

#8: OPEN SPACE, PARKS, TREES

CORE METRIC FOR CATEGORY A & B & C CITIES

Bold, green font indicates metrics that must improve to be recognized at Step 5

METRICS

- **Open Space**
 - 8.1 Percent of total city acres in open space
- **Parkland Quantity & Access:**
 - 8.2 Acres of parkland
 - 8.3 Percent of city residents within ½ mile/a 10-minute walk 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**
 - 8.6a Percent of 8.6 trees that are “likely to thrive”

METRIC DEFINITION

- **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). ([Metric 8.1](#))
- **Parkland** is a common metric 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. ([Metrics 8.2 and 8.3](#))
- **Percent of city residents:** people in residential housing who are within 1/2 mile of parkland, which is a 10-minute walk for most people. ([Metric 8.3](#))
- **Percent canopy coverage** is the percent of all acres within city limits that are shaded by trees. ([Metric 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. ([Metric 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. ([Metric 8.6](#))
- **Trees “likely to thrive”** means that they are considered for our changing climate and other impacts. For example, an ash tree is not likely to thrive due to spread of emerald ash borer. ([Metric 8.6a](#))
- **Alternative metrics:** if you have been gathering or want to gather different metrics, 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
 - 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

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- 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 (Metrics 8.1-8.6)
- The size and location of parkland is usually tracked by local parks & recreation departments (Metric 8.2)
- Met Council's Community Profile at <http://stats.metc.state.mn.us/profile/> (Metric 8.2)
- The Trust for Public Land's ParkServe search tool calculates percentage of residents who live within a 10-minute walk of a park, and number of parks (and their total acreage), for all Minnesota cities. Note that you may need to add in some parklands not included by TPL, such as private golf courses open to the public. See <https://parkserve.tpl.org/> (Metrics 8.2 & 8.3)
- 2015 tree canopy coverage percentages for most Minnesota cities at <http://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=e3d71d9cbb5e4a6cbe39cc48aa49c582> (Metric 8.4)
- Free i-Tree canopy calculation using Google Maps at: <https://landscape.itreetools.org/> (Metric 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> (Metrics 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. (Metric 8.1)
- The Global Land Cover Facility of the University of Maryland at <https://glad.umd.edu/> develops and distributes remotely sensed satellite data that includes forest inventories. (Metric 8.5)
- MPCA and DNR "[Trees likely to thrive in Minnesota's changing climate](#)" list indicates appropriate species. Additional recommended tree lists can be located through the [University of Minnesota Exertion](#) and the [Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science](#). The DNR "[Tree Troubles](#)" site lists potential threats to Minnesota trees. (Metric 8.6a)

METRIC 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. (Metrics 8.1-8.5)
- **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. (Metric 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. Outside the metro area cities may use their own data, and/or ParkServe data. (Metric 8.2)
- **For the percent of residents metric, use ParkServe or, 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 people in residential dwelling units within the boundary/zones. Finally compare the number of people to total people in the city and express the ratio as a percent. (Metric 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 parkland is within ½ mile or a 10-minute walk of a resident's dwelling. (Metric 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. (Metric 8.3)

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- **Percent canopy coverage** is calculated by iTree as acres within the city shaded by trees divided by the total acres within the city boundary. (Metric 8.4)
- **Top 3 trees** is the percentage of each genus in the canopy being assessed, ideally the overall city canopy using a physical or remote sensing inventory, or if that is not possible, an inventory of city-owned trees. (Metric 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. GreenStep will report number per 1000 population. (Metric 8.6)
- **New trees “likely to thrive”** can be calculated from reviewing the total number of new trees planted and identifying the amount that you consider are “likely to thrive.” This should be recorded as a percentage. (Metric 8.6a)

METRIC 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, storm-water 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 minutes 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 METRICS

There are no state-wide goals for these metrics. Individual cities are best equipped to set realistic goals for metric improvement, and any improvement in the metrics 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. The LEED for Cities Green Space credit is for between 121 and 145 sq. ft./person.

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. 10% of city land committed to park/recreation space was recommended by Clarence Perry, the leading figure on neighborhoods in the 20th Century.

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 of at least 15%. A 5-10-15 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 5% of one species, 10% of one genus, and 15% of one family.

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

[NEED HELP? CONTACT](#)

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