Public Safety

Saint Paul Parks and Recreation

Agenda

- Our Public Safety Approach
- Saint Paul Fire Collaboration
- Vandalism
- Recreation Center Incidents
- Teen Takeovers
- Scooters, E-Bikes, & ATVs
- Awakenings
- Right Track

Safe parks and recreation spaces require both response and prevention.

We are:

- Preparing for emerging safety concerns
- Maintaining strong partnerships with public safety agencies
- Engaging youth rather than simply reacting to behavior
- Adjusting operations to protect all park and recreation users
- Connecting young people with trusted adults and opportunities
- Learning from incidents and continuously improving our response

Our goal: *Safe, welcoming recreation spaces where young people and all community members can participate, connect and thrive.*

Recreation Center Incidents

May 1–September 4

- **184** Recreation Services incident reports
- **88 (48%)** were public-safety related
  - Fights
  - Teen takeovers
  - Police presence
  - Verbal abuse
  - Disruptive behavior
- **6 (3%)** involved substance use or vaping inside a building

Understanding Teen Takeovers

What we are seeing

- Planned teen takeovers are typically promoted through flyers or social media with a date, time and location
- Not every planned takeover occurs
- Not every takeover results in unsafe behavior
  - Some groups have simply used the park to recreate like any other visitors
- Youth attending are not always Saint Paul residents
  - Staff have spoken with youth from Stillwater, Burnsville, Maplewood and other communities
- Youth arrive in a variety of ways:
  - Public transit
  - Personal vehicles
  - Dropped off by adults

Key takeaway: *We prepare for every reported takeover while recognizing that each event and crowd is different.*

Our Approach: Prepare, Engage, Respond

Three-part approach

1. Prepare	2. Engage	3. Respond
• Share information with public safety partners • Adjust staffing and building operations • Identify opportunities to engage youth • Prepare staff for changing conditions	• Parks staff monitor the crowd and conditions • When safe, staff engage directly with youth • Offer alternative recreation and activities • Work with youth to understand their plans and redirect unsafe behavior	• Maintain safe operations for everyone using the park or facility • Escalate when conditions become unsafe • Contact 911 when necessary • Coordinate with public safety partners based on the circumstances

A Collaborative Response

When Parks & Recreation receives information about a potential takeover, we coordinate:

Externally:

- Saint Paul Police Department
- Office of Neighborhood Safety
- Ramsey County Sheriff's Office
- Saint Paul Fire Department

Internally:

- Area supervisors, managers and department leadership
- Recreation center staff
- Programming staff
- Aquatics staff

Goal: *Have the right people and resources available while keeping recreation and aquatics spaces open and safe whenever possible.*

Preparing for the Day

Parks adjusts operations based on the anticipated event

Potential adjustments include:

- Scheduling additional staff
- Assigning staff from other recreation centers
- Having Parks leadership on site
- Adjusting building schedules
- Informing facility users about potential impacts
- Modifying programming to engage youth who arrive
- Providing additional staff to maintain safe indoor and outdoor operations

What Happens During an Event

Parks staff are present and actively monitoring conditions

- Parks leadership is on site when possible
  - Area supervisor
  - Manager
  - Director
- Staff monitor crowd size, behavior and conditions
- When safe, staff engage youth and offer alternatives
- ONS outreach staff may provide additional engagement
- Ramsey County Sheriff's community engagement crews may assist depending on availability and location
- Parks staff call 911 when conditions become unsafe

Important: *The response is based on what is happening in the moment—not simply the fact that a crowd has gathered.*

Examples of engagement:

- Pickup basketball
- Handing out Freezies
- Informal activities
- Conversations with youth
- Redirecting behavior before situations escalate

What We Learned From a Three-Event Week

Three planned takeovers occurred in one week

Tuesday - Frogtown

- Crowd grew to more than 100 youth
- Multiple fights on park property and in the neighborhood
- Youth were carrying bear spray
- Youth repeatedly left and returned as the crowd became more agitated
- 15 Parks staff were on site, including supervisor, manager and director
- ONS and Sheriff's Office provided support
- SPPD responded early and returned as additional fights occurred

Thursday - Frogtown

- Crowd remained below 50
- Youth appeared intoxicated
- Reckless e-scooter riding created safety concerns
- ONS provided support
- SPPD responded but remained in vehicles
- Parks staff continued monitoring and protecting other park users

Friday – Oxford

- Approximately 20 youth arrived
- Building was short-staffed and scheduled to close at 6 p.m.
- Staff notified SPPD that youth were arriving and that Parks staff would be leaving at 6
- SPPD arrived and cleared the property
- Parks reviewed camera footage; youth did not return to Oxford or move to Frogtown

What is Working

Early awareness and youth engagement are making a difference

- Right Track interns have notified building supervisors when they learn about planned takeovers
- Parks has adjusted programming to engage youth
- Additional staff have helped maintain safe operations while allowing other community members to continue recreating
- Parks and ONS staff are:
  - Building relationships with youth
  - Learning more about their plans
  - Redirecting behavior
  - Identifying patterns and potential conflicts
  - ONS outreach staff who already know youth can be particularly effective when those youth arrive at a takeover

The relationship-building work before an incident matters.

Aquatics + SPFD: Preventing Teen Takeovers

Proactive engagement helped reduce unsafe activity at pools

During the 2026 summer season:

- Aquatics and Fire Department teams maintained a close presence at facilities
- Staff stayed connected with visitors and monitored emerging concerns
- Teams identified potentially dangerous situations being planned or promoted
- Staff were able to intervene proactively and discourage unsafe behavior
- The approach was associated with a **significant reduction in the severity and recurrence of teen takeovers at Saint Paul pools**

Aquatics Response Team Approach

- Continually engage with visitors
- Address dangerous behavior before it escalates
- Consistently enforce facility rules
- Prohibit:
  - Face coverings
  - Glass containers
  - Weapons
  - Smoking
- Remove conditions that can facilitate unauthorized gatherings

Consistent presence + engagement + clear expectations = prevention

Proactive collaboration in parks and recreation spaces

Fire Truck Splash Down Events

- During summer heat waves, Parks & Recreation partnered with the **Saint Paul Fire Department** to bring water access directly into neighborhoods.
  - Firefighters used fire engines to spray water for community members to cool off
  - Events were held at parks and recreation centers
  - Created a safe, supervised opportunity for young people and families to gather
  - Strengthened relationships between Parks staff, firefighters and community members

A public safety partnership can also be a community engagement partnership.

Office of Neighborhood Safety Partnership

- **Youth outreach**
  - ONS outreach staff work at select recreation centers
  - Staff build relationships with youth before problems occur
  - Existing relationships can help de-escalate situations during takeovers
- **Referrals**
  - Parks staff can refer youth who need additional support
  - Example:
    - Youth involved in repeated fighting and threats received a six-month recreation center ban
    - Parks connected the youth and family with ONS
    - ONS is working with the family to address the behavior and support a return to the recreation center
- **Community coordination**
  - ONS also helps Parks work with community organizations and event organizers to address safety concerns and identify alternative locations or approaches.

Awakenings Program – Summer 2026

- **134 youth served**
- Youth participated in:
  - First Tee programming at Highland Golf Course
  - Free swimming lessons
  - Biking around local lakes
  - Annual 3M golfing event
- Free swim passes and Como Town passes provided opportunities for positive family engagement

Youth Success Stories

- 1 youth hired full-time at MLK Recreation Center for the fall
- 1 youth hired by Urban Boatbuilders MN
- 1 youth participated in a Congressional youth roundtable
- 1 youth named middle school valedictorian
- More than half of Awakenings Right Track participants achieved their Summer savings goals

Right Track: Investing in Young People

- **Summer 2026**
  - **3,000+** young people applied
  - **760** internship and training experiences offered
  - Opportunities across the public sector (including city departments), nonprofits and private-sector employers
- **Intern experience**
  - 91% felt proud of their work
  - 93% learned something useful or interesting
  - 93% strengthened their skills
  - 95% said their supervisor treated them with respect
  - 92% said their supervisor valued their opinions
  - 95% made at least one adult reference
  - 84% said their pay was an important source of income for themselves or their family
- **Employer experience**
  - 80% said interns brought new perspectives
  - 85% said interns brought energy and enthusiasm
  - 80% said they would hire their intern if they had an opening

Right Track: Expanding Youth Violence Prevention

- **New school-year partnership**
  - Parks helped establish a partnership with the **Ramsey County Office of Safety and Justice**
  - Launching a school-year internship program as a violence-prevention strategy
  - Targeting approximately **70 young people ages 14–24**
  - Prioritizing youth who have been impacted by the justice system
- **Approach:**
  - Connect young people to meaningful work, trusted adults, skills and opportunities before they become involved in harmful behavior.

Public safety also means protecting public property

Parks staff are responding to vandalism and damage that can affect operations, maintenance and community access.

- **Restrooms / sewer backups**
  - **Raspberry Island:** repeated backups caused by non-disposable and non-flushable items
  - **Arlington:** additional resources required to address sewer backups
  - **Harriet Island Wigington Pavilion:** additional resources required for similar sewer issues
- **Fountain damage**
  - **Kellogg Park Lower Fountain:** oil was poured into the fountain
    - Fountain had to be drained and refilled
    - Equipment and filtration system required cleaning to remove oil

Scooters, E-Bikes, & ATVs

- Damage occurring throughout the park system
- Pedro Park: burnout marks throughout pathways
- Reckless riding through playgrounds and recreation center properties
- Riders sometimes do not stop when asked
- Incidents involving youth being threatened or assaulted over e-bike keys
- Adult operating a four-wheeler Frogtown Community Center property
    - Driver threatened a staff member who attempted to intervene
    - A small child was riding with the adult

Wire Theft

- Continued theft of wire is creating ongoing challenges for Parks facilities and infrastructure