

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

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**Minneapolis Parks Department
Survey of Facilities - 2**

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CITIZENS LEAGUE OF MINNEAPOLIS AND HENNEPIN COUNTY

REPORT ON

A SURVEY OF MINNEAPOLIS
PARK FACILITIES

Period of Survey: Summer of 1955

Date of Report: October 1955

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

Charles T. Silverson, President
Johnston Livingston, Park Section Chairman
Mrs. John Crimmins, Survey Chairman

601 Syndicate Building
Minneapolis 2, Minnesota

Lincoln 0791

INTRODUCTION

The Citizens League is a volunteer non-partisan organization concerned with maintaining and improving good local governmental services in Minneapolis and Hennepin County. It has assigned the responsibility for studying and reporting on the Minneapolis park system to the Park Section of the League's Public Education and Recreation Committee.*

The Park Section has recently completed its second summer program of surveys of certain classes of Park facilities maintained by the Minneapolis park system. During the course of the survey, 67 parks, largely community centers and playgrounds, were visited by teams of League members.

Survey teams were set up for five sections of the city and they were instructed to make a minimum of three visits at different times of the day and week. They were also instructed to visit playground leaders and participants as well as people of the community.

(The sections do not indicate equal population nor park distribution. They were made for the convenience of the surveyors.)

It is not the primary purpose of this report to draw conclusions or make recommendations for the Minneapolis park system. Rather it is written to record data gathered by committee members in first-hand, on-the-spot observations of Minneapolis parks. It is hoped that this data will be helpful to the committee in construction of future reports. It is also our belief that these observations will be of interest to the Park Board, its staff and others.

Throughout this report references are made to the need for considering additional facilities or services. This report was not intended to reconcile the financial aspects of these requirements. However, insofar as capital expenditures are concerned, this committee has concurrently issued a report on the long range bond program which gives an evaluation of the priorities and needs for such projects. The cost for increased maintenance ties into a report to be issued by the park staff which is to set up priorities for maintenance projects and to indicate the extent of projects yet to be accomplished and their cost. This Park staff report was requested by resolution of the Park Board on November 3, 1954, and until it is completed, an adequate evaluation of deferred maintenance costs cannot be made. The cost for increased services, referenced in this committee's report, revolve around some improvements in the recreation program. This committee feels its suggestions would not be significant cost-wise, perhaps not over \$50,000 annually, and where cost becomes a limiting factor, the proper organization and use of volunteers can be an effective substitute.

This report has been written in four sections as follows:

1. Major additions to the park system since the last report.
2. Condition and maintenance of Parks and Playgrounds. Adequacy of buildings and equipment.

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

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

3. Extent of recreational use of parks. Nature of supervision.
4. The local community attitude toward its parks.

The detailed findings of the survey are tabulated by locations in Appendix A.

Since the 1955 survey is a continuation of this committee's 1954 study and since it generally confirms the Park Section's earlier findings, a copy of the major conclusions of the 1954 study are included in Appendix B.

I. Additions of Park System Since Last Report

The completion of Kenny and Armatage Parks and Athletic Fields constitutes a major addition to the city's park facilities. We heartily endorse the idea of co-operative projects between schools and parks such as Waite Park, Kenny and Armatage. It should be noted that the park and playground improvement (as differentiated from the Armatage regional athletic field) in these three projects has been totally paid for by assessment of benefitted property owners. MacRae, Dickman, Holmes, Elwell, Clinton and North Commons, now at varying stages of completion, will be further additions.

Bossen and Northeast regional athletic fields will, when completed, relieve the smaller parks of competitive team sports and permit younger children to make greater use of these facilities. In general, the planning and execution of the regional athletic field program appears to be excellent for relieving playgrounds for use of younger children and concentrating competitive sports where sufficient space and parking are available.

II. Conditions and Maintenance of Parks and Playgrounds Adequacy of Buildings and Equipment

All members of the survey teams who had visited parks in the 1954 survey noted improvements in the condition of our parks, indicating that our parks are catching up on deferred maintenance. However, a substantial amount remains to be done and some question was raised as to whether progress might not be more rapid.

Because of rehabilitation and better maintenance, the condition of park buildings generally is better than it was in 1954. Many of the park buildings used in connection with the recreation and community center programs are poorly arranged and inadequate to meet the needs. (See Appendix A for tabulation) New buildings could lead to more efficient supervision and maintenance, resulting in improvement and expansion of services at little extra cost. Large expenditures for truly up-to-date community center buildings should be considered. Several of these serving large areas and with large participation records are badly outmoded and inadequate. The cost of modernizing these buildings would be high and we would still have basically old and essentially unsatisfactory plants.

Buildings requiring major or minor repairs or replacement were reported at many different areas of the city. (Appendix A)

More apparatus and playfields needed consideration. Requests for wading pool additions were noted by many. (Appendix A)

Shelter type buildings such as were built at Armatage, Kenny, Waite Park, Franklin Steele Square and at other locations, are sufficient when the area being served is small or there are other buildings near which may be utilized in the program.

More illuminated play areas and park buildings should be considered. We find that few problems arise at the lighted areas, and lighted playfields lead to constant participation in wholesome recreation. Lighted buildings encourage constructive, not destructive activities. After the initial installation cost, lighting is an inexpensive supervisor to maintain.

The Sixth Ward playground is the poorest in the city with no immediate improvements being considered, since its future may be dependent on the over all highway plan.

Most surveyors noted minor repairs were needed in most of the least supervised parks. A large number of tennis courts were being improved, but still a larger number needed repairs in the form of leveling.

Community center needs were best noted by viewing the inadequacy of the present buildings and checking the participation records. Logan Center appeared the most adequate of the present center buildings; Sibley the newest; Nicollet and Loring the most in need of a complete rebuilding. The Nicollet Center is well established in all program phases and something should be done quickly to meet its present and expanding needs.

III. Extent of Recreational Use of Parks and Nature of Supervision Training and Assignment of Leaders

This past summer 57 playgrounds were serviced by the Park Board on a schedule of five days per week for eight weeks. The leaders were given a day and a half of orientation before the playgrounds opened. The assistant recreation director, in charge of the training program and specialists in various fields, discussed the different areas of activity such as water safety, dancing, tennis, nature study, etc. The district recreation supervisors were responsible for the boys' playground activities in their districts and attempted to visit the parks at least every other day, while their assistants (women) were responsible for the girls' activities. They too visited the parks in their districts two or three times weekly. Special effort was made in the planning to retain one play leader at each park every week day, with the girls on the playgrounds from 9:30 to 12:30, 1:30 to 4:30, and the men from 2:00 to 5:30 and 6:30 to 8:30 or 9:00.

These leaders have broad and heavy responsibilities, and in the parks, where a large and varied age group wants to participate, more help is needed if the recreation program is to be fully organized and supervised. In reading this report we must keep constantly in mind the Park Board's limited funds for recreational leadership purposes.

Tiny Tots (preschool to second or third grade)

This age group participated most during mornings and mid-afternoon. A park with a wading pool was never empty during those hours. The attendance records surely justify expenditures for such facilities. The new parks and a few of the old ones have the new sanitary enclosed pools which are much better from a health and safety standpoint. They should be considered for city-wide installation as rapidly as possible.

An excellent water safety program was expanded this year with the instructor spending a day at each of five playgrounds. She initiated safety clubs and gave water safety instruction one hour at each park. It is regrettable that more in-

structors were not available at more parks for this purpose. One hundred and forty children and fifty adults showed up for the first day of instruction at one park (Linden Hills). Fortunately there were two teenage volunteers who could assist.

Tot-lots are play areas with sandboxes, swings and other play apparatus and craft supplies available, without toilets or other shelter, which are not needed since these small children should not be far from home for long periods of time. Thoughtful planning and experimentation permits spreading park services for tots without too major expenditures. The population trend in this age bracket is on the constant increase.

Intermediates (third thru sixth grade)

These children enjoy the parks throughout the daylight hours. More boys participated in sports than girls. Between Hennepin and Fourth Avenue and the Parade and Lake Street there are no spaces for baseball, football, etc. Out of Nicollet Community Center 70 teams participated in baseball.

A very fine induction workshop is given by the Park staff for the summer playground leaders. The plans laid out and the type of interested leaders contributed much to the success of the summer playground program for this age group. Most surveyors noted the best all over response to the crafts. Playground apparatus and game equipment were used heavily by this group. A variety of club groups and tournaments were carried on in the playgrounds, with more prevalent use where volunteers were assisting.

Teenagers (seventh grade up)

Lighted basketball courts receive nine months use with electricity serving as the supervisor. Most of the lighted courts had participants daily. Tennis interest and instruction is increasing in certain areas. Softball seems to be lagging, but hardball is increasing.

Teenagers do need special understanding. Where there were more permanent leaders or community volunteers, crafts and workshop as well as games and social activities were available. These young people were assisting in some areas, with childrens' programs, crafts, etc. They were encouraged to work on their own publicity, planning and decorating committees and even on clean-up and fix-up committees.

Evening and week-ends are the most desirable time for these activities but very few parks have been able to offer a supervised program particularly with emphasis for this group at those times because of lack of personnel (both paid and volunteer), lack of facilities and lack of equipment.

Adults

The younger members of this group are most completely mobile and, therefore, able to seek out the parks with facilities and equipment suited to their needs. They utilize the outdoor facilities widely, the sports fields and courts and picnic and play areas. In the older group there again is need for special understanding. There appears to be an overcrowding of some of the parks in areas where old age pensioners reside in large numbers. It is difficult for the Park Board to furnish sufficient permanent and varied personnel to constantly meet these needs. It would be well if more facilities could be geared to meet this problem.

General Comments

The present park supervisors are excellent, but there are not enough of them to cover all parks. The summer playgrounds program only covers eight of the 12-week vacation. Perhaps this could be extended by having less concentrated programming. It is important to keep buildings open and equipment available if a regular constructive pattern of leisure time activities is to be established. Teenagers have more available time evenings and week-ends, yet most parks are unsupervised week-ends. Only one park has kept teenagers activities going every Friday night for almost two years (this was due to community cooperation through volunteers). In this same area the Police Department records demonstrate concrete proof of the value since in 1953, 109 juveniles were involved and it dropped to 37 in 1954, a 70% decrease. Complaints dropped 45% in the same year from 146 to 85. City-wide there was only a 15% drop over this same time period.

The present recreation staff has very widespread responsibility. More assistants should be considered who could be permanently responsible at the various center of activities. Loss of valuable time in establishing programs both at beginning and ending of temporary leaders' time is inevitable. Permanent personnel creates good community relations due to their daily recognition of the needs and desires for the area.

Everyone realizes the value of the professional, but when funds are not available and the need is there, the use of volunteers should be seriously encouraged. Where this has been done, it has met with outstanding success. The encouragement of local volunteer groups to assist in providing leadership at the playgrounds should be continued. It has been interesting to note that the survey conducted by the Baltimore Council of Social Agencies on "Leadership Needs and Qualifications in Baltimore Playgrounds" in 1954 indicates the same leadership needs (both professional and volunteer) as ours.

IV. The Local Community Attitude Toward its Parks

Our surveyors found wide differences in the extent of community interest in parks, playgrounds and community centers. While variations are to be expected because of age, economic status, availability of other facilities and other conditions the differences between areas seem to exceed those which would result from these factors. We believe that this results from lack of adequate communication of information to the community about the park and recreation program.

There is a direct relation between the community's attitude and the extent of correct and up-to-date information on the community's park. In areas where local newspapers, volunteers and schools are cooperating in providing constant publicity, relation between the community and the parks are at their best. In general, there is insufficient localized information.

There is a lack of realization that the parks belong to the citizens, being paid for with their tax funds and being administered by their elected Board of Park Commissioners and paid staff. With the realization that this is the case, comes more civic pride, personal responsibility and notably less abuse of property. This has been demonstrated at Pershing, Kenny, Waite and elsewhere where community organizations have led to more cooperative endeavors with mutual benefit to all concerned.

Unless it makes for inefficient use of work crews, some improvement money should be allocated for smaller improvements in many parks for we find that even small improvements tend to increase interest and pride in the park by the surrounding com-

munity. Further, the communities reaction to small improvements will help determine the reaction to further improvements and the possible willingness of the area to locally finance by contribution or assessment some of the work which needs doing.

Park Section Survey Committees

In making the survey the city was broken down into the geographical areas which contained approximately an equal number of parks and each of which included a community center. The boundaries of each of the areas are as follows:

NORTH (includes area of Glenwood Avenue on the South, the River on the East and city limits on West and North)

Chairman -- Mrs. Francois Johnston
Rev. Charles M. Sexton
Paul W. Anderson

SOUTH (Bounded on North by Lake Street, West by Bloomington Avenue, East and South by city limits)

Chairman -- Alvin G. Anderson
Mrs. John Dean
Mrs. Arnold Church

EAST (River and St. Paul city limits serve as boundaries)

Chairman -- R. A. Vanstrum
George Nelson
Lloyd Booth
Mr. & Mrs. Raymond H. Shove
Mrs. Edwin Furru

CENTRAL (Bounded on South by Lake Street, East by the River, North by Glenwood Avenue and Cedar Lake and West by the city limits)

Chairman-- Mrs. Marvin Sukov
Mrs. William Stevens
Tom Warner

SOUTHWEST (Bounded on East by Bloomington Ave., North by Lake Street, West and South by city limits)

Chairman -- Dr. Leslie S. Keyes
Allen Benzick
Mrs. Jordan
Harold Chucker
O. D. Gay
Mrs. Felix Perry

Park Section Chairman -- John Livingston

Survey Chairman -- Mrs. John (Inez) Crimmins

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.