



Chapter 7

Community Health & Safety

Vision for Community Health & Safety

The health and safety of St. Louis Park community members is fundamental to their quality of life and economic vitality. Health and safety are integrated into all five of the city's Strategic Priorities adopted in 2018.

The World Health Organization (WHO) operates with the principle that “health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” This principle guides the city's understanding of health and how the city contributes to community well-being. St. Louis Park recognizes that health is impacted by many social and physical determinants, including health and healthcare, education, economic stability, neighborhoods and the built environment, social and community context.

The city strives to address those determinants where possible so that all community members have the opportunity to reach their full health potential. A particular community health focus for the city has been youth and schools. One of Vision 3.0's five recommendations is "Prepare Our Next Generation" which encompasses both K-12 and post-secondary education.

Community safety is essential to health, well-being, and the overall vitality of the community. Residents, business owners, and people who work and visit the city need to feel safe and protected. Cities typically have public safety as one of their main functions. St. Louis Park specifically has police, fire and inspection services – all of which are looking out for the safety and well-being of people in the community.

St. Louis Park has made a practice of being proactive in its public safety services. From community-oriented policing, to fire responders paying attention to people's issues that become apparent from medical calls, to the point-of sale and rental licensing programs, people in St. Louis Park benefit from this proactive approach. With this philosophy, public safety personnel get to know the community in a more holistic way, and become partners with community members. These community connections build trust and improve the safety and well-being for everyone.



Community Health

Where We Have Been

Modern public health emerged as a response to widespread illness and environmental contamination in the late nineteenth century and early to mid-twentieth century. Broad public health efforts focused on the eradication of disease through the development of vaccines and sanitary sewer systems, securing clean water, separating industrial processes from the general population, and establishing public medical facilities. In St. Louis Park, the city contributed to these efforts by developing clean municipal water and sanitary sewer systems, cleaning up polluted sites, and pioneering building and property maintenance codes to ensure safe living conditions.

In more recent decades, the understanding of public health and how cities contribute to community well-being has evolved to include aspects of the built environment and social and economic realities that impact the long-term health of community members. St. Louis Park has expanded upon past public health efforts to include this broader understanding in planning and policy initiatives.

1995 Vision Process and Comprehensive Plan

Livable Community

In 1994, a committee of St. Louis Park community members representing government, schools, businesses, community organizations, religious institutions, and residents set a new vision for the city that focused on sense of community, connection, and principles of a livable community, which include walkability, mixed use neighborhoods, human-scale development, multi-modal streets and pathways, and transit-oriented development with the intention of creating a healthier community.

2006 Active Living Hennepin County Partnership

In 2006, the City of St. Louis Park engaged with Hennepin County and partnering cities in sharing and learning from best practices that promote more walkable and bikeable communities. The partnership encourages complete streets policies, active living resolutions, accessible and safe design of roads, trails, sidewalks, and transit, the development of community gardens, and funding and technical support for local initiatives. The city continues to be a partner in this group.

2006 Vision Process and Comprehensive Plan

Active Living: Parks and Trails Master Plan

The 2006 Vision St. Louis Park initiative provided city staff and elected officials an opportunity to learn from community members that the city's sidewalks and trails are a vital piece of the city's infrastructure. The vision process identified the need to continually improve the sidewalk and trail system to make it safe and easy for residents and visitors to move around the city without being dependent on automobiles. Such efforts help reduce reliance on cars and improve the overall health of residents by facilitating active lifestyles.

Influenced by community feedback in the 2006 Vision St. Louis Park, the city worked with community members to create the 2008 *Active Living: Sidewalks and Trails Plan*. The plan envisions the city as a place with a connected network of sidewalks and trails that encourage physical fitness and non-polluting transportation options accessible to all ages and abilities.

Connect the Park

To implement the *Active Living: Sidewalks and Trails Plan*, the city launched the *Connect the Park* initiative in 2013. This program of investing in sidewalk and trail connections aims to increase pedestrian and bike friendly neighborhoods and improve connectivity across St. Louis Park. It is a comprehensive, city-wide system of sidewalks, trails, and bikeways that provides local and regional connectivity, supports health and active living, improves safety and accessibility, and enhances overall community livability.

CONNECT THE PARK

Ten-year initiative to improve sidewalks, trails and bikeways in St. Louis Park

- 10 miles of sidewalks
- 3 miles of trails
- 32 miles of bikeways
- 2 trail bridges

Select Recent Initiatives

Urban Reforestation (2009)

A healthy and robust urban tree canopy can support more physical activity and promotes mental well-being. It also cools the city in the summer, and mitigates some of the negative health effects of climate change. The purpose of the Urban Reforestation Policy is to provide a healthy and diverse tree population and support the city's vision regarding environmental stewardship. This policy is achieved by replacing past, current, and future tree losses along corridors and in our parks with a diverse selection of trees, prioritizing native species where possible.

Health in the Park (2013)

In 2013, the city launched the Health in the Park initiative with funding from the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross Blue Shield. The city partnered with the school district, Park Nicollet and local non-profits to lead this effort. At its launch, more than 1,500 community members participated in conversations about health in the community which led to a community-wide collaboration to implement program and policy changes that align with the community's health needs in physical, mental and social well-being.

Complete Streets (2013)

Complete Streets consists of the planning, scoping, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of roads in order to reasonably address the safety and accessibility needs of users across all ages, abilities, and transportation modes. The Complete Streets Policy helps support biking and walking in St. Louis Park, and creates safer streets for all community members.

Healthy Eating and Active Living (2013)

The Healthy Eating and Active Living Policy aims to establish mechanisms to support individual, community, and environmental efforts to improve the public's health by encouraging the development and implementation of policies and practices that support and promote healthy eating and active living among residents of St. Louis Park.

Where We Are Today

St. Louis Park continues to implement policies and programs and engage citizens in activities that support a healthier community. Progress made by the Health in the Park initiative, as well as across many city departments, impacts health through a holistic approach.

Health in the Park

The Health in the Park initiative is a collaborative effort between the city, the school district and community members. Two programs make up the current Health in the Park initiative, the *Health in the Park Champion Program* and the *Healthy Living Grant Program*.

Health in the Park Champion Program

The Health in the Park Champion Program is made up of volunteer community members who partner with the city and school district to advance health through program and policy changes and act as a connection point between the city, school district and the community. Volunteers sit on advisory boards, volunteer at health related community events and create their own grassroots programs such as healthy cooking classes, mental health support groups, and community walks.

Champions interested in advancing mental health awareness and resources in St. Louis Park partnered with the National Alliance for Mental Illness to bring mental health awareness classes and resources to the community from 2014-2016. Several classes were hosted at businesses, work sites, religious institutions and through community education. They have also created a show for public television, hosted tables at community events, hosted support groups and partnered with Friends of the Arts to combine art with mental health awareness.

Champions interested in promoting physical activity have proposed and coordinated bike safety classes in schools, created a safer crosswalk at Susan Lindgren Elementary School, and have hosted community walks in both the winter and summer months. They advocate for safe sidewalk and trail connections throughout the community and volunteer at various events promoting physical activity.

Champions interested in nutrition education and promotion have worked with the school district on creating more nutritious school lunches and have helped with the creation and testing of a new nutrition curriculum program. They also partnered with the University of Minnesota to bring Cooking Matters® education courses to adults and teens who are at risk of living in hunger. The Champion group currently has thirteen volunteers and is continually growing.

Healthy Living Grant Program

The Healthy Living Grant Program was created in 2017 to support grassroots community driven action related to health and well-being. The city provides funds up to \$1,000 per project and in 2018 we expect to fund 10-12 projects. The Healthy Living Grant Program is open to all individuals and organizations in the community and provides funding for health projects relating to mental and physical well-being. Notable activities funded in 2017 included funding to Wayside Recovery Center for six weeks of nutrition education courses for those in recovery, the Birchwood Neighborhood 5K Walk/Run, which had 135 participants of all ages, a mental health awareness walk, and a partnership with Susan Lindgren Elementary School to bring free yoga to adult residents, parents and teachers.

Beyond the Health in the Park initiative, the opportunities to be well physically, socially and mentally are supported throughout several city departments.



Recreation and Parks

Recreation programming in the city supports physical, mental and social well-being for adults, teens and youth. Recreation programming offers a variety of physical activity programs including exercise classes, organized sport leagues, dance, karate and more, bringing the community together improving social and mental well-being.

Facilities

Parks and recreation facilities brings opportunities for social, physical and mental well-being by providing gathering spaces for community members to be active, connect with one another and spend time in nature. The city's parks and recreation system includes 52 parks and 750 acres of dedicated parks and open space, and accounts for 11.47% of land in the city. City parks have features including outdoor ice skating rinks, playgrounds, picnic tables, basketball courts and athletic fields, fostering physical activity and social connections. Recreation facilities including the Aquatic Park, Recreation Center, Skate Park, and the Recreation Outdoor Center bring opportunities for social connections and physical activities such as swimming, skate boarding and hockey, as well as numerous events, classes and programs.



Westwood Hills Nature Center

The Westwood Hills Nature Center offers 160 acres of natural area featuring trails and open space for community members to spend time in nature, as well as programming to educate youth, teens and adults and inspire appreciation for our natural world. The center partners with schools to introduce the benefits of nature to school kids during field trips, and gets youth and teens involved with volunteer opportunities through the Junior Naturalist Program.

Community Gardens

The city promotes physical, mental and social well-being through community gardens. Five community gardens are managed by the city, which are available for yearly rental, with others managed by neighborhood or apartment associations. Ensuring garden plots are accessible for lower income communities, the city offers free assistance for community garden plots. Furthermore, the city manages six edible gardens as part of the Summer Park Playground Program.

Additional information can be found in the Parks, Open Space and Natural Resources section of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

Local Food Growing

St. Louis Park supports homegrown food options that support mental health and wellness and locally sourced nutritious foods. In addition to community garden space for community members, the city also permits the keeping of bees and chickens subject to some conditions in single family residential areas.

Community Connections

Volunteer Opportunities

The city engages its community members in volunteer opportunities throughout the year with one-time and ongoing activities in virtually all departments. Each year more than 1,000 volunteers donate more than 10,000 hours of time, extending and enhancing the city's services. Offering volunteer opportunities connects community members with the work the city does and engages community members in improving their social well-being.

Neighborhood Revitalization Grant Program

The City of St. Louis Park established the Neighborhood Revitalization Grant Program began in 1996 to support neighborhoods and enhance community connections by bringing neighbors together. Financial support is provided for special projects initiated by neighbors to connect, address issues, implement ideas and get to know one another. Support of neighborhood organizations allows for community connections and reinforces residents' social well-being. Through the neighborhood grant program, several social events are held throughout the year for neighbors to connect with one another (see the Plan by Neighborhood section of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan).

Police Department Community Outreach

The Police Department Community Outreach team hosts a wide variety of community outreach activities and programs to promote community well-being. Community outreach activities create safer, better connected communities, including Basketball in the Park and the Skateboarding Extravaganza (see Police Department Services section).

Community Organizations

There are many community organizations throughout the city that focus on community building and improving the lives of residents in St. Louis Park. These organizations contribute to the well-being of St. Louis Park by bringing people together through events, programming and education, bringing resources to those at risk in the community and by providing financial resources.

St. Louis Park has many community focused organizations that bring resources, programs, events, and education, enhancing the lives of those living and learning in St. Louis Park. Some of these include:

- » St. Louis Park Schools Community Education
- » Sabes Jewish Community Center
- » Children First
- » League of Women Voters
- » Parktacular
- » Friends of the Arts
- » St. Louis Park Historical Society

There are many organizations that provide resources to those at risk or in need through services, resources or funds. Some of these include:

- » Perspectives
- » Knights of Columbus
- » Fare for All
- » St. Louis Park Emergency Program
- » Matter
- » Park Nicollet Foundation
- » Community Youth and Development Fund

Select New and Ongoing Initiatives

Tobacco-Free Places

St. Louis Park has been a regional leader in tobacco-free policies, including making our parks and open spaces tobacco-free, restricting the sale of flavored tobacco, and raising the purchasing age of tobacco to 21. Additionally, the St. Louis Park Housing Authority has become smoke-free in its publicly-owned housing.

Advancing Racial Equity

In 2016 the city initiated the Advancing Racial Equity initiative with the goal of making St. Louis Park a more equitable place for all people. This initiative began with city officials and staff participation in training and education on racial equity, to explore government's role in advancing racial equity. A full time staff member has been hired to assist in future goal development to reduce racial disparities present in the community.

A racial equity statement has been created:

If the practices, programs and services of the city are not fair, inclusive and equitable to all, the potential of the community and those it serves is diminished. From an elected, appointed and staffing perspective, our organization does not mirror the community. We will strive for racial equity by building understanding of the issues in our organization and intentionally and proactively take measures that break down barriers to a just and inclusive community.

Kids in the Park (2017)

Stable, affordable housing is important to the health and well-being of children and their families. Furthermore, studies suggest kids who stay in the same school and the same home do better. Kids in the Park is a city-funded program that provides rental assistance for up to four years to households with school-age children that are at or below 50% area median income. This program is aimed at alleviating some of the housing instability that can impact lower income families and is available for those households that do not already receive another form of housing assistance. Kids in the Park was developed by the St. Louis Park Housing Authority in partnership with the St. Louis Park Emergency Program (STEP) and the St. Louis Park School District.

Tenant Protection Ordinance (2018)

Without adequate housing, families have trouble managing daily lives; and when this happens, their health suffers. This is a particular challenge for low income community members because a larger percentage of their income must be used to pay for rent, leaving less for other expenses that contribute to their health and well-being. In 2018, St. Louis Park passed a tenant protection ordinance, the first of its kind in Minnesota, that provides low-income renters some protection in the case that a new landlord decides to raise rents, not renew leases, or re-screen tenants.

Climate Action Plan (2018)

In February 2018, the St. Louis Park City Council adopted a Climate Action Plan with the ambitious goal of achieving carbon neutrality, having a net zero carbon footprint, by 2040. Three initiatives related to the Climate Action Plan are currently in progress to build community awareness and engagement and inspire change. The three initiatives are:

- » A youth-led initiative building on the city's history of engaging its young residents;
- » Centralizing information about the plan and other climate action resources into one, easy-to-find hub for households and business to reference; and
- » Accelerating adoption of electric vehicles by installing chargers in public parking lots.

Living Streets (In Process)

To support healthier, more livable neighborhoods, streets must be vital, healthy places. To accomplish this, the city is developing a Living Streets Policy that will inform decision-making throughout all phases of transportation projects. Some of the Living Streets Policy components include:

- » Invest in neighborhood livability
- » Promote travel by walking or bicycling
- » Enhance the safety and security of streets
- » Improve the quality of stormwater runoff
- » Support the urban forest
- » Improve the aesthetics of streets



Where We Are Headed

Determinants of Health

Health is sometimes thought of solely as it relates to clinical health care; and while access to health care is still a priority for St. Louis Park, research shows that social, environmental, and economic factors, and how those factors become embedded in the built environment, have a significant impact on the health of community members. These factors are social and physical determinants of health because they influence the conditions that impact people's ability to thrive and be healthy. These include:

- » Neighborhood and built environment
- » Education
- » Economic stability
- » Health and health care
- » Social and community context

These determinants can have long-term ramifications. Inequities related to opportunities, conditions, policies, and practices impact the healthy development and lifestyle of entire generations.

St. Louis Park strives to support social and physical environments that promote good health for all. The goal is to ensure the conditions in which people in the community are able to achieve a state of health and well-being, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender, neighborhood of residence, income, sexuality or any other characteristic.

Health Equity

Currently, there are wide disparities in the health outcomes of Minnesotans, particularly among American Indian, Hispanic/Latino and African American communities, but also for low-income populations, those with mental illnesses, and others. Many factors contribute to these health disparities, among them persistent and significant differences in the conditions that create health and the opportunity to be healthy within these communities. When these health disparities arise out of conditions that are socially determined – or, created by decisions that affect community or society at large – they are considered health inequities. In St. Louis Park, an increasingly diverse population means an increasing need to address these health inequities and the social and economic disparities that underpin them. A health equity lens is vital to the city's vision of a healthy St. Louis Park for all community members.

Moving Forward

Holistic health and well-being that is achievable for all is a priority, as the city strives to advance mental, physical, and social well-being strategies. The Health in the Park initiative will remain a priority, and will continue to engage with community members through the Champion Program and the Healthy Living Grant program, advancing physical, mental and social well-being.

Figure 7-1. Public Health Determinants



Community Health Goals and Strategies

1. Support social and mental wellbeing initiatives that span age and culture.



Strategies

- A. Prioritize programs that promote health equity for all in the Healthy Living Grant program.
- B. Support opportunities for children and youth to gain skills, increase self-esteem, and envision a positive future through partnership with organizations such as Children First.
- C. Engage older residents in community conversations and volunteer opportunities so that they can find fulfillment in ways that benefit themselves and the community.
- D. Promote volunteerism and community service among people of all ages and cultures by creating and communicating volunteer opportunities within the city.
- E. Promote opportunities for people to build connections with their peers, neighbors, and the greater community by supporting activities, and events through the support of neighborhood organizations, the neighborhood grant program and the Healthy Living Grant program.
- F. Celebrate young people's accomplishments, and promote activities for children and youth to increase their participation in the community through volunteer programs such as the junior naturalist and junior park leader volunteer programs.

2. Support physically healthy communities that span age and culture.



Strategies

- A. Partner with the school district and support nutritional changes and education in the schools and across the community.
- B. Support community nutrition education through the Healthy Living Grant program.
- C. Seek ways to offer healthy nutritional options in municipal buildings.
- D. Engage with the community on needs and desires pertaining to physical wellbeing.
- E. Seek ways to implement initiatives that support physical activity in St. Louis Park through walking and biking in all parts of the community.
- F. Support efforts led by the Health in the Park Champions that strengthen the ability of children, youth, families, seniors and people of all ages to participate in their physical health, wellness, and education, and to contribute to the development of a vibrant, growing community.
- G. Support efforts to reduce exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke in outdoor areas, particularly where vulnerable populations, such as children and seniors, are likely to be present.

3. Ensure all in our community have access to healthy food.



Strategies

- A. Conduct a detailed study to assess food accessibility and security in the community, and determine if there are any gaps.
- B. Determine what steps the city can take to address gaps in food access and security.

4. Continue the Health in the Park initiative to support healthy growth, healthy aging, and healthy lifestyles for all.



Strategies

- A. Grow the Health in the Park Champion Program, engaging with community members to adopt healthy and active lifestyles to improve their general physical and mental health and well-being and to promote healthy aging for all ages.
- B. Promote access to affordable opportunities for people to participate in fitness and recreational activities and to enjoy the outdoors.
- C. Support connections and opportunities that serve the homeless, mentally ill, and chemically dependent populations through the Health in the Park program.
- D. Grow the Health in the Park initiative in partnership with the school district and other community organizations who wish to advance the wellbeing of those in the city.
- E. Expand reach of the Health in the Park program ensuring equitable communication and opportunity for participation.

5. Consult the Climate Action Plan to increase resiliency and adaptability to the health effects of climate change.



Strategies

- A. Address prospective health concerns related to climate change and the impact of extreme weather conditions on community members.

6. Improve regional collaboration around health and human services.



Strategies

- A. Continue to be a part of county-wide initiatives such as Active Living Hennepin Communities and seek ways to collaborate across communities on healthy living activities and initiatives.
- B. Support and make connections with community organizations and other jurisdictions that advocate for strong health, human service, and public safety systems, including services for mental health and substance abuse in partnership with the Health in the Park initiative.
- C. Continue to address health issues in the community, with attention to helping provide information on resources for seniors, and vulnerable and isolated populations.