

6:00 p.m. Study session – Community Room

Discussion items

1.	Environment and Sustainability Commission annual meeting with council
2.	Consider study session topic proposal: council ambassador program for advisory boards and commissions

Written reports

3.	Rainwater Rewards Program overview
4.	Environmental impacts of drive-throughs
5.	Emerald Ash Borer update
6.	Annual Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program

Members of the public can attend St. Louis Park Economic Development Authority and city council meetings in person. At regular city council meetings, members of the public may comment on any item on the agenda by attending the meeting in-person or by submitting written comments to info@stlouisparkmn.gov by noon the day of the meeting. Official minutes of meetings are available on the city website once approved.

Watch St. Louis Park Economic Development Authority or regular city council meetings live at bit.ly/watchslpcouncil or at www.parktv.org, or on local cable (Comcast SD channel 14/HD channel 798). Recordings of the meetings are available to watch on the city's YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/@slpcable, usually within 24 hours of the meeting's end.

City council study sessions are not broadcast.

Generally, it is not council practice to receive public comment during study sessions.

**The council chambers are equipped with Hearing Loop equipment and headsets are available to borrow.
If you need special accommodations or have questions about the meeting, please call 952.924.2505.**

Executive summary

Title: Environment and Sustainability Commission annual meeting with council

Recommended action: None at this time.

Policy consideration: Does the council have any work direction for this commission?

Summary: The second June 2026 boards and commission check-in with city council features the Environment and Sustainability Commission (ESC), represented by chair Jessie Hendrix. The staff liaison for this commission is Emily Ziring, sustainability manager.

The ESC is one of the five advisory boards and commissions whose purpose is to focus on guiding city initiatives by offering recommendations, collaborating with staff and council, fostering community engagement, and facilitating partnerships. Additionally, the ESC acts as a bridge between residents and the public for environmental and sustainability-related information.

The discussion will include a summary of the commission's most recent approved work plan, highlighting completed items, ongoing projects and areas still in progress. The focus of this check-in will be on opportunities for council feedback, guidance on work plan priorities, and any additional direction the council would like the commission to consider moving forward.

The next scheduled check-in on August 17, 2026, will feature the Police Advisory Commission.

Financial or budget considerations: None at this time.

Strategic priority consideration: St. Louis Park is committed to being a city that delivers reliable services, uses city resources responsibly, operates transparently and builds strong relationships with residents.

Supporting documents: ESC 2025 Approved Workplan

Prepared by: Pat Coleman, community engagement coordinator

Reviewed by: Cheyenne Brodeen, administrative services director; Pa Dao Yang, racial equity and inclusion director

Approved by: Kim Keller, city manager

Current Roster

Current Roster:	Notes/Comments:
Jessica Hendrix (Ward 4)	Term expires May 31, 2027
Tatiana Giraldo (Ward 1)	Term expires May 31, 2027
Adam Oien (Ward 2)	Term expires May 31, 2028
Shaina Ashare (Ward 3)	Term expires May 31, 2027
Marisa Bayer (Ward 4)	Term expired May 31, 2026
Ryan Griffin (Ward 2)	Term expires May 31, 2027
Natalie Wagner (Ward 2)	Term expired May 31, 2026
Sasha Shahidi (Ward 2)	Term expires May 31, 2027
Ethan Kehrberg (Ward 2)	Term expired May 31, 2026
Bennet Myhran (Ward 4)	Term expires May 31, 2027
Kati Helseth (Ward 2)	Term expires May 31, 2028
Avital Krebs (Ward 1)	Youth member - Term expired Aug. 31, 2025
Avery Kuehl (Ward 2)	Youth member - Term expired Aug. 31, 2025



Board and Commission Annual work plan

Presented to council: **February 18, 2025**

2025 work plan | *Environment and Sustainability Commission*

1	Initiative name: Prepare for Climate Action Plan update		
	Initiative type: ☒ Staff support (review project, policy or program and provide feedback) ☐ Independent research project ☐ Gather community feedback ☐ Lead community event	Initiative origin: ☐ Third party-initiated ☒ Staff-initiated ☒ Commission-initiated ☐ Council-initiated Legally required (e.g. response to Legislative changes or Judicial decisions)? ☐ Yes ☒ No	Commissioner lead(s) name(s): Shaina Ashare, Ryan Griffin, Ethan Kehrberg, Marisa Bayer If joint commission initiative, list other board or commission: Planning Commission Is this an established work group? (if applicable) ☐ Yes ☒ No but recommend new work group
	Initiative description: Discuss what, when and how the 2018 Climate Action Plan should be updated, and how to integrate the update into the comprehensive plan. - Review plan and highlight sections or initiatives to keep, remove and add in prep for update. - Recommend a timeline for updating the CAP. - Recommend a structure for updating the CAP: amend current CAP or rewrite? - Consider a community engagement plan.		
	Strategic Priority: ☐ 1 ☒ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ N/A		
	Deliverable: ☒ Research report ☐ Summary of community input ☐ Other ☐ N/A		
	Target completion date: Q4		
	<i>This section to be completed by staff:</i>		
	Council request (if applicable): ☐ Review and comment or reply ☐ Review and decide ☐ Informational only – no response needed		
	Budget required: None beyond staff capacity		
	Staff support required: New work group will require additional meetings outside of normal working hours. Anticipate 8-10 additional hours in 2025.		
Liaison comments: Supportive of this initiative and help from the work group.			

2	Initiative name: Electrification event		
	Initiative type: ☐ Staff support (review project, policy or program and provide feedback) ☐ Independent research project ☐ Gather community feedback ☒ Lead community event	Initiative origin: ☐ Third party-initiated ☐ Staff-initiated ☒ Commission-initiated ☐ Council-initiated Legally required (e.g. response to Legislative changes or Judicial decisions)? ☐ Yes ☒ No	Commissioner lead(s) name(s): Natalie Wagner, Tatiana Giraldo If joint commission initiative, list other board or commission: Is this an established work group? (if applicable) ☒ Yes—Events (reestablish) ☐ No
	Initiative description: Plan a public event to demonstrate e-bikes and share information about e-bike and home electrification incentive programs. Consider collaborating with other cities' environmental commissions. Idea: "Pedal, Pints & Power" event in July or August, would involve multiple stops at local businesses		
	Strategic Priority: ☐ 1 ☒ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ N/A		
	Deliverable: ☐ Research report ☐ Summary of community input ☐ Other ☒ N/A		
	Target completion date: Q3		
	<i>This section to be completed by staff:</i>		
	Council request (if applicable): ☐ Review and comment or reply ☐ Review and decide ☐ Informational only – no response needed		
	Budget required: TBD but may require local businesses to sponsor event		
	Staff support required: Events work group will require additional meetings outside of normal working hours. Anticipate 10-20 additional hours in 2025.		
Liaison comments: Staff appreciate commissioners' interest in organizing this event. Need to determine whether staff has capacity and budget to successfully accomplish.			

3	Initiative name: Promote curbside organics program to single-family households		
	Initiative type: ☒ Staff support (review project, policy or program and provide feedback) ☐ Independent research project ☒ Gather community feedback ☐ Lead community event	Initiative origin: ☐ Third party-initiated ☒ Staff-initiated ☒ Commission-initiated ☐ Council-initiated Legally required (e.g. response to Legislative changes or Judicial decisions)? ☐ Yes ☒ No	Commissioner lead(s) name(s): Jessie Hendrix, Eric Zweber, Ramil G. If joint commission initiative, list other board or commission: Is this an established work group? (if applicable) ☒ Yes – partner with Events work group ☐ No
	Initiative description: Support solid waste division staff in promoting organics recycling program to 1-4 unit households. Current participation rate is 43% among 1-4 unit households. Assist staff in creating poll to distribute to community members at tabling events to determine resistance to participation. Focus on 2-4 unit buildings to start. Encourage residents to participate in organics recycling through social media, outreach at events, and other engagement.		
	Strategic Priority: ☐ 1 ☒ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ N/A		
	Deliverable: ☒ Research report ☒ Summary of community input ☐ Other ☒ N/A		
	Target completion date: Q4		
	<i>This section to be completed by staff:</i>		
	Council request (if applicable): ☐ Review and comment or reply ☐ Review and decide ☐ Informational only – no response needed		
	Budget required: TBD		
	Staff support required: Success depends on capacity within Solid Waste division to support this work plan item, as this is not work managed by the sustainability division and the ESC liaison.		
Liaison comments:			

4	Initiative name: Educate residents at elementary school open houses		
	Initiative type: ☐ Staff support (review project, policy or program and provide feedback) ☐ Independent research project ☐ Gather community feedback ☒ Lead community event	Initiative origin: ☐ Third party-initiated ☐ Staff-initiated ☒ Commission-initiated ☐ Council-initiated Legally required (e.g. response to Legislative changes or Judicial decisions)? ☐ Yes ☒ No	Commissioner lead(s) name(s): Abigail Oppegaard, Avery Kuehl If joint commission initiative, list other board or commission: Is this an established work group? (if applicable) ☒ Yes – Events work group ☐ No
	Initiative description: Table at elementary school open houses to educate residents about city programs and state and federal incentives. High school commissioners lead an activity with kids to keep them occupied while they talk to parents about programs.		
	Strategic Priority: ☐ 1 ☒ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ N/A		
	Deliverable: ☐ Research report ☐ Summary of community input ☐ Other ☒ N/A		
	Target completion date: Q3		
	<i>This section to be completed by staff:</i>		
	Council request (if applicable): ☐ Review and comment or reply ☐ Review and decide ☒ Informational only – no response needed		
	Budget required: TBD but likely \$300 for materials for crafts		
	Staff support required: Events work group will require additional meetings outside of normal working hours.		
Liaison comments: Youth commissioners have great ideas for tabling and engaging kids to keep them occupied. Success depends on staff capacity to assist and provide materials as needed.			

5	Initiative name: Promote value of trees and native ecosystems		
	Initiative type: ☒ Staff support (review project, policy or program and provide feedback) ☐ Independent research project ☐ Gather community feedback ☐ Lead community event	Initiative origin: ☐ Third party-initiated ☒ Staff-initiated ☒ Commission-initiated ☐ Council-initiated Legally required (e.g. response to Legislative changes or Judicial decisions)? ☐ Yes ☒ No	Commissioner lead(s) name(s): Bennett Myhran, Sasha Shahidi If joint commission initiative, list other board or commission: Is this an established work group? (if applicable) ☐ Yes ☐ No
	Initiative description: Engage in various tree-promoting initiatives, including: - Assisting staff with Tree of the Year campaign ideas - Encourage use mystlouispark app or mystlouispark.org to submit ideas - Lead tree planting at nature center as part of joint meeting with Park & Recreation Advisory Commission in April - Table at Arbor Day event - Assisting staff in educating residents about tree care and maintenance via handouts, newsletter articles, social media Additionally: - Monitor effects of tree preservation ordinance through periodic meetings with CD and Natural Resources staff - Review how city categorizes park space and whether a new definition of “wild space” is needed - Research GHG emissions from wood waste and explore alternatives		
	Strategic Priority: ☐ 1 ☒ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ N/A		
	Deliverable: ☐ Research report ☐ Summary of community input ☒ Other ☐ N/A		
	Target completion date: Q4		
	<i>This section to be completed by staff:</i>		
	Council request (if applicable): ☐ Review and comment or reply ☐ Review and decide ☐ Informational only – no response needed		
	Budget required: None beyond planned		
	Staff support required: Success depends on CD and Natural Resources staff capacity to meet with and update ESC on these issues, as this work is not managed by the sustainability division and the ESC liaison.		
Liaison comments: Staff appreciate commissioners’ interest in tree preservation and native ecosystems and will provide as much support as capacity allows. Because trees within city parks fall under PRAC, further recommend that PRAC commissioners take on some of this work if interest and time allow.			

6	Initiative name: Support citywide Vision 4.0 process		
	Initiative type: ☒ Staff support (review project, policy or program and provide feedback) ☐ Independent research project ☐ Gather community feedback ☐ Lead community event	Initiative origin: ☐ Third party-initiated ☒ Staff-initiated ☐ Commission-initiated ☐ Council-initiated Legally required (e.g. response to Legislative changes or Judicial decisions)? ☐ Yes ☒ No	Commissioner lead(s) name(s): All If joint commission initiative, list other board or commission: Is this an established work group? (if applicable) ☐ Yes ☐ No
	Initiative description: Support the citywide Vision 4.0 process by participating directly and/or encouraging others to participate, and by sharing information with other community members about the process. This work plan item has been included in all board & commission work plans.		
	Strategic Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☒ 5 ☐ N/A		
	Deliverable: ☐ Research report ☐ Summary of community input ☒ Other ☐ N/A		
	Target completion date: Q3		
	<i>This section to be completed by staff:</i>		
	Council request (if applicable): ☐ Review and comment or reply ☐ Review and decide ☒ Informational only – no response needed		
	Budget required: None		
	Staff support required: Communication from staff liaison about opportunities with Vision 4.0		
Liaison comments: Plan to keep the commission informed about opportunities to assist with the citywide Vision 4.0 process.			

Initiative Origin Definitions

- Third party-initiated – Project initiated by applicant or external agency (statutory boards)
- Staff-initiated – Project initiated by staff liaison or other city staff
- Commission-initiated – Project initiated by the board or commission
- Council-initiated – Project tasked to a board or commission by the city council

Strategic Priorities

1. St. Louis Park is committed to being a leader in racial equity and inclusion in order to create a more just and inclusive community for all.
2. St. Louis Park is committed to continue to lead in environmental stewardship.
3. St. Louis Park is committed to providing a broad range of housing and neighborhood oriented development.
4. St. Louis Park is committed to providing a variety of options for people to make their way around the city comfortably, safely and reliably.
5. St. Louis Park is committed to creating opportunities to build social capital through community engagement

Modifications

- Work plans may be modified, to add or delete items, in one of three ways:
- Work plans can be modified by mutual agreement during a joint work session.
- If immediate approval is important, the board or commission can work with their staff liaison to present a modified work plan for city council approval at a council meeting.
- The city council can direct a change to the work plan at their discretion.

Future ideas

Initiatives that are being considered by the board or commission but not proposed in the annual work plan. Council approval is needed if the board or commission decides they would like to amend a work plan.

Initiative	Comments

Executive summary

Title: Consider study session topic proposal: council ambassador program for advisory boards and commissions

Recommended action: There is no action being requested. This item is for discussion purposes.

Policy consideration: Does the city council want to implement the council ambassador program for the five advisory boards and commissions?

Summary: Council members submitted a study session topic proposal to explore creating a council ambassador program for the city's five advisory boards and commissions (Community Technology Advisory Commission, Environment & Sustainability Commission, Human Rights Commission, Police Advisory Commission, and Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission). The goal of this model is to strengthen communication between the council and its advisory bodies, addressing the ongoing desire for more consistent and meaningful connection.

Staff reviewed the proposal and prepared a high-level analysis. On [May 4, 2026](#), the council chose to move this item to a future study session for additional discussion. All related materials are now ready for the council's consideration to determine whether they want to move forward with this model.

Financial or budget considerations: None

Strategic priority consideration: St. Louis Park is committed to being a city that delivers reliable services, uses city resources responsibly, operates transparently and builds strong relationships with residents.

Supporting documents: None

Prepared by: Pat Coleman, community engagement coordinator

Reviewed by: Cheyenne Brodeen, administrative services director;
Pa Dao Yang, racial equity and inclusion director

Approved by: Kim Keller, city manager

Discussion

Background: During the study session on [May 20, 2024](#), regarding the broader boards and commissions program, the council discussed how it wanted to provide policy direction to its advisory bodies. At that time, the idea of establishing a council liaison was introduced, but the council did not implement the idea because a number of members felt they lacked the capacity to effectively support such a structure.

Since then, the concept has resurfaced as the council continues to explore ways to strengthen its presence and engagement with advisory boards and commissions. To take a closer look, a previously established working group made up of three council members and three staff liaisons reconvened on Feb. 24, 2026. The discussion focused on what a council ambassador model could entail, including the role, expectations and boundaries needed for the program to be successful.

Present considerations: The discussion for the council during this study session focuses on identifying the core purposes and intent of the ambassador program. The following topic areas and recommendations reflect the consensus of the working group:

1. Purpose and Intent
 - a. Increase visibility between council and commission
 - b. Strengthen lines of communication
 - c. Demonstrate council's commitment to board and commission work
2. Ambassador Role Definition
 - a. What should ambassadors be:
 - i. Observers and listeners (ears)
 - ii. Information sharers about council consensus on decided matters
 - iii. Thought partners (with careful boundaries)
 - iv. Conduit for quicker communication
 - b. What ambassadors should not be
 - i. Commissioners themselves
 - ii. Replacements for staff liaisons
 - iii. Provide work direction or make decisions/commitments on behalf of the council
 - iv. Voices speaking for the entire council (unless sharing already-decided positions)
3. Responsibilities and expectations
 - a. Minimum of two meetings per year
 - b. To coordinate ambassador's attendance through email threads including agenda packets with the same RSVP expectations as commissioners
 - c. Ambassadors should defer to staff liaisons for most questions during meetings
 - d. Commission members should continue using formal communication processes rather than directly contacting ambassadors
 - e. Outside-of-meeting contact should go through proper forms and processes
 - f. Ambassadors can share updates on council decisions already made
4. Boundaries and guardrails
 - a. Ambassadors must be clear when speaking personally versus sharing council positions

- b. Formal communication processes must still be used for commission business
 - c. Staff liaisons remain operational leads
 - d. No outside meeting or lobbying by individual commissioners to ambassadors
- 5. Matching and assignments process
 - a. Initial interest-based pairing, with annual review opportunities
- 6. Training and onboarding needs
 - a. Commission rosters
 - b. Rules and procedures document
 - c. Current workplans
 - d. City code sections relevant to the commission
- 7. Communication structure (with full council)
 - a. Standing agenda item following written reports on study session agendas for verbal updates that need to be shared with the full council
- 8. Evaluation and continuous improvement
 - a. Annual review process
 - i. First review to occur at the beginning of 2027 (note: this is less than a full year in order to be able to receive earlier feedback)
 - ii. Subsequent reviews of assignments and program effectiveness at the beginning of each year
 - b. Commissioner feedback
 - i. Annual email survey to all current commissioners for anonymous feedback
 - ii. Exit interviews for commissioners completing their service (not seeking reappointment or term-limited)
- 9. Relationship -building and recognition
 - a. Council-signed thank you notes for departing commissioners

Next steps: If the council chooses to move forward with this concept, staff will coordinate the next steps and ensure that the implementation occurs in alignment with council direction.

Executive summary

Title: Rainwater Rewards Program overview

Recommended action: The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the city's Rainwater Rewards Program.

Policy consideration: None at this time.

Summary: The city's Rainwater Rewards Program supports homeowners in making yard improvements that reduce runoff from roofs, driveways and other hard surfaces that do not allow water to soak into the ground naturally. These projects help reduce pollutants carried into local lakes and streams, improving overall water quality.

The Rainwater Rewards Program is structured as rebates offered by the city for projects such as rain gardens, rain barrels, permeable pavement and green roofs. Depending on the project, homeowners can receive up to 75% of the project cost, with a maximum reimbursement of \$3,000.

The city offers two different ways to complete a rainwater rewards project:

- Rain Garden Lottery – rain gardens are designed and installed for the residents by professionals.
- Rainwater Rewards Do-It-Yourself (DIY) – projects designed and built by the homeowners with or without help from professional designers and contractors; also includes rain barrels.

Applications are accepted year-round, but funding is limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis, so residents are encouraged to apply early. Since 2017, the program has helped residents install 363 rain gardens, 128 rain barrels, three permeable paver projects and one small water reuse project. The program has also received more than \$150,000 in Clean Water Land and Legacy Funds to help support resident projects through the Rain Garden Lottery program.

Financial or budget considerations: The annual budget for this program in 2026 is \$83,900. The city received \$27,900 in Clean Water grant funds and the remaining \$56,000 is funded through storm water utility funds. Any operating and maintenance costs are the responsibility of the property owner.

Strategic priority consideration: St. Louis Park is committed to being a climate leader that cares for the planet and maintains dynamic parks that connect people and nature.

Supporting documents: Discussion

Prepared by: Erick Francis, water resources manager

Reviewed by: Sarah Schweiger, engineering services manager;
Debra Heiser, engineering director

Approved by: Kim Keller, city manager

Discussion

Background: The focus of the Rainwater Rewards Program is to help roughly 12,000 single-family properties reduce the runoff and to mitigate drainage issues through infiltration practices that improve water quality and wildlife habitat while also reducing pressure on the city's stormwater infrastructure.

The initial planning process for the Rainwater Rewards Program began in 2016. By spring 2017, the program had been approved by the city council and funding was secured. Immediately following approval, the program was opened to the community and it began taking applications that summer. The water resource manager led the creation of the program and advocated for its many benefits, including improving water quality, increasing pollinator and wildlife habitat, and helping address isolated flooding issues.

What kinds of projects qualify? Eligible projects include anything that can demonstrate a reduction in rainwater runoff, which typically includes rain gardens, permeable pavement, green roofs, rain barrels, tree trenches and water reuse.

Ways to participate: There are two options to participate in the Rainwater Rewards Program:

Rain Garden Lottery: The lottery has been held every spring since 2018, and the program offers between 30 and 40 rain gardens annually, depending on available funding.

This program is a partnership between Metro Blooms (a non-profit who designs the rain gardens), Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa (a non-profit whose staff construct them), and residents who pick up the plants at a designated annual pickup event held at the Westwood Hills Nature Center and plant them in their new rain gardens. Additional planting assistance is available if needed.

The program's format had to be converted to a lottery early on due to overwhelming interest among residents. Depending on the year, over 100 residents participate in the lottery.

Once selected through the lottery, homeowners pay an upfront consultation fee of \$50. Once the project is completed, homeowners also cover 25% of the design and plants costs, averaging about \$200 for the entire project. The city contributes 75% of the design and plants costs and Clean Water Land and Legacy funding reimburses the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa for their work constructing the gardens.

Rainwater Rewards Do-It-Yourself (DIY): These are custom-made projects designed and built by homeowners; with or without help from professional designers and contractors. Often, DIY projects are completed as part of a home addition, larger landscaping project, to help reduce localized flooding issues, or to add pollinator habitat to their yard.

Rain barrels are also a part of the DIY program. They are a great way to collect roof runoff that can later be reused to water gardens and plants, helping to reduce potable water use.

Participants in the DIY program are typically eligible for reimbursement of up to 75% of project costs, with a maximum reimbursement of \$3,000. Rain barrels are reimbursed at \$50 each, up to three rain barrels and a maximum of \$150. Reimbursement is issued after the city inspects and approves the completed project.

How do residents apply? Homeowners can submit applications on the city's website year-round. Once approved, residents get notified via email and can start on the project. They also receive a specialized link to upload final documentation once the project is complete. Once the documentation is uploaded, the completed project is reviewed and reimbursement is issued.

Projects that were not approved by the city before construction began are not eligible for funding. The project must be completed within one year of approval.

On the city's side, most of the documentation process is handled automatically using ArcGIS software. The water resources manager has been successful in minimizing staff time spent administering the program and maximizing the funds available to residents to complete rainwater projects.

Community benefits: The St. Louis Park residents widely accepted and embraced the Rainwater Rewards Program. In its first nine years of implementation, the program supported the installation of 363 rain gardens, 128 rain barrels, three permeable paver projects and one small water reuse project. The program has also received more than \$150,000 in Clean Water Land and Legacy Funds to support resident projects through the Rain Garden Lottery program.

The program makes landscaping projects more affordable for residents by covering a significant portion of project costs. It also helps more community members improve the appearance of their property while providing water quality and wildlife benefits.

Operation and maintenance:

Maintenance agreements are required under St. Louis Park's Rainwater Rewards program to support collaborative water-resource protection, education, and outreach efforts between the city and the property owner. The agreements function as the city's mechanism to ensure that publicly funded private stormwater improvements continue to operate as designed and deliver intended environmental benefits over time. Specifically, they allow the city access to inspect each Best Management Practice (BMP) to verify proper function. Ultimately, the agreements help foster shared responsibility between the city and property owners in caring for these practices for years to come. Agreements are filed against the property for a five-year term under the DIY program. The lottery program, which are funded through clean water funds, require a ten-year agreement.

Executive summary

Title: Environmental impacts of drive-throughs

Recommended action: None at this time.

Policy consideration: None at this time.

Summary: In 2025, council members requested that staff study the impacts of drive-throughs on the environment. The purpose of this report is to respond to this request.

Drive-through windows can negatively affect greenhouse gas emissions, local air quality and walkability. However, they can also improve access for people with limited mobility, support businesses and generate tax revenue from previously underutilized land.

The city zoning code already limits where drive-throughs may be built. Proposed zoning code changes would further restrict them. In areas where drive-throughs are allowed, the zoning code includes multiple regulations that directly mitigate common concerns related to vehicle emissions, traffic impacts and pedestrian safety.

Staff will monitor trends in drive-through usage and will return to council if there is a desire for policy amendments.

Financial or budget considerations: None at this time.

Strategic priority considerations: St. Louis Park is committed to being a climate leader that cares for the planet and maintains dynamic parks that connect people and nature.

St. Louis Park is committed to being an inclusive, equitable and vibrant city where everyone feels safe and experiences a strong sense of belonging.

St. Louis Park is committed to providing safe, reliable and well-maintained infrastructure and neighborhoods that connect people and places with an emphasis on walking, biking and transit.

Supporting documents: [Oct. 11, 2021 study session agenda](#)
[Oct. 11, 2021 study session minutes](#)
Discussion

Prepared by: Emily Ziring, sustainability manager

Reviewed by: Sean Walther, deputy community development director

Approved by: Kim Keller, city manager

Discussion

Background: In 2021, council directed staff and the environment and sustainability commission (ESC) to collaborate on research and recommendations around the topic of vehicle idling. At an Oct. 11, 2021 study session, staff presented a menu of options to council, highlighting the two endorsed by the ESC. Council expressed opposition to regulating idling of privately owned vehicles but indicated support for staff and the ESC's two recommendations: an idling reduction policy for city fleet vehicles, and an educational campaign for drivers in St. Louis Park.

In 2022, the city manager approved the Idling Reduction Policy, which was then shared with departments through a series of staff meetings (the information has been re-shared annually in the years since). In collaboration with Park Nicollet/HealthPartners and St. Louis Park middle school students, parents and faculty, sustainability staff also launched *Idle-Free SLP*, a public health and education campaign for cleaner air and healthier lungs. Under *Idle-Free SLP*, "please do not idle" signs were distributed and posted in school and park parking lots, and property owners were invited to request a free aluminum sign for their commercial parking lots (includes schools, nonprofits, businesses and multifamily buildings). Handouts explaining the impacts of idling were also created and continue to be provided to school bus drivers, including those transporting kids from outside of St. Louis Park to programs at Westwood Hills Nature Center.

The *Idle-Free SLP* campaign has been well received by the public, and staff continue to field phone calls from other jurisdictions interested in replicating the program in their cities.

Simultaneously, council has considered a few new commercial development proposals that feature drive-throughs. Because using drive-throughs results in some amount of vehicle idling, this has led to some council members repeatedly raising the issue of the impact of drive-throughs on the environment. During the February 2025 council study session discussion about a proposed drive-through within the Terasă development and at the Oct. 6, 2025 council meeting discussion about a proposed Chipotle restaurant development in the Knollwood area, a number of council members requested that staff study the impacts of drive-throughs on the environment. The purpose of this report is to respond to those requests.

Present considerations: There are currently nearly 20 existing drive-throughs in St. Louis Park (an additional three have been approved but are not yet built: Knollwood Chipotle, Park Place East and Terasă). Businesses with drive-throughs include eight banks, one pharmacy, a dry cleaner, two coffee shops and seven fast-food restaurants. An additional dozen or more businesses offer curbside pick-up for drivers to park and wait. The drive-through and curbside pick-up locations are noted in Figure 1 and Figure 2:



Figure 1. Map of St. Louis Park businesses with drive-throughs

Note that the map does not include three additional drive-throughs that have been approved but are not yet built or open: Knollwood Chipotle, Park Place East, and Terasă.



Figure 2. Map of St. Louis Park businesses with curbside pick-up

Environmental impacts

Drive-throughs impact the environment in a number of ways.

Air quality and greenhouse gas emissions

Drivers who elect to use a drive-through are deciding to idle while they wait to place their order (or transact business) and/or pick-up their order at the pick-up window. In some cases, often when orders are placed in advance, drivers still need to park and wait for orders to be delivered to their vehicles—and although staff could not find research on how often drivers shut off their vehicles while parked and waiting for orders, anecdotal evidence suggests this happens rarely at either drive-through waiting areas or at curbside pick-up locations. As long as engines are running, diesel and gasoline-powered vehicles emit pollutants that are harmful to both local air quality and to global greenhouse gas concentrations. These tailpipe pollutants include carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), hydrocarbon (HC), particulate matter (PM), and carbon dioxide (CO₂).

Estimating the amount of pollutants emitted is challenging due to the variability of drive-through wait times, drive-through customers, vehicle types, vehicle condition and vehicle features. To walk through one example:

- A large sedan burns, on average, 0.39 gallons/hour while idling; this is equivalent to 7.6 lbs. of CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent, a measure of greenhouse gases).
 - 7.6 lbs./60 minutes=0.13 lbs. per minute.
- McDonald's national average wait time in 2025 was just over six minutes.¹
- Six minutes of idling a large sedan emits 0.78 lbs. of CO₂e at the drive-through.
- Assuming 650 customers use the drive-through daily, that equates to 507 pounds CO₂e emitted per day at McDonald's. This is equivalent to greenhouse gas emissions produced by burning 26 gallons of gasoline.

If this example were a bank instead of a McDonald's, it would likely be less than half that amount (banks generate about 170 drive-through visits per day for every 1,000 square feet of building).

Depending on the length of the vehicle queue, wind conditions, and the amount of sunlight present, these pollutants can be more concentrated and unhealthier, creating clouds of poor air quality and ground-level ozone (smog). This can cause equity and public health concerns for those who live, work, or wait for transit near retail businesses with drive-throughs, including the retail business employees themselves.

There are additional variables that can affect the amount of pollution caused by drive-throughs. The example above does not necessarily consider what's known as "stop-start" or "idling stop" systems, where when a vehicle comes to a complete stop, the technology may turn off the vehicle's engine. In the US, manufacturers began to include this technology around 2012 when the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) made it so car companies could earn a credit toward federal emissions rules by installing the feature in vehicles; now over 62% of 2023

¹ 2025 QSR Drive-Thru Report

model-year vehicles come with it installed. Depending on driving conditions, stop-start technology can improve fuel economy by up to 26%, although most cars also have the option to turn this feature off easily on the main dashboard (disabling the feature must be done each time the car is re-started). In February 2026, the EPA rescinded the ability for manufacturers to earn a credit for employing the start-stop feature, referring to the technology as “almost universally hated” in its press release.²

Safety for non-vehicular travelers

St. Louis Park’s support of non-motorized transportation is well established and is reflected in the city’s “Connected, safe infrastructure” priority. But the physical elements needed to operate most drive-throughs—wide driveways, multiple lanes for circulation, and curb cuts—can conflict with the desire to create safe paths for pedestrians and cyclists to get around. Additionally, land for parking and vehicle stacking can place the retail establishment farther from the sidewalk than it would otherwise be. This can make it less convenient, direct and welcoming for pedestrians and cyclists to navigate these retail establishments and their surrounding area. Drivers who are distracted by ordering and waiting or impatiently driving away after receiving their order may not be looking for people on foot or bikes, which adds risks to their safety.

Pedestrian-oriented design and interaction

An indirect environmental impact is that customers who visit retail drive-throughs are less likely to engage with other local businesses than customers who exit their vehicles or approach on foot or bicycle. There are more opportunities for social interactions outside of vehicles—customers can get to know their local businesses and one another. Walk-in customers are also more likely to complete additional errands or stops without getting back into their vehicles, reducing vehicle emissions.

Drive-throughs also impact building orientation. Having a drive-through means that a business is likely to have vehicle traffic encircling it, which in turn creates an environment in which customers are less willing to approach on foot or on bicycles.

Benefits

Drive-throughs also pose a number of benefits for communities and their residents and visitors.

Equity for customers

Drive-throughs allow people with disabilities and anyone with limited mobility to access retail businesses without issue (as long as they have a vehicle). They are also a convenient option for parents and caregivers of young children, saving the time and hassle of unbuckling and carrying kids, especially in inclement weather. These opportunities spur revenue for these businesses that might not be generated in the absence of a drive-through.

Use of underutilized land

Redevelopment projects can transform land that generates limited tax revenue into active sites that contribute significantly more to the tax base. This applies to all types of redevelopment

² U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (2026, February 12). *President Trump and Administrator Zeldin Deliver Single Largest Deregulatory Action in U.S. History* [Press release]. <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/president-trump-and-administrator-zeldin-deliver-single-largest-deregulatory-action-us>

projects, including those with drive-throughs. Some recent examples include the Park Place East, Knollwood Chipotle and Terasă projects.

Park Place East is an approved project located at 5775 Wayzata Boulevard that proposes redeveloping a portion of an existing office parking lot with two retail buildings. The buildings may contain a total of four fast casual restaurants and a drive-through lane for pick-up orders only. The existing site has a nine-story office building and two underutilized surface parking lots with over 550 parking spaces. The project would more efficiently use existing parking to meet the needs of both uses, provide desired services in the area and generate more economic productivity on the site. It would also provide additional aesthetic and environmental benefits through landscaping and stormwater management improvements and by helping to screen part of the shared parking lot behind the new buildings from the street.

The Knollwood Chipotle project on the northwest corner of Highway 7 and Aquila Avenue South developed a vacant site formerly used as on-ramp to Highway 7 with a Chipotle restaurant with a drive-through lane for pick-up orders only. The site was previously encumbered by a highway easement until the Minnesota Department of Transportation released a portion of this easement in 2022, allowing redevelopment of the land. Despite releasing the easement, the property presented several development challenges given its size, shape and lack of direct access to a roadway. Knollwood Chipotle will increase the value of this vacant site and add to the commercial nature of this corner of the city. The project is currently under construction with an anticipated opening in mid-July 2026.

Another example is the Terasă project, which is currently under construction at 5401 Gamble Drive, directly south of the Shops at West End. The redevelopment will convert a 3.3-acre office property into a six-story, 223-unit mixed-use, mixed-income apartment building with approximately 21,000 square feet of commercial space, potentially including a grocer, restaurant and coffee shop with a drive-through. The current assessed market value of the subject redevelopment site is \$6.87 million and the estimated value upon project completion is \$73.1 million. The developer has also shared that having a drive-through use in one of the retail spaces reduces the financial gap significantly compared to a non-drive-through use.

Zoning code and design standards mitigate concerns

Reflecting prior city council direction dating back to [2003](#), the zoning code limits drive-throughs to specific zoning districts and subjects them to conditions intended to address their potential impacts. Under the current zoning ordinance, drive-throughs are permitted with a conditional use permit (CUP) in the C-1 neighborhood commercial, C-2 general commercial and O office districts. Drive-throughs are also permitted with conditions in three planned unit development (PUD) districts (10, 12 and 25). Drive-throughs located in the C-1, C-2 and O districts must meet the following conditions:

- Locate more than 100 feet from a residentially zoned property with a residential or institutional use (e.g., school, religious institution, community center)
- Comply with yard requirements
- Provide stacking for a minimum of six cars per customer service point
- Demonstrate the use will not adversely impact the existing level of service on adjacent streets and intersections

- Demonstrate the use will not impede traffic or impair vehicular and pedestrian traffic movement
- Provide site access from a collector or arterial roadway
- Ensure compatibility between canopies and principal building design
- Conform to the comprehensive plan

The table below details where drive-throughs are permitted or prohibited:

District	Permission	Notes
C-1 neighborhood commercial	Permitted with CUP	
C-2 general commercial	Permitted with CUP	Not permitted as an accessory use to pawnshops, firearm sales, payday loan agency and currency exchange
O office	Permitted with CUP	
PUD 10, 12, 25	Permitted with conditions	PUD 10 limits in-vehicle sales and services as accessory uses to restaurants, banks and pharmacies PUD 10 – Knollwood Mall PUD 12 – McDonald’s on Excelsior and surrounding area PUD 25 - Terasă
N districts	Not permitted	
BP business park	Not permitted	
IP industrial park	Not permitted	
IG general industrial	Not permitted	
MX-1 neighborhood mixed use	Not permitted	
MX-2 vertical mixed use	Not permitted	Specifically prohibited for banks, food service, post office customer service, private entertainment (indoor) with or without intoxicating liquor license, service, vendor market
POS parks and open space	Not permitted	
PUD 2, 22, 24	Not permitted	Specified under the list of permitted commercial uses
PUD 1, 3-9, 11, 13-21, 23, 26	Not permitted	Not listed as a permitted use

Under the [proposed zoning code update phase 2](#) (to be considered by council later this year), drive-throughs siting could be subject to an additional restriction; as currently drafted, the amended code would not allow them in residential mixed-use buildings. Further, they would not be permitted in the MU-1 district, which includes Historic Walker Lake and the smaller commercial nodes along Minnetonka Boulevard and most of Excelsior Boulevard.

Although the zoning code permits drive-throughs, it incorporates multiple regulations that directly mitigate common concerns related to vehicle emissions, traffic impacts and pedestrian safety. These provisions emphasize site design and transportation alternatives that reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles.

First, the off-street parking ordinance supports reduced vehicle trips by allowing parking requirement reductions for developments located near transit. Depending on proximity and transit type, parking may be reduced by 10 to 30%. This encourages transit use and limits the scale of auto-oriented site design typically associated with drive-throughs. The city further reinforces this approach by coordinating with Metro Transit and developers to ensure site plans provide convenient and comfortable access to nearby transit facilities.

Second, the zoning code promotes lower-emission transportation options. All new, expanded or reconstructed parking structures or lots must include bicycle parking proportional to the amount of off-street parking and the use of the site. Parking lots with 15 or more parking spaces must also provide electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure including both EV chargers and infrastructure to accommodate future installation of EV chargers. These requirements support a shift toward biking and electric vehicle use, helping offset emissions associated with drive-through activity.

Third, design standards prioritize pedestrian safety and walkability, which are key concerns for drive-through developments. Requirements for pedestrian infrastructure ensure safe and accessible pathways through sites, while ground-floor transparency standards enhance visibility and create a more engaging streetscape. Together, these elements reduce conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians and discourage auto-dominated site layouts.

Finally, in cases where drive-throughs are included in a planned unit development or the overall project receives financial assistance from the city, they must comply with the city's green building policy. This policy requires third-party sustainability certification and includes standards for energy efficiency, renewable energy use and resource conservation, further mitigating the environmental impacts associated with drive-through uses.

Collectively, these zoning regulations proactively offset some of the negative impacts of drive-throughs with transportation demand reduction, sustainable infrastructure and pedestrian-oriented design.

Looking into the future

The future of drive-throughs is difficult to predict. Historically, fast food drive-throughs have comprised 50 to 70% of visits—but trends since the pandemic show that fewer and fewer people are visiting drive-throughs each month and instead, are opting for “off-premises dining” provided by delivery and take-out. The National Restaurant Association reported that in 2025, nearly 75% of all restaurant traffic occurred off-premises³. At the same time, in an effort to retain and attract more customers, fast food restaurant operators are evolving, pouring capital

³ National Restaurant Association. (2025, April 16). *From Trend to Transformation: Off-Premises Dining Now Essential for Restaurant Consumers, Operators* [Press release]. <https://restaurant.org/research-and-media/media/press-releases/from-trend-to-transformation-off-premises-dining-now-essential-for-restaurant-consumers,-operators/>

into improving their drive-throughs since the pandemic. Restaurant chain locations with drive-throughs are more profitable than those without them because they require less staff and maintenance. Nationally, many fast-food chains are investing in shrinking dining rooms, building more drive-through lanes and upgrading drive-through technology with artificial intelligence-based cameras and order taking equipment (the country's only Taco Bell "Defy" location, which is drive-through only, is located in Minnesota). Banks are also investing more in mobile banking, reflecting trends that show fewer and fewer customers visiting branches or ATMs each year and over 75% of people preferring to bank online or via app. Even dry-cleaning consumers are shifting towards contactless service, preferring app-based pick-up and delivery rather than visiting their local dry cleaner⁴.

Consumer behavior is one variable, and technology is another. Even if manufacturers decide to stop installing start-stop systems in vehicles, any resulting tailpipe emissions increase may be offset by the increase in the number of EVs and hybrid electric vehicles on the road (vehicle types that produce no tailpipe emissions). EV ownership has been rising steadily in St. Louis Park in recent years. In 2025, EVs (including both battery electric vehicles and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles) made up 2.5% of cars registered in the city (1,227), compared to 0.36% in 2018 (177). Assuming the 2025 rate of adoption remains steady, EVs will make up 7% of cars in the city by 2030. The city's Climate Action Plan calls for EVs to make up 28% of car ownership by that year, and staff are working on plans to further promote EV ownership and simultaneously increase the number of EV chargers in the city.

Although municipal bans and restrictions on drive-throughs generate significant news coverage, Minneapolis was the first city in the US to ban drive-throughs (2019) and only five other American cities have put bans or restrictions in place since.

Next steps: Staff will monitor trends in drive-through usage and will return to council if there is a desire for policy amendments.

⁴ Unisec. (2025, March 10). *The Future of Dry Cleaning: Innovations, Market Trends, and Industry Growth*. <https://www.unisecdc.com/news-/the-future-of-dry-cleaning%3A-innovations%2C-market-trends%2C-and-industry-growth>

Executive summary

Title: Emerald Ash Borer update

Recommended action: No action recommended. The purpose of this report is to inform council members of the status of the emerald ash borer infestation in the city and resulting actions taken.

Policy consideration: None.

Summary: Emerald ash borer (EAB) is a destructive invasive pest that kills ash tree and was first discovered in St. Louis Park in 2019. The city preemptively began preparing for the impending infestation years before the discovery with strategic preventative injections in 2016 and an increased focus on planting. Since 2019, thousands of ash trees have been removed within the city, including 1,376 on city boulevards and maintained parks - nearly half of the inventoried ash tree population. This reduction in canopy prompted the city council to establish tree canopy goals of 30% by 2035 and 35% by 2045. Over the past decade, the city has planted or partially funded over 10,000 tree plantings on public and private properties and currently injects over 1,300 mature ash trees. These actions come with a significant cost. To moderate this burden, city staff have applied for multiple grants and have been awarded over \$1.2 million in grant funds since 2019.

The peak infestation in St. Louis Park appears to have been in 2023 – 2024 with a significant reduction in the number of ash trees remaining untreated. The next phase of EAB response is continued treatment and protection of remaining mature ash trees, continued planting, and an increased emphasis on maintaining the new cohort of trees that have been planted during this epidemic response.

Financial or budget considerations: None.

Strategic priority consideration: St. Louis Park is committed to being a climate leader that cares for the planet and maintains dynamic parks that connect people and nature.

Supporting documents: None.

Prepared by: Michael Bahe, natural resources manager

Reviewed by: Stacy M. Voelker, administrative coordinator
Larry Umphrey, parks superintendent
Cindy Walsh, deputy city manager

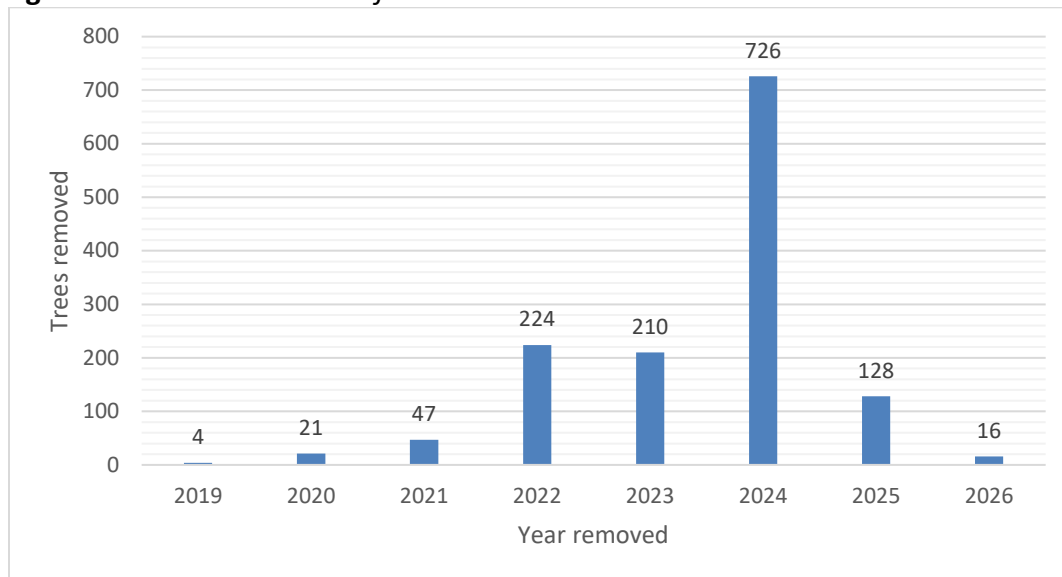
Approved by: Kim Keller, city manager

Discussion

Background: Historically, the city has actively managed infectious tree diseases (Dutch elm disease and oak wilt) and pests to reduce or prevent spread. Dutch elm disease has killed thousands of elm trees since the mid-1900s, leaving very few mature elms remaining. The city is now managing the emerald ash borer (EAB) beetle epidemic. This invasive insect species has been attacking and killing ash trees in the United States across the trees' native range, including St. Louis Park.

Emerald ash borer is an extremely destructive invasive pest that infests and kills all species of North American ash trees (trees in the genus *Fraxinus*). The first ash trees identified with EAB in St. Louis Park were found in 2019 and tree removal began that same year. Since that time, 1,376 public ash trees have been removed from our boulevards and maintained park areas with numbers peaking in 2024 (Figure 1). The spike in 2024 can be partially attributed to a state bonding grant that was awarded to the city to expedite removals before the trees became hazards. In addition, thousands more have been removed from our public natural areas, such as Westwood Hills Nature Center, and on private property.

Figure 1. Ash Tree Removals from Parks and Boulevards



Note. A state bonding grant allowed for expedited removals in 2024.

Many ash trees were protected from EAB with an insecticide injection treatment through the city's injection program. These injections are very effective in healthy ash trees. In 2016, the city initiated the treatment program for public trees in maintained areas. The focus was on treating high quality ash trees that were over 15 inches in diameter measured at 4.5 feet above the ground (DSH). These trees were injected on a three-year rotation based on research for large ash populations. Injections prior to the heaviest infestation years accomplished two main objectives: they protected the trees that received treatment and killed any of the adult EAB that subsequently fed on those trees. This reduced the overall EAB population, effectively slowing the progression of infestation within the city and allowing time to react without dead, hazardous trees standing.

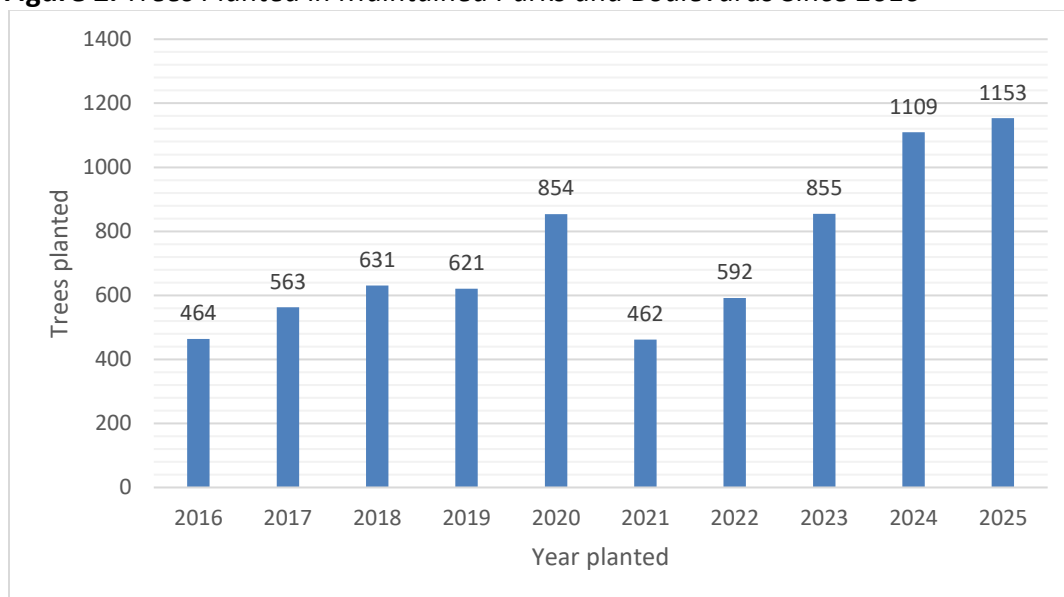
During 2023 and 2024, it appeared that the EAB population was reaching its peak in St. Louis Park. At that time, council provided additional funding for tree treatments that were utilized to increase injection rotation for the highest priority ash trees. At the end of 2025, the city treated a total of 1,366 ash trees; 435 trees treated on a two-year cycle. The average size of these trees was 22 inches in diameter.

Also in 2016, as part of the injection contract, the awarded contractor was required to provide a discount to private property owners in St. Louis Park for preventative injections. As of the end of 2025, 709 privately owned ash trees were protected utilizing this discount. Through this partnership, the city also educated homeowners on the value of treating their ash trees. This included promotional mailings, featured pieces in local news media, social media campaigns and the utilization of neighborhood communication applications.

Injections have preserved a significant amount of tree canopy throughout the city and all the benefits that trees provide to urban areas, such as increased property values, lower local temperatures, reduced stormwater runoff, storage of carbon, reduction of pollutants, wildlife habitat and healthier people. In many cases, especially on private property, injections can be continued for over a decade for the same price as removing the tree.

The loss of ash trees has resulted in a loss of canopy coverage throughout the city. In 2015 the University of Minnesota estimated the canopy coverage in St. Louis Park was around 38%. During an analysis in 2023, performed by city GIS staff, the coverage was 28.5%. It should not be assumed that the city has lost precisely 9.5% of its canopy in eight years because the same methods for data sources and software were not used, but it is safe to say a significant decline has occurred. In reaction to this decline, the city council approved ambitious canopy goals in 2024: 30% canopy by 2035 and 35% by 2045. To accomplish this, the city has aggressively planted trees in city boulevards, city parks, natural areas and on private property. Since 2016, the city has planted over 7,300 trees in parks and boulevards (Figure 2), and over 3,000 trees on private property through the city tree sales. To reduce future tree epidemic impacts, planted species have been diversified to ensure that one species does not dominate the population.

Figure 2. Trees Planted in Maintained Parks and Boulevards Since 2016



Removals, injections and replanting have come with significant financial cost to city operations and residents. To lessen this burden, city staff have consistently pursued grant funding over the past decade. Since 2016, the city has received ten grants totaling over \$1.27 million for ash tree removal, injections, tree planting and tree maintenance (Table 1). From that total, \$471,100 was received for direct support to private property owners for managing ash trees.

Table 1. *Grants received for ash tree management since 2016*

Grant name	Funding organization	Year received	Grant amount
SLP Healthy Canopy Grant	Hennepin County	2019	\$10,000.00
EAB Tree Planting Grant	MnDNR	2020	\$30,000.00
Shade Tree Program Bonding Grant	MnDNR	2021	\$40,000.00
Protect Community Forests by Managing Ash for EAB Grant	MnDNR	2022	\$25,320.95
2023 ReLeaf Community Forestry Grant	MnDNR	2023	\$371,100.00
2023 Shade Tree Program Bonding Grant	MnDNR	2024	\$489,232.00
Centering Communities in Canopy Solutions	MnDNR & USDA FS	2025	\$100,000.00
Community Tree Planting Grant	MetCouncil	2025	\$72,383.00
2025 Community Tree Planting Grant	MnDNR	2026	\$44,204.00
2025 ReLeaf Grant	MnDNR	2026	\$96,484.00
		Total:	\$1,278,723.95

The city also hosted seven AmeriCorps service members from GreenCorps and Climate Impact Corps from 2020 to 2025. These members supported natural resource staff with many tasks such as tree inventory, tree planting, tree watering, educational outreach, volunteer coordination, policy updates and grant activity management.

Present considerations: In 2026, EAB continues to dominate urban forest management in St. Louis Park, but large-scale removals and replanting is coming to an end. Over the next five years, ash management will rely on the continuation of our injection programs and removal of dead ash trees in natural areas that may impact people or property. Ash trees that are not hazards will be left standing as snags for wildlife habitat.

Other forestry operations will focus on preserving and increasing canopy by investing in the maintenance of the new cohort of trees that have been planted over the past decade to establish quality structure supporting tall canopies with reduced susceptibility to storm damage. In addition, natural resources staff will continue to actively enforce city tree protection ordinances on public and private property to preserve the mature trees that are critical to our canopy goals.

Executive summary

Title: Annual Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program

Recommended action: This report is intended to provide the council with a summary of activities undertaken by the city in 2025 to meet the city's Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit and Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program (SWPPP) requirements.

Policy consideration: None

Summary: The City of St. Louis Park is permitted by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) for the discharge of stormwater from the city's storm sewer system into waters of the state, such as Minnehaha Creek. This permit is required based on an amendment to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Clean Water Act (CWA) and the creation of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). St. Louis Park, along with over 200 other Minnesota cities, is permitted as an MS4 community.

Each year, as a condition of the permit, the city conducts a review of its SWPPP to determine program compliance, the appropriateness of best management practices (BMPs) and progress toward achieving the identified goals. City staff conducted an annual review of the activities completed to ensure compliance. The MPCA is in the process of updating their electronic reporting platform and, as a result, MS4 permittees covered by the 2020 MS4 general permit are not required to submit an annual report for calendar year 2025 by June 30, 2026. When MPCA releases its new e-service submittal program, anticipated sometime in 2026, the city will provide annual reports for our MS4 activities for the previous calendar years.

As a SWPPP requirement, the city provides the public with opportunities to offer input on the adequacy of the program. The SWPPP and the annual assessment materials are located on the city's stormwater management webpage, along with a link to submit questions or comments regarding the program's adequacy. Staff also held a public open house to share the city's stormwater program activities on March 26, 2026, at city hall. Approximately thirty community members attended the open house.

Financial or budget considerations: Not applicable at this time.

Strategic priority consideration: St. Louis Park is committed to being a climate leader that cares for the planet and maintains dynamic parks that connect people and nature.

Supporting documents: Discussion

- 2025 NPDES SWPPP activity highlights
- 2025 NPDES MS4 SWPPP activities completed
- 2026 NPDES MS4 SWPPP initiatives

Prepared by: Erick Francis, water resources manager

Reviewed by: Sarah Schweiger, engineering services manager
Debra Heiser, engineering director

Approved by: Kim Keller, city manager

Discussion

Background: The National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permits set requirements for discharging stormwater into state waters. Regulated small MS4 operators must develop a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Program (SWPPP) that:

- Reduces pollutants to the maximum extent practicable (MEP)
- Protect water quality
- Meeting Clean Water Act requirements

Under the EPA Phase II Rule, the SWPPP includes six Minimum Control Measures (MCMs) designed to significantly reduce pollutants in stormwater runoff:

- MCM 1: Public education and outreach
Educate the public on stormwater impacts and pollution prevention.
- MCM 2: Public participation/involvement
Engage the community in program development and implementation.
- MCM 3: Illicit discharge detection and elimination
Identify and eliminate illegal discharges, maintain system maps and public awareness.
- MCM 4: Construction site runoff control
Require erosion and sediment controls for construction sites (1+ acre).
- MCM 5: Post-Construction runoff control
Manage stormwater from new development and redevelopment using BMPs and site protection.
- MCM 6: Pollution prevention/good housekeeping
Reduce pollutants from municipal operations through training and practices (e.g., street sweeping, reduced chemical use, catch-basin cleaning).

Meeting the MEP standard requires developing and implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs) and achieving measurable goals for each of the six MCMs.

BMPs are effective, practical methods used to prevent or reduce pollution from nonpoint sources. These include regulatory measures, structural and nonstructural controls, and operation and maintenance procedures.

As required by the permit, the city reviews its SWPPP annually to assess compliance, evaluate BMP effectiveness and track progress toward goals. This review includes evaluating completed activities to ensure program requirements are met.

MS4 annual report updates: The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is developing a new e-service for MS4 annual reporting and updating report requirements to align with the 2020 MS4 general permit and federal NPDES Electronic Reporting Rule. As a result, permittees

are not required to submit a 2025 annual report by June 30, 2026. Instead, once the e-service launches, anticipated sometime in 2026, permittees will report data for prior years (2022–2025).

SWPPP review: Although the City of St. Louis Park is not required to submit a 2025 report, staff conducted an annual review of the activities completed to ensure compliance. The SWPPP is available on the city’s stormwater webpage. MPCA reporting evaluates BMP effectiveness and progress toward MCM goals using inspection data and public input collected during the reporting period.

Public engagement: The city provides multiple opportunities for public input, including outreach through publications, social media, events, and an annual public meeting. The 2026 meeting was held on March 26, in conjunction with the Metro Blooms Planting for Pollinators workshop, in the council chambers, where there were thirty attendees.

Ongoing commitment: Staff remains committed to implementing and improving the SWPPP, maintaining MS4 permit compliance, and refining processes to reduce pollutant runoff and improve record keeping.



Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program 2025 Activities

The MS4 General Permit requires regulated entities to reduce pollutants in stormwater by implementing a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program (SWPPP) and best management practices (BMPs). The City of St. Louis Park has developed required Standard Operating Procedures, Emergency Response Procedures and supporting documentation. The summary below provides the city's 2025 annual assessment of MCM activities.

MCM-1: Public Education and Outreach

Permit Requirement: Develop and implement a public education program that explains stormwater impacts and actions the public can take to reduce pollution.

2025 Activities:

Rainwater Rewards Program

- Installed 49 rain gardens; secured \$24,800 in Clean Water, Land and Legacy grant funding.
- Reimbursed 57 rain barrels.
- Hosted three workshops (42 attendees).

Educational materials and outreach

- Distributed materials on rainwater management and yard waste impacts.
- Posted: 2 pet waste, 4 smart salting and 1 illicit discharge messages.
- Shared materials at Westwood Hills Nature Center (38,823+ annual visitors).
- Published 32 stormwater articles (print and online).
- Posted 23 social media updates (248,225+ views; 5,159+ clicks).
- Recorded 3,634 website visits to stormwater program pages.

MCM-2: Public involvement and participation

Permit requirement: Develop and implement a public participation and involvement program to solicit public input on the Program.

The following are activities completed (see Table 1) in compliance with the Permit sections 17.3-17.7 and the city's program:

Table 1 Public Events and Meetings Held (2025)

Activities	Date	Quantity/ Units
Adopt-a-Drain	Open throughout the year	336 Participants
		585 Drains adopted

Activities	Date	Quantity/ Units
Steering Committee for the Minnesota Cities Stormwater Coalition	Monthly	200+ Member Cities
Metro Watershed Partners	Quarterly meetings	50+ Partners
Metro Blooms workshops	3	42 Attendees
City Council S.S. Report Stormwater 101 report	April 28	10 Attendees
Ecotacular	June 14, 2025	100+ Attendees

The Program materials are posted on the city's website [here](#); comments are welcome at any time.

MCM-3: Illicit discharge detection and elimination (IDDE)

Permit requirement: Develop, implement and enforce a program to detect and eliminate illicit discharges into the city's storm sewer system.

The following activities were completed in compliance with Permit Sections 18.8–18.17 and the city's program:

Illicit discharge response

- Investigated 11 illicit discharges; issued verbal and written warnings.
- ERPs and response records available upon request.

Inspection and mapping

- Identified and inspected high-priority areas (maps available upon request).
- Developed a Cartograph-based inspection and tracking database.
- Inspection reports and maps available upon request.

Training

- Implemented NeoGov training for field staff, including public works, parks and recreation, engineering, fire, police, and building and energy departments.

Public outreach

- Shared illicit discharge detection and prevention information on social media targeting residents, businesses, institutions and commercial facilities.

MCM-4: Construction site stormwater runoff control

Permit requirement: Develop, implement and enforce a construction site stormwater runoff control program that reduces pollutants in stormwater runoff related to construction activity.

The following activities were completed in compliance with Permit Sections 19.3–19.15 and the city’s program:

Permitting and review

- Reviewed 37 construction plans and issued 37 erosion control permits.
- Collected damage deposits to support compliance.

Inspections and enforcement

- Conducted 362 site inspections.
- Issued two written notices of violation (projects >1 acre); contractors responded and corrected issues.

Training

- Provided required training to engineering staff through NeoGov

MCM-5: Post-construction runoff control

Permit requirement: Develop, implement and enforce a post-construction stormwater management program that prevents or reduces water pollution after construction activity is completed.

The following activities were completed in compliance with Permit Sections 20.3–20.17 and the city’s program:

Plan review

- Reviewed stormwater management plans for 6 projects.

Inventory and mapping

- Maintained a GIS inventory of structural BMPs not owned or operated by the city (maps available upon request).

Training

- Engineering and community development staff completed required NeoGov training.

MCM-6: Pollution prevention/good housekeeping for municipal operations

Permit requirement: Develop and implement an operations and maintenance program that prevents or reduces the discharge of pollutants from permittee-owned and operated facilities.

The following are activities completed in compliance (Table 2) with the Permit sections 21.3-21.14 and the city's program:

Table 2 Pollution Prevention/Good Housekeeping Practices completed (2025)

Maintenance or operational activity	Location/Element	Quantity
Inspected	Storm sewer outfalls	120
	Stormwater ponds	60
	Stormwater management best practices (underground vaults, tree trenches, pervious pavers, rain gardens)	52
Maintained	Storm sewer outfalls, sump manholes, grit pit and underground vault	Two outfalls replaced, removed sediment, cleaned ten sump manholes, two grit pits
Removed sediment	Lamplighter Pond & Beltline Pond	3,211 cubic yards
Swept	Streets and alleys	1,454 miles and 7,545 cubic yards of material removed and about 4,200 cubic yards of leafy material removed
Chloride application	Primary roads	883 tons + 24.5 tons = 907.5 24,500 gallons of brine 24.5 tons of salt
Community-Assisted Monitoring Program (CAMP)	Water quality monitoring	6 Lakes: Bass Lake, Cobble Crest, South Oak Pond, Twin Lake, Westwood Lake
South Oak Pond Rehabilitation Project	Installation of a Contech stormwater filter system (80 filters)	Received \$350,000 in Clean Water Funds

The following outlines the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program (SWPPP) Minimum Control Measure (MCM) assessment of the activities that have been completed in 2025. These MCMs are included in the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit issued by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA).

MCM ACTIVITIES COMPLETED

2025
MCM



Installed 49 rain gardens and received \$32,000 in Clean Water Grant Funding



Sold 57 rain barrels



585 drains and 336 participants



Hosted 38,823 visitors at Westwood Hills Nature Center



Maintained level 4 Green Step City



Inspected 120 storm outfalls, 60 ponds and 52 stormwater treatment practices; removed sediment from Lamplighter pond



Public outreach: held annual SWPPP meeting, reported activities completed to city council, and attended the Ecotacular event.

2025
MCM



Provided Smart Salt training to city staff



Performed 362
construction site inspections



Received \$350,000 in Clean Water Funding
for the South Oak Treatment system



Held Blue Thumb Resilient Yard, Turf
Alternative and Rain Garden Maintenance
workshops with 42 attendees



23 social media posts with 248,225 views
and 5,159 clicks



Monitored six lakes within the city as part of the
Citizens-Assisted Monitoring Program (CAMP)



1,454 miles of streets and alleys swept
with 7,545 cubic yards of material removed



Experience LIFE in the Park

Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program 2026 Activities

This outlines the 2026 Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program (SWPPP) Minimum Control Measures (MCMs) required under the City of St. Louis Park's MS4 permit issued by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA).

MCM 1: Public education and outreach

Implement a public education program on stormwater impacts.

Focus on Rainwater Rewards and yard waste/mulching education.

- Continue Adopt-a-Drain (with Clean Water Minnesota).
- Host Metro Blooms Resilient Yards workshops.
- Participate in the Minnesota Cities Stormwater Coalition.
- Promote stormwater pollution prevention through partnerships, city communications, social media, and Westwood Hills Nature Center programs.

MCM 2: Public involvement

Solicit public input on the SWPPP.

Host a public open house on the SWPPP.

- Provide outreach at Ecotacular and other events.
- Hold a Rainwater Rewards plant pickup event.

MCM 3: Illicit discharge detection and elimination

Detect and eliminate illicit discharges to the storm sewer system.

Continue inspections and public education.

- Update mapping and launch a new ArcGIS tracking app.
- Provide staff training in NeoGov.

MCM 4: Construction site runoff control

Reduce construction-related stormwater pollution.

Continue erosion control plan review, inspections, enforcement, and education.

MCM 5: Post-construction runoff control

Prevent or reduce pollution after construction.

Continue plan reviews and coordination with watershed partners.

MCM 6: Pollution prevention and good housekeeping

Reduce pollutants from city-owned facilities and operations.

Maintain and repair storm sewer infrastructure.

- Identify BMP opportunities in street projects.
- Continue routine inspections, street sweeping, and maintenance.
- Continue to use Cartegraph and GIS for tracking.
- Provide online staff training modules in NeoGov.