

DESCRIPTION

Parks are an important component in supporting healthy communities in Ramsey County. They support good health by increasing physical activity, improving mental health, and supporting community interaction and social connectivity.¹ They provide a safe and accessible venue for people to play and exercise away from potentially hazardous situations, like busy streets or commercial zones. Parks also have environmental benefits, such as reducing air and water pollution and mitigating the urban heat island effect. These environmental benefits, in turn, protect the health of residents.² Access to parks is largely influenced by proximity to parks. The closer one lives to a park, the more likely the park will be used for physical activity. In addition, those who feel protected from traffic, crimes and other hazards are more likely to utilize parks.²

HOW WE ARE DOING

In Ramsey County, 81.2 percent of the population has access to a park within 1/2 mile.³

DISPARITIES

In Minnesota, white people use parks nearly twice as often as other populations, and rarely note any safety concerns, while populations of color are more likely to use the parks for fishing, special events and picnicking, and are more likely to note safety concerns about being in the relatively isolated spaces of regional parks. Park accessibility varies across Minnesota, and is a concern for adults and children with disabilities.⁴

RISK FACTORS

Nationally, factors that limit access to parks include:¹

- Long distances to parks;
- Lack of physical infrastructure (e.g., incomplete or disconnected streets, lack of pedestrian crossings, lack of adequate street lighting, etc.);
- Crime and traffic safety concerns (e.g., dangerous or busy traffic areas, physical designs in parks that influence crime); and
- Lack of collaboration between local government agencies, nonprofits and community organizations in working toward unified park accessibility goals.

WHAT RAMSEY COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS DOING

Ramsey County is home to nine county parks, six regional parks and five regional trail corridors. Many parks include lake access and provide a variety of recreation opportunities, such as boating, picnicking, play areas and swimming. Ramsey County is addressing the potential risk factors cited above in part through its “Active Living Ramsey Communities” (ALRC) initiative. Developed in 2004, ALRC supports active living by encouraging walking, taking the stairs and using recreational facilities. Ramsey County departments (including Parks & Recreation, Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health, Public Works, Libraries and Regional Railroad Authority) join municipalities, schools, businesses, health care entities, nonprofits, community groups, and residents to help more people engage in physical activity. The group works to reduce physical activity health disparities and support a way of life that makes physical activity in our neighborhoods and communities safer and easier, through initiatives such as the *Go Ramsey* mapping portal and the *Be Active! Be Green!* bench initiative.

Information to note

- Ramsey County is home to nine county parks, six regional parks and five regional trail corridors.
- In Ramsey County, 81.2% of the population has access to a park within 1/2 mile.

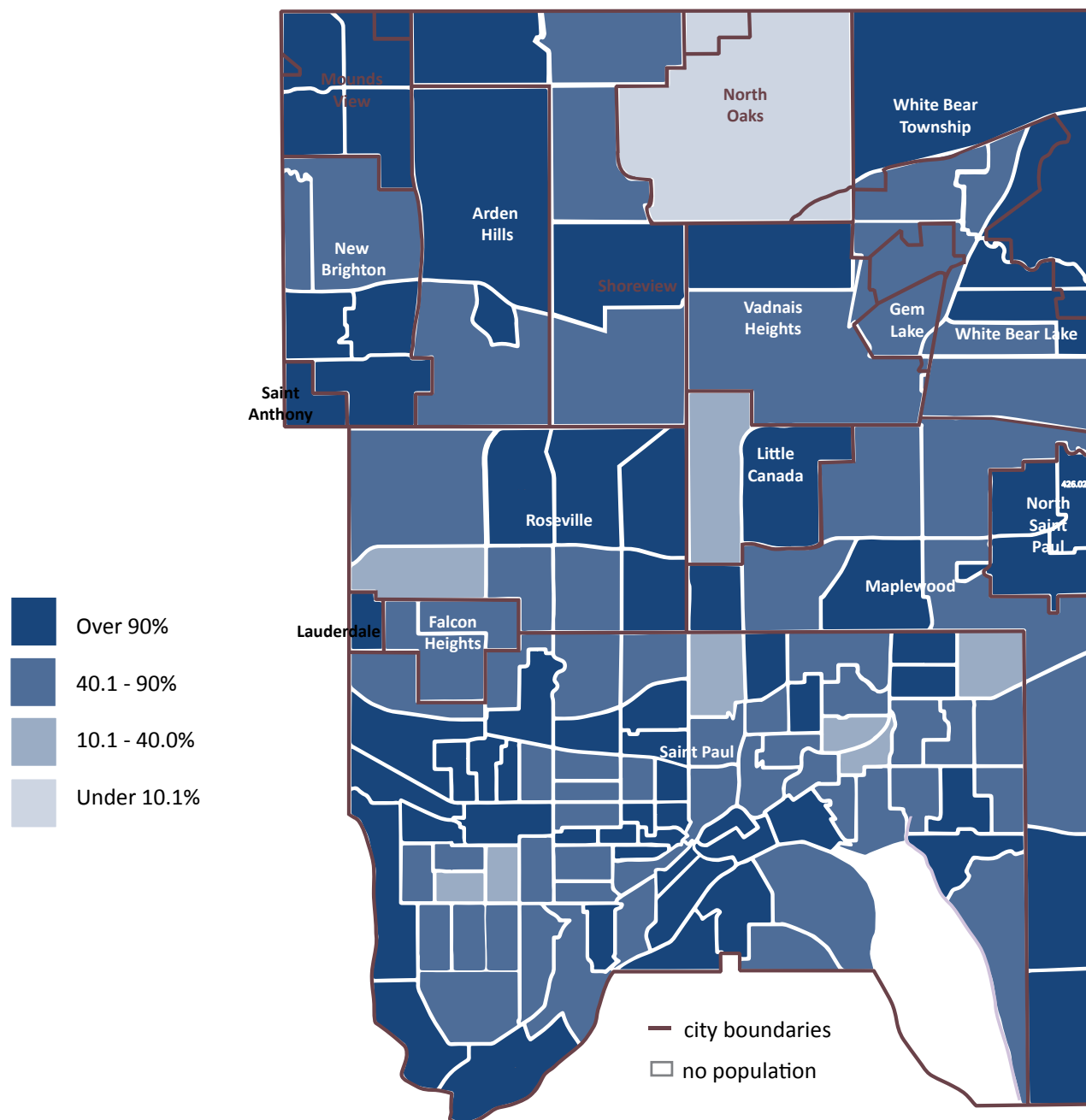
¹ Safe Routes to Parks: Improving Access to Parks through Walkability. National Recreation and Park Association. <http://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/f768428a39aa4035ae55b2aaff372617/park-access-report.pdf>. Accessed December 14, 2017.

² Parks, Trails and Health. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/healthtopics/parks.htm>. Accessed December 14, 2017.

³ Community Health Needs Assessment. Community Commons. <https://assessment.communitycommons.org>. Accessed December 14, 2017.

⁴ 2017 Minnesota Statewide Health Assessment. Minnesota Department of Health. <http://www.health.state.mn.us/healthymnpartnership/sha.html>. Accessed May 26, 2018.

Census Tracts with Park Access within 1/2 Mile, Ramsey County, 2013



Source: Ramsey County