

GreenStep Cities Best Practice # 18 **- final draft for comment through May 2010 -**

❖ **Green Infrastructure:** Enhance city parks and trails.

Optional for all cities

Category: Environmental Management

Summary

Along with city trees, city parks and trails soften our daily life spent in buildings, satisfying an innate affinity for the natural world. These green and open spaces can be a defining feature of a city, providing civic gathering spaces, venues for exercise and cost-free recreation, and connections to open space beyond city limits. City parks and trails provide many important ecosystem services, including the purification of air, reduction in the urban heat island effect, stormwater management, wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration. Parks and trails are also economic development tools, increasing property values in their vicinity. And finally, trails can serve important transportation functions, connecting recreational destinations, job centers, retail centers, schools, neighborhoods and points beyond the city.

Best Practice Actions

- Category A cities that choose to implement this best practice must complete at least one Action.
 - Category B cities that choose to implement this best practice must complete at least two Actions.
 - Category C cities that choose to implement this best practice must complete at least three Actions.
- (1) Identify gaps and connectivity breaks in your city's system of parks, trails and open spaces, and remedy at least one of them.
 - (2) Plan and budget for a network of parks, green spaces, water features and trails in all new development areas.
 - (3) Achieve a threshold of at least 20% of total city land area in protected green infrastructure (parks and protected natural resource areas and trails).
 - (4) Document that all residents are within a ½ mile of a park or protected green space.
 - (5) Adopt low-impact design standards in parks and trails that infiltrate or retain all 2 inch, 24-hour stormwater events on site.
 - (6) Create park management standards that maximize at least one of the following:
 - a. Low maintenance native landscaping.
 - b. Organic or integrated pest management.
 - c. Sources of non-potable water for irrigation.
 - (7) Certify at least one golf course in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses.
 - (8) Construct all new park buildings to a green building standard, with special attention to highlighting and educating around the green features.
 - (9) Develop a program to involve community members in land restoration and stewardship.

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Implementation Resources

(tied to the relevant Action by number)

- (1) Remedies include acquiring a high quality natural area, a priority stormwater management area, or connecting to a trail outside the city.
- (1) Minnesota Local Trail Connections Grants: http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails_local.html
- (1) *Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines* (DNR: 2007): http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/publications/trails_waterways/index.html

- (2) Open spaces for new development should be integrated into the city Parks, Open Space & Trail Plan, provide sidewalk, trail and/or bikeway rights-of-way for connecting to parks, open spaces, and trails beyond city limits, and can be funded by park dedication fees.
- (3) and (4) For example, 90% of St. Paul residents are within ½ mile of a park or protected green space and 20% of the total city land area is protected green infrastructure.
- (4) Shared parks in urban blocks: (<http://www.communitygreens.org/>)
- (5) The Sustainable Sites Initiative's *Guidelines and Performance Benchmarks 2009*: <http://www.sustainablesites.org>
- (6) Minnesota Recreation and Park Association best management practices: <http://www.mnrpa.org/> and <http://www.bestpracticesmn.org/>
- (7) Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses: (<http://acspgolf.auduboninternational.org>)
- (7) Golf and pesticides: <http://www.beyondpesticides.org/golf/index.htm>
- (8) Green features include renewable energy generation capacity, native landscaping, rain gardens, green roofs, composting toilets, and greywater systems.
- (8) MN Solar Energy Legacy Grants from DNR, 2009- 2011: http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/se_legacy.html
- (8) *Using Renewable Energy in Minnesota Parks: A Guidebook for Park Managers* (Center for Energy and Environment: 1999): http://www.mncee.org/pdf/tech_pubs/parkguide.pdf
- (9) Great River Greening assistance for working with volunteers: www.greatrivergreening.org

Benefits

- *The Economic Value of Open Space: Implications for Land Use Decisions* (Twin-Cities-based Embrace Open Space: 2005) and other studies: http://www.nextstep.state.mn.us/res_detail.cfm?id=113
- Background on the psychological and economic benefits of natural spaces: http://www.nextstep.state.mn.us/res_detail.cfm?id=1329
- Studies have demonstrated that access to parks and trails increases physical activity - the research findings suggest locating playing areas, parks and trails within a 1/4 mile of residential areas - and that direct contact with vegetation or nature leads to increased mental health and psychological development: <http://www.designforhealth.net/resources/mentalhealthissue.html>

Connection to State Policy

- State law enables cities to require private developers to dedicate up to 10% of a development parcel to parkland (or make an equivalent monetary contribution): MN Statute (2007) 462.358.