

# Kris Nelson Community-Based Research Program

*...a program of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)*

## Frogtown as a model for innovative vacant land management: Health, economic, and ecological effects of improving access to parks

Prepared in partnership with  
Frogtown Green

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# Executive Summary

This report examines three factors in the debate about vacant land: the role of green space in the development of Frogtown past, present, and future; the consequences of inconsistent city policies for various actors invested in the (re)development of Frogtown; and academic research that points toward the positive effects of access to vacant land on public health, economics, and the environment. With the completion of the Green Line Light Rail that connects Minneapolis to Saint Paul, Frogtown has become an increasingly attractive site for new development. In order to achieve development goals, the City of Saint Paul should engage affected communities through a variety of means before, during, and after project implementations and empower neighborhood planning organizations to achieve their goals. Furthermore, future development of vacant land should be done in a holistic manner that emphasizes the importance of public space to community and the ecological effects of development while recognizing Frogtown's history as a home for immigrants and working class residents who practice agriculture.

The following themes are addressed in this report:

- Frogtown has a large amount of vacant lots and one of the most diverse populations in any neighborhood of the Upper Midwest. Historically a working class, immigrant neighborhood, Frogtown was struck especially hard by the foreclosure crisis. The completion of the Green Line Light Rail has begun to spur new development along University Avenue, which raises questions about the possibility of displacing current residents.
- The land use goals outlined in the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan contradict priorities listed in the section on parks and recreation. Land use goals prioritize new development and the creation of neighborhood centers without much mention of public space while the parks plan proposes the development of “vibrant places” that either already exist or just need a boost of city support. This contradiction hampers the ability for new development and the creation of vibrant places to occur simultaneously, which has serious consequences for the city, neighborhoods, and non-profit planning groups.
- The Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan seldom mentions community involvement in land use and parks and recreation decisions. Without a strategy for community involvement, the city frequently finds itself defending development decisions over which community members feel they have no control. The report mentions several kinds of community engagement strategies in Frogtown that have generated much discussion about the neighborhood's development priorities.
- There are public health, economic, and ecological benefits for cities to develop public spaces, green space, and encourage urban agriculture. Those include reducing obesity, increasing property tax revenue from parcels adjacent to parks, and in realizing sustainability goals, so long as these spaces reflect neighborhood diversity, house relevant amenities, and may be accessed by a variety of means—from walking and biking to driving and using public transportation.

These themes point toward a set of thirteen recommendations that should be incorporated into future comprehensive plans at the city level and small area plans at the neighborhood level.

Recommendations 1-6 are policy recommendations for the city and neighborhood association, while 7-13 are recommendations for future planning endeavors.

1. The City should include ecological footprint assessments in new developments, budgeting, and departmental goals
2. The City should work toward clarifying the contradictions of the comprehensive plan to better connect land use goals and parks and recreation priorities in future endeavors
3. The City should incentivize community engagement and foster greater citizen inclusion in land use planning decisions
4. The Frogtown Neighborhood Association should continue to provide listening sessions, forums, and lot squats as part of a concerted community engagement effort in the small area planning process
5. The City and neighborhood groups should work toward a shared vision that honors both development efforts and park space initiatives to reflect the interests of residents
6. Neighborhood organizations like Frogtown Green and the Frogtown-Rondo Home Fund should continue to promote their unique visions through enhanced engagement and outreach efforts for future site selection and management
7. Offer community parks and gardens long-term leasing options and target investment for new green space in areas that lack adequate park land
8. Redevelop north-south corridors in Frogtown to be more walkable and serve pedestrians of all ages, particularly Dale Street, Rice, Street, and Marion Avenue
9. Improve signage in and around parks, especially with signs that designate how to get to them
10. Invest in traffic calming measures around well-used parks and recreation spaces
11. Provide more public transportation opportunities in Frogtown to improve access to the regional park system
12. Improve Frogtown's walking and biking connections to other neighborhoods in Saint Paul, especially Summit-University and Como Park
13. Invest in new water management and conservation technologies, green energy systems, and other cost-saving measures in

Some limitations to this report include a lack of empirical research on the impact of parks on property values and how realistic the incorporation of a city's economic footprint into its economic calculus would be. Further research into the matter would provide insight into a general model for sustainable economic structuring in the face of global climate change.

# Introduction

Neighborhoods in American cities face various and serious challenges including but not limited to: poverty and systematic disinvestment; infrastructure deterioration brought on, in part, by rapid climate change; increased solid waste and water quality management problems; perceived and actual declines in public safety; and chronic disease linked to physical inactivity. The complexity of these problems requires multiple solutions that work together in an orchestrated and comprehensive fashion. Appropriate, well-planned and managed green space helps to offers one such solution, one which is being deployed in Frogtown, a multi-ethnic, working class neighborhood in Saint Paul.

A traditionally immigrant neighborhood long perceived as having few assets and many pathologies, Frogtown could become a model for the use of green space in urban (re)development. Given active implementation of existing green space policies and plans, maintenance of recently developed greenspaces, and creative development of new projects, Frogtown could be a local and regional leader in how it chooses to effect policy that makes a sustainable future attainable.

Frogtown has many unique resources already in place: a chain of community gardens, a community-supported organic farm with multiple sites, and sliver lots deemed too-small to be sold by the city. Moreover, food production and greening has become increasingly synonymous with the Frogtown since the addition of Saint Paul's newest public park, Frogtown Park and Farm—the first publically owned farm in a city park—in 2015.

This paper outlines and supports the work of a Frogtown residents' task force, which, in 2015 identified the neighborhood's green space assets and issued a variety of recommendations for future green space development and management to enable the neighborhood to capitalize on these assets. This paper details how urban planning, public health policy, economic development research, and

ecological analyses all support the positive effects envisioned by the task force's recommendations to increase park access, amenities, and walkable pedestrian infrastructure throughout the neighborhood.

Urban planning documents often espouse a commitment to greenspace development and investments in active transportation opportunities, a commitment which is often ignored. Most of the issue centers on the divergence between city land use and parks and recreation priorities, as well as the lack of citizen input in land use and development decisions. Using Frogtown as a case in point, this paper investigates recommendations and challenges associated with the creation of new green space; how they are outlined in city, neighborhood, and non-profit plans, and how the city may come to honor its commitments to neighborhoods and communities like Frogtown.

## Frogtown: A First Home for Immigrants

Today, Frogtown can serve as a model for green space use in predominantly minority neighborhoods with large immigrant populations. Indeed, this character reflects the neighborhood's long history as a home for immigrants and working class families. MAP OF FROGTOWN

Frogtown formed in the second half of the 19th century when German, Polish, Scandinavian, and Irish immigrants settled just outside downtown Saint Paul. By 1882, many of Frogtown's first and second generation immigrants found work in the rail yards of the Saint Paul and Pacific Railroad, whose tracks form the neighborhood's northern boundary with Como Park. In addition to the railroad, Frogtown's local economy blossomed with commercial establishments constructed along University Avenue and small manufacturers which included Ford assembly lines and the Old Home Creamery (Frogtown Neighborhood Association 2015a).

The name "Frogtown" had emerged from the neighborhood's notoriously swampy conditions—houses sometimes sank into mud—and the prevalence of frogs. Rumor has it that John Ireland, the first Archbishop of Saint Paul, once said, "That sounds like a frog town," while he observed croaking frogs



from Calvary Cemetery (ibid.). The fact that the neighborhood land is a former swamp actually contributes to its green space potential today and, where uncontaminated by dumping and landfill use, the soil is rich and fertile.

Believe it or not, Frogtown has historically been a center for urban agriculture and park development in the Twin Cities. In 1903, the city constructed Como Playground on the site where Scheffer Recreation center sits, the first public park in the city (Historic Saint Paul 2009, 5). West Minnehaha Recreation Center was founded as a playground in the 1920s. The building housing the gym, offices, and community space was constructed in 1937-38 as “one of many Works Progress Administration buildings in Saint Paul” (McClure, accessed 2015b). Designed and built



The playground and fields at West Minnehaha Recreation Center during one of its rare slow days. Photo courtesy of Evan Flom, April 2015.

during “Cap” Wigington’s time as the City’s Municipal Architect—the first African American to ever hold that title in the United States—West Minnehaha Recreation Center continues to be one of the most well-used public recreation facilities in the city today along with Scheffer, which attracts more than 80,000 visitors annually (Melo 2015).

The neighborhood has also had its share of commercial farming operations throughout the years. The Dale Street Greenhouse, which had previously been in near-continuous operation since 1896 under the ownership of Bavarian immigrants and their descendants, remained standing until 2006. Today, the building houses Neighborworks Home Partners—a local community development corporation and affordable housing developer—and sits across the street from Stone’s Throw Urban Farm, one of the country’s largest organic urban farms (McClure, accessed 2015a). What’s most fascinating about the history of Frogtown’s early development is the way it seems to be replicated

today: the remnants of yesteryear, the rich soil from its days as swampland, the commercial agriculture establishments, and the working class made up of immigrants who speak dozens of languages and hundreds of dialects, all contribute to the identity of the Frogtown community.

A report from the Metropolitan Design Center observes that “the one-hundred and forty years of daily life in Frogtown are layered on the walls of residential buildings and the architecture of its many churches...Its many residences built sometimes in unusually narrow lots are...surviving by multiple additions and modifications from a miscellaneous collection of decades.” And while the neighborhood shows evidence of numerous vacant homes and properties, “those being occupied maintain lush and well-tended gardens” (Metropolitan Design Center 2011, 8). But how Frogtown exists today, how the buildings and houses look, and how people come together, echoes the development of generations past.

As the neighborhood continued to grow into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, regional transportation agencies built miles of streetcar tracks that could move people with ease and efficiency. One of the most important projects during this time was the completion of the streetcar along University Avenue that connected Saint Paul to the budding city of Minneapolis in 1890. After World War II the University Avenue streetcar line, along with additional lines on Thomas Avenue, Dale Street, Lexington Parkway, and Rice Street, were torn up. A decade later, Interstate-94 was constructed, demolishing much of the Rondo neighborhood to the south, and many African American families moved north into Frogtown. Dale Street was controversially widened in the late 1980s and early 1990s to speed traffic flow from the northern suburbs to I-94. Many businesses along the major thoroughfare were demolished, and a chain of vacant lots in unbuildable shapes and sizes were created.

These urban planning decisions—tearing up streetcar tracks, demolishing old neighborhoods to build the interstate, and widening Dale Street—continue to affect pedestrian access and limit transportation options for residents in the “Central Corridor”, the five blocks north and south of

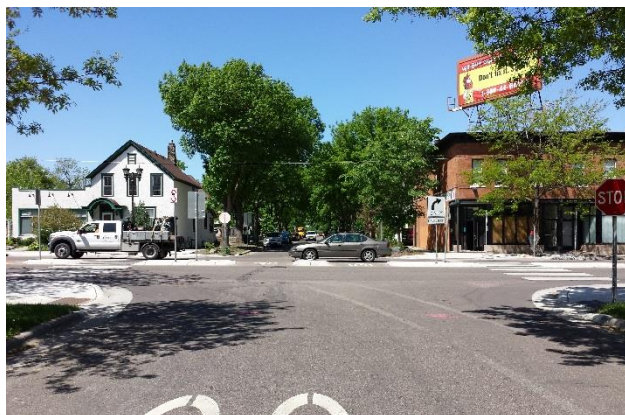
University Avenue. The physical design of Frogtown, bounded by two interstates and the railroad, necessitates the funneling of traffic down several high-volume arterials, namely Dale Street, Lexington Avenue, and Rice Street, which can be hazardous at rush hour and throughout the winter when snow, ice, and cold temperatures make any kind of transportation difficult.

For now, however, it is enough to recognize how these features of Frogtown's physical design can make walking, biking, and driving intimidating, if not isolating. Isolation from neighbors, public spaces, and cultural institutions—which frequently include semi-private green space and community gardens—has serious implications for recently-arrived immigrants, refugees, and newcomers alike. Moreover, isolation implicit in neighborhood design also affects perceptions of neighborhood safety and individual freedom, which influences how people relate to each other and the physical space around them, which will be investigated further below.

To this day, the neighborhood is a haven for newly-arrived immigrants and their families. Rather than the Germans, Scandinavians, Irish, and Poles who preceded them, today's immigrants are more likely from Hmong, Latino, and Somali heritage. Frogtown continues to be one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the State of Minnesota, if not the Upper Midwest Region, with almost 82% of its population representing people of color, 30% born outside of the United States, and more than 50% speaking a primary language other than English (Minnesota Compass 2015). Frogtown “offers an extremely rich tapestry of culture, made up of multiple languages, interests in the arts, gardening, and culinary treasures” comprised of restaurants, cultural events and celebrations like the Hmong Freedom Celebration and the Little Mekong Night Market, community gardens, and the ongoing renovation of the Victoria Theater (Metropolitan Design Center 2011, 8). Many of these communities, especially elders, frequently hail from agrarian societies and so opportunities to garden, cook, and share food might offer a familiar sense of comfort in new (and sometimes cold) surroundings.

# Effects of the Foreclosure Crisis in Frogtown

Before the foreclosure crisis hit the country in late 2008, the Frogtown Neighborhood Association/Thomas-Dale District Planning Council (a resident-led group which serves as the liaison to St Paul City government, hereinafter referred to as FNA) had declared ambitious intentions in their Small Area Plan of 2005 to increase the amount of green space; to provide residents with more opportunities



The Charles Avenue Bikeway is a great example of making a street more pedestrian-friendly. Crosswalks and median strips allow safe passage across busy Dale Street and allow cyclists and pedestrians to cross two lanes of traffic at a time, rather than four at once.

Author's photograph, July 2015

for recreation and physical activity; to increase access to existing public spaces; and to improve neighborhood safety—especially for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit users. This plan identified increasing community participation and involvement and decreasing the sense of isolation as primary objectives for future development.

Sadly, these goals outlined in FNA's Small Area Plan had to be put on the back burner as the

foreclosure epidemic influenced an abrupt and devastating devaluation of land and properties from which Frogtown has yet to fully recover.

The 2010 Census, two years after the onset of the crisis, found that 16 percent of properties were vacant in the eight block radius surrounding the 400 and 500 blocks of Charles Avenue (the area between Marion and Dale Streets, in the geographic heart of Frogtown). Compared to the 6 percent vacancy rate found in the census a decade earlier and the 8 percent rate city-wide in 2010, it is evident that Frogtown was disproportionately affected by subprime mortgage lending practices that impacted renters, homeowners, and businesses alike (Melo and Webster 2012). To this day, the 400 and 500 blocks of Charles Avenue retain numerous vacant properties. Residents on these blocks are cut off from

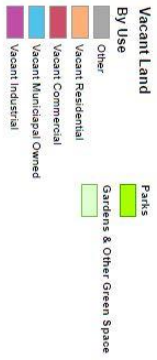
access to the neighborhood's existing green space, as evidenced by Map 1 on the following page that shows the number of vacant properties by land use classification.

Gardening is one of the primary strategies for community members to transform vacant lots (one of many categories of "urban blight") into a resource. At least 15 vacant lots in Frogtown are leased to community and for-profit gardeners for management—Stone's Throw Urban Farm at Lafond Avenue and Dale Street serving as perhaps the most visible example. Given that the city may hope to eventually develop these properties for new housing and/or commercial development, questions about who benefits from new development and how the city engages the community to determine development goals become paramount.

Completion of the Green Line Light Rail between Downtown Minneapolis and Saint Paul in the summer of 2014—like the streetcar of 1890 along the same route—generated momentum to redevelop and upscale properties adjacent to University Avenue. This massive public investment parallels a decline in vacant properties and a renewed emphasis on the development and renovation of Frogtown's housing stock. These changes are reflected in planning documents from the City of Saint Paul's Central Corridor Development Strategy to plans from private and non-profit agencies, such as the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), to build new affordable housing along the light rail line. The city, FNA, community members, and non-profit organizations remain cautious in their optimism about the potential for development without displacing working class communities who have come to call Frogtown home. Through several channels, these agencies—from the FNA and city to gardening groups and non-profits—began to investigate the ways community members and institutions wish to see Frogtown grow.

# District 7

# Vacant Land by Use



Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)  
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Map by CURA Staff May 2015  
Sources: Ramsey County, FNA

## Neighborhood Processes to Rethink Vacant Land Uses

In 2013, the Frogtown Neighborhood Association (FNA) hosted “lot squats” on vacant properties throughout the neighborhood. In these listening sessions, community members were encouraged to consider new possibilities for these lots, whether they should become new housing, businesses, or simply public green spaces where neighbors, friends, and families may come together. The end goal for these squats was to think about how the neighborhood “can reclaim our space” (Frogtown Neighborhood Association 2015b).

In early 2015, Frogtown Green—an ad hoc, resident-led group focused on greening and sustainability—partnered with the FNA to host a series of public meetings and information gathering sessions. This group called itself the “Vacant Lots Task Force” and established as its mission identifying green space shortages in the neighborhood and recommending

Fig. 1 Vacant Lots Task Force Recommendations

1	Target development of vacant lots for park/garden/parklet use in the area bounded by Dale, Western, University and Minnehaha
2	Improve walkability across arterial roads, particularly in places where these roads abut parks
3	Improve signage to access neighborhood parks
4	Implement traffic calming measures on roads bordering park space
5	Add amenities like picnic tables and shade trees that serve multiple uses to existing park spaces
6	Encourage mixed use development and "eyes on the street" near parks to improve safety
7	Implement design improvements that increase access to and visibility of recreation centers
8	Increase bike and pedestrian connections to Charles Avenue Bikeway

improvements of existing green space.<sup>1</sup> The group met six times in 2015 and you can find a summary of recommendations in Figure 1.<sup>2</sup>

The findings of the Vacant Lot Task Force address, on a smaller scale, the recommendations of a comprehensive report by the Trust for Public Land that seeks to increase the amount of green space in

<sup>1</sup> For full disclosure, the author was employed by Frogtown Green to work on this project.

<sup>2</sup> For a complete summary of findings and recommendations, see the final presentation that summarizes these findings here: <https://prezi.com/pnbnbgsvsfdb/lots-of-possibilities-road-findings/>

the Central Corridor—an area bounded five blocks to the north and five blocks to the south of University Avenue. TPL’s *Greening the Green Line* report found that just 4.7% of land in the corridor was reserved for green space, compared with nearly 15% of Minneapolis and Saint Paul overall (Trust for Public Land 2014, 2).

Frogtown’s Vacant Lots Task Force assessed existing neighborhood green space—everything from public parks to community gardens and parklets—and, with technical support from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota, developed maps of Frogtown that showed “green space buffers”. These buffers symbolize the average distance that people are willing to travel to green space—50 meters, 150 meters, and 250 meters represent a 2-minute, 5-minute, and 10-minute walk respectively. These maps were scrutinized further to show limitations presented by the poor pedestrian access across major neighborhood thoroughfares, which may be seen in Map 2 on the following page.

Poor pedestrian access included limited walk signals across Dale Street and steep curb cuts at major intersections like Minnehaha Avenue and Pierce Butler Route and Como Avenue and Marion Avenue—all streets with fast-flowing traffic. While the Task Force did not find the issue of public transportation connectivity to be within the scope of its investigation, it did find the city’s proposed improvements to bicycle infrastructure promising, and remained hopeful about the installation of bike lanes on Western Avenue. The Task Force lauded the city’s transformation of Charles Avenue into a dedicated bike route, and remained hopeful that the city will invest in linking Frogtown to other Saint Paul neighborhoods—particularly Como Park and Summit-University—in future pedestrian infrastructure development.

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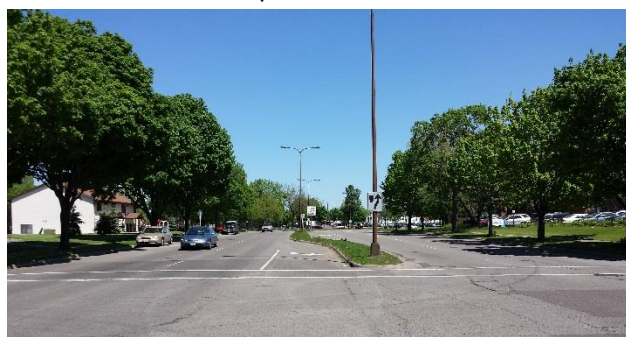
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The intersection at Dale Street and Minnehaha Avenue lacks pedestrian light timers and central medians. The perceived lack of safety results in infrequent walking trips across this boundary, especially for children, families, and people with disabilities. Author’s photograph July 2015

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Marion Avenue in Saint Paul only has crosswalks on the north side of east-west intersecting streets. The central median does not provide pedestrians shelter from traffic unless they jaywalk. Author’s photograph, July 2015

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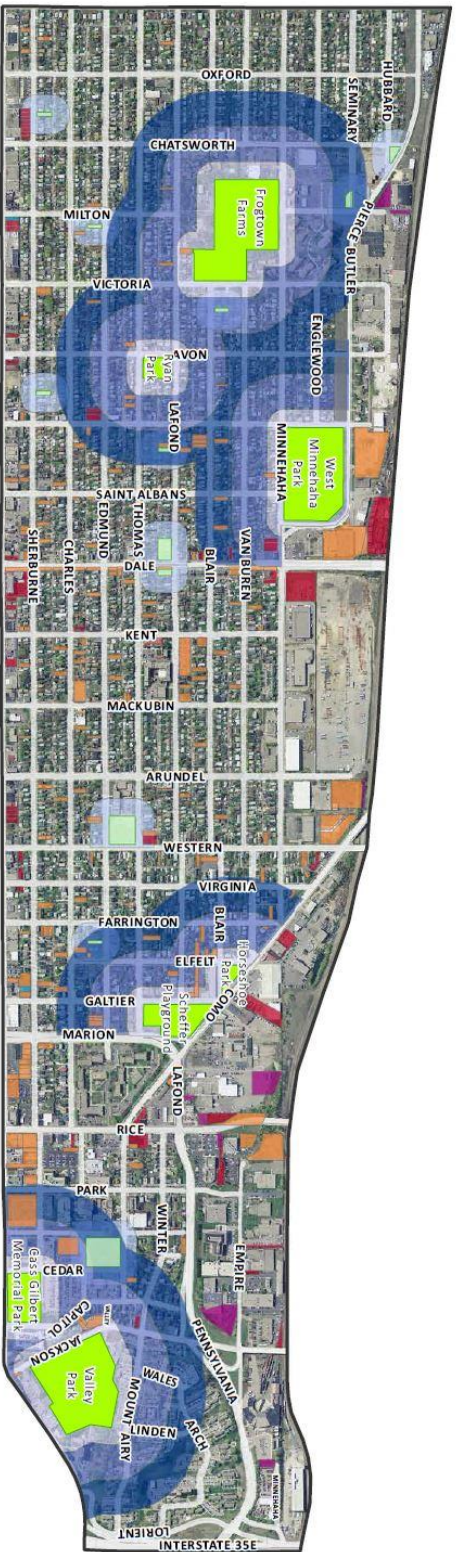
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In 2017, the FNA is required by the City of Saint Paul to deliver an updated Small Area Plan. With work beginning on that document, investigation of the role of active transportation infrastructure—bike lanes, curb extensions and cuts, pedestrian light signals, and so on—increasing neighborhood connectivity to parks and nature, and creating a built environment that promotes interaction among people and places becomes essential.

Ultimately, for whom this development occurs relies on the ability of the city, and the FNA to bring resident voices into the mix and to partner with organizations and community groups that reflect the immense diversity among Frogtown neighbors. Furthermore, neighbors are frequently well-positioned to guide local development, given their stake in the neighborhood, the community, and its

# District 7

## Vacant Land by Use Green Space Buffers



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Map by CURA Staff May 2015  
Sources: Ramsey County, FNA

future. Historically, one of the essential ingredients to Frogtown’s budding character has been the transformation of vacant land into garden space and parklets, which connects people to place in a way that few other activities can. That is why the recommendations from the Vacant Lots Task Force should be included in answers to the following questions as Frogtown develops:

- What strategies may be deployed to grow local economies without displacing residents or long-standing businesses who wish to remain in the neighborhood;
- 
- What kinds of features or amenities in the built environment may encourage participation in neighborhood affairs, community life, and the use of public spaces;
- 
- What neighborhood and city-level plans support the expansion of transportation alternatives—especially pedestrian infrastructure and improving access to public transit—and how can they incorporate engagement practices that help communities realize short-term and long-term development goals?

## Effects of Contradictory City Plans

The City of Saint Paul produces a Comprehensive Plan every 10 years. The most recent plan, approved by the City Council in 2010, sets recommendations for growth, land use policy, historic preservation, parks and recreation management, and guides the overall development of the city’s neighborhoods and services. As is often the case, there is tension in the Plan between land use goals on the one hand and those of parks and recreation on the other.

The Comprehensive Plan makes little mention of community involvement in planning decisions: engagement is only mentioned in relation to housing needs of targeted communities, especially those who may benefit from affordable housing development. Without community engagement, the contradiction between land use policy and parks and recreation goals frequently yields inconsistent arrangements and engenders suspicion of the city in traditionally underserved neighborhoods. Given the history of Saint Paul’s development and the sometime strained relationship among neighborhoods and planners—the demolition of neighborhoods during construction of Interstate-94, or the expansion

of Dale Street during which numerous homes and businesses were destroyed serve as great examples—these concerns stand on solid ground.

### **Economic Development: Policy or Place?**

Two strains of contradictory thought runs through the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan. According to the document, land use policy should be a “complex mechanism for creating a city that is economically strong, environmentally sustainable, vibrant, and active” that can account for demographic growth targets (City of Saint Paul 2010b, LU1). The city faces numerous challenges, such as increasing population with more diversity; changing demographics and housing choices; widening disparities; the need to shift the economy toward a service sector focus; an increasing need for educated and skilled workers; an increasing mismatch between the location of jobs and available housing; rising energy costs and climate change; and an evolving downtown. To address these challenges, the city proposes the prioritization of land use policies that effect targeted growth in unique neighborhoods, reserve undeveloped land for jobs, and promote aesthetic and development standards (LU2-6).

To address economic shifts in the era of globalization, the city recognizes that “the land likely to be developed with job-rich industries may often be found on smaller parcels throughout the city rather than in large swaths of land in railroad corridors” (LU23). Targeted development should therefore occur in “Neighborhood Centers” that have easy access to public transportation, that accommodate walking and commercial activity along arterial streets (LU10-13). To encourage continued economic growth in a globalized service economy, the Land Use Plan proposes renovation of outmoded and non-productive sites and to attract industries that use best environmental practices in site development and operations (LU24). The plan goes on to describe the need to redevelop and/or acquire land along rail corridors and to create “Station Area Plans” around Green Line stations in the Central Corridor that include bringing new tech firms and startups in the Midway neighborhood (LU26-27).

Implicit in these proposed approaches is the intensification of land uses for the preservation of the city's economy. Increasing density in targeted areas allows the city to take several unique policy positions at once, with a strong city economy as the ultimate goal: offering a variety of housing choices to a wide variety of people, broadening the city tax base, promoting more efficient use of public services, encouraging greater use of public transportation, and recognizing that higher-density development attracts "residents likely to work in emerging labor markets of the knowledge-based economy" are all strategies to increase the economic viability of Saint Paul (LU8).

The second strain of thought found in the Comprehensive Plan focuses on the social needs of the city's neighborhoods and residents, outlined in the Parks Plan. Accordingly, the city's goal to create "vibrant places" that "become focal points of neighborhood pride and identity" and "reflect and enhance neighborhood character" are listed not in land use guidelines, but in future priorities for the city's Parks and Recreation services. To contrast with land use policies designed to stimulate new investment in neighborhoods, the Parks Plan indicates that development occurs *after* vibrant parks and public spaces get built so long as they serve a variety of social functions. Parks "augment the physical appearance of the city and contribute to increased property values. Housing and redevelopment projects are boosted by nearby park facilities" and thereby play a "concrete role in economic development" (PR11). Moreover, parks "will have to do as much as possible to help Saint Paul become more environmentally sustainable by preserving natural resources, building and operating more efficiently, and educating the public on the importance of the human connection to the natural realm" (City of Saint Paul 2010b, PR2). The parks plan outlines ways to promote active lifestyles, ensure convenient and equitable access to parks and recreation facilities, to complete the trail and bikeway system and to install bike racks at all parks facilities (PR4).

The Parks Plan seeks to present the public with better information on access to facilities, and to use "crime prevention through environmental design" in parks—increasing visibility within park spaces, and providing mobility options for people as they move through public spaces (PR8). To address other safety concerns, the document proposes to explore the use of surveillance in parks, particularly in "specific problem areas", to assign police officers to parks, and to expand public security staff in parks (PR9). In addition, the Parks Plan issues guidelines that will put healthy foods in vending machines and working with Metro Transit for ways to improve access to parks, particularly regional parks. Finally, the city document is supportive of promoting special events that encourage alternative modes of



Light industrial factories, auto repair shops, and vacant buildings front Como Avenue across the street from Scheffer Recreation Center and the Horseshoe Park. These kinds of single uses minimize the times when eyes can be on the street, which makes crime prevention in public spaces difficult. Author's photograph, July 2015.

transportation, of promoting parks as a health asset through partnerships with healthcare providers, and to emphasize collaborative programs with St. Paul Public Schools.

In order to enhance the city and

neighborhood, the Parks Plan proposes the creation of a parkland zoning designation, to improve communications, public relations, and marketing of parks, and to evaluate the importance of food and to "explore the use of public/private

partnerships for enhanced food experiences" (PR11). With an emphasis to reduce encroachments on park land, to incorporate park building in redevelopment projects, to integrate public art, the plan seeks to respond creatively to changing demographics and land uses. That includes meeting changing recreation needs, to increase community gardens and expand community gardening programs, and to connect the entire city via pedestrian infrastructure (PR20-29). Several examples include the construction of soccer fields, ensuring that staff are prepared to work with diverse groups, and to improve signage of and directions to parks.

That parks and public spaces should be subject to community oversight remains unquestioned in planning goals while the creation of land use policies and priorities remains the exclusive subject of city planners and economic development officials, with public input limited to Planning Commission meetings and a diverse array of (unconnected) neighborhood planning organizations and community development corporations. And while the academic literature on parks demonstrates a windfall of economic and public health benefits to cities, it is fairly clear that the provision of parks and public spaces are hardly considered to be within the scope of land use planning at the City of Saint Paul.

Nowhere in the Land Use Plan does one find mention of community engagement, public involvement in future decision making processes, or a coherent strategy to preserve or manage parks and public spaces other than vague references to the creation of vibrant places through the intensification of development at targeted locations. Instead, the city's land use priorities privilege new development and new investments in places where the old, the somewhat dated, and the possibly defunct still operate with different degrees of success. The implicit risk of economic restructuring, of encouraging the growth in new tech sectors, light industry such as artisan craftwork, breweries, and distilleries, entails the transformation of neighborhood character without the oversight of long-standing residents and those committed to living in Saint Paul.

The Parks Plan and the Land Use Plan diverge in their development priorities and goals for the spatial organization of Saint Paul. While the former emphasizes environmental, ecological, and social sustainability directed toward improving public health, the latter prioritizes new economic



Example of multilingual signage at Troy Gardens. Garden Fun 2013; Madison, WI.



development, new kinds of economic growth, and new places into which to funnel money and technical assistance. These kinds of contradictions make it difficult for the city and residents—particularly those in historically underserved communities—to trust one another: the city fears public disruption of development plans while residents fear the transformation of their neighborhoods and the possibility of displacement. By siloing land use and parks decisions, the city and residents alike cannot assuage these concerns or find common ground.

### Central Corridor Development: Parks or Housing?

This disagreement between the city's stated priorities for land use and park development also affect the planning goals of non-profit organizations when it comes to housing and the provision of park space in the Central Corridor. The Affordable Housing Study, put forth by the Local Initiatives Support Coalition (LISC) and with support of the City of Minneapolis and the City of Saint Paul, identifies a need to "promote efficient, compact neighborhoods with an interconnected street network, access to transit, mixed land uses, and" support for the local organization of retail and services (Twin Cities LISC 2012, 1).

Though housing is technically outside the scope of this project, the LISC study intersects with City plans in important ways: namely through a quest to stabilize neighborhoods and invest in activities that help low and moderate income people stay in homes given the massive public investment in the Green Line. In order to achieve an "ideal neighborhood" that serves a variety of income levels, owners and renters, and people with different family sizes, ethnicities, and ages, the plan calls specifically to identify vacant and foreclosed properties and create "Corridors of Opportunity" that redevelops vacant and boarded homes (Twin Cities LISC 2012, 2). The LISC study supports employing "interim development strategies" like community gardens and short-term rental models that will eventually be transformed into affordable home ownership (Twin Cities LISC 2012, 9). Creative strategies for the

reuse of vacant land in neighborhoods with depressed housing economies are but stepping stones toward greater economic growth and development.

On the other hand, The Trust for Public Land's (TPL) study, entitled "Greening the Green Line", states how the city should work toward creating a system of public parks that form a "charm bracelet" throughout the cities. These charms include everything from new park development to privately-owned public spaces (POPS) included in development plans of new commerce, residences, or even industries (Trust for Public Land 2014, 2). The TPL recognizes how parks are catalysts for development when they include amenities for residents and workers, when they have great connectivity to public infrastructure, when they provide access to underserved groups, and in their potential for branding neighborhoods along the corridor and the corridor itself (5). In the language of Saint Paul city documents, well-designed parks become a foundation on which vibrant places get built. Parks become "spatial anchors" that contribute to a sense of place and a sense of diversity.

Greening the Green Line authors propose the identification of future land for public parks, to streamline park operations and maintenance, and to develop new programming that increases park use. They propose that communities and the city work with developers to prioritize the design and implementation of privately-owned public spaces in new projects (7). They suggest using parks to innovate: insisting on new storm water management techniques that maximize land use and to promote short term programs that inspire new models and approaches for open space development and improving/fostering community relations.

The Affordable Housing Plan and the Greening the Green Line study diverge at an important juncture despite what appears as a general consensus among the neighborhood, city, and development organizations. The LISC plan wishes to see temporary uses on vacant and unproductive land until it becomes profitable enough to develop, while the TPL plan identifies the economic goods that result from increasing park and public space. This divergence mirrors that of the city's land use and parks

priorities which have differing opinions about whether or not housing, job creation, and efficiency or parks, public spaces, and social life creates economic value *first*.

### Neighborhood Development: Economic or Social?

In order to identify and create mutually reinforcing goals, the City of Saint Paul endorses and authorizes neighborhoods to create a "shared vision and commitment recognized by [the] Planning Commission and City Council" (City of Saint Paul 2010a, 2). Topics covered by the Small Area Plan should include strategies to guide land use policy, transportation improvements, parks and recreation improvements, water resource management, historic preservation, and more. By 2010, the city was emphasizing a shift toward strategies in small area plans that plan for economic, environmental, and social sustainability (City of Saint Paul 2010a, 11). In 2005, the Frogtown Neighborhood Association and District 7 Planning Council drafted a small area plan that actually anticipated a number of these changes.

The FNA identified the development of a coherent neighborhood identity that emphasizes the community's diversity. A "global village" with new mixed-use development, better transportation options that included the now-complete Green Line light rail. The primary goal for this plan was to increase the amount of recreational activities, natural landscapes, and public space in the neighborhood, considering the Frogtown had "little land available for new parks" (District 7 Planning Council 2005, 8). These new public spaces should reflect the diversity of residents in the district, which includes replacing some baseball fields with soccer fields, increasing free or low-cost programming for families, and to increase the amount of "meditative space" by returning some of the land to green space and/or wetlands. Finally, the neighborhood association emphasized increasing connections to the growing city park and bike systems (District 7 Planning Council 2005, 7-9). All of these goals fit in line with both city documents and academic research, which will be explored further below.

Other major goals of the Small Area Plan included building strategies to become a model organization for citizen involvement in community life, to sponsor land use policies that make the neighborhood more walkable, to promote investment in improving the aging housing stock and facilitate landlord, tenant, and homeowner connections, and to improve regional connectivity among the neighborhood, job centers, and commercial corridors (District 7 Planning Council 2005, 11-20). However, unlike city documents that place land use planning for job growth ahead of investments in public spaces and community input, the FNA plan strives to emphasize social inclusion and broadening opportunities for connection to land and place.

At this point the staggering consensus among local government policies and procedures, and independent planning documents should begin to generate questions about why these plans have not been implemented in the ten years since the Frogtown Neighborhood Association published its goals in 2005. The Foreclosure Crisis and the Great Recession constrained public budgets and forced the city to put the brakes on numerous development priorities, which explains a large part of the story. Another part of the issue, which should be subject to further investigation, is the effectiveness of community engagement strategies, planning processes, and the responsiveness of cities and counties to the needs of residents, especially those in traditionally underserved communities.

## Conclusion

Contradictory city documents have left some confusion about the city priorities in planning and economic development. At the city, the contradiction between the development of vibrant places on the one hand and managing new development on the other represents a confusion about where to begin: does new development encourage growth or do improvements to public parks and public spaces foster greater senses of community which stimulates the demand for new development? Non-profit agencies, for their part, have planned in accordance with confusing city priorities which has resulted in plans that privilege commercial and housing development *or* public space. Neighborhood groups also

must choose their priorities under this calculus, which for Frogtown meant a focus on interconnected street networks, fostering community cohesion, and developing a communal sense of identity. With better community engagement strategies, the city may be able to work past this divide and instead assist neighborhoods choose their preferred route of growth.

## Community Engagement Strategies

Community engagement is, first and foremost, a difficult task for cities. However, community engagement is too often considered a “chore” among planners and decision makers with skills to perform their roles as technicians well. Rather, engagement is essential to future development as it can more adequately identify the problems people encounter in their everyday life and in how they move around the city. When city departments of planning and economic development view communities from 30,000 feet, they frequently overlook informal networks that spring forth and make places function. Support networks among people, businesses, and families become intertwined in places and time. Without community engagement, cities frequently remain ignorant of the dense and compact network of actors, places, and ideas which can derail plans and development initiatives that may be enacted with the best of intentions.

Despite the “communicative turn” in urban planning theory,<sup>3</sup> literature on community engagement rarely includes strategies for city governments to improve governance. Engagement in the United States today still relies on the oversight practices of government and private sector watchdogs and neighborhood councils, and as a result literature on government engagement practices during the last ten years has come from the United Kingdom. Blake et al. argue that the continuous reshuffling of government structures in the UK “has the potential for creating confusion and disengagement among all those trying to engage” while transparency of government agents and agencies remains a serious issue

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<sup>3</sup> For more on Communicative Practice, see the works of Patsy Healy, most notably 1992’s “Planning through debate: The communicative turn in planning theory.” *The Town Planning Review* 63(2): 143-162.

(Blake et al. 2008, 67). Without concerted efforts to engage citizens, public meetings lose decorum and the good intentions of oppositional actors—planners and businesses as with the case of Saint Paul's downtown bike loop—become entrenched and may even refuse to find common ground.

Despite the lack of community engagement literature for governance, much has been written about corporate social responsibility and non-profit accountability measures that include engagement of populations served. When non-profit agencies and watchdog groups (and governments) employ community engagement, they legitimize themselves in the long-term rather than the short term (Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, and Herremans 2010, 297). According to Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, and Herremans, community engagement strategy is a "pattern of activities implemented by firms to work collaboratively with and through groups of people to address issues affecting the social well-being of those people" (Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, and Herremans 2010, 298). However, these authors also point to the weaknesses of community engagement strategies today, namely how they are limited to focus groups, surveys, public meetings, and semi-formal meetings from which survey responses may not represent the wishes and desires of all community members.

South and Phillips argue that community engagement should not seek to control the complexity of community responses because these strategies are inherently complex and dynamic. Instead, communities should identify appropriate outcomes and define what success will look like. Then, communities and organizations may partner together to strategize the different support structures that will assist in reaching them. Measures to evaluate successes should be flexible and should include ways to incorporate unintended effects while the purpose of evaluation must be defined in terms of stakeholder needs—what information is important and to whom is it essential (South and Phillips 2014, 694).

In addition to lot squats, Frogtown's Community engagement sessions include monthly forums hosted by the Neighborhood Association where residents may voice their opinions on new development

plans and local initiatives like the renovation of the Victoria Theater and the Saxon Ford site. Other initiatives include the Frogtown-Rondo Home Fund, which connects community development organizations, housing experts, city planners and development officials, and residents to build capacity and improve the neighborhood's housing stock. Independent organizations like Frogtown Green publishes the neighborhood newsletter and attempts to connect residents to green space and gardens. These kinds of engagement strategies—though they may appear cobbled together in different sectors of community life—have begun to instill some confidence about community oversight of development activities. In terms of parkland, green space, and community gardens, future research might attempt to replicate the listening forums, lot squats, and more formal avenues like the Vacant Lots Task Force.

In the specific case of Regional Parks in the area—parks managed by the Metropolitan Council (Met Council)—Rainry Salk conducted a major qualitative study into the use of regional parks among communities of color. This Met Council report sought to identify the preferred activities for minority groups, perceived barriers to park use among minorities, issues and concerns about parks, and recommendations to increase park visits. Barriers included a lack of awareness about regional parks—what they are, how to get there, and park use rules—a lack of time to visit parks, fear and safety concerns, lack of transportation options, language barriers, cost, and the perception of cultural or religious insensitivity. One African American woman responded that "the noise ordinance they passed for the parks"—that music cannot be played in regional parks—specifically targeted behaviors typically associated with members of "her culture" who frequently play music (Metropolitan Council 2014, 8). A Muslim woman noted how regional parks lack private places for prayer and that park users stare at her for wearing hijab: "they might think, when they see you, they may think you're a bad person or something like that" (Metropolitan Council 2014, 9). And while it might be difficult to imagine park associations alone improving this perception, parks have numerous options at their disposal to help.

In order to overcome these barriers, Met Council respondents recommend better signage and better descriptions of regional parks and the activities they offer in plain language English and/or multiple languages, to provide directions that rely less on maps and more on landmarks, to create a Park Ambassador or tour guide program onsite, to enhance and increase the amount of gathering spaces, and to provide more events and increase the diversity of programming geared toward families and children (Metropolitan Council 2014, 12-16). These kinds of improvements—especially easy-to-understand signage, advertising, and relevant programming—could also help to increase the use of neighborhood green space in Frogtown by promoting greater walkability and providing spaces for more community interaction. In doing great community engagement, the city, local businesses, and non-profits partner with community members who are empowered to decide the trajectory of the neighborhood's development.

Despite the evidence of the economic, ecological, and social benefits of public space in well-connected and walkable communities—which will be detailed further below—many politicians and community developers remain skeptical of the benefits that parks and public spaces have in cities. For the issue of urban agriculture specifically, Deelstra and Girardet argue that constraints on supportive policy prescriptions include restrictive land use policy, uncertainty over property rights of urban farms, lack of supportive services, unfeasible implementation of new environmental technologies, and a lack of organizational capacity and representation of urban farmers (Deelstra and Girardet 2000, 58). Since common economic wisdom identifies the maximization of value as the greatest priority—property value, tax revenue, and so on—the ecological footprint of a city as well as neighborhood well-being and community health remain external to cost-benefit analyses.

In effect, cities and governments must balance the desire for sustainability with the demands of economic productivity and income generation. Deelstra and Girardet identify the need for policy makers to work cooperatively with local farming groups, to refocus development toward ecological



sustainability instead of short-term economic growth, and to incorporate urban agriculture into land use planning documents (Deelstra and Girardet 2000, 58-59). In this light, community engagement strategy is usually identified as the most important way to balance individual and community needs with those of cities and firms who operate more frequently with economics in mind. The following section will provide insight into strategies that municipalities and regions may use to modify the calculus of cost-benefit analysis of parks, green space, and urban agriculture under greater levels of community oversight in planning affairs.

## Health, Economic, and Ecological Benefits of Park Access

In 2014, the City of Saint Paul funded the 8 80 Vitality Fund to redevelop cultural centers like the Palace Theater in downtown, public spaces along the Green Line corridor, to improve pedestrian access, and to install bike lanes throughout the city (City of Saint Paul 2014). These investments represent the city's commitment to improving active transportation opportunities and to use cultural institutions and public spaces as a way to promote urban growth and development. Like the stated goals of the city's parks plan, the 8 80 Cities project works to "develop integrated mobility strategies that are designed to move people." It does so by determining barriers to access and through engaging communities in decision making, which allows it to "pinpoint programming and infrastructure that encourage active modes of transportation" (8 80 Cities 2015). The result is to design urban spaces that encourage healthy lifestyles, that bring people aged 8 to 80 together, and that foster a spirit of community around public spaces. These kinds of modifications to the built environment offer individuals and families alike the chance to engage in active transportation which may help reduce the obesity epidemic, increase the usage of public spaces, increase property tax revenue and small business development, and neighborhood

cohesion. For these reasons, the city should focus on comprehensive development strategies that work in concert to alleviate ecological, economic, and public health problems.

### Health benefits

Preserving green space and creating new parks, community gardens, and parklets is of little use if people cannot access them. Subsequently, preservation and creation of new public spaces must maintain or improve access for visitors through a combination of multi-modal transit options—biking, walking, using public transportation, and/or driving. Most of the academic literature around the topic of park access has focused on park use, physical activity, public safety, public health outcomes, and socio-economic and racial disparities in all of these categories. This section will include a discussion of the literature on park access and several examples from Frogtown that exemplify academic and statistical analyses about parks.

Both children and adults today are less physically active than previous generations, (Carver et al. 2008; Handy et al. 2008; Kaczynski et al. 2014). Authors attribute primarily to three sources: safety concerns, especially for children; the increasing humans reliance on new technologies; and changes to the urban spatial fabric. Those changes include the ability to travel greater distances at greater speeds (in an automobile or by rapid public transportation) and changing mores about parental responsibility, particularly as it relates to driving their children to and from school. Carver, Timperio, and Crawford investigated how the neighborhood safety—both real and perceived—becomes a barrier to greater physical activity: "Subjective rating of crime (and fear of crime) is a strong predictor of behavior (e.g. reluctance to go outdoors to exercise) than are actual crime rates" (Carver et al. 2008, 219). "Stranger Danger" as it is more commonly known, was not associated with changes in the level of walking and biking in a neighborhood. By analyzing research on road safety in several English-speaking contexts, they found that well-supported discrepancies in safety, where there exists a disproportionate number of

pedestrian injuries and deaths, are positively associated with decreased levels of physical activity and active transportation—biking and walking (Carver et al. 2008, 219). In Australia, England, and Maryland, local streets were the likely place for pedestrian accidents, and in Maryland, “70% of parents of junior schoolchildren restricted their children’s outdoor play venues because of ‘unsafe cars and trucks’, regardless of rate of child pedestrian injury there” (Carver et al. 2008, 220).

Given these sentiments, it should be no surprise that children and their parents also perceive public places to be less safe than the home. As a result, Carver, Timperio, and Crawford write, children and adults participate in less active transport on a daily basis. And even though, as these authors stress, there is no association between perceptions of safety and active transportation, parents and children have serious concerns about personal safety in public spaces since children are more likely to witness violent behavior in public than in the home and since the likelihood of abduction and/or sexual assault is greater (Carver et al. 2008, 218). Furthermore, the safety found in the home facilitates the consumption of new media and technology: recent research by Common Sense Media found that teenagers spend an average of nine hours per day with digital technology and that “tweens”—between the ages 8 and 12—spent an average of six hours on smartphones, computers, tablets, and television (Common Sense Media 2015, 9). Finally, parents today are more likely to chauffeur children to and from school and activities, which now may be dispersed across entire regions. Frequently, parents, driven by socially constructed notions of parental responsibility, fall into “social traps” to conform to the behavior of other parents (Carver et al. 2008, 224).

The logical follow up question—what can planners and policy makers do to reduce the effects of so-called “social traps” and to encourage active transportation—has focused on elements of the built environment that prevent and/or deter access across spatial boundaries in urban areas. These features include highways, long blocks of vacant buildings, cracked or uneven sidewalks, poor crosswalks or a lack of pedestrian timers, the number of streets to cross to access public spaces and public goods, the

speed and type of traffic, railroad right of ways, a lack of traffic calming measures, among others. In Frogtown, Interstate-94 deters access between Frogtown and Summit-University, Interstate-35E limits access to the East Side, the railroad tracks prevent access to Como Park, the limited number of crosswalks and pedestrian signals on Dale Street, Marion Ave, and Rice Street inhibit pedestrian mobility, and a lack of traffic calming measures in the vicinity of public spaces all have serious repercussions for neighborhood residents.

According to a comparative study of transit behavior in California, Handy, Cao, and Mokhtarian, argue that "selected neighborhood design characteristics were associated with physical activity within the neighborhood and changes in selected neighborhood design characteristics were associated with changes in physical activity within the neighborhood" (Handy et al. 2008, 350).

Neighborhood design and street connectivity favoring pedestrian access has a positive association with the neighborhood's overall level of physical activity, a finding that was particularly true for older people and

those with higher educations. Furthermore, these findings were "at least as important as socio-demographic characteristics" in explaining how often people engage in physical activity in their neighborhood (Handy et al. 2008, 354). What this study does not analyze, however, is how often neighborhood physical activity occurs in parks and green space.

With a team of fellow researchers, Andrew Kaczynski found a positive association between the connectivity of neighborhoods and increased levels of local park use. "In addition to park proximity and the design of park features, ensuring direct and safe access to parks through street network design and



The intersection of Pierce Butler Route and Minnehaha Avenue, viewed from the northeast corner of Dale and Minnehaha. The high volume of car and truck traffic make this intersection intimidating to families, the elderly, and people with disabilities and even deters access to West Minnehaha Recreation Center, located in the background. Author's photograph, July 2015

traffic speed reduction strategies" may help to encourage park-related physical activity (Kaczynski et al. 2013, 197). They found that traffic speed has a significant influence on the perceptions of road safety and active transportation as well as a strong association between high street connectivity and park use and between connectivity and park-based physical activity. Less connected areas, with more cul-de-sacs and less measures of walking and biking accessibility, tend to funnel automobiles down a few high-volume arterials. This is true of Frogtown's north-south routes, especially Lexington Avenue, Dale Street, Marion Avenue, Rice Street, and (to a lesser extent) Como Avenue. The heavy flow of fast-moving cars discourages walking beyond the perimeters of these major roads.

Many national advocacy groups have jumped on this research and supported efforts that broadly fall under the heading of "Safe Routes to Parks". For the American Planning Association, "ensuring access to green space for all people is a value that should be shared by every resident, community group, and government official" (American Planning Association 2015). Other organizations, including the Trust for Public Land, the National Complete Streets Coalition, and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) support the initiative, since greater levels of access to parks are associated with increased park usage. This is particularly true for individuals living within a 5 to 10-minute walk of parks. On the following page will be two maps that demonstrate how Frogtown and other neighborhoods with large-minority populations in Saint Paul have fewer acres of park space even with the caveat that the Grand Rounds and Parkland along the Mississippi River boost green space numbers in Highland, West Seventh, Dayton's Bluff, and Battle Creek neighborhoods.

According to NRPA, several other factors must be considered when considering park access and As a matter of fact, spatial distribution of parks around cities and metro regions frequently overlap with areas of extreme racial disparity (National Recreation and Park Association 2012, iii). NRPA also notes

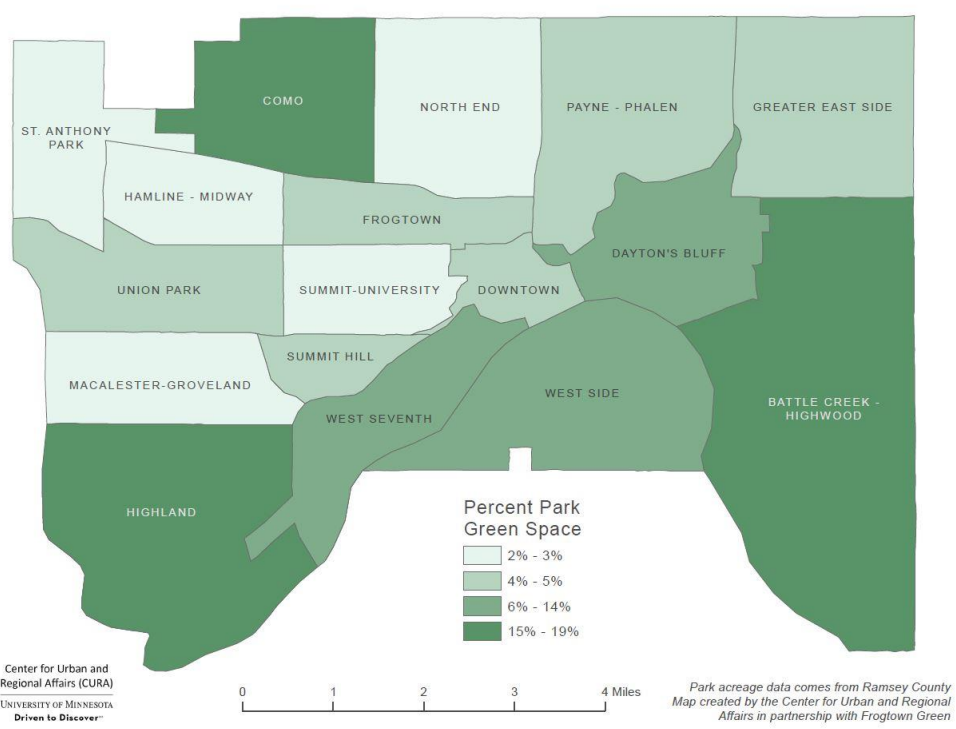


One of the largest public parks in Frogtown with over 12 acres of space, Valley Park only offers users a large field and a sandbox despite gorgeous views of the surrounding city. Photo courtesy of Evan Flom, April 2015

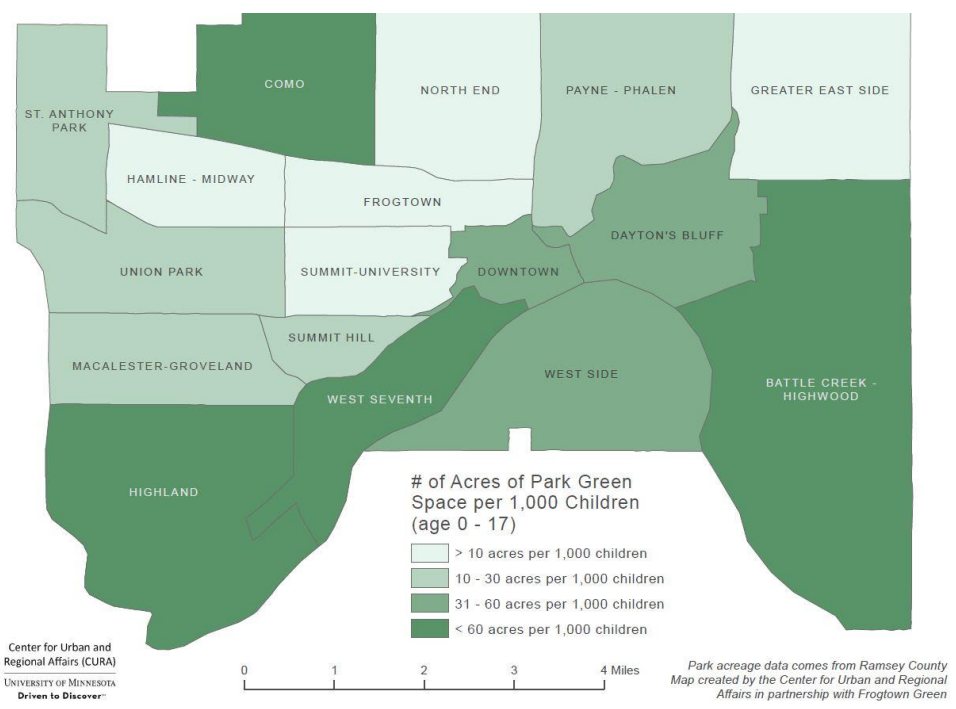
that certain types of park facilities, the quality of amenities, and culturally-relevant parks programming encourage higher levels of physical activity. One challenge for disadvantaged communities is the reality that "there are notably fewer publicly-provided resources such as parks, trails, and playgrounds" in communities with lower comparative socio-economic status than

those with higher average incomes. Furthermore, non-white and low-income communities were 50% less likely to have one recreation facility in their community than white and high-income neighborhoods (National Recreation and Park Association 2012, 3). This corroborates findings from the aforementioned Trust for Public Land study of the Central Corridor between Minneapolis and Saint Paul, where just 4.7% of land is reserved for park space in neighborhoods with large minority populations, or like Frogtown, where minorities constitute the majority.

Partially because this push to provide safe access to parks has developed quite recently, few communities around the United States have engaged in creative re-imagining of physical infrastructure to support active transportation and active lifestyles. Seattle is one exception to that rule. Research by Rebecca Deehr and Amy Schumann, private consultant and King County Public Health official respectively, build on NRPA's findings in an article about a commitment the city made to "Active Living by Design". They found that King County minority residents were more likely to be physically inactive than their white counterparts, were less likely to live in homes in close proximity to green space, and



Map 3 shows the amount of park green space in each of Saint Paul's neighborhoods. Those with the greatest population of minorities—the North End, Payne-Phalen, the Greater East Side, Frogtown, Summit-University—also tend to have the least amount of Green Space.



Map 4 shows green space acreage per 1,000 children. With greater proportions of young people, neighborhoods like Frogtown continue to have proportionally less green space..

that the green spaces that were in close proximity frequently lacked relevant amenities and programming that suited interests of the community. "To reach vulnerable populations that have substantial barriers to increasing walking frequency," they write, "extensive staff time for outreach is needed. Changing the built environment to encourage walking may be a long-term solution in communities with diverse populations" (Deehr and Shumann 2009, 403). To arrive at a long-term solution for active living, planners, advocates, and community members must engage in a process that identifies goals for "active living by design." Together with advocates and communities, Deehr and Shumann helped the city government in Seattle pass a "complete streets policy," which requires the design of streets to consider all users—bicyclist, driver, trucker, child, grandparent—and how to improve access throughout urban space (Deehr and Shumann 2009, 408). Results of the effort include the city's adoption of a Pedestrian Master Plan and new development and rehabilitation of commercial and residential areas throughout by increasing connectivity (Deehr and Shumann 2009, 408). Saint Paul has codified similar programs, although they are less developed than those of Seattle and often face resistance from those concerned about the loss of parking spaces, exemplified in the debate over Saint Paul's proposed downtown bike loop (Lindeke 2014).

The success of programs like Active Seattle point to the benefits of park access and green space proximity in achieving a healthier public, in reducing disparities of access among racial groups and/or socioeconomic classes. An increased emphasis on pedestrian access and visibility may even contribute to greater levels of actual and perceived pedestrian security. Better neighborhood connectivity may also reduce the (real or perceived) need to use automobiles in local trips—to schools, grocery stores, commercial centers, public parks and green spaces, and cultural institutions. Yet while the public health argument—a concern to reduce chronic disease and high national rates of obesity—continues the move to the fore of planning and policy making, it does not make appeals to economic realities faced by city governments, which are frequently asked to do better governance with fewer resources. The moral



imperative to provide equal access and equitable distribution of parks and green space, like other public goods, must also fit within the general strategies of cities to realize an increase in property values and long-term planning goals if they are to be salient politically. And while this kind of argumentation most certainly deserves critiques—and indeed has been subject to criticisms of the Right to the City and the Just City movements<sup>4</sup>—it is within neither scope nor purpose of this report to do so.

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<sup>4</sup> For more on the Just City Movement which seeks to ask if and how cities may become equitable, diverse, and democratic, consult Fainstein, Susan. *The Just City*. (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010) and Friedman, John. “The Good City: In Defense of Utopian Thining.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24(2): 460-472. 2000. The best place to begin research on the Right to the City Movement is with Henri LeFebvre’s “The right to the city” (1996) in Kofman, Eleonore; Lebas, Elizabeth, *Writings on cities*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell) and David Harvey’s “The right to the city.” *New Left Review* (53):23-40. 2008.

To recap, public health officials and planners look toward active design for living to increase pedestrian access throughout urban areas. Usually they do so by placing emphasis on moral imperatives for improving communities and individual health outcomes. What has been infrequently researched, however, is the relationship between physical activity, the built environment, and the cost of major health



Minnehaha Avenue, with bike lanes, bus routes, and old street trees encourages a wide variety of pedestrian uses. Author's photograph, July 2015.

epidemics. According to the National League of Cities, the yearly cost of obesity-related illnesses in the United States is over \$190 billion, which translates to 21% of all national healthcare spending (National League of Cities, n.d.). Obesity also contributes to higher costs in unemployment and disability benefits, and near unanimous consensus in academic literature finds that obesity problems affect minority populations disproportionately. Sallis, Floyd, Rodriguez, and Saelens analyze the positive health impacts of park proximity and neighborhood design on physical activity. They contend that the built environment may be arranged to encourage active modes of transportation and public transportation use, which has a strong, positive association with health outcomes: "nationwide 29% of those who used transit were physically active for 30 minutes or more each day, solely by walking to and from public transit" (Sallis et al. 2012, 732). Though that figure includes many transit-dependent communities on the East Coast—New York, Boston, and Washington DC have higher rates of transit use than many other American cities—the impacts on individual and community health of public transit use may easily be extrapolated.

Babey, Wolstein, Krumholz, Robertson, and Diamant found that recent park visits and greater levels of physical activity are associated irrespective of race, class, gender, age, income, and perceptions of park safety (Babey et al. 2013, 3). Teens who live near parks are more likely to meet daily

recommendations for physical activity: in their study of several communities in California, almost 45% of teens living within a "park service area" meet these recommendations, compared to 35% of teens statewide (Babey et al. 2013, 1). So while it may be difficult to prove a direct causal relationship between park proximity, health outcomes, and economic benefits, the combined effect of good public transportation, neighborhood connectivity, and access to public spaces and green space may help to reduce yearly spending on obesity-related medical costs.

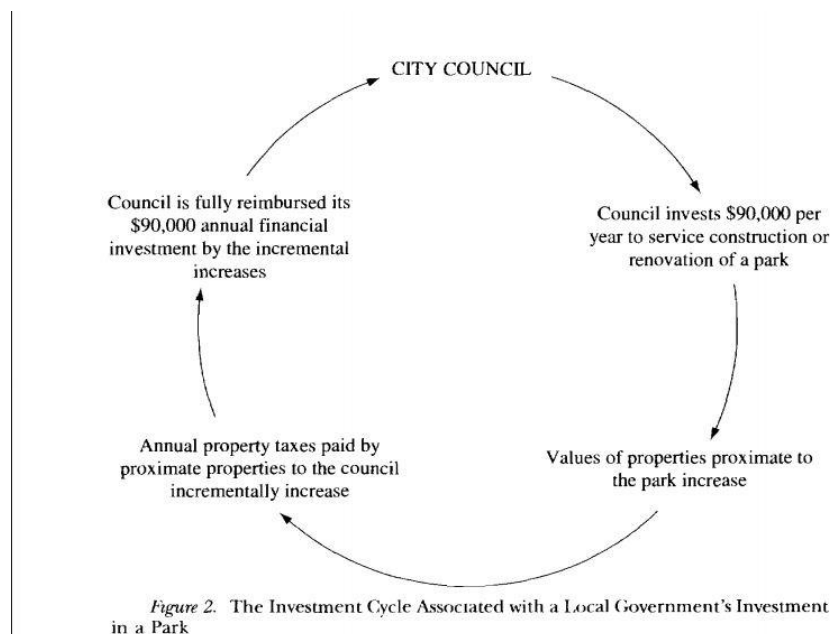
### Economic benefits

One may ask about other kinds of economic benefits of parks in communities, or whether the benefit is purely related to offsetting public health problems. Compared to the bevy of literature on the positive health impacts of park proximity there has been little research done on the impact of parks in economic prosperity. Fortunately, the research that has been done has been quite comprehensive.

In an article entitled, "The Impact of Parks on Property Values", John Crompton found that the increase in property tax revenue from adjacent properties paid for lost development revenue by developing public spaces in twenty-five of thirty studies he analyzed from cities around the United

States (Crompton 2001, 1).

John Crompton advances the idea of the "proximate principle" to describe the increase in property tax revenue collected from houses and businesses adjacent to new parks. For example, property owners



Crompton's Local Park Investment Flow Chart (2001, 4). Smart investments in parks can generate increased property tax revenues for cities and may even generate further development in areas adjacent to parks via housing rehabilitation and new retail construction.

whose land abuts or fronts "passive park areas"—fields, recreation centers, basketball courts that can be used formally or informally—might expect an increase in property values up to 20%. He goes on to identify an "edge principle" whereby cities, parks and recreation departments, and planning agencies might consider extending green space linearly, which has a similar effect on property values to the proximate principle. One major caveat for such an experiment, however, is the perception of safety and security: "if you put money in a park, chances are that you will improve one portion of the neighborhood. But if the park does not have proper security and maintenance, it becomes a liability for nearby homes" (Crompton 2001, 6). Effective park location, decisions about amenities and programs become important factors for increasing property values, and therefore property tax revenue, through greening efforts.

Greening efforts also contribute to the growth of new models of participation and income generation outside traditional urban economies of land, capital, and labor. Brian Obach and Kathleen Tobin even problematize the value traditional economies place on "large and anonymous enterprises" since they often "displaced the network of small business owners who were not only tightly interwoven and highly interdependent themselves" but who also provided benefits to the community and form "social bonds and a sense of trust" (Obach and Tobin 2013, 308). Studying the Mid-Hudson region of New York State, they found that "direct personal social ties and mutual interdependence once found among farmers and rural communities have largely been lost" (308). Among those communities, people who participate in agriculture, who farm on community gardens and buy food at farmers' markets and health food stores were also more likely to take interest in community politics, to participate in community groups, to have written a letter to the editor or legislator, to have attended political meetings. They even had a better overall opinion of the communities in which they lived (Obach and Tobin 2013, 317). One limitation of translating this study into other local contexts around the country and globe is selection bias, with whites overrepresented in numbers of people who shop at health food

stores and who are more likely to shop at farmers' markets (Obach and Tobin 2013, 311). And despite other contrary evidence (people join community-supported agriculture to get more organic produce and not to build a sense of community, for example), the "civic agriculture effect" was still present even when they controlled for education and income levels.

One strategy that has received much attention in recent years has been Community Wealth Building approach taken by Democracy Collaborative's Ted Howard in Cleveland. Community wealth building "is a form of development that puts wealth in the hands of locally rooted forms of business enterprises (with ownership vested in community stakeholders), not just investor-driven corporations" (Howard 2012, 206). Unlike the dispersal and decentralization of market forces under the weight of which communities collapse, community wealth building asks "anchored" businesses and institutions—hospitals, universities, major businesses—to reinvest in their local neighborhoods, building wealth in asset-poor communities" (Howard 2012, 206). In Cleveland, Evergreen Collaborative asked hospitals and universities to shift a portion of their purchases toward local communities and businesses, like Green City Growers, and employee-owned and -operated, year-round greenhouse. A flowchart of the Cleveland Model can be found on the following page, but features a deeply-interconnected network of institutions, worker cooperatives, governments, and non-profits working to purchase, hire, finance, and invest locally.

Though Frogtown may lack a formalized system in place like the Democracy Collaborative, their strategies for encouraging the financial and technical support of anchor institutions may provide direction for development initiatives the Frogtown Neighborhood Association will put forth in their coming small area plan. Leaders from Stone's Throw Urban Farm and Frogtown Farm and Park may become resources for the community who wish to grow food to either eat or sell. Nearby anchor institutions with whom the neighborhood association and/or a future co-operative grocer may partner include the State Capitol, Hamline University, Macalester College, the University of Minnesota,

numerous nearby medical organizations (Children’s, Gillette, Saint Joseph, United, Regents, and Bethesda Hospitals), social service agencies (Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, Wilder Foundation, etc), and major businesses headquartered in Saint Paul like EcoLab, US Bancorp, and 3M. In the end, it will be up to the city and the Frogtown Neighborhood Association to encourage community and neighborly discussion about these kinds of development options that may bring in new employment opportunities, new businesses, and new ideas to Frogtown.

In sum, constructing new green space on the one hand and the practice of urban agriculture on the other—once seen as a non-productive use for urban space—may be an important component in creating jobs and generating income in American cities. Through a comprehensive planning process that seeks to improve access to existing green space and that pays particular attention to neighborhoods



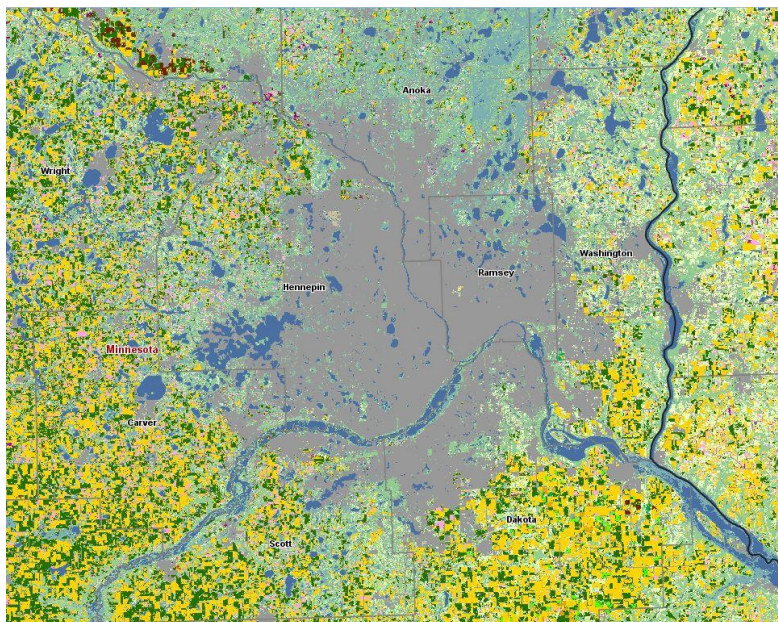
traditionally underserved by parks and nature, cities may reap benefits of increased property values near these centers of community. Cities may even begin to encourage greater participation in community organizations and community-level politics by endorsing owner-operated businesses and leveraging anchor institutions to support locally-sourced products, as has been done by the Democracy Collaborative in Cleveland, Ohio.

**Ecological benefits**

Design plans for Frog Town Park and Farm, a new “spatial anchor” for the Eastern half of the neighborhood. Completed in 2015, plans include five-acres of urban farmland as well as an orchard and plenty of outdoor space on 13 acres. Frog Town Farm (2015)

Tjeerd Deelstra and Herbert Girardet note that humans are quickly becoming an urban species and question how humans may transform this present reality into a sustainable future (Deelstra and Girardet 2000, 43). Similarly, Jac Smit and Joe Nasr propose that thinking about cities through a sustainability lens implies using wastes as fertilizers for urban agriculture, which would put vacant and underused land to productive use, and would conserve precious land and resources outside urban centers. They write how cities *only* consume food and other agricultural resources, and must therefore rely on the food and energy production from the hinterlands instead of local systems of production. Smit and Nasr propose "converting the consume-dispose open loops into consume-process-reuse closed loops" (Smit and Nasr 1992, 141-143). Waste water could be used for planting and watering crops as a constant source for important minerals and fertilizers, which would save freshwater for drinking, cooking, and other uses.

In traditional spatial distribution and organization of the world's cities, agriculture is left to small towns and rural communities in the areas that surround them. These "hinterlands" provide the food and energy resources that power factories, manufacturing plants, high-tech industry, offices, and commerce that comprise income-generating sectors of local and regional economies. In the academic literature about the ecological sustainability of cities—in age where



Map 5 shows the agricultural development pattern in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Region with the surrounding "hinterlands" as the dominant agricultural producer in 2014. National Agricultural Statistics Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (2014).

the more than 50% of the total population will live in urban environments by 2050, no less—authors

point to one of the principle limitations of urban growth throughout history: the ability for urban environments to properly manage their wastes and the ability to be either self-reliant or forge interdependence with other regions that may have different competitive advantage in relation to other natural resources.

The immense expansion of cities during the industrial era can be partially attributed to the ability for London, Manchester, New York, Berlin and the like to move toward a system of managed growth. According to a seminal piece of planning literature by Jon Peterson, sanitary reform in the United Kingdom and the United States between 1840 and 1890 had serious repercussions for modifying social and material environments in cities. The lack of adequate waste treatment—the putrid filth, grime, and waste found in gutters, alleys, and backyard cesspools of major cities in the western world—led public health officials of the era to identify filth as the cause for the innumerable diseases of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Scourges like “yellow fever, Asiatic cholera, typhoid, typhus, scarlet fever and diphtheria”, doctors believed, could be attributed to “stagnant water, sodden ground, vitiated air, and the absence of sunlight” (Peterson 1979, 83). Sanitation engineers saw the “helter-skelter process” of city planning as an uncoordinated and haphazard approach that, if more properly organized, may assist in the elimination of innumerable diseases. And so these engineers developed the comprehensive water carriage system that “facilitate the gravity-flow of waterborne wastes to outfall points located beyond the immediate environment of the urban dweller” (Peterson 1979, 84) and in their efforts, became the world’s first city planners, if only out of historical necessity.

Today, given the ever-present specter of global climate change, the way cities decide to manage waste as more and more people flock to urban centers will have serious consequences for the availability of safe food and clean water throughout the world. On the one hand, water carriage systems allowed individuals and cities to remove private-lot waste removal (e.g. privately-owned, backyard cesspools) which undoubtedly had positive impacts on public health crises and interrupted the



regularity of disease epidemics. On the other, the rapid and universal access to public water supplies when New York City began drawing water from the Croton River Reservoir in 1842 resulted in a three-fold increase in water usage by city residents in eight years. Similarly, three years after Boston opened the Cochituate Aqueduct to public use, the city consumed twice as much water as it did in 1848 (Peterson 1979, 87). For these reasons, authors like Smit and Nasr and Deelstra and Girardet envision the potential for cities to put wastes to reuse, to transform vacant and underused land into sites of agricultural production, and to devise systems that conserve valuable resources in the hinterlands.

Smit and Nasr, as mentioned above, envision a sustainable system where cities convert “consume-dispose open loops into consume-process-reuse closed loops” while Deelstra and Girardet demand the inclusion of a city’s ecological footprint into cost-benefit market analyses (Smit and Nasr 1992, 141; Deelstra and Girardet 2000, 44). Ecological footprint analysis, they argue, assumes that every category of energy consumption, material consumption, and waste discharge requires the productive or absorptive capacity of a finite area of land or water. And while that definition may seem lengthy and overly-complex, the idea is that the amount of consumption and waste should never exceed the total area of land and water in urban regions that it would take to dispose of it properly. In the end, ecological footprint analysis can be expressed by this fairly simple equation:

$$\sum (Area_{Land} + Area_{Water}) - (Material\ Consumption + Waste\ Discharge)$$

These authors argue that without creative strategies for the reuse of solid waste and waste water, humanity runs the risk of depleting massive quantities of phosphates and encouraging other “extractive industrial processes” (Deelstra and Girardet 2000, 50).

To wit, urban agriculture becomes a logical necessity for numerous reasons in cities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. First, the value of waste water increases as incomes decrease: a poor urban farmer may use wastewater more cheaply than freshwater and may therefore earn more for her produce. Second, the reuse of wastewater in agricultural activities allows individuals, families, cities, and possibly entire

regions the ability to conserve precious freshwater for drinking, cooking, and household uses. Third, orchards, vineyards, street trees, and backyard trees can contribute to greater citizen comfort by increasing humidity, lowering temperatures, and counteracting unpleasant urban odors (Deelstra and Girardet 2000, 48). Fourth, urban farming allows urban residents to create connections to the earth, which triggers thoughts about food consumption, supply, and distribution. In line with the aforementioned research of Obach and Tobin in Upstate New York, Deelstra and Girardet point to the way urban agriculture fosters “more interest in the food-growing process and the bio-physical processes involved when crops are locally cultivated” (Deelstra and Girardet 200, 54). And while many global cities and megacities may come to struggle with questionable and/or costly waste management practices, the ecological struggle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may be determined by the ability of cities, regions, states, and countries to minimize the waste of waste, rather than how they eliminate waste altogether.

## Conclusion

The academic literature is abundant with the positive effects the proximity to parks have on public health. Those who live closer to parks are more likely to meet the recommended daily levels of physical activity so long as parks have amenities that adequately serve nearby populations, as long as they may be accessed by well-connected street grids, and have a positive public perception as safe places. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the areas that lack well-connected street grids and public spaces generally also happen to be home to large minority and/or poor residents. The Active Seattle program may be a great example for future neighborhood design that encourages active transportation and the use of public transit in traditionally underserved communities. Furthermore, this program used design elements that help foster a sense of community and emphasize connections between people and the earth. For Frogtown, this might mean the continued investment in bicycle infrastructure to connect bikeways and paths to the Grand Rounds and regional parks, redesigning the public transportation

system through the neighborhood, especially the north-south bus routes, and improving sidewalks and pedestrian crossings along busy arterial roads like Dale Street and Marion Avenue.

What has not been studied to nearly the same degree are the economic benefits of proximity to parks for both homeowners (increased property values) and for cities (increased property tax revenue). However, comprehensive surveys, like John Crompton's (2001), point to evidence of a "proximate principle" and an "edge principle" by which cities may generate up to 20% more revenue from homes and residences that abut or front park areas. Future research that investigates the proximate or edge principle in relation to community gardens and parklets would add much to the discussion of what to do with numerous vacant lots in Frogtown. Moreover, the creative reuse of vacant land may help catalyze local investment and the support of anchor institutions, which could provide underserved communities with important and well-paying jobs, as has been done with several community development organizations throughout the country, with Cleveland's Democracy Collaborative as the primary example in this paper. Finally, a reflection on creative strategies to mitigate waste and to reuse waste might provide valuable insight into transforming the unsustainable present into a sustainable future. The ecological model even serves as a launching point for urban agriculture and greening activists who wish to effect the local production of food and to counter critics of the urban agriculture movement.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The Frogtown neighborhood's historical development provides much insight into the current dilemmas facing the community and the city today. The streetcar built along University Avenue in 1890 provided an impetus for developing commercial and industrial sectors in the neighborhood. With an influx of development opportunities since the completion of the Green Line Light Rail in 2014, concerns about resident displacement and the city's development goals for the area arose. With a long history as a center for gardening and connections with the earth—from the swampy conditions of John Ireland's

days that gave the rich and fertile soil of today—Frogtown’s identity has begun to coalesce, in part, around working class lifestyles that include gardening. Frogtown began to reconsider what it could become after the devastating foreclosure crisis through a loosely-connected body of community organizations which include the Frogtown Neighborhood Association, Frogtown Green, and the Frogtown-Rondo Home Fund. These groups host public meetings, lot squats, capacity-building opportunities, listening sessions that contribute toward the future (re)development of the neighborhood.

City Planning documents tend to confuse the development process through a contradictory set of policies outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. The divergent opinion on the proper avenue through which development should occur—by either public investment that draws in new developers and new design plans or investment in public spaces, walkable places, and fostering community character—has serious consequences for future planning efforts, as was shown in the disconnect between LISC’s Affordable Housing Plan and the TPL’s Greening the Green Line report. To privilege one kind of development over the other, “build it and they will come” over “book it and they will come”, has serious implications for neighborhoods and district councils as they work on small area plans. Instead, the city should try and engage communities during the small area planning process to identify preferred development opportunities considering how Saint Paul lacks a way for citizens to influence land use decisions and priorities.

The public health and ecological benefits that parks and recreation have in cities points to the idea that great public spaces that represent community character may also assist in economic development. Improving access to green space can help address the obesity epidemic and may even assist in generating Saint Paul additional property tax revenue. By continuing to support residents who wish to farm, by incorporating advanced waste management strategies, and offering greater public transit access to job centers and commercial corridors, Saint Paul may be positioned to greatly reduce

greenhouse gas emissions and lead the nationwide effort to mitigate the effects of climate change. In the end, the decision to develop resources rests in the city's efforts to encourage community participation in public life through transparent engagement strategies. How the city chooses to develop its existing and future public spaces and how much attention the city pays to comprehensive and small area plans will have a serious impact in neighborhoods located on the Green Line corridor.

### Policy Recommendations

- The City should include ecological footprint assessments in new developments, budgeting, and departmental goals
- The City should work toward clarifying the contradictions of the comprehensive plan to better connect land use goals and parks and recreation priorities in future endeavors
- The City should incentivize community engagement and foster greater citizen inclusion in land use planning decisions
- The Frogtown Neighborhood Association should continue to provide listening sessions, forums, and lot squats as part of a concerted community engagement effort in the small area planning process
- The City and neighborhood groups should work toward a shared vision that honors both development efforts and park space initiatives to reflect the interests of residents
- Neighborhood organizations like Frogtown Green and the Frogtown-Rondo Home Fund should continue to promote their unique visions through enhanced engagement and outreach efforts for future site selection and management

### Planning Recommendations

- Offer community parks and gardens long-term leasing options and target investment for new green space in areas that lack adequate park land
- Redevelop north-south corridors in Frogtown to be more walkable and serve pedestrians of all ages, particularly Dale Street, Rice, Street, and Marion Avenue
- Improve signage in and around parks, especially with signs that designate how to get to them
- Invest in traffic calming measures around well-used parks and recreation spaces

- Provide more public transportation opportunities in Frogtown to improve access to the regional park system
- Improve Frogtown's walking and biking connections to other neighborhoods in Saint Paul, especially Summit-University and Como Park
- Invest in new water management and conservation technologies, green energy systems, and other cost-saving measures in

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