

PRIORITY EQUITY ZONE ENGAGEMENT PLAN

2025 - 2026

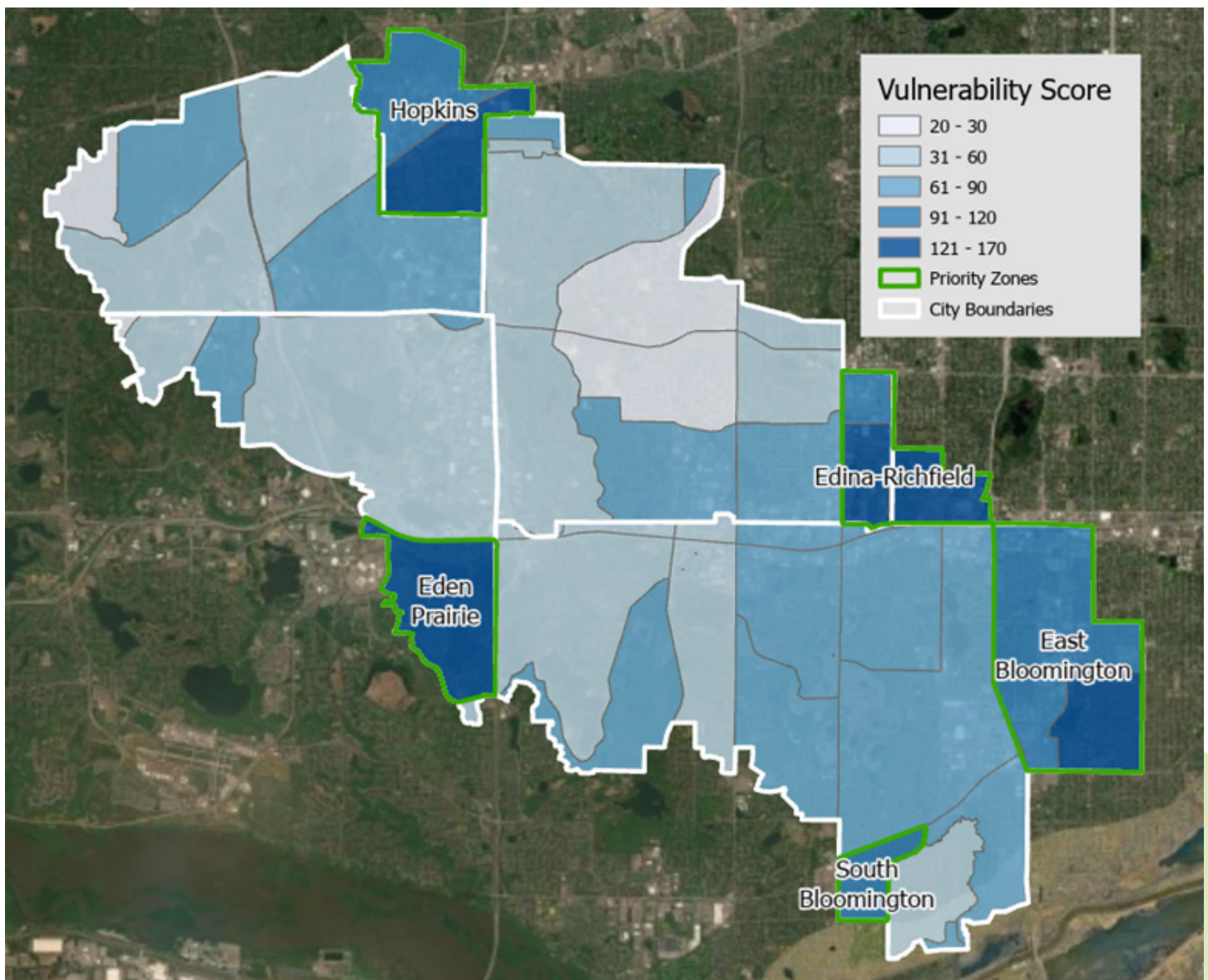


April, 2025

PRIORITY ZONE ENGAGEMENT

I. BACKGROUND

At the February 2025 Nine Mile Creek Watershed District (NMCWD) board meeting, district managers adopted a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Plan to help guide the integration of a DEIA lens into district policies and programs. Developing an education and outreach plan to better connect with and understand communities within the district’s “priority equity zones” is one identified action within the district’s DEIA plan.



The NMCWD vulnerability map was developed using the Hennepin County Climate Vulnerability data. Scores were calculated using a combination of environmental and social vulnerability variables. NMCWD’s five priority equity zones are the areas of the district that are most vulnerable in responding to environmental impacts.

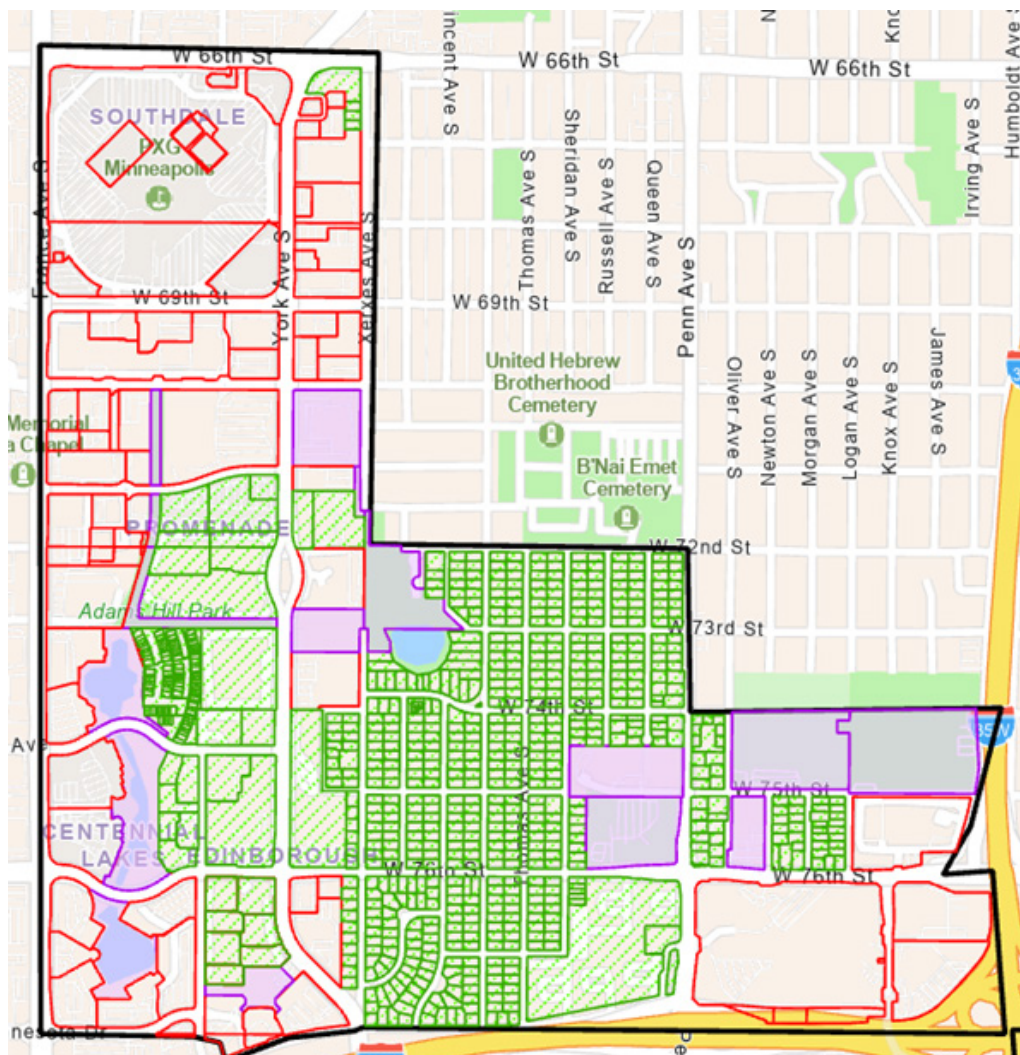
I.I PURPOSE

NMCWD currently does not have strong community connections in many of its priority equity zones. Through the identified engagement tactics listed within this plan, NMCWD staff aim to:

- Make connections with community members that live or work in the priority equity zones
- Create trust between NMCWD and the community
- Increase awareness of NMCWD as an organizational resource

These three identified purposes for engagement are foundational. NMCWD needs to develop relationships and trust within the priority equity zones as a first step that will eventually lead to NMCWD's more traditional mission-driven initiatives. The district has five priority equity zones. To keep this effort manageable, NMCWD's internal DEIA workgroup selected the Edina-Richfield priority equity zone as the focus for 2025.

II. EDINA - RICHFIELD EQUITY ZONE

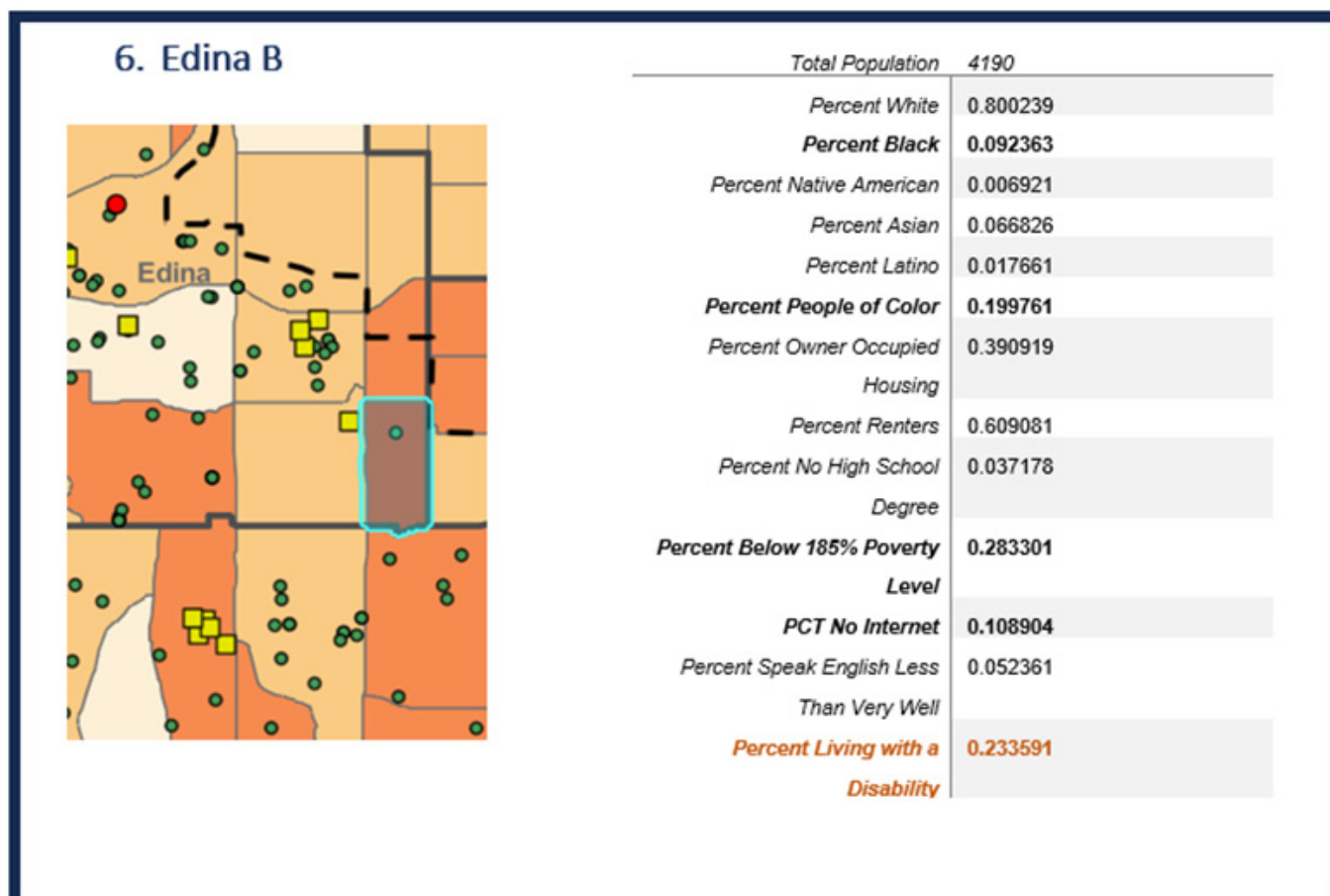


Land use within the Edina-Richfield priority equity zone. The portion of the equity zone in the City of Edina is dominated by commercial use and multi-family housing. Most of the City of Richfield portion is dominated by single-family housing.

Each of NMCWD’s priority equity zones have different demographics and different social and environmental vulnerabilities. NMCWD believes that it is important to understand who lives in the community and what their environmental burdens are to create an effective outreach and engagement plan. The Edina-Richfield priority equity zone has two distinct areas through land use and community composition.

II.I EDINA

The portion of the priority equity zone in Edina has a high poverty level. 28% of the population live below the 185% poverty level, 23% of the population live with a disability, and 19% of the population are people of color.



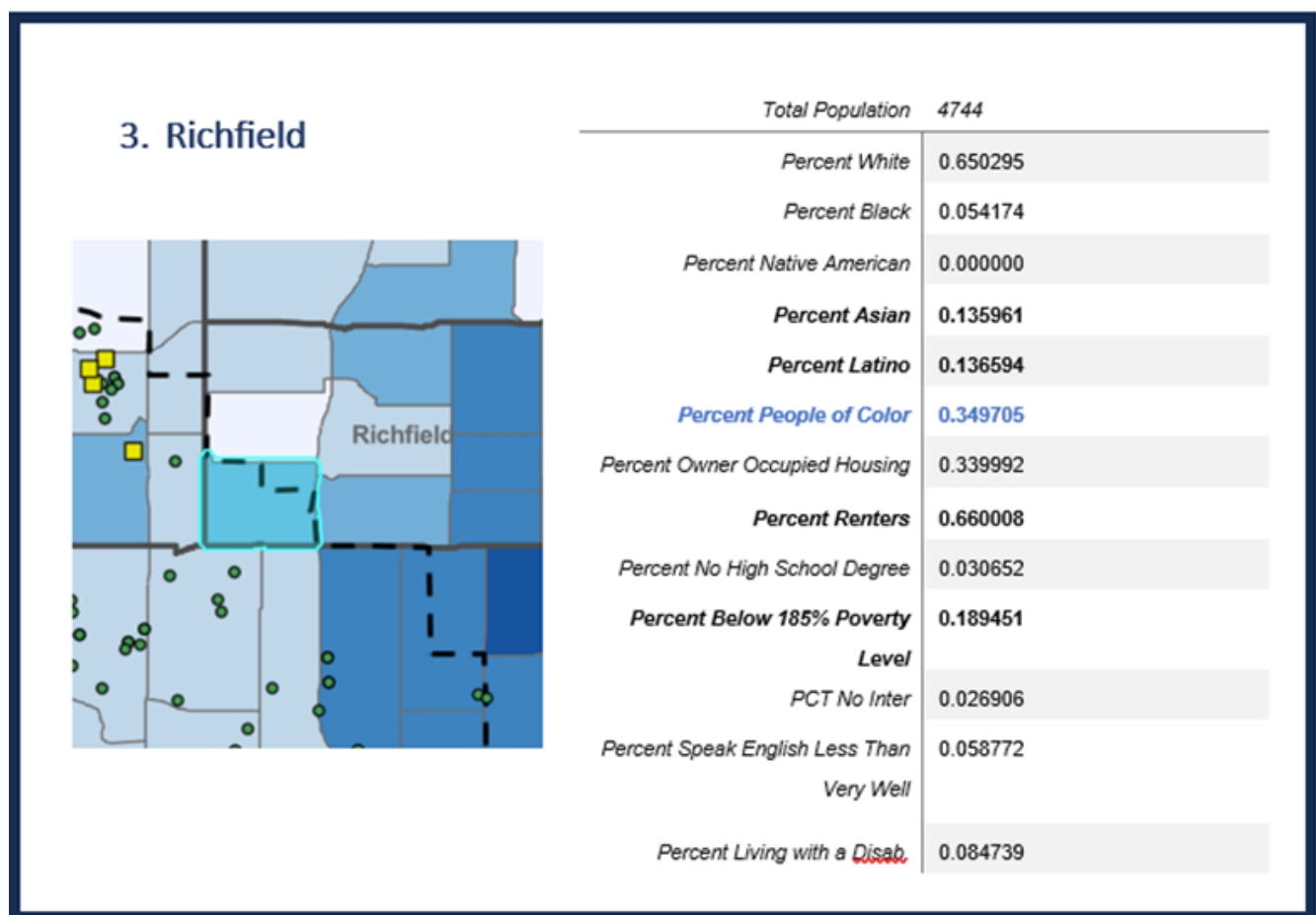
Social vulnerability metrics defined from 2020 census data. Decimals are shown out of 1 rather than 100. The 185% poverty level is calculated using 2020 data to align with the last 2020 census data collection. It is calculated using defined federal poverty levels and multiplying by 1.85 times. For example, the 2020 annual poverty level for a household of four is \$26,200. Multiplied by 1.85, the 2020 annual 185% poverty level for a household of four is \$48,470.

The residential properties in this area of Edina are primarily multi-family housing. However, most of the land use is commercial. The commercial land use has defined the environmental pressures of this area. This part of Edina has more pavement than green space and there is a very limited urban tree canopy. The Southdale Mall complex in conjunction with other large parking lots and roads increase the need for road salt application in winter. Correspondingly, all three sub-watersheds that encompass the area—Lake Cornelia-North, Centennial Lakes, and Adams Hill Pond are increasing in chloride levels. Adam’s Hill Pond is above the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s (MPCA) 230 mg/L chronic chloride standard (Richfield 2022 annual monitoring report).

The pervasive coverage of impervious surfaces in this area has also led to a high heat island effect (City of 2021 Climate Action Plan). Census data shows that 46% of the population is aged 65 and older—a demographic particularly vulnerable to high heat events (2020 Census data viewer).

II.II RICHFIELD

The portion of the priority equity zone in Richfield has a slightly lower poverty level with about 19% of the population living below the 185% poverty level. However, there is a much higher percentage of people of color making up almost 35% of the population. Most people of color are Asian and Latino. Another important factor to note while thinking about outreach tactics is that most people living in this area of Richfield do not own their property. Although single-family homes make up most of the area, 66% of the population rent their property.



The single-family homes in this area are predominantly within the Adam's Hill Pond sub-watershed. So again, chloride pollution is an environmental issue of concern. There are also significant areas of localized flooding identified through NMCWD's Atlas 14 flood study that has been confirmed with the City of Richfield. Several school and church campuses, some multifamily housing, and the large Best Buy Campus fall within the Penn Lake Sub-watershed. Penn Lake is listed on the MPCA's impaired waters list for high nutrients.

III. AUDIENCES FOR ENGAGEMENT

	Single Family Homes	Multi-Family Housing and Commercial	Churches	YMCA	Schools	Community Groups - Physical	Community Groups - Virtual
Who	Homeowners and renters	Property managers and residents	Church leadership	Youth Programming	Children and teachers	i.e. Master gardeners, rotary club	Facebook and other social media groups
Purpose	Make community connections						
	Increase awareness of NMCWD as an organizational resource						
		Foster environmental stewardship to improve environmental pollution i.e. chloride and TSS		Encourage next generation of environmental stewards/professionals			
		Support City of Edina goals		Encourage recreation and learning in outdoor spaces for all communities			
				Empower teachers in outdoor education strategies			
Goals	Distribute flyers to all single-family homes in priority equity zone	Develop comprehensive low salt no salt campaign		Make one contact	Make one contact with all the schools	Generate a list with contacts for known community groups of the area	
	Receive at least <u>on</u> grant application from this area			Develop a lesson plan	Visit each school once		
Tactics	Utilize CAC & Richfield Sustainability Commission for flyering ; tabling at the Edina Farmer's market	Coordinate with the City of Edina on Low Salt No Salt; tabling at the Edina Farmer's Market	Utilize the CAC to make first effort of contact	Contact property manager and program coordinator, Manager Kirk can facilitate connection	Work with Wood Lake Nature Center in Richfield to make initial contact	Utilize CAC for first effort to generate list; include gathering spaces and groups just outside the district boundary	

IV. MEASURING SUCCESSES

Measuring the success of an education and outreach campaign can be difficult. Many positive results can only be measured qualitatively. A good understanding of what success means for this campaign will be important to ensure useful data collection throughout the engagement effort. Following this initiative, staff should be able to answer the following questions:

- Do staff and CAC better understand the demographics of the community?
- Do staff and CAC better understand the community's needs/concerns as they pertain to the environment?
- Did NMCWD build new relationships/community connections?
- Did target audience learn what a watershed district is? Did they learn something new?
- Did NMCWD reach the audience it was trying to reach?
- Do staff have a better understanding of what engagement tactics are successful to help inform future engagement plans?

Pre and post engagement surveys, demographics surveys, and interviews are data collection methods that staff can use to track whether NMCWD is engaging its target audiences, inspiring behavioral outcomes, shifting knowledge bases, and developing lasting relationships.

IV. RESOURCES

There will be some direct costs associated with this engagement plan—paper promotional materials and materials for new lesson plans. However, the biggest resource needed for this initiative is staff time. Meaningful engagement that builds relationships and trust takes time. It is also important that full-time staff are involved in the initiative. NMCWD should strive to be a reliable resource to the community so, when possible, contacts should remain constant from year to year. That said, CAC volunteer time and potentially GreenCorps member time can support staff led efforts to engage the community.