



WALK-THROUGH OF THE 2005 THOMPSON COUNTY PARK MASTER PLAN

VISION FOR THOMPSON COUNTY PARK:

A blend of facilities for individuals and groups, with recreation and education focused on the natural resource setting.

OVERARCHING CONCEPT FOR THE THOMPSON COUNTY PARK MASTER PLAN:

An urban oasis for all seasons that provides a stage for community life and celebration.

OVERVIEW OF THE PARK

Thompson County Park is a County Park in the Dakota County Park System, and is located in the city of West St. Paul, south of Butler Avenue, west of Highway 52, west of South St. Paul's Kaposia Park and connected to it by a pedestrian bridge. The 57-acre park lies along the east bank of Thompson Lake, and includes an active recreation area complete with indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, and a passive area characterized by dense woods and trails. The park's role in the regional system is to provide outdoor recreation facilities for northern Dakota County residents in a natural resource setting.

Acquisition Status: The park is publicly owned.

Last Master Plan: 1989.

Current Recreational Uses: Hiking/Walking, Social gatherings, Picnics, Senior citizen events.



Dakota Lodge

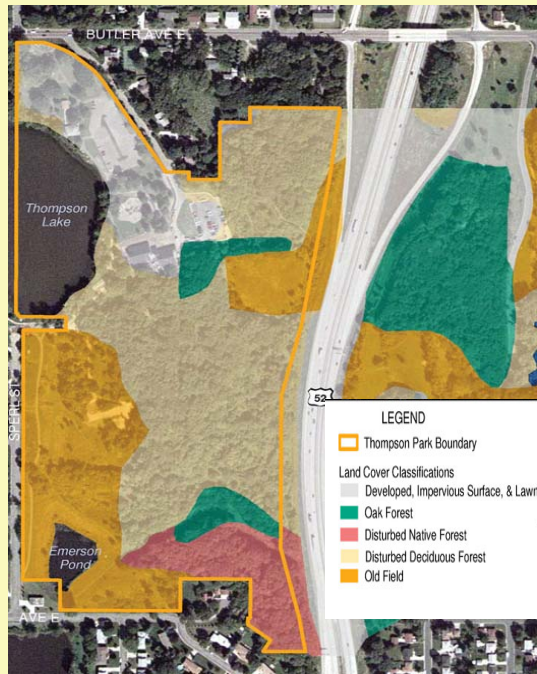
GOALS FOR THIS PLAN

The Thompson County Master Plan reflects the site history, geographic setting, and recreational needs of the area, and the natural and cultural resources of the park itself. The plan sets a vision for the park and guides its physical development for appropriate and enriching recreational use. The planning process specifically sought to:

- ✓ Create a highly designed, pastoral landscape in the active park areas that transitions to the wooded natural area
- ✓ Make Dakota Lodge the “nucleus” of park activities
- ✓ Develop programming that supports the outdoor extension of Dakota Lodge use
- ✓ Enable the Park to be a stage for community life and celebration

The master plan is the first step in realizing the vision created for Thompson County Park.

EXISTING VEGETATIVE COVER



NATURAL RESOURCE HIGHLIGHTS: The plan reports on park ecosystems to understand the park’s “health.”

VEGETATIVE COVER: Prior to European settlement, the park area was covered with scattered trees and oak groves. In the 1800s, the land was cleared for agricultural uses. With increasing urbanization, farming ceased and the site became a park. Repeated disturbance by farming and grazing eliminated native plants, degraded soil structure, reduced soil fertility, and altered hydrologic cycles. The park’s ecological connection to the Mississippi River was severed when Highway 52 was built in the 1970s. The site has become increasingly covered with non-native weedy tree and shrub species over time, and species diversity is low. Existing land cover types include:

- Oak Forest
- Disturbed Native Forest
- Disturbed Forest
- Developed Land

The plan also examines water resources, with the following findings:

- ♦ Erosion is occurring on the bank of Thompson Lake due to heavy use by fisherman
- ♦ A great deal of peak-time stormwater flows through Thompson Park

STEWARDSHIP: A large effort would be needed to restore native plant communities to the park. It may be more appropriate to create a park for people with emphasis on sustainable landscape practices. Stewardship priorities include:

- **Increase plant species diversity:** native species and fruiting plants.
- **Control invasive species:** Garlic Mustard and Common Buckthorn.
- **Improve water quality:** A water quality pond could prevent sediment from entering Thompson Lake. Continue riparian area restoration along shoreline of Thompson Lake.
- **Conduct targeted plant community restoration and reforestation:** Focus on high quality areas.



Remnant Oaks in Ravine



Stormwater Holding Pond



Disturbed Native Forest



West St. Paul City and Township - 1870

CULTURAL RESOURCE HIGHLIGHTS

Throughout history, the park area has remained open space within an ever-changing urban environment. Preservation of this open space provides a bridge to the past, with at least one archaeological site still intact. Remnants of stone tools, from as early as 6,000 B.C. have been found on the site. The park also sits on the former Kaposia Village, established by a band of Mdewakanton Dakota in the 1800s.

The Cultural Resource section of the plan identifies historical sites within the park; characterizes the significance of cultural resources; identifies zones for avoidance, preservation, and interpretation; and reviews requirements for resource preservation. Potential interpretive themes for the park include:

Theme 1: The Road to Kaposia—
The Native Americans of Thompson County Park

Theme 2: Daly at Dairy—
Early Euro-American Settlers and Agriculture

Theme 3: A Tale of Two Cities—
West St. Paul and South St. Paul

DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS

The development master plan for Thompson County Park is based on park resource analyses, public input on desired activities, and analysis of regional recreation needs. The plan enhances Thompson Park's continuing role as a natural oasis within the urban fabric of northern Dakota County.

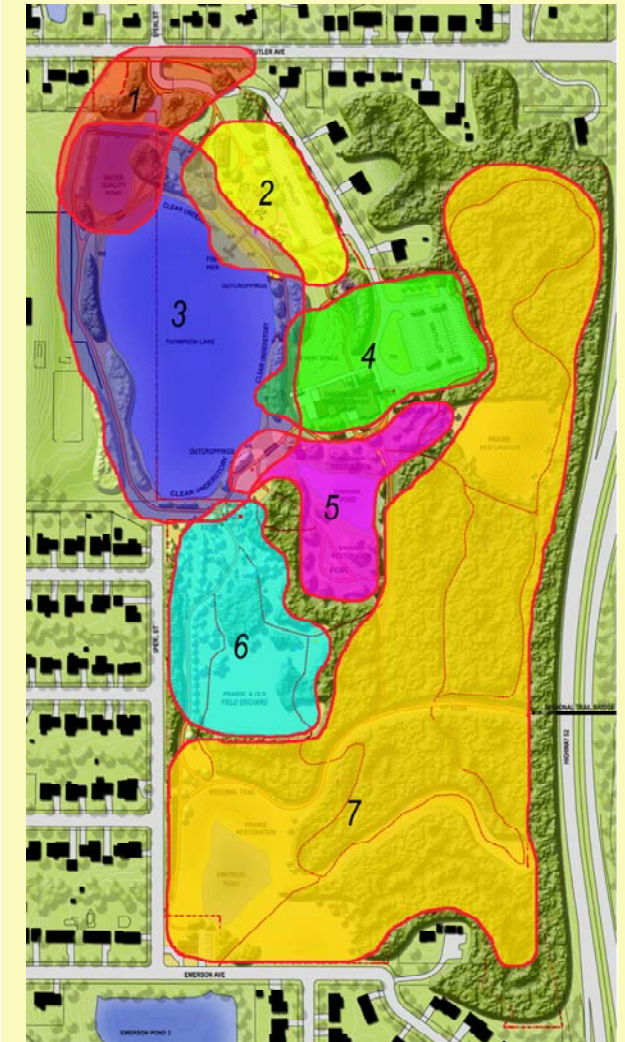
DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- Beautify the park
- Expand use of the south half of the park
- Extend use of the Lodge outdoors
- Enhance Thompson Lake
- Realign the entry drive
- Improve the trail network
- Expand picnic opportunities
- Improve parking distribution
- Recreate a pond for birding habitat and skating.

PLAN ELEMENTS: There are seven major master plan elements (see *right*). From north to south, they are:

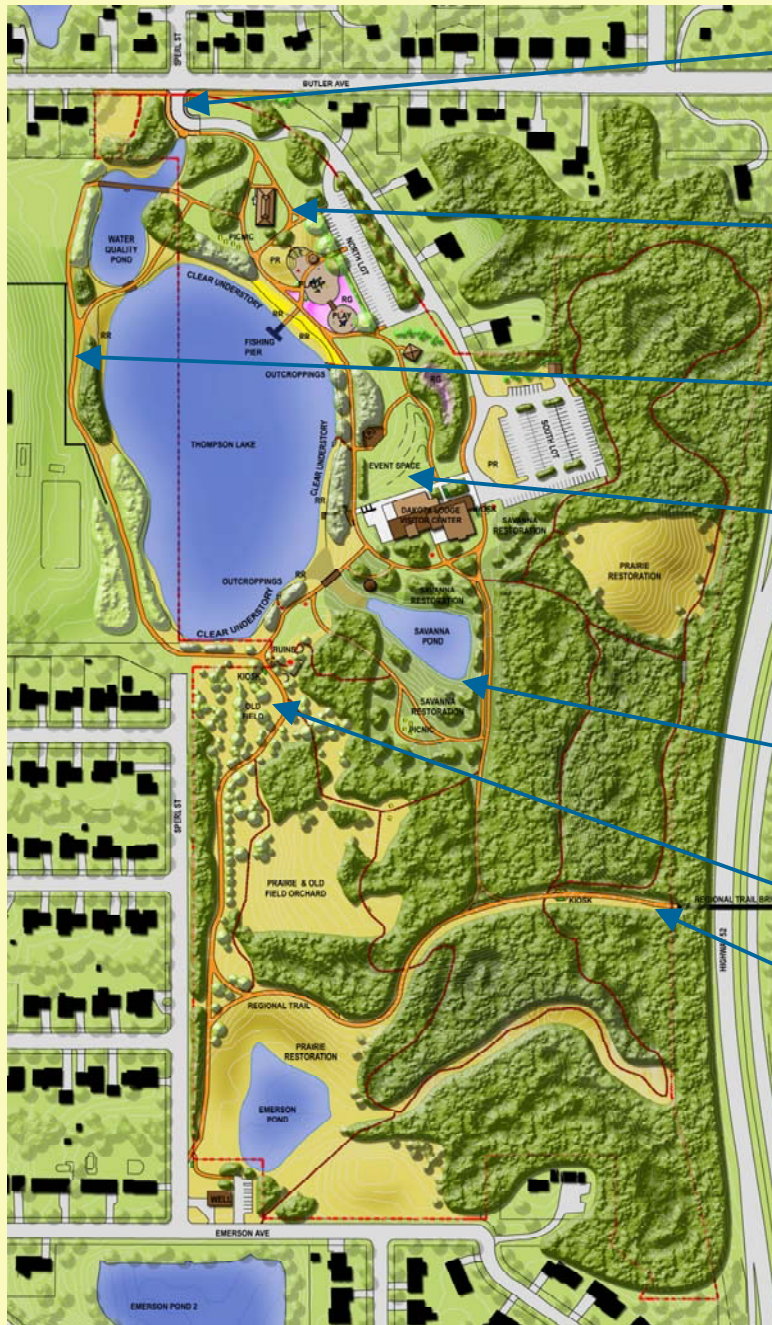
- 1) Entry drive and water quality pond,
- 2) Picnic and play area,
- 3) Lake loop trail,
- 4) Dakota Lodge area,
- 5) Woodlands pond area,
- 6) Old field, and
- 7) Historical south connection.

PLAN ELEMENTS



THOMPSON COUNTY PARK MASTER PLAN

THOMPSON COUNTY PARK MASTER PLAN: SEVEN KEY ELEMENTS



1. Entry Drive and Water Pond
 - Realigned entry drive for safer park entry and exiting.
 - New trail along Butler Avenue connects to Kaposia Park and to other park trails.
 - New water quality pond collects stormwater before it reaches Thompson Lake.
2. Picnic and Formal/Informal Play Areas
 - New enlarged picnic shelter with bathrooms, food serving station, grills, and picnic tables.
 - New bridge over expanded rain garden connects new 2-5 year old and new 5-12 year old playgrounds, located below shelter.
3. Lake Loop Trail
 - Paved west side of lake trail fulfills a major recreation need in the park.
 - Floating boardwalk trail over the water quality pond provides an interpretive lookout over the two waterbodies.
4. Dakota Lodge Area
 - The Lodge currently separates the north and south halves of the park. Area enhancements blend these two halves and extend Lodge use to the north, south, and west.
 - Expanded plaza on west side of lodge towards the lake.
 - Expanded plaza connects to a proposed lake overlook with stairs to a small lakeshore platform.
 - Play equipment relocated to north, closer to picnic shelter.
5. Savanna Pond
 - Created from existing wetland south of the Dakota Lodge.
 - Provides a bird watching area and winter ice skating rink.
 - Transition between the active north part of the park and the more passive south area.
6. Old Field
 - Orchard plantings of fruit, nut, and aromatic blooming trees near a recreated farmstead foundation.
7. Historical South Connection
 - Paved trail extends from Lodge parking lot to the North Urban Regional Trail.
 - Interpretive kiosk, seating, and waste receptacle located near the regional trail bridge over Highway 52.

MASTER PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

DAKOTA LODGE AREA



Dakota Lodge event space

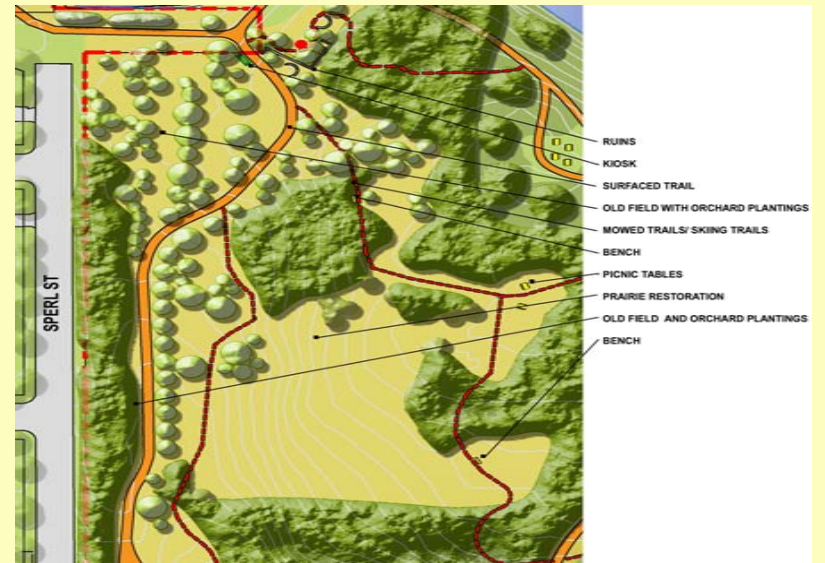
Orchard Plantings



PICNIC AND FORMAL/INFORMAL PLAY AREAS



OLD FIELD AREA



Development Priorities: Priority projects for implementation phases.

Early (1-5 years)

Trail Improvements
Woodland Pond with savanna gardens, loop trail
Entrance drive relocation and water quality pond

Mid (5-10 years)

Dakota Lodge Improvements

Late (10-15 years)

Picnic and Play Area
Old Field

On-Going

Plantings
Invasive Species Control

Suggested Outdoor Education Opportunities:

Cultural Themes

The Road to Kaposia
Daly to Diary
A Tale of Two Cities

Natural Themes

Urban wildlife, birding
Snow art
Seasonal landscapes

Stewardship

Home landscaping
Rainwater gardens
Edible landscapes

Recreation

Outdoor art/walk
Fitness walks
Fishing
Community festivals
Skiing/snowshoe
Skating

Implementation Costs:

Park Development	\$5,048,040
Plant Community Restoration	\$1,806,560
Total Implementation Cost	\$6,854,600

PLANNING PROCESS HIGHLIGHTS

The master plan update for Thompson County Park began in early 2004. The planning team included Hoisington Koegler Group, Inc. as the primary consultants and park planners, Ingraham and Associates as park planners, Barr Engineering as ecological consultants, and The 106 Group as archeological and cultural resource consultants. The project management team included staff from the Dakota County Office of Planning and the Parks Department. Members of the Dakota County Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PARAC) participated throughout the process. Natural and cultural resource experts from local, state, and federal agencies generously contributed their time and shared their knowledge at a series of workshops and with review of the plan. The Dakota County Board of Commissioners adopted the 2005 Master Plan for Thompson County Park on July 12, 2005.

The plan is available at Dakota County Libraries and online at www.co.dakota.mn.us/parks

Please direct e-comments to: DC2020@co.dakota.mn.us (that's DC 2 zero 2 zero@...), or mail comments to: Dakota County Office of Planning, 14955 Galaxie Ave., Apple Valley, MN 55124.

