

District 10 Como Community Council
District Plan
FINAL VERSION – JULY 13, 2015

Forward

Located on the edge of the City of St Paul, the Como Park neighborhood is one of the city's most desirable residential neighborhoods. It shares some of the characteristics of a suburban neighborhood and some characteristics of an urban one. At its heart lies Como Regional Park, an oasis of natural beauty that is also one of the most popular visitor attractions in the state. Heavily residential in character, the neighborhood also includes the Energy Park commercial district, a smattering of small- and medium-sized businesses and institutions, and borders the Minnesota State Fair Grounds.

This plan, submitted on behalf of the neighborhood by the District 10 Como Community Council, identifies the neighborhood's preferred path forward to resolve the tensions created by these dichotomies and to build a thriving neighborhood for the future. It was drafted by a volunteer committee of neighborhood residents after extensive public outreach and deliberation. Over the three years required to develop this plan, the committee heard from several hundred residents and invested over one thousand human-hours in its development.

Approved by the District 10 Como Community Council on _____

Neighborhood Vision

The Como Park neighborhood seeks to be a stable, livable, and connected community where residents, businesses, and public and private institutions can thrive.

Neighborhood Goals

In the next 10-15 years:

- The stable, residential quality of the neighborhood will be maintained with limited, sensitive development and re-development that enhances the residential quality of the neighborhood (Housing & Land Use).
- Park and recreational facilities, including Como Regional Park, will enhance the livability of the neighborhood as improvements are designed in partnership with the neighborhood (Parks & Recreation).
- The neighborhood's connectedness will be enhanced by increasing the walkability and bikeability of the neighborhood, by improving the safety of street crossings for pedestrians, and by maintaining a solid road infrastructure (Transportation).
- The neighborhood will be home to a thriving variety of small- and medium-sized businesses and institutions offering desirable products and services close to home (Business).
- Designs and policies that support the environment and promote sustainable development will reinforce the neighborhood's livability and economic vitality (Environment).

Chapter 1: Housing & Land Use (HLU)

Current State: The Como Park neighborhood is comprised primarily of single-family residential homes. Some rental housing, including large multi-family complexes and smaller properties, combined with smaller neighborhood businesses and a few large institutions, complete the neighborhood. Over 80% of the homes were built before 1960, but are generally well maintained and owner occupied.

Aside from the redevelopment of the Energy Park area in the 1980's, population growth in the neighborhood has been low. There are virtually no vacant lots in the neighborhood, so opportunities for development and re-development will by necessity involve the re-use or replacement of current structures.

Como Park neighbors are passionate about preserving the residential character and natural environment in the neighborhood. As re-development occurs, it is vital to ensure that projects respect the scale and residential character of the neighborhood, re-use existing structures where possible, and expand business and housing alternatives that are congruent with the existing neighborhood.

Vision: The stable, residential quality of the neighborhood will be maintained with limited, sensitive development and re-development that enhances the residential quality of the neighborhood (Housing & Land Use).

Strategies

HLU 1 Maintain the residential character of the neighborhood by supporting re-development projects that add to, rather than detract from, it:

General Neighborhood

HLU 1.1 Develop criteria for appropriate transitions between single family residential homes and other zoning uses that do not detract from the residential character of the neighborhood and minimize new intrusions into existing properties.

HLU 1.2 Develop commercial and mixed-use design standards that reinforce human scale developments, promote sustainable design, promote quality in exterior materials and construction, reinforce a pedestrian-oriented streetscape, manage storm water effectively, reduce impervious surfaces, incorporate Crime Prevention through Environmental Design, and encourage transit use.

Lexington & Larpenteur Area

HLU 1.3 Ensure that re-development in the area surrounding Lexington and Larpenteur Avenues is congruent with its established, residential scope and scale.

HLU 1.3.1 The line dividing the block between California and Larpenteur, between Lexington and Oxford, into north/south halves represents the start of the established, existing residential neighborhood composed of single family homes.

HLU 1.3.2 Maintain existing zoning so that development occurring along Larpenteur should be in keeping with the scale of the existing residential neighborhood, re-using existing structures where possible and avoiding the construction of new structures greater than two stories in height.

HLU 1.3.3 Appropriate buffers and transitions must be part of any re-development proposal in order to ensure that the scale and character of this established residential neighborhood is not permanently destroyed.

Snelling & Como Area

HLU 1.4 Complete a small area plan for the area surrounding Snelling and Como Avenues to identify commercial and residential re-development opportunities in light of new transit-oriented options facilitated by the opening of Metro Transit's "A Line" bus rapid transit. This plan should seek to identify actions needed to proactively transform Snelling Avenue from Hamline University to Midway Parkway into a transit-oriented, pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, neighborhood commercial district.

HLU 1.4.1 Identify priority pedestrian, bicycle, and traffic safety enhancements that can be taken in the short- and medium-term to rectify problems caused by the nature and location of the Como/Snelling on and off ramps, including a plan to limit cut through vehicle traffic on Breda Avenue.

Como/Front/Dale Area and Front Avenue

HLU 1.5 Complete a small area plan for the area surrounding the Como/Front/Dale intersection and Front Avenue (between Dale and Lexington) to identify commercial and residential re-development opportunities. This plan should seek to identify actions that encourage the development of a thriving commercial node at the C/F/D intersection.

HLU 1.5.1 Identify priority improvements that can be made to the C/F/D intersection itself that will improve its safety and aesthetic appeal, building off the recommendations in the "Re-Thinking the Intersection: Como/Front/Dale," prepared by the Metropolitan Design Center/University of Minnesota (<http://www.designcenter.umn.edu/projects/documents/ComoFrontDale.pdf>).

HLU 2 Identify resources to help neighbors stay in their homes or home neighborhood as they age.

HLU 2.1 Develop an online and/or printed toolkit of resources for distribution to the neighborhood.

HLU 2.2 Support re-development of the former Shalom Home Campus on Midway Parkway into a senior-focused living option.

HLU 3 Identify resources to that help maintain and improve the quality of the existing housing stock.

HLU 3.1 Develop an online and/or printed toolkit of resources for distribution to the neighborhood, including information on energy efficient investments.

HLU 3.2 Identify opportunities to support policies that ensure zoning enforcement is designed to keep residents in their homes rather than leading to abandonment/demolition.

HLU 4 Enhance physical cohesiveness of the neighborhood by supporting initiatives that strengthen neighborhood identity.

HLU 4.1 Support programs, studies, and policies that serve to preserve its historical character.

HLU 4.1.1 Support citizen-led preservation activities in the neighborhood.

HLU 4.1.2 Support cultural resources surveys in the neighborhood to both re-survey and to survey new historic sites and districts.

HLU 4.1.2.a Support survey work and potential designations for the historic “tangle town”/“warrens” area south of Como Lake

HLU 4.1.2.a Support survey work and potential designations for the western portion of the neighborhood, between Midway Parkway and Breda Avenue

HLU 4.1.3 Work with the City of St Paul to educate property owners regarding affordable preservation and to develop strategies for private maintenance and improvement initiatives.

HLU 4.1.4 Promote the use of historic tax credits and develop strategies for economic development through historic preservation.

HLU 4.1.5 Promote ongoing preservation and continued use of all designated sites in the neighborhood.

HLU 4.2 Support initiatives and policies to ensure that physical connections (streets, bridges, bikeways, etc) are enhanced with natural beauty.

HLU 4.3 Develop recommendations for neighborhood gateway and other branding installations, through SPVSP and other opportunities. See also TRN 2.3 below.

HLU 4.4 Support pilot research project to identify opportunities to incorporate more energy-efficient lantern streetlight options that focus light down, rather than up.

Chapter 2: Parks & Recreation

Current State: The Como Park neighborhood is defined, in many ways, by the presence of Como Regional Park in its heart. Smaller neighborhood facilities combined with the Parkway system to round out the neighborhood’s facilities.

As home to the second-most visited attraction in the state, Como Park neighbors enjoy easy access to a range of world-class attractions, amenities, and natural beauty in Como Regional Park. However, the presence of such a large and popular attraction in the heart of a residential neighborhood is a double-edged sword, as problems created by the ever-increasing number of visitors places a strain on the parking, street, and transportation infrastructure of the neighborhood – especially on the western and southern sides of the Regional Park. While passionate about maintaining the quality of the Regional Park and its many attractions, neighbors are concerned about investments in the park that will continue to expand its scope to such an extent that the neighborhood is unable to accommodate residents and visitors in a manner that respects the traditional character of the neighborhood.

The neighborhood’s recreational centers and passive parks are important neighborhood amenities that require ongoing investment, both in facilities and programming. The city’s Parkway system has the potential to be a signature civic amenity, but the portions within the Como Park neighborhood are neglected and poorly maintained.

Vision: Como Regional Park will remain a public amenity as park enhancements and improvements are designed in partnership with the neighborhood. The quality of neighborhood-level facilities and programming is enhanced.

Strategies

PRK 1 Enhance access to Como Regional Park by increasing the availability and utilization of mass transit options.

PRK 1.1. Incorporate recommendations made by the District 10 Council in response to the Como Regional Park Transportation Implementation Plan (see Appendix A).

PRK 1.2 Partner with Parks & Recreation Department to develop strategies that encourage utilization of the Como Regional Park Shuttle Service.

PRK 1.2.1 Partner with Parks & Recreation Department to explore the conditions necessary to utilize the Bandana Square parking ramp as an off-site parking/shuttle base.

PRK 2 Work with the Parks & Recreation Department to develop plans to maintain the passive and green space that makes Como Regional Park a natural oasis in an urban area.

PRK 2.1 Support maintaining tree/shrub buffers along the east side of Hamline Avenue, between Como Avenue and Arlington Avenue.

PRK 2.2 Work with the Parks & Recreation Department on a plan to clean up and eliminate dumping in the vicinity of the Hamline Avenue Parks & Recreation facility.

PRK 2.3 Support plans from the Parks & Recreation Department that preserve the amount of undeveloped green space surrounding the Como Pool.

PRK 2.4 Support investigation of the desirability of transforming East Como Lake Drive between Maryland and Lexington into green space.

PRK 3 Support efforts to preserve, maintain, and utilize the historic structures and elements within Como Regional Park.

PRK 3.1 Support efforts to rebuild the historic Compass Point on the east side of Como Lake

PRK 3.2 Support efforts to rehabilitate the Schiffman Fountain (mermaid fountain on the south side of the Lakeside Pavilion)

PRK 3.3 Support efforts to restore the Mannheim Memorial Steps

PRK 3.4 Support efforts to restore the Kaufman Cascade

PRK 4 Work in partnership with the Parks & Recreation Department, Como Zoo and Conservatory, park vendors, and other possible partners to provide amenities and programs in Como Regional Park that are focused on encouraging neighborhood utilization.

PRK 4.1 Support efforts to offer free WiFi at key locations throughout the park.

PRK 4.2 Work with above partners to develop a plan to increase the amount of neighborhood-scale programming available throughout the year, including educational and entertainment options for all ages.

PRK 4.3 Support efforts to maintain and expand the winter sports program.

PRK 4.4 Support efforts to identify the conditions necessary to re-introduce ice skating on Como Lake or, in the alternative, develop a seasonal lakeside rink.

PRK 5 Partner with elected officials and the Parks & Recreation Commission to develop a permanent mechanism to ensure that neighborhood voices are included in short- and long-term decisions related to Como Regional Park.

PRK 5.1 Support continued efforts that increase effectiveness of the Como Regional Park Advisory Committee. Recommend that park noise, the north/south bikeway parallel to Lexington, and Lexington Avenue crosswalk (north of the Pavilion) be identified as community priorities for action.

PRK 5.2 Facilitate the creation of routinely scheduled forums that link neighbors with elected officials, the Parks & Recreation Commission, and Parks & Recreation staff.

PRK 5.3 Partner with Parks & Recreation Department to study maximum capacity of Como Regional Park.

PRK 6 Support activities that maintain Tilden Park and other passive parks as neighborhood amenities.

PRK 6.1 Partner with the St Paul Police Department and Parks & Recreation Department on programs to ensure that a sense of physical safety and security is maintained, especially at Tilden and Orchard Recreation Center.

PRK 6.2 Facilitate the investigation of organized events that could provide positive teen-oriented activities.

PRK 7 Support activities that maintain and enhance the physical structure, amenities, and programs offered at the three neighborhood recreation centers.

PRK 7.1 Partner with Parks & Recreation Department and Black Hawk Soccer Club (Orchard Rec) to encourage development of neighborhood amenities, such as a coffee shop atmosphere with free WiFi, to create a place of community within the rec centers.

PRK 7.2 Partner with Parks & Recreation Department, St Paul Police Department, and Black Hawk Soccer Club to address neighborhood concerns related to Orchard Rec Center, including enhanced site signage, improved availability of online information, and personal safety.

PRK 7.3 Partner with Parks & Recreation Department and St Paul Police Department to enhance personal safety at North Dale Rec Center.

Chapter 3: Transportation

Current State: The Como Park neighborhood depends on a well-balanced transportation system that offers residents, visitors, and commuters viable mobility choices. Changes in personal preferences have increased demand for pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly amenities. Infrastructure gaps, growing demand, poor maintenance, and poorly planned facilities have created challenges for the neighborhood.

The neighborhood's transportation priorities include smoothing vehicle flow, increasing walkability and bikeability, and enhancing the public transit options available to both residents seeking to access other parts of the region and visitors to the neighborhood. Improving the safety of pedestrian street crossings is a critical priority.

The recent growth in the transportation of oil by rail, coupled with recent rail disasters, have flagged the issue of rail safety as critical to the neighborhood, which is bisected by two trunk rail lines.

Vision: The neighborhood's connectedness will be enhanced by increasing the walkability and bikeability of the neighborhood, by improving the safety of street crossings for pedestrians, and by maintaining a solid road infrastructure.

Strategies

TRN 1 Support efforts to enhance the connectedness of the neighborhood by improving pedestrian and bike facilities.

TRN 1.1 Support efforts through SPVSP and other programs to fill sidewalk gaps:

- Brewster/Pascal/Jessamine to Hamline
- Hamline south of Como
- Larpenteur between Hamline and Lexington
- The area roughly bounded by Grotto and Dale/Larpenteur and Arlington

TRN 1.2 Actively collaborate with Public Works Department, St Paul Police Department, and others to address dangerous pedestrian crossings and excessive vehicular speeds through appropriate safety and traffic calming treatments:

- Horton and Beulah
- Lexington between Hoyt and Larpenteur
- Horton and Churchill
- Como between Snelling and Hamline
- Victoria between Maryland and Larpenteur
- Hamline between Como and Larpenteur
- Lexington and East Como Lake Drive
- Como/Front/Dale and Front Avenue between Lexington and Dale

- Dale between Front and Larpenteur
- Chatsworth between Front and Horton

TRN 1.3 Incorporate by reference letter of support for St Paul Bicycle Plan (Appendix B).

TRN 1.4 Support efforts to construct a pedestrian/bicycle bridge over the northernmost BNSF Railway tracks at Hamline Avenue.

TRN 1.5 Support efforts to connect the Lexington Avenue bikeway with Pierce Butler Route.

TRN 1.6 Support development of a north-south bikeway roughly parallel to Lexington Avenue between Como and Larpenteur that incorporates Regional Park trails into a seamless, direct bike connection.

TRN 1.7 Support designation of Arlington Avenue as a bike connection to/from the Gateway Trail.

TRN 2 Support efforts that enhance neighborhood connectedness by enhancing public transit options.

TRN 2.1 Support efforts to increase utilization of Como Park Shuttle (see above, PRK 1.1).

TRN 2.2 Partner with Metro Transit to identify a transit solution for Lexington Avenue between Como and Larpenteur that fills this north-south gap.

TRN 2.3 Partner with Metro Transit and the City of St Paul to identify opportunities for gateway transit stops in the neighborhood and within Como Regional Park that include distinctive shelters and bike storage facilities. Options to investigate include Lexington and Front, Como/Front/Dale, Como and Snelling, and within Como Regional Park.

TRN 2.4 Partner with Metro Transit to identify opportunities to facilitate connections between different bus routes, including Routes 3/83 at Lexington and Hamline and Lexington and Como.

TRN 2.5 Ensure that planning efforts related to the Como/Front/Dale intersection (see HLU 1.5 above) facilitate improved transit connections.

TRN 3 Support efforts that enhance neighborhood connectedness by enhancing vehicular facilities.

TRN 3.1 Partner with Parks & Recreation Department to improve traffic and parking problems related to Como Regional Park (see PRK 1 above).

TRN 3.2 Develop neighborhood recommendation for installation of grade separation at Como and BNSF Railway crossing.

TRN 3.3 Support prompt actions to fix confusing or poorly designed streets that impede smooth traffic flows:

- Lexington Avenue between Front and Como
- Energy Park Drive eastbound at Lexington
- Lexington northbound at Larpenteur

TRN 3.4 Support efforts to ensure that streets are maintained in a state of good repair.

TRN 4 Engage in efforts to increase the safety of railroads in the area with a special focus on oil trains.

TRN 4.1 Collaborate with private and governmental agencies to educate neighborhood about the issue, including the importance emergency preparedness.

TRN 4.2 Actively monitor developments in this area for opportunities to identify and support plans to improve rail safety.

TRN 4.3 Support efforts to facilitate planning related to Como Avenue/BNSF Railway grade separation (See 3.2 above)

Strategy 4: Environment

Current State: Natural and designed amenities, especially green spaces, gardens, and Como Lake, make the Como Park neighborhood a special place to live and visit. Preserving and enhancing the natural environment in the neighborhood is important to residents, with a long history of environmental stewardship. Residents have made great strides in improving the water quality in Como Lake, enhancing shoreline preservation, and improving surrounding green spaces.

Vision: Designs and policies that support the environment and promote sustainable development will reinforce the neighborhood's livability and economic viability.

Strategies

ENV 1 Preserve and foster a strong neighborhood identity through clean energy development, waste reduction, and sound transportation design.

ENV 1.1 Encourage programs and policies that support clean energy development.

ENV 1.1.1 Develop an online toolkit promoting home energy audits and energy efficient home improvements.

ENV 1.1.2 Encourage efforts to develop solar, wind, and geothermal power.

ENV 1.1.3 Provide education to neighbors about clean energy and energy efficiency.

ENV 1.2 Support efforts to reduce waste.

ENV 1.2.1 Support efforts to increase curbside recycling.

ENV 1.2.2 Support efforts to encourage composting.

ENV 1.2.3 Educate residents about the importance and ease of utilizing household hazardous waste disposal sites.

ENV 1.3 Support the development of sound transportation alternatives.

ENV 1.3.1 Educate residents about non-polluting, energy efficient transportation options, including walking, biking, public transportation, and shared transportation.

ENV 2 Preserve and enhance the quality of the neighborhood's natural environment.

ENV 2.1 Encourage sound land management practices.

ENV 2.1.1 Support citizen efforts to collect tree and bird survey data as baseline for decision-making.

ENV 2.1.2 Support citizen efforts to improve the health of wooded areas through the addition of trees and removal of non-native, invasive species.

ENV 2.1.3 Support efforts to inventory Como Regional Park's natural resources, including trees, birds, and macro-invertebrates.

ENV 2.1.4 Support efforts to educate neighbors about bio-friendly lawn care management practices.

ENV 2.1.5 Support efforts to promote citizen involvement in community and native gardens.

ENV 2.2 Support efforts to improve water quality.

ENV 2.2.1 Support citizen efforts to remove leaves and adopt drains to help reduce runoff into Como Lake.

ENV 2.2.2 Partner with Capital Region Watershed District to improve water quality in Como Lake and work to support implementation of recommendations in the "Como Lake Strategic Plan," including increased use of rain gardens, construction of detention basins to offset Como Golf Course pollution, work to reduce waterfowl waste run-off, and efforts to improve street cleaning.

ENV 2.2.3 Support efforts by CRWD to improve storm water treatment in City of St Paul Public Works projects.

ENV 2.3 Support efforts to mitigate intrusive noise pollution in the neighborhood.

ENV 2.3.1 Work with the Como Regional Park Advisory Committee to develop strategies to mitigate noise pollution from Como Regional Park, especially ComoTown and large park events using amplified sound.

Chapter 5: Business

Current State: Given its character as a residential neighborhood, Como Park's business community is characterized by small businesses in disparate locations, coupled with a handful of large institutions, largely concentrated in the Energy Park area.

Neighbors have expressed a strong desire for locally-rooted retail, dining, and other businesses closer to home – in settings that enhance the quality of life. Despite the fully developed nature of the neighborhood, opportunities to create this exist in the neighborhood, especially in the Como/Snelling and Como/Front/Dale areas.

Vision: Neighbors actively support local businesses and work in partnership to identify opportunities that are sensitive to the context of the neighborhood.

Strategies

BUS 1 Partner with appropriate stakeholders to develop a plan for the redevelopment of the Shalom Home Campus site into a senior housing option (see also HLU 2.2 above).

BUS 2 Continue to build the Como Business Network as a resource for neighborhood businesses and as a tool to promote them.

BUS 3 Ensure that opportunities for new and re-developed businesses are fully explored in the development of small area plans in the Como/Front/Dale/Front Avenue and Como and Snelling small area plans (identified in HLU 1.4 – 1.5 above).

BUS 4 Investigate the feasibility of a business incubator or co-working center in the neighborhood.

APPENDIX A: District 10 Position Statement on Como Regional Park Transportation Implementation Plan
(http://www.district10comopark.org/uploads/crptip_action_item.doc)

APPENDIX B: District 10 Position Letter on St. Paul Bike Plan

April 15, 2014

Rueben Collins
Department of Public Works
25 West 4th Street
1500 City Hall Annex
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Mr. Collins,

Thank you for presenting the Saint Paul Bikeways Plan proposal on March 10, 2014, at District 10 Land Use Plan Committee meeting. We appreciate the opportunity to review the draft and offer feedback. During that meeting comments from the attendees were recorded and at our next meeting on April 14, 2014, the committee evaluated the feedback we have received and prioritized of list of bicycle facility projects we believe would best serve District 10 residents.

We strongly support the idea of the Saint Paul Bikeways Plan and are pleased that the bike facilities are evenly distributed across the city, based on strong horizontals and strong verticals. Based on what we have heard back from bicyclers in District 10 we have some suggestions, we believe would strengthen the plan and improve conditions for bicycling within our district.

A) We want a bicycle facility on Hoyt Avenue. It is a moderately traveled through street with traffic lights at major intersections.

B) We need a strong route from the Lexington/ Horton intersection that goes north through Como Park and terminates via Chatsworth and/or Milton.

C) We would prefer Maryland as a bikeway over Wheelock Parkway or Arlington because it is straight, flat, direct, and accessible.

Overall, our east/west route priorities for District 10 are:

- Como-Horton
- Hoyt Avenue
- Front Street/Energy Park
- Maryland or Arlington. Maryland is a more desirable route than Arlington.

Our north/south route priorities for bike facilities are:

- Hamline Avenue
- Lexington Parkway
- Victoria Street

- Chatsworth or Milton. Milton would be a good route, especially north of Como Lake because it goes through to Larpenteur and closely aligns with Victoria on the Roseville side of Larpenteur.

Because the amount of traffic on Hamline, especially at Como Avenue and at Midway Parkway, we suggest a higher level facility such as an in-street separated lane for greater bicycle safety and traffic calming. Additionally, bridges are needed on Chatsworth and Hamline over the railroad tracks.

In terms of timeline, we would like to see facilities on Hamline, Hoyt, Victoria, Como, Front/Energy Park and Lexington, Maryland in the short term, with our **top three priorities** being:

1. Lexington Parkway from Como/Horton to Chatsworth north of Como Park,
2. Hamline Avenue from Como to Larpenteur,
3. Hoyt Avenue from Victoria to Snelling.

Longer term projects should include the Chatsworth bridge, Hamline bridge, and enhancing the Maryland route by replacing railroad bridge east on Dale (District 6.) Further out we can see a great benefit in working with the City of Falcon Heights and the State Fairground to *extend the Hoyt route on the north side of the fairgrounds to the University campus and beyond to Saint Anthony Park.*

Finally, a theme that has consistently arisen in our discussions is the desire to see routes identified by level of difficulty for riders in much the same way ski hills are now designated. This would involve signage but need not add clutter. It could be as simple as assigning different colors to the bicycle images on the signs or the street, eg. white = easy, yellow = moderate, red = difficult.

The Saint Paul Bikeways Plan is an ambitious plan with great potential to enhance St Paul's livability by offering more options for safe and accessible bicycle transportation. The plan's implementation will ultimately improve property values and calm traffic in our neighborhoods and District 10 looks forward to incorporating many of its principals in our Land Use Plan.

Warm regards,

Chris Harkness