

## Introduction

Parks are an integral part of a city's civic infrastructure. The City of Burnsville has an extensive park system, one which it has planned and built in conjunction with the growth of its residential neighborhoods and commercial and employment centers since its incorporation in 1964. In 2000, the City is over 95 percent developed, and its focus has shifted to redevelopment and neighborhood maintenance. The park system, through this plan, is addressing similar issues of **maintenance, renovation and enhancement**.

The existing park system is sufficient in acreage – with over 1,800 acres of parkland, or approximately 29 acres per 1,000 residents. The number of parks – 75 at present – also ensures that a park lies within walking or biking distance of most households. One of the City's most pressing needs, for a youth ballfield complex, is currently being addressed through development of the Sue Fischer Memorial Park athletic field complex. A few additional parks are anticipated, as certain areas such as the Heart of the City, the Gateway area and the Northwest Quadrant are redeveloped. With these anticipated additions, **the park system is essentially complete**.

Park system needs, then, are related to **quality, not quantity** of parks. Maintenance and renewal are concerns, as facilities age or become obsolete. Furthermore, the park system plan should assess demographic and lifestyle changes in the City's population, and determine how the parks system can best respond to these changes to serve this population in the future. The following issues were identified at the beginning of the planning process:

- ◆ How can Burnsville's parks evolve in step with changing demographics and community needs? What changes may be needed in park facilities? In park programming?
- ◆ Are there recreational activities for which there is an unmet demand (for example, dog exercise areas)? Can or should the park system meet these demands?
- ◆ Are there other emerging activities that haven't been considered in the past, or other uses for the parks?

## Background

Park planning efforts go back to the 1950s, when the Burnsville Athletic Club was formed. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, as the City grew, parks and park programs were developed, and public monies were set aside for parkland acquisition. In 1975 an ordinance was adopted requiring park dedication or fees in lieu of dedication from

developers. A series of park studies were completed during the late 1960s and 70s, including a Park and Recreation Facilities Analysis in 1978-79. A Parks Master Plan was adopted in 1981. That plan established goals and objectives for the system, created a classification of parks, and set priorities for park acquisition and improvements in each of ten planning sectors of the City. The majority of those acquisitions and improvements have been accomplished, with the assistance of a park bond approved in 1982. The bond provided the last major growth impetus for the park system. Since then, while the City has developed some small neighborhood parks, its primary focus has been on maintaining what was already in place.

The City's philosophy has been to provide sufficient numbers of parks to meet all community needs throughout the system, at a fairly uniform level. Because of the size of the park system, this "democratic" approach proved the most cost-effective. However, as the City shifts attention from build-out to redevelopment, there is an increasing interest in creating a number of distinctive "Gemstone Parks" in central and highly visible locations (see page 28).

The level of park maintenance was probably at its highest in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since that time, the system's size and usage, and therefore its maintenance demands have grown significantly, placing pressure on a static budget. In 1999 additional funding was provided to improve the appearance of boulevards and parks, raising the standard of maintenance back to previous levels.

## **Related Planning Efforts**

Many recent or simultaneous planning efforts are related to the park system plan. These include:

- ♦ **Comprehensive Plan Update (2000):** The comprehensive plan, approved in 2000 by the Metropolitan Council, includes the elements of community background and policies, land use (including housing and redevelopment), public facilities and implementation. The transportation plan, also updated in 1998, is part of this document.
- ♦ **Stormwater Management Plan (1996):** This plan, currently being updated, focuses on integration of stormwater facilities with parks and on wetland restoration to improve stormwater quality.
- ♦ **Community Appearance Initiatives:** The City has made a concerted effort, beginning in the late 1990s, to improve its appearance as viewed from its major roads. Streetscape improvement projects have been completed on Burnsville Parkway and Nicollet Avenue, and are being implemented for the I-35W corridor and the Heart of the City area.
- ♦ **Natural Resources Master Plan (1999):** This plan defined the City's natural resources through an ecological approach, defining terrestrial, aquatic and wildlife resources and grouping them into resource management units – high

concentrations of natural resource sites. These resource management units are then assigned priorities for management. The recommendations of this plan are integrated into the Parks Master Plan (see page 19).

- ◆ **Gateway and Northwest Quadrant Area Planning:** The Gateway Area is located at the City's northern entrance, on either side of I-35W. The area north of Highway 13 and west of I-35W is termed the Northwest Quadrant. Special redevelopment and enhancement plans are being prepared for both areas. Some improvements have already been made in the Gateway area where Burnsville Parkway crosses over I-35W. Major land uses in the Northwest Quadrant include the Freeway Landfill and a portion of the 767-acre Kraemer Quarry. Issues in this area include a current proposal for an amphitheater on the former landfill site and the eventual redevelopment of the quarry into a lake and redevelopment sites. The Parks Master Plan includes goals and concepts for the parks planned for these areas (see page 41).
- ◆ **Heart of the City Master Plan (1999):** The Heart of the City district is a redevelopment area centered on Nicollet Avenue and Burnsville Parkway. It is envisioned as a distinctive, compact, mixed-use center of activity that will become a city-wide focal point and gathering place. A Design Framework Plan and zoning ordinance have been adopted for the district, specifying land uses, street types, streetscape improvements and design standards for buildings. The plan includes two parks: a central "town square" and a neighborhood park. General goals for these parks have been integrated into the Parks Master Plan (see page 42).
- ◆ **Trails Master Plan:** The trails plan is being developed concurrently with the Parks Master Plan, and the recommendations of each plan are intended to be consistent with the other. The Parks Master Plan shows proposed trail links between parks.



*Paved trail in Wood Park*

## ANALYSIS OF CONDITIONS

### The Park System

In 1999 the park system contained approximately 1,800 acres spread throughout 75 parks, comprising over 10 percent of the City's land area. When the two regional facilities in the City are included, the total amount of public open space increases to approximately 2,850 acres.

Parks have been classified into three categories: community park, neighborhood park and mini park, based primarily upon size and extent of facilities. This system is based on national park and recreation standards. However, it is of limited usefulness as a management tool within the Burnsville park system, because the facilities and level of development at many parks do not match their size-based classifications. A new classification system is presented under Park System Organization (page 16).

The sixteen **community parks** generally are 20 acres or more in size and include intensive recreational facilities (playing fields and courts) and/or natural areas for more individualized recreation. They also include the majority of the park system's special uses and facilities: ice center, boat landings, fishing docks, etc. Other special facilities include the 9-hole Birnamwood Golf Course, the Lake Alimagnet Center for the Arts in Alimagnet Park, and "The Garage," a newly opened youth center in Civic Center Park. Community parks draw users from more than one neighborhood, and are generally located along collector or arterial streets for ease of access. They are distributed fairly evenly within the City, so that most households are located within a mile of a community park.

The 35 **neighborhood parks** range from 4 to 40 acres in size, and generally share a common set of facilities, including play structures and one or more playing fields. A few neighborhood parks, such as Tennesioux and Knob Hill, include natural areas or special use facilities such as a sledding hill or fishing dock. Neighborhood parks are intended to be located within ½ to ¾ mile of all households, and to be accessible on foot.

The 23 **mini parks** are generally 1 to 3 acres in size, although a few range up to 8 acres. About half of them function as play lots, with play equipment and an informal playfield; others are largely natural. Special use facilities include the City's two archery sites. Mini parks have traditionally been designed to serve neighbors within a convenient walking distance, and to serve persons with limited mobility, such as small children and the elderly.

The city also has two major **regional facilities**. Part of the Black Dog Unit of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, approximately 1,300 acres in size, is located within the City. Part of Murphy Hanrehan Park Reserve, a 2,400 acre regional park in

Dakota and Scott Counties, is located in the City's southwest corner.

School facilities also help to meet recreational needs. The three school districts that serve Burnsville cooperate with the City and the area's athletic associations to schedule the use of their playing fields.

### **Conditions in the System**

Conditions of park facilities and natural areas in the parks were analyzed during development of this plan. The following issues were raised and discussed:

- ♦ Many parks emphasize active recreation, specifically organized sports; although some parks, such as Terrace Oaks West and Sunset Pond, are focused on natural areas and trail use.



*Facilities in Oak Leaf West Park*



*Colonial Park*



*Lake Park*

- ◆ Active use areas in parks are well-maintained, but many parks could benefit from enhancement of their natural areas.
- ◆ Mowed turf predominates in many parks.
- ◆ Trees and shrubs are often ornamental species, with few native plants.



*West Buck Hill Park*

- ◆ Naturalized areas tend to have low plant diversity.
- ◆ Trail connections within parks and to parks could be improved. Trails linking active use areas and natural areas are needed in some locations.



*Vista View Park*

- ◆ Some pond and wetland areas could benefit from addition of native plants as buffers along shorelines.
- ◆ There is potential for scenic vistas in the parks – toward lakes or toward the Minneapolis skyline, for example – but many are obscured by vegetation.

In general, there are many opportunities to make the park system more responsive to natural resources and to enhance its aesthetic qualities, in keeping with streetscape enhancement initiatives on Nicollet Avenue and Burnsville Parkway. These issues are addressed under Park Management Policies (page 23) and Site-Specific Park Improvements (page 29).

## **Park Programs and Park Use**

The City's Recreation Department offers a wide array of recreational programs such as nature programs, day camps, teen programs, adaptive programs and the very popular Kids of Summer playground program.

The majority of organized youth athletics are provided by the Burnsville Athletic Club (BAC), a non-profit volunteer organization. BAC programs include baseball, basketball, football, golf, hockey, soccer, softball and volleyball. The BAC serves about 8,500 children, about 75 percent of whom are Burnsville residents. The remainder are from Savage and Eagan; the BAC also uses parks in these communities.

Affiliated clubs include the Burnsville Hockey Club and the Burnsville Soccer Club. Both offer recreational and traveling programs for boys and girls. The Burnsville Minnesota Valley Figure Skating Club offers instruction and practice in that sport to about 125 members.

The Valley Athletic Association and the Lakeville Athletic Association are youth athletic associations similar to the BAC that serve Burnsville residents in school districts 196 (southeast) and 194 (southwest), respectively. The Valley Athletic Association is headquartered in Apple Valley. About 20 percent of Burnsville's school-age children live in District 196 and are covered by this association. The Lakeville Athletic Association, in that City, serves about 5 percent of Burnsville's school-age population.

Most adult athletic programs are run by the City's Recreation Department, although some are run by independent leagues that rent city facilities. Facility rentals are not restricted to city residents, but are open to the general public, depending on availability.

While it is obvious that the park system is well-used, statistics regarding park use are generally program-based, since it is easier to collect data on numbers of program participants than on general park users. The following numbers indicate the range of participation in park programs in 1998-1999.

- ◆ The seven-week Kids of Summer playground program serves about 750 children in nine parks.
- ◆ The Birnamwood Golf Course receives use totalling about 32,500 rounds of golf per year. An eight-week youth golf league serves about 164 participants.
- ◆ The city-run summer softball program fields 196 teams in 25 leagues, using 12 fields at three different parks.
- ◆ Summer softball programs are also run by independent leagues, with 83 teams.
- ◆ Fall softball programs (city-run and independent) served 174 teams
- ◆ Other programs include:
  - Summer sand volleyball: 8 teams
  - Fall sand volleyball: 6 - 8 teams
  - Winter broomball: 10 - 12 teams
  - Winter boothockey: 6 - 8 teams
  - Adult hockey: 12 - 20 teams year-round

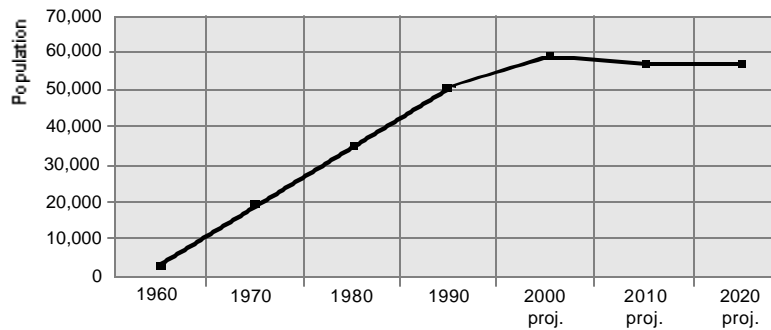
### **Demographic Trends Affecting the Park System**

In order to assess and anticipate the City's current and future recreational needs, one must understand its current and future population. The age composition of the population, the number of multi-family residents, changes in the economic, racial and ethnic makeup of the population, and the extent of housing turnover in the City's neighborhoods are all likely to impact park use.



## Population and Household Growth

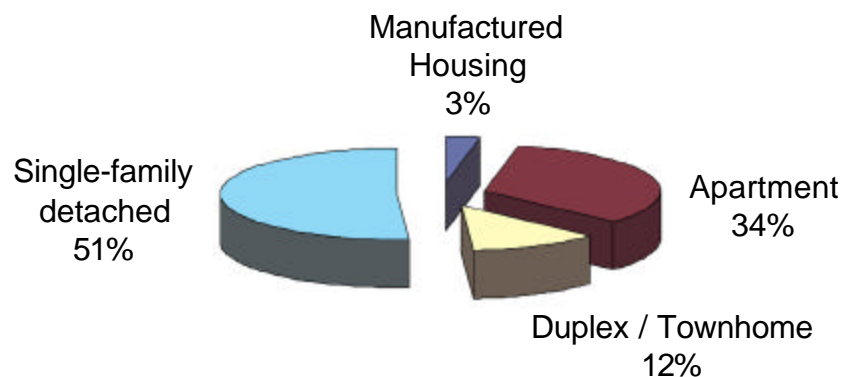
Burnsville's population has almost tripled since 1970, increasing from just under 20,000 people to an estimated 58,670 in 1998. The City's population has already exceeded the Metropolitan Council's projection of 58,500 for 2000. In the future, however, the City's population is expected to decline, to 57,523 in 2010 and 57,002 in 2020.



At the same time, the number of households in the City is expected to grow, from its 1998 estimated level of 22,661 to 23,000 in 2010 and 24,000 in 2020. The reason for this increase is a continuing drop in the number of persons per household. This drop is due to trends such as fewer children per family, an aging population (many of whom live alone), divorce, and the currently strong economy, which has resulted in a trend toward homeownership for young singles or renting one's own apartment rather than sharing one with roommates. In Burnsville, the number of persons per household has dropped from 4.09 in 1970 to 2.58 in 1998.

## Housing

Since the 1970s, Burnsville has been notable among metro-area cities for its diversity of housing. Even in 1980, single-family housing represented only 53% of the total occupied housing units. That percentage dropped to 47% in 1990, and is currently estimated at about 51%. Duplexes and townhomes, about 90% of which are owner-occupied, make up about 12% of all occupied housing units, while multi-family apartments constitute about 34%.



About 35% of Burnsville's housing units are rental units, and the City supplies 30% of Dakota County's rental market. The City's rents are higher than the County average, indicating a demand for apartments in Burnsville.

Burnsville continues to enjoy a healthy housing market due to its relatively close-in and convenient location and its many amenities, including good schools, parks, shopping and numerous recreational lakes. The City's housing stock is relatively new, with 46% built between 1980 and 1997 and about 50% between 1960 and 1980. However, the detached housing built in the 70s and 80s has become somewhat dated. Housing more than 20 years old begins to require major repairs. The City has emphasized improvement of housing conditions through code enforcement and maintenance assistance.

### **Household Composition**

In general, the population of the Twin Cities region, like the nation as a whole, is aging. Within this larger trend, however, there may be smaller ebbs and flows occurring at a local level. Burnsville's age makeup is affected by the period of its greatest growth – the 1970s and 80s – when young people purchased homes in the City. In 1980 and 1990, the City's median age was younger than that of Dakota County and the state as a whole. Burnsville has continued to attract first-time homebuyers. Householders in the 25 - 34 age group made up the largest percentage of Burnsville's population in 1980 and 1990 – about 31% in each decade. At the same time, the population of persons over 55 is also increasing; their numbers more than doubled between 1980 and 1990. The over-55 population, generally classified as empty-nesters and seniors, are likely to demand smaller housing, much of it rental, and various types of senior housing, including assisted living. They may also begin to seek housing in close proximity to transit and commercial services.

One relevant trend in the Twin Cities region is the dramatic increase in immigration from outside the U.S., much of it from southeast Asia, Africa, Mexico and eastern Europe. The Office of Refugee Services estimates that well over 90,000 Southeast Asians, 17,000 Africans and about 7,500 Eastern Europeans have arrived in the Twin Cities over the past two decades. Other estimates indicate that there are now over 30,000 recent Spanish-speaking arrivals in the region.

These families have very different demographic characteristics than the local native-born population or even the immigrants from other parts of the United States. For example, they are younger and tend to have more children per family than do the native Minnesotans.

While data from the 2000 U.S. Census are not yet available, anecdotal information from a survey of apartment managers indicates that the renter population in Burnsville

includes substantial numbers of Hispanic, Russian, Hmong, Somali and Chinese immigrants. Organizations that work with immigrant groups indicate that Spanish speakers make up the largest non-English-speaking group in the south and west metro area. As these new arrivals establish themselves it is anticipated that some will purchase homes in the City.

### **School-Age Children**

Much of the use of Burnsville's parks is through the many youth athletic associations which sponsor school-age teams in baseball, softball, soccer, hockey and other sports. Therefore, the existing and projected numbers of school-age children are of concern to park planners and managers.

About 80% of Burnsville children attend school in Burnsville Independent School District 191, where they make up about 70% of the district's population; the remainder of the students are from Eagan and Savage. The City's southwestern corner is served by ISD 194 (Lakeville) and its southeastern quadrant by ISD 196 (Rosemount).

Enrollment in District 191 initially peaked in 1976-77, with just under 11,000 students, driven largely by new housing development in Burnsville. Enrollment reached its low point in 1986-86, with just under 9,000 students. Since that time, enrollment has grown by about 200-300 students per year, mainly due to new housing development in Savage and Eagan. The district's projections through 2002 show enrollment at most elementary schools remaining stable and then slowly declining by about 100 students over four years. Middle and high school enrollments are expected to remain relatively stable.

Participation in the free or reduced price school lunch program serves as a useful indicator of the low income population in the school districts. In District 191, the number of children participating in the free or reduced price lunch program has remained stable at about 1,800 over the past several years, or about 16% of the student population.

There has been a substantial increase in numbers of children from ethnic and racial minorities within the past 15 years. In District 191, the number of minority children has increased from 5.62% in 1983 to 14.6% in 1998. Asians make up the largest group, with over 6%, followed by African-Americans at about 5%; the remainder are of Hispanic and American Indian origin. In 1998, about 4% of District 191's students came from non-English speaking homes.

### **Housing Turnover**

One of the concerns of both the City and the school district is the rate at which single-family homes are "turning over" from empty-nesters to younger families with children, especially school-age children. Theoretically, based on the age of the City's housing and the aging of its householder, there should be a substantial amount of turnover.

However, the reality is that with a mobile population, there is a good deal of “turnover” occurring all the time. Some houses may have been sold a number of times over the past several decades. This pattern is especially true in communities that attract corporate transferees, the majority of whom typically have school-age children.

Another factor in turnover seems to relate to the value of the house. The lower the value of the house, the fewer times it appears to turn over during its lifetime.

Occupants tend to stay until retirement age, since neither the equity in the house nor the residents’ income represent enough buying power to purchase a newer townhome or other life-cycle housing in the area. Based on discussions with area Realtors, housing turnover in Burnsville is currently slow.

### **Summary of Demographic Trends**

The following trends and projections are based on the demographic data discussed above.

- ◆ The City’s population has likely reached its peak, and will decline slightly in the coming decades;
- ◆ The number of households will continue to grow while household size will continue to decline;
- ◆ The number of children increased through the 1980s and 90s but appears to have leveled off and is likely to decline slightly in the coming decade; school districts project slight declines in next 5 years;
- ◆ Increased immigration of young families balances the general aging of the City’s population;
- ◆ Housing turnover is slow;
- ◆ The number of low-income children remains fairly constant at about 15%.

### **Short-Term Projections**

The following projections represent a “best guess” scenario for likely changes in the next 10 years – through 2010 – based upon our evaluation of the demographic trends discussed above and current development initiatives in the City. Clearly, any projections are by their nature speculative. The availability of data from the 2000 Census should provide an opportunity to reevaluate and revise these conclusions.

- ◆ Turnover of owner-occupied housing will be slow; most residents will remain in their current homes;
- ◆ Heavy use of athletic fields will continue;
- ◆ Multifamily apartment complexes will continue to attract diverse populations;
- ◆ The need for adult recreational facilities – trails, community gardens, gathering places – will continue to grow;

- ◆ The Heart of the City, as Burnsville's first major redevelopment area, will add life-cycle housing, pedestrian-scaled commercial development and community gathering places, including parks.

### **Long-Term Projections**

The following projections deal with the 2010-2020 period. Because they are "farther out" from the present, they are somewhat more speculative, and will need to be reexamined and adjusted over the next decade.

- ◆ Housing turnover will increase, as seniors find new housing;
- ◆ There will be a growing need for senior facilities;
- ◆ Housing turnover means that numbers of families with young children will again increase;
- ◆ The City's investments in infrastructure will spark private redevelopment;
- ◆ The Gateway area will redevelop;
- ◆ Use of athletic fields may begin to taper off;
- ◆ Continuing need for adult recreational facilities.

### **PARK-RELATED ISSUES**

Beginning in the spring of 1999, a series of neighborhood meetings were held to discuss issues related to park use, facilities and maintenance, specifically the 1999 community appearance initiative, under which funds were added to the park budget for improved maintenance of parks and boulevards. A survey was sent out with meeting notices. Attendees commented on the improved level of park maintenance, and indicated that they had noticed a significant difference from past years. Other comments and concerns shared at meetings and through the survey fall into the following areas:

- ◆ Requests for additional landscaping, including trees and flowers;
- ◆ Requests for tree pruning and dead tree removal in natural areas;
- ◆ Requests for the mowing of specific natural areas;
- ◆ Requests for basic amenities such as drinking fountains, picnic tables, horseshoe pits and barbecue grills;
- ◆ Requests for security lights, especially in parking areas;
- ◆ A few requests for tennis courts and picnic shelters;
- ◆ Complaints about after-hours use of parks by teenagers and related noise;
- ◆ Complaints about dog owners not cleaning up after their pets.

In October and November of 1999 two community meetings were held by the Parks and Natural Resources Commission to discuss park and trail-related issues, problems

and opportunities. The following qualities were identified as strengths of the park system:

- ◆ The high ratio of parkland to people;
- ◆ Diversity of park facilities;
- ◆ Physical distribution, accessibility;
- ◆ Well-maintained;
- ◆ Heavily used;
- ◆ Ample number of fields; accommodates youth sports needs well;
- ◆ Variety of natural areas, varied terrain and topography;
- ◆ Presence of water bodies ponds, lakes, etc.

Participants also identified the following areas for improvement:

- ◆ Landscaping of trails and paths;
- ◆ More multi-use fields, fields of different sizes;
- ◆ Enhanced pavement treatment;
- ◆ More winter use opportunities – cross-country trail links between parks;
- ◆ Better “wayfinding” – direction signs to parks;
- ◆ Security, vandalism – better lighting of parking lots, certain trails;
- ◆ Lack of “vistas” over the Minnesota River valley;
- ◆ Reduce dominance of mowed turf;
- ◆ Improvements to wetlands;
- ◆ New facilities – community gardens, better seating (shade) for field observation, etc.;
- ◆ Better integration of facilities – connections between fields, playgrounds, etc.

Meeting summaries are included in the Appendix.

## Park System Vision

The following recommendations were developed based upon input at the neighborhood and community meetings, to define a vision for the evolution of the park system:

- ◆ A more visually appealing system, with enhanced landscaping, naturalized areas, and native plant materials;
- ◆ Physical and visual connections to the Minnesota River; vistas or viewpoints over the river valley and other water bodies;
- ◆ A more integrated system, with trail connections between and within parks, and more opportunities for walking and biking;
- ◆ A flexible system that can respond to the changing needs of the City's population;
- ◆ An increased emphasis on "destination" parks that have a specific theme or focus.

This vision is consistent with the broad vision defined by the City Council, as expressed under the theme of "Reinvesting in Our Community":

- ◆ **Parks are an essential part of our community.**
- ◆ **We should reinvest in our parks as part of the community reinvestment process.**

Reinvestment in parks should occur in the following ways:

**Maintenance**

**Renovation and replacement**

**Basic park elements**

**Park enhancements**

**Natural resources and landscape maintenance**

**Trail system**

Each of these types of reinvestment is discussed under Park Management Policies in the following section.

## PARKS FRAMEWORK PLAN

The parks framework plan consists of a series of maps, policies and recommendations organized into the following topics:

### **Park System Organization**

### **Natural Resources and Management Priorities in the Parks**

### **Park-Trail Connections**

### **Park Management Policies**

### **Gemstones in the Park System: A Framework for Park Enhancements**

### **Site-Specific Park Improvements**

### **Future Parks: A Conceptual Framework**

### **Potential New Facilities**

## **Park System Organization**

Figure 1, Park System Organization, shows the entire park system, including existing and planned parks, organized in the following categories: **community parks, neighborhood parks, mini parks and preservation areas**. Although the names for the categories are largely the same as under the previous system, classifications are now based on function rather than size.

The category of **community parks** has been broadened to encompass **all specialized facilities** that are intended to attract users from the City as a whole. For example, the planned “Town Square” park in the Heart of the City redevelopment area, while small in size, is intended as a place for public gatherings for the entire community. Day Park, formerly classified as a mini park, is combined with the Earley Lake Trail to create a community-level facility. Likewise, the Minnesota Riverfront Park is considered to have a broad appeal.

**Neighborhood parks** and **mini parks** largely retain their traditional functions: serving neighborhoods or smaller areas with active recreation facilities.

A new category, **preservation area**, applies to areas that are intended to remain as undeveloped neighborhood open space. By contrast, all neighborhood and mini parks contain, or should contain, a similar set of recreational facilities and equipment (although there will continue to be variations among parks based on neighborhood needs and natural amenities).





# Natural Resources and Management Priorities in the Parks

The Natural Resources Management Plan classifies the City’s natural resources into terrestrial, aquatic and wildlife resources. A database was developed to integrate and evaluate resource information. Aquatic resources include wetlands, rivers, lakes and ponds, and trout streams. Terrestrial resources include woodland, prairie and meadows. Locations of rare plant species and habitat of rare wildlife species were also included.

These natural resources were evaluated and grouped into resource management units (RMUs): defined areas with high concentrations of natural resource sites and lakes and rivers. Sites within and outside of these RMUs were then assigned priorities for management.

1. High priority sites are identified for protection and management activities, whether or not they are part of a Resource Management Unit. All lakes in RMUs are considered high priority natural resources.
2. Medium priority areas are identified for improvement when they are part of a Resource Management Unit.
3. Low priority areas are identified for maintenance, rather than active improvement efforts.

Nine RMUs were defined, including all or portions of the following parks; management goals are summarized below:

<b>Alimagnet RMU:</b>	Alimagnet	Maintain and improve lake, woodland and wetland communities.
<b>Bluff Valley RMU:</b>	Archery Site Black Dog Cedarbridge Cliff Fen Woods Lane Tennisioux	Protect and enhance forest cover for bird habitat. Woodland management, buckthorn removal, bird monitoring, prairie/oak vegetation improvement.
<b>City Center RMU:</b>	Civic Center Krestwood Nicollet Rolling Meadow Acres Forest Heights Parkwood Wolk	Fen monitoring and protection, manage surface water runoff; limit impervious cover in trout stream watersheds; monitor well pumping impacts on hydrology.

<b>Crystal Keller RMU:</b>	Crystal Lake West Crystal Beach Pik Nik Island Lac Lavon Keller Lake	Lakeshore and lake management; establish water level goals; work with neighborhood groups and adjoining cities.
<b>Kraemer RMU:</b>	Rudy L. Kraemer Nature Preserve Sue Fischer Memorial Park	Intensive restoration of prairies, wetland; bluff slope and woodland regeneration; parkland expansion in southwest corner.
<b>Quarry Complex RMU:</b>	West Riverfront and Kraemer Quarry Parks (planning stages)	Natural heritage restoration plans; integrate wetlands with uplands; protect recreational use of future quarry lake.
<b>Southwest RMU</b>	Cam Ram Judicial Loop Orchard Gardens	Landscape management in Cam Ram and Murphy-Hanrehan parks; buckthorn management, bird survey, rare species monitoring.
<b>Sunset RMU:</b>	Sunset Pond	Prairie restoration, land management to protect lake resource.
<b>Terrace Oaks RMU:</b>	Terrace Oaks West Terrace Oaks East Utech Pond	Ecosystem based management for high priority sites; buckthorn management, deer enclosure, wetland improvements.

Figure 2 identifies the RMUs and all high or medium priority natural resource sites that are located within the parks. Protection and improvement projects in these areas are managed by the City's Natural Resources Department, with a focus on high priority sites. Current efforts include:

- ◆ Pursuit of conservation easement in Bluff Valley RMU;
- ◆ Restoration of prairies at Sunset Pond, Alimagnet Park, Kraemer Preserve;
- ◆ Oak savannah restoration at Terrace Oaks West;
- ◆ Buckthorn removal at Kraemer Preserve and Terrace Oaks West;
- ◆ Bank stabilization at Crystal Lake;
- ◆ Wetland monitoring at high priority sites throughout City.

FIGURE 2

BACK OF FIGURE 2

Of course, there are many natural areas within parks that do not fall within an RMU or were not identified in the natural resources plan as significant. Management of these areas is discussed below under Policies.

**Park – Trail Connections**

The Trails Master Plan identifies trail systems that serve multiple user groups (walkers, bicyclists, in-line skaters, families, etc.) and needs that include commuting and recreation. Connections to parks and trails within parks are key elements of a recreational trail system. Many trail users will visit a single park as a destination or visit one or more parks as part of a longer trip by trail. Existing paved trails within parks are shown on Figure 1. The “core” trail system proposed in the Trails Master Plan is shown on Figure 3.

**Park Management Policies**

This section of the Parks Master Plan includes policies for management, maintenance and improvements to the park system as a whole. The policies below are organized into six topic areas:

- Maintenance**
- Renovation and Replacement**
- Basic Park Elements**
- Park Enhancements**
- Natural Resources and Landscape Maintenance**
- Trail System**

All policies fall under a broad theme: **We need to reinvest in our parks in the following ways:**

**Maintenance**

Citizens are pleased with the enhanced level of maintenance initiated in 1999. Continue to implement this level of maintenance for parks and boulevards. The feedback from residents indicated that this was an extremely high priority for them, probably more so than any individual park improvement or enhancement. Maintaining what we have should be a high priority.

- ◆ Improve maintenance of natural areas that are visible from adjoining active use areas by removing dead trees and debris as appropriate. (See below under Natural Resources and Landscape Maintenance for more detail on establishing a vision for natural areas and adjusting maintenance practices.)

- ◆ Address dog problems by continuing to expand public education and enforcement efforts and through creation of dog exercise areas in selected park(s).

### **Renovation and Replacement**

- ◆ Move toward a 10-year replacement cycle for play equipment;
- ◆ Identify facilities that need complete renovation or replacement (see Improvements to Existing Parks);
- ◆ Review renovation needs on a five-year basis.

### **Basic Park Elements**

Where practical and justified by level of use, all parks in active use should include the following elements, if these are consistent with the wishes of surrounding neighborhoods:

- ◆ Security lighting in parking areas and, where needed, on trails;
- ◆ Drinking fountains;
- ◆ Basic amenities such as portable toilets, seating, bike racks and picnic tables;
- ◆ Visible and safe pedestrian access via public streets or well-marked trails;
- ◆ Internal trails between activity areas;
- ◆ Overstory trees to provide shade.

### **Park Enhancements**

**Gemstone Parks:** Make strategic investments in the appearance of key parks: along roads receiving streetscape improvements, other main roads, and in heavily-used parks (see Gemstone Parks discussion below).

### **General Park Enhancements**

- ◆ Replace play equipment with an eye toward aesthetics as well as function;
- ◆ Identify a site for development of a lighted soccer facility with amenities;
- ◆ Identify sites suitable for new facilities such as community gardens and dog exercise areas (see discussion below under New Facilities).

**Special Requests for Enhancements:** Occasionally, residents request facilities in their neighborhood parks that go beyond basic neighborhood park amenities and which are not needed system-wide. The primary example is a tennis court. Based upon usage, there appears to be a sufficient number of tennis courts in the park system. Tennis courts are community facilities in the sense that users may be expected to travel a distance to access them. In such cases, the City will work with residents in partnership to raise funds for this type of facility.

PLACEHOLDER, FIGURE 3



BACK OF FIGURE 3

## **Natural Resources and Landscape Maintenance**

Establish natural area management plans for open spaces within individual parks. There are natural areas in many City parks that are not sufficient in size or quality to be addressed in the Natural Resources Master Plan. A simple plan for each of these natural areas should be developed that identifies the long term vision for the natural area. Maintenance practices should then be established to help the area evolve in that manner. One option would be to allow the area to turn into a wooded area through natural progression, in which case no extraordinary maintenance would be required. Another option would be to assist this process by planting desirable overstory trees rather than letting the volunteer trees (e.g. cottonwoods, box elders, silver maples) become the dominant species. If the desire is to have an area remain a meadow, then the area should be mowed occasionally, volunteer trees removed and possibly planted with prairie plants. In all of these cases, it would be appropriate to meet with area residents to help determine the desired vision for the area and solicit their help with planting and maintaining the trees or native prairie plants. Other natural area improvements might include:

- ◆ Maintaining or improving views to ponds and vistas;
- ◆ Establishing criteria for conversion of mowed turf to natural areas (i.e., meadows, prairie, wetland);
- ◆ Managing pond and wetland edges with native buffer vegetation;
- ◆ Managing exotic and invasive species; providing weed control in natural areas;
- ◆ Use of native plants to improve park appearance and enhance individual park character.

Other natural resource management policies include:

- ◆ Coordinating park improvements with the Stormwater Management Plan – i.e., identify areas within parks that may be used for stormwater management;
- ◆ Coordinating park improvements with the priorities and projects of the Natural Resources Management Plan;
- ◆ Conduct environmental education and demonstration projects within parks.

## **Trail System**

- ◆ Provide safe pedestrian access to all parks via local streets or hard surface trails;
- ◆ Connect external community trails to internal trails in parks;
- ◆ External community trails should be hard surface and separated from roadways, to serve multiple uses;

- ◆ Community trails should connect all neighborhoods, employment centers and destinations;
- ◆ Maintain trail system with sweeping, snow plowing and surface care.

## **Gemstones in the Park System: A Framework for Park Enhancements**

While all active-use parks (in contrast to preservation areas) are likely to have a similar set of facilities, a key element of this plan is enhancement of selected parks. The “Gemstone Concept” would provide **focused revitalization** of a small number of highly visible and important parks.

A Gemstone is a special park or part of a park in which the City has invested extra resources to make it a special place. Gemstones will be highly visible, attractive places with an appealing ambiance created by amenities such as fountains, lighting, landscaping, decorative tables, benches and public art as well as activities to encourage people to gather and enjoy their leisure time. These Gemstones will demonstrate in a concrete and visible way the City’s commitment to reinvesting in itself, and will support Burnsville’s reputation as a “preferred community” in which to live.

Gemstone Parks can contribute to the attractiveness of the community. They can enhance the quality of neighborhoods while playing a significant revitalization role in the redevelopment of older residential areas. They can also help create a special “feel” in targeted development areas such as the Heart of the City.

The City already has some unique natural parks in its system such as Terrace Oaks West, Sunset Pond, Cam Ram and Crystal Lake West. It also has some special active use parks such as Lac Lavon, North River Hills and Alimagnet. Gemstones will, however, be different. They will be oriented toward walking, gathering and quiet contemplation of broad vistas or intimate views of nature. They will add a new and important dimension to the City’s park system, a dimension essential to meeting the needs of our changing population.

A park could be selected as a Gemstones based on criteria such as:

- ◆ Visibility and accessibility from a major community roadway such as Nicollet Avenue, Burnsville Parkway, Southcross Drive or County Road 11;
- ◆ Meeting an important recreational or leisure need of the community;
- ◆ Having the natural character that can be enhanced to provide a special leisure experience;
- ◆ Having or providing space for recreational facilities that meet the need for a place to be alone, to gather with friends or family, or play together;

- ◆ Being distributed broadly throughout the City.

Some amenities which could be used to create Gemstones include:

- ◆ Spray fountains in ponds;
- ◆ Formal fountains for visual appeal;
- ◆ Interactive water amenities such as play equipment or dancing water;
- ◆ Decorative lighting, outdoor furniture and landscaping, potentially utilizing the themes established in the Streetscapes and the Heart of the City;
- ◆ Special seating and gathering places for individuals and small groups;
- ◆ Public art;
- ◆ Special plantings to enhance the existing natural vegetation.

Since the city has already begun substantial reinvestments in the Nicollet Avenue and Burnsville Parkway streetscapes, and will be facilitating redevelopment of the Heart of the City area, this area is a logical place to begin investing in Gemstone Parks.

Improvements to Crosstown West Park, for instance, would extend the Heart of the City reinvestment into an adjacent neighborhood and provide an important amenity for residents of nearby high density housing.

Seven parks are currently proposed as Gemstones:

**Crosstown West Park: A Quiet Place to Stroll and Sit by the Water**

**Neill Park: A Place for Water Play**

**Day Park and the Earley Lake Trail: Another Great Place to Walk Around a Lake**

**Vista View Park: A Place to Gather**

**Terrace Oaks Park: A Minnesota Valley Overlook**

**North River Hills Park: An Enhanced Play Environment**

**Civic Center Park: A Lighted Park for Evening Use**

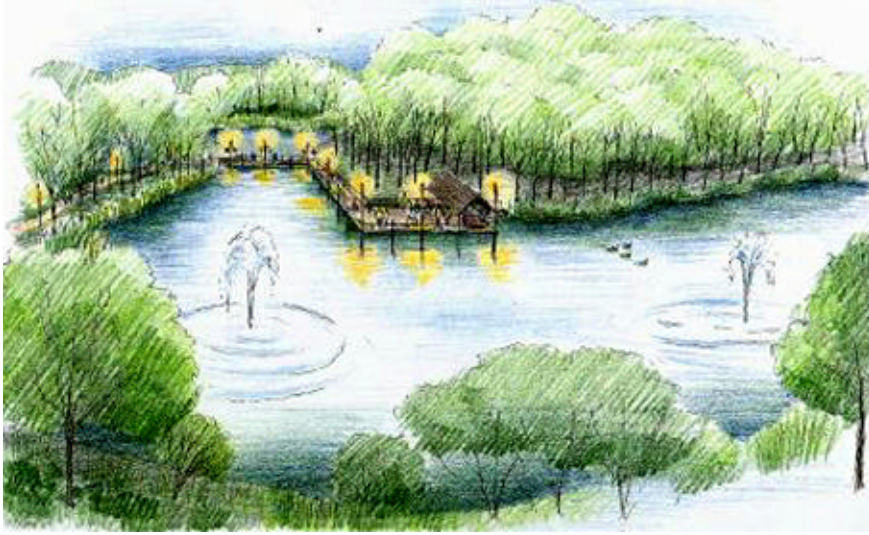
The improvements proposed for these parks are discussed below under Site-Specific Park Improvements.

## **Site-Specific Park Improvements**

This section identifies parks that are recommended for major improvements, beginning with the proposed new Gemstone Parks, and including community, neighborhood and mini parks. The functions of the various preservation areas are also discussed.

**Crosstown West Park – A Quiet Place to Stroll and Sit by the Water:** Crosstown West Park is located on the north side of the Burnsville Parkway just one block east of the Heart of the City; it is thus very visible and within easy walking distance from the HOC. It would be a perfect place to eat lunch on a nice summer day, especially for those who live, work or shop in the HOC. The park surrounds a pond, and a small peninsula juts into the pond with a hill covered in oak trees. It is rather picturesque and has the potential to be much more so. There is currently a trail loop around the pond, a medium size picnic shelter and play equipment. Selective clearing along trails will increase the sense of openness and security. The park could become a special place to walk, sit and gather during the daylight hours and in the evening. The following actions would achieve this goal:

- ◆ Provide trail lighting compatible with the nearby streetscape lighting;
- ◆ Provide a boardwalk across a narrow area in the pond over to the natural peninsula;
- ◆ Build a large deck with a partial roof over the water at the point of the peninsula, using the oak tree-covered hill as a visual backdrop;
- ◆ Provide seating and gathering areas along the trail and on the deck;
- ◆ Provide lighting on the deck and boardwalk;
- ◆ Provide hanging baskets similar to the streetscape baskets on the deck and irrigate them with water from the pond;
- ◆ Provide a couple of lighted spray fountains in the lake,
- ◆ Provide a place for public art;
- ◆ Prune back the vegetation along the trails and around the picnic shelter and play equipment to provide a more open feel and sense of security for park users;
- ◆ Encourage a partnership with the neighboring seniors complex(es) to introduce woodland wildflowers into the park;
- ◆ Construct a narrow, natural (soft surface) trail on the peninsula that does not interfere with its natural charm;
- ◆ Remove invasive species and deadfall in the wooded area and reforest with appropriate overstory trees, understory trees and shrubs;.
- ◆ Clear and maintain overlooks to the pond from the Parkway and Eagle Ridge Drive;
- ◆ Replace the play equipment with equipment designed for grandparent and young grandchild;
- ◆ Install smaller, permanent picnic and game tables in the existing shelter;



Crosstown West Park

*Proposed "Gemstone" Improvements*



Vista View Park

*Proposed "Gemstone" Improvements*

- ◆ Connect this park with the Heart of the City and the small HOC neighborhood park on the east side of Nicollet Avenue by means of a special trail, signage, hanging baskets, and other visually similar amenities.

**Neill Park – A Place for Water Play:** Neill Park is a large community park located on the south side of the Burnsville Parkway a few blocks west of County Road 5. There is an open, undeveloped area in the very southeast corner of the park, which is at a curve in the Parkway, and at a slightly higher elevation. This would be an ideal place to locate wet playground equipment with supporting amenities such as restrooms, gazebo, concrete patio with picnic tables and benches, lighted trail system around the pond, and parking lot. Water from the wet play equipment could flow into the lake by means of an artificial stream, which could go under a small bridge serving the trail. The site could also include a fountain of some type, which might be combined with the wet play equipment. The wet play equipment and fountain could be placed to be very visible from the Burnsville Parkway, to provide the desirable Gemstone visual impact and attract users to the site. The whole area could be designed to serve families with young children. We could achieve this by doing the following:

- ◆ Provide wet playground equipment;
- ◆ Provide a gazebo with restrooms;
- ◆ Provide a large concrete patio and picnic area;
- ◆ Include an interactive fountain or dancing water;
- ◆ Incorporate art into the water elements of the park;
- ◆ Provide a looped trail around the lake with decorative lighting compatible with the parkway streetscape;
- ◆ Provide decorative tables and benches compatible with the parkway streetscape;
- ◆ Remove invasive species and deadfall and reforest the woods which serve as a backdrop to the water play area and the looped trail around the pond.

**Day Park and the Earley Lake Trail – Another Great Place To Walk Around A Lake:** The park system already has a Gemstone in Sunset Pond Park, which is a place to take a walk around a lake in a naturally beautiful setting with prairie plants and waterfowl. This is already a heavily used and highly appreciated Gemstone. We have the opportunity to create another one – Day Park and the Earley Lake Trail. The City is currently working on completion of the trail around Earley Lake, which includes a boardwalk across a small bay. This trail is currently supported by a picnic shelter, play equipment and small parking lot. This park and trail could be enhanced further to provide the Gemstone experience, and thereby provide a great place for a stroll in a natural and scenic setting. We could achieve this by doing the following:



- ◆ Establish a native prairie under and around the oak trees in Day Park immediately adjacent to the corner of Southcross Drive and County Road 5, thereby reestablishing an oak savanna in an extremely visible location with Earley Lake as the backdrop;
- ◆ Provide a special park sign right at the corner, possibly with running water as a highlight;
- ◆ Provide interpretive signing regarding the community's original oak savanna character;
- ◆ Enhance the new stormwater pond that will be constructed in the new development on the east end of the lake, so that its outflow into the lake is a stream, potentially including a cascade or small waterfall down the embankment;
- ◆ Provide an auxiliary pump to keep water flowing during the warm season, which would both improve the water quality in the lake and enhance the stream aesthetically;
- ◆ Provide an additional boardwalk on the west end of the lake to keep the trail closer to the lake rather than to County Road 5;
- ◆ Provide deck(s) on or overhanging the lake at appropriate places around the lake;
- ◆ Work with the neighbors to introduce wetland flowering plants along the lake edge and woodland wildflowers next to the trail;
- ◆ Provide interpretive signing describing the specific plants being established;
- ◆ Work with the neighborhood to enhance the landscaping along the trail;
- ◆ Provide decorate tables and benches in character with the natural setting of the park;
- ◆ Provide small and personal seating areas or overlooks to stop and enjoy the setting.

**Vista View Park – A Place To Gather:** Vista View Park is located on the north side of the Burnsville Parkway a few blocks west of I-35W, and just a short distance beyond the current end of the parkway streetscape. It contains a pond with an island in the middle and numerous trees, giving it a natural feel. It also has a trail loop around the pond, a recreation building with restrooms and an attached picnic shelter, a large play equipment area, two youth ballfields, basketball court and hockey rink. It also has a special pleasure rink with its own landscaped “island” in the middle with special lighting and a sound system. With the addition of a few facilities, the park would provide an excellent place for adults, families and multi-generational groups to gather or to meet. It would be an ideal place to hold a family reunion, a graduation party, an informal wedding or an end-of-season picnic. With the addition of some visual amenities it

could become an extension of the Burnsville Parkway and Nicollet Avenue streetscapes and the Heart of the City. Given that the park is in the Weed & Seed (crime prevention) area, it could provide a huge, visible symbol of reinvestment in an older part of our community. The following actions would achieve this goal:

- ◆ Provide decorative lighting compatible with the streetscapes/HOC;
- ◆ Provide decorative tables and benches compatible with streetscapes/HOC;
- ◆ Provide a seating area and bonfire circle adjacent to the picnic shelter;
- ◆ Upgrade the play equipment;
- ◆ Provide a spray fountain in the pond;
- ◆ Add recreational amenities for group activities: e.g., volleyball court, horseshoe court;
- ◆ Provide additional landscape screening from adjacent homes;
- ◆ Provide lights for the basketball court.

**Terrace Oaks West Park – A Minnesota Valley Overlook:** The northwest corner of Terrace Oaks West Park is one of the highest spots in Burnsville. It provides an excellent overlook over a large portion of Burnsville, the Minnesota River Valley, and Minneapolis, and would be a great place to watch a sunset. There is currently no way to reach this spot without bushwhacking through the underbrush. This portion of the park is being restored as an oak savanna and a native prairie. The City could provide an overlook via an ag-lime (gravel) trail through these restored natural areas. A seating area would allow one to enjoy the view in comfort. The ag-lime trail would also provide handicap accessibility to the park. The following improvements would be needed:

- ◆ Construct an overlook structure and seating area compatible with the natural character of the park. Locate the overlook to be visible from below (County Road 11 and Burnsville Parkway) to draw people to it.
- ◆ Construct an ag-lime trail from the chalet near the Terrace Oaks West parking lot to the overlook. This would also provide improved access for controlled burns.
- ◆ Provide interpretive signing regarding the history and geology of the Minnesota River Valley, of the park itself, of oak savannas and native prairies.

**North River Hills Park – An Enhanced Play Environment:** Neill Park has been proposed as a Gemstone site for wet play equipment. Based on the use that facility receives, North River Hills Park should be considered for such an amenity in the future. A natural area in the southwest corner of the park and a mowed area along River Hills Drive could both be nicely landscaped using a combination of native plant materials, specimen trees and landscaping beds. This would enhance the appearance of the park and provide an excellent backdrop for the wet play equipment. A gazebo and seating

areas could be blended into the landscaping. Additional water features such as fountains, small ponds and a small artificial stream could further enhance the area's appearance. Additional trail connections to the east and north would make the water play equipment and landscaping area accessible by trail to a large number of residents. The following improvements would be needed:

- ◆ Provide wet playground equipment;
- ◆ Reshape and landscape the west part of the park along River Hills Drive;
- ◆ Provide a gazebo and seating areas;
- ◆ Include water features as part of the landscaping;
- ◆ Provide additional trails in the park.

**Civic Center Park – A Lighted Park For Evening Use:** Civic Center Park has many public facilities, many of which are used predominantly in the late afternoon and evenings: the Garage, the Ice Center, the community rooms in City Hall, and the Council Chambers. Civic Center Park could be enhanced as a place to go in the evenings by providing lighted trails and activities, using the lighting style of the Nicollet Streetscape. This theme could be supported by providing places for people to gather along the trails and additional youth-oriented, outdoor recreation activities. We could achieve this by doing the following:

- ◆ Provide lighted, hard surface trails in the wooded area in the northeast and east parts of the park; these could also be used for cross-country skiing in winter;
- ◆ Provide a lighted spray fountain in the pond immediately south of the City Hall;
- ◆ Provide lighted basketball courts for use by “The Garage” youth center and the community in general;
- ◆ Provide improved lighting and evening sitting areas in the Bicentennial Garden, and some sites for public art;
- ◆ Provide lighted trails up to and including Nicollet Junior High, Sky Oaks Elementary and Gideon Pond Elementary;
- ◆ Evaluate the concept of providing a lighted athletic field at Nicollet Junior High for informal use by youth;
- ◆ Provide decorative tables and benches compatible with the themes established in the streetscapes/HOC.

If the City were to make the trail lighting improvements in Crosstown West, Vista View and Civic Center Parks, the community would have a system of lighted trails for evening walking to the east, west and south of the Heart of the City. This trail network would build upon and support the Heart of the City as a place for a pleasant

stroll in the evening, for a cup of special coffee or an ice cream cone. All are close enough to the HOC to make them a practical walking destination. They each could become a visual beginning of the HOC as one enters it from Nicollet Avenue and Burnsville Parkway.

**Community Parks**

Only the parks listed below are scheduled for improvements or have major issues that should be addressed. Parks not listed here will retain their current facilities and receive ongoing maintenance. Natural area management plans will be developed for all parks that have significant natural areas. Parks may also be considered for additional improvements based on community interest (see “Special Requests for Enhancements” under Policies, page 24).

**Alimagnet Park:** This is a large community park which connects with the City of Apple Valley’s Alimagnet Park. No major changes are envisioned for this park. Park needs include:

- ◆ Hard surface trail from County Road 11 into the park.
- ◆ Renovate and upgrade baseball fields. The City is currently exploring a partnership with the local young adult baseball association to enhance the park’s baseball facilities, including improved lighting on Field #1, a concession stand and restroom, protective netting above the backstops, nine inning scoreboards and irrigation.
- ◆ Develop a dog exercise area immediately east across parking lot from four existing softball fields.
- ◆ Provide lakeshore access via a wood chip trail or other means.

**Biramwood Golf Course:** This facility is managed by Burnsville’s Recreation Department. No major changes in design or amenities are planned.

**Blackdog Park:** A hard surface trail is planned, starting at River Hills Drive near Sioux Trail Elementary, continuing through Tennisioux Park and Blackdog Park and ending at 12th Avenue. The City will be enhancing the existing football field in 2001, to include regrading the field, irrigation, improved lighting and bleachers.

**Cam Ram Park:** This is a large natural park with only the northwest corner developed for active use. The vision for the park includes a trail link between the active use area in the northwest corner to Northview Park to the east.

**Civic Center Park:** See above under Gemstone Parks.

**Cliff Fen Park:** This park is a destination because of the Skyland playground; it also offers trail connections to the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. No major changes are envisioned. Planned improvements include hard-surfacing of the parking lot expansion area and addition of a third picnic shelter.

**Crosstown West Park:** See above under Gemstone Parks.

**Crystal Beach:** The park includes the City's only guarded public beach. No major changes are envisioned in this park; the park building will be renovated in 2000-2001.

**Crystal West Park:** A hard surface trail is planned between the boat launch area and the fishing dock located below Tyacke Park.

**Day Park:** See above under Gemstone Parks.

**Sue Fischer Memorial Park:** Currently under development; future improvements will include maintenance building, concession stand with restrooms and scoreboards. This park is connected to the Rudy L. Kraemer Nature Preserve by the trail system.

**Rudy L. Kraemer Nature Preserve:** This park is guided by a 1996 Master Plan and is managed by the City's Natural Resources Department. It is currently connected to Sue Fischer Memorial Park by adjoining trail systems. The plan is to connect both parks to the neighborhood to the north by trail connections through the Nature Preserve.

**Minnesota Riverfront Park:** This is a small piece of land leased from NSP for park purposed. Improvements will include a hard surface parking lot. This should be done in conjunction with improvements to Blackdog Road. Landscape improvements should be made to this park to improve its appearance, and an internal trail to the bluff top along the river should be developed. A riverfront trail linking this park and the planned West Riverfront Park should also be considered as that park is developed.

**Neill Park:** In addition to the Gemstone Park concept discussed above, major renovations of the adult softball fields are needed.

**North River Hills Park:** See above under Gemstone Parks.

**Pik Nik Island:** No major changes are envisioned. A permanent picnic table on slab should be provided.

**Rose Park:** This is leased land. Once the lease is up in another 15 years (or earlier if the landowner chooses to terminate the lease) the City will need to decide if these fields are needed on a permanent basis. If so, the City will need to find funds to purchase the land.

**Sunset Pond:** The internal loop trail system should be extended to the north beyond the dam to connect with the Savage trail system. There is an off-street parking shortage, however there appears to be sufficient on-street parking on Preserve Boulevard. The City will evaluate whether the present parking situation is acceptable.

**Terrace Oaks West Park:** The vision for the park is already well-established through the Terrace Oaks Master Plan; current projects include oak savanna and prairie restoration. See the proposed overlook and trail improvements above under Gemstone Parks. Stormwater from outside of the park is currently being directed into the park from the

south. In wet years this has flooded a low area, killing some trees and making certain trail sections inaccessible. The City is preparing a Stormwater Management Plan that will identify solutions to this problem. At minimum some of the stormwater will be redirected to a storage area outside of Terrace Oaks Park. When this area dries up sufficiently, the City should touch up the area, remove dead trees and vegetation debris as appropriate and replant with appropriate native vegetation.

**Tennisioux Park:** A hard surface trail is planned through Tennisioux Park to Blackdog Park (see above under Blackdog Park).

**Vista View Park:** See above under Gemstone Parks.

**Wolk Park:** No major changes are envisioned. A proposal to construct a hard surface and/or natural trail system in the natural part of the park has been dropped due to neighborhood opposition.

**Neighborhood Parks**

Changes are not anticipated for the majority of neighborhood parks. Only the parks listed below are scheduled for improvements or have issues that should be addressed.

**Cedarbridge Park:** Some hard surface trail/sidewalk improvements should be made on the street side of the park, connecting to the play equipment and basketball court.

**Chateaulin Park:** The southwest corner of the park (on top of the hill) needs to be cleaned up, final graded, and landscaped. A picnic shelter could potentially be added in this area. This concept should be discussed with the adjacent neighborhood.

**Hollows Park:** Residents have requested a tennis court in this park. Although there appear to be sufficient tennis courts in the park system to meet the community’s needs, this park is located in far western Burnsville and area residents do not have good access to an existing tennis court. In addition, there are a large number of businesses in the area, whose employees would benefit from access to a tennis court. Based on these factors, a tennis court should be provided in this park.

**Keller Lake Park:** Add swings to play equipment.

**Krestwood Park:** Ballfield and turf need renovation, and encroaching woods should be pushed back.

**Northview Park:** A hard surface trail connection to Cam Ram Park is planned.

**Skyline Park:** Residents have requested a trail through the park connecting the entrance drive to Chippewa Lane (the street on the other side of the park).

**South River Hills Park:** The natural area needs to be upgraded and its appearance improved.

**Timberland Park:** A hard surface parking lot should be developed.

**Tyacke Park:** Security lighting along trail through the park has been requested.

**West Buck Hill Park:** A tennis court has been requested. Although there appear to be sufficient tennis courts in the park system to meet the community's needs, this park is located in far south Burnsville and area residents do not have good access to an existing tennis court. Based on this, a tennis court should be provided in this park.

**Wood Park:** A picnic shelter should be added on the lake side of the play equipment. Residents have requested parking lot and trail lights. Neighborhood input should be sought before proceeding with the trail lighting in particular, as there has not been sufficient opportunity to discuss this potentially controversial amenity.

### Mini Parks

As with neighborhood parks, few changes are anticipated for the majority of mini parks. Only the parks listed below are scheduled for improvements or have issues that should be addressed.

**Rolling Meadows Park:** Residents have requested addition of a half court basketball area, if space permits. This request should be evaluated, along with the potential for adding swings and play equipment.

**Sunset Park:** Need to establish vision and plan for the park. Is a trail through the park appropriate?

**Westview Park:** Evaluate potential for trail through the park, although the hill may be too steep.

**Archery Park:** Evaluate as potential community garden site.

### Preservation Areas

**Brookview Park:** Cannot be developed due to topography. No development anticipated.

**Country Club Park:** Cannot be developed due to topography. No development anticipated.

**Forest Heights Park:** The park's value is primarily as open space. The only facility that could potentially be developed in this park without destroying its natural resources value would be a wood chip trail system. An informal trail system already exists, and is probably all that is justified considering the park's location and lack of good access and parking. There are no plans to develop this park.

**Judicial Park:** Cannot be developed for active use due to topography. The park's value is primarily as open space. The only facilities that could potentially be developed in

this park without destroying its natural resources value would be a wood chip trail system and very small parking lot. An informal trail system already exists, and is probably all that is justified considering the park's location. There are no plans to develop this park.

**Lake Park:** Due to topography, powerlines and the proximity of backyards adjacent to steep hill next to ponds, it is impractical to develop the west portion of the park. The east portion is flat and is mowed and currently used for football practices. There is an existing half-size basketball court that could be upgraded and expanded if desired. There are no plans for further development of this park.

**Loop Park:** Residents have opposed active use facilities being developed in this park. If residents wish to have it developed in the future this designation could be changed. As the years go by and the volunteer trees mature, the environmental cost of developing active uses will increase.

**Twin Lakes Park:** Residents have opposed active use facilities being developed in this park. If residents wish to have it developed in the future this designation could be changed.

**Wellington Crescent Park:** This park has very poor access from the street and is in reality just a backyard natural area for the surrounding homes. No development is anticipated.

**Woods Lane Park:** Cannot be developed due to topography. No development is anticipated.

**Future Parks: A Conceptual Framework**

The following parks are envisioned as being developed within the time period covered by this plan – roughly through 2020. Some parks are likely to be developed within the next decade (i.e., the Heart of the City parks). Others, such as the Kraemer Quarry park, may not be developed for many years. The purpose of this plan is to establish a conceptual framework for these parks that specifies their function within the community, environmental considerations that should be addressed, and the recreational facilities that they may contain. Obviously, more detailed site planning will be needed as these parks are developed. The park names given below are provisional, and will be changed in most cases as park plans evolve.

**West Riverfront Park:** Several studies have explored the use of a large riverfront parcel (the McGowan property) in the City's northwest quadrant that has most recently been used for a landfill. A 1992 PUD application included plans for an amphitheater, marina, riverfront park and trash transfer station. A recent proposal for an amphitheater is currently under consideration. The City has a permanent use easement on approximately 5 acres along the northern edge of the property. The eastern portion of



the property extends to the Minnesota River, but the western portion does not.

More detailed site analysis will be conducted as the plans for the site progress.

Amenities for this park should include a trail along the river, picnic tables and potentially picnic shelters along the river. Other possible facilities might include play equipment and a turf area for informal play. Constraints include the frequent flooding of the riverbank area.

If the adjacent U.S. Salt business ever becomes available for purchase, the City may consider buying that land to add to the park site (although the city has no intention of buying out the business or condemning the land).

**Heart of the City “Town Square” Park:** A principle of the Heart of the City Design Framework Plan is to “provide parks and plazas for a variety of uses and community gatherings.” The town square park, called “Nicollet Commons,” is intended to be bounded on three sides by a concentration of three-story, mixed-use and institutional buildings, with Nicollet Avenue on the eastern edge. “This central gathering space will become the focus of civic and cultural activities, providing an area for programmed events such as a farmers’ market, art fairs, sidewalk sales and concerts, as well as passive recreation space.” This park will consist primarily of lawn areas divided by paved paths, with a central paved plaza, plentiful shade trees, pedestrian-scale lighting, ornamental flowerbeds, seating areas, and probably a water feature such as a fountain and other public art. There may also be a bandshell or gazebo for concerts. It may be desirable to include an active play area with play equipment or an interactive sculpture.

**Heart of the City Mini Park:** This park, on the east side of Nicollet Avenue, is intended primarily as a “pocket park” – a small landscaped area with shade trees and terraced seating – that will serve surrounding housing, to be developed by the Dakota County HRA. The actual facilities in the park will largely depend on the type of housing to be developed adjacent to it (i.e., senior housing, townhouses, housing for families). The plans for both Heart of the City parks will take shape as detailed site and landscape designs are developed, beginning in summer of 2000.

**Kraemer Quarry Park:** This park will be part of the redevelopment of the Edward Kraemer & Sons (EKS) mining operation and former landfill site. An Implementation Scoping Study was prepared in 1998 for the entire Gateway Area, and was extended to cover the 767-acre EKS property, which is also covered by an approved Planned Unit Development (PUD) plan. The long term end use plan calls for the property to be used for various purposes, including office and industrial redevelopment, wetland restoration, stormwater management, and open space and recreation. The PUD plan for the EKS property is reviewed every five years and will be updated periodically as nearby properties redevelop.

The future park is envisioned to include a lakefront swimming beach and boat launch and a trailhead for a lakefront trail. The lake that will be created when the quarry is closed will need to be configured to provide shallow water for aquatic recreation and natural habitat for wildlife.

**Potential New Facilities**

One of the major issues that confronts every city parks department is how to accommodate new recreational activities within its existing (or new) parks. Burnsville has already responded to these issues, by developing mountain bike trails, in-line skating rinks, and a new youth center at Civic Center Park. Two activities that are currently under consideration are off-leash dog exercise areas and community gardens. Each activity has certain criteria that should be met in selecting appropriate sites.

**Dog exercise areas** are becoming increasingly popular with urban and suburban residents who want to provide exercise for their pets in a natural setting. These sites should meet the following criteria:

- ◆ Adequate size to accommodate heavy use without damage to natural resources – probably a minimum of three to five acres;
- ◆ Preferably, some diversity of terrain and habitat. A site that includes some wooded areas would be preferable to one that is entirely open field..
- ◆ Adequate parking for users – not a problem in most parks, except at busy athletic field areas during peak hours.
- ◆ Access from an arterial or collector street, rather than a local residential street.
- ◆ Sufficient buffering from neighboring residential areas. Ideally, the site should be wooded or separated by vegetation and by a distance of at least 100 feet from adjacent properties. The site should also be fenced.

Based on these criteria, it is likely that most dog exercise areas would be located in community parks. One such area is currently proposed in Alimagnet Park. The City will monitor and evaluate the use of the area, in order to determine if additional areas should be developed.

**Community gardens** can increase neighborhood cohesion and sense of community, beautify vacant or under-utilized land, and provide outdoor recreation for residents of multi-family apartments or other higher-density housing. Gardens can also serve a variety of special populations: seniors, youth, people with disabilities, etc. Well-established in many cities, community gardening is now becoming popular in suburban locations. It has been identified at neighborhood and community meetings as a need that should be addressed within the park system.

The Parks Department will work with groups that wish to start community gardens to make sites available at appropriate locations. There may also be city-owned sites outside the parks that are suitable. Criteria for selecting garden sites include:

- ◆ Availability of public water (hydrant converters can be used, although a spigot would be preferable);
- ◆ Adequate sunlight;
- ◆ Relatively level topography;
- ◆ Suitable soils (avoid poorly drained soils or soils with the possibility of contamination);
- ◆ Proximity and accessibility from a public street, since many gardeners will bring tools and supplies by car. Availability of parking (5 to 10 spaces should be adequate).
- ◆ Sufficient buffering from neighborhood residential areas. The location should be acceptable to any adjacent neighborhood(s).
- ◆ Compatibility with other park activities.

For their part, garden groups should be willing to maintain their sites neatly, to ensure that all plots are cleaned at the end of the season, and to plant ornamental flower beds or shrubs around the visible perimeter, in order to make the site aesthetically pleasing to neighbors and passers-by.

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

This section discusses funding sources, cost estimates and general phasing for the projects proposed in this plan.

### Parks Funding

Funding for park improvements, renovation and development comes from a variety of sources, some already determined as part of the City budgeting process and some (such as grants) to be determined.

**Renovation Funding:** The City of Burnsville allocates funds on an annual basis in the City's Capital Improvements Program for park renovation. In 2000, this amount was \$410,000. It will go up by \$10,000 a year until 2003 at which time it increase by \$15,000 a year. These funds are for the replacement and renovation of existing facilities and amenities such as bituminous surfaces, fencing, athletic field and area lighting, play equipment, amenities and buildings. These funds are not used for improvements to parks or the addition of new facilities.

**Development and Improvement Funding:** Funding for improvement and development of parks and facilities is addressed as part of the annual budgeting process. Project requests are included in the City's Capital Improvements Program, and are evaluated on a project-by-project basis. This would be the primary funding source for the projects listed in this section.

The funding for both park renovation and for park improvement and development is drawn primarily from ad valorem (property) taxes. The City does receive some park dedication money each year. It is expected that this will taper off to virtually zero as the City becomes fully developed. This is the source of the \$25,000 a year general park improvement funding from 2002 to 2004. The funds projected for 2000 and 2001 are already committed to the youth ballfield complex in Sue Fischer Memorial Park.

A sum of \$20,660 a year in ad valorem taxes is also being allocated to pay land acquisition costs for Sue Fischer Memorial Park each year from 2000 to 2004.

The City will try to identify and utilize other funding sources to minimize the impact on property taxes.

Certain projects are a combination of park renovation and park improvement. Two examples are the football facility improvements in Blackdog Park (scheduled in 2001) and the baseball improvements in Alimagnet Park (presently being evaluated). The portion of these projects that are replacement of existing facilities, such as athletic field lighting and fencing will be taken out of the annual allocation for park renovation. The funds for improvements, such as irrigation, parking lot addition, concession stand/rest-

room building, will need to be placed in the Capital Improvements Program on a project by project basis.

Currently the City's Capital Improvements Program contains funds for the following development and improvement projects:

<b>2000</b>	- Cam Ram - Northview Park Trail Connection *	- \$ 58,000
	- Blackdog - Tennisoux Park Trail Connection *	- \$ 69,000
	- Early Lake Trail - East End	- \$ 65,000
	- Fencing and Backstops for Sue Fischer Memorial Park	- \$150,000
<b>2001</b>	- Blackdog Park Football Field	- \$ 80,000
<b>2002</b>	- General Park Improvements (no project designated)	- \$ 25,000
<b>2003</b>	- General Park Improvements (no project designated)	- \$ 25,000
<b>2004</b>	- General Park Improvements (no project designated)	- \$ 25,000

\* *These improvements scheduled for 2000 were identified in an earlier Parks Master Plan revision. They will not be implemented in 2000, but instead will be re-prioritized along with the new projects identified in this plan.*

## **Cost Estimates and Phasing**

The table on the following pages lists preliminary cost estimates for the proposed improvements in each of the City's parks. Unit costs (i.e., linear foot of trail; costs per light fixture) are multiplied by the estimated total distance, area or number of items. Other costs are listed on a lump-sum basis.

Gemstone Park improvements are listed in priority order; other park improvements are listed alphabetically.

The second table, "Phasing of General Park Improvements," is a preliminary phasing plan that divides the major park improvement projects *not* listed in the Capital Improvements Program (or re-prioritized as part of this plan) into short-term, medium-term and future long-term projects.

## **Appendix: Summaries of Public Meetings on the Parks Master Plan**

A series of neighborhood meetings were held in the spring and summer of 1999 to discuss park use and park facilities in neighborhood parks. A survey was also distributed with meeting notices and the results were summarized. The Parks and Natural Resources Commission held two community meetings in October and November of 1999. At both meetings, the consultants presented a summary of demographic trends and their assessment of issues and conditions in the park system. Attendees then divided into small groups for a “brainstorming session” to discuss issues relating to the system in general and to individual parks. Comments from these meetings are summarized below. All comments have been evaluated and incorporated into the Parks Master Plan as appropriate.

### **Summary of General Themes Raised at Neighborhood Park Meetings**

- ◆ Provide security lighting in parks: in parking lots, along trails, around play equipment.
- ◆ Improve forestry maintenance in natural areas:
  - Remove dead trees;
  - Reforest areas which lose many trees due to storms (north end of Knob Hill);
  - Remove cottonwood trees and willow trees around ponds and lakes which block views and make the area look unkempt (Paha Sapa, Crosstown West, Vista View);
  - Remove trees and undergrowth that enclose play equipment areas and make them feel unsafe (Knob Hill, Crosstown West).
- ◆ Provide drinking water at parks.
- ◆ Provide foul line and three-point line markings on basketball courts.
- ◆ Provide practice boards at tennis courts.
- ◆ Provide swings in all play equipment areas.
- ◆ Replace elements in the park system as needed: e.g., play equipment, basketball backboards, etc.
- ◆ Provide benches near basketball courts.
- ◆ Provide grills with picnic tables in appropriate areas.
- ◆ Provide bollards to prevent vehicle access to internal trails in parks, e.g., Knob Hill and Keller Lake.

- ◆ Provide more small picnic shelters in neighborhood parks: e.g., West Buck Hill, Hollows.
- ◆ Owners not picking up after their dogs (brought up numerous times). This is a City-wide issue of major significance to residents.
- ◆ Provide internal access trails in parks; e.g., Alimagnet, South River Hills.
- ◆ Provide wildflowers in natural areas and more landscaping at park entrances and key points within parks, i.e., around park entrance signs.

## **Summary of October 5th Community Meeting**

### **Strengths of the Burnsville Park System**

- ◆ The high ratio of parkland to people;
- ◆ Diversity of park facilities;
- ◆ Physical distribution, accessibility;
- ◆ Well-maintained;
- ◆ Heavily used;
- ◆ Ample number of fields; accommodates youth sports needs well;
- ◆ Variety of natural areas, varied terrain and topography;
- ◆ Presence of water bodies – ponds, lakes, etc.

### **Opportunities for Improvement**

- ◆ Landscaping of trails and paths;
- ◆ More multi-use fields, fields of different sizes;
- ◆ Enhanced pavement treatments;
- ◆ More winter use opportunities – cross-country trail links between parks;
- ◆ Better “wayfinding” – direction signs to parks;
- ◆ Security, vandalism – better lighting of parking lots, certain trails;
- ◆ Lack of vistas over the Minnesota River valley;
- ◆ Dominance of mowed turf;
- ◆ Improvements to wetlands;
- ◆ New facilities – community gardens, better seating (shade) for field observation, etc.;
- ◆ Better integration of facilities (fields, playgrounds, etc.)

### **Issues the Master Plan should address**

- ◆ Strategies for renovation and replacement of equipment;

- ◆ Guidelines for system-wide elements such as entry and directional signs, lighting, restroom enclosures, structures;
- ◆ Reduction in turf cover; strategies for “release” of lawn areas;
- ◆ Policies for trail plowing, access for disabled, etc.

## **Summary of November 16th Community Meeting**

### **Suggestions for System-wide Improvements**

- ◆ Athletic fields locked in off-hours – youth discouraged from informal use;
- ◆ Fields unlighted in off-hours – more informal use of lighted fields;  
example: Black Dog Park
- ◆ Extend Centennial Park level of landscaping to other parks;
- ◆ Summer use of hockey rink surfaces (street hockey?);
- ◆ Full-court basketball;
- ◆ More swings, hand pump swings;
- ◆ Tennis court improvements – more lighting, new court surfaces;
- ◆ More tennis practice boards;
- ◆ Wider trails;
- ◆ Better access into parks;  
example: Kraemer Preserve
- ◆ Better ice maintenance – grading system of “A, B, C” ice rinks;  
example: Carnelian
- ◆ Add lockers to warming houses;
- ◆ More (and safer) sledding hills;
- ◆ Management of geese and deer populations;
- ◆ Seek corporate sponsorship of park improvements;
- ◆ Community gardens;
- ◆ More plowing of paths and trails for winter walking;  
examples: Red Oak and Alimagnet
- ◆ More connecting bike trails, longer routes;
- ◆ “Pet parks” – off-leash exercise areas;
- ◆ Increase community awareness of landscape management issues, i.e. buck-thorn;  
example: Terrace Oaks
- ◆ Add lawn bowling as a park activity;



- ◆ Add houses or shelters for birdwatching to one or more parks;
- ◆ Consider creating a botanical garden in a park.

### **Suggestions for Specific Park Improvements**

- ◆ Make a trail connection along the lake between Crystal Lake West and Tyacke Parks, between boat ramp and fishing dock.
  - potential for picnic area
  - elevation change provides privacy
- ◆ Consider installing a labyrinth (of landscape materials, rock, etc.) as a central landscape feature in a park (i.e. Heart of the City square).
- ◆ Plow path in Red Oak Park in winter.
- ◆ Pave trail at north end of Red Oak Park.
- ◆ Paha Sapa Park – provide a stairway down the hill.
- ◆ Hollows Park – develop a formal path.