

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 50

**Minneapolis Park System
Long-range Capital Improvement
Program**

December 1955

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CITIZENS LEAGUE OF MINNEAPOLIS AND HENNEPIN COUNTY

A REPORT ON

THE LONG RANGE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

FOR THE MINNEAPOLIS PARK SYSTEM

Findings and Conclusions

of the

Park Section

of the

Public Education and Recreation Committee

of the

CITIZENS LEAGUE OF MINNEAPOLIS AND HENNEPIN COUNTY

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801 Syndicate Building
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December 1955

Approved by the Board of Directors

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A REPORT ON THE LONG RANGE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM FOR THE

MINNEAPOLIS PARK SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

The Park Section of the Public Education and Recreation Committee of the Citizens League has, since 1953, been studying the operation of the Minneapolis Park System. This study has included an examination of the annual operating budgets, surveys of park facilities, a review of certain Park Board policies and an evaluation of the current bond programs.* Over the past year, one of the assignments of the Park Section has been to review the long range bond program of the Park Board.

For many years the Park Board, through its staff, has had and kept up to date, a well conceived plan for improvement of the Minneapolis Park System through bond financing. This plan includes detail sketches of the proposed improvements in conformance with clear and well-defined objectives. Because of the city's debt retirement program and the higher priority of school and other projects, the Park Board has made little progress in getting the bond moneys allocated to it for the plan to be carried out. Because it now appears that the city has more bond leeway and should be looking to its capital development, the City Council has set up a Long Range Capital Improvements Committee to review city needs and schedule the orderly expenditure of capital funds.

Because of the good planning which has been done, the Park staff was ready with a complete presentation of its program as soon as the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee asked for a statement of the city's capital funds needs for parks. After considering the Park Board's request and requests from other city departments, the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee on July 27, 1955, issued its preliminary conclusions regarding a long range bond program for Minneapolis.

The League's Park Section has studied the Park Board's requests and the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee's preliminary conclusions carefully in the light of our previous studies and the surveys our Park Section members have made of Minneapolis parks. We present in this report our own observations as to the long range park needs of the city.

This report is not intended to evaluate how much of the city's bond proceeds should be spent for the Minneapolis Park System since this can only be done by a group such as the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee, which examines each of the many municipal programs and balances one against the other. Instead, the purpose of this report is to evaluate in a general way the priority given to the various aspects of the Park bond program and to point out some major considerations which it believes have been overlooked in evaluating this program.

* Previous reports by the Park Section have been made as follows:

The Operations of the Minneapolis Park System 1951 vs. 1953 and 1954 -- Nov. 1953
Park Board Policies on Acquisition, Retention and Disposition of Real Estate - May 1954
Survey of Minneapolis Park Facilities -- Summer 1954
Park Board Budgets and Budgeting -- September 1954
Report on 1955 Park Board Bond Request -- March 1955
Survey of Minneapolis Park Facilities -- Summer 1955

FINDINGS

1. There is Need for More Park Facilities

For the past two years this committee has undertaken detailed surveys of Minneapolis park facilities. Results of these surveys are contained in two separate reports, A Survey of Minneapolis Park Facilities 1954 and 1955. In both surveys it was noted in detail that there was considerable need for modernization and improvement of existing facilities. Although some of this is carried out under the annual operating budget, there is more than can be handled by these funds. The need for bond funds is apparent. Some typical projects include facilities, particularly the buildings, at Minnehaha Park, North Commons, Loring Park and Nicollet Field.

With a decrease in working hours and an increase in our standard of living and leisure time, we find greater and greater demand for recreational facilities. These include demands for more picnic areas, bathing beaches, swimming pools and athletic fields. The participation records of the Park Board testify to the extensive use of these facilities. It is obvious that if public demand is to be met, the existing facilities must be expanded. Some typical projects of this type are the Cedar Lake and Columbia Park Improvements and the proposed Northeast and Bossen Athletic Fields.

In order to provide adequate wholesome recreational activities for children, there are many districts where deficiencies in park and playground facilities must be corrected. Expenditures for parks may decrease the need for mental or juvenile institutions. Examples of parks in need of improvement or expansion in areas of social need include Peavey Field, Sumner Field and Battineau Field.

Allied to the increased demand for recreation facilities for both adults and children is the Community Center Program being carried out by the Park Board. Study after study has proven that only with adequate supervision can an effective recreation program be carried out. The community center buildings form a hub for this activity. The present condition of our community center buildings such as at Nicollet Field and Loring Park is deplorable, and if an adequate program is to be maintained, they must be either replaced or improved considerably.

It is apparent that the population growth within the Minneapolis city limits is leveling off and we can expect less need for radical expansion of our park program such as was experienced during the early years of this city's growth. With an increase in suburban population and the desire of city people to seek recreation outside the city limits, we will find an increasing emphasis and need for some type of Metropolitan Park System. However, this does not mean that a reasonable expansion in the Minneapolis Park System should not occur concurrently. As redevelopment of the city takes place, the need for open spaces and scenic beauty still exists within the city.

Often overlooked is the increased city revenue resulting from capital expenditures on the park program. In past years the money spent on improving this city's lakes and on building our fine system of parks has increased property values and maintained them at high levels. Many of these improvements were paid for by the benefitted districts rather than by the city as a whole, but the city continues each year to reap the benefits resulting from the relatively high assessed valuation of these properties and the proportionally higher taxes resulting therefrom. Capital funds expenditures for parks can thus benefit the city as a whole and provide additional tax income for city government and other services.

In conclusion, this committee is impressed with the need for additional bond funds in order to improve existing facilities, provide additional recreational facilities, help combat juvenile delinquency and to improve the physical resources of this city. This committee is in no position to evaluate these needs versus the needs for schools, library, auditorium, drains and streets, and, therefore, accepts with confidence the decision of the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee in this regard on the assumption that it has considered the several factors enumerated above.

2. The Amount Allocated to the Park Program in the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee's Preliminary Report is Not Clear

After studying the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee's preliminary report, this committee believes that the amount allocated to the Minneapolis Park Program is not clearly set forth.

The Park Board requested authorization for a \$28,000,000 program over 12 to 15 years to be paid for partly from general obligation bonds and partly from special assessment. Roughly \$3,500,000 of the \$28,000,000 is for parkways with the balance of \$24,500,000 going for improvement of existing parks and playgrounds and development of new parks and playgrounds.

The Long Range Capital Improvements Committees report states on page 7 under "Six Year Program Projects Financed by Local Taxation"

"Parks \$6,431,000"

and on page 8 under "Six Year Program Projects Financed Other Than by Local Tax Obligation Bonds"

"Local Parks and Streets \$6,000,000"
(by Special Assessment)

This would suggest a possible six year outlay for parks of up to \$12,431,000 or over \$2,000,000 a year, which would compare favorably with the Park Board's request. However, closer examination of the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee report shows that of the \$6,431,000 only \$3,831,000 is allocated to park and playground improvement with the balance of \$2,600,000 going for streets and parkways.

^{distinction}
As the foregoing implies, this committee feels strongly that there should be a clear definition between funds spent for parkways and for playgrounds. They serve two entirely different functions; the first is primarily for traffic at present, though we look to the day when this may no longer be so, and the second a recreation facility. The need for better streets or parkways should not be sold under the guise of a park program or vice versa. Funds spent on parkways should be considered in the large part, because of present usage of parkways, as a part of the over-all city traffic program. This committee does not wish to question the need for \$2,600,000 to solve an important traffic problem on River Road West and East, but it should be clearly understood that this does not add materially to the recreation facilities of the city, particularly for children, and may to some degree detract as traffic on these roads increases as a result of their improvement.

In discussing parkways a differentiation should be drawn between roads around lakes and through parks such as Cedar Lake Boulevard and Glenwood Parkway and thoroughfares such as parts of River Road West and East, Stinson Boulevard and Kings Highway. The first are part of the parks, but the second are principally traffic ways.

Of the \$6,000,000 special assessment money for local parks and streets, it appears to us that very little money for parks and playgrounds will be coming from special assessment because of the precedent already established for the park projects given priority by the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee. Therefore, we must conclude that on the basis of the preliminary report, parks and playgrounds are likely to get less than \$666,000 per year on the average over the next six years as compared to the Park Board's request of \$1,630,000 to \$2,000,000 per year. However, the \$666,000 is substantially more than the \$360,000, exclusive of parkways, that the Park Board has been getting over the past ten years.

3. Should Bond Funds be Allocated to Each Individual Park Project or by Major Category?

After having studied the Minneapolis Park System for the past two years, this committee approaches with considerable humility any attempt to place a priority on one playground or particular park project versus another. There are many factors to consider, including participation, public demand, juvenile delinquency, most effective location, financing, etc. In deciding upon financing, consideration should be given to the best means available at the time, such as from current funds, bonds, special assessments or a combination. Because of the complex nature of these considerations, the city has a most competent staff of trained specialists to do this type of planning. This committee questions the ability of a lay group to get into the details of such evaluations. This committee favors flexible allocations which will enable the Park Board and staff to take current conditions into account in their financial planning. It seems to us that the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee and groups such as ours can be most helpful in giving the Park Board recommendations on policy questions such as emphasizing community centers vs. playgrounds or maintenance vs. recreation, as proper areas for lay decisions. These general considerations are of much legitimate concern to citizens and citizen groups.

This committee notes that the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee has attempted some examination and evaluation of each project listed by the Park staff, with the result that priority ratings based on a formula were assigned. While this undoubtedly was a helpful guide in allocating funds among various unrelated services, such as between parks and sewers, we question the use of the formula method in deciding the priority of park projects. For example, such a method may unjustifiably throw out small projects which could be more critical and should have higher priority than completing every detail of a program in a large park. We believe funds should be allocated by major categories, leaving the particular projects location and timing of these projects up to experts. A possible listing of such categories based on the Long Range Committee's first report would read as follows:

Playgrounds	\$1,670,000
Community Centers	---
Regional Athletic Fields	585,000
Scenic Parks and Picnic Areas	1,027,000
Beaches, Bathhouses & Swimming Pools	59,000
Service Buildings & Other Facilities	490,000
Parkways	2,600,000
	<u>\$6,431,000</u>

The figures above are an arbitrary breakdown of the Long Range Committee's recommended projects. Assuming the projects are properly classified, such a listing shows what park functions were to be promoted first.

The need for new and reconditioned community center buildings was "deferred from evaluation" by the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee. Since we are quite

convinced of the value of and need for community center buildings we wonder whether funds for them would have to come from other park projects or whether an increase in capital funds allocated to parks is still possible?

In several instances the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee selected projects which we understand are given low priority by the Park staff, such as Stevens Square, and overlooked projects given high priority, such as Sumner Field. This committee, from its studies thus far, is impressed with the ability of the Park staff and believes that the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee should go slow in disregarding the staff's recommendations.

This committee noted that in the case of Rehabilitation for Existing Schools (\$3,000,000), Extension of Storm Drain System (\$2,950,000) and Resurfacing and Paving Local Streets (\$4,724,000), the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee did not single out specific schools or storm drains or streets that should be given priority. We believe that this same principle should have been applied to the park program.

Finally, this committee questions whether such detailed examination does not reflect and encroach upon the authority of the Park Board, the elected representatives of the citizens on such matters. Certainly, in general terms, one municipal activity must be balanced against another and an over-all program evolved. However, when several elected bodies and appointed commissions all become involved in the details, the proper perspective is lost, responsibility is diffused and decisions may be influenced to a greater extent by political pressures.

4. Many Recommended Projects Could be at Least Partially Financed by Special Assessment

This committee feels that insufficient emphasis has been placed on financing local park improvements through special assessments as provided in the Elwell proceedings. Several of the projects recommended by the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee could be financed in whole or part by special assessments against the local community. Some of these projects could be Shingle Creek, Bohanon Field, Bossen Field and Windom Park.

The Elwell proceedings should be used, ^{as a matter of principle} even if only a portion of the expenditures can be shared by the neighborhood, ~~as a matter of principle~~. Experience has shown that where the neighborhood must muster local support for a park project and help pay for it, a greater incentive exists for use of these facilities. In economically depressed areas where a large portion of the residents are not home owners, it is recognized that the Elwell proceedings are difficult to carry out. In many cases, for social reasons, the entire city must share the tax burden even though individual owners of adjoining properties will be specially benefitted. Such may be the case of projects like Stewart Field, Bottineau Field and Peavey Field.

The principle of local assessments for parks has been traditionally followed in Minneapolis. It may come as a surprise to many that from about 50% to 100% of such projects as Lake Harriet Boulevard, Stinson and St. Anthony Boulevards, Webber Park, Minnehaha Parkway and Glenwood-Camden and Victory Memorial Boulevards, to name but a few, were paid for by special assessment against the benefitted districts. This committee recommends that the Park Board take the lead in urging the use of special assessment procedures wherever possible. The funds resulting from special assessments should be in addition to the total funds recommended for parks and playgrounds by the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee. If our suggestion of allocation by categories (see Section 3) were followed, the Park Board would have the incentive to request the use of special assessments to cover a proportion of the work on its proposed projects.

5. Insufficient Attention has Been Paid to the Effect of the Bond Program on Annual Operating Costs

This committee could find no reference to any consideration of the possible increase or decrease in annual operating costs which would result from the adoption of the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee's bond program. This applies to all projects considered and not just parks. This was further confirmed at a meeting of Long Range Capital Improvements Committee members before the Park Section, though all present agreed that such information should be developed. This committee feels that no capital improvement program should be considered without due regard to the annual costs for maintaining the additional facilities.

Insofar as parks are concerned, this committee believes that the bond program will result in some increase in annual operating costs, but the extent of this increase could not be ascertained. Some projects will result in operating cost decreases because of more efficient use of facilities, others will result in increases because of expansion in the park program. This committee recommends that the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee ask the Park Board for a thorough study of the net effect on operating costs before final action is taken on the bond program and that priority be given to projects which will decrease maintenance and operating costs.

6. General Comments

On the whole, this committee was impressed with the difficulty of the task facing the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee. From our experience in only one segment of this city's activities, we felt that the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee has approached the problem sincerely, diligently and effectively. To balance one municipal need against another is an arduous and difficult task.

The concept of task forces to continue study ⁱⁿ each area before final action is taken, is heartily endorsed by this committee.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Park Section of the Citizens League draws these conclusions from its surveys and its study of the proposed long range capital improvement program as it affects the Minneapolis Park System.

1. There is need for additional facilities for the Minneapolis Park System which must come from bond financing.
2. The judgment of the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee in recommending \$3,831,000 as the city bond funds available for parks and playgrounds over the next six years is accepted.
3. Expenditures for parkways should be considered separately and not as part of the park and playground program.
4. The Long Range Capital Improvements Committee should refrain from approving individual park projects, but should instead concern itself with overall programming, leaving the details to the Park Board and its staff.
5. More consideration should be given to the use of special assessments against benefitted districts, and projects should be reviewed with this in mind.

6. Allowance should be made for the Community Center program.
7. The effect of the park bond program on annual operating costs should be considered and should be taken into account and announced before the bond program is approved.
8. The Long Range Capital Improvements Committee of the City Council is to be commended for its valuable contribution to the community.

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

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8. Neighborhood Park and Recreation Center, November 10, 1953, Board of Park Commissioners, Minneapolis.
9. Long Range Improvement Program, September 9, 1953, by F. K. Dhainin, Board of Park Commissioners, Minneapolis.
10. Capital Needs for Parks and Recreation, November 12, 1953, Board of Park Commissioners, Minneapolis.

Citizens League Reports

1. The Operations of the Minneapolis Park System 1951 vs. 1953 and 1954
2. Park Board Policies on Acquisition, Retention and Disposition of Real Estate
3. Survey of Minneapolis Park Facilities -- Summer 1954 and Summer 1955
4. Park Board Budgets and Budgeting
5. Report on 1955 Park Board Bond Request
6. Statement of Taxation and Borrowing Policy for Minneapolis by the Taxation and Finance Committee

APPENDIX 1

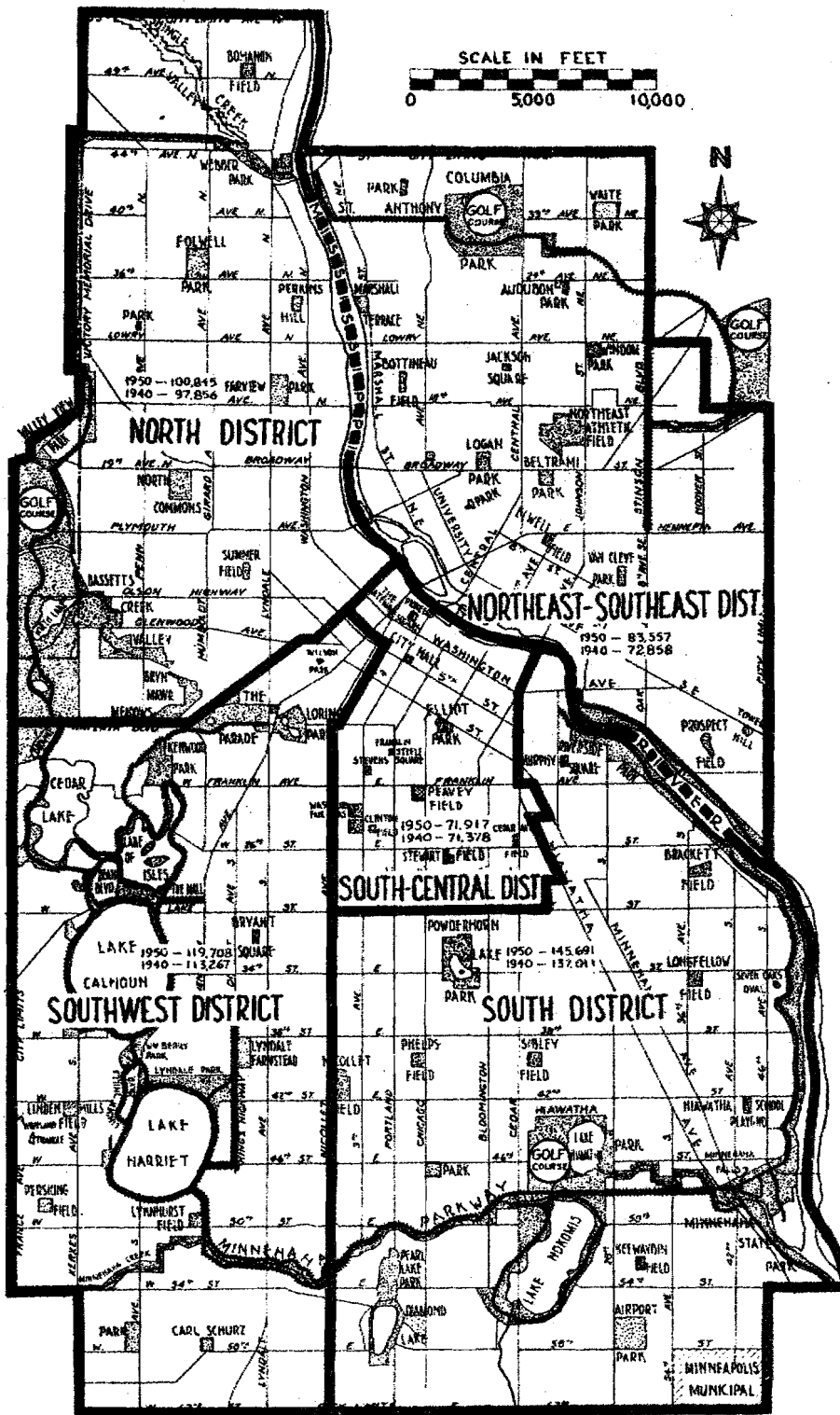
LONG RANGE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT FOR PARKSRecommendation of Long Range Capital
Improvements Committee and Park Board

<u>Project</u>	<u>Long Range Capital Improve. Committee</u>	<u>Long Range - Park Board Program \$</u>	<u>Priority</u>	<u>Other Funds and Remarks</u>
Wirth Park		\$500,000	I	1955 Bonds---\$50,000 for modern toilets
Summer Field Bryant & Dupont N.		116,000	I	
North Commons Morgan & 16th Av. N.	\$ 25,000	150,000	I	1955 Bonds -- \$125,000
Folwell Park Knox & 36th Av. N.		460,000	II	New CC, etc.
Shingle Creek Oliver & 51st N.	359,000	359,000	I (although playground might be II)	
Bohanon Field Bryant & 49th Av. N.	105,000	105,000	II	
Webber Park	118,000	43,000-I & II \$75,000		(with Shingle Creek and pool improvements)

	<u>L.R.C.L.C. \$</u>	<u>L.R. \$</u>	<u>Priority</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
Columbia Park 31st & Central N.E.	250,000	500,000	II	1955 Bonds - \$15,000
Windom Park Johnson & 25th Ave. N.E.	347,000	347,000	II	CC cost not included
Northeast Athletic Field Johnson & 13th Ave. N.E.	185,000	203,000	II	Rental and other funds available
Logan Park Broadway & N.W. Monroe	215,000	215,000	II	
Bottineau Field 2nd St. & 19th Ave. N.E.	50,000	50,000	I	small shelter
Dickman Park Main Street & 2nd N.W.		75,000	I	1955 Bond - \$50,000
Prospect Park Williams & Yale Place S.E.	85,000	85,000	I	Shelter building, etc.
River Road East Arlington S.E. to City Limits	1,800,000	1,500,000 300,000	I III	Lower road deferred

	<u>HCIC \$</u>	<u>L.R. \$</u>	<u>Priority</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
River Road West 24th to Lake St. & grade separation at Lake St.	800,000	1,000,000	I	1954 bond - \$250,000. About \$90,000 left from 1953 previous bond issue.
Brackett Field 36th Ave. S. & E. 29th		75,000	III	
Longfellow 36th Ave. S. & E. 34th		385,000	II	CC building to be reviewed.
Minnehaha Park	450,000	450,000 412,000	I II	Refect., picnic, toilets, band-stand, roadways & parking
Bossen Field 56th & 28th Ave. S.	400,000	142,000 300,000	I II	1955 bond - \$50,000 regional athletic field
Pershing Field 48th & Chowen S.		88,000	I	
Lake Harriet		1,000,000 1,000,000 1,000,000	I II III	
Nicollet Field 42nd & Nicollet Av. S.		478,000	I	First new community center
Stewart Field 26th & 10th Av. S.	195,000	195,000	I	

	<u>L.R.C.I.C. \$</u>	<u>L.R. \$</u>	<u>Priority</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
Peavoy Field 22nd and Park	218,000	218,000 250,000	I III	CC Questioned
Clinton Field Clinton & E. 25th		27,000 390,000	I III	1955 bonds - \$15,000
Stevens Square 18th & Stevens Av. S.	104,000	104,400	III	
Loring Park Hennepin & Harmon	535,000	545,000	II	
Parade	40,000	250,000 1,500,000	I II	1955 bond - \$15,000
Bryn Mawr Meadows Laurel & Knox South		82,000 100,000	I II	Regional athletic field
Kenwood Parkway		150,000		\$40,000 ok now from property assessments - need \$100,000 more.
Cedar Lake 22nd & Sheridan S.	150,000	588,500	II	
Lake Calhoun		361,350	III	1955 bond - \$60,000 (redo bath) \$15,000 (fill for meadow)



TOTAL POPULATION
CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS

1950	521,718
1940	492,370

A DISTRICT MAP

SHOWING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE DISTRICTS
STUDIED IN PARK AND RECREATION SURVEYS

BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
MINNEAPOLIS MINN.

C.E. DOELL - SUPERINTENDENT	F.K. DHAININ - LAND ARCH. ADM.
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K.B. RAYMOND - DIR. OF RECR.	E. BRADDOCK - ENGINEER
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AUGUST 1952

DRAWN BY
B. EDMONDS

DZ-462

SEE GRAPHIC SCALE