

PARKS, OPEN SPACES, AND TRAILS PLAN

The City of Mendota Heights enjoys a park, open space, and trail system with over 290 acres of City parkland and 21 miles of trails. The City also has Fort Snelling State Park, Big Rivers Regional Trail, North Urban Regional Trail (Mendota-Kaposia Trail), and other park facilities located within or near its boundaries. The park system is recognized as an important asset to the community because it provides opportunities for residents to relax, recreate, and enjoy nature, while also enhancing the physical landscape and improving property values.

Previous Comprehensive Plans (1959 & 1979) and Park Plans (1971 & 1985) have guided the City in the development of its park system. As development has occurred, parkland has been dedicated to provide residents with recreational opportunities. Since the adoption of the 1979 Comprehensive Plan, the City has made improvements to all parks and has developed the following new parks: Copperfield Ponds, Hagstrom-King, Kensington, Mendakota, Sibley, Valley View Heights, and Victoria Highlands. The location of these new parks closely resemble Plan recommendations and reflect the City's commitment to providing park services to all residents as opportunities arise.

Not only has the City made improvements and developed new parks, it has also made efforts to retain existing open space. The City purchased the 17-acre Mendota Heights Par 3 Golf Course after the private owners proposed to develop the property into approximately 30 single family lots. The City also joined with other public entities and purchased the 25.5-acre Pilot Knob area, which will be retained as open space.

The City of Mendota Heights currently has sufficient park acreage to serve its residents, although not all residents have equal access to those facilities. Future improvements will focus on updating existing facilities, adding trail facilities to neighborhoods that lack access to parks, and increasing the amount of open space. This may be accomplished through either park dedications or purchasing land. Trails are also an important component and focus of this plan because they connect neighborhoods to one another and the community to regional recreational opportunities.

The Parks and Recreation Commission is an appointed citizen body responsible for evaluating park facility needs. The needs are determined based upon the adequacy and accessibility of existing facilities, the availability of a desired piece of land, and budget considerations. Recommendations are forwarded to the City Council during the City's annual budget and Capital Improvements Program (CIP) process.

RECREATION PROGRAMMING

The City of Mendota Heights currently has one part-time recreation programmer. This person is responsible for coordinating adult and senior activities, non-athletic youth activities, and youth recreation activities not provided by the Mendota Heights Athletic Association (golf, tennis, fishing, etc). The Mendota Heights Athletic Association coordinates youth athletic activities within the City.

GOALS AND POLICIES

Goals:

1. To provide the optimum amount of active and passive open space for the enjoyment of all Mendota Heights residents.
2. To provide a park system that assures the quality of facilities will match residents' desires and standards of living.
3. To use the park system as a means to enhance the environment of each neighborhood and the City as a whole.
4. To support the Dakota County 2030 Greenway Corridors Plan/Vision.

Policies:

1. Encourage the preservation of open space by private property owners and the City.
2. Maximize the use of existing park facilities and consider establishment of additional facilities for all age groups when necessary, including facilities for the handicapped.
3. Explore new opportunities and continue to work cooperatively with School District #197, St. Thomas, Visitation, Fort Snelling State Park, and other entities to provide maximum recreational opportunities and avoid duplication of services.
4. Improve and expand bicycle and pedestrian connections to City parks and other community destinations.
5. Provide neighborhoods of the City with trails, open space, and quality park facilities and amenities.

EXISTING CITY PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

Mendota Heights now has 295.7 acres of City parks and open space. A brief discussion of the three types of parks that typically comprise a local park system is provided below. The descriptions and standards should serve as a guide. Other factors, such as proximity to regional or county parks, financing, or major trends in recreation, will also influence the evolution of the City’s park system.

1) Neighborhood Park

Neighborhood parks are the basic unit of the park system and serve as the recreational and social focus of the neighborhood. They accommodate a wide variety of age and user groups, including children and adults. They create a sense of place by bringing together the unique character of the site with that of the neighborhood. Mendota Heights should seek to achieve a balance between active and passive neighborhood parks. Neighborhood parks range from 5-30 acres and serve a ½ mile area. Communities often will operate a joint neighborhood park with the school district and elementary schools. The City’s neighborhood parks include Friendly Hills, Hagstrom-King, Ivy Hills, Marie, Valley, Valley View Heights, Victoria Highlands, and Wentworth.

2) Community Park

Community parks are designed to meet the recreational needs of several neighborhoods or larger segments of the community. They are intended for lit ballfields and larger athletic facilities or community gatherings. They can also be designed to preserve unique landscapes and open spaces. They serve a ½ mile to 5-mile radius. The City’s community parks include Kensington, Valley, Roger’s Lake, Mendakota, and Sibley Athletic Complex.

3) Natural Resource Area

Natural resource areas are areas set aside to preserve significant or unique landscapes. They are often, but not always, properties unsuitable for development with steep slopes, drainageways, and ravines or wetlands. In addition, there may be locations where local tree protection, shoreland and critical area ordinances, or state and local wetland ordinances restrict development in some way. Natural Resource areas include Friendly Marsh, Copperfield Ponds, Valley Park, and Pilot Knob.

The table on the following page identifies the City’s Parks and Open Spaces, their locations, and facilities offered:

City of Mendota Heights Parks & Facilities	Acres	Nature Area	Trail	Softball/ Baseball	Soccer	Tennis	Basketball Court	Volleyball	Play Equipment	Picnic Area	Shelter(s)	Hockey Rink	Skating Rink	Parking	Bandshell	Boats	Portable Toilet
Civic Center Lexington & Hwy 110	4		•	•										•			•
Copperfield Ponds East of Huber Dr at Cheyenne Ln	24.9	•P	•														
Friendly Hills Park Pueblo Ln & Decorah Ln	15.5	•P	•	•	•YO	•	•3	•	•	•	•	•	•5	•			•
Friendly Marsh Park North of Cheyenne Ln & Apache St	33.4	•P	•														
Hagstrom-King Park Mendota Heights Rd, East of Huber	9.6	•P	•	•			•3		•					•			•
Historic Pilot Knob Just off Mendota Bridge, Between Acacia Cem & TH 55	25.5	•	•											•			
Ivy Hills Park Butler & Maple Park Dr	9.3	•P	•	•	•YO	•	•3	•	•	•				•			•
Kensington Park Concord Wa, South of Mendota Heights Rd	14.6	•P	•		•F				•	•	•E			•			•C
Marie Park North of Marie Ave, Between Victoria & Lexington	6.2	•P	•	•		•	•3	•	•	•		•	•	•			•
Mendakota Park Dodd Rd & Mendakota Dr	19.7		•	•	•Y		•	•	•	•	•E			•	•		•C
Roger's Lake Park Wagon Wheel Tr, East of I-35E	9.2	•	•			•	•3	•4	•	•	•E			•		•	•
Sibely Athletic Complex Marie & Delaware	11		•	•	•F	•2								•			•C
Town Center NE Corner Dodd Rd @ Hwy 110; within "The Village"	0.5									•				•			
Valley Park Marie Ave, East of I-35E	94.4	•	•	•		•	•3		•	•	•			•			•
Valley View Heights Cullen & Timmy	0.7		•				•3		•								
Victoria Highlands Park Victoria Rd & Douglas RD	6.7		•	•	•YO		•3		•					•			•
Wentworth Park Wentworth Ave, West of Dodd Rd	10.5	•P	•	•	•YO	•	•3	•	•	•	•	•	•	•			•
Total	295.7																

1. Sibely Athletic Complex is a joint use facility owned and operated by School District 197 (Additional fields not included in above table)
2. School District 197 maintains 12 tennis courts at Sibely High School.

3. Half-court only.
4. Sand volleyball court – all others on grass.
5. Paved rink for inline skating (summer).

6. The city has no lighted ball fields.
7. All hockey rinks contain lights – rinks close at 10:00 p.m.
C. Comfort station – Permanent toilet facility – Open seasonally.

E. Electrical service.
F. Full size soccer field(s).
O. Overlay.
P. Pond/Natural areas.
Y. Youth soccer fields.

EXISTING STATE, REGIONAL, AND PRIVATE PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

There are also a number of regional, county and private facilities within or near the City's borders.

Fort Snelling State Park

The largest park with 611 of its 2,642 acres located in the City. It provides outdoor recreation opportunities and natural resource conservation for the public and is considered part of the regional recreational open space system. Fort Snelling State Park is a recreational state park offering swimming, large group and family picnic grounds, a boat launch, interpretive center and historical areas, trails, and scenic overlooks. Most of the park's active facilities are located on the Bloomington side of the River, requiring most Mendota Heights residents to drive or bike across the I-494, I-35E and Mendota bridges. The Mendota Heights portion of the park is left primarily as a natural area as it contains extensive floodplain marsh habitat. Facilities located in Mendota Heights support less intensive uses, such as biking, hiking, cross country skiing, and fishing. The Sibley and Faribault historic sites are also located on the Mendota Heights side of the River.

Harriet Island-Lilydale Regional Park

Located just north of Mendota Heights, this park is managed by the City of St. Paul. The lower portion of the park in the City of Lilydale is planned to remain passive open space. A beach and concessions area is planned, but highly unlikely due to wetland issues. The area also has a ramp for boat access to the River. A trail through the park, separate from the roadway, is planned to link St. Paul to the *Big Rivers Regional Trail*.

Dodge Nature Center

A 170-acre private facility dedicated to the restoration of native plant and animal communities. The nature preserve provides excellent educational programs and events.

School District 197

The City and School District work cooperatively to provide for joint use of facilities and recreation programs within the community. Play equipment, two softball fields, soccer and T-ball are provided at the Mendota and Somerset Elementary Schools. Friendly Hills Middle School is utilized for soccer, two softball fields and fitness programs. Tennis, baseball, softball, track, football, lacrosse, and soccer are all accommodated at Sibley High School.

Big Rivers Regional Trail

Developed in 1996 by Dakota County along the old Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way, this trail enables residents to bike, walk, and roller blade along the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers. This trail serves as an important link to other communities and has greatly improved the awareness and accessibility of the River.

North Urban Regional Trail (Mendota-Kaposia Trail)

This trail serves as a link from Big Rivers Valley Park to West St. Paul and to South St. Paul.

Other Private Facilities / Open Space:

- Mendakota Country Club (18 hole private golf course)
- Somerset Country Club (18 hole private golf course)
- Acacia Park Cemetery
- Resurrection Cemetery
- St. Thomas Academy
- Visitation School
- St. Peter's Cemetery
- St. Peter's Church

Other Public Facilities / Open Space:

- Mendota Heights Par 3 Golf Course (9 hole public golf course)

REGIONAL PARK AND TRAIL NEEDS

The Metropolitan Council's *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* is the metropolitan system plan for regional recreation open space with which local comprehensive plans must conform. Needs of the metropolitan region were identified, and changes have therefore been indicated that need to be implemented in order to meet the needs of the region.

The following Regional Park System Plan considerations would specifically affect the City of Mendota Heights:

1. **Dakota County North Urban Regional Trail** – This trail is proposed to connect the Dakota County Mississippi River Regional Trail to the Big Rivers Regional Greenway in northern Dakota County. A master plan for the trail has been completed and a portion of the trail is complete on the east end.
2. **Dakota North/South Regional Trail Search Area** – This is a proposed regional trail that will connect the “Empire Wetlands” Regional Park to the proposed Chub Lake Regional Park, the proposed Dakota South Cannon River Regional Trail, and Lake Byllesby Regional Park. The regional trail does not have an approved master plan yet. Dakota County will conduct a master planning process in the future to determine the trail alignment.

LOCAL PARK and TRAIL NEEDS

Parks

City park needs can be determined by evaluating the number, size, and accessibility of parks. It is often recommended a park system contain 25 acres of park for each 1,000 population, which is equal to 1,089 square feet per person. To meet this standard, the City would need to provide 302.5 acres of parkland (based on the projected year 2030 population of 12,100 persons when fully developed). The City currently has 295.7 acres of parkland and open space, and essentially meets the standard. Some additional parkland may be obtained as the few remaining larger parcels develop.

It is also important to evaluate residents' access to parks. Residents are typically willing to walk $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to reach a neighborhood park. Major roads, wetlands, drainageways, and bodies of water also restrict access. The Park and Trails Plan Map identifies the existing parks, open spaces, nature preserves, cemeteries, and golf courses within the City.

The following three areas of the City are under served by the City's park system:

1. North of Somerset Country Club and east of Dodd Road. This neighborhood is lacking a City Park facility. However, most of these residents are within walking distance of Cherokee Regional Park in West St. Paul.

2. North of Highway 110, east of Dodd Road and south of Wentworth Avenue (Somerset). Although the Sibley Athletic Complex is located in this area, it does not serve a neighborhood function. A new neighborhood park should be considered as some of the larger lots re-subdivide.
3. North of Highway 110 and west of Lexington Avenue, there is a ball field at the Civic Center site. Marie Park is the nearest permanent park facility (aside from the aforementioned ball field) and for many residents is more than ½ mile away on the other side of Lexington Avenue. There are limited opportunities for a larger neighborhood park because the area is nearly fully developed. However, a mini-neighborhood park should be developed to serve the residents.

The City has identified several sites for additional park, open space, or trail connecting segments. The sites are identified as follows:

Areas of Interest:

- Resurrection Cemetery “Break-Off” area
- Visitation School property
- St. Thomas property off Mendota Heights Road
- Foss homestead by Wentworth Park
- Somerset area

Mendota Heights will pursue additional park, open space land, and trail connections to the extent it becomes available and is within the resources of the City.

Trails

Trails for biking, walking, and roller blading have become very popular in recent years. Twenty-one (21) miles of trails currently extend through portions of the City’s neighborhoods. These trails are both off- and on-road and serve as important connections for recreational opportunities and travel.

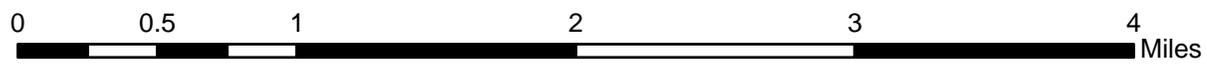
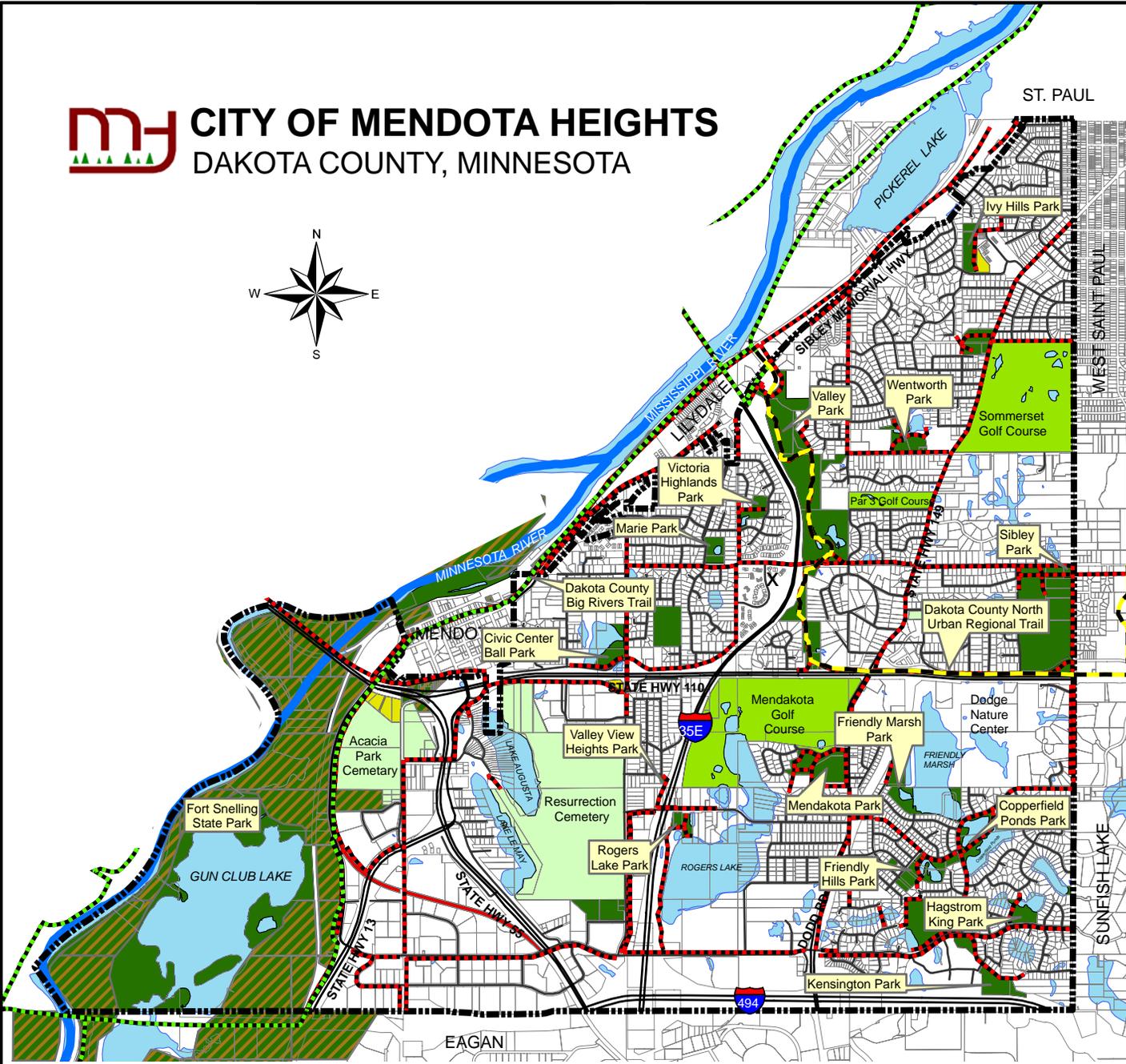
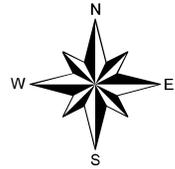
Improved trail connections are important because many residential areas are divided by highways and arterial roads. The recent construction of the *Big Rivers Regional Trail* along the Minnesota River and the trail connection to the I-35E Bridge railway have also heightened the awareness and demand for improved access to the river valley. Access to the *Big Rivers Regional Trail* is difficult due to the significant elevation changes. As a result, many areas of the community cannot be easily accessed on bikes, roller blades or foot from other areas of the community. Additional or improved trail connections are needed to provide residents access to City parks and other recreational opportunities in the region.

Trail connections and improvements planned by the City are shown on the following map and are listed below.

Planned Trail Connections and Improvements:

- Delaware Avenue/TH 110
- Lexington Avenue south of TH 110
- Valley Park/Par 3 Golf Course/Wachtler/Wentworth
- Highway 13 west of Opus
- Dodd Road: TH 110 to Marie Avenue
- Augusta Shores/Resurrection/Lexington
- Wagon Wheel Trail
- MRCA/MNRRRA Plan Trail Connections – MRCA/MNRRRA trail improvements and who will be responsible for their development are listed below.
 - Huber/Friendly Marsh to Dodd/TH 110
 - TH 110/Delaware to Huber
 - Dodge Nature (Dakota County Greenway Corridor)
 - Future Upgrade through Valley Park (City of Mendota Heights)
 - Highway 13 from Victoria Avenue to Lilydale Road – 6
‘ Trail on the north side (Lilydale side) (Mn/DOT)

CITY OF MENDOTA HEIGHTS
 DAKOTA COUNTY, MINNESOTA



2030
COMPREHENSIVE
PLAN

Park and Trails Plan

- Parks**
- State Park
- City Park
- Open Space
- Nature Preserve
- County Trail
- Cemetery
- Golf Course
- Regional & State Trails**
- Existing
- Planned
- Proposed
- City Trail**
- Existing
- Major River
- Roads
- City Boundary
- Water

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Source: City of Mendota Heights, Dakota County, Metropolitan Council, and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.
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