

Walk & Talk Self-Guided Tours

# Minnehaha Creek: 35W-Lake Nokomis

Difficulty: 2 Moderate 3.5-mile roundtrip on mostly paved trail



Sarah Evenson is a landscape architect with HKGi. She worked on the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's 2020 Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail master plan.

The Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail area has a long history as part of the lands of the Dakota, followed by industrial and recreational use tied to the development of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Follow landscape architect Sarah Evenson's guide to Minnehaha Creek from just east of I-35W to Lake Nokomis, taking a look at the past, present, and future of this storied waterway that receives more than 1.3 million visits annually.

★ **Start:** Park in one of the bays on Minnehaha Parkway (or arrive by foot or bike); this stretch is east bound only and is accessed via the parkway traveling east or from northbound 2nd Ave S. After European Settlement, **Minnehaha Creek** was known as Brown's Creek (and a number of variations) for Joseph Renshaw Brown, who made the first documented voyage along the entire creek while he was a fifer and drummer with the U.S. Army in 1822. The name "Minnehaha" comes from the Dakota words mni (water) and gaga (falling or curling) and references Minnehaha Falls. The name was popularized in the 1855 poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow titled "Song of Hiawatha."



- A.** As a cross-town pinch point, **50th and the Parkway** experiences a lot of congestion at peak hours and can feel unsafe no matter which mode of travel one prefers. The master plan proposes an intersection realignment that will tee up Minnehaha Parkway with 50th Street and 4th Avenue to clarify crossing.
- B.** As you move on to the next stop, look across the Parkway at the Creek, and consider the hard shoreline edge. With climate change, the area around **Portland Avenue** is projected to be particularly susceptible to future flooding.
- C.** "**Cottontail on the Trail**" by Jeffrey Barber, or "The Bunny," as it's colloquially known, is probably the creek's best-known piece of artwork. The master plan proposes a revitalized rest area here, offering working drinking water, seating, bike racks, and picnic tables.
- D.** In the early 1900s, across the country and in Minneapolis, developers and officials started including racially restrictive language in property deeds. The greatest concentration of racial covenants was found in neighborhoods facing parkland, like those along Minnehaha Creek and Lake Nokomis.

- E.** Minnehaha Parkway intersects with busy north-south roads frequently along this stretch. The master plan's proposed **intersection enhancements** focus on maintaining separation of bikers and walkers, while making room for creek restoration that will reduce flooding and increase habitat.
- F.** A proposed picnic ground on the north side of the creek at **16th Avenue** will provide restroom and water access to support the active recreational uses across the creek to the south, including a sledding hill, four new pickleball courts replacing existing tennis courts, and a new course of single-track bike trails between 12th and 16th Avenues.
- G.** In 1938, the Board of Park Commissioners straightened a sharp curve of Minnehaha Creek here to "improve water flow and reduce soil erosion." A proposed re-meander of the creek would make a large wetland restoration possible and allow for re-routing trails **under Cedar Avenue**, and new views from adjacent trails and a new overlook.

Our Walk & Talk event series explores little-known or fascinating aspects of Minneapolis parks. Contributions to the Minneapolis Parks Foundation help us highlight the important history and impacts of Minneapolis Parks through free programs like this. Learn more, suggest a topic, or donate at [MplsParksFoundation.org](https://MplsParksFoundation.org).



MINNEAPOLIS  
**PARKS**  
FOUNDATION