

2017-2022 VISITOR SERVICES PLAN: INTERIM TARGETS THROUGH 2025

Pt. 1 Visitor Services Plan Progress to Plan

KEY FINDINGS

- VSP targets for all areas were met in 2019. Although the pandemic impacted numbers for most programmatic areas, targets were met in 2023 in awareness and outreach, outdoor education, events, and facility rentals. Numbers of volunteers have steadily grown since the pandemic and are nearing the target. Equipment rentals have increased since the pandemic but have also been affected by beach closures and warm winters.
- Overall park visitation has significantly increased since 2017.
- Positions identified in VSP have been filled and are responding to current level program and service demands.
- Parks fee-based revenue increased by 43% over 2017 baseline to over \$1.5M.
- Cost Recovery Policy and approach was approved by County Board in July 2020.
- Temporary staffing approach impacts efficiency in program delivery.
- The 2050 Vision Plan will guide direction of the next Visitor Services Operational Plan (planning 2025, implementation 2026).

VSP Interim Goals & Targets:

Interim targets have been added to existing plan goals in order to continue operations and to attempt to meet additional demand.

Figure 1.1 Overall Revenue

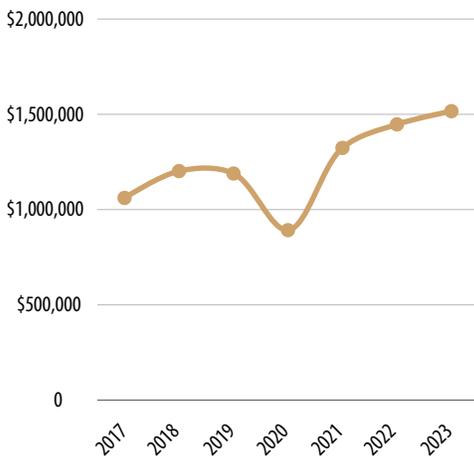
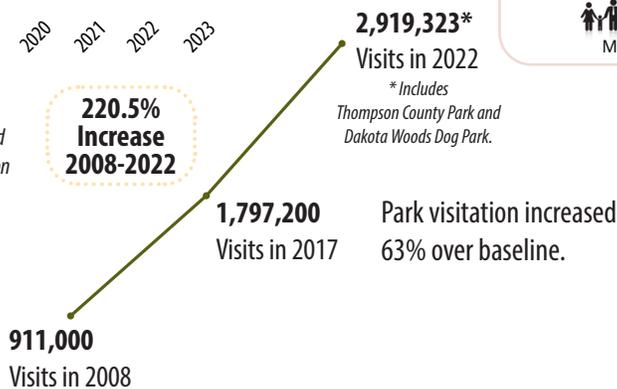


Figure 1.2 Parks and Greenways Visitation



COST RECOVERY MODEL

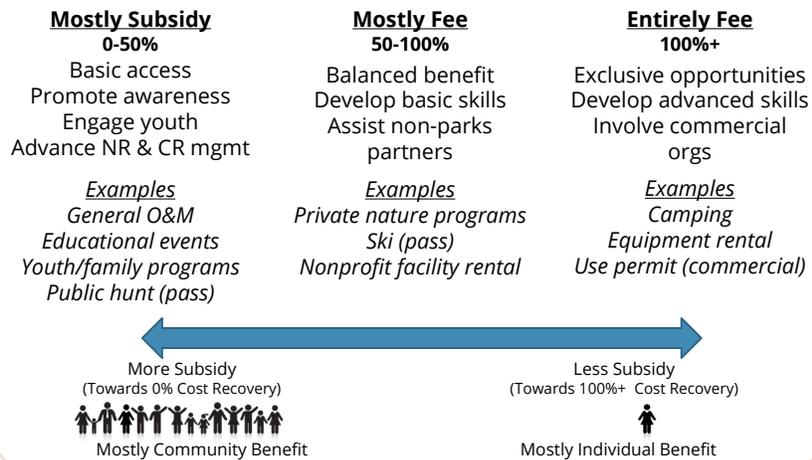
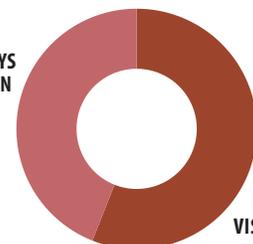


Figure 1.3 Parks and Greenways Visitation, 2022

44%
GREENWAYS
VISITATION



Data Source: Met Council Annual Use Estimates, 2022.

**Pt. 2
Awareness &
Outreach**



KEY FINDINGS & RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

- Outreach programming is well received and an effective way to reach underrepresented communities.
- Outreach programming has created more demand on Outdoor Education and recreation programs to provide and support this type of programming.
- To continue outreach programming and meet demand, an increase in resources will need to be considered.

Goal:

Build awareness of Dakota County Parks and its services across all communities, including current users, new users, and under-represented groups.

Focus: Awareness and Outreach Plan and implementation.

Two-Year Interim Targets:

2024: 6,000 people engaged and 160 activities (status quo)

2025: 6,000 people engaged and 160 activities (status quo)

Specific Outreach Programs

- Caminatas Domingueras Monthly Walks in the Park
- District 196 Diversity in Skiing Program
- Nature Walks with Latino Families Series
- Community Liaison Program
- Fiesta en la Nieve
- Music in the Park
- Implemented Met Council Equity Grant on Building and Bridging Community by Creating Equitable Spaces along the Mississippi River Greenway

Figure 2.1 Parks Outreach

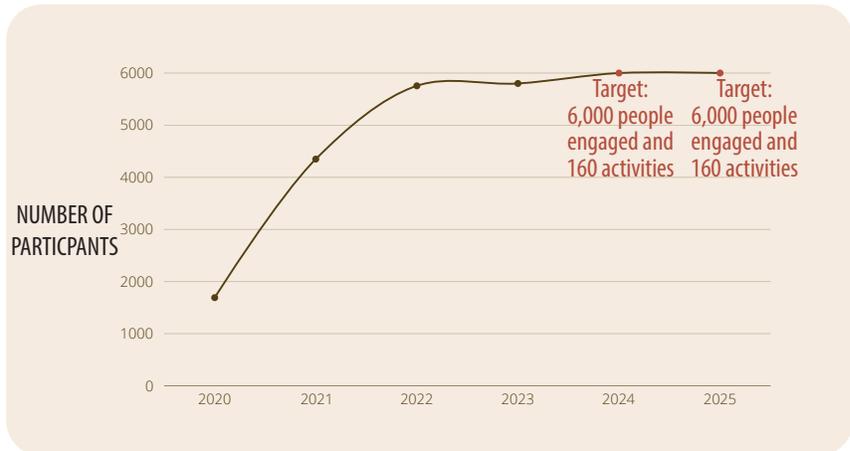


Figure 2.2 Awareness and Outreach Timeline, 2019-2023



Pt. 3

Outdoor Education



KEY FINDINGS & RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

- Outdoor Education Program participation continues to grow by 20% annually on average.
- School programming continues to bounce back post pandemic.
- Demand exceeds capacity with 1,085 youth or adults waitlisted for programs.
- Temporary staffing approach impacts program capacity and efficiency in program delivery.
- Partnerships and contracts with external organizations, municipalities, agencies, and businesses help extend reach of outdoor education.
- Outdoor education has expanded programming from 6% (in 2019) to 21% (in 2023) at parks and greenways other than Lebanon Hills Regional Park.
- 98% of surveyed program participants rated their experience with outdoor education programs as excellent or good.

Goal:

Enhance education programming to serve more residents and introduce a variety of education opportunities to more of the system beyond Lebanon Hills.

Focus: School and youth group partnerships, self-guided interpretation, and new program opportunities as part of the 2025 budget process.

Two-Year Interim Targets: Meet Demand

Outdoor Education Participants

2024: 8,000 participants (add capacity to meet demand)

2025: 9,000 participants (add capacity to meet demand)

Outdoor Education Students

2024: 6,000 students (status quo)

2025: 7,000 students (add capacity to meet demand)

Figure 3.1 Outdoor Education Participants, 2017-2023

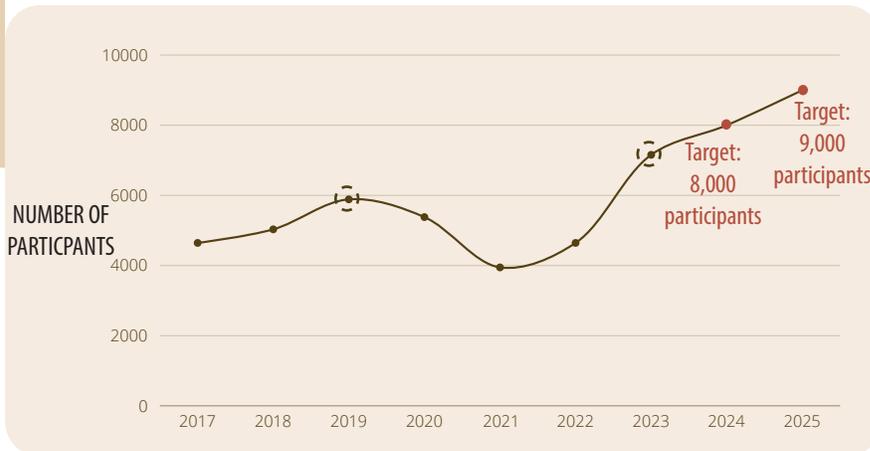
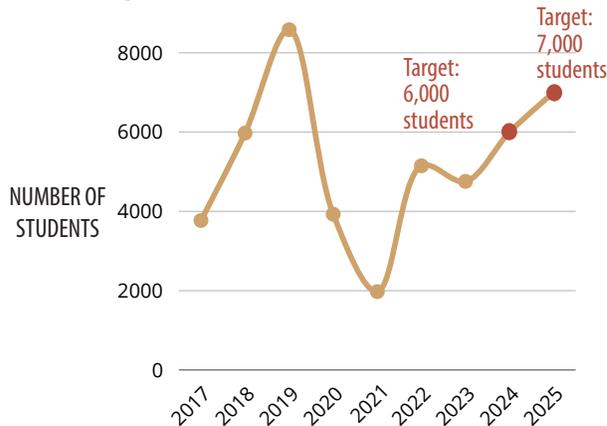


Figure 3.2 Parks Programming Waitlist Numbers, 2023

Program	People on Waitlists
Day Camps	140 individuals (84% of day camps)
School Field Trips	535 students
Cross-Country Skiing	90 individuals
Other Programming	320 individuals
Total	1085 individuals

Figure 3.3 Outdoor Education Students, 2017-2023



*In 2022, Parks provided bussing as part of a transportation pilot project.

Self-Guided Interpretation

- Since 2017, interpretive plans have been completed as part of master plans, or stand-alone documents for Minnesota River Greenway, Lake Byllesby Regional Park, Thompson County Park, Miesville Ravine Park Reserve, Spring Lake Park Reserve, and the Veterans Memorial Greenway.
- In 2017, self-guided interpretation primarily existed in Lebanon Hills Regional Park, with a handful of scattered panels throughout the system.
- Interpretation has since been installed in Whitetail Woods Regional Park, Lake Byllesby Regional Park, Thompson County Park, Spring Lake Park Reserve and along the Minnesota River and Mississippi River Greenways including the Dakota Ways of Seeing Interpretation, South St. Paul Stockyards Node, Rock Island Swing Bridge Node, Whitetail Woods Nature Play Area, and interpretive walks around Thompson Lake and along Lake Byllesby, among many others.

Pt. 4
Special Events



KEY FINDINGS & RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

- Since 2017, events have occurred throughout more of the park system including in Thompson County Park, Spring Lake Park Reserve, Lebanon Hills Regional Park, Whitetail Woods Regional Park. Grand opening events have also occurred in Lake Byllesby Regional Park and various greenways.
- Ability to deliver successful and safe special events is a team effort. Park Operations, Grounds, and Park Rangers must also have resources allocated to deliver and increase number of events.
- To continue growing special events and meet community interests, an increase in resources will need to be considered.
- Consider adding more events on greenways, beginning with a celebration to mark the completion of Mississippi River Greenway in 2025.
- Pursue smaller scale events throughout more of the park system.

Goal:

Increase events in more of the Park System, celebrating the unique aspects of the park units and the communities they serve.

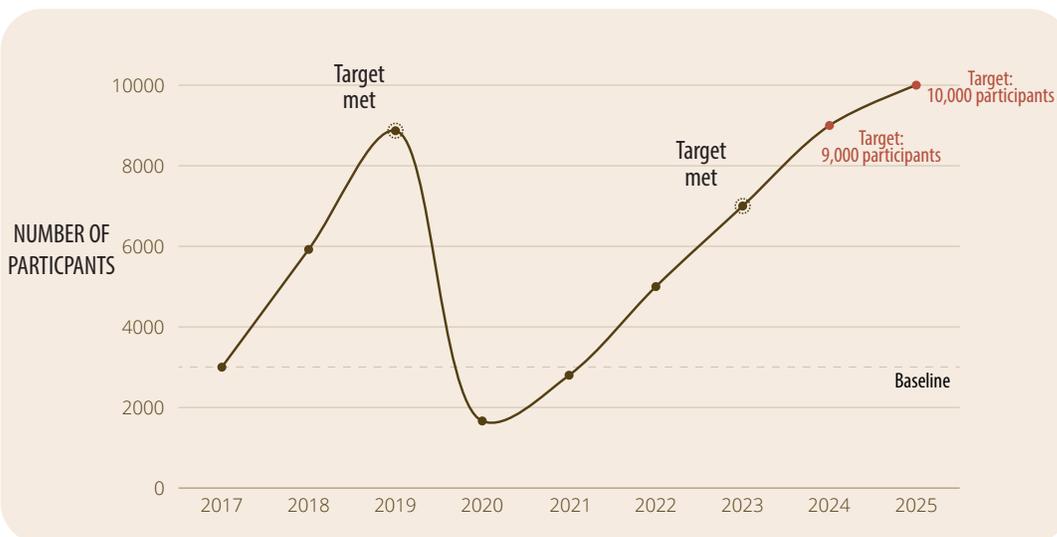
Focus: Events at more parks.

Two-Year Interim Targets:

2024: 9,000 participants (growth)

2025: 10,000 participants (growth)

Figure 4.1 Event Participants and Number of Events, 2017-2023, with 2024 and 2025 Targets



EVENT PARTICIPATION

5-Year VSP Target for Events:

Increase participation by 3,000 by 2022

- **Target met in 2019 and 2023**
- **Event participation has increased since the pandemic.**

**Pt. 5
Volunteerism**



KEY FINDINGS

- Volunteers are important resources and partners for delivering Visitor Services programs and services.
- In 2023, the value of donated Visitor Services-related volunteer hours (5,328) equals \$169,430, providing a cost-savings to county taxpayers.
- Volunteer hours can be dependent on weather, especially related to special events and trail patrol.
- Future – evaluate opportunities to grow the volunteer program.

Goal:

Provide training and a variety of volunteer opportunities to engage people who want to contribute to their parks.

Focus: New opportunities in natural resources stewardship, citizen science, trail patrol, clean-ups, education.

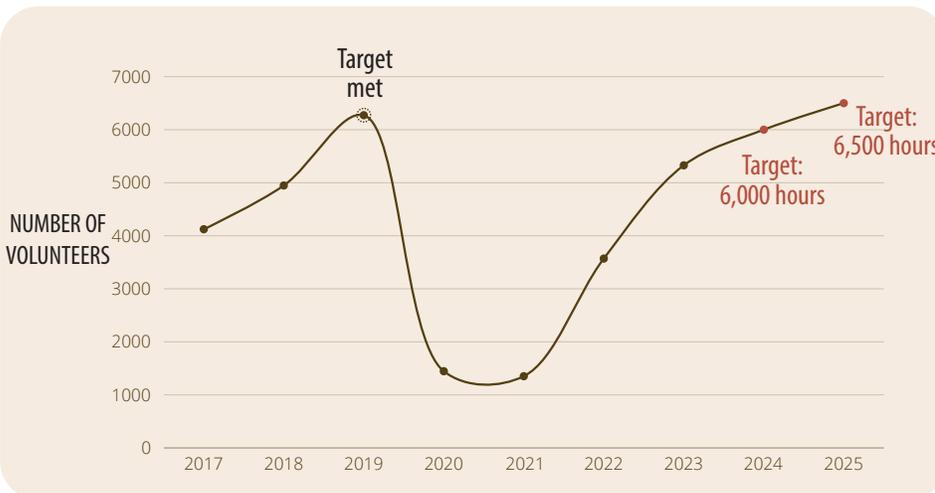
Two-Year Interim Targets:

2024: 6,000 hours (status quo)

2025: 6,500 hours (growth)

VOLUNTEERS

Figure 5.1 Volunteer Hours, 2017-2023, with 2024 and 2025 Targets



5-Year VSP Target for Volunteers:

Increase volunteer hours by 2,000 by 2022

- **Target met in 2019**
- **2,000 volunteers and 5,328 volunteer hours in 2023**
- **Current volunteer programs:**
 - Trail Patrol
 - Bison Ambassadors (45 in 2023)
 - Special Events
 - Special Projects

Pt. 6
Facility Rentals



KEY FINDINGS & RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 90% of facility rental customers rated overall satisfaction as ‘excellent’ or ‘above average.’
- Online presence and customer experience continues to improve. This is an area of continuous improvement focus.
- Interim – opportunity to promote and market facilities to increase use, especially during off-peak times (e.g. weekdays, shoulder seasons).

Goal:

Evaluate and make optimal use of facility rentals to provide program services, private group rental, and casual public use.

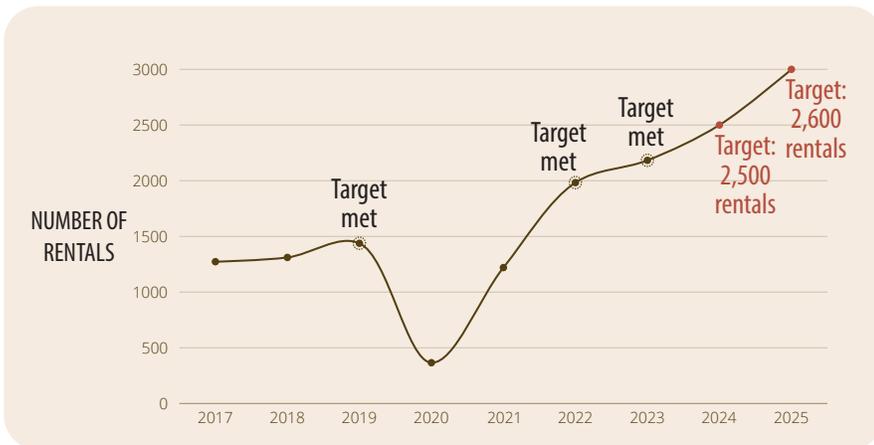
Focus: Improved service, process, policies, and fees.

Two-Year Interim Targets:

2024: 2,500 rentals (growth)

2025: 2,600 rentals (growth)

Figure 6.1 Facility Rentals 2017-2023, with 2024 and 2025 Targets



5-Year VSP Target for Facility Rentals:

Increase rentals to 1,400 by 2022

Target met in 2019, 2022, and 2023

Rentals have increased since the pandemic.

Pt. 7
Equipment Rentals



KEY FINDINGS & RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

- Equipment rental provides affordable and popular gateway recreation experiences to visitors.
- Equipment rental numbers are heavily dependent on weather and other factors (e.g. lack of snow and extended public health beach closure).
- Interim – in 2024 will be implementing two All-Terrain Track Chairs in Lebanon Hills Regional Park for visitors to explore more of the park. We will also be implementing a pilot bike share as part of the Unity Trail project.

Goal:

Expand a variety of equipment rentals to more parks in the system, building on park natural resources and recreational assets.

Equipment rentals have a target of cost-neutrality for the County.

Focus: Bicycle rentals for greenways, watercraft rentals for large waterbodies, adaptive gear for people with disabilities.

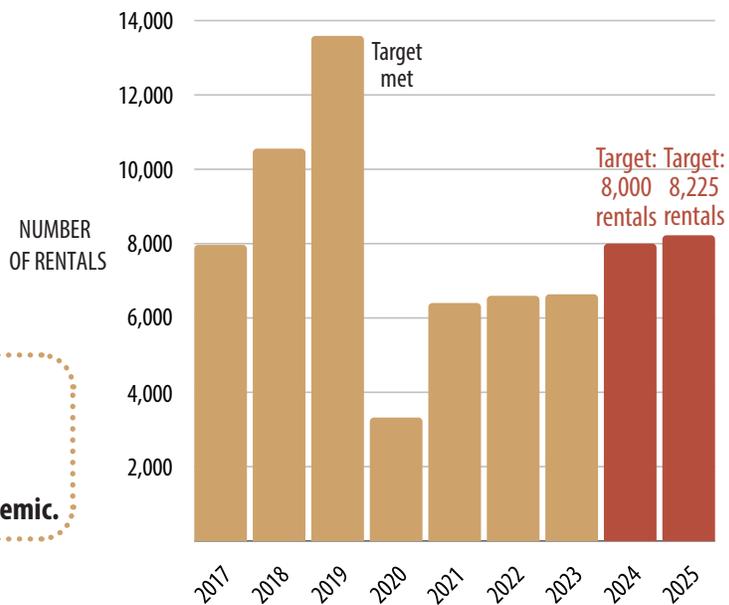
Two-Year Interim Targets:

2024: 8,000 rentals (status quo)

2025: 8,225 rentals (status quo)

EQUIPMENT RENTALS

Figure 7.1 Equipment Rentals, 2017-2023, With 2024 and 2025 Targets



5-Year VSP Target for Rentals:

Increase rentals to 11,949 by 2022

Target met in 2019

Rentals have increased since the pandemic.