

# RICHFIELD

The 2021 Annual Report

**Reaching for a  
better future, together**

*City leaders, residents, staff and visitors all contributed  
towards the accomplishments of 2021*



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# Letter from the city council

**A**s we reflect on the last year, we are proud of the resiliency, strength and connection we've seen our community build during 2021. We have experienced incredible accomplishments, such as starting construction on the 77<sup>th</sup> Street Underpass, organizing city-wide trash, recycling and organics collection, and the opening of the Augsburg Adventure Park. We have added a variety of housing options throughout the past 'decade of development', with the creation of 1,489 units of new housing. Richfield is truly becoming a more inclusive and welcoming community by the day.

In response to the pandemic, we hosted dozens of testing and vaccine clinics, as well as provided at-home tests and masks to our historically-excluded residents. We provided hundreds of thousands of dollars of rental assistance and forgivable small business loans. We worked hand-in-hand with groups and organizations across Richfield to respond to the changing needs of our community in the midst of COVID-19 and are prepared for what the future might bring.

Not only are we proud of our community's strength and resilience, but we are optimistic about our future. We are excited for the ongoing strategic planning process to provide a roadmap that will give everyone the opportunity to thrive. We look forward to partnering with our residents on initiatives that will have generational impacts, like the redesigning of the Wood Lake Nature Center. We value your many contributions to the community and look forward to working on a variety of exciting initiatives with you in the future.

Remember, we are stronger together than we are apart.



**Maria  
Regan Gonzalez**  
*Mayor*



**Mary  
Supple**  
*At-Large*



**Simon  
Trautmann**  
*Ward I*



**Sean  
Hayford Oleary**  
*Ward II*



**Ben  
Whalen**  
*Ward III*

# Just Deeds aims to evict racism from land titles

*More than 3,700 discriminatory covenants exist on property deeds in Richfield. The city has gathered tools and resources to help remove them and fight housing inequality.*

“No person or persons other than of the Caucasian race shall be permitted to occupy said premises.”

That is a direct quote from a property deed on Harriet Avenue. One of 3,714 racial covenants on deeds within city limits that once determined who could purchase or live on the property.

Last April, the council voted to participate in the Just Deeds project to provide guidance, support and encouragement towards the discharge of racial covenants on property records. This will be accomplished through a partnership with residents, staff and attorneys.

“We are always looking for ways to make Richfield more

equitable by addressing historic and systematic discrimination against our neighbors of color,” said Ward III City Councilmember Ben Whalen. “Partnering with residents to discharge the thousands of racial covenants on properties throughout the community is the right thing to do and in line with our goals.”

Racial or discriminatory covenants were a tool used from the early 1900s through the 1960s to prevent Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC), and non-Christians from buying property and living in residential neighborhoods across the country.

These discriminatory practices had a far-reaching impact on the development of the Twin Cities and its communities



of color, resulting in racially-segregated communities and creating deep inequities between white and BIPOC communities. The lasting impacts of these disparities are still present.

“Separate is never equal. And, that is exactly what racial covenants did to cities like Richfield; it separated the

community by race,” remarked Mayor Maria Regan Gonzalez. “The effects of this type of segregation can still be felt today, where our communities of color have less access to quality of life resources, such as medical care, green spaces and schools.”

The Just Deeds project gives homeowners the opportunity to

renounce these covenants.

The Community Development Department created a webpage to provide information about racial covenants and the project.

Residents interested in seeing if their property has a covenant or learning more should visit: [www.richfieldmn.gov/justdeeds](http://www.richfieldmn.gov/justdeeds).









# A picture is worth a 1000 words

*In an effort to promote transparency and trust with the community, Richfield's police officers started donning body cameras in January 2021. So, the next time you see an officer: smile!*

Anything worth doing, is worth doing right. After three years of conversations with the community, police implemented body cameras in 2021.

The cameras are recording during the entirety of the officer's shift and then retained by the department's data and media specialist.

The body cameras selected by the RPD are the Motorola WatchGuard V300. Each camera weighs 6.8 ounces and will predominantly be worn at the center of an officer's chest.

Retention of the recorded video content depends on the type of interaction an officer is having with a member of the public. For infractions, such as traffic stops, the data will remain on file for two years. Interactions that lead to a case number being assigned will be saved for three years.

"There are a wide variety of body camera styles and data storage options available in the public safety marketplace," explained Police Chief Jay Henthorne. "From start to finish, we wanted to make sure we selected a body camera system that met the needs of the residents we protect and serve. Resident input was very important in our decision making process."

Prior to implementation, the department conducted a survey, hosted a public meeting, participated in a city council hearing and held numerous informal conversations with residents about the initiative.

"Body cameras are showing tremendous promise for improving public safety, as well as increasing transparency and accountability," said Deputy Police Chief Mike Flaherty. "Our cameras synchronize with our

squad cameras, increasing the likelihood that any incident is captured from multiple angles."

The cost of the new equipment came in at \$195,000 with an additional cloud-based storage expense starting in 2024 at the cost of approximately \$70,000 a year. The addition of a staff member to maintain and retain the recorded content was also needed.

Leading up to body cameras being issued to officers, each member of the force completed three trainings.

Furthermore, body-worn cameras will be used for documenting evidence, officer training, improving officer performance and officer accountability.

To learn more about the RPD's body camera program, visit: [www.richfieldmn.gov/PoliceFAQ](http://www.richfieldmn.gov/PoliceFAQ)

From start to finish, it took almost a year to explore the possibility, and then implement, organized garbage collection in Richfield. The new system of garbage, recycling and organics collection made its debut during the week of October 4.

“Organized collection advanced so many of our city’s goals and priorities,” said Mayor Maria Regan Gonzalez. “Changing our garbage, recycling and organics collection efforts provides a more consistent, sustainable, efficient and equitable service for all residents.”

During transition week, residents put their existing garbage, recycling and yard waste carts out for collection on their new service day. The old carts were emptied by residents’ new garbage hauler and picked up. Most new carts were then delivered that day. By the end of the first week of organized collection, the new system was functioning like it was intended. The weeks leading up to organized garbage



## Simplifying city garbage collection, one cart at a time







collection, as well as the first couple days of the transition also allowed residents to reevaluate their cart sizes and other solid waste service needs, such as every-other-week pick up and curbside organics.

Under organized garbage collection, all haulers (Republic, Waste Management and Aspen) kept their same market share of the city, but instead of each resident negotiating with a single hauler, the city negotiated the garbage rates and allocated specific sections of the city for each hauler to service.

Residents should already have noticed that the reorganization of routes and service days has greatly reduce the number of missed pick-ups. It has also led to fewer garbage trucks on the road, thus, protecting our resurfaced streets and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

“We want organized collection to be better than the system that came before it,” stated Ward III City Councilmember Ben Whalen. “One of the biggest priorities for residents, in terms of garbage collection, is high-quality customer service. We specifically included provisions in the contract with haulers that will ensure resident needs are met.”

Throughout the process, residents have been valued partners in deciding if organized collection was the right choice for the city. They provided staff with garbage bills to analyze rates, recounted what services they like and dislike, as well as participated in the city’s numerous engagement events.

As part of organized garbage collection, residents received a detailed services guide in the mail. The guide included a collection schedule calendar, information about services, and service rates.

If residents have questions about organized collection or anything else regarding the city’s sustainability efforts, they should contact sustainability specialist Rachel Lindholm by calling 612-861-9188 or emailing [rlindholm@richfieldmn.gov](mailto:rlindholm@richfieldmn.gov).







S. CHWIALKOWSKI  
ASSISTANT CHIEF



Here, assistant chief Shea Chwialkowski demonstrates the benefits of 'close before you doze' to MICC students at an event last fall.



# RFD plots course for future success

*For more than a decade, one of the things you could always count on was Fire Chief Wayne Kewitsch. With his retirement, the RFD is looking to new leaders to 'steer the truck.'*

When you hear the term 'dynamic duo' it probably conjures up images of Batman and Robin. Well, for nine years at the City of Richfield it had a different meaning, it usually meant Fire Chief Wayne Kewitsch and Assistant Fire Chief Mike Dobesh. And, just like the caped crusaders, they kept residents healthy and safe.

In January of 2021, Chief Kewitsch passed the torch of RFD leadership to Dobesh, which led to changes at the department. Eleven year veteran Jenell Wood was elevated from captain to assistant chief for risk reduction. Shea Chwialkowski, who has been with the department for eight years, was promoted to assistant chief for operations and training.

"Whether it was COVID-19 or staff transitions in the RFD,

Mike has dealt with a lot since starting as acting chief," declared City Manager Katie Rodriguez. "He has managed the transition well and his focus has always been on the RFD's mission and his team."

Chief Dobesh and his team have been busy during 2021. The RFD answered 4,693 calls for service.

One of the aspects of his previous role that he would like to continue is an emphasis on collaboration.

Right now and into the future, the Fire Department leadership team is prioritizing succession planning so the RFD can remain on strong footing for decades to come.

Learn more about the RFD at: [www.richfieldmn.gov/rfd](http://www.richfieldmn.gov/rfd)

# Adventure awaits at Augsburg Park

*With 23 city parks, residents and visitors have a lot of outdoor play options, but a fully-inclusive play experience was missing from the city's park offerings. Not anymore.*

**R**ichfield wants to be a place where all children, of all ability levels, can play, so in 2019 the Recreation Service Department set out to build a universally-inclusive playground.

On July 22, that dream became a reality when the city opened the Augsburg Adventure Park, one of only a few fully-inclusive playgrounds in the region.

An inclusive playground allows children of all abilities and developmental stages to play in the same space and creates a nurturing environment for all.

The playground features rubber surfacing, accessible swings, zip line, 10-person whirl, play structure ramps that allow for users to get 72 inches off the ground, ground-level musical instruments and a team swing.

"No one deserves to feel left out. An inclusive playground considers the needs of all kids and incorporates play equipment that addresses those needs and promotes growth and joy," explained Recreation Services Director Amy Markle.

The \$750,000 project was funded through a variety of sources, none of which increased residents' taxes. The largest contributors included Hennepin County (\$300,000) and the Minnesota DNR (\$200,000).

The Richfield Liquor round-up program also donated \$20,000 to the project.

"We are always striving to make Richfield a more inclusive place to live," declared Mayor Maria Regan Gonzalez. "Only

a handful of fully-inclusive playgrounds exist in the metro area. We hope that the Augsburg Adventure Park is not just a place where our residents can play barrier-free, but a place for all children to come and have fun."

The park opening celebration included a kids DJ, free ice cream, a bedtime story with the mayor and a chance for those of all ages to try out the new play equipment.

The grand opening celebration was attended by more than 600 parents and kids.

Details: [www.richfieldmn.gov/augsburgadventurepark](http://www.richfieldmn.gov/augsburgadventurepark)









*More than 75 elected officials, residents and staff attended the 77th Street Underpass ground breaking ceremony in July.*





# Underpass under construction

*The 77th Street Underpass project was three decades in the making, but over the summer leaders from around the state converged on Richfield to finally break ground.*

Since the 1990s, Richfield has made a substantial investment in its transportation system to make the I-494 Ring Route a reality. The city has delivered over \$142 million in projects to upgrade 76<sup>th</sup> Street and 77<sup>th</sup> Street, as well as the Penn Avenue and Lyndale Avenue Bridges to realize the long-term vision for the I-494 Corridor.

The Ring Route will relieve congestion on I-494. The last piece in the Ring Route puzzle was the 77th Street underpass.

City, county, state and local officials broke ground for the underpass project on July 15.

The project will cost \$22 million and be completed during the second half of 2023.

The project will bring other notable changes and improvements to the area. The Cedar Avenue connection to 77<sup>th</sup> Street will change, one block of the future Richfield Parkway will be constructed, the sledding hill at Washington Park will be moved, two new soccer fields will be established and a trail will be rebuilt and extended.

Additionally, Metro Transit will reconfigure several of its area routes to utilize the underpass, providing area residents with increased public transit access.

“Adding the 77th Street Underpass to the city’s roadway network will provide more efficient and reliable public transportation services to area residents,” said city engineer Joe Powers.





# Vets Park ablaze

Shortly after 9 p.m., on April 2, the Fire Department (RFD) received a call that a fire had broken out in the northeast section of Veterans Park. The area affected by the fire was predominantly wetlands, including a section of the cattail marsh, encompassing approximately four acres.

Firefighters responded quickly and were able to contain the fire with the help of other fire service jurisdictions. The cause of the fire is still unknown.

“With the ‘red flag’ conditions at the time, a fire can start and spread very quickly,” remembered Fire Chief Mike Dobesh. “As a department, we

were able to respond, assess the situation and deploy a plan that limited the damage to the natural areas of the park.”

The park’s walking bridges, floating bridge, recreational buildings, playground equipment and other structures were all spared from the fire. The fire was monitored and allowed to burn out under the supervision of the RFD.

“Most people do not realize how tricky a cattail fire can be to get under control,” explained Recreation Services Department Director Amy Markle. “The RFD’s quick response protected not just the park structures, but possibly the surrounding neighborhood and highway.”



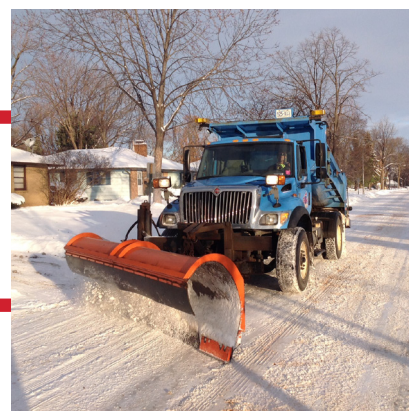
## WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

If you are looking for a one stop shop for city news, we strongly recommend you subscribe to the new Richfield Recap. It is a once a week email, text or both that will keep you informed about everything going on in the city from recreation to road closures. Subscribe by visiting: [www.richfieldmn.gov/subscribe](http://www.richfieldmn.gov/subscribe)



## MILL & OVERLAY COMPLETED

The six-year mill and overlay project that resurfaced nearly all 100 miles of streets wrapped up over the summer. Most cities opt to reconstruct their roads, but with the city’s strong base layer of concrete and firm, sandy soil, Richfield was able to utilize the mill and overlay process, saving millions.



## CHANGE TO SNOW EMERGENCIES

To make sure snow emergency practices benefit all residents, regardless of the type of housing they occupy, a pilot program expanding the snow emergency threshold from two to four inches took effect this winter. Learn more about the program by visiting: [www.richfieldmn.gov/](http://www.richfieldmn.gov/)





## Profitability leads to park improvements

Without city liquor stores, Richfield would be a much different place. The profits from the stores are reinvested in the community, primarily through park improvements. In 2021, Minnesota's Office of the State Auditor reported that Richfield had the second highest sales for municipal liquor operations in the state. Watch out, Lakeville, we're comin' for ya!

The four stores recorded \$13.9 million in sales, leading to a more than \$1 million profit that ensures our parks remain a jewel of the city.

The stores' round-up program has aided the construction of a pollinator garden, Wood Lake Nature Center bus scholarship, an all-terrain wheelchair and

over the summer, a \$20,000 contribution to the building of the Augsburg Adventure Park

The funds will also aid other worthy projects ranging from public safety to sustainability to public engagement.

Another project that would not have been possible without the contributions of the liquor store profits is the popular off-leash dog park at Roosevelt Park.

"For years Richfield needed a dog park. Many of my neighbors would drive to other cities to give their pups space to run around, said Councilmember Sean Hayford Oleary. "The Roosevelt dog park is convenient, close to home, and a great place to connect with other members of the community."

# Year two of COVID-19

*As 2021 came to a close, Richfield surpassed 6,000 total positive coronavirus cases. Residents can follow the city-specific changes in the pandemic by visiting the city's COVID-19 dashboard.*

**W**ith the omicron variant raging, cases climbed fast before the start of 2022. During the last six weeks of 2021, Richfield added more than 1,000 positive cases, bringing its total count to 6,207 on December 31, 2021.

Sadly, 416 residents have been hospitalized, 69 of them required a stay in the ICU. Sixty residents have lost their lives due to the COVID-19 virus.

If there is a bright spot to this stage in the pandemic, it is that residents are highly vaccinated. By the end of 2021, 78 percent of eligible residents had completed their vaccine series. That number has only grown over the first weeks of 2022.

"Residents understand that

COVID-19 is a serious, possibly life-threatening disease," said Community Health Services Administrator Jennifer Anderson. "As soon as a new group becomes eligible to receive the vaccine or a booster shot, the majority of them go out and get it."

Richfield's health officials understand that everyone is experiencing "pandemic fatigue," but stress that it is still very important to utilize safe virus mitigation practices to reduce the possibility for community spread of the virus.

Residents interested in staying up to date on the state of the pandemic in Richfield can take advantage of the city's interactive dashboard by visiting: [www.richfieldmn.gov/coviddashboard](https://www.richfieldmn.gov/coviddashboard)









# Wood Lake Nature Center celebrates 50th birthday



*If the Wood Lake  
Nature Center's walls  
could talk...*

*They would  
probably teach you  
a thing or two about  
conservation, climate  
change, and a lot  
more. That happens  
after 50 years of  
offering high-quality  
environmental  
education.*



On May 5, the Wood Lake Nature Center turned the 'Big 5-0' and, in our opinion, can officially be labeled as a "silver fox." Come to think of it, it actually has dozens of resident foxes...

The lake was molded by glaciers 12,000 years ago and was at least 20 feet deep, at that time. The first people to inhabit the area were members of the Dakota Nation.

Up until the early 1900s, Wood Lake was used for watering cattle, fishing, swimming, and ice cutting.

In 1969, the city council, backed by the support of thousands of residents, decided to build a nature center. The building opened in 1971.

Today, the Wood Lake Nature Center welcomes more than 100,000 visitors to its indoor and outdoor spaces, annually.

Due to the center's central location in the Twin Cities metro and its close proximity to the Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport, you never know who you will meet as you traverse the miles of trails at Wood Lake.

"The other day I met a woman who was on a layover from Dallas and decided to take a hike here," mentioned naturalist Brianna Rodgers. "Only about a third of our visitors are from Richfield. The rest come from other cities in the metro, greater Minnesota, different states and even other countries."

One of the pillars of the Wood Lake Nature Center is its commitment to student environmental education. From the day it opened its doors, it has partnered with the Richfield Public Schools to welcome every student from preschool to fifth grade at the center for field trips at least twice a year.

Larger annual events at Wood Lake include Candlelight and Ice, Half-Haunted Halloween and the Urban Wildland races.

Additionally, nature center staff are looking to secure the center's future for another 50 years by exploring the possibility of replacing its current building with a new, state-of-the-art learning center that will meet the needs of regional students, residents and visitors.

"We are limited by our current building, having new designated teaching spaces will allow for continued program growth and further outreach with our underserved communities," remarked former naturalist and current Recreation Services Director Amy Markle.

Watch for future project updates and upcoming program offerings by visiting: [www.richfieldmn.gov/woodlake](http://www.richfieldmn.gov/woodlake)



# A decade of development

*Richfield's 'personality' has not changed much over the past several decades. It is still the 'Urban Hometown' that makes everyone feel welcome. However, in terms of living and commercial spaces, things look quite a bit more vibrant.*

**D**uring the past 10 years, Richfield has been transformed by projects that have rejuvenated tired corners, boosted the housing market with strong values, added units and revitalized some of the city's busiest corridors.

In total, between 2011 and 2021, roughly \$440 million dollars have been invested into 32 projects within the city borders. From housing to commercial uses, large-scale projects to niche markets, the city has not seen this type of investment since the early 2000s.

"Richfield is finally getting the recognition it deserves," reflected Community Development Director Melissa

Poehlman. "Years ago, people referred to Richfield relative to Edina or Bloomington, but now there is a new sense of pride in this community."

One of the transformational projects to develop during the course of the decade was the Lakes at Lyndale area, between 64<sup>th</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> Streets on Lyndale Avenue. Once most recognized by a dilapidated garden center and an old Kmart, the transformation of the corridor began in 2011 with the development of Lyndale Station project, now home to L.A. Fitness, Von Hanson's Meats and MyBurger.

One year later, the Lyndale Plaza Apartments were completed, adding the first

new rental housing units to the community since 2000.

"That project was transformative for the entire city, in that it brought new rental housing to the community at a time when we hadn't seen that in years," remembered Housing Manager Julie Urban. "It also provided 19 new units for our Section 8 renters, which offered an amazing opportunity for our program participants to access new, high-quality housing."

Now, the area is thriving with an additional 210 housing units, Lakewinds Coop and other commercial spaces. The area has been designed to integrate the once-hidden Richfield Lake, with walking trails and bridges, plus a beautiful outdoor amphitheater which hosts programming for the community.

"I love how I can look out over the Lakes at Lyndale area and see a thriving area full of walkers, bikers, businesses and places to live," At-Large Councilmember Mary Supple.



“That reality is the result of years of planning, investment and engagement.”

Beyond the Lakes at Lyndale area, evidence of development in the community can also be seen in the multitude of new commercial spaces throughout the city. During the period from 2011-2021, more than 700,000 square feet of commercial space has made its home in Richfield. This includes large-scale developments like Menards, Richfield Bloomington Honda & Mitsubishi, Audi, and Morrie’s Jaguar Land Rover, as well as smaller locales like Plaza 66, Pizza Luce, CVS, Dunkin Donuts and Taco Bell.

Another area that has had an impact on the trajectory of development is on the east side of the city, along the Cedar Avenue Corridor. The Chamberlain project, in particular, played an important role for the area.

“The Chamberlain was instrumental in demonstrating the market strength of the community,” noted Poehlman.



“When the Chamberlain project came in, it showed other developers that Richfield was a community worth investing in.”

The RF64 Townhomes and Rya Apartments are also transforming the area along Richfield Parkway. Coupled with investments in infrastructure, the area is being transformed into a multi-modal hub where residents can live, work and play.

Throughout the city, other housing projects have added residents to the community, including: Havenwood Senior Housing, NOVO apartments, Landsby on Penn and the Lynk65 development, which will soon be under construction.

Overall, a total of 1,489 housing units have been added, including 148 units that are owner-occupied townhomes, condos, or single family homes built under the Richfield Rediscovered program.

“The influx of new housing, residents and commercial areas during the last decade is a real opportunity for our community,” acknowledged Mayor, Maria Regan Gonzalez. “My hope is that those residents find ways to build a sense of community and belonging here in their new city, and that they decide to invest in growing their own aspirations here in Richfield.”





*What are your b-day traditions? For Finley Erickson , who was delivered by Richfield firefighters in 2018, it is stopping by the RFD to say 'hi.'*

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