

# Rondo Land Bridge

## *Health Impact Assessment (HIA) Summary and Additional Community Insights*

Authors: Jessie Austin, Melanie Ferris, and Anna Granas

**JANUARY 2021, REVISED AUGUST 2023**





# CONTENTS

- Executive summary.....1
  - Health Impact Assessment (HIA) key findings and recommendations ..... 1
  - New directions and updated recommendations from recent studies and community engagement activities ..... 3
- Rondo Land Bridge: An opportunity to improve community health.....4
- Background .....5
  - About the Rondo community..... 5
- Health Impact Assessment (HIA) summary and key findings.....8
  - ReConnect Rondo HIA stakeholders ..... 9
  - HIA process overview ..... 10
  - ReConnect Rondo HIA key findings and lessons learned ..... 11
- Building on the HIA: Addressing broader community concerns.....20
  - Additional considerations for decision-makers from recent studies and community engagement ..... 20
  - A deeper dive: Gentrification and equitable development ..... 24
- Looking ahead.....27
  - Final thoughts and conclusions..... 28
- References.....29
- Appendix.....31

Note. Citations and references were updated in August 2023. The content and narrative was not changed.



# Executive summary

*In 2017, ReConnect Rondo, in partnership with Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health, conducted a Health Impact Assessment (HIA). The HIA process was used to engage residents in efforts to consider the potential impacts of a land bridge on community health and well-being, and bring forward new information to inform decisions made by the Minnesota Department of Transportation about whether a land bridge in the Rondo neighborhood will be a component of improvements made along the Interstate 94 (I-94) corridor. Conducted as a capstone project by three University of Minnesota graduate students (Hoveland, Hoffman, and Jerome, 2017), the project made helpful and important contributions to the conceptualization of a land bridge, but was not without limitations. This process is one tool in a decades-long effort to revitalize and restore a thriving Rondo neighborhood after it was torn apart with the construction of I-94 in the 1960s. Findings and recommendations from the Rondo land bridge HIA are presented here, as well as findings and recommendations from more recent studies and community engagement activities. The intent of this report is to inform decision-makers about community concerns and desires and to help set priorities to be addressed in the planning process for a land bridge.*

## Health Impact Assessment (HIA) key findings and recommendations

While many issues surfaced as community concerns and desires, the HIA committee selected the following three topics as primary focus areas for this HIA: **green space**, **opportunities for physical activity**, and **local economy**. Recommendations were developed through the HIA to mitigate potential negative health impacts and optimize community well-being.

Focus area	Findings	Recommendations
Green space	Overall, the work completed by Hoveland, Hoffman, and Jerome (2017) concluded that increased green space was likely to improve mental health and well-being for individuals closest to the land bridge or who regularly use the space. They also concluded there was low likelihood for changes in asthma or cancer among Rondo residents and that potential for changes in injury were uncertain. The authors drew these conclusions based on a review of relevant studies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Design the green space on the land bridge with the community, specifically youth and elders, to ensure future utilization. It should include:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– A portion dedicated to urban agriculture</li><li>– Public art commemorating the history of the Rondo neighborhood</li><li>– Key components of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) theory</li><li>– A diverse range of plant and tree species to increase canopy coverage</li></ul></li><li>• Create a local nonprofit focused on programming on the land bridge, particularly youth programming</li><li>• Increase street cleaning on streets with an increase in boulevard trees to avoid clogged sewers and flooding</li><li>• Establish permit-parking only areas around the new green space to limit parking problems and encourage the use of public transit</li><li>• Work in partnership with the Capitol Region Watershed to increase storm water capacity in the neighborhood</li><li>• Explore new technologies to clean emissions and reduce noise in the tunnel created by the land bridge</li></ul>

Focus area	Findings	Recommendations
Physical activity	The assessment concluded that a land bridge was likely to lead to greater opportunities for physical activity and very likely to have a positive impact on reducing obesity rates among people closest to the land bridge and who use it regularly. They concluded there is a low likelihood of residents experiencing positive change in asthma and cancer rates and rated changes in mental health as “possible” but requiring additional data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the land bridge design, include programming and amenities designed to increase neighborhood physical activity (e.g., sports fields, playground equipment)</li> <li>• Increase pedestrian connections across the freeway</li> <li>• Integrate the Rondo neighborhood into the Saint Paul Bicycle Plan</li> <li>• Zone Rondo as a dense, mixed-use neighborhood where residents can easily walk or bike to reach goods and services</li> </ul>
Local economy	The assessment concluded that, depending on the types of policies enacted, a land bridge could have positive or negative impacts on the economic stability of current Rondo residents and related mental health and chronic disease outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a community benefits agreement (CBA) between developers, community members, Minnesota State Government, and the City of Saint Paul focused on inclusiveness and accountability throughout the negotiation and development process</li> <li>• Utilize inclusionary zoning and neighborhood planning tools to increase the amount and diversity of affordable housing types in the neighborhood</li> <li>• Expand support for local businesses and entrepreneurs through City funding streams and nonprofit business support organizations</li> <li>• Reserve legitimate decision-making participation opportunities for community members</li> </ul>

It should be noted that, as with any HIA, some descriptive information, as well as health and well-being measures, of interest to the HIA Community Advisory Committee were not readily available. For some types of data relevant to the HIA (e.g., health behaviors, measures of mental health), estimates had high margins of error at the neighborhood level, while other types of information (e.g., neighborhood cohesion) can only be gathered through new data collection. A community survey was considered, but ultimately determined to be too cost-prohibitive to pursue.

## New directions and updated recommendations from recent studies and community engagement activities

Building on the priorities identified through the HIA, ReConnect Rondo has since expanded its focus to explore additional potential impacts through a series of studies focused on gentrification, neighborhood reconnection, affordable housing, and equitable development, among other topic areas. Key findings and recommendations from these studies are summarized below.

- In order to mitigate future gentrification and displacement in Rondo, as highlighted in the place-based study of gentrification and housing resiliency, ReConnect Rondo and their partners should **center community voice and concerns, address broader needs through “community investment,” and increase community ownership** (Dolde, 2018).
- As identified in a feasibility study of potential land bridge concepts, the Rondo community’s goals for the development of the land bridge are for neighborhood reconnection, affordable housing, equitable development, public health, green space, and community leadership (Kaskaskia Engineering Group, LLC & RKG, 2020). Recommendations from the study conclude that the land bridge should be developed using a **phased approach that incorporates public engagement; developing and adopting a community preferred concept/master plan; and integrating findings and recommendations from the Rondo land bridge HIA, sustainability study, healthy community initiative steps, and the place-based gentrification study.**
- In order to promote equity generation, prevent displacement, and increase homeownership within the Rondo community, the Yorth Group, author of the Past Prosperity study recommends that ReConnect Rondo and their stakeholders **prioritize the creation of local jobs, career pathways, and local businesses through a circular economy hub, apply Regenerative Urbanism principles to restore community well-being, and leverage opportunities for circular economic financing** (Sævarsson, 2020).

Upon reflection of the Rondo land bridge HIA, HIA is an informative tool that is most effective when the scope and specifications of a project are set, the scope is narrow, and a decision-point is clear. Since the HIA, additional studies conducted by ReConnect Rondo and its partners have pointed to the desire of Rondo community members for decision-makers to consider many of the elements that are key to the revitalization of the Rondo neighborhood. Moving forward in the Rondo land bridge planning process, assessments and processes for community engagement that consider the breadth and depth of potential community impacts, many of which affect health and well-being, will be critical. MnDOT planning processes in the Rondo neighborhood, as well as those of other key stakeholders, should involve community collaboration and be in alignment with community-driven needs and priorities. Planning a successful project will necessitate ReConnect Rondo working in close partnership with multiple government agencies and require these agencies to approach their work differently in order to hear and respond to community concerns. Please see the full report at [reconnectrondo.com](https://reconnectrondo.com) for more detailed information about the Rondo land bridge HIA and other studies conducted by ReConnect Rondo.



## Rondo Land Bridge: An opportunity to improve community health

Photo: Interior of the Credjafawn Co-op Store, 678 Rondo Avenue, St. Paul, ca. 1950. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

*In the 1960s, the construction of Interstate I-94 tore through Rondo, a thriving African American community in Saint Paul, displacing hundreds of residents, closing local businesses, and forever changing the neighborhood and disrupting the closely-knit community. The freeway lanes created a cemented chasm, dividing what remained of the physical neighborhood and serving as a stark reminder of the breach of trust that occurred as government entities pushed I-94 construction forward without regard to the concerns of the community or willingness to consider alternative routes. Today, as the Minnesota Department of Transportation considers potential improvements along the I-94 corridor, there is hope among some community members that future transportation projects can catalyze changes to reconnect the neighborhood and ensure the residents benefit from new investment into the Rondo neighborhood.*

ReConnect Rondo was established in 2016 to lead a restorative movement with a revitalized African American cultural enterprise district connected by a community land bridge (ReConnect Rondo, n.d.). They aim to be a national model for equitable development success, known for leading a restorative movement to end racial disparities in Minnesota. In 2017, ReConnect Rondo, in partnership with Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health, conducted a Health Impact Assessment (HIA). The HIA process was used to engage residents in efforts to consider the potential impacts of a land bridge on community health and well-being and bring new information to decisions that will be made by the Minnesota Department of Transportation about whether a land bridge in the Rondo neighborhood will be a component of improvements made along the Interstate 94 (I-94) corridor.

The scope of any HIA is determined by understanding 1) what topics are most important to the community, 2) what is likely to influence future decision-making, and 3) what can be accomplished with available time and resources. Extensive, valuable work was undertaken in the HIA process. However, while the land bridge HIA describes the potential impacts of a land bridge on some aspects of community health and well-being, it provides only a partial picture. This report, which describes the HIA process and highlights key findings and recommendations from the study, both concludes that phase of work and describes how it can be part of ReConnect Rondo's transition to focus on new priorities moving forward. ReConnect Rondo has been and will continue to consider ways that the land bridge can be a tool to support the health and well-being of African American residents and the broader Rondo community.



## About the Rondo community

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Rondo neighborhood in Saint Paul, Minnesota, was the heart of a close-knit African American community and a thriving cultural and economic center, including a diverse and prosperous business sector. Rondo Avenue, the community's namesake, was the main thoroughfare of the neighborhood, which extended for one-and-a-quarter square miles - roughly in between University Avenue to the north, Marshall or Selby Avenue to the south, Rice Street to the east, and Lexington Avenue to the west (Alam, 2017; Gerlich, 2016). By the 1930s, half of all African American residents in Saint Paul lived in Rondo (Alam, 2017).

Supported by local businesses and the railroad industry, many of Rondo's African American residents were middle- or upper-class, and nearby integrated schools provided widespread access to high quality education. There were a number of well-established African American community centers and social clubs, including the Hallie Q. Brown Center; the Credjafawn Social Club, food cooperative, and credit union; and the Sterling Club professional networking association, as well as several established newspapers (Alam, 2017; Anderson, 2016; Huber, 2011).

Rondo residents defined their community by tight-knit social connections, public trust, and safety (Lindeke, 2019). Everyone knew one another, and children experienced a "network of care" from adults in the community, outside of their own families, who would look out for and protect them (Lindeke, 2019; Williams, 2016).

*We used to skate all night long almost. And walk in the neighborhood, didn't care if it was night or not 'cause nobody ever bothered you. They all protected you [...] they knew who you were (Williams, 2016).*

## Destruction and displacement from I-94

In the 1940s, the Minnesota Highway Department (MHD) began planning for the construction of a highway system connecting downtown Saint Paul and Minneapolis. The primary proposed route, called the "St. Anthony Route," was planned to cut straight through the Rondo neighborhood (Cavanaugh, 2006). The Saint Paul city engineer, George Harrold, opposed the St. Anthony Route because it would lead to the displacement of families and local businesses in an entire neighborhood. He proposed an alternative, called the Northern Route, which would instead run adjacent to existing railway lines one mile north of St. Anthony Avenue.

MHD never seriously considered this alternative because they thought it was too far out of the way and, therefore, too inconvenient for residents in Saint Paul neighborhoods south of University Avenue—theoretically leading to less traffic on the proposed highway, and higher road costs on alternative routes. The highway plan, with the St. Anthony Route, was approved in 1947. African American leaders in the Rondo neighborhood did not become aware of the already approved plan until six years later, in 1953 (Cavanaugh, 2006).

Despite community resistance, construction on the interstate began in 1956 (Beer, 2019). I-94 construction destroyed over 700 Rondo families' homes and destroyed many Black-owned businesses, many of which never reopened (Beer, 2019; Cavanaugh, 2006; Sævarsson, 2020). Among the families who lost their homes, 72% were African American, which amounted to one out of eight African Americans in Saint Paul losing their home because of the construction of I-94 (Cavanaugh, 2006). Families not only experienced the immediate loss caused by the destruction of

their homes, local businesses, and community assets, but also received unfair compensation for these losses. This was coupled with difficulty relocating to other neighborhoods because of redlining and racial covenants that restricted African Americans from purchasing homes in some areas of Saint Paul, allowing families fewer opportunities for wealth generation from home or business ownership. A recent study from the Yorth Group, commissioned by ReConnect Rondo, estimated that the construction of I-94, and the resulting loss of home equity, contributed to \$157 million in potential intergenerational wealth lost among Rondo residents (Sævarsson, 2020).

## Reconnecting Rondo and fostering community healing

Despite the physical chasm created by the interstate, and many families being forcibly physically displaced from their homes, the Rondo community has maintained a strong collective memory and cultural identity. Long-standing organizations, like the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, continue to be strong community assets, and new organizations, such as Rondo Avenue, Inc., work to preserve the neighborhood's past and look to its future (Rondo Avenue, Inc., n.d.). In 1983, the annual Rondo Days Festival was established, which “reunites a dispersed people” and works to “transmit the history and rich cultural traditions of Rondo and connect them with modern values for an ever-evolving community” (Rondo Avenue, Inc., n.d.). In 2018, the Rondo Commemorative Plaza opened, which includes green space, areas for gathering, art, and panels celebrating both the community’s African American history and recognizing the cultural communities that have more recently become part of the Rondo neighborhood, often as immigrants or refugees.

Efforts to revitalize the Rondo neighborhood or investment in nearby community development projects, such as Allianz Field and the Green Line segment of the light-rail system, often begin with a promise of benefiting community members and local businesses. However, these projects have the potential to cause gentrification and displacement if not planned and implemented with community input and agencies’ willingness to prioritize community interests.

The idea of a cap or land bridge first surfaced as a community response to initial development plans for the light rail along the Central Corridor in 2009. Specifically, community members were outraged that the Green Line plans did not include any light rail stops along the section running through Rondo (Yuen, 2014). ReConnect Rondo was established in 2016 to engage community members and work in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), the City of Saint Paul, the Metropolitan Council, and Ramsey County to further explore a land bridge crossing I-94 and to identify potential health impacts on the community. ReConnect Rondo believes that the land bridge has the potential to not only physically reconnect the Rondo neighborhood, but also to support healing and reinvestment that benefits African American residents and the broader Rondo community.

### *Rethinking I-94*

In 2016, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) began *Rethinking I-94* to engage communities in work to identify and address needs along the I-94 corridor between Broadway Avenue in Minneapolis and Highway 61 in Saint Paul, which includes the Rondo neighborhood. The work is intended to make transportation easier along the corridor and establish a sense of place for communities along the corridor, improve safety for all types of mobility and transportation options, and emphasize reconnecting neighborhoods and engaging communities in transportation decision-making. The agency’s approach also acknowledges the harm caused through the initial construction of I-94. On the MnDOT website, the project overview states that “MnDOT formed *Rethinking I-94* as part of the promise to the Rondo community – and all the communities in the I-94 corridor – to do better” (MnDOT, n.d., Executive Summary).

The MnDOT has three main purposes for *Rethinking I-94* (n.d., p. 1):

- Make it easier to travel to, along, and across the I-94 corridor and establish a sense of place for the communities that live, work, and play there.
- Enhance safety and mobility for people walking, biking, driving, and using transit.
- Develop a community-based approach focused on reconnecting neighborhoods, revitalizing communities, and ensuring residents have a meaningful voice in transportation decisions that affect their lives.

Throughout the planning process, MnDOT has engaged with ReConnect Rondo around their concept of a land bridge. The land bridge would not be constructed using MnDOT funds, but has the potential to contribute to the goals of *Rethinking I-94*. A land bridge (also called a freeway lid or highway cap) is an alternative to a traditional bridge deck that can be used to create new green, residential, or commercial space; connect neighborhoods; and improve accessibility for pedestrians and bicyclists. For individuals using the space, the land bridge is a continuation of the city landscape, rather than an obvious crossing over a busy highway. ReConnect Rondo envisioned a .5-mile land bridge that would cross I-94 between Chatsworth and Grotto streets. A feasibility analysis for the land bridge was completed in 2020. Master planning and preliminary design for the land will begin in 2021. With this said, the size and scale of the community land bridge, and what inclusions will be atop of the land bridge are not decided, nor has a determination been made as to the balance of green space, retail, education, business incubation spaces, and residential properties and units. This and other decision-making processes should incorporate extensive community engagement and input in partnership with ReConnect Rondo.

### Status of MnDOT planning

In 2018, MnDOT completed Phase 1 of planning their development around I-94. This phase included community engagement activities to understand what communities in the I-94 corridor want from transportation systems. To this end, MnDOT collected 2,200 baseline surveys, held listening sessions with 75 participants, and conducted over 800 interviews, among other engagement activities. This information was used to create guidelines for MnDOT on how to interact with communities along the corridor and how to plan and design projects. The first set of guidelines includes Guiding Commitments related to vision, co-power, authentic respect, transparency, and inclusivity established through a formal community engagement process. The second set includes statements that form a Livability Framework; health & environment, economics, sense of place, safety, connections, equity, and trust. For more information, see MnDOT's *Rethinking I-94 Phase 1 Report* (2018).

Phase 2 will focus on the creation of an environmental document to develop and evaluate transportation improvement actions for I-94. The process schedule was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The public engagement efforts will resume in February 2021.

### ***A land bridge as a potential tool for revitalization and restoration***

The first land bridge in the United States was built in Seattle in 1976 and became Freeway Park, the city's largest public space in the downtown area and a new connection between downtown and the city's convention center and nearby neighborhoods (Seattle Parks and Recreation, n.d.). Since that point, land bridges have been constructed in multiple cities, including Gichi-ode' Akiing (Lake Place Park) in Duluth (van der Hagen, 2021), Klyde Warran Park in Dallas (Klyde Warren Park, n.d.), and Millennium Park in Chicago, built over a railyard (Center for Innovative Finance Support, n.d.).

Many of these projects are located in downtown areas, in high-value real estate markets, and often focus on creating green space and boosting economic development. However, Saint Paul is on a short but growing list of cities considering land bridges as a way to invest in communities that had been unjustly harmed by past transportation construction projects. Ensuring these types of projects are designed and constructed in ways that benefit the local community, and avoid unintended negative impacts such as displacement due to rising property values, requires proactive planning and collaborative decision-making in partnership with community members and agency stakeholders.

### A Community to Watch: Denver

Denver is midway through construction of a highway cap that will create new park space next to the Elyria-Swansea neighborhood, a predominantly Latino community that had previously been disconnected from the larger city by I-70. While residents welcomed the additional green space and the potential benefits to students attending the neighborhood elementary school, there are also concerns about potential increases in property values and rent displacing residents, as well as pollution during and after construction. Understanding this community's experience may provide insight into how to avoid unintended negative consequences and implement effective policies to mitigate concerns of Rondo residents. (CDOT, 2016).

ReConnect Rondo sees an opportunity for a land bridge to be used as a tool for neighborhood revitalization and community restoration. However, doing so requires ongoing community engagement and true partnership with the state and local government agencies with decision-making authority so that practices and policies are put in place to not only avoid displacement, gentrification, and other inequitable outcomes, but to ensure the community benefits through the project and investment of resources. ReConnect Rondo envisioned the Health Impact Assessment (HIA) as an initial step to identify the considerations that must be incorporated into the I-94 redesign planning process so that past mistakes are not repeated and the project becomes an opportunity for healing and revitalization.

## Health Impact Assessment (HIA) summary and key findings

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a tool for ensuring the potential health impacts of a proposed policy or decision on communities are identified and addressed. This approach can help decision-makers adopt a broader perspective and consider a more holistic set of factors that impact community members, rather than focusing exclusively on economic or environmental impacts. While HIA is a relatively new approach, it has been used in a number of communities in Minnesota, across the United States, and globally to help ensure community health and well-being is considered in decision-making processes.

### What is HIA?

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a process to help communities and decision-makers identify the potential health effects of a plan, project, or policy and how it may disproportionately affect different groups before it is implemented. The process helps identify potential positive and negative health impacts and considerations to the decision-making process and leads to practical recommendations to increase positive health effects and minimize preventable health risks and negative health outcomes.

- Adapted from Health Impact Project

<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/projects/health-impact-project/health-impact-assessment>

HIAs often focus on social determinants of health, defined as the conditions in the environments in which people live, learn, work, and play that affect health and overall quality of life (Healthy People 2020, n.d.). Social determinants include neighborhood conditions (e.g., access to resources and high quality schools, community safety, green space, air and water quality), economic circumstances (e.g., employment rates, homeownership), and other social factors (e.g., experiencing racism or other forms of oppression, community cohesion). Unjust policies and decision-making can lead to unequal distribution of resources and allocation of funding across neighborhoods, often adding to advantages already present in affluent communities and neighborhoods where white residents predominantly live. As a result, social determinants of health are considered drivers of health inequities, the pervasive but avoidable differences in health outcomes between populations.

**Health equity** is achieved when all people have the opportunity to attain their best health and no one is unjustly prevented from having this optimal health due to unfair and avoidable social and environmental conditions.

Because HIAs are often conducted when there is potential for a community to be disproportionately impacted by a pending decision, equity is a focus for many HIAs. The HIA process can be a tool for amplifying community voice, introducing relevant data into the decision-making process, and offering solutions to avoid overlooked or unintended negative health impacts.

## ReConnect Rondo HIA stakeholders

To conduct the HIA, ReConnect Rondo staff convened an **HIA Planning Team** that included Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health and Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) staff with experience in the approach to provide ongoing technical assistance. This group was responsible for planning the process used to ensure the HIA included all key steps (described below). Within ReConnect Rondo, the process was led by staff with community organizing expertise and supported by three graduate students from the University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs.

The **HIA Community Advisory Committee**, comprised of Rondo community residents and representatives of community-based organizations, was the main decision-making body, using information gathered through the HIA process to establish the scope of work, consider ways in which health and well-being could be impacted by a land bridge, and develop recommendations.

ReConnect Rondo also convened an **HIA Technical Advisory Committee**, which included HIA Planning Team members as well as local city council members and representatives from MnDOT, Trust for Public Land, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), and Wilder Research who could advise on data, provide technical assistance, and offer suggestions for data collection methods being considered by ReConnect Rondo staff and the HIA Planning Team.

# HIA process overview

While HIAs can vary widely in terms of scope and the degree to which community members are engaged in or leading the process, all use a common set of five key steps: screening, scoping, assessment, recommendations, and monitoring and evaluation (Figure 1). The ReConnect Rondo HIA is an example of an independent HIA; in contrast, other HIAs have been conducted as part of a broader environmental impact assessment or feasibility study.

## 1. Health Impact Assessment (HIA) steps

<b>SCREENING</b>	Clarify what specific proposed project, program, or policy decision the HIA will address. Determine whether the HIA is likely to succeed and add value.
<b>SCOPING</b>	Establish the plan for the HIA, including the health effects and potential benefits the HIA will address. Identify concerns expressed about the pending decision.
<b>ASSESSMENT</b>	Describe the baseline health of the community and predict the potential health impacts of the decision. Use appropriate methods to review existing information and gather new data.
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	Develop pragmatic solutions that can reasonably be implemented in the local context and with consideration of the limitations of the project or policy being assessed. Disseminate to key audiences, including community members and decision-makers.
<b>MONITORING AND EVALUATION</b>	Evaluate the degree to which the HIA moved forward as intended (process evaluation), informed decisions or achieved other identified objectives (impact evaluation), and led to changes in health status (outcome evaluation). While some activities occur during the HIA process, most occur after the formal HIA is complete.

Note. – Adapted and printed with permission from The PEW Charitable Trusts, 2014

# ReConnect Rondo HIA key findings and lessons learned

Since the completion of the HIA in 2017, there have been transitions among ReConnect Rondo staff and board members who were involved most directly with the process, including the individuals who led the HIA and related community engagement efforts. ReConnect Rondo has used the HIA findings to understand some of the community's priorities regarding the development of a land bridge and its potential contribution to the revitalization of Rondo. The review of key findings in this summary draws heavily from a capstone paper completed by the graduate students who were involved with the project. Additionally, this report draws upon the experience of a Wilder Research staff person who participated as a member of the HIA Technical Advisory Committee and continued to engage with the HIA Planning Team after the HIA was completed to determine the best ways to document this phase of work. To honor the work done by the HIA team and HIA Community Advisory Committee, this section elevates work completed and recommendations developed through that process, while also offering lessons learned, both as a participant and observer of the process. New data compiled by Wilder Research are also included.

## Screening

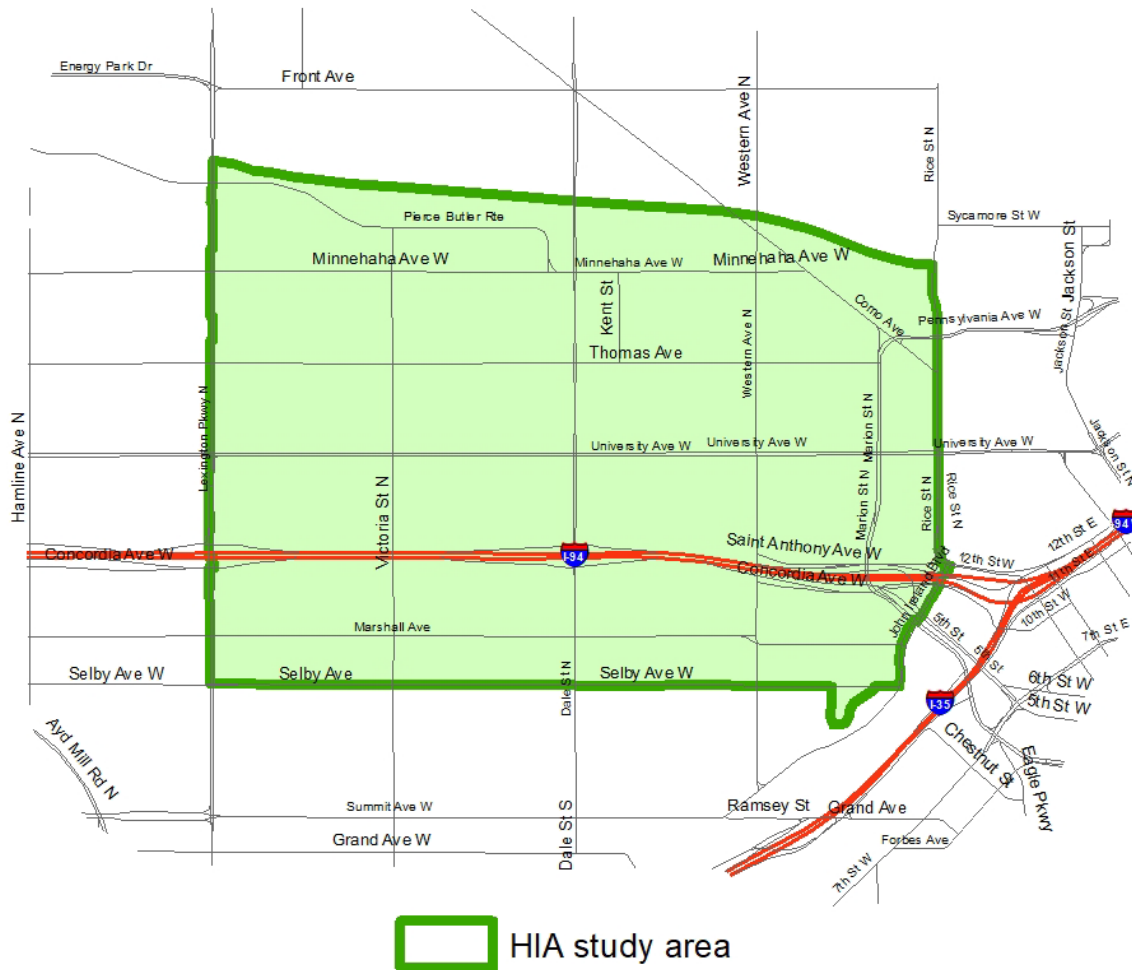
The HIA process helped inform MnDOT's *Rethinking I-94* planning efforts by working to determine whether there was community support for a land bridge and to inform future decision-making by exploring the potential health impacts of a land bridge. The screening step was conducted by ReConnect Rondo and Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health. The HIA was seen as an opportunity to amplify community voice and introduce the importance of considering the potential health impacts that both construction and the completed land bridge may have on community health and well-being. However, the fact that many of the land bridge design elements were unknown and open for consideration at this early conceptualization phase caused challenges in subsequent HIA steps. The HIA was intended to be completed in time to meet MnDOT deadlines for I-94 project concepts to be considered in the agency's first phase of planning. In practice, while the work completed through the HIA will still be used by MnDOT, the timelines established by MnDOT did not align with the funding period and time necessary for meaningful community engagement.

**Lessons learned:** HIA is a promising tool to bring information about potential health impacts into MnDOT planning and decision-making. However, introducing HIA early in MnDOT's planning process also presented challenges. For example, uncertainty about the land bridge size and design led to challenges clearly identifying potential health concerns. In addition, knowing that multiple studies are needed to inform decision-making and design, it was unclear how to best focus this HIA to inform future MnDOT planning and complement the work likely to be undertaken in future feasibility, technical, and environmental studies.

## Scoping

The scoping step occurred in a series of HIA Community Advisory Committee meetings facilitated by ReConnect Rondo. During these meetings, the HIA committee members identified how they would define the community most likely to be affected by the project, and the health effects that were most important to focus on throughout the HIA. With input from the HIA committee, the decision was made to focus the HIA on a relatively large geographic area that included the area between Lexington Avenue and extending east along I-94 to Rice Street, bordered by Selby Avenue to the south and Pierce Butler Route to the north (Figure 2).

## 2. HIA geographic area of focus



Through a series of discussions, HIA committee members reflected on what a healthy Rondo community looked like to them and identified a number of factors that influence health and that could be the focus of the HIA. The factors were wide-ranging and included the following themes:

- Affordable housing
- Historical trauma
- Local economy
- Access to opportunities for physical activity and green space
- Food access
- Mental health
- Pollution
- Relationships and community connection
- Youth well-being
- Support for aging in place
- Gentrification



Although each of these topics are important to the health and vitality of the Rondo neighborhood, the scoping phase of the HIA requires participants to prioritize topic areas. Through a combination of discussion and voting, the HIA committee selected the following three topics as primary focus areas for this HIA: green space, opportunities for physical activity, and local economy.

In HIAs, causal pathways are often used to consider the potential health effects of a decision to help inform decisions about scope. Pathways typically begin by identifying an effect closely related to the proposed project or decision, and uses community input, literature review, and sometimes consultation from experts in a topic area to identify the relevant social determinants and potential short- and long-term health effects. For each focus area of the ReConnect Rondo HIA, the HIA committee members created causal pathways to visualize ways in which the land bridge could potentially impact short- and long-term health outcomes and measures of well-being, both positively and negatively. These pathways (see Appendix) informed data gathered during the assessment step of the HIA process. While each pathway diagram included unique elements, all three ultimately identified ways in which the land bridge, both while under construction and after completed, could impact mental health, asthma, and chronic disease among Rondo community members.

Across all pathways, changes in pollution were identified as the primary factor that may contribute to changes in asthma rates. A broader set of factors were identified as potentially influencing rates of chronic disease, including: pollution, which can increase risk of cancer, and opportunities for physical activity and access to healthy food and subsequent changes in obesity, which impacts the risk of diabetes, heart disease, and some types of cancer. Two of the three pathways (green space and local economy) both consider how the land bridge could impact mental health and well-being as a result of changes in property value, household wealth, and, potentially, neighborhood gentrification. The green space pathway also emphasized the land bridge potentially impacting community cohesion and ultimately influencing mental health and well-being.

**Lessons learned:** To work within the parameters of the HIA budget and timeline, it was critical for the HIA to focus on a small number of priorities that would likely impact Rondo residents if a land bridge was constructed. However, as new stakeholders were engaged with the HIA process, there were questions about the degree to which the scoping decisions made by the HIA committee reflected the priorities of the entire Rondo community. Clear documentation of the decision-making process in the scoping stage of HIA is helpful for maintaining transparency and building buy-in throughout the process.

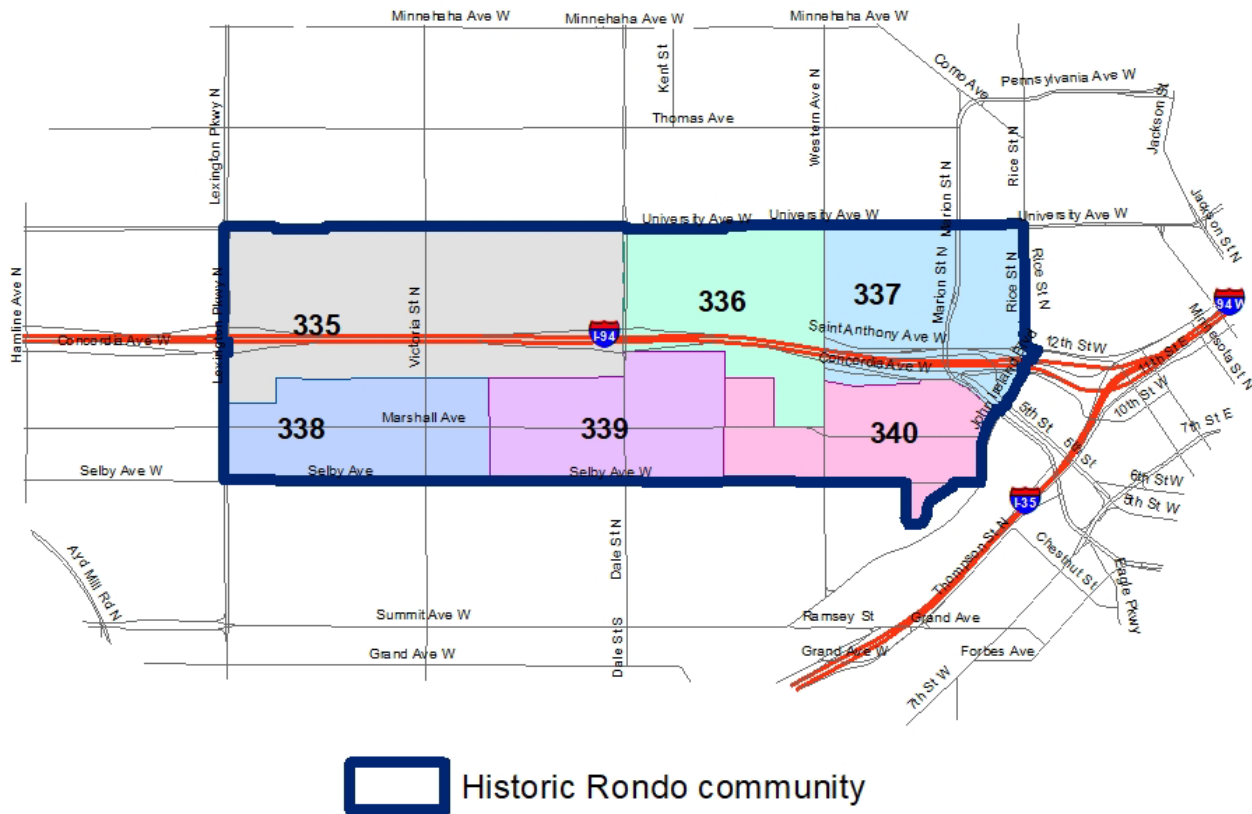
## Assessment

In HIA, potential changes in health outcomes are assessed by first establishing the base conditions, including the demographic characteristics of community residents, to then consider how key outcomes of interest may be influenced by a proposed decision. Estimating potential health impacts of a decision is challenging, as changes in health outcomes may take place over years or decades and can be influenced by multiple factors. As a result, many HIAs – including the ReConnect Rondo HIA – use descriptive information to report the likely direction and magnitude of changes in health outcomes, rather than clear numerical data.

## Community demographic and descriptive information

The data gathered during the HIA process focused on a geographic area that extended north to Pierce Butler Route. In this report, this information is updated to include the most recent demographic data available, and with a focus on a somewhat smaller geographic area (extending north to University Avenue; Figure 3). Specifically, demographic data are reported for six specific census tracts in Saint Paul, which, together, form the approximate boundaries of the historic Rondo neighborhood. Data are reported for each census tract individually, and not in aggregate (i.e., for Rondo as a whole) because of substantial differences in gentrification in the census tracts which fall largely north (335, 336, and 337) and south (338, 339, and 340) of I-94.

### 3. Approximate historic Rondo neighborhood boundaries



→ *The Rondo neighborhood is home to an increasingly culturally diverse population (Figure 4; Figure 5).*

#### 4. Race and ethnicity of Rondo residents

	Census tracts North of I-94			Census tracts South of I-94		
	335	336	337	338	339	340
<b>Race and ethnicity (2013-17)</b>						
White	17%	a	24%	41%	45%	83%
Of Color	83%	98%	77%	59%	55%	a
Black or African American	48%	73%	53%	40%	41%	11%
American Indian and Alaska Native	a	a	a	a	a	a
Asian or Pacific Islander	18%	21%	14%	a	a	a
Other	a	a	a	a	a	a
Two or more races	a	a	a	5%	a	a
Hispanic or Latino	8%	a	a	a	a	a

Source. Minnesota Compass. (n.d.). *Build your own profile – by census tract.* <https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/custom>

<sup>a</sup> Indicates that the data for this demographic characteristic have been suppressed. Data are suppressed when there are fewer than 10 people or units in a category, the percentage estimate is less than 1%, or the error margins were greater than 70% of the estimate of a numeric value.

#### 5. Nativity of and languages spoken among Rondo residents

	Census tracts North of I-94			Census tracts South of I-94		
	335	336	337	338	339	340
<b>Foreign-born residents (2013-17)</b>	22%	45%	47%	a	18%	a
<b>Language spoken (2013-17)</b>						
English only	64%	35%	48%	87%	67%	94%
Language other than English	36%	65%	52%	a	31%	a
Speaks English less than “very well”	18%	27%	38%	a	11%	a

Source. Minnesota Compass. (n.d.). *Build your own profile – by census tract.* <https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/custom>

<sup>a</sup> Indicates that the data for this demographic characteristic have been suppressed. Data are suppressed when there are fewer than 10 people or units in a category, the percentage estimate is less than 1%, or the error margins were greater than 70% of the estimate of a numeric value.

→ *There are differences in socioeconomic status across the Rondo neighborhood (Figure 6).*

## 6. Household income and poverty among Rondo residents

	Census tracts North of I-94			Census tracts South of I-94		
	335	336	337	338	339	340
<b>Household income (2013-17; 2017 dollars)</b>						
Less than \$35,000	37%	74%	87%	36%	36%	30%
\$35,000-\$49,999	11%	16%	a	12%	11%	19%
\$50,000-\$74,999	21%	a	a	14%	31%	20%
\$75,000-\$99,999	19%	a	a	13%	9%	13%
\$100,000 or more	13%	a	a	25%	13%	18%
Median household income	\$53,415	\$17,156	\$16,089	\$53,068	\$54,125	\$50,926
<b>Poverty (2013-17)</b>						
With income below poverty	34%	49%	43%	26%	29%	13%
With income 100-149% of poverty	a	24%	34%	12%	a	a
With income 150-199% of poverty	12%	a	12%	9%	a	9%
With income 200% of poverty or higher	49%	a	12%	53%	54%	63%

Source. Minnesota Compass. (n.d.). *Build your own profile – by census tract.* <https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/custom>

<sup>a</sup> Indicates that the data for this demographic characteristic have been suppressed. Data are suppressed when there are fewer than 10 people or units in a category, the percentage estimate is less than 1%, or the error margins were greater than 70% of the estimate of a numeric value.

→ *Many Rondo neighborhood households are housing cost-burdened (Figure 7).*

## 7. Housing availability and affordability in Rondo

	Census tracts North of I-94			Census tracts South of I-94		
	335	336	337	338	339	340
<b>Total housing units (2013-17)</b>	1,246	644	699	667	625	907
Vacant housing units	a	a	a	a	7%	a
Occupied housing units	92%	98%	95%	93%	93%	93%
<b>Owner-occupied (2013-17)</b>	47%	11%	7%	57%	41%	25%
<b>Renter-occupied (2013-17)</b>	53%	89%	93%	43%	59%	75%

Source. Minnesota Compass. (n.d.). *Build your own profile – by census tract.* <https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/custom>

<sup>a</sup> Indicates that the data for this demographic characteristic have been suppressed. Data are suppressed when there are fewer than 10 people or units in a category, the percentage estimate is less than 1%, or the error margins were greater than 70% of the estimate of a numeric value.

## 7. Housing availability and affordability in Rondo (continued)

	Census tracts North of I-94			Census tracts South of I-94		
	335	336	337	338	339	340
<b>Housing cost-burdened households (2013-17)<sup>b</sup></b>						
Overall	38%	50%	56%	38%	44%	35%
Owner households	26%	a	a	36%	46%	32%
Renter household	48%	51%	57%	41%	42%	37%

Source. Minnesota Compass. (n.d.) *Build your own profile – by census tract*. <https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/custom>

<sup>a</sup> Indicates that the data for this demographic characteristic have been suppressed. Data are suppressed when there are fewer than 10 people or units in a category, the percentage estimate is less than 1%, or the error margins were greater than 70% of the estimate of a numeric value.

<sup>b</sup> Households are considered housing cost-burdened if they pay 30% or more of their income for housing.

### **Estimated health effects presented in the HIA**

The HIA included a wide range of data points, relevant to each focus area and pathway. The capstone report completed through the HIA included a rationale for the data compiled for each focus area and how these measures contribute to overall health outcomes. In the assessment phase of many HIAs, subjective ratings are used to describe likely health impacts of a decision. In this report, we present the ratings established through the HIA process with ReConnect Rondo and the HIA Community Advisory Committee, and documented in a final capstone report (see Appendix).

**Green space.** The HIA included multiple data sources to estimate how increasing green space with the addition of the land bridge would impact health outcomes. The assessment considered: available park space; changes in water quality that may occur during land bridge construction; air pollution from traffic moving under the land bridge; impacts of green space on mental health, stress, and well-being; impacts of green space on air and water quality; and rates of crime.

Overall, the report completed by Hoveland, Hoffman, and Jerome (2017) (see Appendix) concluded that increased green space was likely to improve mental health and well-being for individuals closest to the land bridge or who regularly use the space. They also concluded there was low likelihood for changes in asthma or cancer among Rondo residents and that potential for changes in injury were uncertain. The authors drew these conclusions based on a review of relevant studies.

**Opportunities for physical activity.** The completed report described that the land bridge could lead to more opportunities for physical activity by adding additional green space, parks, and other community space to the neighborhood, as well as creating more opportunities for active transportation (e.g., walking, bicycling). The assessment noted that the land bridge could create more opportunities for residents to walk to various locations (e.g., school, grocery store, child care, places of employment, parks) or access public transit. The authors concluded that by increasing opportunities for physical activity and reducing reliance on driving to access goods and services, obesity rates could decrease.

They further concluded there is a low likelihood of residents experiencing positive change in asthma and cancer rates and rated changes in mental health as “possible” but requiring additional data.

**Local economy.** The capstone report authors described multiple ways that the land bridge could impact the local economy. Increasing green space could lead to an increase in property values and stimulate new business and real estate development. Both the construction phase and addition of new businesses could impact rates of employment or wages. The report also highlighted potential concerns, including potential misalignment between new employment opportunities and the job skills of local residents, and the potential of increasing property values leading to gentrification and displacement of current Rondo residents due to higher rent or property taxes.

The assessment concluded that, depending on the types of policies enacted, a land bridge could have positive or negative impacts on the economic stability of current Rondo residents and related mental health and chronic disease outcomes. Specifically, the HIA referred to insights from rezoning along the Central Corridor for the Green Line light rail project. Based on these insights and studies reviewed, the authors assert that the land bridge will most likely be a valuable asset that could draw more businesses and developments to the area. Mixed use, higher density developments, especially along commercial corridors in the area could improve livability for current residents, as mixed-use zoning could allow for improved walkability, space for locally owned businesses, more affordable housing units, and more community spaces. When paired with inclusionary zoning, mixed-use developments can provide even more affordable housing and business options.

### ***Gaps and other data limitations***

As with any HIA, some descriptive information, as well as health and well-being measures of interest to the HIA community advisory committee were not readily available. For some types of data relevant to the HIA (e.g., health behaviors, measures of mental health) estimates had high margins of error at the neighborhood level, while other types of information (e.g., neighborhood cohesion) can only be gathered through new data collection. A community survey was considered, but ultimately determined to be too cost-prohibitive to pursue.

**Lessons learned:** Presenting census tract-level data, when available, can show how demographic and descriptive information varies at a local level within the broader Rondo neighborhood. While it was appropriate and common in the HIA to focus the analysis on long-term health outcome measures (e.g., obesity, cancer, mental health), estimating changes in social determinants (e.g., homeownership, income, employment, changes in property value) may have been of greater utility to ReConnect Rondo and local stakeholders.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed through the HIA to mitigate potential negative health impacts and optimize community well-being. These recommendations will be shared with MnDOT, along with recommendations highlighted in other studies referenced later on in this report.

### *Green space recommendations*

- Design the green space on the land bridge with the community, specifically youth and elders, to ensure future utilization. It should include:
  - A portion dedicated to urban agriculture
  - Public art commemorating the history of the Rondo neighborhood
  - Key components of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) theory
  - A diverse range of plant and tree species to increase canopy coverage
- Create a local nonprofit focused on programming on the land bridge, particularly youth programming
- Increase street cleaning on streets with an increase in boulevard trees to avoid clogged sewers and flooding
- Establish permit-parking only areas around the new green space to limit parking problems and encourage the use of public transit
- Work in partnership with the Capitol Region Watershed to increase storm water capacity in the neighborhood
- Explore new technologies to clean emissions and reduce noise in the tunnel created by the land bridge

### *Opportunities for physical activity recommendations*

- As part of the land bridge design, include programming and amenities designed to increase neighborhood physical activity (e.g., sports fields, playground equipment)
- Increase pedestrian connections across the freeway
- Integrate the Rondo neighborhood into the Saint Paul Bicycle Plan
- Zone Rondo as a dense, mixed-use neighborhood where residents can easily walk or bike to reach goods and services

### *Local economy recommendations*

- Establish a community benefits agreement (CBA) between developers, community members, Minnesota State Government, and the City of Saint Paul focused on inclusiveness and accountability throughout the negotiation and development process
- Utilize inclusionary zoning and neighborhood planning tools to increase the amount and diversity of affordable housing types in the neighborhood
- Expand support for local businesses and entrepreneurs through City funding streams and nonprofit business support organizations
- Reserve legitimate decision-making participation opportunities for community members

**Lessons learned:** The HIA was designed to inform decisions by MnDOT about whether to include consideration of a land bridge in its ongoing *Rethinking I-94* efforts. However, a potential project of this size requires the involvement of multiple state and county government entities. The recommendations developed through the HIA will need to be shared with multiple partners at different points in time to help inform relevant decision-making processes.

## Evaluation and monitoring

The final step of any HIA is evaluation and monitoring. This report, which highlights lessons learned from the HIA process, is one way of documenting the process and lessons learned along the way. The HIA's impact can be evaluated by monitoring the degree to which recommendations developed through the process are adopted by MnDOT and identifying measures that will indicate progress towards desired long-term outcomes or flag concerns that need to be addressed in order to ensure the project is a benefit to the community.

## Building on the HIA: Addressing broader community concerns

### Additional considerations for decision-makers from recent studies and community engagement

The HIA provided valuable information about the potential impacts of the Rondo land bridge on green space, opportunities for physical activity, and local economy and the subsequent health of community members. However, in the years since the HIA, ReConnect Rondo has expanded their focus to explore additional potential impacts that encompass a more comprehensive understanding of community interests and concerns. This work has included, but is not limited to, the Place-Based Study of Gentrification and Housing Resiliency (Dolde, 2018), the Rondo Land Bridge Feasibility Study (Kaskaskia Engineering Group, LLC. & RKG, 2020), and the Past Prosperity study (Sævarsson, 2020). Findings and recommendations to inform decision-making around the Rondo land bridge among key stakeholders (e.g., MnDOT, Metropolitan Council, City of Saint Paul, Ramsey County, community members, ReConnect Rondo) are summarized below.

### Place-based study of gentrification and housing resiliency

Through ReConnect Rondo's community engagement activities, many community members raised concerns related to gentrification and displacement that could arise as a result of development projects such as the Rondo land bridge. In response, ReConnect Rondo initiated Dolde's place-based study of gentrification and housing resiliency (2018). This study focused on two primary research questions:

1. How can a land bridge project uplift the aspirations of Rondo while ensuring that this community can remain in place to reap the benefits?
2. How can research and place-based knowledge help to promote justice for the Rondo community?



## ***Place-based gentrification study recommendations***

Based on a review of the existing literature, this study recommended a number of strategies to address and mitigate future gentrification and displacement in Rondo, including:

- **Centering community voice and concerns**, through the incorporation of a Rondo community committee in ReConnect Rondo’s governing structure, the creation of a community benefits agreement, and throughout project conceptualization and policy decision-making points.
- **Addressing community needs and desires via “community investment,”** through addressing existing needs in the Rondo community beyond the land bridge (e.g., through neighborhood coalition-building and advocacy), establishing an anti-gentrification task force that advocates for local policy change (e.g., 4(d) tax breaks with rental subsidy, housing trust funds, rental assistance and education programs, rental rehabilitation programs, just cause eviction ordinance), and collaborating with other community partners and knowledge centers.
- **Increasing community ownership**, through strengthening community leadership and engagement (e.g., through the ReConnect Rondo community committee), the creation of a housing stock and residential stability inventory, and increasing land control and legal ownership through the aforementioned community benefits agreement and affordable housing advocacy (including the incorporation of affordable housing into future designs of the potential Rondo land bridge).

## **Rondo land bridge feasibility study**

In 2019, a study was conducted to further explore the concept of a land bridge through the next step of the project development process and provide decision makers with the information necessary to make feasible and reasonable decisions (Kaskaskia Engineering Group, LLC. & RKG, 2020). Goals related to the implementation of a land bridge were identified and used to screen several development concepts. These goals build on themes identified through the HIA process detailed in the previous section. Goals identified in the feasibility study include (p. 4):

1. “Neighborhood Reconnection – Physically, reconnect the neighborhood on both sides of I-94 in ways that serve as a catalyst for wider community-wide initiatives; alternatively, socially, create a cultural connection that promotes community leadership.”
2. “Affordable Housing – Provide mechanisms to minimize barriers, and provide financial incentives, to promote the production and preservation of a diverse, safe, healthy, and affordable housing stock for residents to build wealth.”
3. “Equitable Development – Create a framework for inclusive economic opportunity for an equitable community, as a result of collaboration and sustainable wealth-building.”
4. “Public Health/Green Space – Improve public health disparities by providing access to green space and outdoor opportunities.”
5. “Community Leadership – Strategize to keep this project a “community led” initiative and work closely with state, regional and city officials to implement regulatory and policy solutions, as appropriate, to maximize community involvement and to minimize involuntary displacements and moderate gentrification.”

After the initial screening of concepts for the land bridge, evaluation criteria were developed that included project goals and additional criteria to evaluate the top concepts, including considerations for engineering/traffic, network/modal connectivity, environmental/health, and economic opportunities.

Additionally, a SWOT analysis identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the potential development of a land bridge (Figure 8).

## 8. SWOT analysis from Rondo land bridge feasibility study

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Established neighborhood</li> <li>– Existing recognized arts and cultural community (e.g., Selby Jazz Fest, Penumbra Theatre)</li> <li>– Rondo Community Land Trust</li> <li>– Ongoing work by community leaders and groups provides a foundation for required analyses</li> <li>– Victoria Street lacks on/off ramps, avoiding conflicts with freeway functions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Project lacks a Master Plan – long-term planning document that provides a conceptual layout to guide future growth and development and includes analysis, recommendations, and proposals for an area’s population, economy, housing, transportation, community facilities, and land use</li> <li>– Project lacks a comprehensive market analysis and financial analysis to examine the feasibility before a development program is finalized</li> <li>– Developing outside of Victoria Street runs the risk for conflicting freeway functions</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Healing a neighborhood identity</li> <li>– Redevelop vacant properties</li> <li>– Removal of/redevelop blighted properties</li> <li>– Create open space for passive recreation and social interaction, which the area currently lacks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Gentrification concerns similar to other developed areas of Saint Paul</li> <li>– Environmental impacts – hazardous waste, threatened and endangered species (e.g., Rusty patched bumble bee)</li> <li>– Lack of scale of traffic changes prevents certainty on a number of impacts</li> <li>– Lack of private funding to pay for features not covered by public funding</li> </ul>

## Feasibility study recommendations

Recommendations for the feasibility study include:

- Using a phased approach for the implementation of the land bridge, from a design/engineering and planning perspective, to allow for development as funding sources become available and market demands improve.
- Consider options for future stages of planning presented in a toolkit of relevant design/engineering activities and planning activities.
  - Potential engineering/design activities include: conduct other studies (e.g., analyses of noise and air quality impacts, traffic impacts), conduct life cycle cost aspects (LLC-Aspects) of a land bridge,

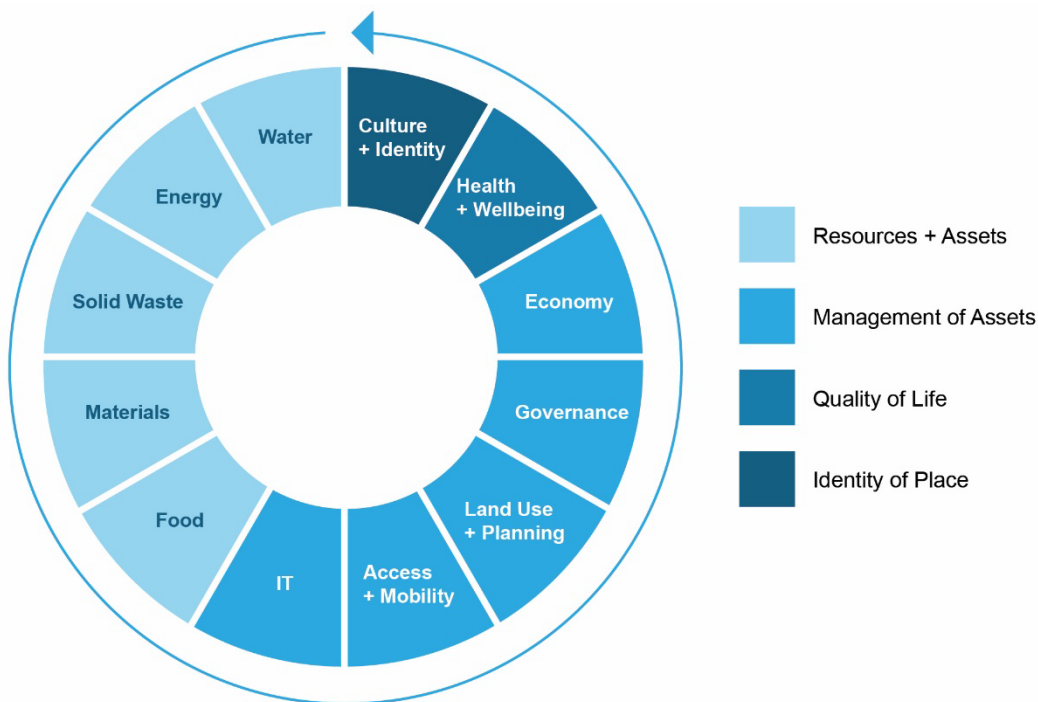
develop a preliminary and final design (e.g., detailed architectural and engineering drawings), construction plan, and opening and operation planning.

- Potential planning activities include: establishing milestones with key stakeholders (public engagement), developing/adopting a ReConnect Rondo land bridge community preferred concept/master plan, incorporating the Rondo land bridge into relevant planning documents, use findings and recommendations from HIA, sustainability study, healthy communities initiative steps, and gentrification study.

## Past Prosperity study

Lastly, the Past Prosperity study expanded ReConnect Rondo’s scope of focus even further (Sævarsson, 2020). This study conducted an analysis of key economic indicators of Rondo’s development since the 1940s (focusing on homeownership and costs of living). Additionally, this study used the Yorth Group’s proprietary Restorative City Standard™ to assess equity in twelve “performance areas”: water access, energy resiliency, food security, solid waste management, circular material strategies, technology infrastructure, transportation access & mobility, land use & planning, management & governance, local economy, health & well-being, and culture & identity (Sævarsson, 2020; Figure 9).

### 9. Restorative City Standard™



Note. Reprinted with permission from *Restorative Rondo: Building equity for all. Past Prosperity Study*. Yorth Group.

## Past Prosperity study recommendations

Based on their analyses, the Yorth Group recommended a number of strategies to secure equity generation, prevent displacement, and increase homeownership within the Rondo community (Sævarsson, 2020, p. 34-35):

- **“Create a catalyst for local jobs, career pathways, and local businesses through a circular economy hub in Rondo,”** such as a community-owned Integrated Utility Hub (IUH) that incorporates urban agriculture, hydroponics, and a material remanufacturing program
- **“Provide additional career pathways within the district, including education and training”**
- **“Apply Regenerative Urbanism principles to restore community and well-being”** through not only formally established parks, but also creating integrated opportunities on residential streets for pop-up parks, urban oases, pop-up cafes, art installations, and outdoor markets
- **“Leverage opportunities for circular economic financing”**

## A deeper dive: Gentrification and equitable development

Gentrification and concerns about a land bridge ultimately leading to displacement was a concern raised repeatedly during the HIA process. Whether the land bridge becomes primarily a green space or location for new development, past projects have shown that these types of projects can have negative impacts on current community residents and lead to displacement or a loss of community identity. In this section of the report, we build on what was identified through the HIA to offer additional frameworks and tools that may be useful for ReConnect Rondo in its ongoing work.

Gentrification is a commonly used term, but one that is often politically charged and that lacks consistent definition. In this report, we borrow a definition that seemed to resonate with the concerns elevated by Rondo residents who participated in the HIA community advisory committee:

---

**Gentrification is the process by which higher income households displace lower incomes residents of a neighborhood, changing the essential character and culture of the neighborhood (Kennedy & Leonard, 2001).**

---

It is important to recognize that neighborhood investment and revitalization can occur without displacing current residents or changing the fundamental feel and character. While the specific factors that lead to gentrification may vary in different neighborhoods, and the indicators below have limitations, these are factors that suggest gentrification is likely to occur or is underway (Figure 10). Additionally, as highlighted in Dolde’s (2018) study of place-based gentrification in the Rondo community, there may be tension between “community-oriented ideas of gentrification and market or policy-driven ideas of the same phenomenon... Community understandings of gentrification should not only be highlighted during research, but should also guide and structure the theory and application of gentrification research in a local context” (p. 26). Thus, ReConnect Rondo and their partners should work with community members to conceptualize, define, and measure gentrification within the local Rondo context, alongside more generalized indicators of gentrification such as those listed below.

## 10. Indicators of gentrification

Neighborhood features suggesting gentrification is likely	Neighborhood trends suggesting gentrification is occurring
High rate of renters	Shift from rental to greater homeownership
Ease of access to job centers (via freeway, public transit, etc.)	Increase in home down payment ratios and declines in Federal Housing Authority (FHA)-financing
High and increasing urban congestion	Influx of households and individuals with niche specialized or cultural interests (e.g., young professionals)
High architectural value in existing buildings, homes, and other spaces	Influx of amenities that serve higher income levels (e.g., boutique retail stores, upscale restaurants, art galleries)

Adapted from “Dealing with neighborhood change: A primer on gentrification and policy choices,” by M. Kennedy & P. Leonard, 2001 (<https://www.policylink.org/resources-tools/dealing-with-neighborhood-change-a-primer-on-gentrification-and-policy-choices>). Copyright 2001 by PolicyLink.

While adding more green space to a neighborhood has many potential benefits to physical and mental health, as well as creating new space for community connections to occur, new neighborhood development projects with these added amenities do not always benefit nearby communities, particularly lower-income neighborhoods. Parks can go unused by communities of color who feel unsafe or unwelcome in spaces because of experiences of discrimination and being excluded from processes that determine what the park looks like and how it will be used (Byrne, 2012). The creation of green space in urban settings can lead to increased property values, ultimately displacing community residents. An example of this is the High Line Rail in New York City, which turned an old rail line into a walking path with gardens. After the rail line was revitalized, nearby property values increased 103% between 2003 and 2011, a period when the United States was experiencing an economic recession (Zaveri, & Slotnik, 2021)). To prevent these unintended impacts from occurring, some planners have advocated for prioritizing small-scale projects to create spaces beneficial for communities and less practical and appealing for developers (Schauman & Salisbury, 1998).

According to The Trust for Public Land’s ParkServe mapping tool (n.d.), all current Rondo residents live within a 10-minute (1/2 mile) walk of a park. However, as discussed in the past prosperity study and public spaces survey, other external challenges impact the Rondo community’s access to parks and green space, such as access to adequate leisure time, general neighborhood safety, and the safety of mobility infrastructure (Lindeke, 2019; Sævarsson, 2020). In future land use planning discussions (including, but not limited to the design of the Rondo land bridge), these challenges should be considered and addressed to ensure adequate access to green and public spaces within Rondo.

*Compared to the pre-freeway era, the arterial streets of the Rondo Community Study Area have been greatly transformed. The combination of street widening, a narrowing of the sidewalks and pedestrian right-of-way, high traffic volumes, and high vehicle speeds create a perception and reality of danger that dramatically affects how these spaces can be used by people not driving in personal vehicles. Streets like Lexington Parkway, Dale Street, Rice Street, Concordia Avenue, St. Anthony Avenue, and Marion Boulevard all have the effect of eroding the quality of the public space on the streets and sidewalks. The present-day design restricts who can use it, and how welcoming and accessible these public spaces are along those corridors.*

-- Lindeke, 2019, p. 29

Current housing stock also gives into the likelihood of gentrification and displacement of community residents. An HIA conducted to explore potential impacts of the central corridor light rail line that runs along University Avenue in Saint Paul explored this topic in depth (PolicyLink, 2011). The final report explains that in neighborhoods with high vacancy rates and a weak housing market, new housing can fill in vacant lots without broader community impacts (PolicyLink, 2011). However, as that trend continues in communities with a stronger housing market, homes are renovated and sold at much higher prices, apartments become higher-price condominiums, and older buildings are demolished to make space for new construction. This latter scenario can lead to displacement without anti-displacement policies in place. The Rondo land bridge feasibility study commissioned by ReConnect Rondo found that, in the Rondo neighborhood, approximately 61% of housing is renter-occupied, a rate higher than the City of Saint Paul overall (Kaskaskia Engineering Group, LLC. & RKG, 2020). In addition, only 272 of the 5,115 housing units in the study area were vacant (5% of all housing units). Additionally, a high proportion of households in Rondo are cost-burdened by housing (i.e., paying 30% or more of their income for housing). In two out of three Rondo census tracts north of I-94, at least 50% of households are cost-burdened by housing (Figure 7).

If ReConnect Rondo wants to assess risk of gentrification in the future, the following indicators or risk factors of gentrification (borrowed from the Central Corridor HIA gentrification framework) may be of use (PolicyLink, 2011):

- Rising rents and home value
- Decreased racial diversity
- Increases in educational attainment of residents
- Increases in property values
- Close proximity to transit
- High density of amenities including youth facilities and public space
- High percentage of workers taking public transit
- High percentage of non-family households
- High percentage of buildings with three or more units
- High number of renter versus owner occupancy
- High number of households paying a large share of household income on housing (Housing Cost Burden)

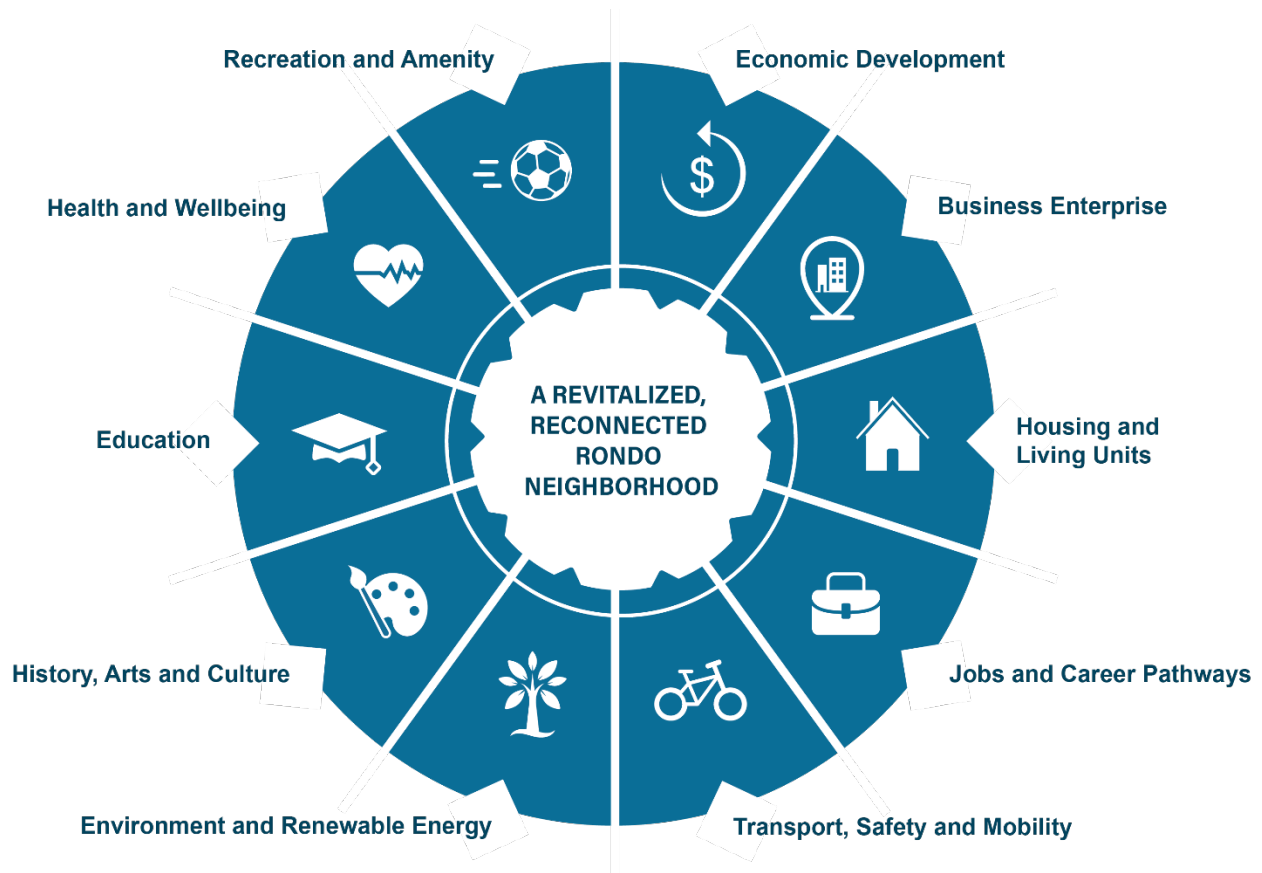
As stated in a report developed by the Urban Land Institute, ReConnect Rondo views the goal of the land bridge as an opportunity “to realize community ownership of the process, the physical places and spaces (atop the bridge), and the maintenance and programming of the asset moving forward. This includes increasing the opportunity for locally owned homes and businesses throughout the community” (Urban Land Institute, 2018, p. 13). The ULI report outlines several recommendations for strategies to monitor the occurrence of displacement and promote community ownership of businesses and homes.

As planning continues for a potential land bridge, protections need to be put in place to mitigate potential community harm that could occur through large-scale development. To avoid the unintended impacts of neighborhood development projects, such as the proposed land bridge concept, ongoing collaboration is needed by community members, planners, designers, and community developers to create spaces that align with the community’s priorities. There are also a number of anti-displacement policies that can be implemented to mitigate unintended impacts. Examples of these include provisions requiring affordable housing in new development, rent stabilization programs for homes and small businesses, financial incentives for homeownership among current residents, or policies that incentivize hiring employees from the community.

# Looking ahead

The HIA was a tool for beginning broader discussions about the land bridge concept to include considerations of community health and well-being. Through this HIA and ReConnect Rondo’s ongoing community engagement and planning efforts, it is clear that a community-determined, iterative approach is needed to fully consider how a project with such potential to impact a community that has a history of being left out of decision-making can best be designed and implemented. The visual below (Figure 11), developed by ReConnect Rondo, highlights the areas the organization sees as areas to further explore through ongoing community engagement. In the field of public health, these are known as the social determinants that influence community health, well-being, and resilience.

## 11. The Rondo Neighborhood Ecosystem



## Final thoughts and conclusions

Upon reflection on the Rondo land bridge HIA, HIA is an informative tool that is most effective when the scope and specifications of a project are set, the scope is narrow, and a decision-point is clear. Since the HIA, additional studies conducted by ReConnect Rondo and its partners have pointed to the desire of Rondo community members for decision-makers to consider many of the elements that are key to the revitalization of the Rondo neighborhood as identified in the Rondo Neighborhood Ecosystem (Figure 11). Moving forward in the Rondo land bridge planning process, assessments and processes for community engagement that consider the breadth and depth of potential community impacts, many of which affect health and well-being, will be critical. MnDOT planning processes in the Rondo neighborhood, as well as those of other key stakeholders, should involve community collaboration and be in alignment with community-driven needs and priorities. Planning a successful project will require ReConnect Rondo to work in close partnership with multiple government agencies and require these agencies to approach their work differently, in order to hear and respond to community concerns.

Currently, ReConnect Rondo and the broader community have concerns that Phase 2 of Rethinking I-94 will focus heavily on key infrastructure needs identified by MnDOT, such as pavement, safety, and mobility, rather than the interests of the community. MnDOT's priorities are not in alignment with what community members have defined as important concerns, which are the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the I-94 project. In October 2020, ReConnect Rondo sent a position paper to MnDOT outlining priorities that should be considered as part of the formal National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process.



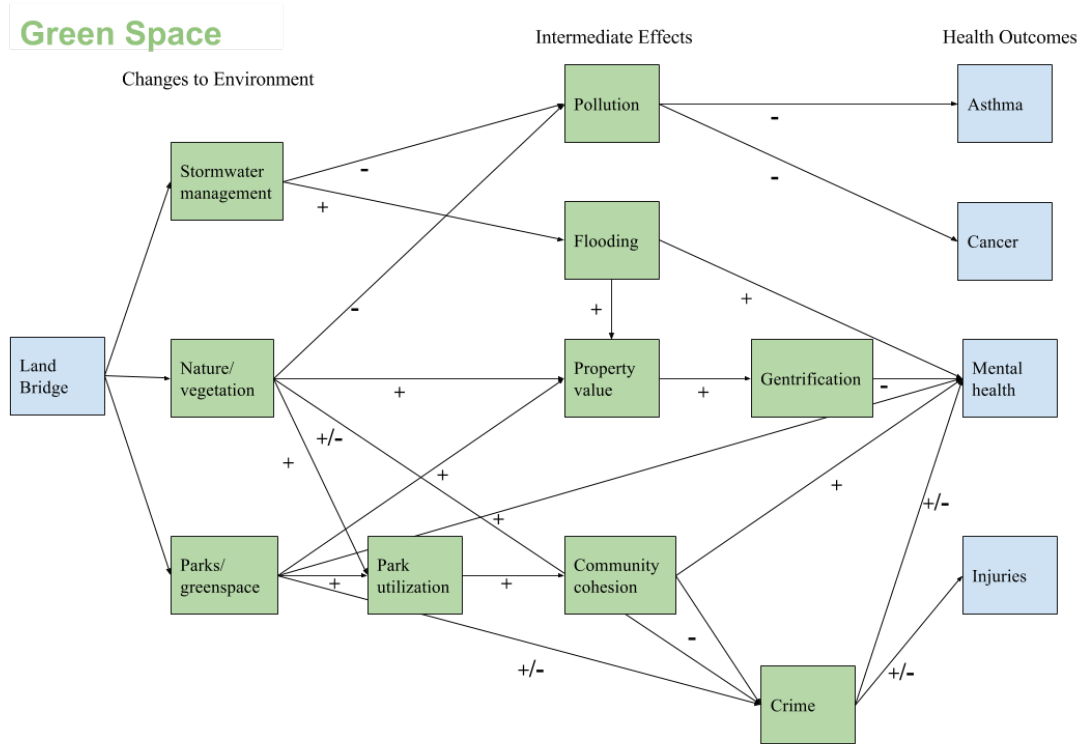
## References

- Alam, E. (2017). *Rondo neighborhood, St. Paul*. In *MNOpedia*. Minnesota Historical Society.  
<http://www.mnopedia.org/place/rondo-neighborhood-st-paul>
- Anderson, M. (2016, March 5). Interview by C. Avezzano. <http://omeka.macalester.edu/rondo/items/show/79>
- Beer, T. (2019). *Neighborhood resistance to I-94, 1953-1965*. In *MNOpedia*. Minnesota Historical Society.  
<https://www.mnopedia.org/event/neighborhood-resistance-i-94-1953-1965>
- Cavanaugh, P. (2006). *Politics and freeways: Building the Twin Cities interstate system*. Center for Urban and Regional Affairs and Center for Transportation Studies, University of Minnesota.  
<https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/2082/Freeways.pdf>
- Center for Innovative Finance Support. (n.d.). *Project profile: Millennium Park, Chicago, Illinois*. Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation.  
[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/project\\_profiles/il\\_millennium\\_park.aspx](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/project_profiles/il_millennium_park.aspx)
- Colorado Department of Transportation (2016). 1-70 East Final Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(f) Evaluation.
- Dolde, A. (2019). *Why Is There Always A Winner and a Loser?: A Place-Based Study of Gentrification and Housing Resiliency for ReConnectRondo*. Geography Honors Projects.  
58.[https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/geography\\_honors/58](https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/geography_honors/58)
- Gerlich, J. (2016, March 5). Interview by E. Benson. <http://omeka.macalester.edu/rondo/items/show/74>
- Healthy People 2020. (n.d.). *2020 topics and objectives: Social determinants of health*. <https://wayback.archive-it.org/5774/20220413203948/https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health>
- Huber, M. (2011). *Western Appeal*. In *MNOpedia*. Minnesota Historical Society.  
<https://www.mnopedia.org/thing/western-appeal>
- Kaskaskia Engineering Group, LLC., & RKG. (2020, July). *Rondo Avenue land bridge: Feasibility study final report*. <https://reconnectrondo.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Rondo-Avenue-Land-Bridge-Feasibility-Study-Final-Report.pdf>
- Kennedy, M., & Leonard, P. (2001). *Dealing with neighborhood change: A primer on gentrification and policy choices*. PolicyLink. <https://www.policylink.org/resources-tools/dealing-with-neighborhood-change-a-primer-on-gentrification-and-policy-choices>
- Klyde Warren Park. (n.d.). *About the park*. <https://www.klydewarrenpark.org/about-the-park/index.html>
- Lindeke, W. (2019). *A survey of public space in the Rondo community: Past, present, and possible future*. ReConnect Rondo. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qXnJM-7I76y1SwHqVIPQ6MQty7-CpMky/view>

- Minnesota Compass. (n.d.). *Build your own profile – by census tract*. <https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/custom>
- Minnesota Department of Transportation. (n.d.). *Rethinking I-94*. <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/I-94minneapolis-stpaul/background.html>
- Minnesota Department of Transportation. (2018). *Rethinking I-94: Phase 1 Report*. <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/I-94minneapolis-stpaul/pdf/vision/phase-1-report.pdf>
- PolicyLink. (2011). *Healthy Corridor for all. A community health impact assessment of transit-oriented development policy in Saint Paul, Minnesota*. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2012/healthycorridorsummaryfinal.pdf>
- Rondo Avenue, Inc. (n.d.). *Our mission*. <https://rondoavenueinc.org/who-we-are3/>
- Sævarsson, B. (2020). *Restorative Rondo: Building equity for all. Past Prosperity Study*. Yorth Group. <https://reconnectrondo.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Rondo-Past-Prosperity-Study.pdf>
- Schauman, S., & Salisbury, S. (1998). Restoring nature in the city: Puget Sound experiences. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 42(204), 287-295.
- Seattle Parks and Recreation. (n.d.). *Freeway Park*. <https://www.seattle.gov/parks/allparks/freeway-park>
- The Alliance. (2016). *Equitable development principles & scorecard: A tool for communities and planners*. <http://thealliancetc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/EquitableDevelopmentScorecard.pdf>
- The Pew Charitable Trusts. (2014, August 26). *The HIA Process*. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2014/08/28/the-hia-process>
- The Trust for Public Land. (n.d.). ParkServe® mapping application. St. Paul, Minnesota. <https://parkserve.tpl.org/mapping/index.html?CityID=2758000>
- Urban Land Institute. (2018). A ULI Advisory Services Panel: St. Paul, Minnesota, March 18-23, 2018. <https://americas.uli.org/rondo-saint-paul-mn-advisory-services-panel/>
- Van der Hagen, J. (2021). Landscape advocacy for Duluth's urban waterfront. *The Field*. <https://thefield.asla.org/2021/03/09/landscape-advocacy-for-duluths-urban-waterfront/>
- Williams, J. P. (2016, March 5). Interview by C. Avezzano. <http://omeka.macalester.edu/rondo/items/show/78>
- Yuen, L. (2014, June 12). *After rocky start, Green Line overcomes community objections*. MPR News. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2014/06/11/green-line-overcomes-community-objections>
- Zaveri, M., & Slotnik, D. E. (2021, January 11). \$60 Million High Line Expansion to Connect Park to Moynihan Train Hall. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/11/nyregion/moynihan-station-high-line.html>

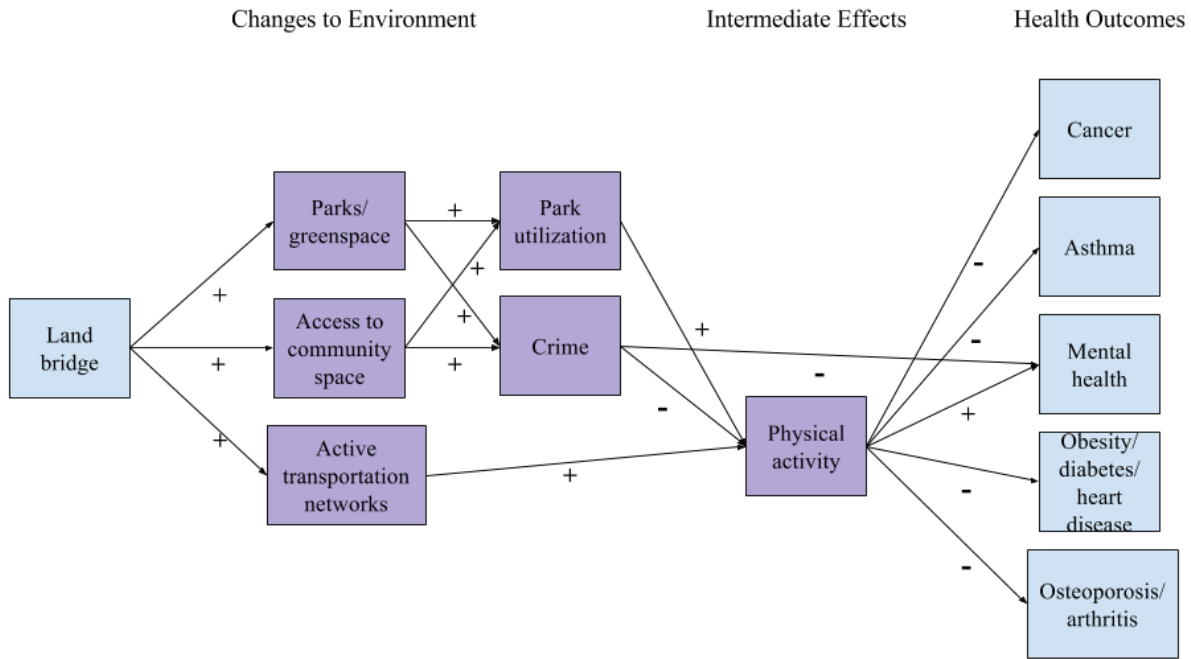
# Appendix

## A1. HIA Pathway diagram: Green space

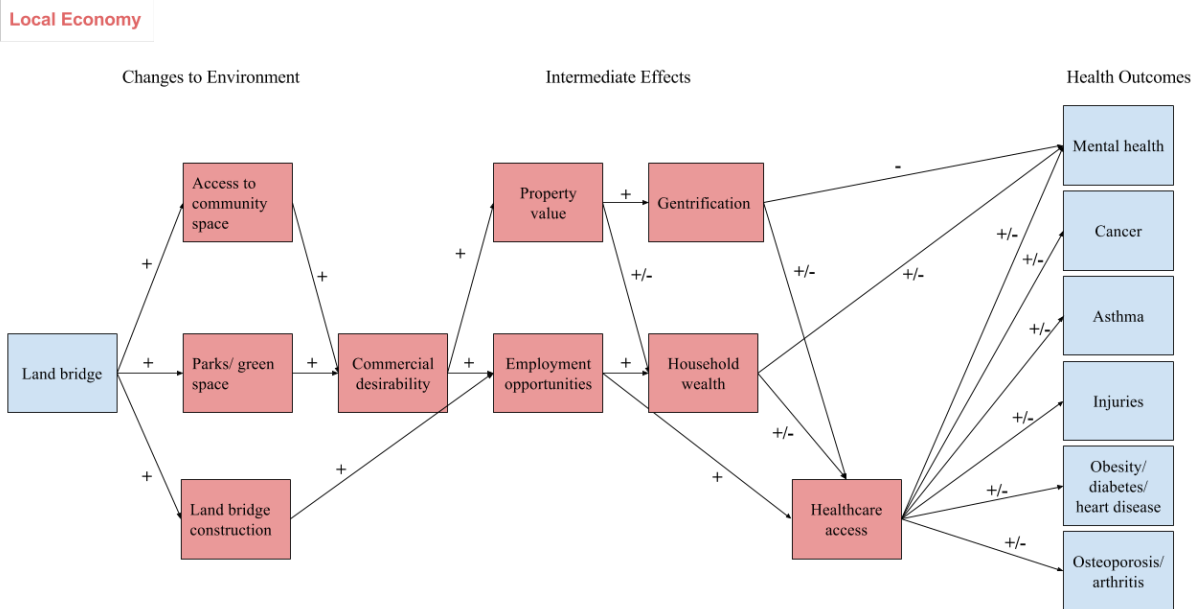


**A2. HIA Pathway diagram: Access to opportunities for physical activity**

**Physical Activity Access**



**A3. HIA Pathway diagram: Local economy**



## Acknowledgements

This report draws heavily from an HIA report developed by Olivia Dorow Hovland, Maureen Hoffman, and Nellie Jerome as their Capstone project as students in Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs. We want to thank them for their work and their willingness to share the report findings for this summary.

We also want to thank ReConnect Rondo and its partners, Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and the Metropolitan Council, for their guidance on the completion of this report.

The following Wilder Research staff contributed to this report:

Anna Alba  
Heather Loch  
Maureen McGovern

Wilder Research, a division of Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, is a nationally respected nonprofit research and evaluation group. For more than 100 years, Wilder Research has gathered and interpreted facts and trends to help families and communities thrive, get at the core of community concerns, and uncover issues that are overlooked or poorly understood.

451 Lexington Parkway North  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104  
651-280-2700 | [www.wilderresearch.org](http://www.wilderresearch.org)

## Wilder Research®

Information. Insight. Impact.

