their vistas also provide a sense of openness, something seen and experienced from the outside.

Policy 7.5: Protect landscapes that are significant to the historic legacy of Minneapolis, the region and state, and preserve and expand artistic features in publicly accessed open spaces.

- 7.5.1 Encourage the preservation of historic buildings, memorials and monuments found in open spaces throughout the city.
- 7.5.2 Develop a comprehensive inventory of significant historic, artistic, and cultural landscape features within the city to ensure their protection into the future.
- 7.5.3 Encourage the integration of public art into the development and renovation of open spaces and parks and encourage the interpretation of the landscape through art.
- 7.5.4 Use open space to protect prime public view corridors such as those of landmark buildings, significant open spaces, and/or water bodies.

Beauty and Built Form

Open spaces and parks are an integral part of the urban fabric. As the city is continually redeveloped, opportunities to better design the built environment and weave together its different components should be taken.

Policy 7.6: Continue to beautify open spaces through well designed landscaping that complements and improves the city’s urban form on many scales – from street trees to expansive views of lakes and rivers.



Important open spaces, like the indoor Crystal Court in the IDS Tower, are often provided as part of development projects (photo used with permission of the Inland Group of Companies)

- 7.6.1 Where open spaces and the built environment interface, seek greater design integration between them to create interesting spaces for active and passive use.
- 7.6.2 Provide visual and physical connections between urban areas and open spaces including lakes and rivers.
- 7.6.3 Invest in the greening of streets, particularly those that connect into and supplement the parks and open spaces network.
- 7.6.4 Provide private landowners and developers with incentives to create and maintain publicly accessible open spaces or green infrastructure.
- 7.6.5 Develop design standards for the creation of publicly accessed open space on private property, such as plazas in new developments.
- 7.6.6 Promote open space design that enhances the four season experience for all Minneapolis residents and visitors.
- 7.6.7 Maintain multimodal transportation corridors to link open spaces and parks with surrounding neighborhoods.



Open spaces and parks can enhance economic development and tourism. Gold Medal Park, a public-private partnership, opened in 2007 and is close to the Mississippi River, the Guthrie Theater and other community amenities

Economic Development and Tourism

Parks and open spaces are significant amenities which have been shown to increase investment in cities, attract businesses, and retain residents.

Policy 7.7: Support the expansion and maintenance of open spaces and parks in order to increase economic development and to promote tourism.

- 7.7.1 Support marketing of the city that involves festivals and other events that take place in open spaces throughout the city.
- 7.7.2 Work with business representatives to better understand the open space needs of employees and how they can be served.
- 7.7.3 Promote open space and parks as resources to businesses and their employees.
- 7.7.4 Invest in open space to help improve economically challenged neighborhoods.

Coordination

A host of organizations and individuals control various lands in the city that can contribute to a robust open space network. Partnerships must be forged to create new spaces that can benefit the public and enhance the city.

Policy 7.8: Strengthen existing and create new partnerships, including public-private partnerships, to deliver the best park and open space system possible.

- 7.8.1 Continue to collaborate and coordinate space sharing, maintenance agreements, and programming among public agencies.
- 7.8.2 Support the preservation of former transportation corridors that are intact or largely intact and use them to connect neighborhoods to each other and to major amenities.
- 7.8.3 Encourage new development projects to incorporate open spaces and green spaces through land use regulations and other regulatory tools.
- 7.8.4 Continue to identify future needs related to open space and pursue innovative options for creating new publicly accessed open space.
- 7.8.5 Explore opportunities for partnerships linking farmers markets, community gardens and open space.

Downtown Policies

Downtown Minneapolis has seen an increase of approximately 10,000 new residents since 2000, bringing the downtown population to approximately 30,000 people. While parks and open space have always been important resources to Downtown workers and visitors, the increased residential density is creating an additional need for more greening of Downtown.

Change in the density and demographics of downtown have put new demands on the type and location of open spaces. For example, spaces are now being used in the early mornings and evenings by downtown residents and needs go beyond those desired by daytime visitors.

Policy 7.9: Work to develop high quality open spaces in Downtown.

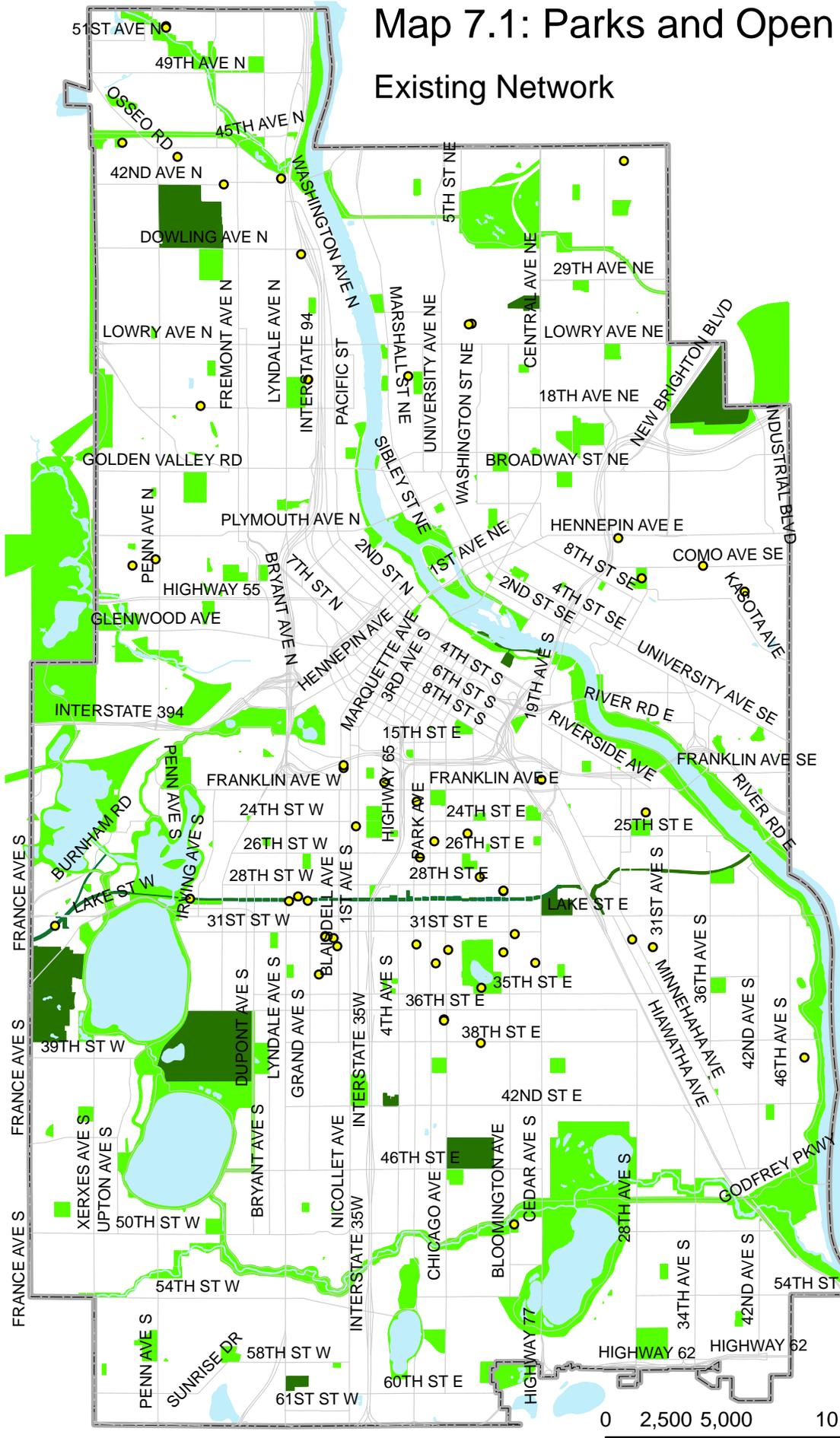
- 7.9.1 Encourage the creation of new parks and plazas that are easily accessible by Downtown workforce and residents
- 7.9.2 Support the incremental greening of Downtown through the addition of more trees, plantings, and small open spaces.
- 7.9.3 Promote the Mississippi River as a major landscape feature and recreation opportunity.
- 7.9.4 Ensure that people feel safe in Downtown open spaces.
- 7.9.5 Encourage activity in Downtown parks and plazas seven days a week.



Incremental greening enhances urban environments.

Map 7.1: Parks and Open Space

Existing Network



- Legend**
- MPRB Parks
 - Other Open Space
 - Community Gardens
 - Major Roads
 - City Boundary
 - Water

Does not include open spaces located on portions of larger parcels, including Downtown plazas and green space, school grounds, institutional campuses, etc.



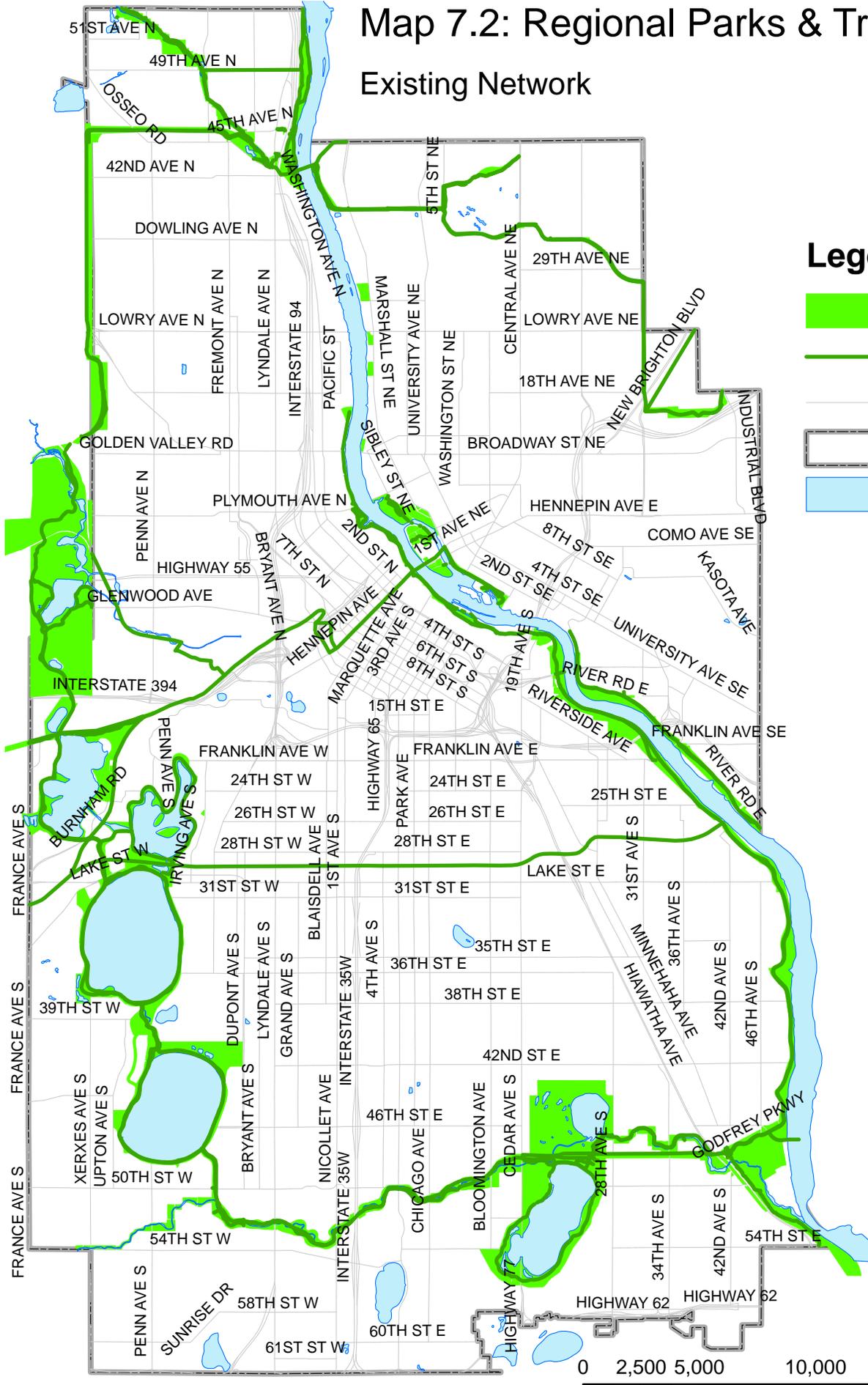
Source:
City of
Minneapolis

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Minneapolis Community
Planning and Economic
Development Department
Planning Division
Adopted by City Council
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Map 7.2: Regional Parks & Trails

Existing Network



Legend

- Regional Parks
- Regional Trails
- Major Roads
- City Boundary
- Water

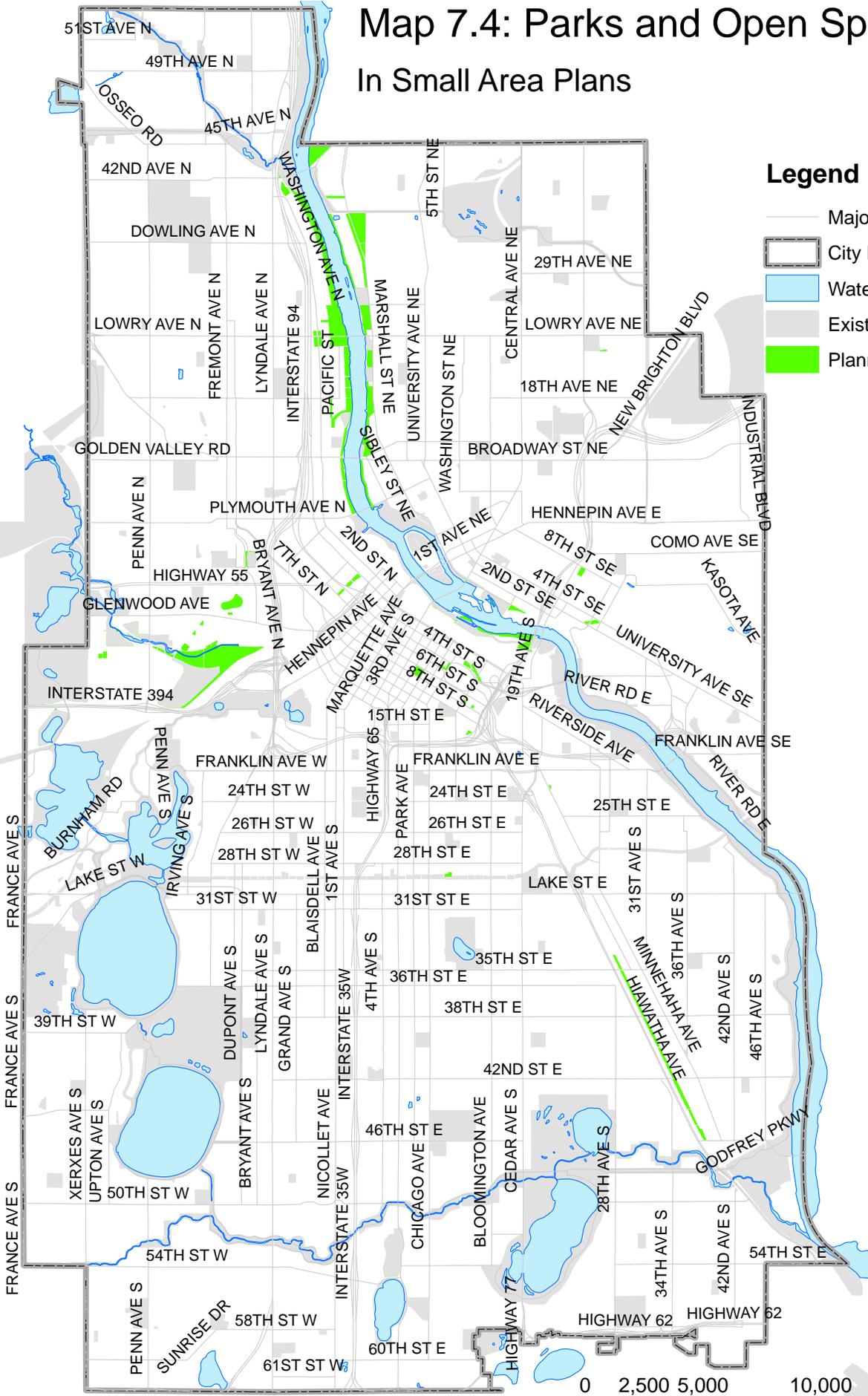


Sources:
 Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and Metropolitan Council

Created by:
 Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development Department
 Planning Division
 Adopted by City Council
 October 2, 2009



Map 7.4: Parks and Open Space In Small Area Plans



Legend

- Major Roads
- City Boundary
- Water
- Existing Parks/Open Space
- Planned Open Space

Source:
City of
Minneapolis

Created by:
Minneapolis Community
Planning and Economic
Development Department
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