

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 37

**A Survey of
Minneapolis Park Facilities**

February 1955

C I T I Z E N S L E A G U E O F G R E A T E R M I N N E A P O L I S

REPORT OF

A SURVEY OF MINNEAPOLIS PARK FACILITIES

COMMUNITY CENTERS

SUMMER PLAYGROUNDS

SCENIC PARKS

Period of Survey: Summer of 1954

Date of Report: February 1955

Prepared by the Park Section of the Public Education and Recreation Committee
of the Citizens League

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C I T I Z E N S L E A G U E O F G R E A T E R M I N N E A P O L I S

SURVEY OF PARK FACILITIES

COMMUNITY CENTER, SUMMER PLAYGROUNDS, SCENIC PARKS

Summer 1954

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C I T I Z E N S L E A G U E O F G R E A T E R M I N N E A P O L I S

SURVEY OF PARK FACILITIES

COMMUNITY CENTER, SUMMER PLAYGROUNDS, SCENIC PARKS

Summer 1954

INTRODUCTION

The Park Section has concluded its summer program of surveys of certain classes of park facilities maintained by the Minneapolis park system. In making this survey the City was broken down into five geographical areas which contained an approximately equal number of parks, and each of which included a community center. The boundaries of each of the areas are as follows:

<u>Area</u>	<u>Boundaries</u>
North	West of Mississippi River, north of Wayzata Boulevard and Hennepin Avenue
Northeast-Southeast	East of Mississippi River
Central	South of Wayzata Boulevard and Hennepin Avenue and north of Lake Street
South	South of Lake Street and east of Nicollet, except Nicollet Field
Southwest	South of Lake Street and west of Nicollet, including Nicollet Field

Tom Beckley was the chairman of the Survey Sub-committee and a survey team for each of the foregoing areas was appointed and served as follows:

North	E. A. Johnston, Chairman; E. P. Balkema, Anthony Barich
Northeast-Southeast	R. A. Vanstrum, Chairman; G. C. Cerney
Central	George Magnuson, Chairman; Allen D. Brosius, Mrs. Marvin Sukov, Leonard Ramberg, Thomas L. Warner
South	Alvin G. Anderson, Chairman; R. E. Anderson, Paul Werler
Southwest	Mrs. John Crimmins, Chairman; Dr. Leslie S. Keyes

The facilities studied in the course of the survey were community centers, summer playgrounds and scenic parks. An attempt was made to study the condition of maintenance of each facility and in general to evaluate the type of program sponsored by the Park System. In an effort to coordinate the studies made by each of the area teams, questionnaires were prepared covering each type of facility. These questionnaires were intended primarily as a guide to the various participants in the surveys, and were prepared and used on the premise that they should constitute only a starting point and suggested checklist for the survey. A copy of each of the forms prepared for use in the survey is attached hereto.* In view of the fact that each class of facility surveyed differs fundamentally in objective from the others, this report will present the major conclusions from the survey and then report the survey findings on each class of facility separately.

* Attached as Appendix C to the complete copies of this report are copies of the questionnaire used.

Major Conclusions and Recommendations of the Survey *

1. Permanent personnel employed at the community centers are high caliber, well trained, enthusiastic and sincere. Summer playground personnel appear to be less qualified for, and take less interest in, their duties than the recreational supervisors at community centers.
2. Means should be found to increase and broaden the distribution of information regarding the facilities and programs of the community centers, playgrounds and scenic parks.
3. Generally community centers complement and supplement settlement houses and school program rather than duplicating them. This seemed to be less clearly established in the case of Loring Park and it is recommended that the status of Loring Park as a community center and as the center of a district should be more clearly defined.
4. Consideration should be given to extending the summer playground supervision from eight weeks to twelve at some playgrounds.
5. Participation by an organization of parents in the playground program, as illustrated by the South West Athletic Club, greatly increases attendance, participation and use suggesting the possibility of the Park Board stimulating the organization of parent groups.
6. Generally scenic parks are well, but not over, maintained. Many buildings, particularly the shelter at Minnehaha Park and the bath houses are not well suited to current needs and because of age and condition require excessive maintenance.
7. Some of the walks in scenic parks appear to be little used, poorly maintained and expensive to repair, so that a review of the walks with the idea of removing some is suggested.
8. Adequate toilet facilities are lacking in many scenic parks and some of those provided are not well maintained. This situation should receive prompt attention. At Loring Park toilet facilities, which are less isolated and can be better supervised, should be installed.
9. Capital expenditures should be weighed carefully in the light of the contribution of the individual facility to the system as a whole as compared to the benefit from a similar expenditure at other locations.

* Attached as Appendix A is a summary of some specific items needing corrective action which were noted during the survey.

SURVEY FINDINGS

"Recreation is recognized as essential for the physical and mental health of all persons in our modern society. Conversely, the provision of recreation services is everyone's responsibility. A portion of an individual's recreational needs can and should be met by the home or by the individual himself, but other recreation services can only be provided on a community-wide basis by the establishment of official recreation agencies. In a democratic society, a full and balanced network of recreational services can best be provided through a combination of services partly under public auspice and partly under the auspice of private or voluntary agencies and organizations.

"Public agency programs are those which are provided by tax funds for all residents of the community and are under the direction of an official governmental agency. This kind of agency is able to provide those services which the majority of the public considers to be essential for the welfare of the entire community. It is based on a legal responsibility to the community from which it receives its tax funds.

"Recreation services which are a public responsibility include:

1. Provision and maintenance of basic facilities and equipment, including libraries, auditoriums, gymnasiums, community centers, parks and playgrounds, swimming facilities, ballfields, tennis courts, facilities for boating, fishing, camping, hiking, etc.
2. Trained leadership and equipment for a broad program of organized activities, including athletics and sports, camping, dramatics, music, arts and crafts, social activities, nature studies, etc." *

The park survey represents one method for determining in part how well the public responsibility for furnishing recreation services through community centers, summer playgrounds and scenic parks is being discharged in Minneapolis.

* Quoted from "The Relative Functions of Public and Private Agencies in the Provision of Recreation Services", a report prepared by the PREP Committee, Group Work and Recreation Division, Community Welfare Council, Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 1953.

COMMUNITY CENTERS

a. Purpose of a community center *

Man is inherently a gregarious type of animal. He demands, enjoys and needs the opportunity of being with others. Being with others gives him a sense of well being, acceptance, accomplishment and, if exercise is involved, physical improvement. A community center provides a location and program for indoor and outdoor gatherings and recreation for a fairly large section of our city and for a fairly large group of people of all age groups. Community centers provide for the active type of leisure time need on a rather highly organized basis. They serve as the focal point for organized recreational activities for the section of the city in which it is located.

b. Location, Program and Participation

At the time the survey was conducted, the Minneapolis Park System operated five community centers. ** These centers are operated on a year-round basis and each enjoys the services of two full time recreational supervisors. The center itself in each case conducts a program at its own building, and in addition serves as an administrative center for supervising programs conducted in a comparatively large area roughly comparable, although not identical with the area in which the city was subdivided for the purposes of this survey. In this manner summer playgrounds, spring and fall after-school activities at certain school playgrounds, and winter sports activities fall within the supervision of the community center recreational supervisors.

While the community center structures appear to have been erected on a more or less haphazard basis, each of them, with the possible exception of Loring Park, appears to be well located with respect to the part of the city each is intended to serve. (See Map A for location of community center.) The area from which each center draws participants varies to some extent with the age of the participants, the younger children being unable to go as far as children in the older age groups. Where good cooperation exists between individual schools and the community center serving that school, there appears to be a high degree of participation in spite of the fact that the center may be some distance from the school. One of the problems noted by the survey teams is the fact that the distribution of information on schedules to the homes of the children is somewhat uncertain, and apparently for this reason parents in many parts of the city were not acquainted with the nature of the program conducted by the community center, and participation in the programs was accordingly limited by lack of information.

c. Buildings

The buildings used for community centers are in most cases old, and appear to have been designed for use in a period before much thought was given to a year-round community center program to be conducted by the Park Board. While the buildings were not designed primarily for the type of program which the Recreation Department plans for community centers, much credit should be

* This statement of purpose for community centers and those in subsequent sections for summer playgrounds and scenic parks were taken from longer statements of purpose prepared by the Park Staff.

** The five community centers are Nicollet, Sibley, Logan, Folwell and Loring. See Appendix B for report on each of these centers.

given to the Park Board in adapting the structures to the requirements of the activities conducted at the centers. Several of the buildings appear to have been cheaply constructed and require substantial maintenance from year to year to permit their continued use. The 42-year old building at Logan needs repair, the ball fields there need sod and soil and picnic tables and benches are needed. The roof at the Folwell Community Center building leaks rather badly.

d. Personnel

All survey teams were impressed with the caliber of the permanent personnel employed at the community centers. The recreational supervisors appeared to have the necessary background to qualify them for their positions and all appeared to be enthusiastic and sincere in carrying out the program assigned to each center.

e. Relation to other agencies

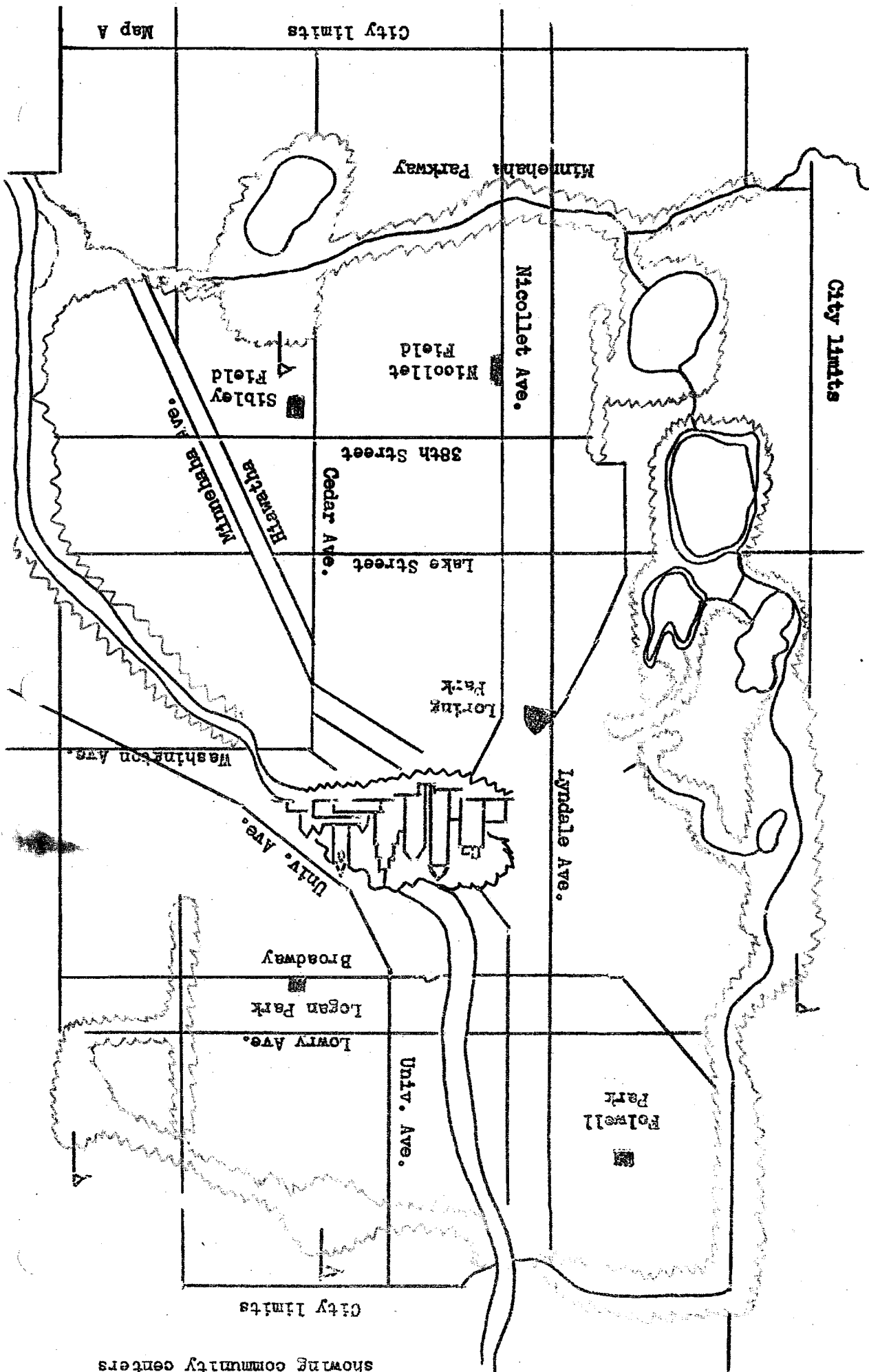
The role of the community center in some respects duplicates some of the activities available through settlement houses and other facilities open to the public generally; however, the centers enjoy the advantage of being located adjacent to playing space and in most cases complement rather than duplicate other recreational facilities. The fact that the activities conducted at community centers enjoy a high level of participation indicates that the centers serve a useful and valuable purpose in our community. The development of the joint school and Park Board facilities such as those found at Waite Park School and Armitage are, we think, indicative of a trend to closer coordination of park and school activities. Where playing space is available adjacent to the schools, we believe that this is a desirable combination. At the same time, the need for community centers continues to exist, particularly in those areas of the city where playing space around individual schools is limited and where the community center is in a position to supplement school activities and at the same time furnish a center for community groups.

f. Loring Park

The situation at Loring Park is somewhat unusual and may be considered separately. The community center at Loring Park has never been raised to the full status of a community center, and there is some question as to the area assigned to it. With the expansion of the loop business district, it is doubtful that the center is well located for the area served. The larger proportion of the children participating in the activities of the center appear to be drawn from the area west of Lyndale Avenue, and accordingly there is a traffic hazard in getting the children to the facility. A related problem is the fact that the center does not have adequate play space available, and is restricted from using the facilities of the Parade Ground because of the same traffic hazard.

The status of the center and its relationship to the district it is in should be more clearly established. Toilet facilities which are less isolated and can be more readily supervised are badly needed since sexual deviates have been gathering here occasionally.

Outline map of Minneapolis
showing community centers



SUMMER PLAYGROUNDS

a. Purpose of summer playgrounds

The desire to play is inherent in every child. In our cities with limited amounts of yard space, the playground is the only safe available site for such activity. The expenditure of public funds for acquiring and equipping playgrounds and providing supervision and leadership is justified by the resulting contribution to the fun, safety, health and character of the children who participate. Such facilities and programs as are provided at the supervised playgrounds are particularly needed during summer months when youngsters have more time available for play -- or mischief. The summer playground has definite, organized supervision. Through this, paid leadership, definite schedules of activities are planned and carried out at the various playgrounds. This organized leadership is geared to satisfying the various needs of the youngsters.

b. Location, program and participation

The Park Board conducts summer playgrounds at a large number of locations throughout the city. (See Map B for location of summer playground operations in 1954.) The number operated varies to some extent from year to year, depending upon the number of supervisors available and the expected attendance load at each of the facilities suitable for use as a summer playground. * Two supervisors are employed for an eight-week period at each summer playground to conduct a program of supervised recreation developed by the central office. These programs supplement the activities of the community center and are supervised by the community center for the area in which the playground is located.

The programs conducted at the summer playgrounds are weighted in favor of the younger age group and participation of teen agers is ordinarily quite limited. The survey teams were of the opinion that consideration should be given to the extension of the season beyond the current eight-week period, at some of the playgrounds, and to a policy of keeping the playgrounds open constantly throughout the season.

c. Buildings and equipment

There is available at most summer playgrounds a shelter where athletic equipment is stored and which offers a place for activities during evening hours and inclement weather. There is a wide variation in the condition of these buildings, some having been built within the past few years and others having been in use for far beyond the normal life of the building. Most of the playgrounds have wading pools for the smaller children and an assortment of playground equipment. A large number of playgrounds have tennis courts, but our survey shows a tendency for the tennis attendance to drop off and in some cases the tennis courts have fallen into disrepair. In general, the playing equipment is well maintained.

* Summer playgrounds surveyed were Pershing, Brackett, Elliot, Peavey, Stewart, Riverside and Franklin Steele Square. Survey data is on file at League office.

d. Personnel

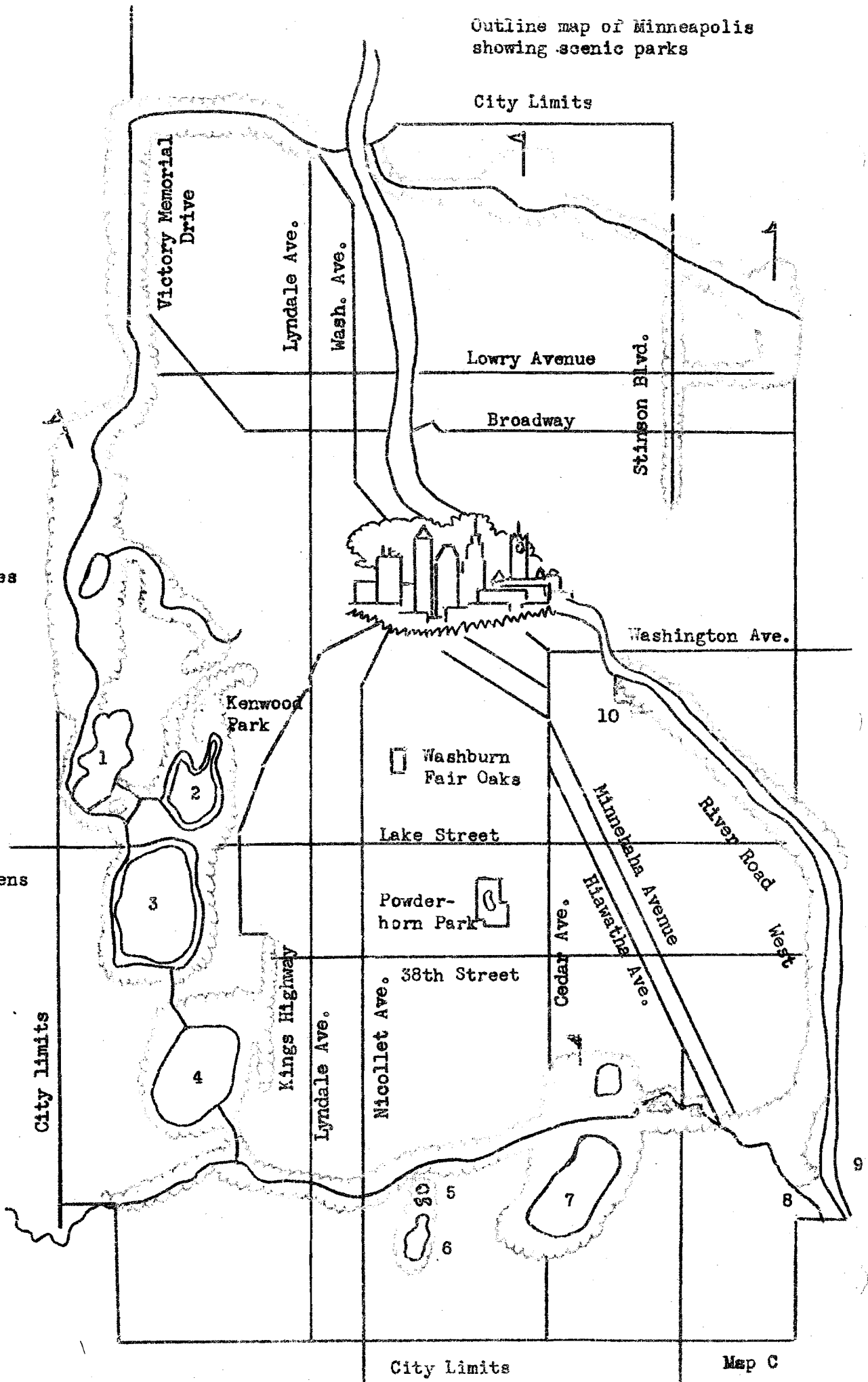
Each of the playgrounds is normally staffed by a man and woman who are employed under Civil Service. Most of these supervisors are either physical education students or teachers. The persons making the survey noted that the playground supervisors as a rule appeared to be less qualified for and to take somewhat less interest in their duties than the recreational supervisors at the community centers. In view of the fact that the tour of duty at the summer playgrounds is relatively short, this might have been anticipated although the lack of recreational skill and aptitude of the supervisors necessarily limits the effectiveness of the summer playground operation.

e. South West Activities Council

In the southwest part of the city an organization of parents has been formed to assist in the development of recreational programs on park property. This organization, the South West Activities Council, has raised funds to supplement those available from park sources and has set up an extensive program for parent leadership of recreational activities. As a result of increased parent interest in park activities in the southwest part of the city, attendance at summer playgrounds in this area has increased tremendously and the benefits of our park system are enjoyed by a wider spread of age groups. The enthusiastic support of the recreational program of the Park Board by the residents in this area suggests the desirability for the Park Board making a special effort to stimulate parent participation in the recreational program.

Outline map of Minneapolis
showing scenic parks

Cedar Lake
Lake of the Isles
Lake Calhoun
Lake Harriet
Pearl Lake
Diamond Lake
Lake Nokomis
Minnehaha Park
Longfellow Gardens
Riverside Park



City Limits

Map C

SCENIC PARKS

a. Purpose of scenic parks

Man is still fairly close to nature and is basically dependent upon land, water and air for his living and well being. He still has the natural instincts related to land and its resources, the basic urge and desire to get out into the open and be able to partake of the scenic beauties. He needs environmental recreation.

Scenic parks provide areas where people may enjoy beauty of landscape and where they may engage in many kinds of recreational activities. They are usually areas kept primarily in their natural state, affording facilities for hiking, nature study, picnicking, riding, winter sports and other outdoor activities. They provide areas where people can secure a little touch of nature which is so lacking in our modern congested cities. They offer opportunities for a passive and relaxing type of experience which is so necessary to help maintain mental stability and physical well being.

b. Location

Minneapolis enjoys a comparatively large area and number of scenic parks.* (See Map C for location of scenic parks.) The earlier development of our park system was centered on the creation of the so-called "Grand Rounds". Virtually all of the shoreline of the lakes located within the city limits has been acquired by the park system and most of the scenic parks are adjacent to the lakes.

c. Maintenance

Maintenance of the parks is performed by men regularly assigned to the individual park whose duties involve daily clean-up, and by rotating crews who make use of specialized mowing and other maintenance equipment throughout the system. In general, the grounds appear to be well maintained and there is little evidence of wasteful over maintenance. The buildings located in the parks are in some cases not particularly suited to current needs. In particular, the bath houses appear to be larger than necessary and by reason of their advanced age require a disproportionate amount of maintenance. The structure at Minnehaha Park is old, and only the central part of the building which is used as a refectory receives much use. Several of the survey teams noted a general lack of toilet facilities at our parks, and there is some indication that where facilities are available they are not well maintained. This committee recognizes the problems encountered in policing these facilities. Nevertheless, it believes that the Park Board should give serious consideration to the erection of toilet facilities at the more heavily used bathing beaches and scenic parks.

In a large proportion of the reports on scenic parks, it will be observed that the condition of walks and curbs has been rated lower than most of the

* Scenic parks surveyed include: Lake Calhoun, Lake Harriet, Cedar Lake, Washburn Fair Oaks, Lake of the Isles, Kenwood Park, Riverside, Powderhorn, Lake Nokomis, Minnehaha Park, Diamond Lake, Pearl Lake, Longfellow Gardens, River Road West. Data regarding these parks is on file in the League office.

other physical facilities at each of the parks. Many of these walks were installed a considerable number of years ago and are beginning to show their age. They were installed before the automobile came into its present wide use and bear considerably less pedestrian traffic than at the time of their construction. In view of the reduction in use and the apparent need for heavy maintenance, it is suggested that a re-evaluation of the need for mending the walks be made to determine whether a large number of the walks might be removed.

d. Publicity on park facilities

Many of the members of the committee visited certain of the scenic parks for the first time during their residence in Minneapolis and had not been aware of the existence of certain classes of facilities maintained by the Park Board. It was the consensus of opinion of the committee that further efforts should be made by the Park Board to acquaint residents in the area served by each of the parks with the facilities available at the park in the area served by it.

In addition, the committee believes that an effort should be made to run a series of articles in the local newspaper at an appropriate season, describing park facilities available to the public at large and to visitors to the city. The fact that the park system receives heavy usage during the Aquatennial festivities suggests that wider use might be made of park facilities if information were more readily available to members of the public of activities carried on by the Park Board throughout the year.

e. Cost of acquiring and developing scenic parks

There is appended hereto a summary (Exhibit A) showing the area and total cost as of December 31, 1952, of each of the parks which were treated as scenic parks for the purpose of this survey. It will be noted that there is a wide variation in amounts spent on each of the facilities and that in many cases high cost facilities have made comparatively little contribution to the park system of Minneapolis. It must be borne in mind in considering the cost figures that the price level has changed radically over the years and that for this reason cost figures are not strictly comparable. At the same time, we believe that the attention of the community should be called to the fact that the cost of the park system in acquiring Pioneer Square is approximately equal to the cost to date in acquiring, landscaping and constructing park facilities at Loring Park, and that each of these facilities represents a greater capital investment than has been made to date at Lake Harriet. In evaluating expenditures for capital improvements it is apparent that each expenditure should be weighed carefully in the light of the contribution of the individual facility to the system as a whole, and that the demands for the creation of new facilities at individual locations be weighed against the contributions which expenditures at other locations might make to the city.

Exhibit A

CITIZENS LEAGUE

PARK SURVEY

LISTING OF SCENIC PARKS

<u>Name of Park</u>	<u>Area</u>	<u>Cost as of 12/31/52</u>
<u>CENTRAL</u>		
Loring Park	35.82	478,924
Kenwood Park	32.69	237,673
Washburn Fair Oaks	6.78	280,048
Pioneer Square	2.50	480,843
Lake of the Isles	199.68	685,814
Riverside	42.28	177,216
Cedar Lake Blvd.	49.82	244,184
<u>SOUTH</u>		
Powderhorn	65.47	610,703
Lake Nokomis	407.68	945,781
Minnehaha Park	144.55	408,258
Diamond Lake	82.07	1,940
Pearl Lake	28.96	815
Longfellow Gardens	4.61	75,000
River Road West	173.04	147,346
<u>SOUTHWEST</u>		
Lyndale Park	61.26	162,674
Lake Calhoun	522.57	1,104,541
Lake Harriet	402.07	327,104
Wm. Berry Park	25.50	168,606
<u>NORTH</u>		
Theodore Wirth	736.66	929,833
Fairview	20.82	98,811
Bassett's Creek Valley	59.90	27,000
Valley View	22.22	21,781
Shingle Creek Valley	57.89	209,586
<u>N.E. - S.E.</u>		
River Road East	173.04	329,242
Richard Chute Square	1.02	21,850
Tower Hill	4.87	23,266

APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF SOME SPECIFIC ITEMS NEEDING
CORRECTIVE ACTION AS NOTED DURING SURVEY

1. Lack of toilets at Queen Beach - Calhoun.
2. Road at Lake Harriet needs repair and sanitary facilities need improvement.
3. Walks and curbs along Cedar Lake Blvd. need improvement.
4. Cedar Lake needs a bathhouse and toilet facilities, if adequately supervised, and weed cutting.
5. Several fences at Washburn Fair Oaks need to be repaired or removed, as they are in a rather dilapidated condition.
6. Walk and curbs along Lake of the Isles need repair. Bicycle paths here would be useful and stocking of the lake with fish is suggested.
7. Tennis courts at Kenwood Park need maintenance work and additional playground equipment could be used here.
8. Trees at Riverside Park need some trimming, tennis courts and retaining wall need work. Weeds are growing high along slope between upper and lower level.
9. The condition of walks, curbs and roads on River Road West was rated only fair.
10. Refectory and toilet facilities at Minnehaha Park need modernization.
11. See attached for recommendations as to Pershing Field.
12. Peavey Field had much debris and broken glass in the sandbox and condition of lawn and trees was rated fair.
13. Wading pools at Elliot Park, Riverside and Franklin Steele Square needed paint.
14. Tennis courts at Stewart Field in bad repair, perhaps because of use as basketball courts. Tool shed rated in fair condition; trees rated fair.
15. Bases loose on basketball standards at Riverside Park. Tennis courts are in terrible condition and as a result are not used. Trees need trimming and pruning. Sustaining walls are only in fair condition.
16. Riverside Park needs two supervisors -- one on upper level for younger children and one on lower level for older groups.

17. The building at Logan needs repair and picnic tables and benches are needed.
18. The roof leaks rather badly in the Folwell Community Center building.
19. Distribution to homes of information as to community center activities is somewhat haphazard, resulting in varied participation.