



8. PARKS & TRAILS

Direction for parks, natural areas, recreational facilities, and trails.

INTRODUCTION

Hopkins has many parks and natural areas that are valued by residents, businesses, and visitors. Minnehaha Creek, in particular, is a resource in the process of renewal and rediscovery of its potential. Parks and open space have multiple, layered values to a community. From providing space for natural habitat to space for physical activity and recreation, the park and open space system in Hopkins provides many benefits to the community.

MAJOR FACTORS

Major factors to consider while planning for parks and trails in Hopkins include:

- **Focus on improving existing systems.** As Hopkins is a fully developed community, there are very limited opportunities for expansion of the system, except as part of redevelopment projects. Instead, the focus will be on maintaining and enhancing the existing system – and on finding ways to increase connectivity through trails and linear green spaces.
- **Role as regional trail hub.** One important role Hopkins plays is as a hub for the regional trail network, with multiple regional trails converging within the city. This will continue to be the case, and future plans include the potential to grow and connect both regional and local networks to provide a fully connected and accessible system.
- **Efficient use of space with multiple functions.** Parks and open spaces provide multiple functions. In addition to recreational and leisure activities for the public, these spaces also provide an opportunity to support the natural environment through best practices for supporting natural habitat, improving water quality, and managing stormwater. This shared, stacked vision can help make the best use of limited space.
- **Equitable access.** To fully support the social environment, the city will also need to ensure there is equitable access to park facilities, and that they reflect the needs and preferences of a changing and diverse population.
- **Going beyond the park.** Particularly in a developed area like Hopkins, it is important to think of open spaces beyond those in public park settings. This includes planted boulevards along streets, privately owned open spaces, and various plazas and pocket parks in developed areas.

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

LIMITED LAND AVAILABILITY



As a fully developed community, there is limited room to accommodate additional open space. Improvements will need to make efficient use of available land for both natural and recreational uses. Some larger scale natural and recreational features may not be able to be accommodated within the city. Connectivity to the regional trail network provides an opportunity to link to larger regional resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS



There are a number of environmental factors which put stresses on natural resources in parks. These include invasive species, tree diseases, soil and water pollution, and climate change effects. For example, the spread of the emerald ash borer has already caused the loss of many ash trees in the Twin Cities area, and is still advancing. On a broader scale, climate change may alter what species are most appropriate for growing in this climate. Addressing these will require careful and ongoing management of resources, in coordination with various resource agencies.

CHANGING USES OF PARKS

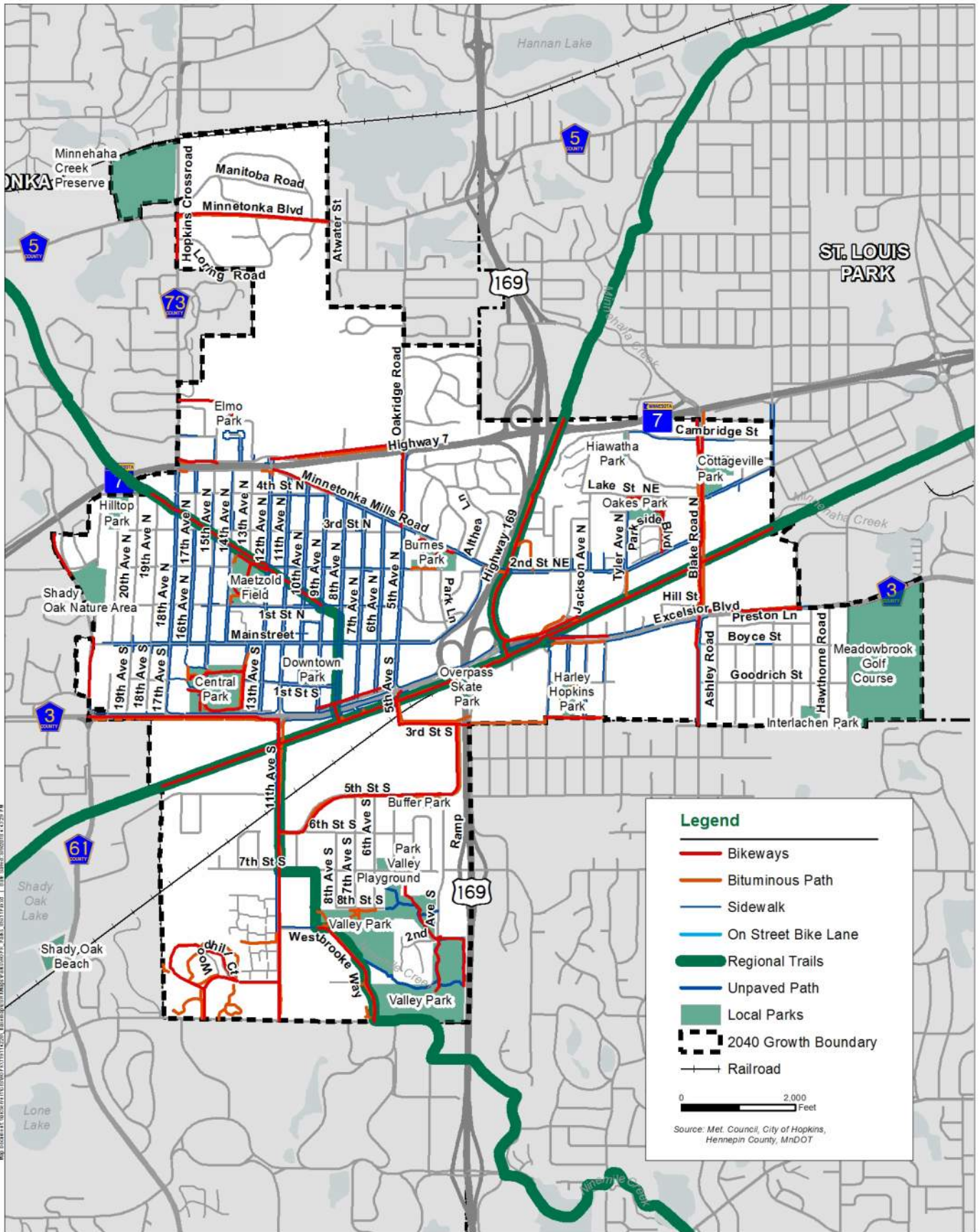


As the demographics of the community shifts, the preferences for how they use parks and related facilities changes as well. Older facilities and equipment may have to be replaced to incorporate improvements that better match current demands and interests. Choosing these improvements will require feedback from the community regarding their preferences, particularly from those currently underserved by the park and recreation system.

PEOPLE ARE BUSY



Feedback from the planning process suggests that people are often too busy to enjoy all the park and recreation opportunities in Hopkins. While it is not possible to simplify everyone's life, facilities and programs may need additional consideration of accessibility, convenience, and flexibility to reach more people.





GOALS AND POLICIES

Recreation, Leisure, and Active Living

A primary function of the parks and trails system in Hopkins is to provide an opportunity for the public to enjoy a range of recreational and leisure activities – contributing to a healthy, active lifestyle. Improvements to these facilities and programs supports and strengthens the city’s social environment as well, by providing public spaces for community events and gatherings, both formal and informal.

Policies:

- Continue to provide a park, trail, and recreation system that meets the needs of a diverse population.
- Focus on maintenance and enhancement of existing parks and recreation facilities.
- Provide a park and recreation system that strengthens the community and serves as gathering places for community and neighborhood events.
- Continue to collaborate with the City of Minnetonka, Hopkins School District, Three Rivers Park District, and other agencies to provide recreational opportunities for Hopkins residents.
- Promote active living and a healthier community through parks and recreation opportunities.
- Cooperate with other jurisdictions on the development of the regional trail network and supporting amenities, and provide local trail connections that link regional trails to local parks and destinations.
- Prioritize and execute improvements at designated Focus Parks (Burnes Park, Central Park, and Valley Park) and other parks based on the guidance documented in the 2015 Hopkins Parks Reinvestment Plan.
- Support the development and maintenance of privately owned public spaces (POPS).

GOAL 1

Provide a range of public spaces, programs, and facilities that meet community needs for recreation and leisure.

Equity and Accessibility

While parks and recreation facilities in Hopkins are available to the public, only a portion of residents report using them regularly. While some of this may be due to personal choice, there are opportunities to improve overall accessibility – particularly for groups and areas currently underserved. This includes ensuring there are opportunities for people with mobility limitations.

Policies:

- Determine if any areas of the city are currently underserved by park and recreation opportunities.
- Ensure facilities and spaces are accessible to people with a range of abilities and levels of mobility.
- Promote safety within parks and along trails to ensure that they have a comfortable and welcoming environment for potential users.
- Partner with other agencies to address any financial barriers that prevent participation of lower income households and individuals in recreational programs.
- Inform the public about parks and recreation opportunities in the community, and invite them to use them.
- Prioritize and improve accessibility to and within parks based on the guidance documented in the 2015 Hopkins Parks Reinvestment Plan so parks can be enjoyed by all Hopkins residents.
- Support the implementation of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) principles in parks and public spaces.

GOAL 2

Support and improve overall accessibility of the park and recreation system to all residents.



Natural Environment and Ecology

Parks and open space provide space for natural resources, including vegetation, natural habitat, and ecological functions. These passive uses of park and open space need to be balanced with more active recreational uses. A key common element is connectivity: developing connections helps support natural environment outcomes around habitat and ecological function, while also adding accessibility to the recreational elements. Stacking benefits that further multiple goals (recreational, environmental, water quality, etc.) can make efficient use of land and create unique places as well.

Policies:

- Protect and enhance natural resources located within public park and open space areas.
- Use park and open space areas where appropriate for stormwater management.
- Maintain current trees and vegetation in public parks and open space areas to established standards, and encourage additional plantings in appropriate areas.
- Provide information and education about natural resources in Hopkins, including opportunities to protect and enhance those resources.
- Investigate how climate change may be impacting trees and plants in parks and open spaces.
- Promote the establishment of edible plants and herb gardens in public open spaces and parks where appropriate.
- Support pollinators through planting and maintaining flowering plants.
- Incorporate native plants in park landscapes, and limit mowing of these areas.

GOAL 3

Use the park and open space system to protect and enhance natural resources.

