

CITY OF
MINNEAPOLIS

above the falls

Ensuring Health Equity
in Decision-Making

health

impact

assessment



City of Minneapolis
Health Department

**ABOUT THE ABOVE THE FALLS CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE,
HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT PROJECT TEAM AND PARTNERS**

IN RESPONSE TO A CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION, THE ABOVE THE FALLS CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE WAS FORMED TO PLAY AN ADVISORY ROLE DURING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ABOVE THE FALLS PLAN. ITS 30 APPOINTED MEMBERS INCLUDE REPRESENTATIVES FROM 10 NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS, 10 REGIONAL DISTRICTS, FIVE BUSINESS CAUCUS SEATS AND FIVE ENVIRONMENTAL CAUCUS SEATS. A SUBCOMMITTEE SERVED AS THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR THE HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT.

THE PROJECT TEAM CONSISTED OF STAFF FROM THE COMMUNITY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH DEPARTMENTS, MINNEAPOLIS PARK AND RECREATION BOARD, MINNEAPOLIS RIVERFRONT PARTNERSHIP, AND THE SUBCOMMITTEE. THE MINNEAPOLIS HEALTH DEPARTMENT WAS THE LEAD AGENCY. PLANNERS FROM COMMUNITY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND MINNEAPOLIS PARK AND RECREATION BOARD PROVIDED ADVICE, DATA, MAPS AND PLAN DRAFTS THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS AND LED AND ASSISTED WITH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS. KEY PARTNERS INCLUDED LAO ASSISTANCE CENTER, SAINTS CYRIL AND METHODIUS CATHOLIC CHURCH AND URBAN DESIGN LAB.



background

This area could be the best place in Minneapolis if the industry were removed to a location not so critical to the health of the river, something that we as citizens of the Twin Cities should hold sacred. ~ Community resident

Public input included a community input survey completed by nearly 400 residents, presentations to 21 local committees, community groups and neighborhood organizations, outreach at 15 community events, including four public forums with more than 300 attendees and more than 120 river comment cards.

In 2012 and 2013, the City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board revised a development plan that had been adopted in 2000 entitled Above the Falls: Master Plan for the Upper River in Minneapolis. The Minneapolis Health Department and partners conducted a Health Impact Assessment to investigate the health impacts that could result from key land-use decision alternatives outlined in the revised Above the Falls plan.

Originally approved in 2000, the Above the Falls plan outlined significant changes to the upper Mississippi riverfront in Minneapolis. A key policy issue was the proposed phasing out of heavy industries that line the banks and alleviation of land-use conflicts that have arisen over time. Since adoption of that plan, a number of public and private projects have been completed. Neighborhoods particularly in north Minneapolis on the west side of the river continue to be characterized by disproportionately high rates of obesity, poverty, crime and unemployment. Access to the river from both north and northeast Minneapolis is limited.

The built environment has a profound effect upon residents' lifestyles and well-being, confirmed by studies in public health, social sciences and urban planning. A Health Impact Assessment is a tool that communities and decision-makers use to evaluate the potential health effects of a proposed project or policy before it is built or implemented. It brings together public input and data to inform recommendations that maximize potential positive health outcomes, minimize unintended negative consequences and seek to achieve greater health equity.

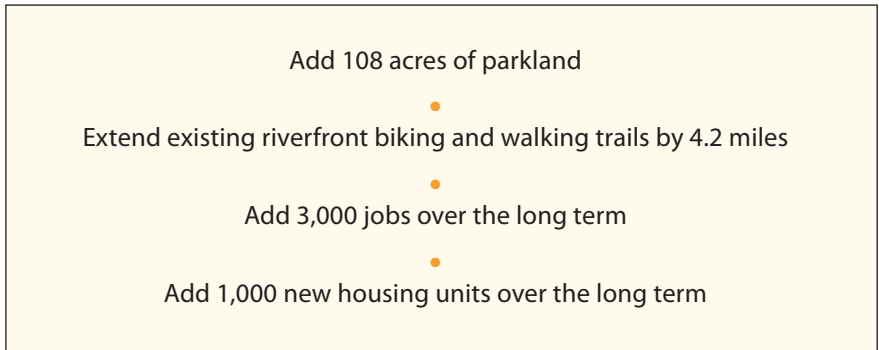
The Health Impact Assessment was conducted from January 2012 through June 2013. Health Impact Assessment activities aligned well with the City and Park Board's plan revision process, including participation at public forums and the kick-off of the public review periods for Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and the City of Minneapolis.

To investigate potential health impacts of the proposed changes to the riverfront, the Health Impact Assessment project team reviewed scientific literature, compiled data about existing health conditions, conducted a community input survey, and hosted public forums and Health Impact Assessment presentations. Consistent findings across a variety of data collection methods were the basis for developing recommendations that were ultimately incorporated into the revised plan.

summary of findings

THE LAND USE DECISIONS

The Health Impact Assessment project team selected four measurable land-use decision alternatives proposed in the Above the Falls plan to focus the scope of the Health Impact Assessment. They were to:



Health Impact Assessment activities assessed the health impact of each of these four land-use decision alternatives on 10 neighborhoods surrounding the Above the Falls area.

POTENTIAL IMPACT RELATED TO OBESITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

The Riverfront is highly regarded by residents of north and northeast Minneapolis as a destination for exercise and recreation, according to the community input survey. Respondents to the survey and many participants in the community forums believed that the addition of new parkland would have a positive impact on their health. In fact, parks were among the most preferred changes to the upper Mississippi riverfront with more than 50 percent of survey respondents saying that additional parks would improve their health.

The positive, potential health impact of reduced obesity and improvements in mental health due to increased parkland is bolstered by a strong connection between parkland, physical activity and mental health in the public health literature and strong evidence that residents currently use the Riverfront for physical activity, including a majority of survey respondents.

POTENTIAL IMPACT RELATED TO ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

"Air pollution," "loud noises and traffic," and "car congestion" in that order, were found to be the main environmental factors that negatively affect the health of both north and northeast Minneapolis residents. Many community input survey respondents and participants in the community forums hoped that heavy industries located along the upper Mississippi riverfront would relocate, even though this is not part of the short-term implementation of the revised Above the Falls plan due to reasons of feasibility. They viewed these industries as sources of air, noise and water pollution, which negatively affects their health.

*The Mississippi is
a pride of the nation,
a basis for folklore,
a reminder of the
power of water and
nature in the midst
of urban sprawl.*
Community resident



The proposed design of narrow strips of parkland and restored wetland along the riverfront will not include vegetation dense enough to make a notable reduction in air and noise pollution, although these changes may provide some psychological relief. The fact that industrial and highway sources of air pollution are likely to remain in the Above the Falls area suggests that the increase in parkland may have little to no impact on air pollution and thus a negligible impact on asthma rates. Evidence in the scientific literature suggests that the new parkland is likely to have a positive impact on reducing river water pollution by providing a buffer between the heavy industries, paved areas and the river.

The land on the North Side needs to be developed to provide a larger tax base and more job diversity for the neighborhood. We need clean energy jobs and jobs that actually employ people from Minneapolis and more women.

Community resident

POTENTIAL IMPACT RELATED TO NEIGHBORHOOD COHESION AND SAFETY

Extending biking and walking trails and improving major transit connections has been shown to improve perceptions of walkability; encourage neighborhood interaction; and promote senses of community, safety and security. Based on the Hennepin County 2010 SHAPE survey, perceptions of walkability and sense of community were lower among north Minneapolis residents compared to residents in other parts of the city. Crime and truck traffic headed to local industries threaten both pedestrian and bicyclist safety in the Above the Falls and surrounding area.

Approximately two-thirds of respondents to the Minneapolis Parks Foundation Survey reported having used local trails and bikeways. Among all possible attractions that would draw community input survey respondents to the Riverfront, “nonstop trails along both sides of the Riverfront” was selected more than any other possible attraction. The addition of riverfront trails, like the addition of parks, will serve residents from both sides of the river and beyond and will likely promote healthy weight and mental health. Whether increased use of these trails will improve neighborhood cohesion and safety is unclear and is dependent on neighborhood factors such as improvements to riverway streets, the main transit connections to the river.

North Minneapolis is characterized by factors affecting neighborhood cohesion and safety that are not related to trails or improvements along riverway streets such as low perceptions of walkability, heavy truck traffic, poor quality housing, high density of poverty, and relatively higher crime density. Since living conditions in Northeast are markedly different than on the North Side, the addition of new trails and improvements may have a stronger impact on the sense of community and safety on northeast residents than northside residents.

POTENTIAL IMPACT RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT

The scientific literature finds a strong link between improvements in public health and increases in income-generating land use. However, residents of north and northeast Minneapolis express skepticism that the proposed jobs would have a positive health impact on areas with higher rates of health problems. Whether the City can successfully attract 3000 new jobs to the Above the Falls area and who would benefit is uncertain. Nonetheless, the revised Above the Falls plan's focus on job-generating land use could have one of strongest impacts on public health, particularly premature mortality, mental health and chronic disease. This impact on health could be maximized by local hiring policies, which focus on employing residents that currently experience health and employment inequities.

POTENTIAL IMPACT RELATED TO HOUSING

The strongest links in the scientific literature between improvements in health and housing are related to the availability of affordable housing. However, given an already high concentration of affordable housing and poverty in north Minneapolis, affordable housing is unlikely to be a focus of the Above the Falls plan. The overall health impact of new affordable housing may be minimal or possibly negative if affordable housing increases the concentration of poverty in the Above the Falls and surrounding area. The main health impact of additional housing is likely to be increased neighborhood livability along the riverfront for a relatively small number of people. What could maximize a positive health impact, suggested by the scientific literature and community input survey results, are improvements in existing housing in surrounding neighborhoods and along riverway streets where housing is deteriorated. A well-maintained neighborhood may promote safety and a sense of community and well-being.



*We moved to north
Minneapolis because of
the original Above the
Falls plan and vision.
We would love for our
children to see it fulfilled.*

Community resident

FINDINGS OF THIS HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT SUGGEST THAT THE CITY COULD:

- Work with existing businesses and industries that will likely continue to be located in the Above the Falls area. Explore ways of effectively engaging them to assist in achieving the Above the Falls plan objectives, for example by promoting environmentally safe or greener practices, by helping to ensure safe connections from the neighborhoods to the river, and by working to achieve greater job density in the area.
- Explore ways to implement local hiring practices among Above the Falls area businesses and industries and add training programs to support residents seeking jobs in this area. Focus on employment equity and opportunities for racial and ethnic minorities and new immigrant populations.
- Effectively monitor air quality and noise levels in the Above the Falls area and work with the industries to identify ways to reduce levels that can be detrimental to health. Work with homeowners and landlords to improve existing residential areas and housing in the neighborhoods along the riverway streets to mitigate crime and safety concerns and promote health through well-maintained neighborhoods.
- Explore safe alternatives for all people to access the riverfront such as planning for off-street access that accommodates people with mobility disabilities, biking and walking. Ensure public transit directly to riverfront destinations and adequate, accessible parking along the Riverfront.
- Support efforts to encourage young people, communities of color and people with limited-English proficiency to become more engaged in activities to design, develop, maintain and enjoy the upper Mississippi riverfront.

CHANGES TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT PROPOSED IN THE ABOVE THE FALLS MASTER PLAN COULD HAVE SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE IMPACTS ON THE HEALTH OF NORTHSIDE AND NORTHEAST MINNEAPOLIS RESIDENTS. THE GOAL OF THIS HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT WAS TO INVESTIGATE THE POTENTIAL HEALTH IMPACTS THAT COULD RESULT FROM KEY LAND-USE DECISION ALTERNATIVES THAT ARE OUTLINED IN THE PLAN. THE REPORT IS INTENDED TO PROMPT KEY DECISION MAKERS TO CONSIDER THE POTENTIAL HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN ON RESIDENTS' HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.

above the falls



Minneapolis Health Department. Above the Falls Health Impact Assessment Brief: Ensuring Health Equity in Decision-making. Minneapolis, Minnesota. May 2013.

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Photo acknowledgments

Photos are courtesy of Mill City Times and Pat Carney Studio.

Full report

To view the full Health Impact Assessment report and access detailed information about the Above the Falls plan, please visit www.minneapolismn.gov/cped/projects/cped_above_the_falls.

For general inquiries or if you need this material in an alternative format, please call Minneapolis Health Department at 612 673.2301 or email health@minneapolismn.gov. Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons may use a relay service to call 311 agents at 612 673.3000. TTY users may call 612 673.2157 or 612 673.2626.

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