



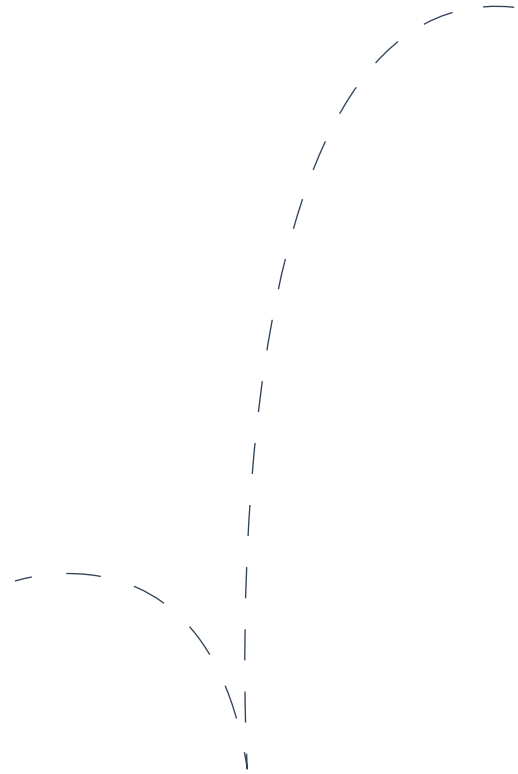
Case For Action

for the **Columbia Heights Parks
and Recreation System Plan**

June 2026

DRAFT



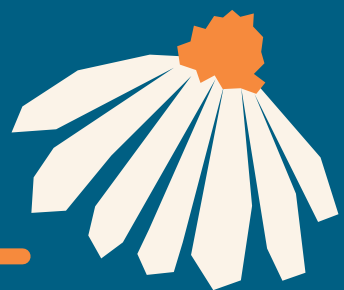


This page has been intentionally left blank.

Table of Contents

Introduction	iv
This is a Case for Action	v
A Brief History	v
Past Planning Efforts	vi
System Understanding.....	1
Typologies and Inventory	3
Benchmarking	5
Level of Service	7
The Community.....	8
Environmental Justice and System-Wide Access	13
Key Takeaways.....	22
Park Maps and Assessments	24

Introduction



This is a Case for Action

Developing a successful Parks and Recreation System Plan begins with a clear understanding of existing conditions, not only within the park system itself, but also within the broader social, economic, and environmental context that shapes how residents of Columbia Heights experience parks and recreation. This is a Case for Action; a grounding understanding of the parks system that establishes a foundation for the planning process by examining the current state of Columbia Heights' parks, facilities, programs, and public spaces alongside environmental and socio-economic factors within the city.

This assessment layers quantitative data with qualitative observations to create a comprehensive understanding of the system today. Existing park assets, recreation amenities, and access and connectivity are evaluated alongside community demographics, development patterns, health and wellness indicators, equity considerations, and broader City goals. Together, these perspectives help identify both strengths and areas of need within the system.

The purpose of this analysis is not simply to document existing conditions, but to establish the critical questions that will guide the planning process moving forward. **By understanding who is being served, where gaps exist, what pressures are influencing the system, and how community needs may evolve over time, this planning process will develop recommendations that are responsive, equitable, and grounded in local realities.**

The findings presented in this section provide the rationale for future investments and help ensure that subsequent recommendations are informed by both measurable data and the lived experiences of Columbia Heights residents.

A Brief History

Before settler development, the Dakota people were stewards of the land that is now Columbia Heights. A hilly area of wetlands, oak savanna, and prairie was transformed into agricultural land as immigrants moved in toward the latter 19th century.

The City of Columbia Heights' park and recreation system has evolved alongside the community's growth from a small streetcar suburb into a fully developed first-ring suburb of Minneapolis. Formally established in 1939, "City Park" was dedicated and eventually became Huset Park, the City's largest park. As development in the city increased through the 1970's, the City became actively involved in the expansion of the park system by acquiring "leftover" parcels of land to be converted into city parks, often low-lying areas, wetlands, and parcels unsuitable for residential or commercial development.

Today, the City of Columbia Heights owns and operates a park system containing 16 parks of various sizes. Serving as a backbone for the community, the park system offers recreation and leisure opportunities for residents and visitors alike.



Youth baseball participants. Photo courtesy of the City of Columbia Heights.

Past Planning Efforts

Previous planning efforts provide an important foundation for the Columbia Heights Parks and Recreation Plan, helping to identify long-standing community priorities, past and ongoing investments, and recurring challenges related to parks, recreation, trails, and public spaces. Reviewing these plans allows the project team to understand what recommendations have been successfully implemented, where gaps remain, and how community needs and expectations have evolved over time. This historical context helps ensure that the Parks and Recreation Plan builds upon prior work rather than duplicating it.



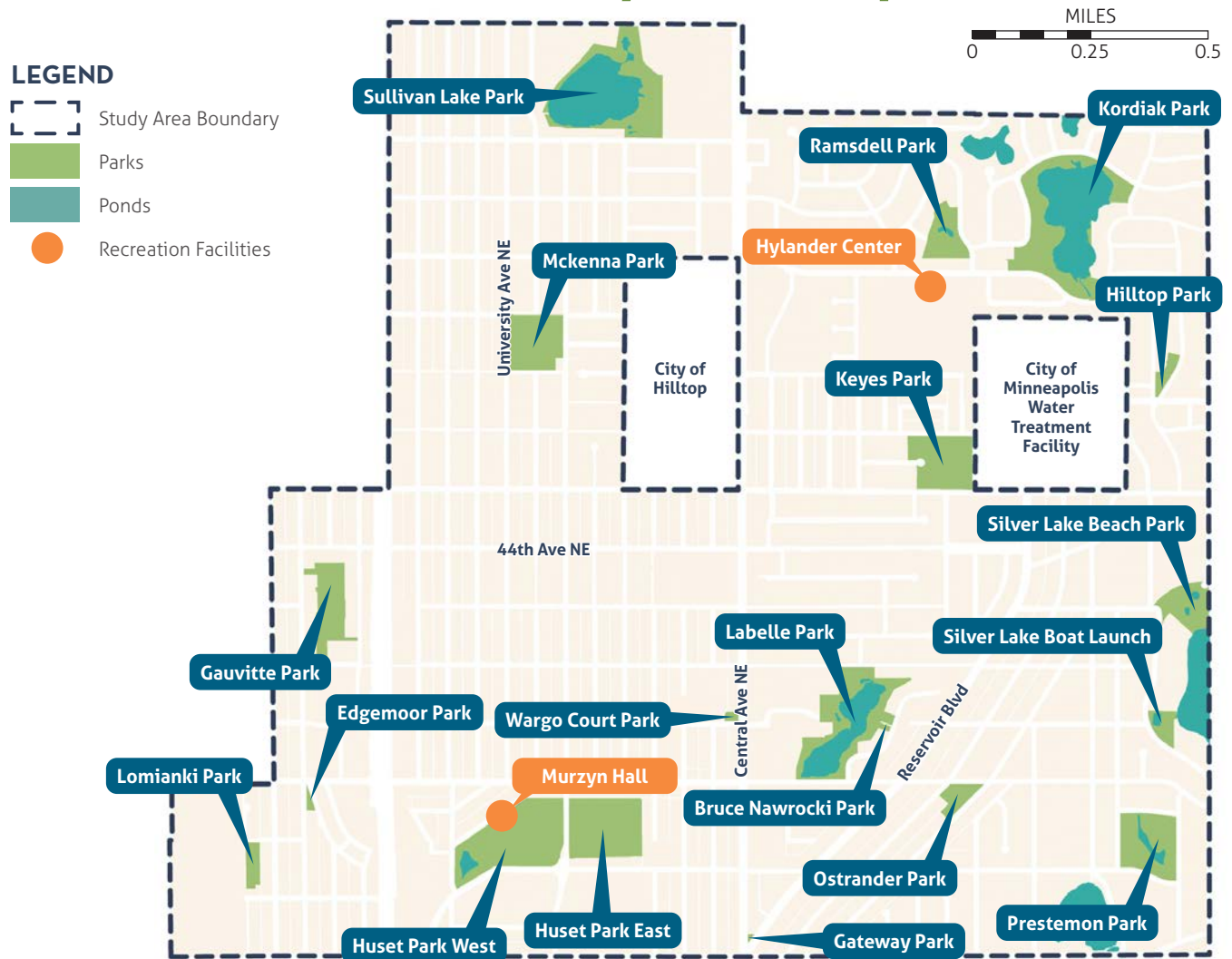
The **Columbia Heights 2040 Comprehensive Plan** recommendations focused on investing in and modernizing Columbia Heights' park and recreation system through park improvements, expanded recreation opportunities, and enhanced connectivity. Key priorities included completing and developing park master plans, updating aging infrastructure and playgrounds, improving drainage, expanding multi-use athletic facilities and community gathering spaces, and pursuing dedicated funding for long-term system improvements. The plan also emphasized strengthening community programming while continuing to improve the citywide trail and bicycle network and incorporating safer, more accessible pedestrian connections throughout the community.



The **2008 Pedestrian and Bicycle Mobility Plan** established a vision for Columbia Heights as an “active living” community, recognizing that parks, trails, sidewalks, and bicycle facilities should function as an interconnected network that supports recreation, transportation, public health, and community well-being. This document provides an important foundation by highlighting many priorities that remain relevant today: expanding trail connectivity, improving access to parks and destinations, supporting an increasingly diverse population, and strengthening the role of parks and recreation facilities in promoting health, social connection, and quality of life.

System Understanding

Parks and Recreation System Map



At a glance...

Columbia Heights' existing parks and recreation system includes a compact but well-distributed network of various types of parks that collectively serve a primarily residential city. The system consists of 16 municipal parks supported by two larger regional parks managed by others.

Across the system, key amenities include playgrounds, ballfields, picnic shelters, walking trails, water activities, informal recreation areas, and indoor or reservable park buildings in select locations. This mix supports both programmed recreation and everyday informal use, reflecting a relatively small but activity-rich urban park system.



Typologies and Inventory

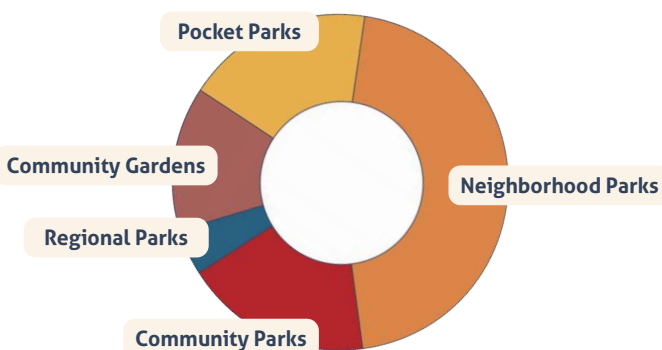
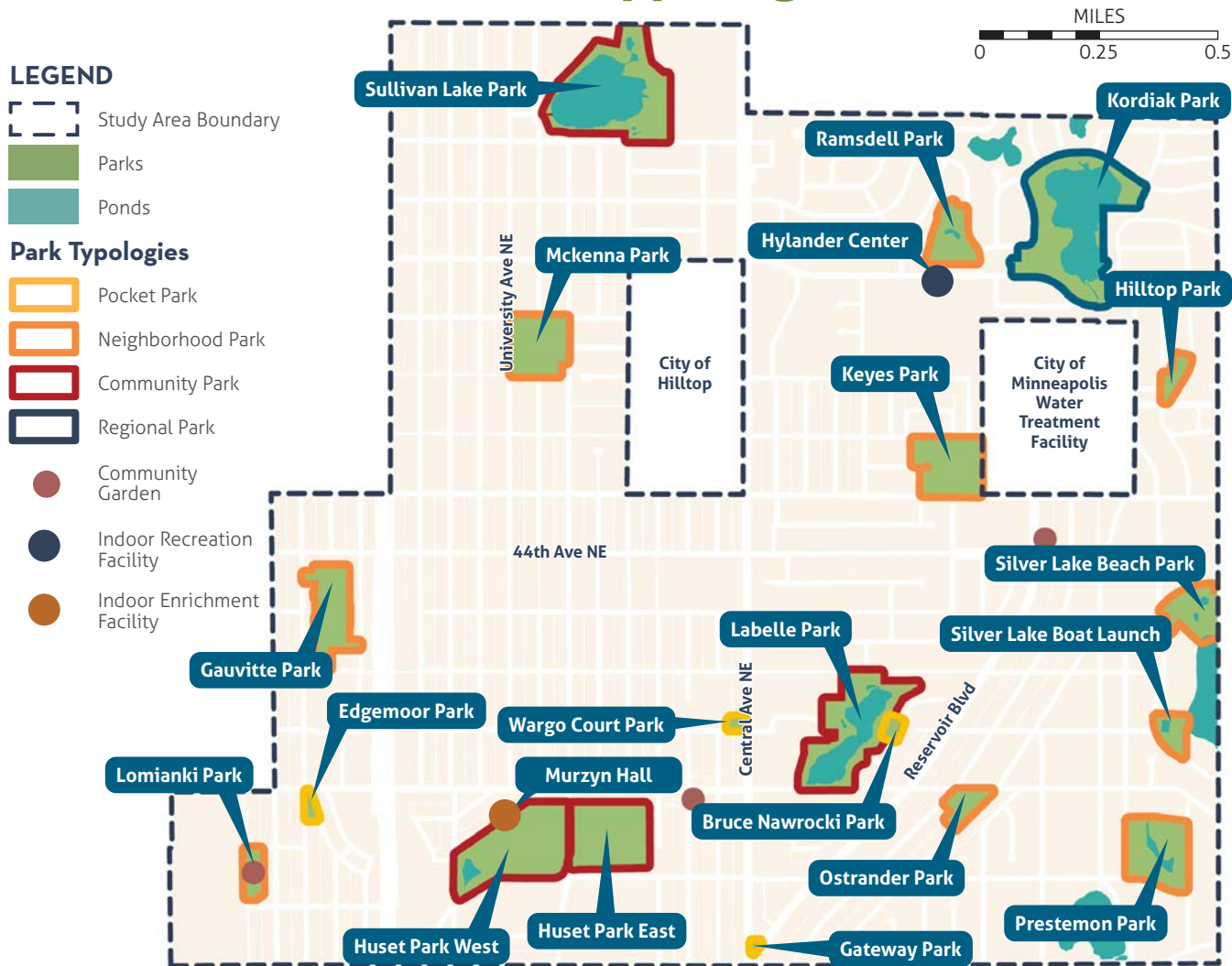
Typical Park and Recreation Typologies		
Typology	Use	Size (acres)
Pocket Park	Limited amenities	0-1
Neighborhood Park	Recreational and social	1-10
Community Park	Broader community service	10-50
Regional Park	Other operating entity	Varies
Indoor Recreation	Sports and Physical Fitness	n/a
Indoor Enrichment	Community Rooms and Programs	n/a

City of Columbia Heights Parks and Recreation Inventory List																			
Park or Recreation Space	Size (acres)	Typology	Walking Paths	Picnic Shelter	Building (rentable)	Playground	Basketball Court	Pickleball Court	Disc Golf Baskets	Slating Rink	Hockey Rink	Volleyball Court	Community Garden	Ballfield	Soccer Field	Splash Pad	Wading Pool	Swimming Beach	Fitness Equipment
Bruce Nawrocki Park	0.60	Pocket Park	x	x	x		x												
City-Owned Community Garden Plot 1	0.37	Community Garden											x						
City-Owned Community Garden Plot 2	0.16	Community Garden											x						
Edgemoor Park	0.35	Pocket Park				x													x
Gateway Park	0.08	Pocket Park																	
Gauvitte Park	7.42	Neighborhood Park				x	x				x								x
Hilltop Park	1.38	Neighborhood Park				x													x
Huset East Park	12.66	Community Park			x		x			x		x		x					x
Huset West Park	17.80	Community Park	x	x		x								x	x	x			
Hylander Center	n/a	Facility					x											x	
Keyes Park	9.13	Neighborhood Park				x								x					x
Kordiak County Park	29.29	Regional Park	x	x		x													x
Labelle Park	18.09	Community Park	x	x		x													x
Lomianki Park	1.84	Community Garden / Neighborhood Park				x							x						x
Mckenna Park	8.41	Neighborhood Park			x	x				x	x			x			x		x
Murzyn Hall	n/a	Facility			x														
Ostrander Park	2.27	Neighborhood Park			x	x				x	x								x
Prestemon Park	9.70	Neighborhood Park	x			x	x	x	x					x					x
Ramsdell Park	4.86	Neighborhood Park	x	x	x	x								x			x		x
Silver Lake Beach Park	5.66	Neighborhood Park	*	x		x						x						x	x
Silver Lake Boat Launch	2.08	Neighborhood Park																	
Sullivan Lake Park	25.48	Community Park	x	x		x												x	x
Wargo Court Park	0.37	Pocket Park																	
Total	128.71																		

Inventory assumes: active improvements in Sullivan Lake Park; opportunity to rent building in Bruce Nawrocki Park.

*Connection to Silverwood Regional Park walking path system

Parks and Recreation Typologies



Within the Columbia Heights parks and recreation system, parks vary in size and function, ranging from small mini-parks and neighborhood parks to larger community destinations. Mini-parks provide small-scale gathering spaces with seating, playground elements, and informal open space, while neighborhood parks serve more active recreation needs. Larger community parks function as the city's primary recreation hub, offering multiple amenities and event space that supports citywide programming and seasonal festivities. Two facilities, the Hylander Center and Murzyn Hall provide recreation spaces for active and enrichment programming.

See the following page for specific park classifications and sizes.

Benchmarking

In a parks and recreation system plan, benchmarking is the process of comparing a city's parks and recreation system's service levels and access standards with those of similar communities. For Columbia Heights, it helps evaluate how the system measures up in key areas such as park acreage per resident, walkable access to parks, facility distribution, and overall recreation investment.

This comparison provides context beyond internal trends, showing whether the city is underperforming, typical, or exceeding peer-city norms given its size, density, and demographic profile. It also helps identify gaps in service, highlight best practices, and set realistic targets based on communities with similar constraints in land, funding, and redevelopment pressure.

Ultimately, benchmarking strengthens decision-making by grounding recommendations in both local conditions and peer comparisons, ensuring that investments align with equitable and high-quality parks and recreation service standards.

Columbia Heights is a compact, fully built-out city with a strong neighborhood park structure. For this system plan, it is most useful to benchmark against peer cities that share similar population size, density, suburban–urban form, and proximity to a major metro core.

Peer benchmark communities:

1. Robbinsdale, Minnesota

An inner-ring suburb with similar size, density, and redevelopment pressures. Like Columbia Heights, it has limited land for new parks and relies heavily on neighborhood access and walkability.

2. Richfield, Minnesota

Comparable in scale and metropolitan context, Richfield has a mature park system embedded in a fully developed suburban grid.

3. Crystal, Minnesota

Similar in age, development pattern, and residential character. Crystal provides useful comparisons for park acreage per capita, facility mix, and community park programming in a suburban context transitioning over time.

4. Brooklyn Center, Minnesota

A slightly larger but still comparable inner-ring suburb with a diverse population and established park system. It is particularly useful for understanding equity-driven decisions, multi-cultural programming, and system-wide access standards.

5. St. Louis Park, Minnesota.

Though larger with more complex land use and a denser redevelopment pattern, St. Louis Park can offer lessons in trail and greenway systems as backbone infrastructure, higher-intensity park programming, and coordinating parks with redevelopment and transit corridors



Columbia Heights

Robbinsdale

Richfield

Crystal

Brooklyn Center

St. Louis Park

National Average

Overall population							
Park acreage							
Residents per park							

UNDER DEVELOPMENT

Level of Service

A level of service analysis evaluates how well a parks and recreation system serves its community by measuring the availability of parks, facilities, amenities, and programs. It helps identify opportunities and gaps where needs may not be adequately met. By comparing the existing parks and recreation system to established standards and community needs, a level of service analysis provides a framework for prioritizing future investments, setting performance targets, and ensuring the park system continues to meet the needs of current and future residents.

UNDER DEVELOPMENT

The Community

Parks are not neutral amenities. They are critical third spaces and lived environments that reflect community identity, traditions, and patterns of daily life. Without a clear understanding of who a city serves and how it serves that community, parks and recreation systems risk reinforcing historical inequities or unintentionally designing spaces that do not align with how residents actually live, gather, and recreate.

The following pages present a series of community understanding in categories that consider demographics, health, equity, and current access to parks and recreation amenities. Each map or diagram is accompanied with a brief narrative of why the information presented is important, and what impact this understanding has on the parks and recreation system plan moving forward.

Understanding Who Lives Here

Understanding the demographic, ethnic, and cultural composition of a city is essential to developing an effective parks and recreation system plan because it shapes how people use, experience, and value public spaces.

Demographic factors such as age, income, and household type help define core needs for recreation, amenities, and park distribution.

Ethnic and cultural context adds another critical layer, as different communities bring distinct traditions, gathering practices, and expectations for public space. Recognizing these differences before parks and recreation system plan recommendations are developed helps ensure the plan is grounded in being inclusive, welcoming, and capable of supporting culturally relevant activities and forms of recreation, leading to more equitable investment decisions and a park system that better reflects and serves the full diversity of the community.

Understanding the Community's Health

Understanding community health is a critical foundation for developing a parks and recreation system plan because it directly influences how parks function as part of a city's broader public health infrastructure. Parks are not only recreational amenities, they are essential spaces that support physical activity, mental well-being, social connection, and environmental health. Without understanding community health conditions, park systems may miss key opportunities to address disparities in well-being and access to healthy environments.

Health indicators such as rates of chronic disease, physical activity levels, and mental health needs help shape the types of amenities and programs a parks and recreation system should prioritize. These conditions influence demand for walking and biking infrastructure, accessible recreation options, therapeutic landscapes, and spaces that support both active and passive health benefits.

Community health also varies across neighborhoods, often reflecting broader patterns of income, housing, environmental exposure, and historical inequities. Recognizing these differences allows park systems to be intentionally designed as tools for health equity, ensuring that communities experiencing higher health burdens also have greater access to high-quality, nearby parks and recreation opportunities.

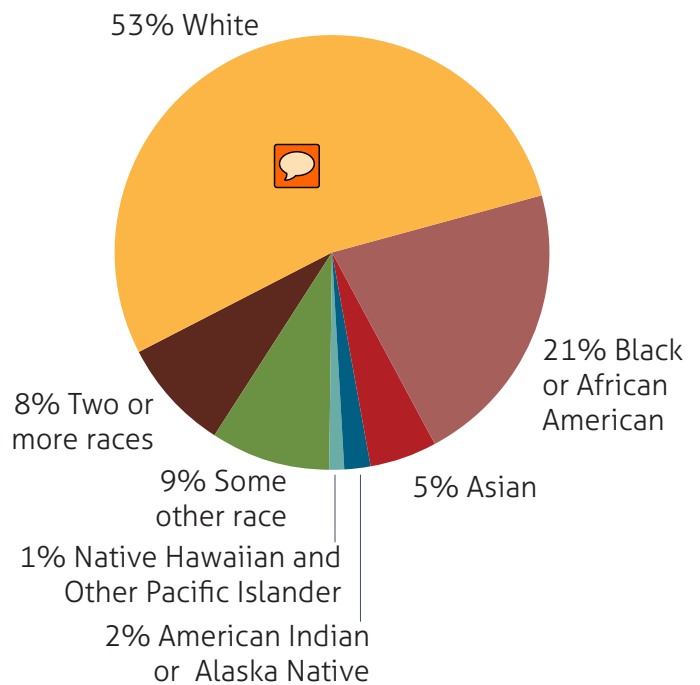
Ultimately, integrating community health data into parks and recreation planning ensures that investments are not only recreational but also preventative and restorative. It positions the park system as a key driver of public health outcomes and supports a more equitable distribution of wellness opportunities across the city.

Who Lives Here?

Columbia Heights is a vibrant and culturally diverse inner-ring suburb that reflects the evolving demographics of the Twin Cities region. Home to residents from a wide range of racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, your city is shaped by a strong sense of community, a rich mix of traditions, and a population that spans multiple generations. Long-time residents, recent immigrants, young families, and older adults all contribute to the city's unique identity, creating a community where parks and recreation spaces serve as important places for gathering, celebration, recreation, and cultural expression.

Diversity is reflected not only in who lives here, but also in how residents use public space. Community events, informal gatherings, youth activities, sports, and cultural traditions all play a role in shaping the demand for parks and recreation opportunities.

As Columbia Heights continues to evolve, its parks and recreation system has an important opportunity to support community connection, celebrate cultural diversity, and provide welcoming spaces that reflect the needs, interests, and experiences of all residents.



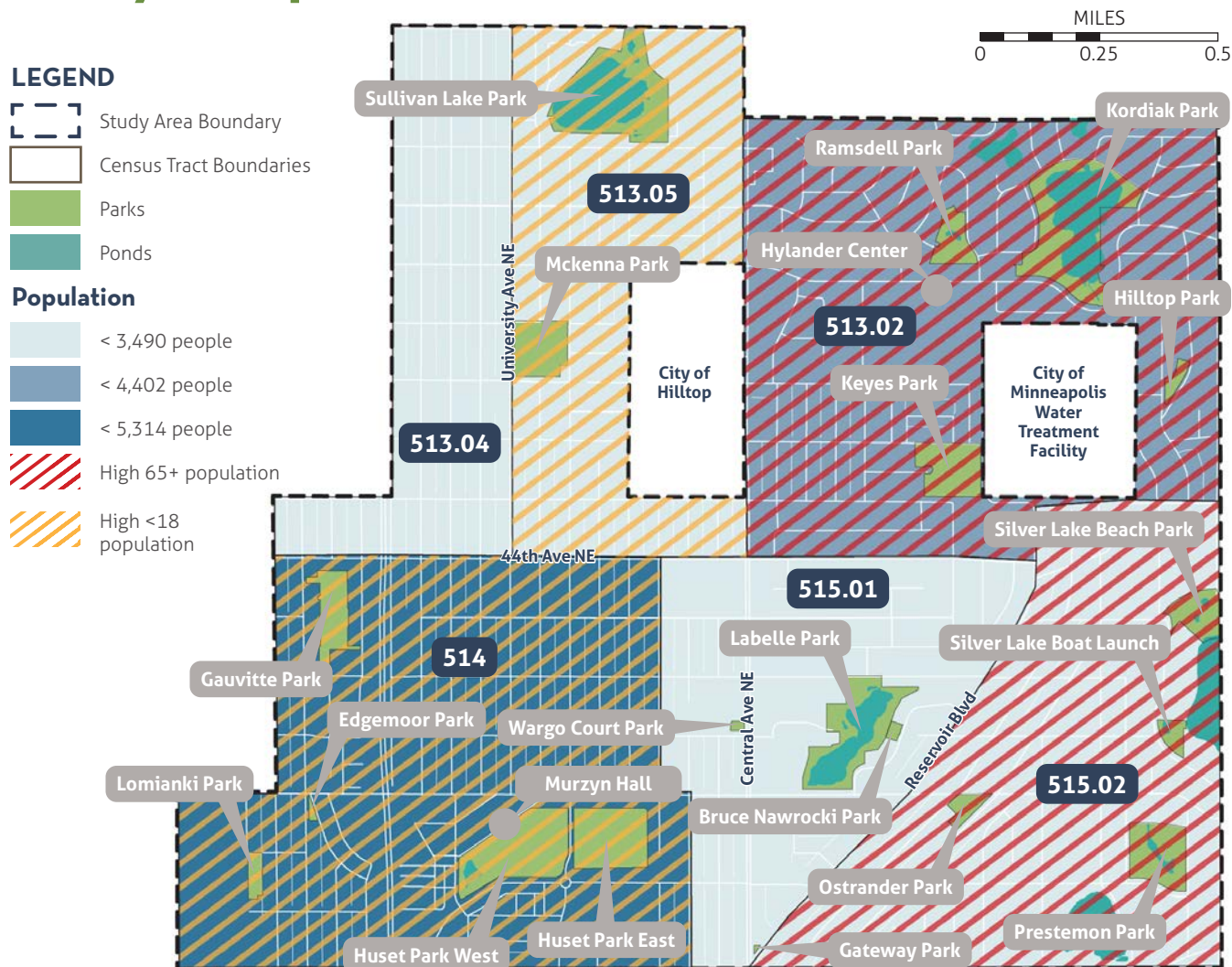
Columbia Heights has a meaningful population of residents who speak languages other than English, including:

- Spanish
- Vietnamese
- Russian
- Arabic
- Hmong
- Somali
- Amharic
- Oromo
- and other African, Asian, and Indo-European languages

Deeply understanding the Columbia Heights community keeps the focus on culturally responsive design for the parks and recreation system plan.



Today's Population



POPULATION DATA					
Census Tract	Total Population	<18 Population	% <18 Population	65+ Population	% 65+ Population
513.02	4,055	846	20.9 %	909	22.4 %
513.04	2,580	495	19.2 %	303	11.7 %
513.05	3,391	869	25.6 %	387	11.4 %
514	5,314	1,293	24.3 %	489	9.2 %
515.01	2,642	534	20.2 %	461	17.4 %
515.02	3,272	603	18.4 %	847	25.9 %
City Total	21,254	4,640	21.8 %	3,396	16.0 %
National Average			21.5 %		19.2 %
Anoka County Average			24.0 %		16.5 %
Hennepin County Average			21.3 %		16.6 %

Notably higher than averages

The map indicates that the city has a generally well-distributed park system serving neighborhoods with different demographic profiles. The primary planning opportunity may not be expanding the system, but ensuring that park amenities align with neighborhood needs, particularly youth-oriented facilities in the southwest and age-friendly amenities in the eastern and northeastern portions of the city. **This reinforces the importance of tailoring future park investments to the specific populations each park serves.**

Map & Data Source: 2020-2024 ACS 5-Year Estimates, City of Columbia Heights

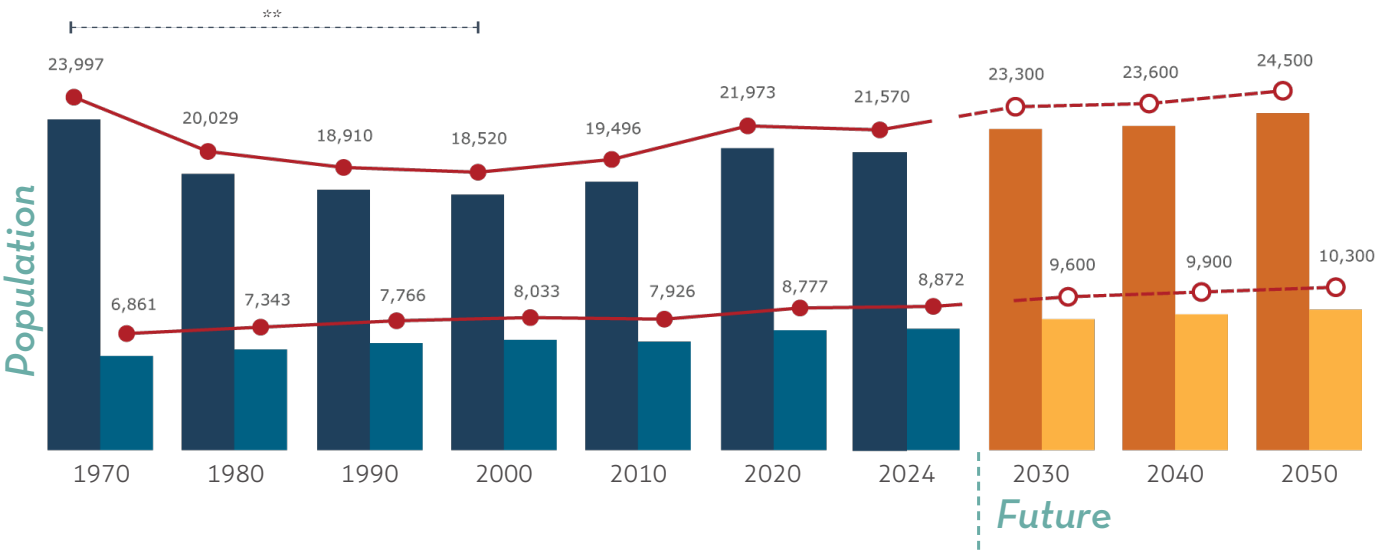
Population and Housing Projections

Compared to the 1970s when the current Columbia Heights park system was largely established, **today's and projected future conditions reflect a similar overall population but a different housing structure, with a modest increase in housing units and smaller household sizes.** In the 1970s, the same-sized population was accommodated in fewer housing units and larger households.

Today, even with relatively stable population levels, the increase in housing units means more households are distributed across the city, each representing a separate point of access to the park system. This shift typically results in more frequent, smaller-scale interactions with parks, with increased emphasis on walking access, everyday use, and informal recreation.

In this population to household ratio shift, park and recreation spaces often function as more of a daily neighborhood infrastructure, supporting a broader range of users, including smaller households, seniors, renters, and non-family households.

This creates a stronger need for equitable neighborhood-level park distribution, safe and comfortable walkable connections, and flexible, multi-use spaces that support passive recreation and short-duration visits. While the total population change may appear modest, the change in household structure meaningfully reshapes how residents experience and rely on the park system today compared to the system's original design context.



LEGEND

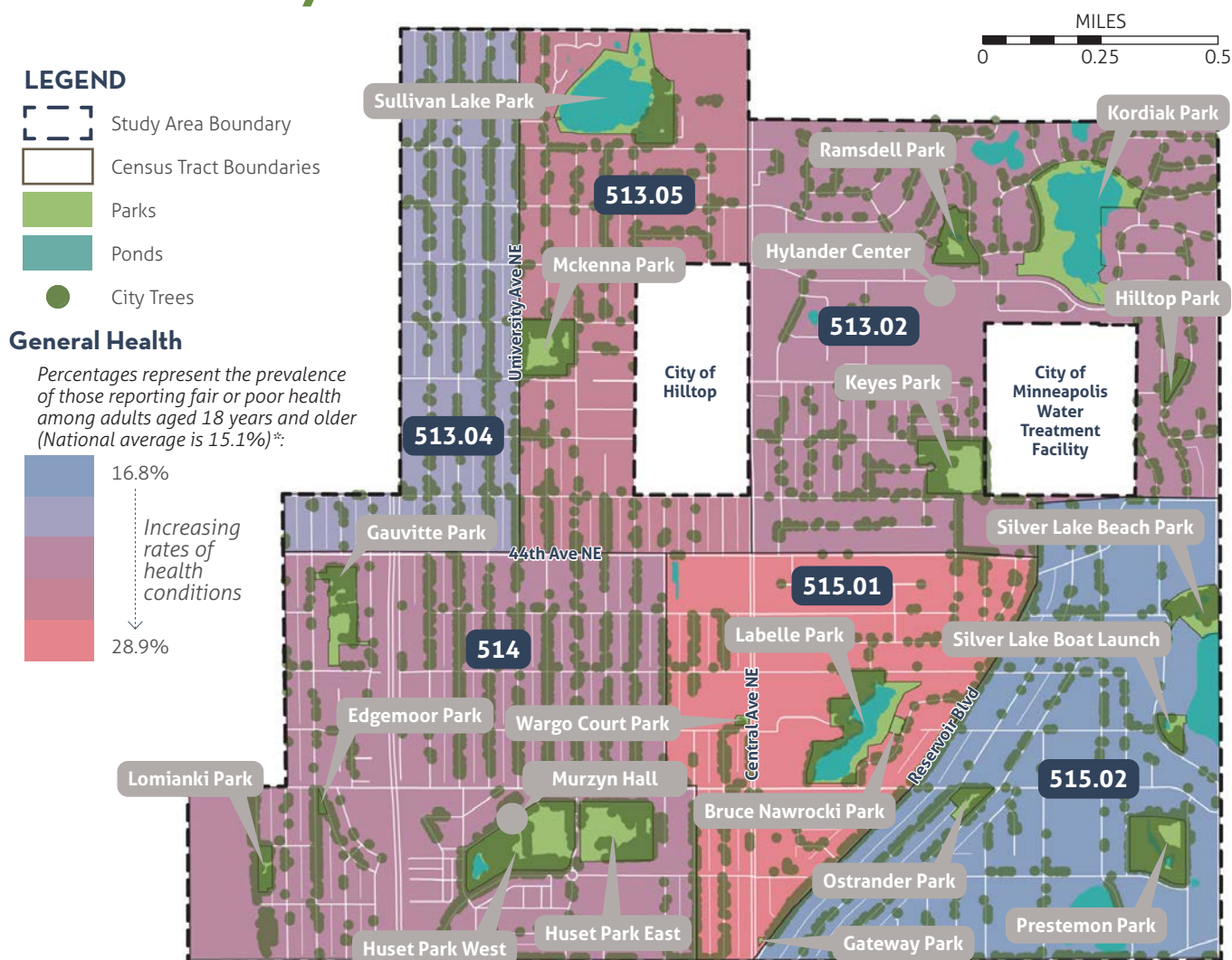
- Past Population
- Past Households*
- Future Population Projection
- Future Households* Projection

*A household is one or more people who occupy the same housing unit (such as a house, apartment, or manufactured home) and share living quarters.

**The population decline in this time frame was primarily driven by a broader trend of suburban maturation, a decrease in average household sizes, and the incorporation of Hilltop.

Data source: U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census, Metropolitan Council Annual Estimates, and Metropolitan Council Forecasts

Community Health



DETAILED HEALTH DATA REPORTING**

Data in this table details specific health conditions by census tract and illustrates areas where higher than national average reporting is happening.

Anoka County Census Tract	Asthma	Depression	Obesity	Physical Inactivity
National Avg.	10.8%	22.9%	36.2%	27.2%
513.02	10.2%	23.6%	38.2%	29.9%
513.04	10%	24.1%	38.5%	28%
513.05	10.1%	24.2%	40.5%	32.6%
514	10.6%	24.9%	40.9%	28.9%
515.01	10.7%	25.3%	43.8%	34.6%
515.02	9.9%	24%	36.8%	25.6%

Higher than national average
Significantly higher than national average

Map & Data Source: CDC PLACES 2025 release, City of Columbia Heights

Across the city, we see instances of health conditions such as asthma, depression, obesity, and inactivity on a higher than national average percentage of the population. Some neighborhoods (shown as census tracts) report significantly higher rates of health conditions. It is important to understand where these specific communities are experiencing health conditions, and how we can target system improvements within these communities to improve outcomes.

* Data Sourced from National Center for Health Statistics. Percentage of fair or poor health status for adults aged 18 and over, United States, 2019—2024. National Health Interview Survey.

**Data sourced from CDC PLACES is self-reported and is represented by percent of the census tract

Environmental Justice and System-Wide Access

Why We Look at Environmental Justice

In planning work, **environmental justice** recognizes that some neighborhoods have historically faced greater environmental and economic-related burdens, and seeks to ensure that public investments are distributed more equitably. For parks and recreation planning, **rather than focusing solely on park acreage or facility counts, environmental justice considers the broader social, economic, and environmental conditions that influence recreation access, health outcomes, and quality of life.**

For the Columbia Heights Parks and Recreation System Plan, environmental justice conditions are being evaluated using Justice40 (J40) indicators and American Community Survey (ACS) demographic and socioeconomic data. These datasets help identify under-resourced neighborhoods by examining factors such as income, housing affordability, transportation access, health disparities, and environmental conditions.

By incorporating environmental justice data into the process of understanding the parks and recreation system, the City can better prioritize investments where needs are greatest, improve equitable access to parks and recreation opportunities, and create a more inclusive and resilient park system for all residents.

Understanding Access

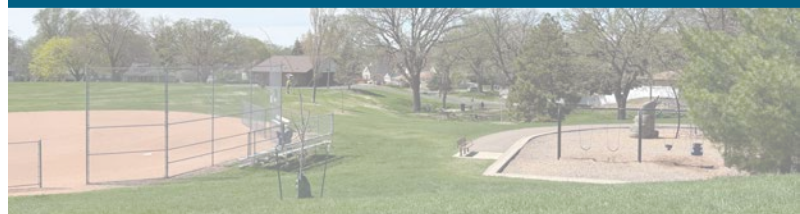
Understanding who has easy access to parks and amenities through both walking distance and transportation networks is a core component of developing an effective parks and recreation system plan. These spaces are only truly valuable when residents can realistically reach them, and access varies significantly depending on where people live, how they travel, and what barriers exist in the built environment. Without analyzing access, a park system can appear well-distributed on paper while still leaving access gaps in practice.

Walkability is a primary lens for evaluating access, as many residents rely on walking, biking, or short trips to reach nearby parks. Even small gaps in a safe pedestrian network can effectively limit access, especially for children, older adults, and people with mobility challenges.

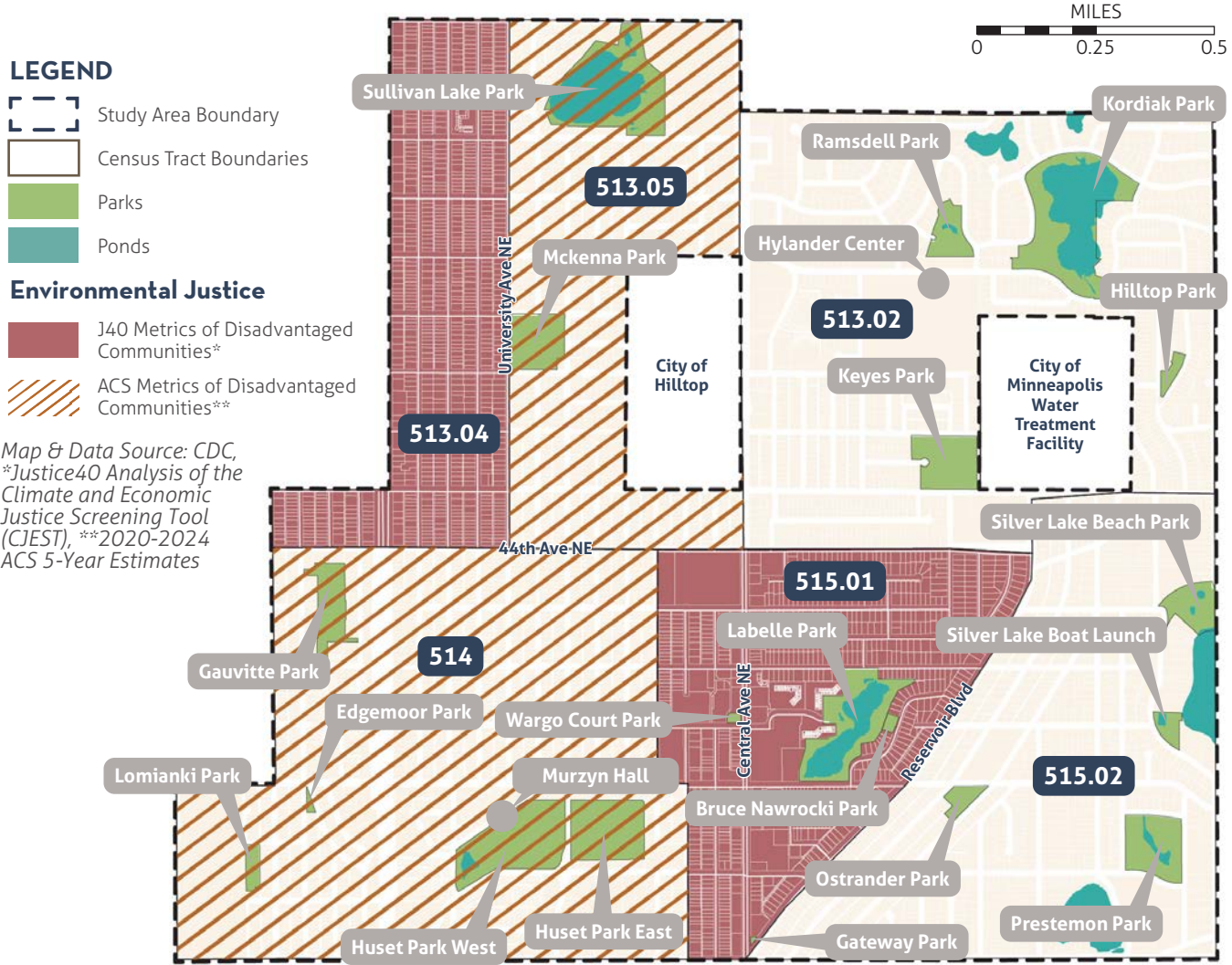
Evaluating park access through both walking and transportation perspectives ensures that the system is measured not just by geographic distribution, but by real-world usability. This approach helps identify gaps in connectivity, prioritize strategic investments, and create a park system where all residents can reach meaningful recreation opportunities regardless of where they live or how they travel.



The most commonly accepted distance that people are willing to walk to an amenity such as a park or recreation facility is between 1/4 and 1/2 mile, or between a 5-minute and 10-minute walk.



Environmental Justice



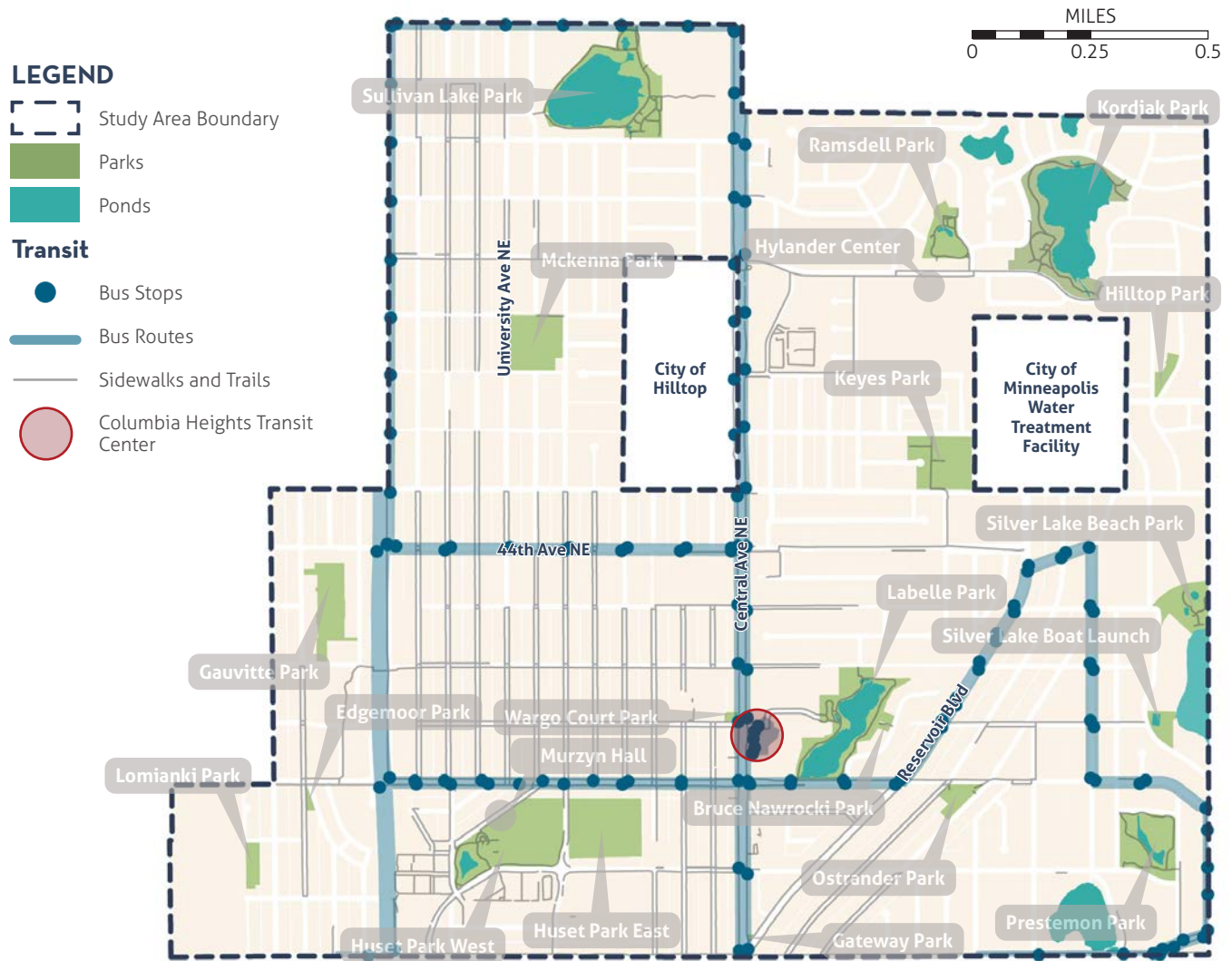
This analysis examines census tracts experiencing higher levels of environmental, social, and economic stress compared to other areas of the city. The dark maroon census tracts represent areas identified with greater burden under the Justice40 dataset. **These communities face elevated socioeconomic, environmental, climate-related, and health-related burdens.**

The American Community Survey (ACS), represented with the hatching, supplements the Justice40 data by providing additional insight into populations that may experience barriers to accessing services and opportunities. **This includes residents who are unemployed, living with disabilities, uninsured, non-citizens, have limited English proficiency, or identify as racial or ethnic minorities.**

Together, this information help identify areas of the community that may have the greatest need for safe and equitable access to community services, including parks, trails, and open spaces. Additionally, the chart below illustrates the **economic burden** the Columbia Heights community faces compared to greater averages.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	
National	\$ 83,730
Anoka County	\$101,869
Hennepin County	\$97,653
CH Census Tract	Median Household Income
513.02	\$ 56,054
513.04	\$ 61,851
513.05	\$ 56,716
514	\$ 55,455
515.01	\$ 52,485
515.02	\$ 74,643

Transit Network



Evaluating access through both transit and walking networks helps ensure that recreation opportunities are equitably available to all residents, regardless of how they travel throughout the community. Thanks to the city's compact geography and location along the Central Avenue (Highway 65) corridor, Columbia Heights benefits from strong public transit access compared to many suburban communities in the Twin Cities.

The Columbia Heights Transit Center further enhances mobility by serving as a hub for multiple transit routes and connections. As a result, many residents are within a short distance of public transit, making it a viable transportation option for daily activities and regional travel. This

level of connectivity is particularly important for residents who may not have access to a personal vehicle, including youth, older adults, and lower-income households.

From a parks and recreation perspective, public transit plays an important role in expanding access to parks, recreation facilities, community programs, and regional trail networks. While Columbia Heights generally benefits from strong transit service, access to specific park destinations can vary depending on route locations, service frequency, and pedestrian connections.

There is a notable gap in public transportation access in the northeast corner of the city.

Map & Data Source: Metropolitan Council, City of Columbia Heights

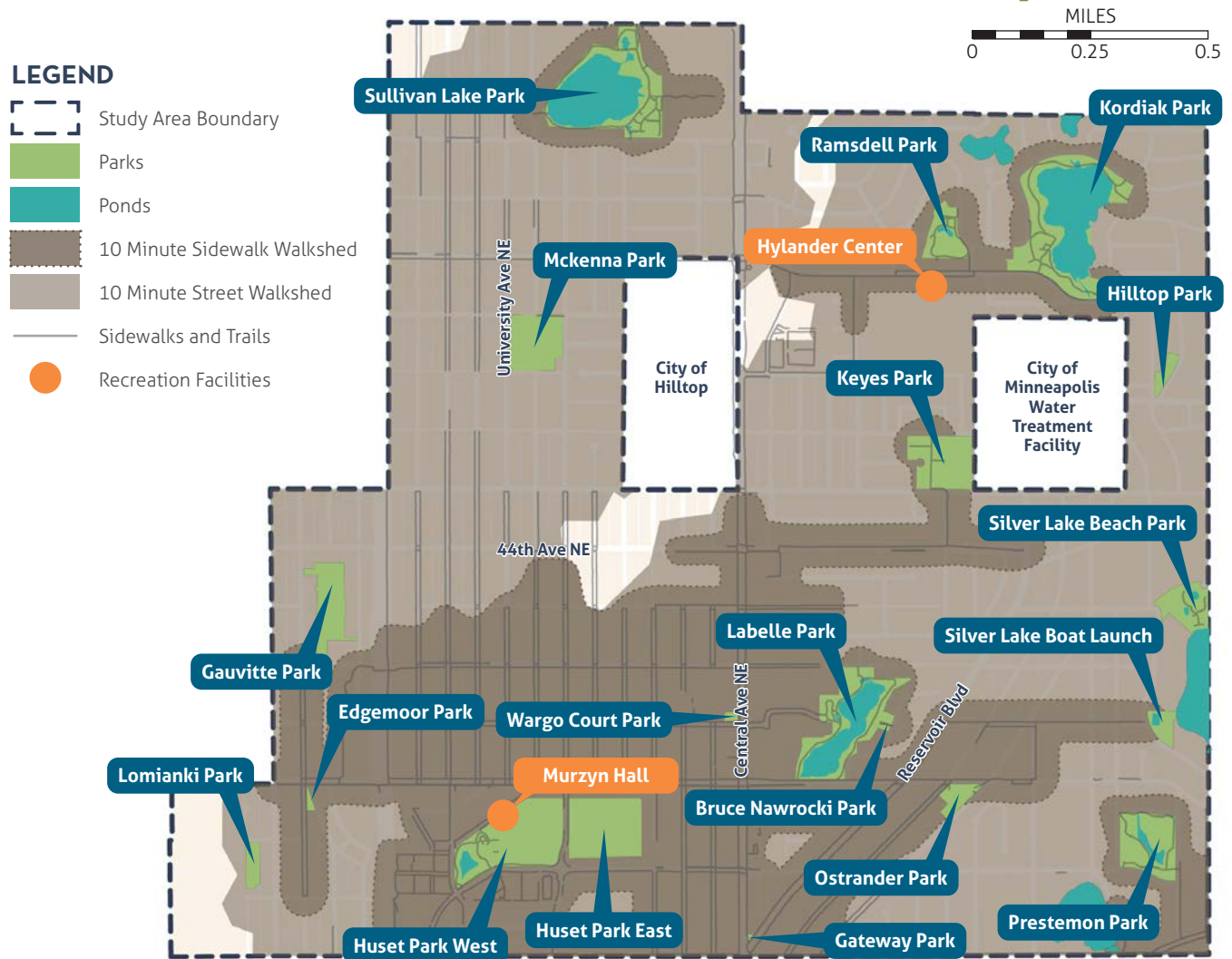
City-Organized Programming Distribution



PROGRAMMING						
High Building Use*	Moderate Building Use*	Low Building Use*	Gardening	Field Activities	City Events	Winter Events
Sullivan Lake	Ramsdell	McKenna	Lomianki	McKenna	Sullivan Lake	McKenna
Huset West	Silver Lake Beach	Keyes	44th & Reservoir	Ramsdell	Ramsdell	Keyes
	Huset East		40th & Jackson	Keyes	Labelle	Ostrander
				Huset East	Silver Lake Beach	Huset East
				Huset West	Huset East	Huset West
				Prestemon	Huset West	
					Keyes	

*Building Use based on averages of rentals from 2022-2024, data provided by City of Columbia Heights

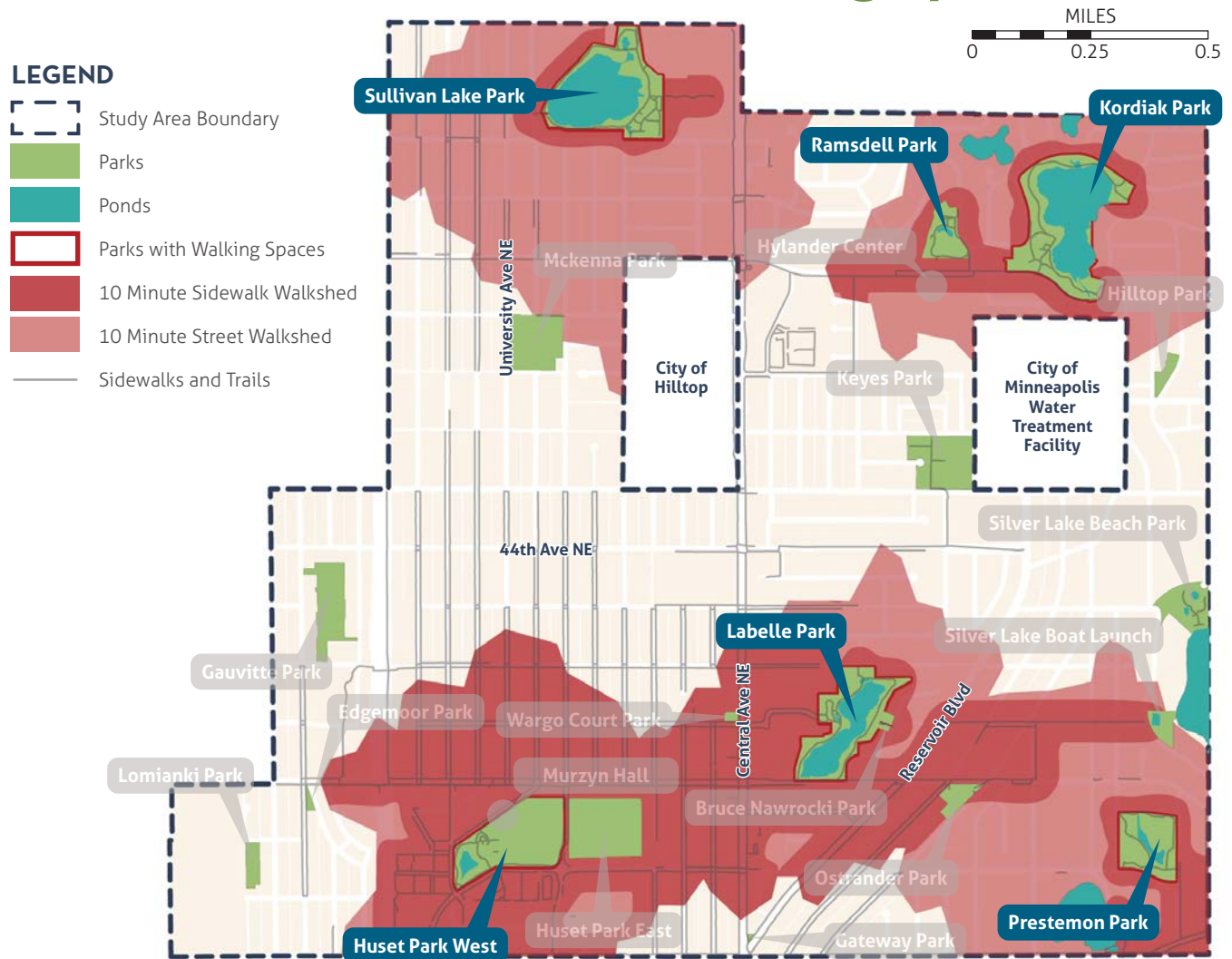
General Parks and Facilities Walkability



This walkability analysis shows that Columbia Heights has strong overall pedestrian access to parks and recreation facilities via the street grid, with most residents located within a 10-minute walk of a park, recreation facility, or both. The city's compact size, connected street network, and well-distributed park system contribute to broad access coverage across nearly all neighborhoods. While overall access is strong, it is important to consider physical barriers that may limit walkable access.

When access is evaluated through the city's connected sidewalk network, walkable coverage becomes more limited. Sidewalks are critical infrastructure that provide safe, reliable routes for residents to access parks and recreation opportunities. This is especially important for children, older adults, and individuals with mobility challenges, who rely on connected pedestrian networks to move safely and comfortably throughout the community. Overall, the analysis suggests that **Columbia Heights has a well-distributed park system and a strong foundation for providing and improving on equitable access to parks and recreation opportunities throughout the city.**

Critical Asset: Access to Walking Spaces



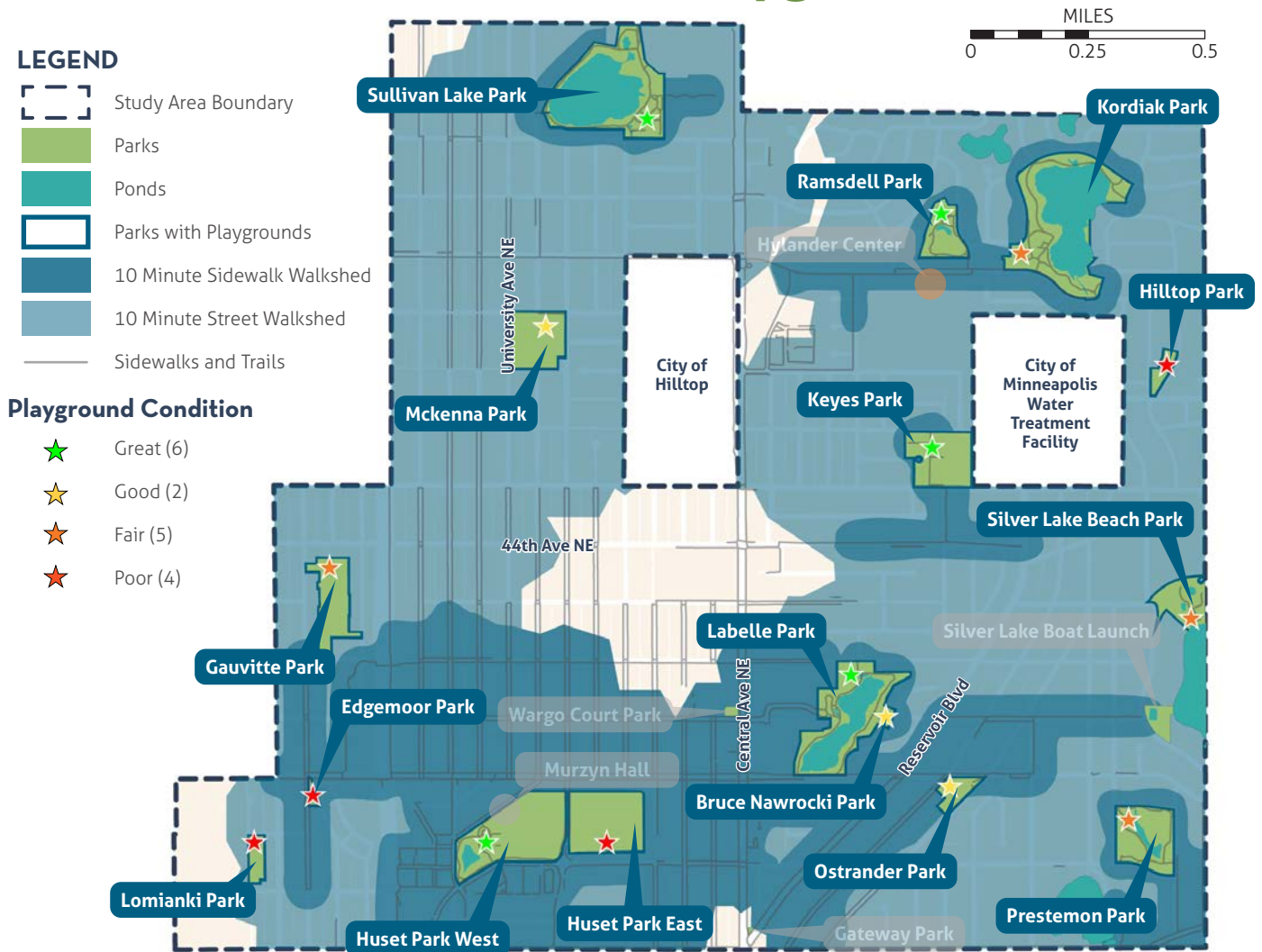
Sullivan Lake Park



Prestemon Park

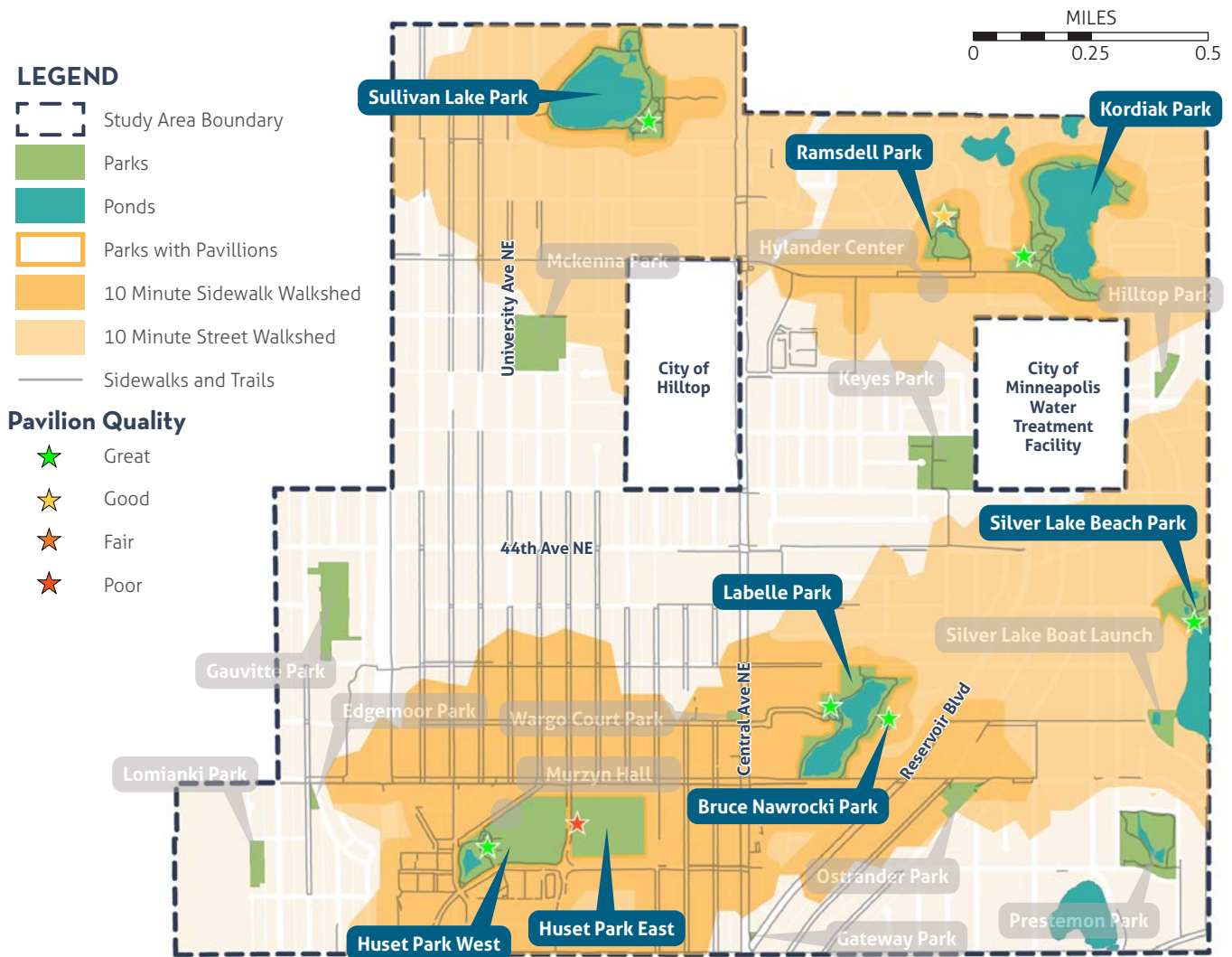
There are significant gaps in access to off-street trail systems in the City. This presents an opportunity to strengthen the city's trail system both within individual parks and between park destinations. Expanding and enhancing the trail network could improve connectivity, increase access to recreation opportunities, and support one of the most popular recreational activities: walking. Trails create a connected system that promotes health and wellness and makes it easier for residents to move throughout the city without relying on a vehicle.

Critical Asset: Access to Playgrounds



Overall, playgrounds are distributed well within the parks system, with most parks featuring a play area. About half of the playgrounds in the system fall in the fair to poor categories and require either immediate or near-term replacement. Four of these aged playgrounds are located in a part of the city with a higher-than-average population of children.

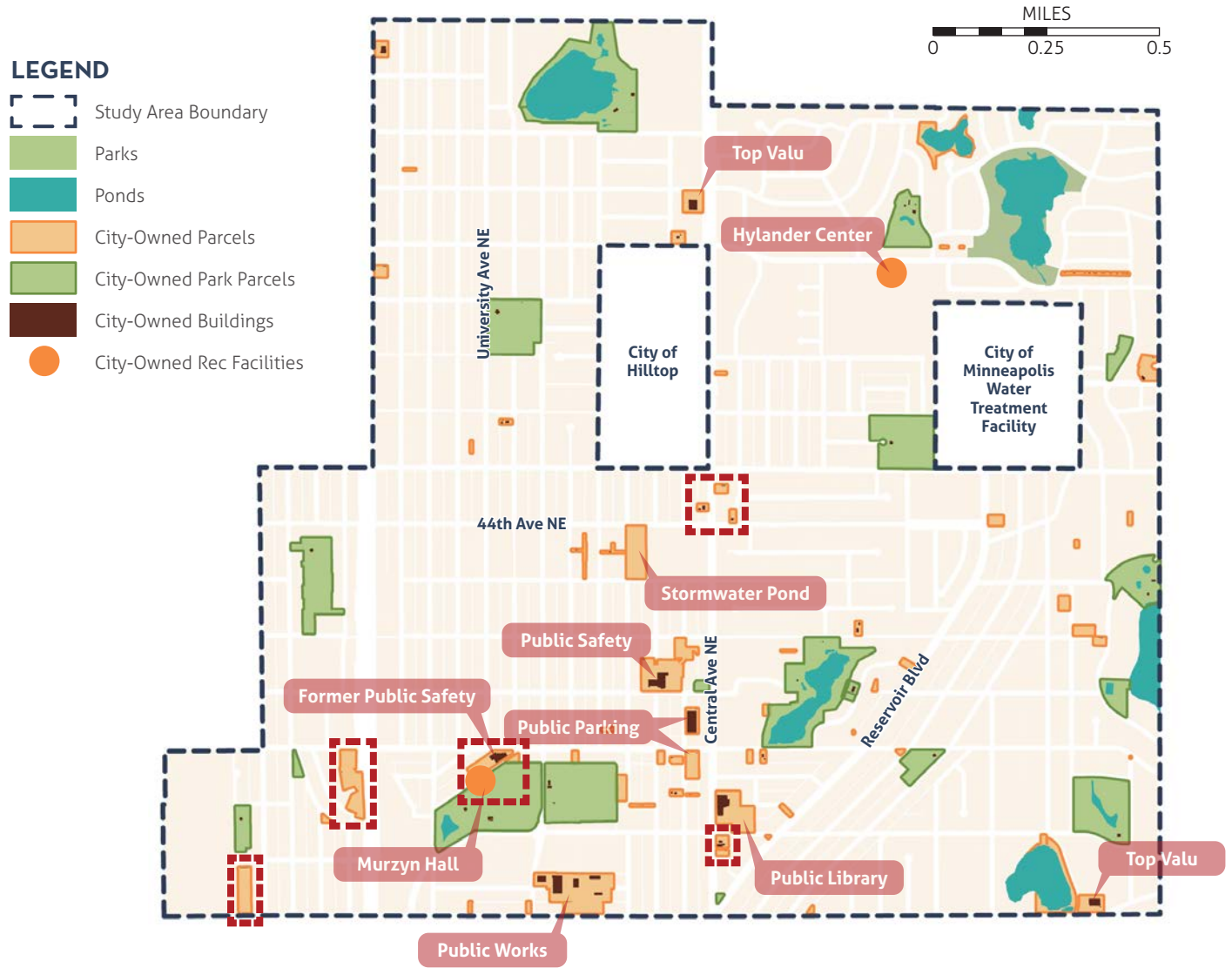
Critical Asset: Access to Pavilions



Overall, the quality of picnic pavilions is good for the city's inventory. The modern, two-tier roof style is most common in the more recently replaced pavilions. Most pavilions have power and provide critical shade to park spaces.

There is a notable gap in walkability to pavilions in the center of the city. Residents from about 42nd Ave NE to 49th Ave NE on the west side of the city, and from about 43rd Ave NE to 47th Ave NE on the east side of the city.

City - Owned Parcels



As a fully built-out community, Columbia Heights has limited opportunities to significantly expand its parks and recreation system through the acquisition of large new park properties. Most land within the city is already developed, making the addition of substantial park acreage challenging and often cost-prohibitive.

However, opportunities may exist to strategically utilize city-owned parcels or other small sites to address localized gaps in service. These locations could support pocket parks, trail connections, seating areas, public gathering spaces, or other unique amenities that enhance the overall parks and recreation system.

Additionally, considering re-development of city-owned properties that are vacant or have dilapidated structures presents an opportunity to consider indoor recreation or enhancement programming.

While such investments may not substantially increase total park acreage, they can improve access, expand recreation opportunities, and help meet neighborhood-specific needs in areas where additional park resources may be beneficial, or create a strategic investment in indoor amenities that serve the entire community.

Key Takeaways

This Case for Action is intended to not only analyze and help understand the city's parks and recreation system as it is today, but how goals for the future of the system should be oriented to best respond to the city's unique nature, demographics, and specific needs. Key takeaways to consider from this analysis are:

Opportunity	Understanding and direction
A reinvestment over expansion frame of reference.	Columbia Heights is a fully built-out community with limited opportunities to acquire significant new parkland. Future efforts should prioritize improving existing parks, facilities, and amenities while strategically leveraging city-owned properties to address localized service gaps.
How can we maintain and strengthen neighborhood-level access?	The city benefits from a well-distributed park system with strong overall walkability. Future investments should focus on improving pedestrian connections, addressing sidewalk gaps, and ensuring residents can safely access parks without relying on a vehicle.
Amenities can align with neighborhood demographics.	Different areas of the city have distinct population characteristics, including concentrations of youth in the southwest and older adults in the eastern and northeastern neighborhoods. Future improvements should respond to these differing recreation needs.
Let's look at health-focused investments.	Community health data indicates higher-than-average rates of obesity, depression, and physical inactivity across much of the city. Parks and recreation facilities should be viewed as public health infrastructure, with investments that encourage walking, physical activity, social interaction, and access to nature.
How can we advance environmental justice and equitable investment?	Several neighborhoods experience higher levels of economic, social, and environmental burdens. Future investments should prioritize under-resourced neighborhoods and focus on improving access to parks, recreation opportunities, and community gathering spaces.
Where can we expand and connect the trail system?	Walking is one of the most popular recreational activities, yet extensive walking trails are limited in many parts of the city. Opportunities exist to develop additional loop trails within parks and improve trail connections between parks and destinations.

Opportunity

Understanding and direction

We need to address aging playground infrastructure.

Playgrounds are generally well distributed throughout the system, but approximately half are rated fair or poor. Replacement and modernization efforts could be prioritized, particularly in areas with higher concentrations of children.

There are opportunities to improve access to gathering spaces.

Pavilion facilities are generally in good condition, but there are notable gaps in walkable access to these amenities in the center of the city. Future improvements could consider how to provide better access to picnic, shelter, and gathering opportunities in underserved areas.

We can build on strong transit access.

Columbia Heights benefits from a robust transit network relative to similar communities. Future recreation investments could capitalize on this asset by improving connections between transit routes, parks, facilities, and trails.

Let's think about how to strengthen recreation programming and facility utilization.

The scale of the city supports having centralized, high-use recreation facilities (such as Hylander Center and Murzyn Hall). Future recommendations could consider how programming, events, and facility investments can continue to enhance recreation throughout the broader system.

How do we plan for changing household patterns?

While overall population growth is expected to remain modest, household growth is projected to continue. This shift suggests increasing demand for everyday neighborhood recreation, flexible park spaces, short-duration visits, and accessible local amenities.

There is opportunity to create a data-driven framework for future investment.

The assessment identified an opportunity to formalize how Columbia Heights evaluates and prioritizes parks and recreation investments. By comparing the system to peer communities, the City can establish clear levels of service, identify gaps and opportunities, and create a more transparent framework for future budgeting, capital planning, and resource allocation.

Park Maps and Assessments



Bruce Nawrocki Park



Quick Facts

- 0.60 acres
- Was once connected to Labelle Park via stairs down the hillside.
- Contains the newest building in the park system, but is rarely used.

Park Description

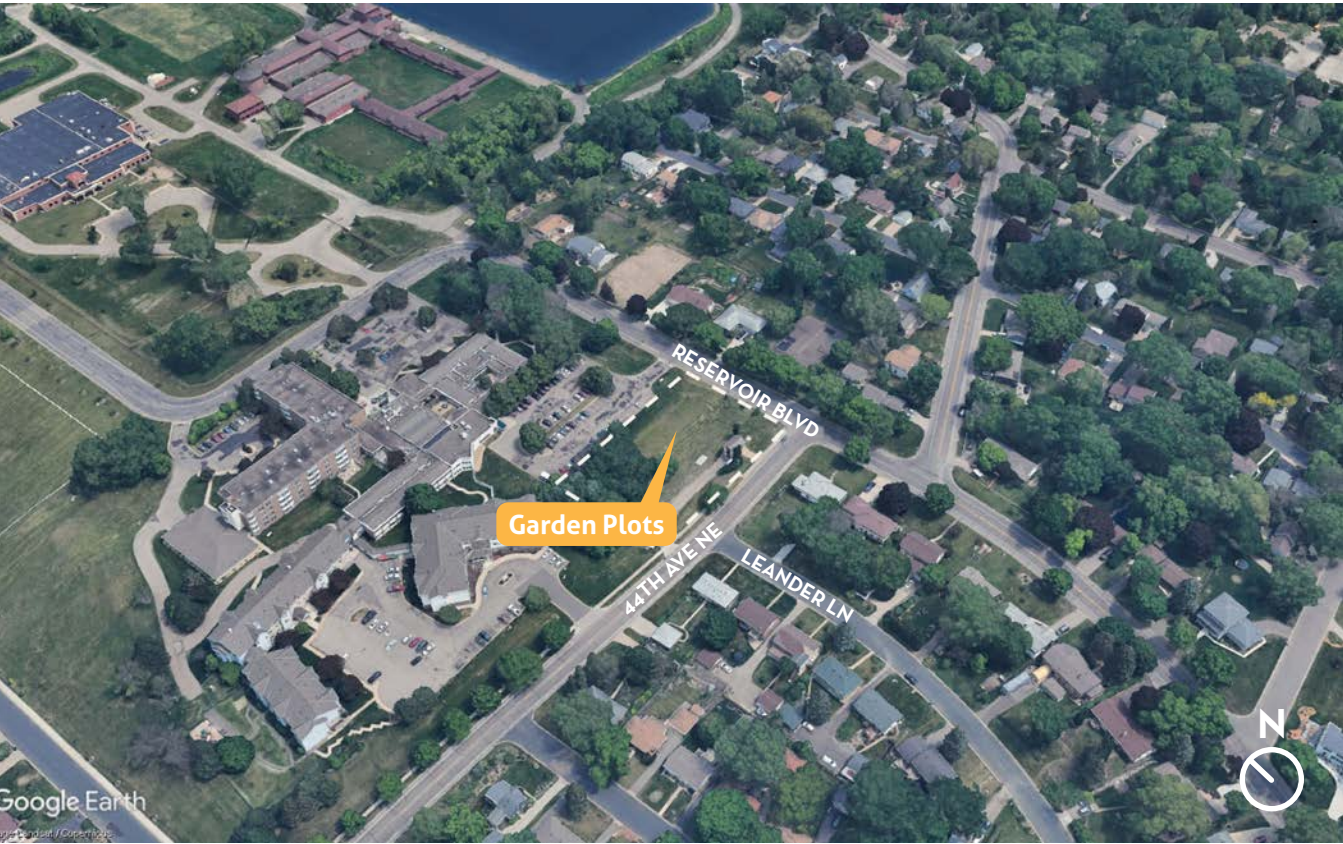
Bruce Nawrocki Park is a small neighborhood park located along Circle Terrace Boulevard Northeast. It features playground equipment, a half-court basketball court, a pavilion with picnic tables, and a rentable building with a TV, whiteboard, wifi, kitchenette and restrooms. Perched on the ridge above Labelle Park, Bruce Nawrocki Park was once connected to the lower park by a stairway linking the two green spaces.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
1/2 Basketball Court	Fair	
Building w/ Restrooms	Good	Neighborhood group rental once a week
Pavilion	Good	
Playground	Good	
Free Little Library	Good	

Field Assessment Notes

- Sits within a very busy neighborhood and on a busy road
- Lots of kids in the neighborhood

Community Garden Plots #1



Quick Facts

- 0.37 acres
- 100+ plots

Park Description

While not officially a parks space, the community garden plots off of Reservoir Boulevard provide critical space for local food production, support gardening hobbies, and serve as a place for the community to meet and do a healthy activity together.



ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Garden Plots	Good	

Field Assessment Notes

- Parking available on-site

Community Garden Plots #2



Quick Facts

- 0.16 acres
- 10 plots

Park Description

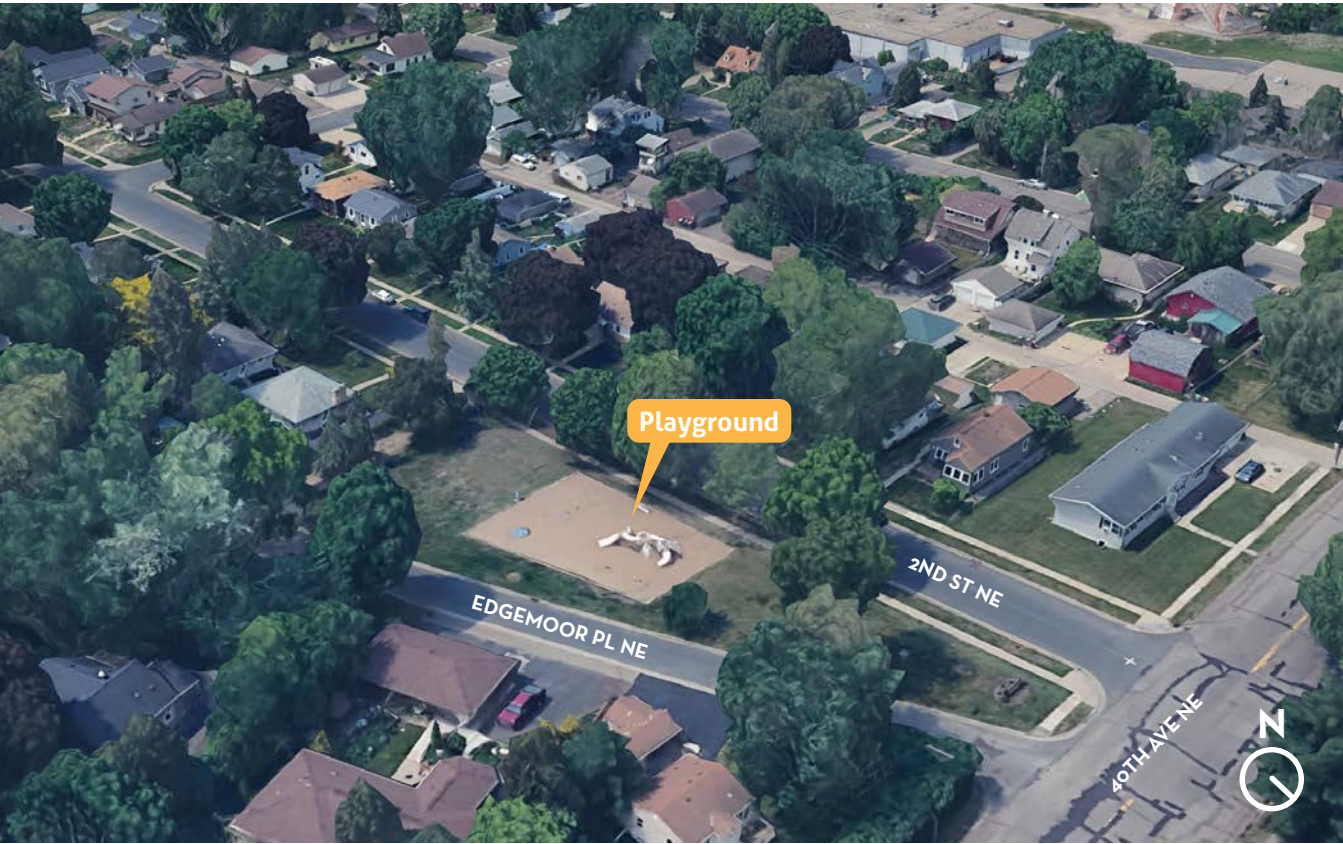
While not officially a parks space, the community garden plots off of 40th Avenue and Jackson Street Northeast, provides dedicated garden plots for growing fruits, vegetables, and flowers. The site includes garden beds and a water spigot to support gardeners throughout the growing season and is a great example of how remnant pockets in a built-out community can be used for open space activities.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Garden Plots	Good	

Field Assessment Notes

- Parking available via the city lot nearby

Edgemoor Park



Quick Facts

- 0.35 acres

Park Description

Edgemoor Park is a small pocket park featuring a playground and small open lawn. This park has sidewalk access on the northern and western edges of the park with primary access on the corner of 40th Avenue Northeast and 2nd Street Northeast.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Playground	Poor	

Field Assessment Notes

- Playground is dated and under-used

Gateway Park



Quick Facts

- 0.08 acres

Park Description

Though not officially a park space, Gateway Park serves as a welcoming rest space at a unique intersection, inviting people into Columbia Heights. A monument sign and some benches with landscaped beds characterize the park.

Gauvitte Park



Quick Facts

- 7.42 acres
- 100+ year old Burr Oaks are a key asset to the park system
- Used for basketball, hockey, sedek takra and sledding

Park Description

Gauvitte Park is a neighborhood park featuring a playground, basketball court, baseball field, hockey rink, sledding hill, and a grove of significant Burr Oaks. The park's primary accessible entrance is located along the western edge at 2nd Street NE, with an additional access point from 42nd Avenue NE to the south. A large open, flat area occupies the center of the park and is surrounded by neighboring homes, while a prominent hill defines the park's southern edge.



ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Ball Field	Poor	
Basketball Court	Good	
Storage Building	Poor	Not rentable
Open Field Space		
Playground	Fair	
Skating Rink (Boarded)	Fair	

Field Assessment Notes

- Parking is an issue
- Building is used for storage and is heated
- Lights work
- Some flooding

Hilltop Park



Quick Facts

- 1.38 acres
- Playground is in poor condition
- Not connected to any sidewalk system

Park Description

Hilltop Park is a small neighborhood park featuring a playground and open lawn. This park contains a picnic table and grill under the shade of mature canopy trees. This park is not connected to the Columbia Heights sidewalk network.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Open Field Space		
Playground	Poor	

Field Assessment Notes

- Quaint neighborhood park with generous open space

Huset Park East



Quick Facts

- 12.66 acres
- This park hosts big city festivals year-round
- Basketball courts are heavily used

Park Description

Huset Park East is a heavily used neighborhood park with year-round programming. The park features a central ball field, a basketball court and playground, a summer soccer field, a volleyball court, open field space, an artistic bridge and skating rink, and a rentable building and pavilion with tables and restrooms. The parks primary access point is along Jefferson Street Northeast via the sidewalk or parking lot.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Ball Field	Good	Spring/Summer/Fall baseball/softball leagues
Basketball Court	Poor	
Building w/ Restrooms	Poor	~20 rentals annually, city events, puppet wagon
Pavilion	Poor	
Playground	Poor	
Sand Volleyball Court	Fair	Summer sand volleyball camps
Skating Rink	Fair	
Soccer Field	Fair	Summer classes, fall flag football/ soccer leagues

Field Assessment Notes

- Bridge garden was planted by volunteers, is not actively maintained
- There is a mural inside the building
- Restrooms are only open for programming or events
- Flooding issues is open lawn area

Huset Park West



Quick Facts

- 17.80 acres
- Contains Murzyn Hall with rentable rooms and event space
- Playground and splash pad are newer to the system

Park Description

Huset Park West is a heavily used neighborhood park featuring one of the park system's most recently updated playgrounds, along with a splash pad, ball fields, pavilion, bocce ball courts, sledding hill, and the Murzyn Hall building. The park hosts a wide range of programmed events and activities and also includes a large stormwater pond and walking loop that provide both recreation and environmental benefits.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Ball Fields	Good, Fair	Spring/summer softball/baseball, camps, fall soccer
Bocce Ball Court	Fair	
Pavilion	Good	~37 rentals annually, Art & Info Fair, city events
Playground	Good	
Splash Pad	Good	
Storage Shed	Poor	
Walking Trail	Good	

Field Assessment Notes

- Sledding hill in wintertime
- Stormwater pond loop is unique to the system
- Parking lot in bad condition

Hylander Center



Quick Facts

- Built in 2009
- City operates programs in the gym
- Critical after school programming destination

Facility Description

The Hylander Center is a city-operated recreation facility connected to Columbia Heights High School. The center serves as a hub for youth and community programming, including after-school programs run by the Police Department. Amenities include a gymnasium with basketball and volleyball courts, an exercise room, and a police liaison station.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Building	Good	Frequent year-round use

Field Assessment Notes

- Parking across the street in the high school lot
- Small community fitness room
- Needs staff available to open for programming and activities

Keyes Park



Quick Facts

- 9.13 acres
- Park Improvements completed in 2016
- Large winter sledding hill

Park Description

Keyes Park is a neighborhood park with more recent park improvements. The park includes playground equipment, a baseball field, a softball field, a park building for rent, picnic tables and grills. The park has significant topography and is used for sledding in winter months.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Ball Fields	Good	Spring/Summer Softball/Baseball, Fall sports classes
Building w/ Restrooms	Good	~8-9 rentals annually
Open Field Space		
Playground	Good	
Sledding Hill	Good	

Field Assessment Notes

- Potential to add winter programming by flooding the stormwater retention area
- Building is under used, but sometimes rented in winter for sledding events

Labelle Park



Quick Facts

- 18.09 acres
- Popular walking loop
- Bird watching
- Memorial space
- Newer playground

Park Description

Labelle Park features a popular walking trail that loops around Labelle Pond, with frequent seating opportunities along the route for rest and scenic views. The park also includes a playground, pavilion, and memorial area with flags and artistic stone features. Multiple access points connect visitors to the park, which was historically linked to Bruce Nawrocki Park by a staircase ascending the bluff.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Open Field Space		
Pavilion	Good	Has hosted police department events
Playground	Good	
Walking Trail	Good	

Field Assessment Notes

- Under-used shelter with low visibility from the road
- Opportunity to expand bird habitat
- Opportunity to add a boardwalk feature

Lomianki Park



Quick Facts

- 1.84 acres
- Community garden
- Under-used and old playground
- Building facility used for storage

Park Description

Lomianki Park is a neighborhood park located along the edge of the city. The park features a playground, a community garden, and a park building that supports local gatherings and activities. Interpretive amenities, including educational signage and a Little Free Library, encourage learning and community engagement. Mature trees and recently planted additions contribute to the park's natural character and will help establish a robust tree canopy for future generations.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Food Forest/Garden	Good	Blooming Sunshine volunteer group
Playground	Poor	
Storage Building	Poor	Not rentable or used

Field Assessment Notes

- Oldest playground in the system
- Potential for trail connections to Minneapolis trails

McKenna Park



Quick Facts

- 8.41 acres
- Boarded hockey rink is used for sepak takraw in warm months
- Winter skating and sledding
- Mature Burr Oaks oh hill and in picnic area

Park Description

McKenna Park is a neighborhood park located along the northwestern edge of the city. The park features a boarded hockey rink that is now used for sepak takraw, as well as a sledding hill, wading pool, playground, ball fields, and a park building. Large canopy trees line the western and northeastern edges of the site, providing shaded areas with picnic tables and barbecue grills for gathering and recreation.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Ball Fields	Good	Summer baseball, middle school softball
Building	Poor	Previously ~9 rentals annually, not rentabl 
Open Field Space		
Playground	Good	
Skating Rink (Boarded)	Fair	
Sledding Hill	Good	
Wading Pool	Poor	

Field Assessment Notes

- Wading pool is at the end of its life
- Building in very poor condition and is not rentable anymore

Murzyn Hall



Quick Facts

- Built in 1939 as a WPA project
- Has a long and significant history in helping to define Columbia Heights' sense of community

Facility Description

John P. Murzyn Hall is a community venue located on the grounds of Huset Park. The facility hosts a wide range of events, including wedding receptions, banquets, anniversary parties, meetings, and other small-group gatherings, and also houses the Parks and Recreation Department office. In addition to private rentals, the building supports community programming such as summer activities, workshops, classes, and after-school programs, with multiple rentable rooms available to accommodate different event sizes. This facility warrants deeper study and consideration, as it is in poor condition.



ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Building w/ Restrooms	Poor	Frequent year-round use

Field Assessment Notes

- Parking available on street, across street, and behind building
- Building is heavily used for an incredible array of things, including department offices, event rentals, and regular enrichment programming

Ostrander Park



Quick Facts

- 2.27 acres
- Park experiences drainage issues, making flooding the hockey rink difficult

Park Description

Ostrander Park is a small neighborhood park located along 40th Avenue Northeast. The park features an open play field, a skating rink, a playground, and a park building. Ongoing stormwater issues and soil settling have created uneven conditions within the field, limiting its suitability for recreation and programming.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Building	Poor	Not rentable
Playground	Fair	
Skating Rink (Boarded)	Fair	

Field Assessment Notes

- Poor drainage throughout park space
- Building is not used anymore since the skating program was moved to Huset Park

Prestemon Park



Quick Facts

- 9.70 acres

Park Description

Prestemon Park is a neighborhood park featuring several unique amenities, including a half-court basketball court, a pickleball court, and a three-hole disc golf course. Meandering walking paths connect the park's sledding hill, playground, ball field, and park building. The park also features a central stormwater area and a mature tree canopy that adds shade and opportunities for wildlife habitat throughout the site.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Ball Field	Good	Adult softball league in spring, summer, fall
1/2 Basketball Court	Good	
Disc Golf	Good	Only 3 baskets
Restrooms	Good	Not open
Pickleball Court	Good	
Playground	Fair	
Sledding Hill	Good	
Walking Trail	Good	

Field Assessment Notes

- Very nice to walk along paths past landscaped areas and natural stormwater features
- Parking lot is in poor condition

Ramsdell Park



Quick Facts

- 4.86 acres
- New ballfield

Park Description

Ramsdell Park is a busy neighborhood park that is connected to the Highlander Center and Columbia Heights High School via a shared parking area. The park features a recently renovated ballfield that is used by the school, as well as a wading pool, playground, park building and linear stormwater/habitat area. Its proximity to community and educational facilities makes it an important recreational resource for residents and students.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Ball Field	Good	High school teams, youth softball league
Batting Cages	Good	
Building w/ Restrooms	Poor	~24 rentals annually
Pavilion	Good	Summer camp, ~8 puppet wagon shows annually
Playground	Good	
Storage Shed	Fair	
Wading Pool	Poor	Summer camp use

Field Assessment Notes

- Pavillion is heavily used and sometimes rented out
- Natural stormwater space helps park feel more in touch with nature
- Wading pool has reached the end of its life

Silver Lake Beach



Quick Facts

- 5.66 acres

Park Description

Silver Lake Beach is the only park in the system that provides public swimming access, making it a popular destination during the summer months. The park features a beach, pavilion, playground, sand volleyball court, and storage building. A trail connection extends from the park to Silverwood Park, providing access to additional recreational opportunities and regional trail connections.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Open Field Space		
Pavilion	Good	Nature camp, ~21 rentals annually
Playground	Fair	
Sand Volleyball Court	Poor	
Building	Poor	Closed and boarded up
Swimming Beach	Fair	Kayaking/ paddling event

Field Assessment Notes

- Parking is ample
- Park building hasn't been used in a very long time, boarded up

Silver Lake Boat Landing



Quick Facts

- 2.08 acres

Park Description

The Silver Lake Boat Landing provides public boating access to Silver Lake. Accessed by vehicle from Stinson Boulevard Northeast, the site includes a steep descent from the roadway to the water’s edge. The site offers a pier for boaters and parking spaces for boat trailers. It also includes a stormwater management feature located near the top of the hill adjacent to the road.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Boat Launch	Good	

Field Assessment Notes

- No other use than boat launch

Sullivan Lake Park



Quick Facts

- 25.48 acres
- Improvements ongoing, including new playground coming soon

Park Description

Sullivan Lake Park is best known for its scenic walking loop around the lake, highlighted by a unique bridge crossing along the lake’s northern edge. The park also features a large pavilion, an outdoor fitness court, and a park building. Planned improvements include the addition of a premier playground, anticipated to be completed by 2028.

ASSESSMENT		
Amenity	Condition	Programming
Fitness Court Studio	Good	Summer fitness classes
Pavilions	Good	~31 rentals annually, Monarch Festival, summer camps
Restrooms	Poor	Not Open
Walking Trail	Good	

Field Assessment Notes

- Ample parking
- Lovely view of the lake from the pavilion

Wargo Court Park



Quick Facts

- 0.37 acres

Park Description

Wargo Court Park is a small pocket park located at the corner of Central Avenue and 41st Avenue Northeast. The park features a memorial, flagpole, and open green space. Historically, the site included a fountain and plaza, which were removed due to maintenance concerns. Mature trees along the park's western edge provide shade and habitat.

Field Assessment Notes

- No program currently
- Opportunity for improvements and to fill a gap in this part of the city