

#8: OPEN SPACE, PARKS, TREES

CORE METRIC FOR CATEGORY A & B & C CITIES

Bold, green font indicates data elements that are eligible to be recognized at Step 5 if improvement is demonstrated.

DATA ELEMENTS

- **Open Space**
 - 8.1 Percent of total city acres in open space
- **Parkland Quantity & Access:**
 - 8.2 Acres of parkland
 - 8.3 Percent of housing within ½ mile of parkland
- **Tree Canopy**
 - 8.4 Percent canopy coverage
 - 8.5 Three most prevalent tree species (by percent genus)
 - 8.6 **Net number of new trees planted**

DEFINITIONS

- **Open space** for purposes of this measure is pervious land, public or private, that is not built upon. It includes public parklands, street boulevards, green space owned by homeowners associations, private golf courses, surface waters (ponds, lakes, streams, wetlands), empty lots, and working lands (forests and farmland). (Element 8.1)
- **Parkland** is a common measurement nationwide but has no standard definition. GreenStep defines it as protected public lands owned by the city and other governmental jurisdictions, and private land with conservation easements (including lands owned by conservation organizations), and private golf courses open to the public. Public lands include passive parkland, trails, greenways, golf courses, playgrounds, school land, recreation fields, fishing and boating lakes and streams, wetlands with walking access, picnic areas, public pools, and beach and lake access. Land should be legally protected from development through conservation easements, forest preserves, land trusts, and similar conservation mechanisms. (Elements 8.2 and 8.3)
- **Housing** means residential dwelling units: count those that are within 1/2 mile of parkland. (Element 8.3)
- **Percent canopy coverage** is the percent of all acres within city limits that are shaded by trees. measure the canopy over several land use classifications – parkland, residential, commercial/downtown – so as to target urban forestry actions, GreenStep at this point is asking for just one overall canopy measure. (Element 8.4)
- **Prevalent trees** is an estimation of what percent of a city's canopy is occupied by the top three most prevalent genus. For example, in 2014 the City of Burnsville reported that their city parks (not their total city canopy) comprised 23% Maples, 14% Spruce, and 13% Ash. (Element 8.5)
- **Net number of new trees** counts the number of trees – not including trees that replace dead, diseased or damaged trees – planted by the city and trees planted by others for which the city supplies money, labor or trees. While it is important for a city to track the type of trees planted by genus, GreenStep at this point is only asking for a raw net number. (Element 8.6)
- **Alternative data elements:** if you have been gathering or want to gather different data, report those and explain why they are a better fit for your city. For example, you may
 - Exclude private golf courses open to the public or stream/lake acreage in calculating acres of parkland
 - Measure % of population within ½ mile

Minnesota GreenStep Cities Performance Metrics for Recognition at Steps 4 and 5

- Calculate your ParkScore (Trust for Public Land: <http://parkscore.tpl.org>), which rates park systems equally on three factors: park access, park size, and services and investment
- Track tree canopy coverage for only a subset of city acres. For example, a city whose land area encompasses mostly ag land may choose to measure percent canopy of only city parks, boulevards, a defined downtown, residential areas, and commercial areas

DATA SOURCES

- City maps, GIS maps and data, records, city tree inventories, and common knowledge of city staff (Elements 8.1-8.6)
- The size and location of parkland is usually tracked by local parks & recreation departments (Elements 8.1 and 8.2)
- Met Council's Community Profile at <http://stats.metc.state.mn.us/profile/> (Element 8.2)
- Free i-Tree canopy calculation using Google Maps at: <https://landscape.itreetools.org/> (Element 8.4)
- Statewide LiDAR coverage at 3.3-foot horizontal resolution available from the MN Geospatial Information Office (MnGeo) at <http://www.mngeo.state.mn.us> (Elements 8.1-8.4)
- The University of Minnesota's Remote Sensing and Geospatial Analysis Laboratory at <http://land.umn.edu/> provides satellite imagery for land cover and impervious surface datasets for several time periods for the state of Minnesota , and for more time periods for the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. (Element 8.1)
- The Global Land Cover Facility of the University of Maryland at <http://www.landcover.org> develops and distributes remotely sensed satellite data that includes forest inventories. (Element 8.5)

CALCULATION AND PUBLIC REPORTING

- **Open space, parkland quantity and access, and canopy coverage and diversity** are annual measures as of December 31st before the reporting year. Since it typically takes a few years to see any change in these numbers, they need not be measured each year. In years when no new measurement is done, simply report the last measurement and note the calendar year during which the measurement was done. (Elements 8.1-8.6)
- **Percent open space** is acres of open land divided by total acres in the city. GIS mapping make such a calculation somewhat easy, but estimates based on city maps and Google maps are also fine. (Element 8.1)
- **Acres of parkland will be normalized** and reported on the GreenStep web site as acres per 1000 population. For cities in the seven-county Twin Cities metro area, use the Met Council web site to find your city. Then click on the tab titled Land Use and Development. Under Generalized Land use, click on Table for the number of acres under Park and Recreational, with or without golf courses. (Element 8.2)
- **Using a mapping (GIS) system**, map a boundary (zones if multiple areas) within which street walking (or, 'as the crow flies') is within 1/2 mile of parkland. Then calculate the number of residential dwelling units within the boundary/zones. Finally compare the number of units to total units in the city and express the ratio as a percent. (Element 8.3)
- **As the crow flies** is a simpler calculation, but for communities with greater GIS capabilities, street network distances more directly capture whether in reality a green space is within ½ miles of a resident's dwelling. (Element 8.3)
- **For smaller cities**, dwelling units in census tracts ½ mile or closer to parkland can provide rough estimations. Or estimation from a city plat map may work fine. (Element 8.3)
- **Percent canopy coverage** is calculated by iTree as acres within the city shaded by trees divided by the total acres within the city boundary. (Element 8.4)
- **Top 3 trees** is the percentage of each in the canopy being assessed. (Element 8.5)
- **Number of net new trees planted** is the only number for which there will be exact new 12-month data each calendar year before the reporting year. (Element 8.6)

RATIONALE

Open space – green and blue - provides a variety of ecological, economic and social goods and services. Ecosystem services include necessities such as air and water purification, stormwater infiltration and management, carbon sequestration, pollination, food and fiber production, nutrient cycling, and urban cooling. Tracking the percent of city acres in open space allows conscious choices about city policies and actions that either increase or decrease the proportion of open space.

Parkland is a subset of open space, which focuses on the extent to which residents can easily and equitably access green/blue spaces that promote activity and support physical and mental health. Spaces designed for congregating and active recreation contribute to healthy and active populations and have a particular impact on children, teenagers and older adults. Parkland also makes neighborhoods more attractive and provides meeting areas and activity hubs that can help build community. One-half mile to a green space is walkable for most people in 10 to 15 minutes without a vehicle and is a national standard.

Tree canopy is the major part of a city's green infrastructure, delivering many financial, energy, quality of life and carbon sequestration benefits that can be calculated by iTree and are well documented on the GreenStep web site. Investments in a city's green infrastructure are analogous to investments in a city's grey infrastructure of roads and utilities (sewer, gas, electric and telecommunication lines). People love and gravitate toward tree-lined streets. Thus tracking coverage, and tree diversity as a hedge against tree health threats exacerbated by climate change, and yearly planting efforts to increase the canopy, are important to a city.

STEP 5 GOALS

There are no state-wide goals for this metric. Individual cities are best equipped to set realistic goals for improvement, and any improvement in the metric is desirable. Nationally there are some rough guidelines, listed below.

Thinking of open space as green infrastructure, a city begins to see climate adaptation benefits when 35% of a city's land area can be characterized as green infrastructure. The national STAR Community Rating System encourages communities to establish a jurisdictional target of 35%, while acknowledging that attaining this standard in highly urban environments may not be realistic.

Acres of parkland can vary widely due to a community's history, culture, demographics, density, development patterns, and distance to parks and open land adjacent to the city. 7 acres per 1000 residents is a minimum cited nationwide, but more like 20 acres is viewed as a reasonable target for most cities. 70% of a city's housing within ½ mile of a park is considered low, with 90%+ a reasonable target for most cities.

An overall city tree canopy of at least 40% is good, with sub-goals for canopy over parking lots of 50%, canopy over residential zones of 60% - 75%, and canopy over commercial/industrial zones at least 15%. A 10-20-30 tree-diversity guideline for reducing the risk of catastrophic tree loss due to pests is to have in the city tree canopy no more than 10% of one species, 20% of one genus, and 30% of one family.

NEED HELP? CONTACT

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