



RAMSEY COUNTY

Open Space Access Assessment Report

May 26, 2022

Prepared by the Ramsey County Open Space Work Team

Margaret Dreon, Martha Faust, Cassie Fitzgerald, Geoff Maas, Amy Schmidt, Chris Ulrich, Scott Yonke



Ramsey County: Open Space Access Assessment Report

Summary. Ramsey County is the smallest county in land area (170 square miles) while simultaneously being the second most populous county in Minnesota, with just over 550,000 inhabitants, making it the most densely populated county in the state at over 3,000 persons per square mile.

A densely populated county such as Ramsey has both the challenge and opportunity to balance many competing needs for land, including new housing and economic development activities and projects aimed at preserving and enhancing its natural environment amenities. Various government interests in Ramsey County, including cities, the county itself, as well as state, regional and other interests all own, support, manage and maintain a range of park, recreational and open space resources available to residents.

The key goals of this report are to:

- Provide an overview of the current park, recreational and open space resources available in Ramsey County. This includes inventorying both types of resources available and some indication of what agencies manage them. This is provided in Part I of this report.
- Provide an analysis identifying where gaps to park and open space access may be occurring, i.e., ‘park deserts’ areas that may be underserved or lack immediate access to park and open space and provide a general profile the various ‘park desert’ areas. This is provided in Part II of this report.
- Inventory lands in County ownership that may at present be underutilized and might be provisioned for open space or other uses as needed by the community. This is provided in Part III of this report.
- Provide a series of general recommendations for addressing how greater access to park and open space lands can be expanded to the residents of Ramsey County. This is provided in Part IV of this report.

Purpose and need. Within the county’s developed urban and suburban landscape there is a continual need for the provisioning and maintenance of high-quality open spaces, parks, and recreational lands and amenities. Many values can be ascribed to the proximity and access to high-quality park and recreational sites ranging from quality-of-life issues, ecological, environmental, psychological, and physiological benefits that they offer and their ability to enhance private property values by proximity. The Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Department is presently working to implement their “21st Century Parks” vision, in which they are striving to create a dynamic, community-centered system that provides opportunities for our ever-changing community to engage with inclusive and welcoming parks and recreation sites and programming. Of specific interest for this report is the equitable availability of these open space resources to the residents of the County. Park and Recreation staff have, in past studies and analysis, examined how much of the county’s park system is available within a 10-minute walk (two-thirds of a mile). This study seeks to build upon that prior work to identify potentially underserved areas.

Ramsey County's leadership understands the value in ensuring that all residents of the county have equitable access to quality park, recreational and open space amenities. This report seeks to clearly define the term 'open space,' assist staff and leadership at the County understand what the current conditions are, understand where potential gaps in access to park and open space resources exist and examine where lands in these gaps could be potentially re-purposed to meet the county's goals. Additionally, the report inventories underutilized lands in County ownership which may have open space use potential.

Defining Open Space. Ramsey County's 2018 Parks & Recreation System Plan includes objectives aimed at the continued preservation and stewardship of protection open space, which is defined as land that is characterized by "*outstanding landscape amenities, critical natural systems and vulnerable natural resources.*" However, when defined more generally, open space can include human-made recreational facilities and underutilized land that is not currently part of the parks system but could be preserved for recreation or conservation. For the purposes of this report, a more holistic definition of open space, as well as a distinction between fully developed and underutilized county property, have been developed to guide our analysis.

Open Space: Land with natural features and opportunities for recreation, including outdoor recreational facilities, landscape amenities, and critical natural resources that are publicly accessible and contribute to public health, outdoor education, aesthetic enjoyment, and ecosystem stability.

Fully developed property: Parcels, buildings or facilities that are fully utilized at their proscribed use with minimal land available for outdoor recreational opportunities or conservation acquisition.

Underutilized property: Parcels, buildings or facilities that are not used at their full capacity or below their proscribed use, including land that could be repurposed or preserved for recreational, aesthetic, conservation, or other development purposes.

Application of these definitions. Within the context of this report, it should be assumed these three above categorical definitions are exclusive. Ramsey County is among the oldest and most developed counties in Minnesota, with most of its territory is fully developed with a range of residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, infrastructural, and institutional uses. As part of this, open space lands reflect some level of intentional establishment and maintenance of park, recreational and/or natural areas for the benefit of the public. Underutilized properties will be the most mutable, in that their use may change over time as properties are subject to sale to new owners, re-use and re-purposing, and reclassification via the municipal planning and zoning process. Cities, through their local land use planning work may specifically designate lands for park, open space, and recreational use, and may also identify and designate lands that as vacant, which may qualify them for definition of underutilized. For example: an abandoned or blighted residential property, while underutilized in its present state would likely remain in residential use to preserve the cohesion of a residential neighborhood. Alternately, an abandoned (underutilized) industrial site might legitimately be planned for conversion to another use (or uses) to accommodate the wishes of the community, including potential open space uses. In this study, we focus primarily on underutilized properties that are owned by Ramsey County itself.

Part I – Existing Conditions

Existing conditions. As of March 2022, approximately 15% of Ramsey County’s total area is dedicated to some form of park, recreational or open space amenity use that are either managed by other cities or Ramsey County. These uses range from small neighborhood level “pocket parks” and playgrounds to large natural area preserves. Data maintained by the County identifies a variety of park and recreational facility types, including sites traditionally thought of as parks and recreation land in addition to specific recreational sites such as golf courses, ice arenas and recreational centers. Table 1 and Figure 1 on the following pages illustrate the current location and size of all parks, recreational, and open space sites within Ramsey County, regardless of owner or management entity.

Table 1 – All Park, Recreational and Open Space Lands by Facility Type (All Agencies)

Specific Facility Type	Acres	Square Miles
City Park Sites	3503.72 ^(a)	5.47 ^(a)
Community Park Sites	155.35	0.24
County/Regional Park Sites	8759.83 ^(a)	13.69 ^(a)
Mini Park Sites	14.20	0.02
Neighborhood Park Sites	248.88	0.39
Open Space Sites	756.74	1.18
Preserve Park Sites	283.68	0.44
State Park Site	514.02	0.80
Other Sites	0.84	0.00
Golf Courses	1783.13	2.79
Ice Arenas	11.24	0.02
Recreational Centers	312.88	0.49
Special Use Facilities (non-golf)	63.24	0.10
Total	16407.74	25.63

Source: Extracted from current GIS data maintained by Ramsey County Park and Recreation Department and Information Services Department; (a) these total area figures differ from those in Table 3 due to how the data is categorized between ‘Type’ and ‘Management’, e.g., some parks are City//Regional, some are County/Regional in their management, etc.

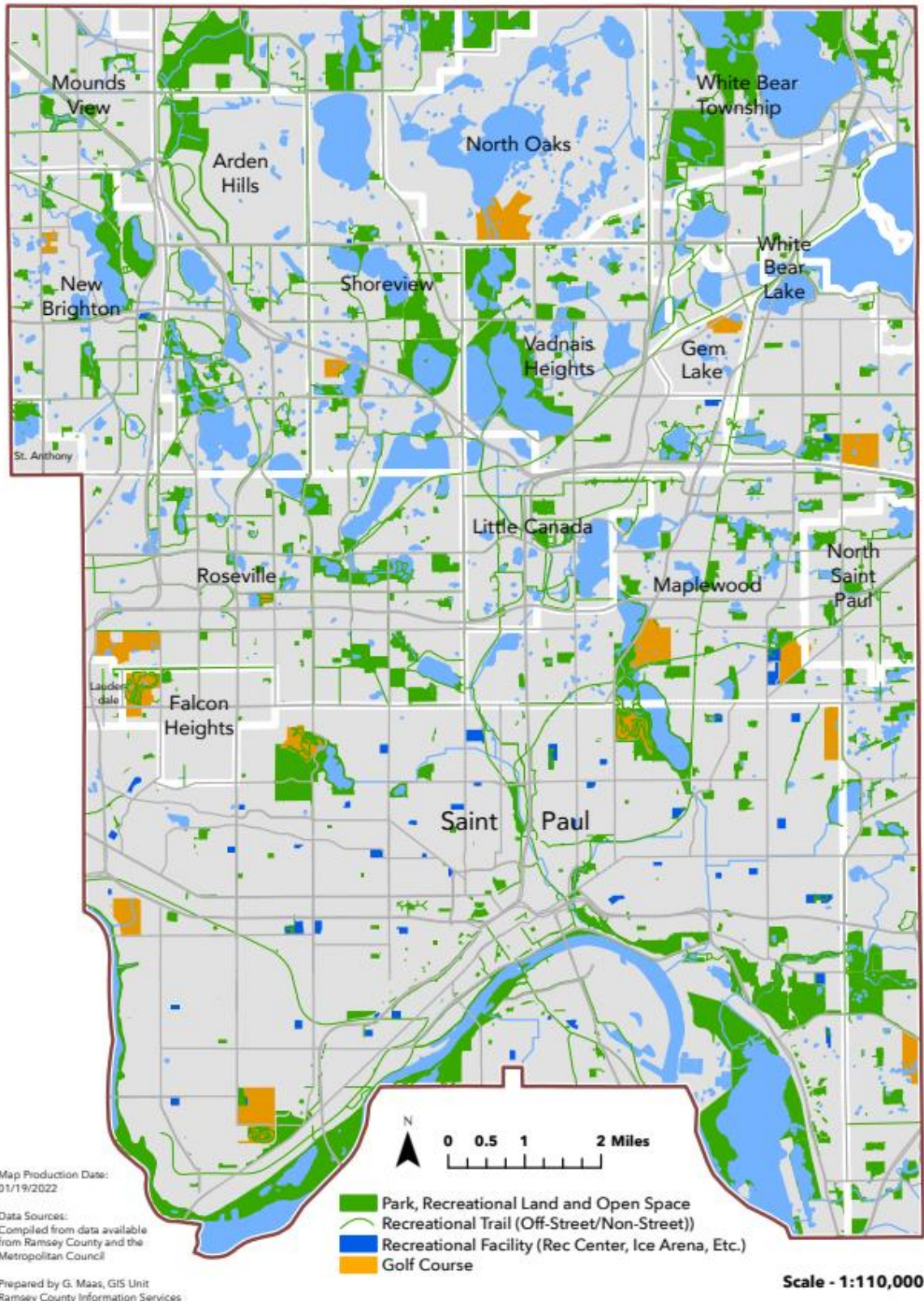
Park, recreational, and open space amenities are not uniformly distributed across the County, rather, they are the results the past and current pattern of urban and suburban development and land use decision making, as well as the result of both past and on-going efforts to maintain and preserve specific natural resources amenities and sites. Table 2 summarizes the various facility types into three succinct categories aligning with what is displayed on Figure 1. These include all park management agencies and interests.

Table 2 – All Park, Recreational and Open Space Lands Summarized by Facility Type

Summarized Facility Type	Acres	Square Miles
Park and Open Space (All)	14237.25	22.25
Golf Course	1783.13	2.79
Ice Arena/Rec Center/Special Use (non-golf)	387.36	0.61
Total	16407.74	25.63

Source: Extracted from current GIS data maintained by Ramsey County Park and Recreation Department and Information Services Department, this table is simply a condensed and summarized version of Table 1 appearing earlier in this report.

Figure 1: Park, Recreational and Open Space Land Resources



Park and open space - management and ownership interests. No single agency controls, manages or maintains all park, recreational and open space lands in Ramsey County; rather, governments at all levels and other interests own, maintain, and manage the various recreational sites. Table 3 below provides a generalized breakdown of the various management interests at work in Ramsey County and the amount of park and recreational land they currently administer.

A variety of legal agreements exist between cities, county government and regional government for shared stewardship, funding, operational activity and maintenance of many parks, trails, and related sites within Ramsey County. The purpose of this report is not to explore the specific and nuanced details of these individual agreements and ownership/management interests, but instead to provide the ‘big picture’ overview of the interrelated nature of park, recreational, and open space land management activity presently occurring.

Table 3 – All Park, Recreational and Open Space Lands by Management Entity

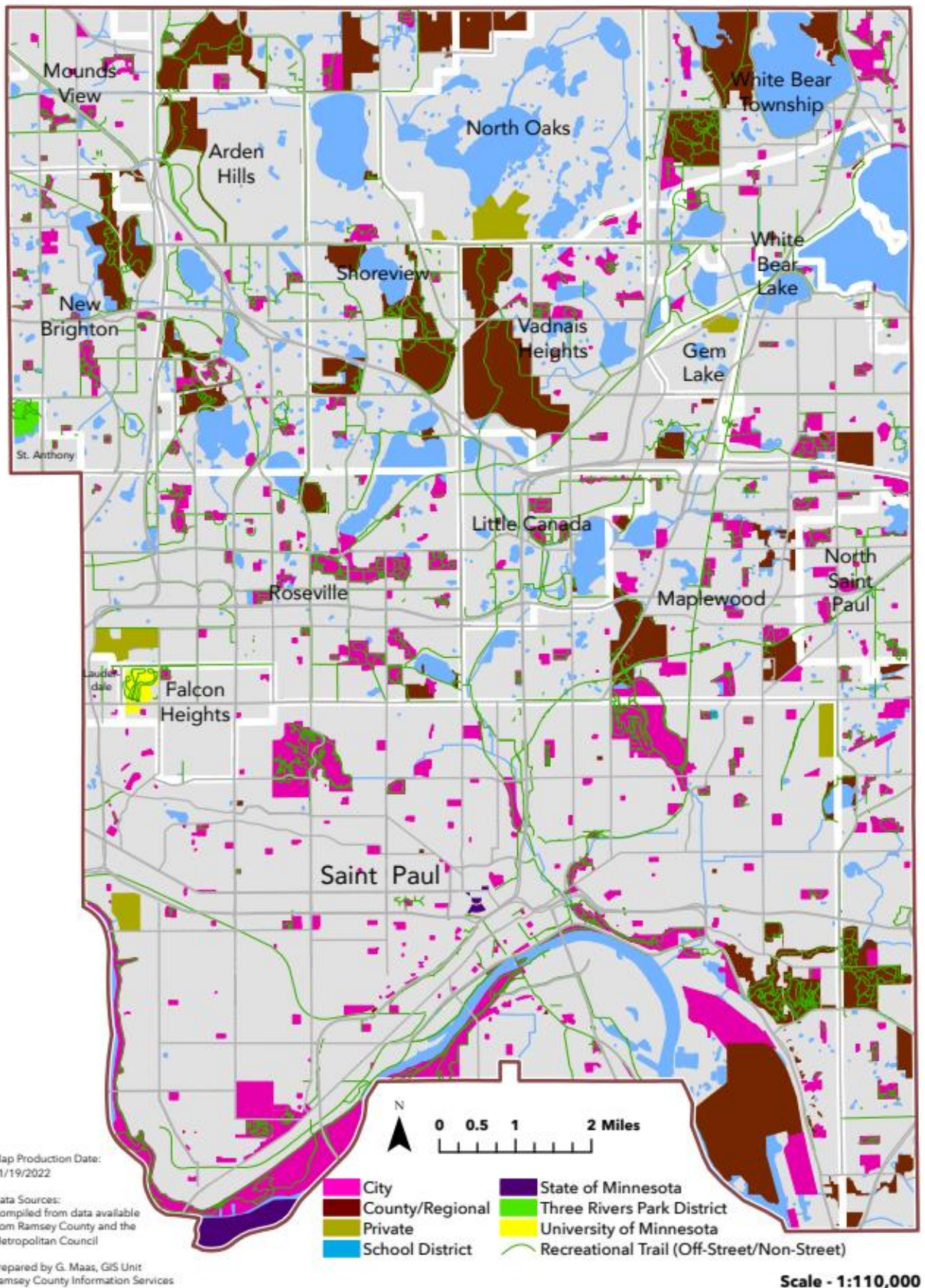
By Management Entity	Acres	Square Miles
County/Regional	7995.94 ^(a)	12.49 ^(a)
City	6929.81 ^(a)	10.83 ^(a)
Private	667.05	1.04
State	536.17	0.84
University of Minnesota	153.39	0.24
Three Rivers Park District	118.09	0.18
School District	7.29	0.01
Total	16407.74	25.64

Source: Extracted from current GIS data maintained by Ramsey County Park and Recreation Department and Information Services Department. (a) these total area figures differ from those in Table 1 due to how the data is categorized between ‘Type’ and ‘Management’, e.g., some parks are City/Regional, some are County/Regional in their management, etc.

Which government entity owns, manages, or maintains a given park or open space site tends to be unknown to the average resident who uses and visits the site. Parks and open spaces are generally perceived by the public as part of the public property they can freely access and enjoy, and which entity (on its own, or acting in collaboration with other entities) manages and maintains is not top of mind for those visiting the park.

Figure 2 is a variation on the Figure 1, differing slightly as it illustrates the generalized landscape of ownership/management interest of park, recreational and open space? lands in Ramsey County. This map is provided to establish the context of the various types of management interests at work in the County. As is shown, city parks (in magenta) tend to be smaller in size; but are spread throughout the extent of the County. County and regional parks (in dark red) tend to be larger and existing primarily in the northern, suburban areas of the County. City parks, while generally smaller in size than county and regional park sites, provide important neighborhood-level recreational amenities. Private sites tend to be associated with golf courses. Other interests, such as the University of Minnesota, Three Rivers Park District and school district lands tend to be either small or ‘one-off’ properties with specific programmatic uses, while the State of Minnesota owns and manages Pike Island (in purple) along the County’s south-western border as part of Fort Snelling State Park at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers.

Figure 2: Park and Recreational Lands by Management Agency



Programmatic maintenance of open space. Ensuring the continued availability of high-quality park, recreation, and open space amenities to the residents within Ramsey County is a shared role of government at all levels. Municipalities can identify and designate their present and desired future park, recreational and open space lands through their land use and comprehensive planning processes. Other agencies which contribute to the maintenance of these resources include the Metropolitan Council the regional government which publishes and maintains the Regional Parks Plan in support of its legislatively mandated role to oversee the acquisition of lands for the development of the regional park and trail system in partnership with city, county, and special park district entities.

Guaranteed Inventory because of “No Net Loss.” In 1994, voters of Ramsey County voted to approve an amendment to Section 2.02.K. of the Home Rule Charter for Ramsey County, which provides as follows:

Before the sale, lease, or disposal of park property for any inconsistent use, the county board shall adopt, by resolution, a policy providing for no net loss of park, recreational or open space land and facilities. At a minimum, the policy shall provide that park, recreational and open space land acquired for such purposes may not be converted to another use unless such land and recreational facilities are replaced in an equivalent amount and of similar quality.

This amendment is commonly referred to as the “No Net Loss” provision. The provision may only be amended or repealed by a ballot question presented to the voters, and that ballot question will be approved only if 51% of the votes cast on the question are in favor of the amendment or repeal.

The provision is generally understood as a limitation on the powers of the County Board to dispose of property that has been acquired by the County for park, recreational and open space purposes. The provision does not apply to any property that is not owned by the County, nor does it apply to any property interest that was acquired by the County for another purpose (e.g., corrections property, office buildings, WIC clinic spaces, roads, or bridges).

Although Ramsey County has occasionally engaged in land swaps with cities or other owners for small parcels to re-purpose park-use acres to a non-park use when it is in the public interest to do so, since 1994, the No Net Loss provision has protected the County’s inventory of parks, trails, open space, and facilities that are maintained by the Parks & Recreation Department, and has guaranteed that that inventory will not decrease.

Part II – Access to Park, Recreational, and Open Space Amenities

Buffering and proximity analysis. To determine where populations may be underserved in access to park, recreational, and open space may be occurring in the county, this study has prepared a very generalized analysis creating a buffer of two-thirds-of-a-mile (*the average time it takes a person to walk 10 minutes*) around all the park and open space sites within the County *excluding* non-park sites such as golf courses, ice arenas and recreational centers. While these non-park recreational sites are still an important part of the fabric of the county's public amenities, these non-park sites were excluded from this study's buffer analysis as they do not provide the same perceived open space environmental experience as those sites with trails, open water, natural vegetation, or, as in the case of golf courses and ice arena, have limited access and tend to be programmatically focused on a single recreational activity. However, this may change as the efforts to implement the 21st Century Park's Vision include extensive community engagement to inform current and future community needs which may impact this assessment.

In summary, the purpose of a generalized buffer analysis is to:

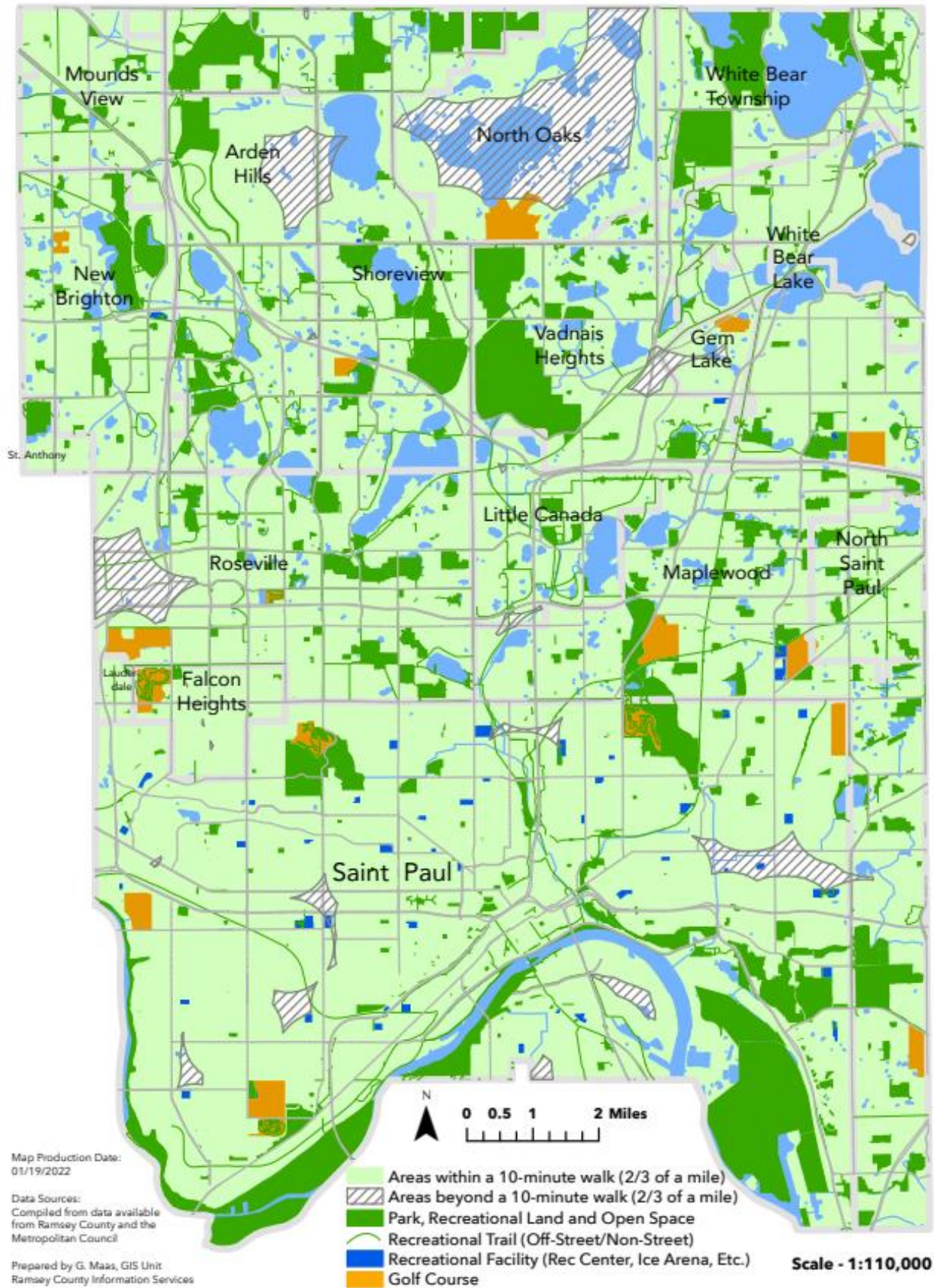
- Determine specifically where 'park deserts' (underserved areas) may be occurring in Ramsey County (areas beyond a 10-minute walk)
- Understand the content (land use, residential density) of each of the 'park desert' areas
- Determine if there are under-utilized lands within these underserved areas that could be identified for future park, recreational or open space use.

A benefit of this buffer analysis is that it can readily display how much of the County is within a 10-minute walk of a recreational amenity. A drawback of this methodology is that it does not fully assess the 'proximity equals access' issue, i.e., just because someone lives within a few blocks of a park, doesn't mean they have immediate access to it, there may be private land, fences, high traffic highways, lack of bike and pedestrian access, etc. between the user and the recreational site.

Figure 3 illustrates the results of the two-thirds-of-a-mile buffer (shown in pale green on the map as covering nearly all of Ramsey County) around all park and open space sites (these being illustrated on the map in medium green).

In summary, of the total 170 square mile territory encompassed by the County, just over 161 square miles of it are within a 10-minute walk of some type of park, trail, or open space amenity. Also, shown on the map are sites beyond the 10-minute walk/ two-thirds-of-a-mile buffer; these are illustrated with a gray diagonal pattern on Figure 3. Granted, this relatively simple 'within a 10-minute walk' buffering technique offers an initial, simplistic modeling approach, and it does not take into consideration nuanced details such as the extent, quality and connectivity of street and sidewalk networks or other on-ground hindrances or barriers to access between parks and park users. However, despite its simplicity, this analysis does serve to indicate the reach and extent of park and open space amenity availability and further illustrates that most areas of Ramsey County are within reasonable proximity to a park or open space site of some kind.

Figure 3: Areas Within a 10-Minute Walk of Park/Open Space



Areas beyond a 10-minute walk. Figure 4 provides a variation of the information shown in Figure 3, by highlighting and displaying the areas of the County that are beyond a 10-minute walk. The buffer analysis performed has revealed a total of nineteen (19) of these sites. For this analysis, these areas beyond a 10-minute walk—termed as ‘park deserts’—in total comprise a total 5197 acres of the County (this being 8.1 square miles or just under 5% of the County’s total area). In the following narrative and maps, these twenty ‘park desert’ sites have each been given an identifying letter (letters A through T) and are ranked according to their size, are listed in Table 4 below corresponding to their appearance on the map of Figure 4. On the map, the sites in the dark red diagonal pattern are above 10 acres in size and are individually described beginning on page 12.

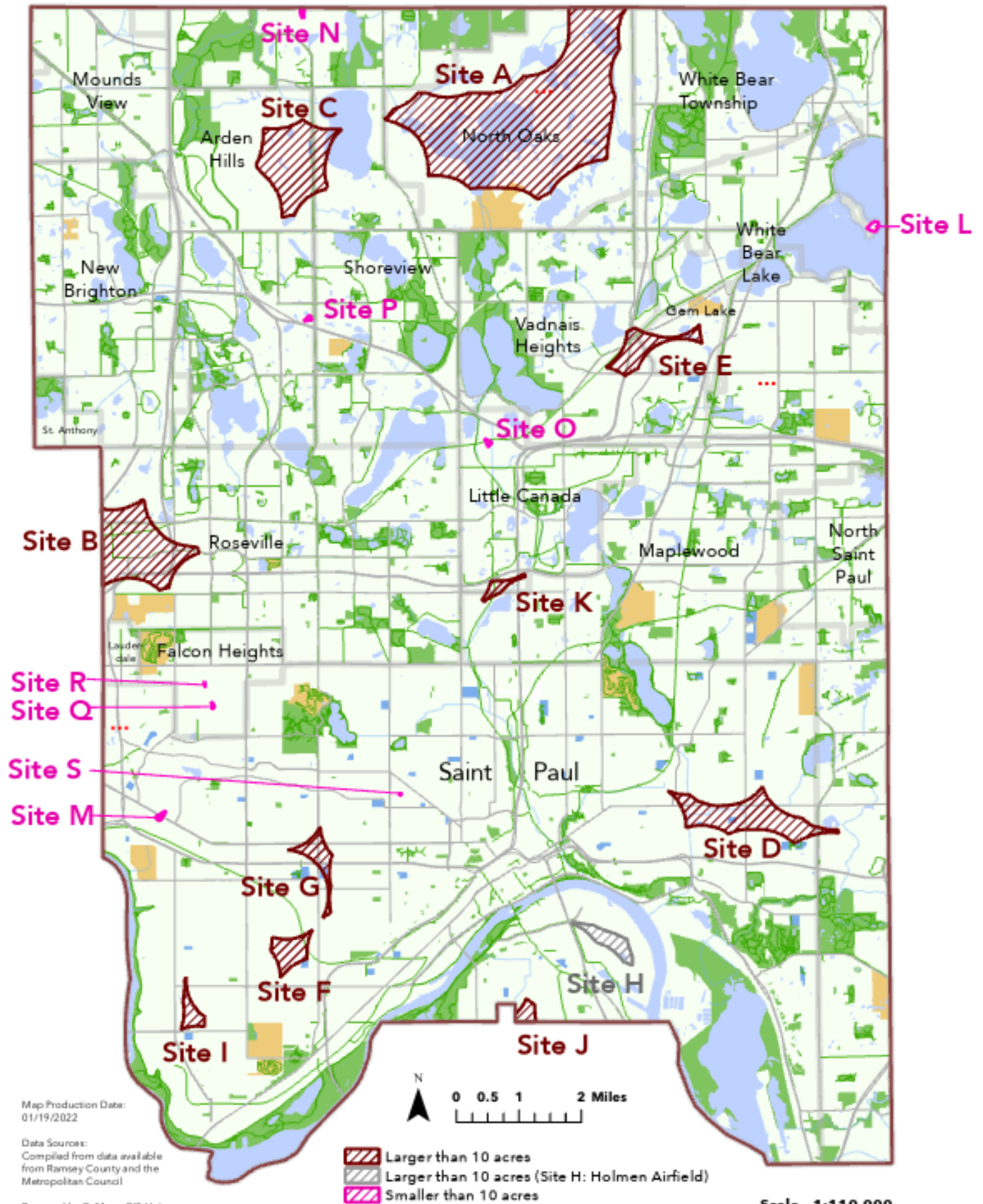
A single site in grey diagonal hash pattern, while also above 10 acres, is located wholly within Holmen Airfield within Saint Paul and as such, is discarded from further examination. The remaining sites, shown in bright pink, are all less than 10 acres in size and tend not to contain many (if any residents). While technically these sites are beyond the 10-minute walk threshold, they can be largely discarded from consideration as true ‘park deserts’.

Table 4 – Areas beyond a 10-minute walk of a park or open space area

Sites more than a minute walk from a park	Acres	Size threshold	Sq. Mi.
Site A - North Oaks	2791.12	Over 10 Acres	4.4
Site B - Western Roseville	629.69	Over 10 Acres	1.0
Site C - Arden Hills	590.91	Over 10 Acres	0.9
Site D - East Saint Paul	445.43	Over 10 Acres	0.7
Site E - Vadnais Heights-Gem Lake	178.61	Over 10 Acres	0.3
Site F - Hamline and Saint Clair in central Saint Paul	121.37	Over 10 Acres	0.2
Site G - Lexington Parkway in central Saint Paul	105.40	Over 10 Acres	0.2
Site H - Holmen Airfield in Saint Paul	101.88	Over 10 Acres	0.2
Site I - Saint Catherine University	61.41	Over 10 Acres	0.1
Site J - Stryker and Wilona in Saint Paul	41.15	Over 10 Acres	0.1
Site K - Highway 36 and I-35E in Little Canada	38.32	Over 10 Acres	0.1
Site L - Manitou Island in White Bear Lake	9.69	Under 10 Acres	0.0
Site M - Vandalia and University	5.44	Under 10 Acres	0.0
Site N - Dellwood Avenue in Shoreview	4.25	Under 10 Acres	0.0
Site O - Ryan Drive in Little Canada	3.47	Under 10 Acres	0.0
Site P - Lexington and I-694	3.20	Under 10 Acres	0.0
Site Q - U of M Parking Lot in Falcon Heights	1.44	Under 10 Acres	0.0
Site R - U of M Farm in Falcon Heights	0.73	Under 10 Acres	0.0
Site S - BNSF Property in Saint Paul	0.40	Under 10 Acres	0.0
Total	5197.68		8.1

Source: Extracted from current GIS data maintained by Ramsey County Park and Recreation Department and Information Services Department.

Figure 4: Areas Beyond 10-minute walk from existing Park/Open Space



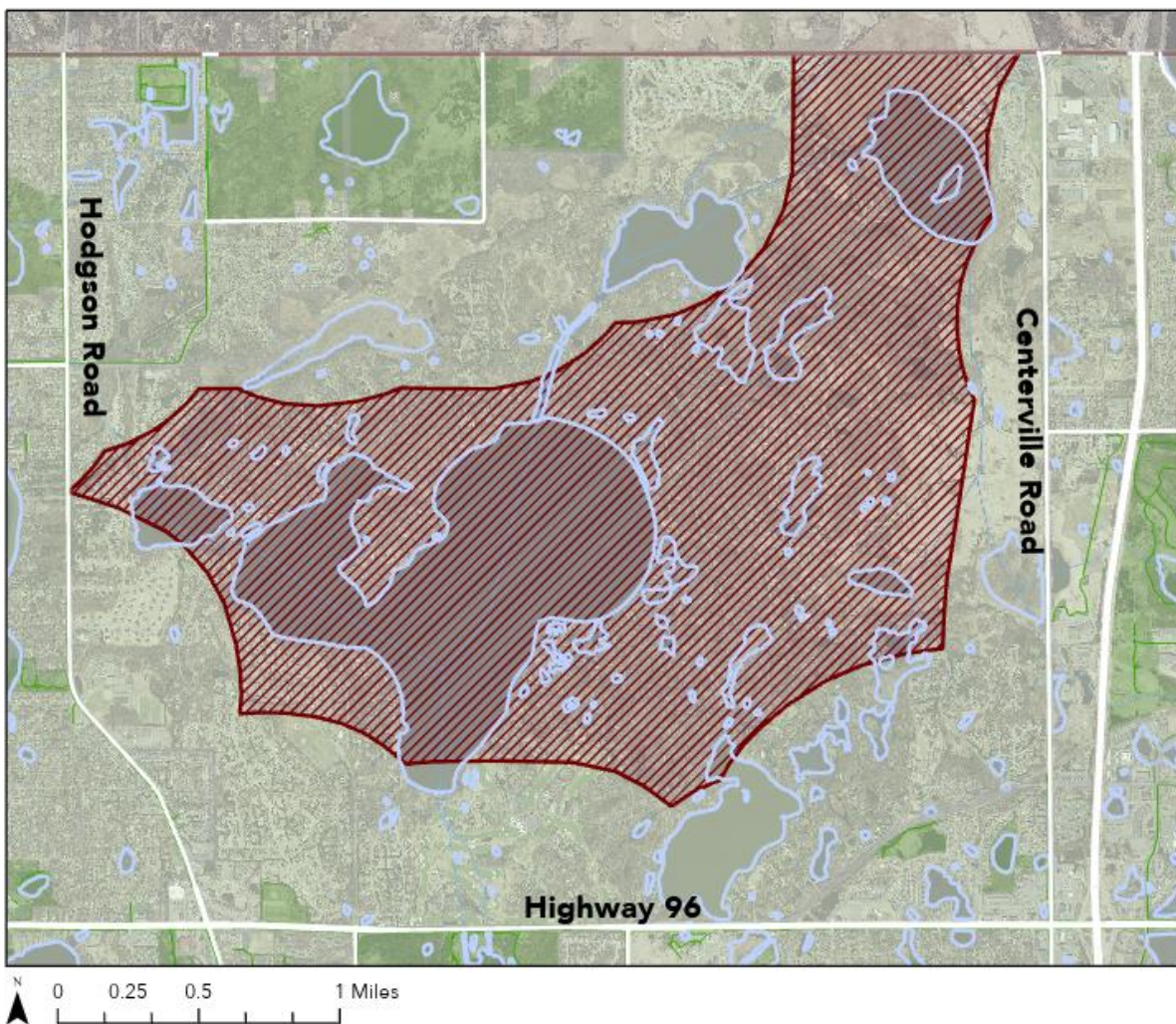
'Park Desert' Summaries:

The following section provides a short description and contextual map of the key 'park desert' areas of the analysis which are over 10 acres in size.

Site A – North Oaks

The Site A 'park desert' revealed by our buffer analysis encompasses over 2,970 acre of land all within the City of North Oaks. North Oaks is functionally a 'gated community' enclave as all roads in the city are in private ownership and access to the area is generally limited other than to residents and those authorized to enter. North Oaks does have various park amenities available to its residents, but the lands are in private ownership and not available to the public. North Oaks is set up as a generally low-impact cluster suburban-style development intended to maximize open space for its residents. As these lands are in private ownership and look to remain so for the foreseeable future this area can be considered 'fully developed property' as articulated in the definitions on page 3.

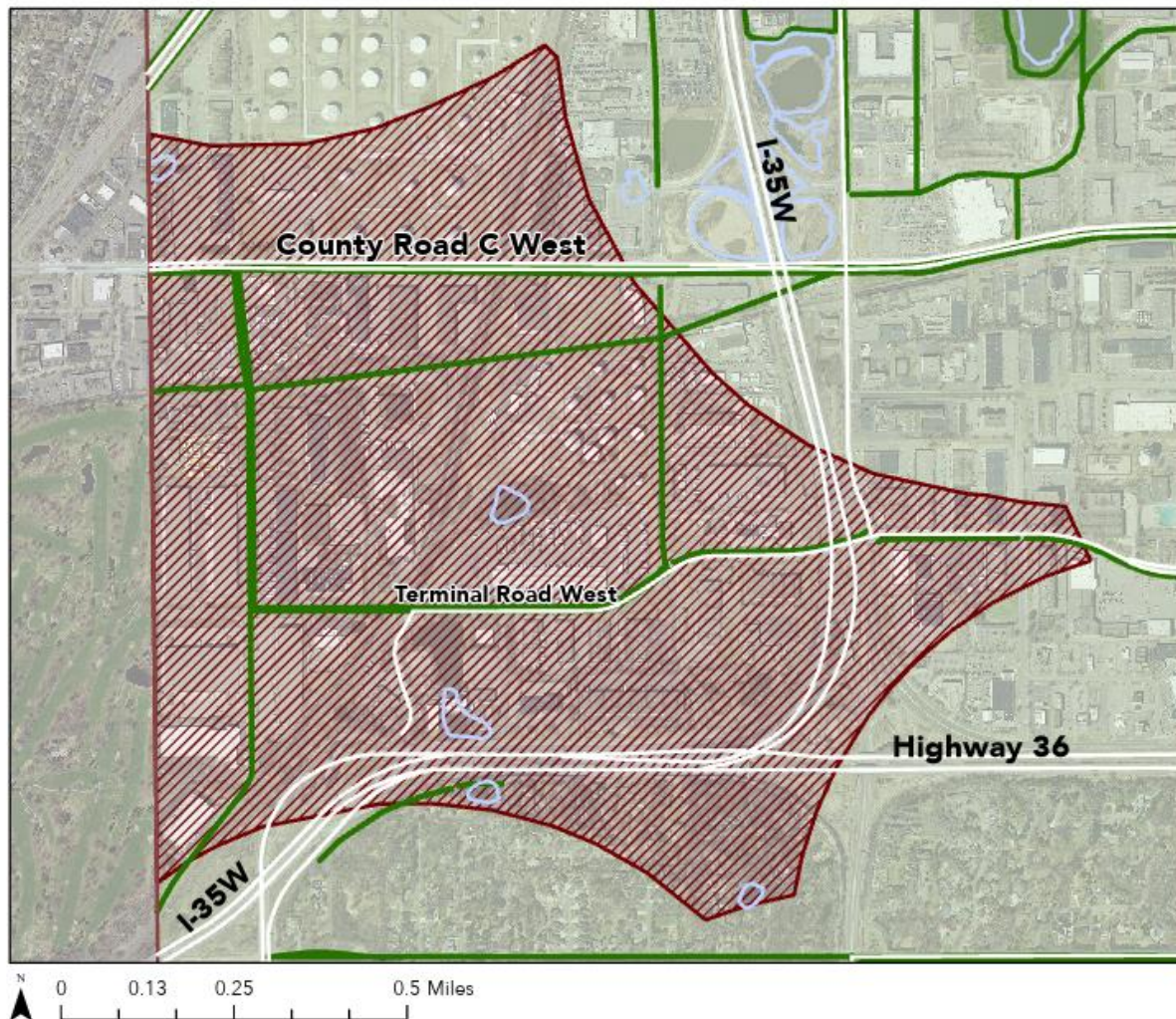
Site A: North Oaks



Site B – Western Roseville

Site 'B' located on the county's western boundary with Hennepin County in the City of Roseville encompasses 629 acres and is characterized by its predominantly non-residential uses, being instead in commercial and industrial uses. Of note a small suburban residential area containing just over two dozen single-family homes is within this site just south of Highway 36. The land here is nearly fully developed with limited opportunity for any new park or open space development, however numerous multi-purpose trails and marked bikeable shoulders along roadways (shown in green) are in place and could be leveraged to connect the site to other existing park and open space amenities. As per the definitions on page 3, most of this site can be categorized as 'fully developed property', however finding ways to leverage the trail networks and the marked/shouldered bicycle lanes might be an appropriate focus for this area in connecting it to other open space sites.

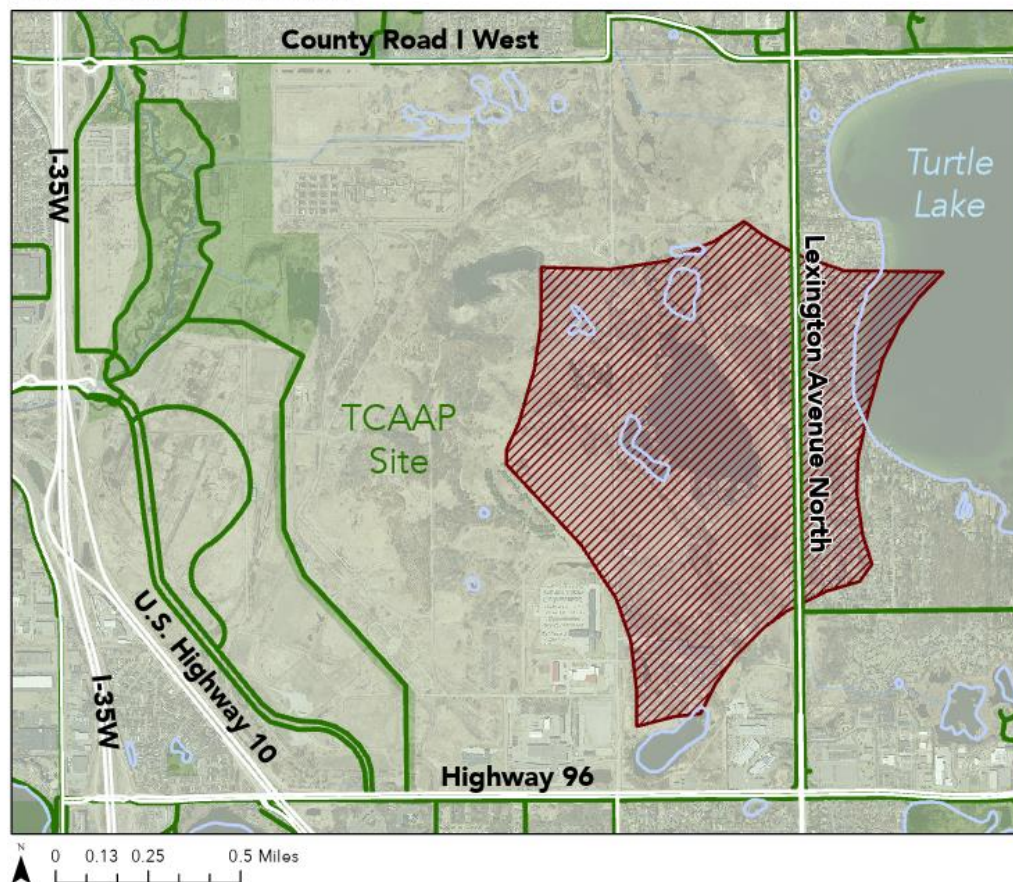
Site B: Western Roseville



Site C – Arden Hills/Shoreview

Site C encompasses just over 590 acres, mostly within the City of Arden Hills, primarily within the Arden Hills Army Training Site (AHATS), which is owned and managed by the federal government, and without public access. Ramsey County owns Rice Creek Commons land and the Rice Creek North Trail Corridor land to the west. A small portion of the 'park desert' site is found on the eastern side of Lexington Avenue North within the City of Shoreview; in a residential area with approximately 50 single-family homes. Lexington Avenue forms the boundary between the cities of Arden Hills and Shoreview and without established pedestrian crossings, forms a barrier for safe foot travel between the residential areas and the AHATS lands. On the map below, the area in the red diagonal pattern represents the 'park desert' in context with the rest of the remaining AHATS site. The county does have a special recreation feature located in this area known as the Marsden Archery Range; additionally, there is an adjacent Wildlife Viewing Area. The Archery Range can be legitimately classified as open space recreational amenity, but it does not have the standard set of recreational amenities comparable to other park areas due to the specific recreational use that it supports. Unlike any other site examined in this study, this site has the most potential for park or open space development as it remains largely undeveloped; despite potentially needing remediation, planning and other pre-development due diligence, and resolving potential access issues with the federal government. This site can be broadly thought of as 'underutilized property', with significant dedicated open space potential in the future. Trail networks, combined with pedestrian and bike access bike shoulders on the west side of Lexington Avenue offer potential for future connectivity.

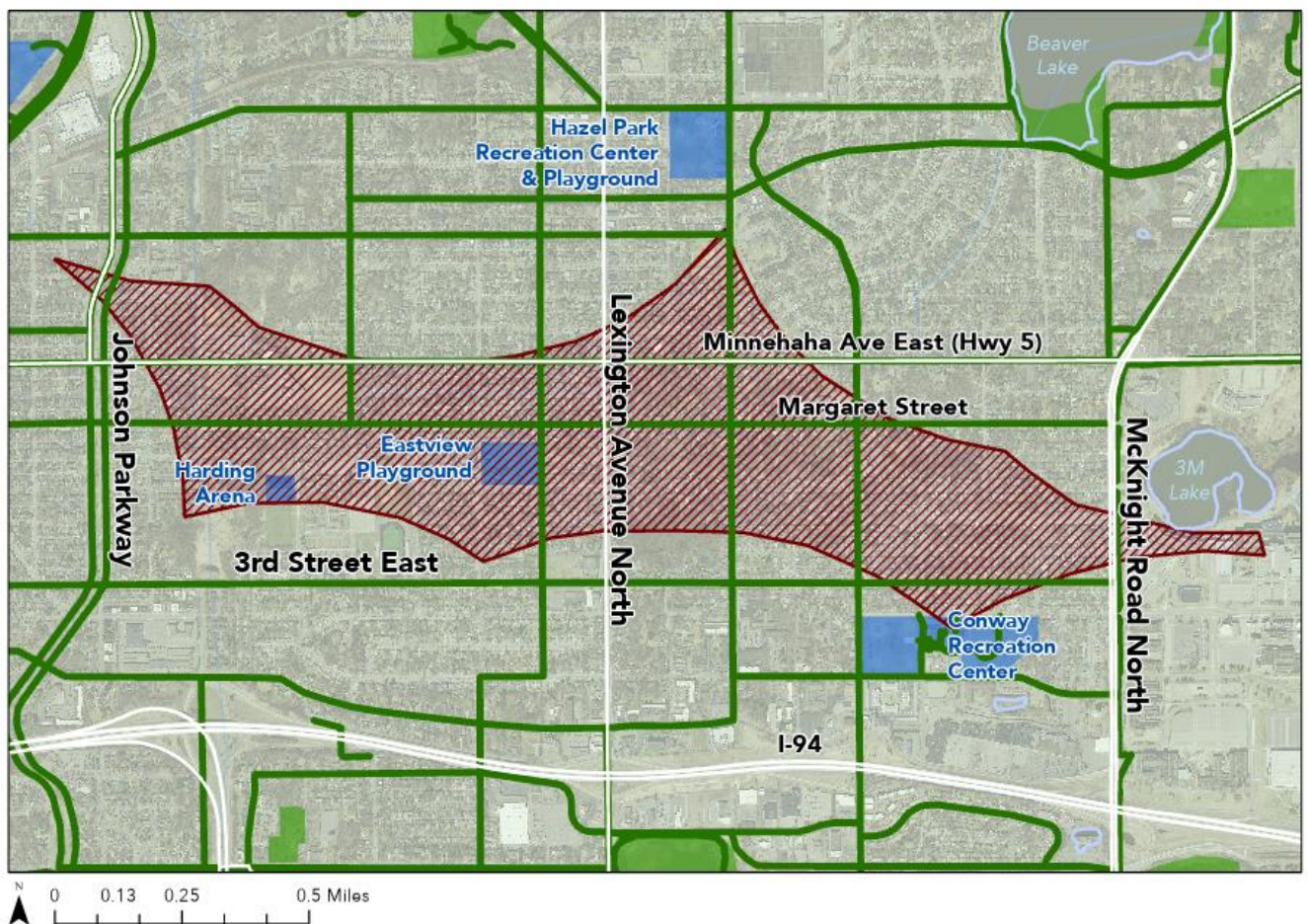
Site C: Arden Hills



Site D – East Saint Paul

Site D encompasses just over 445 acres, running generally along the east-west axis of Margaret Street between Minnehaha Avenue (to the north) and 3rd Street East (to the south) in eastern Saint Paul. This site contains the expected traits of a core urbanized area: many small residential lots within a gridded street network and some mixed-use activity throughout. While this site is beyond the 10-minute walking distance of several nearby dedicated parks and open spaces, it is still well served by other recreational resources within and near to the area, namely Harding Arena and its adjacent open field (used for outdoor skating rinks in winter), Hazel Park and Recreation Center, the Conway Recreation Center and Eastview Playground and the schools in the vicinity which have playgrounds and outdoor recreational space available. Shouldered streets for biking and bike lanes on established roadways (shown in green) provide further connectivity between the site and nearby recreational amenities.

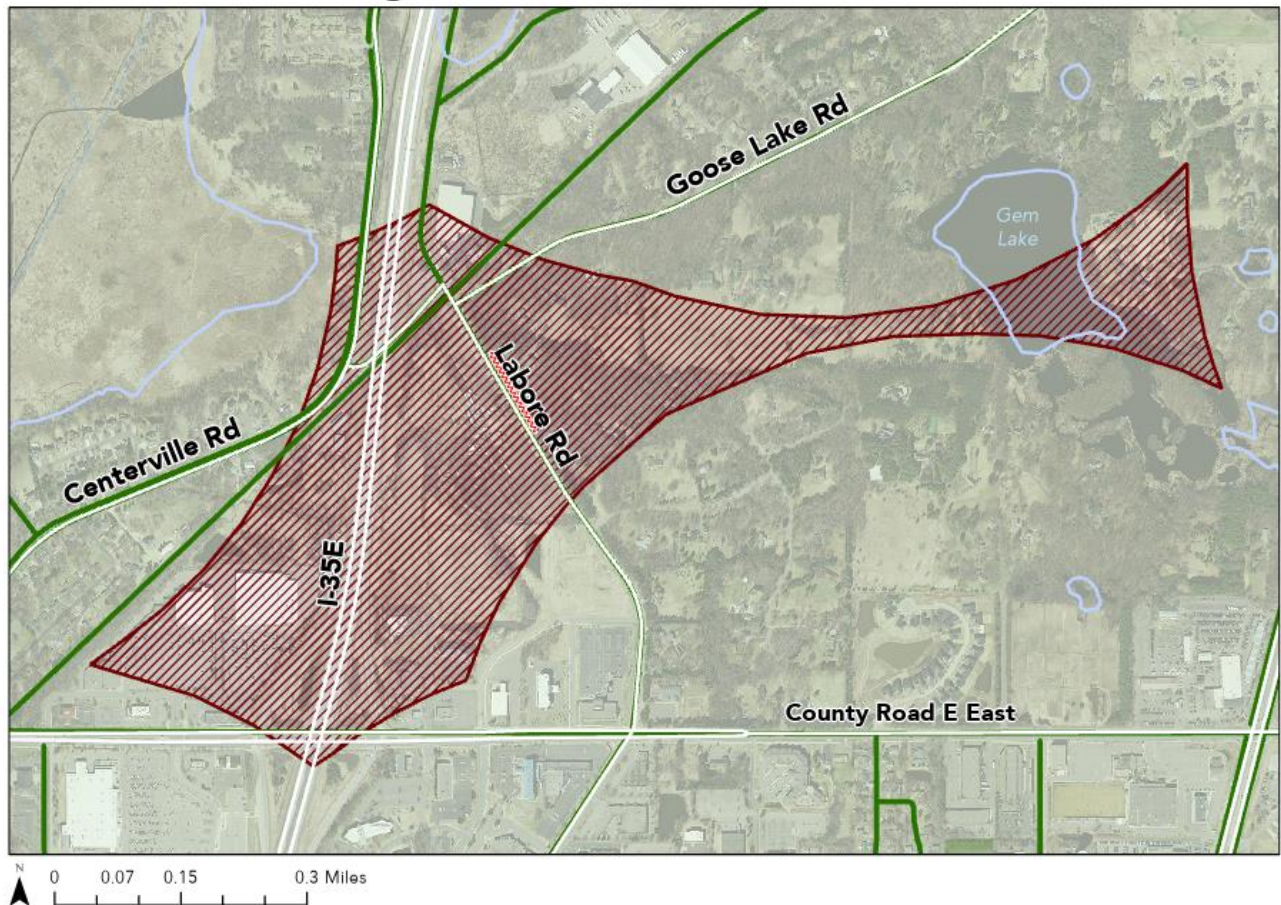
Site D: East Saint Paul



Site E – Vadnais Heights

Site E encompasses just over 178.61 acres, running generally east-to-west from the intersection of I-35E and County Road E East in Vadnais Heights eastward into the City of Gem Lake. The area can be generally characterized as low density suburban residential (eastern arm of site) with intensive commercial activity north of the intersection of I-35E and County Road E in the remainder of the site. This area has limited potential for new open space or park creation opportunity due to the existing land use, commitments of land to the roadways, adjacent wetlands, and large-lot residential land use in Gem Lake. There might be limited opportunities for carving out some modest sized parcels of land for park and open space use. As per our definitions, we would appropriately term this site as fully developed property. In the long-term there may be select parcels within this site for open space use, but this completely dependent upon the land use decisions of the City of Vadnais Heights and Gem Lake.

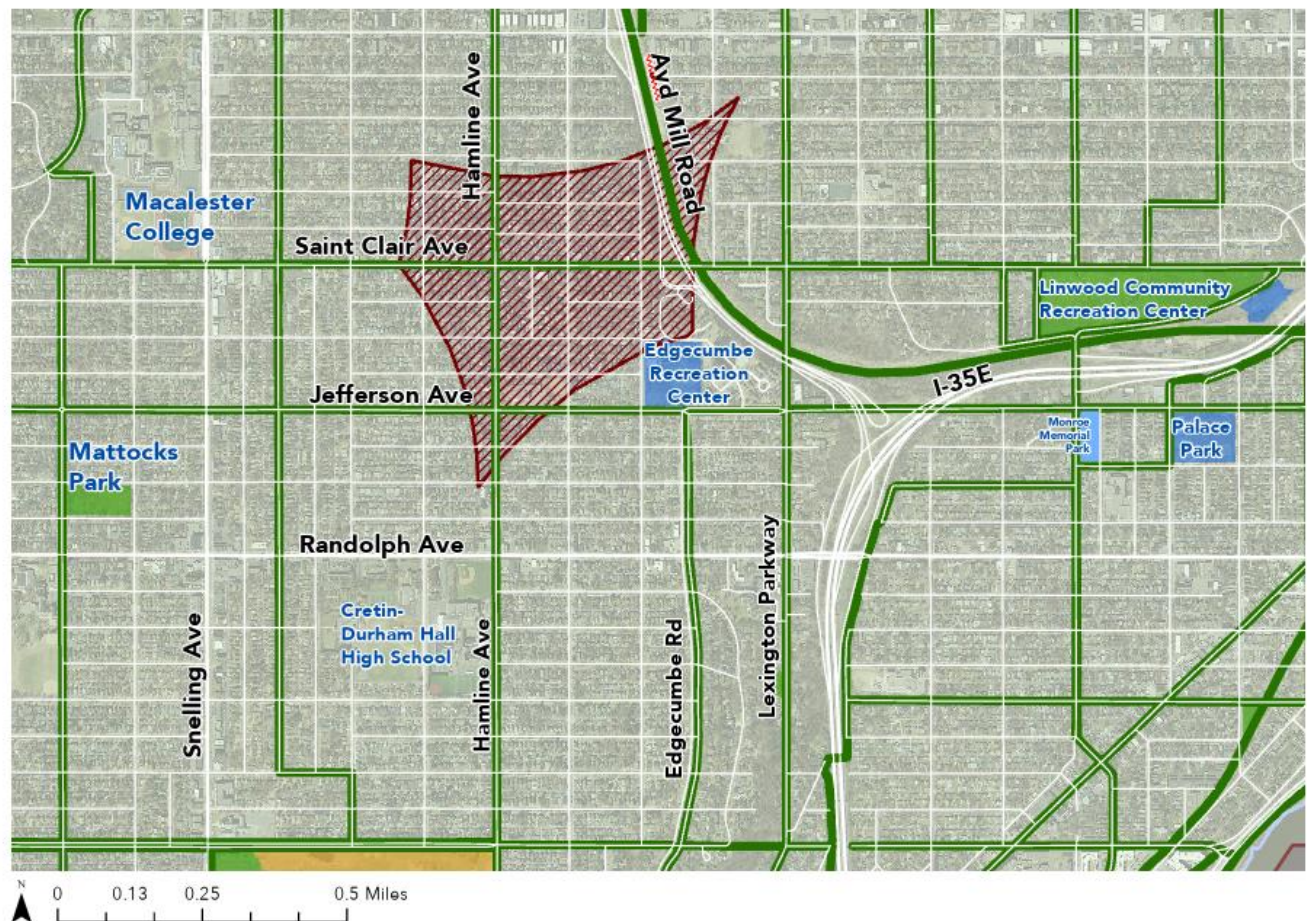
Site E: Vadnais Heights



Site F – Hamline and Saint Clair

Site F encompasses just over 120 acres and is generally centered upon the intersections of Hamline and Saint Clair within the City of Saint Paul. The site contains a landscape typical of a developed, high-density residential neighborhood. Nearby dedicated park and open space amenities include the Edgecumbe Recreation Center, Linwood Community Recreation Center and Mattocks Park. The campuses of Macalester College and Cretin-Durham Hall High School offer informal open space within this urban environment. As might be expected in this kind of environment there is an extensive network of shouldered streets for biking and bike lanes on established roadways (shown in green) providing further connectivity between the site and nearby recreational amenities.

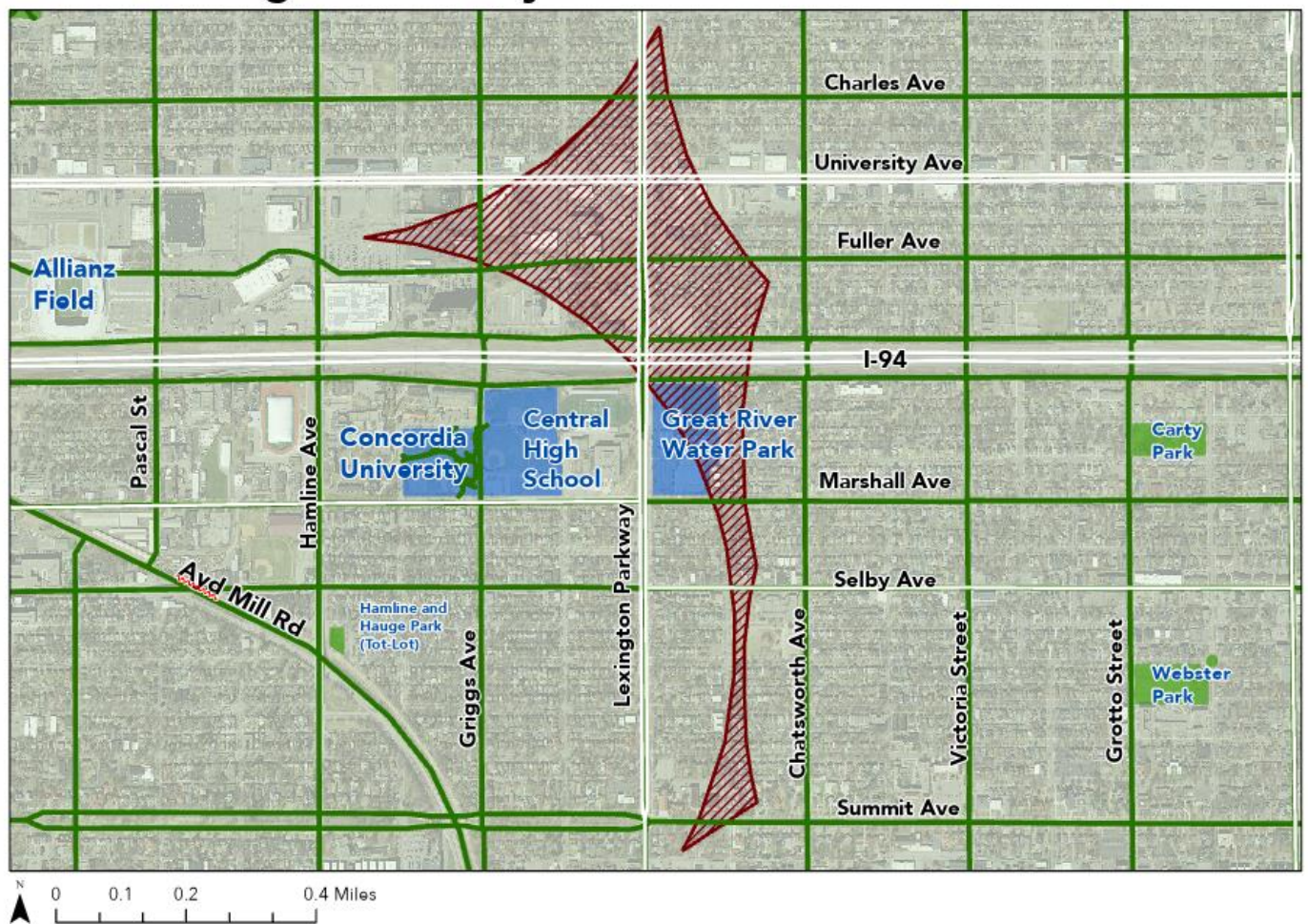
Site F: Hamline and Saint Clair



Site G – Lexington Parkway

Site G is just over 105 acres, running north and south along Lexington Parkway in Saint Paul. The site spans across both sides of I-94 and contains a landscape typical of a developed, high-density residential neighborhood. The area is adjacent to both Concordia University, Central High School, and the Great River Waterpark. Within the area are dedicated park and open space amenities including Carty Park, Webster Park and the Hamline and Hauge Park (Tot-Lot). There is an extensive network of shouldered streets for biking and bike lanes on established roadways (shown in green) these include some additional off-road trail segments however, I-94 is a significant barrier (crossing only possible where overpass bridges are present). Como Regional Park, a large open space amenity is located approximately one mile north of this site.

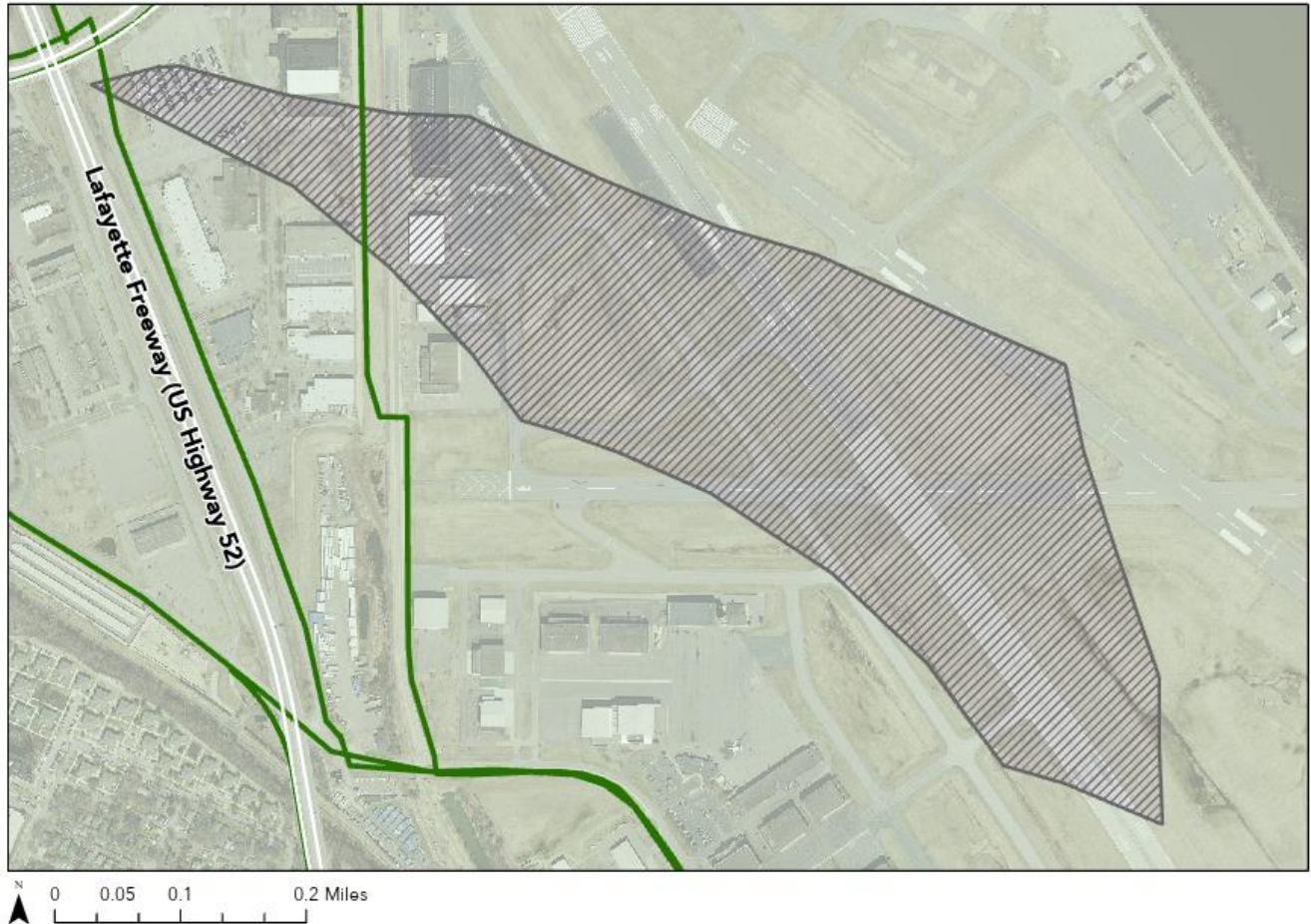
Site G: Lexington Parkway



Site H – Holmen Airfield

The Site H 'park desert' occurs entirely within the Holman Airfield site in Saint Paul. As this site is already dedicated to exclusive use by the airfield, it can be discarded from analysis and consideration from this study.

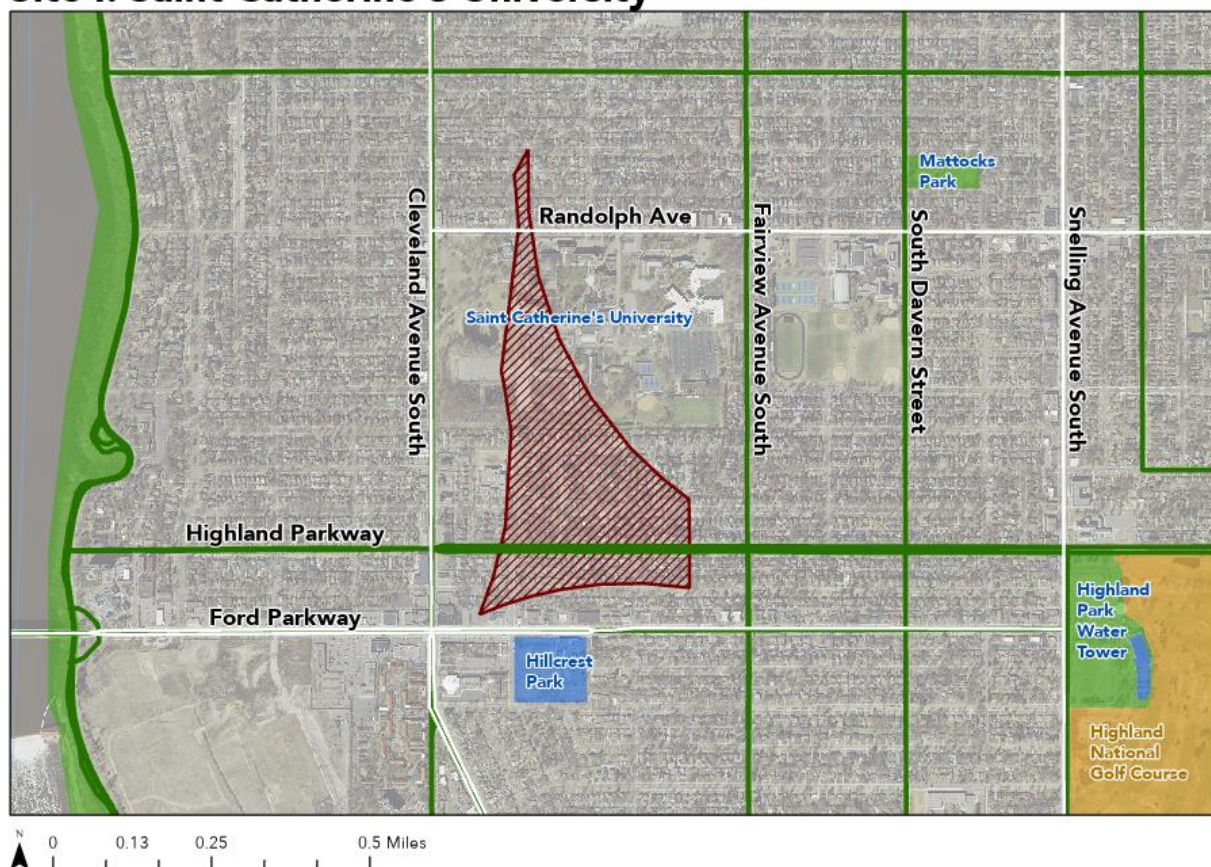
Site H: Holmen Airfield



Site I – Saint Catherine’s University

Site I is just over 60 acres running a north-south course through Saint Catherine’s University and the adjoining neighborhood to the south, nearly reaching Ford Parkway. The site contains a landscape typical of a developed, high-density residential neighborhood. Nearby areas containing dedicated park and open space amenities include Mattocks Park, the land around the Highland Park Water Tower, Hidden Falls Regional Park (along the Mississippi River) and Hillcrest Park (primarily dedicated to sports fields). As with other similar neighborhoods in Saint Paul, there is an extensive network of shouldered streets for biking and bike lanes on established roadways (shown in green), including an off-road trail aligned with Cleveland Avenue. Of note, the Highland Bridge area (formerly Ford Site), southeast of this location has multiple planned parks and recreational amenities. when fully developed.

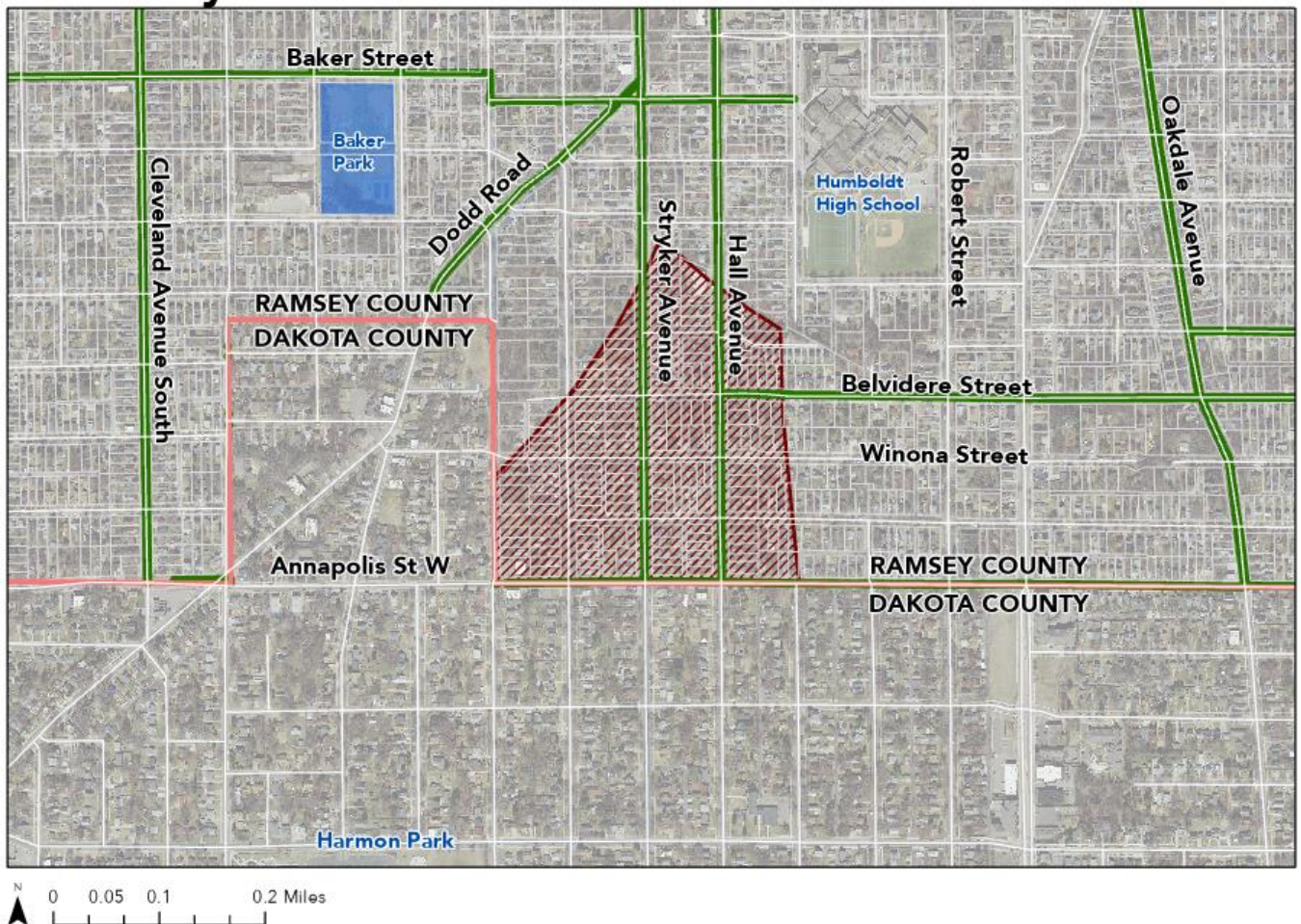
Site I: Saint Catherine's University



Site J – Stryker and Wilona

Site J is just over 40 acres and is tucked along the Ramsey County-Dakota County border in a medium/high density single-family home urban residential neighborhood. Nearby areas lands with park/open space amenities include Baker Park (ball fields and tennis course), Humboldt High School and Harmon Park in West Saint Paul (in Dakota County). As with other similar neighborhoods in urban areas, there is a network of shouldered streets for biking and bike lanes on established roadways (shown in green).

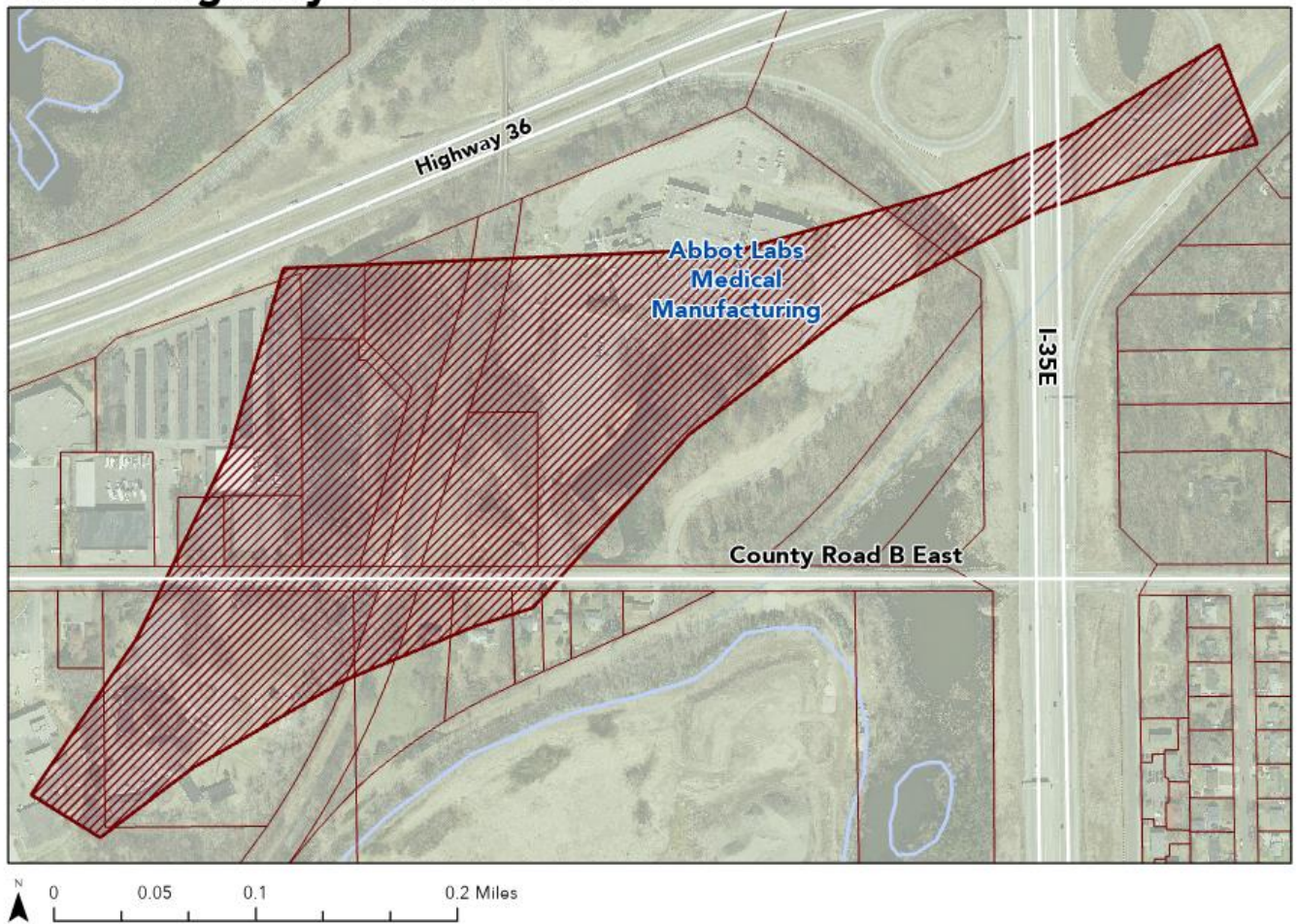
Site J: Stryker and Wilona



Site K – Highway 36 and I-35E

Site K is just under 40 acres located southwest of the interchange between I-35E and Highway 36. This site is predominated by the Abbot Labs manufacturing center and other commercial concerns. Roadways adjacent to the site have bikeable shoulders and there is a potential north expansion route to the Trout Brook Regional Trail that could potentially go through this area.

Site K: Highway 36 and I-35E



‘Park Desert’ Summaries – Small Remnant Areas

The following section provides a short description of each of the ‘park desert’ areas which were revealed by our buffer analysis as more than 10-minutes (2/3rds of a mile) from an existing park or open space amenity but are less than 10 acres and—as will be illustrated—are thinly inhabited or uninhabited. The following sites are shown as **magenta** on Figure 4.

These generally lack the location, size, or context to be considered consequential for consideration for open space development or trail connectivity. Each site is described briefly below.



Site L – Manitou Island

Site L is just over 9 acres, is located on the end of Manitou Island on White Bear Lake. The site is low density residential and given the access to lakefront property of the residents at the site, it would not be a site of concern as a park desert.



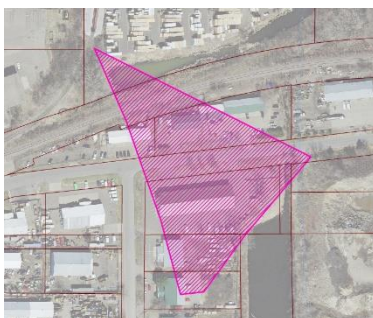
Site M – Vandalia and University

Site M is just over 5 acres located near the intersection of Vandalia and University in Saint Paul. This site is entirely urban commercial (no residents).



Site N – Dellwood Avenue

Site N is just over 4 acres in the City of Shoreview on the south side of the Ramsey-Anoka County border. The site encompasses eight single family homes in a suburban neighborhood.



Site O – Ryan Drive Site

Site O is just over 3 acres, located in an industrial/warehouse district along Ryan Drive in Little Canada; there are no residents in the area.



Site P – Lexington and I-694

Site P is just over 3 acres is located on a wooded wetland owned by the Land O' Lakes in the City of Arden Hills; there are no residents in the area.



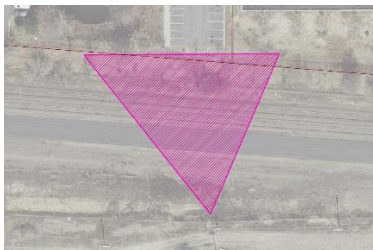
Site Q – State Fairgrounds Parking Lot

Site Q is a 1.4-acre site within a parking lot at the State Fairgrounds in Falcon Heights.



Site R – University of Minnesota agricultural lands

Site R is just under $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre and is in the agricultural lands of the University of Minnesota Saint Paul campus.



Site S – BNSF Right of Way

Site S is 0.4-acres and located in the Burlington Norther Santa Fe Railroad right of way adjacent to the Great Northern Business Center (approximately 750 feet west of Dale Street) in the City of Saint Paul.

In summary, these sites are of little consequence for analysis of potential access to existing park and open space sites or consideration of new park and open space development.

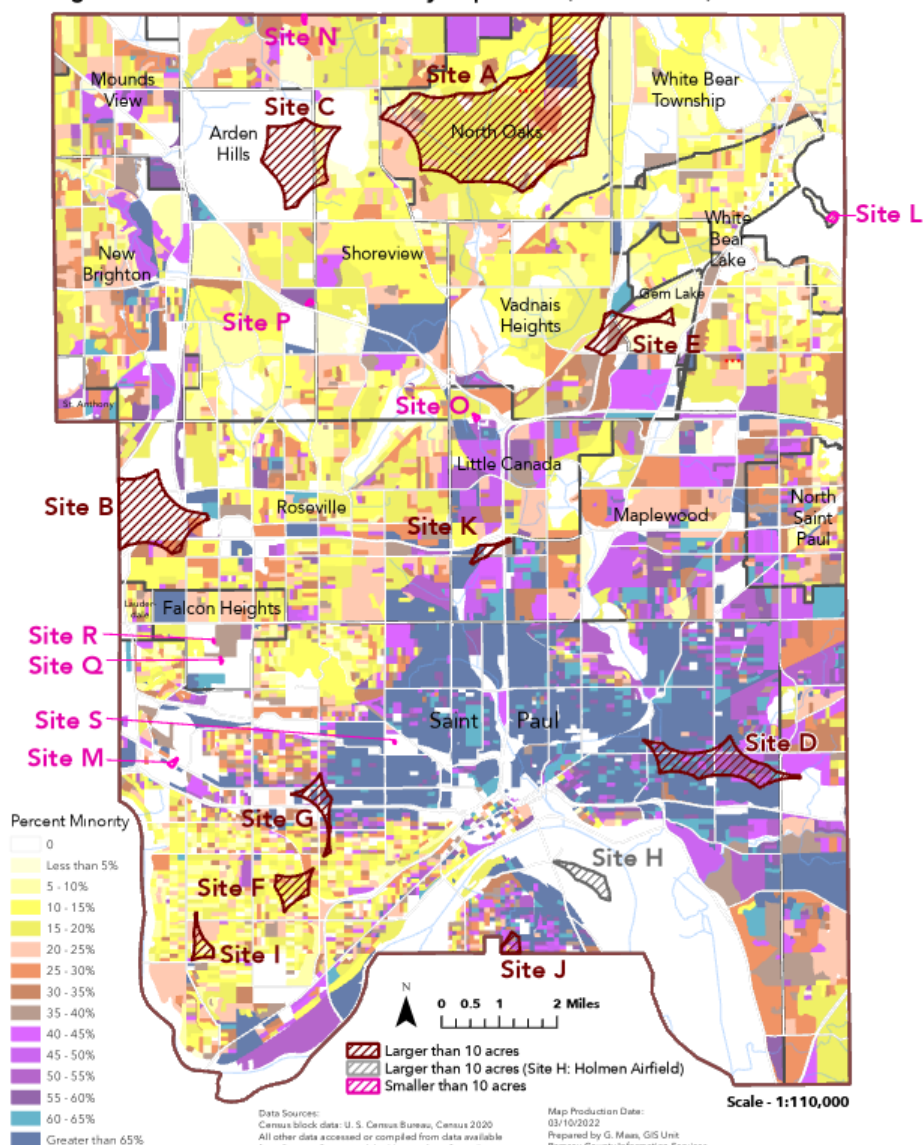
Demographic Analysis

Figure 5 illustrates the ‘park desert’ sites in context with Census 2020 block-level data showing concentrations of racially and ethnically diverse populations in increments of five percent by Census block.

As significant guiding principle of Ramsey County is supporting and advancing the goals of racial equity. As such, this analysis can help reveal where ‘park deserts’ appear in within the County’s current demographic context.

As the map shows, the most significant concentrations of diverse populations are found in central, north, and east Saint Paul and portions of adjacent cities. If the County is interested in expanding park and open space amenities in racially and ethnically diverse communities, coordination and collaboration with City of Saint Paul and community partners will be needed to address the assumed needs for open space at Sites D, G, and J.

Figure 5: ‘Park Deserts’ and Minority Population (Census 2020)



Short term solutions might focus on identifying which immediate trail, bike and walking paths within these areas can be improved, enhanced, or extended or identifying which existing park and open space sites can be enhanced to meet community needs. Longer-term solutions may include identification of specific properties for park space expansion or corridors for enhanced trail, bikeway, or walkway creation. An additional useful approach would be direct engagement with the residents and neighborhood groups in Sites D, G and J to determine what kinds of recreational amenities they value and desire and how these desires are aligned with present county and city recreational development plans and goals.

Meeting residents’ needs for recreational space is an on-going challenge, entailing the alignment of available resource choices with a strong understanding of the desired recreation amenities voiced by the community. The following pages outline summaries about the study and future potential directions.

Residential Proximity Analysis

Figure 6A below illustrates all current publicly available park, recreational, open space and preserve lands (in green) in context of all residential lands (in coral). The residential lands shown include all multi-family housing (apartments), single family residential areas, mobile home parks and mixed-use residential areas. Residential land uses encompass 75.7 square miles (44.5%) of Ramsey County.

Figure 6A: All Residential Land and Park/Open Space Land

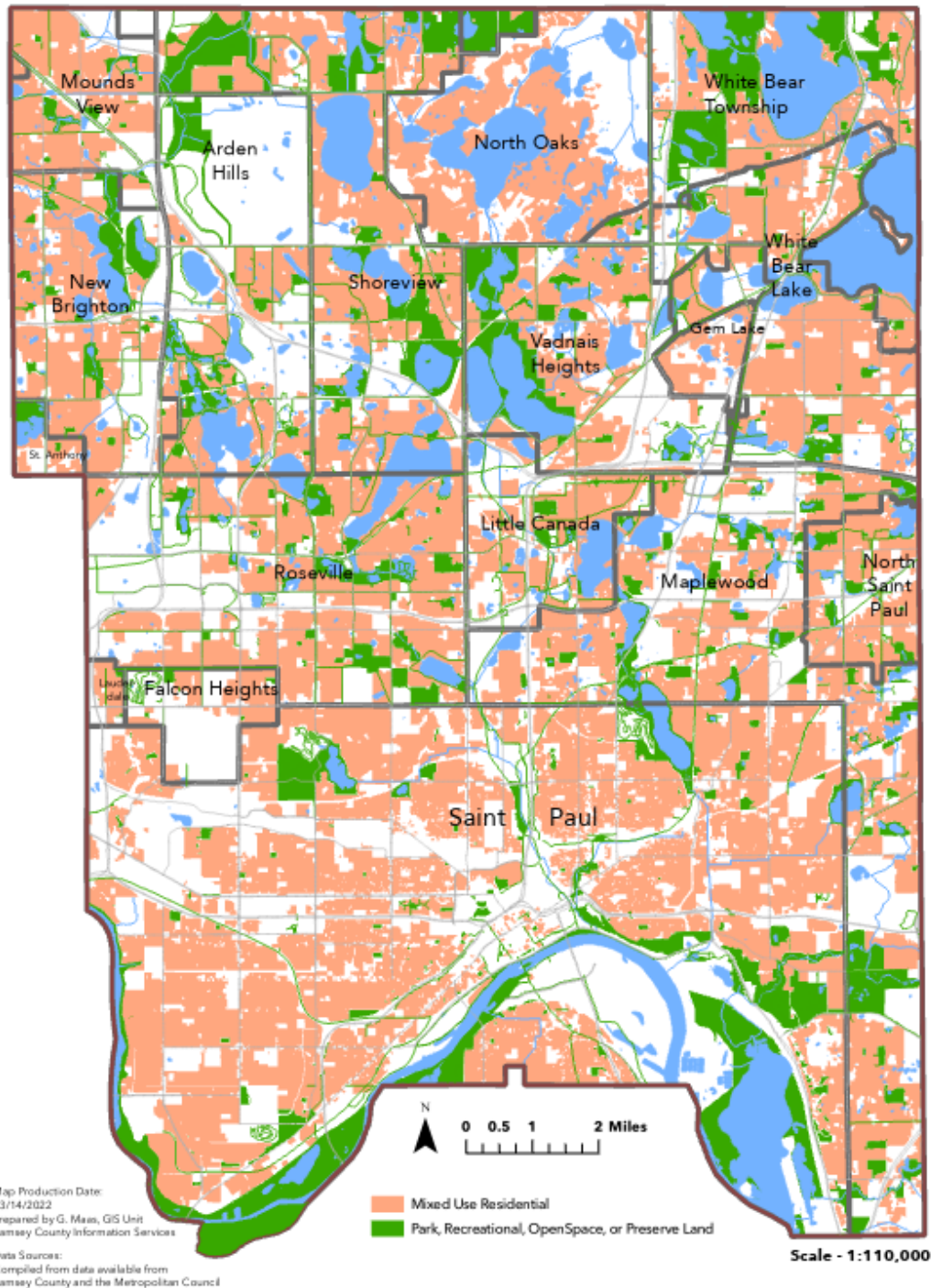


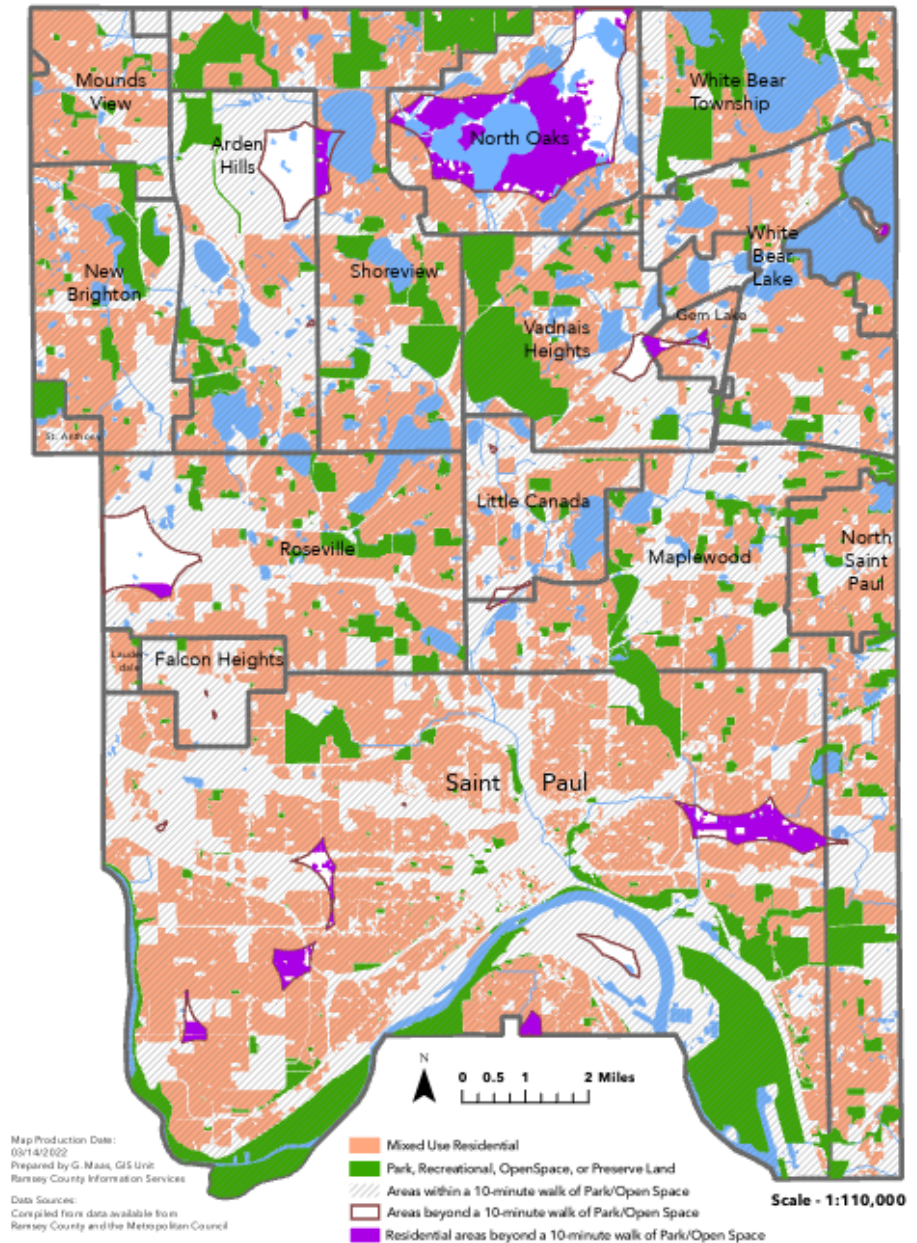
Figure 6B at right illustrates the same open space and residential coverage as Figure 6A on the prior page, with the addition of a buffer zone of 2/3rds of a mile (10-minute walking distance) from park/open space lands (shown in a light gray diagonal pattern).

The areas outlined in **dark red** are those beyond the 10-minute walking distance threshold and within these areas the sites shown in **purple** are specifically residential.

The encouraging message that this map displays is that **less than 2% of residential land in Ramsey County is more than a 10-minute walk (2/3rd of a mile) from some type of open space resource.**

The table at the bottom of the page lists the context of each of the categories described above.

Figure 6B: All Residential Land and Park/Open Space Land



	Square Miles	Acres	Percent of County
Ramsey County	170.0	108,800.0	100.0%
All Residential Lands	75.7	48,430.9	44.5%
All Residential Lands >10-minute walk from open space	3.1	1,972.7	1.8%

Part III – Under-Utilized Properties in Ramsey County ownership

In Part I of this study, ‘underutilized property’ is defined as ‘*parcels, buildings or facilities that are not used at their full capacity or below their proscribed use, including land that could be repurposed or preserved for recreational, aesthetic, conservation, or other development purposes.*’

In a highly developed and highly urbanized county such as Ramsey County, determining which County-held/County-owned lands are underutilized is beneficial for placement of new development and re-use opportunities, including open space, but also potential commercial, residential, or institutional needs where needed, and as their surround context supports these uses.

Determination and definition of under-utilized property within the County include:

- Determining which parcels Ramsey County and its constituent departments own (e.g., where the County holds title to the land)
- Determining what kinds of existing uses are presently in place on these parcels
- Working with leadership within these departments who own and control these parcels to determine which lands they would classify as ‘under-utilized’
- Inventory these parcels and display them on a map.

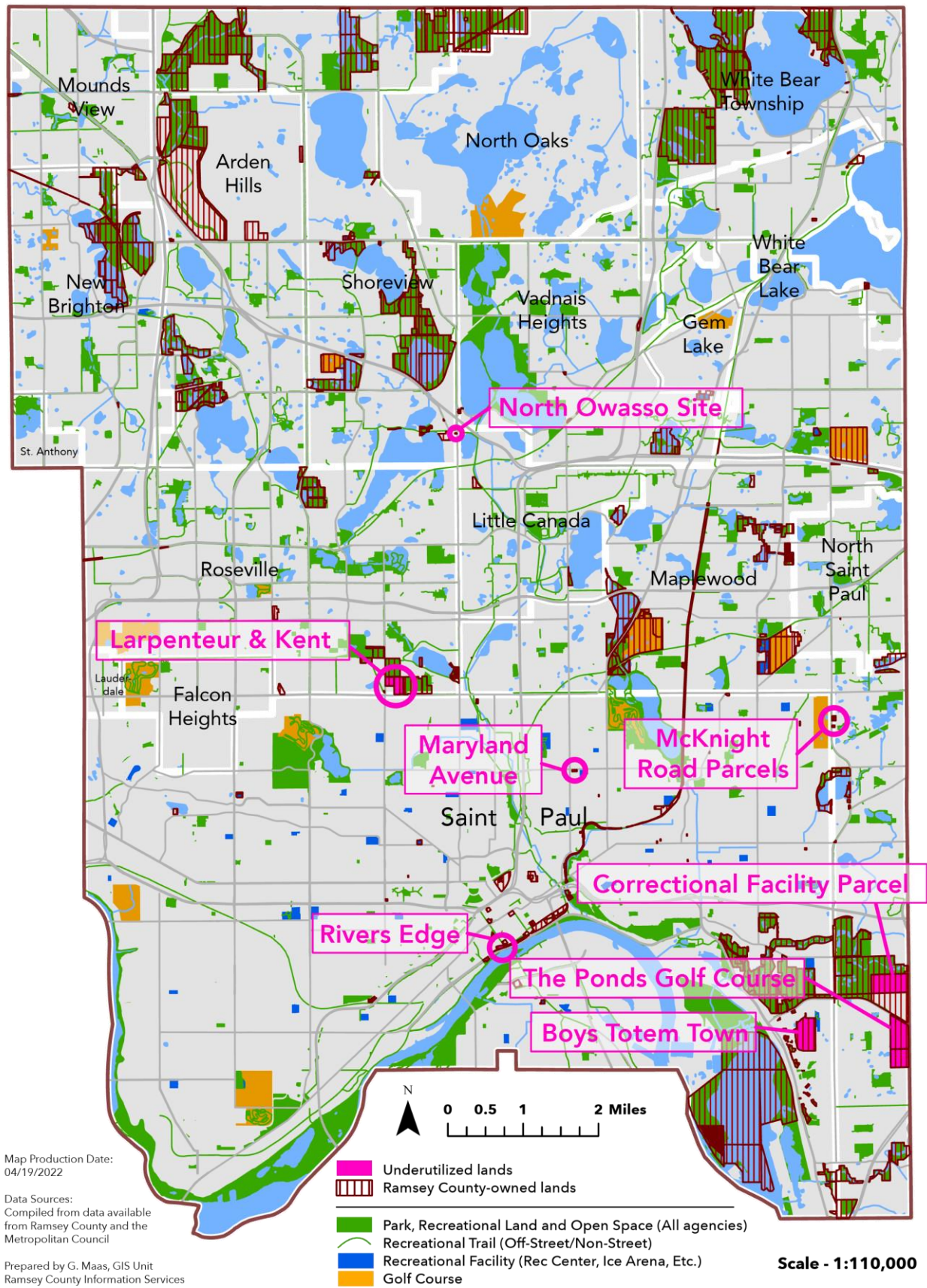
Ramsey County owns 440 individual parcels of land totaling 7,573.48 acres (11.8 square miles) or just about 7% of the County’s total land area. Much of this land is already dedicated to the various specific County government purposes such as office and facility sites, parks, infrastructure, trails corridors, wetland preservers, stormwater impoundments, road right of way, etc. Table 5 below lists the county’s lands as currently known to the Assessor’s Office, while Figure 7 on the following displays all the lands currently owned by Ramsey County (shown with vertical red stripes) as well as underutilized lands which have been identified by Public Works and Property Management as underutilized in magenta. Each underutilized site that has been identified is individually profiled on the pages following Figure 7.

Table 5 – Ramsey County-Owned Parcels by Department

County Division/Department	Number of Parcels	Acres (Total)
Ramsey County (No specific department identified)	62	814.6
Ramsey County Community Corrections	7	353.0
Ramsey County Environmental Health	1	0.5
Ramsey County Land Trust Properties	11	2.5
Ramsey County Landmark Center	1	0.8
Ramsey County Library	1	0.9
Ramsey County Open Space	1	28.3
Ramsey County Parks and Recreation	274	6183.7
Ramsey County Property Management	5	14.3
Ramsey County Public Health	2	4.0
Ramsey County Public Works	31	50.9
Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority	43	118.3
Ramsey County (joint ownership with City of Saint Paul)	1	1.8
Total	440	7573.6

Source: Extracted from current GIS data maintained by Ramsey County Assessor’s Office and Information Services Department

Figure 7: Underutilized Lands in context with Open Space and County Lands



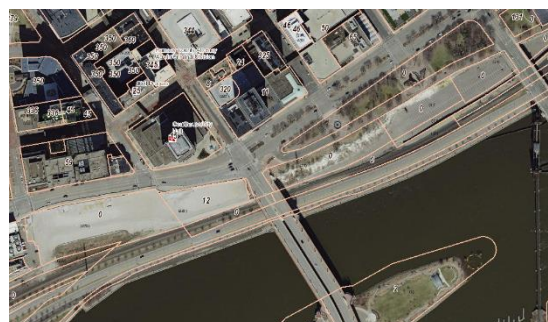
Underutilized Sites in County Ownership as identified by Property Management and Public Works

Staff in the Property Management and Public Works Departments have identified various lands under their management in county ownership that are at present underutilized. Each of these parcels is detailed in the following pages. Of note, several of these sites are ‘high profile’ and well known to the public for their potential future conversion to other uses, while others are less prominent in their current usage but may have a different future potential use.

Sites identified by Property Management.

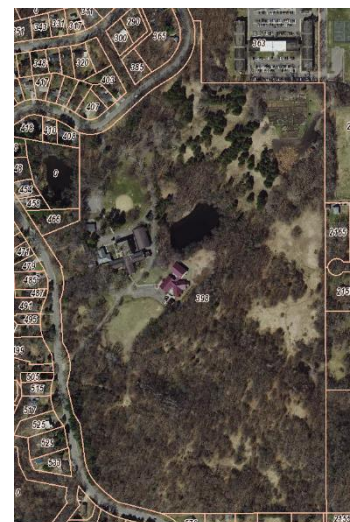
The RiversEdge Site. RiversEdge is a collection of several parcels along the riverfront in Downtown Saint Paul slated for future potential mixed-used development.

The county maintains an informative website on the RiversEdge site project: <https://www.ramseycounty.us/your-government/projects-initiatives/economic-development-initiatives/riversedge>



The Boys Totem Town Site. The County formerly operated this residential treatment facility for adolescent boys in the Highwood Hills neighborhood of Saint Paul. The County is currently in the initial phases of exploring potential future uses of the 72-acre site. The County will coordinate future planning activity for the site in partnership with the City of Saint Paul, the District 1 Community Council, as well as with other stakeholders. The goal is to identify a new use for the land that honors the area’s rich past, is consistent with city and neighborhood goals, and aligns with the County’s Economic Competitiveness and Inclusion Plan and the City of Saint Paul’s 2040 Land Use Plan.

The county maintains an informative website on the site here: <https://www.ramseycounty.us/your-government/projects-initiatives/economic-development-initiatives/boys-totem-town-site-redevelopment>



Maplewood Properties - South: Formerly the site of a county-managed golf course (having closed officially in September 2021), this 88-acre site is proposed for redevelopment. The county maintains extensive information on the site:

A study with detailed potential future development scenarios for the site prepared by Perkins & Will can be accessed [here](#).



Maplewood Properties – North: Ramsey County Department of Corrections owns a 77-acre parcel adjacent to the county's existing correctional facility site. The county maintains information on the site here:

<https://www.ramseycounty.us/your-government/projects-initiatives/economic-development-initiatives/maplewood-properties-site-planning>

A study with detailed potential future development scenarios for the site prepared by Perkins & Will can be accessed [here](#).



Woodview Site (Larpenteur & Kent): Ramsey County owns two adjoining parcels at the intersection of Larpenteur and Kent in the City of Roseville, including the site of the former County-managed Woodview Women's Detention facility (now leased to/operated by Volunteers of America and operated as a corrections center).

Approximately two-thirds of the parcel (the eastern portion) is presently used as a staging area for various Public Works projects. Should the County seek to repurpose this land, it would be well served to consult with Public Works to negotiate a new site for project and materials staging.



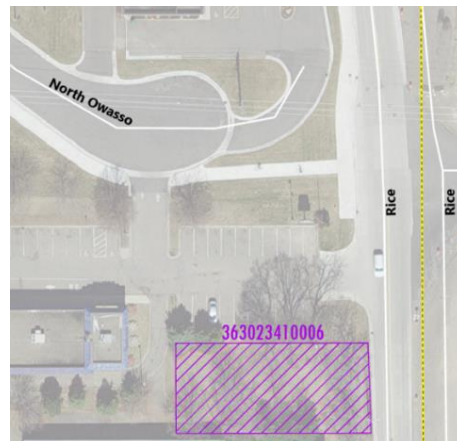
Sites identified by Public Works.

North Owasso site: Ramsey County owns a small undeveloped parcel (0.18 acres in size) along Rice Street near the terminus of the North Owasso cul-de-sac in the City of Shoreview. The Public Works department has indicated this parcel could be sold or committed needed public purpose subject to permanent easements for the Rice Street right of way.

Parcel ID: 363023410006

Location: Intersection of Rice Street and Old Country Drive

Nearest Address: 3333 Rice Street Shoreview, MN 55126



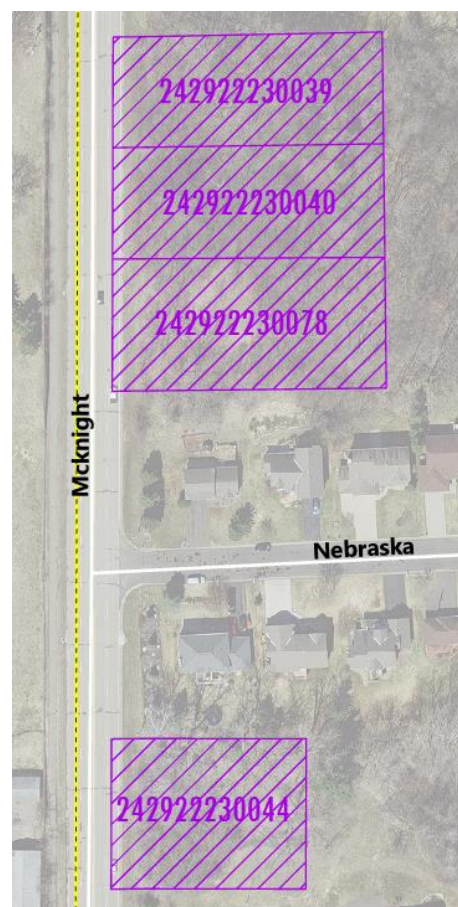
McKnight Road parcels: Ramsey County owns four parcels ranging between 0.57 acres to 0.69 acres in size along McKnight Road in the city of Maplewood. The Public Works department has indicated these could be sold or committed needed public purpose subject to permanent easements for the McKnight Road right of way.

Parcel IDs: 242922230039
242922230040
242922230078
242922230044

General Location: Intersection McKnight Road and Nebraska Avenue E

Nearest Address: 2261 Nebraska Avenue East

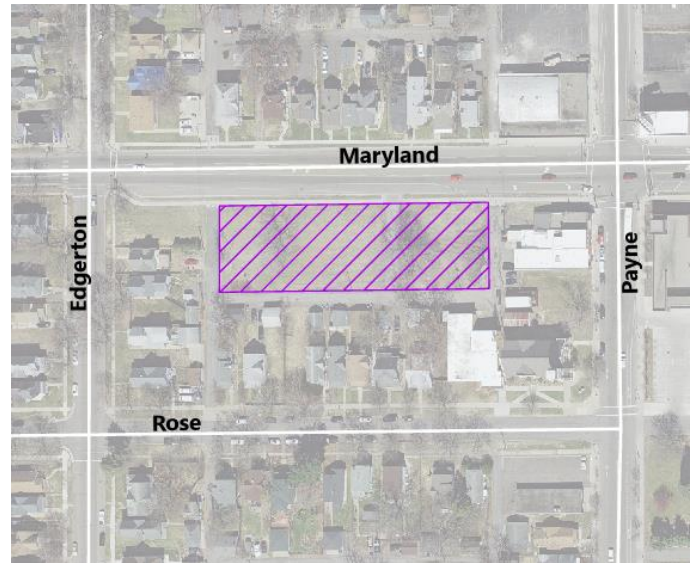
Parcel Sizes: 0.6 Acres (242922230039)
0.61 Acres (242922230040)
0.69 Acres (242922230078)
0.57 Acres (242922230044)



The Maryland Avenue parcel. Ramsey County owns an 0.84-acre parcel along the 600 block of Maryland Avenue between Edgerton and Payne in the City of Saint Paul. County CED is currently marketing the property in accordance with the County's Economic Inclusion and Competitiveness Plan.

The parcel could be sold subject to permanent easement for the Maryland Avenue right of way.

Parcel ID:	292922120229
Location:	Maryland Ave between Edgerton and Payne
Nearest Address:	608 Maryland Avenue East Saint Paul, MN 55130



Part IV – Analysis, Summary and Recommendations

In summary, this report acts as an open space design making guide to assist County staff and leadership to achieve the goals identified below. Additionally, understanding current conditions, ownership interests and demand for land is imperative for defining potential gaps in access to park and open space resources and if these gaps could be potentially re-purposed or programmed to meet the county's goals.

Summary of findings from this report

- Residents of Ramsey County are served by an extensive system of parks, trails, open spaces, and recreational amenities all managed by various municipal, county, regional and state interests—often working in concert to co-manage these resources.
- Nearly every resident in Ramsey County is within a 10-minute walk (2/3rd of a mile), and areas beyond this threshold have been identified in this study for more detailed analysis.
- Dense, urban development areas (e.g., City of Saint Paul and older parts of inner ring suburbs) tend to feature smaller, municipally managed park spaces while larger open space opportunities tend to be found in medium to low density urban developed areas; this is closely tied to the history of residential, commercial, industrial and transportation network development within the County
- Improvement and expansion of path/trail networks for non-motorized transport (pedestrian and biking) provide an opportunity for connecting residents to a larger recreational opportunity access.

Another aspect that must be considered while determining potential gaps or need for repurposing is challenges and opportunities for respective outcomes. Determining what may be an opportunity or challenge provides a process to rethink or be creative on how the county creates and manages open space. Ultimately, this will help address what is working or if a change is needed to effectively serve residents. Below are some potential examples that may become pertinent for this discussion, but other opportunities and challenges may be discovered through this process as well.

Opportunities:

- **Assessment:** Can existing infrastructure (land, buildings, utilities, etc.) be assessed to see how well they perform with the intended or proposed use? This is an important step for determining how our existing infrastructure really serves residents and county operations.
 - For example, just retrofitting or trying to force existing infrastructure to work may not be the best way to achieve long-term vision/goals.
- **Pattern change:** This could also be considered as a challenge, but are we following the same patterns or thinking process to serve residents or county operations? Outcomes may lead to difficult questions but is there a pattern change needed to serve residents and county operations.
 - For example, can county facilities serve multiple functions and still provide valuable open space for stewardship and wellbeing. This might present an opportunity for other open

space development or repurposing properties that may be underutilized, in alignment with the County's Equitable Development Framework and 21st Century Parks Initiative

- **Gaps or Repurposing:** This may also be included in pattern change or a standalone item, but key decision making from the public and other stakeholders is a vital component in determining if a gap/barrier is present or if there is a need for repurposing. As an outcome, it is likely additional planning may be required, but this may provide necessary steps for creating a new process or tie into existing planning initiatives such as Ramsey County's Equitable Development Framework and/or the Pedestrian and Bike Plan to address the issue.
 - For example, instead of just repurposing or acquiring additional land to develop new open space opportunities, can a new sidewalk, trail connection or other infrastructure improve access to an existing open space for barrier reduction instead of repurposing land for traditional park development.
- **Expansion and linkage to other needs, reports, and studies:** The basic facts and premises of this report could be expanded in with more detailed specific analysis of the individual 'park desert' sites and the underutilized sites identified by Public Works and Property Management. Also, this report should be meaningfully leveraged to connect and support other initiatives that the County seeks to meet including non-recreational needs for land such as housing, economic development and any needed or anticipated planned expansion of Ramsey County operations to meet existing and emerging needs.

This study should also be reviewed in alignment with the needs of the County Community & Economic Development Equitable Development Framework study and help to address the array of needs that the county should consider when evaluating park deserts and underutilized properties. This study also presents an opportunity to help inform the work of the Parks and Recreation Departments' planning efforts for areas of to review for either expansion or to improve connectivity and integration.

Challenges:

- **No Net Loss:** This will most often fall into the category of repurposing existing open space or underutilized parkland, or aging facilities into a non-park-related use. The biggest challenge is to find acceptable land or facilities "in an equivalent amount and of similar quality" for replacement if it falls into the No Net Loss category.
- **Funding:** Dependent on anticipated outcome(s), additional funding may need to be secured or reprioritized to achieve long-term vision/goals.
- **Policies:** Dependent on anticipated outcome(s), existing policies may need to be reevaluated to overcome barriers. This may be difficult, but this item may also be linked to pattern change(s) for rethinking what really serves residents and county operations.

Recommendations (Draft Ideas)

(A) Protecting Existing Open Space:

- Given the relative scarcity of land for development in Ramsey County, align the intent and action of the 'No Net Loss' Charter provision with county and municipal park/rec/open space planning efforts to maintain current and future open space amenities
- Identify and inventory sites with future park/open space potential in partnership with other governments or for outright acquisition by the County

(B) Ensuring Open Space Resources Are Available to All:

- Ramsey County would be well served to partner with the City of Saint Paul to examine in detail the sites revealed in our gap analysis (Sites D, F, and G) for opportunities to create new open space or link these areas to existing open space areas.
- Engage directly with residents of 'park desert' areas to ensure their needs and preferences are known, documented, and referenced for future municipal and county park and recreation planning efforts
- Examine innovative alternatives to outright land acquisition and open space creation by examining how existing sites can be better utilized to meet community needs and how existing trail and pedestrian connections can be better leveraged to enhance connectivity and access.

(C) Leveraging under-utilized lands

- Integrate the known need for open space, park and trail resources and improved connectivity into the decisions that guide the County's future planning, usage, and sale of its underutilized lands
- Examine the potential for the County's under-utilized sites to be meaningfully connected to adjacent or proximal park/open space sites via trails, corridors or expansion of land dedicated to open space use