

2017 Saint Paul Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Survey



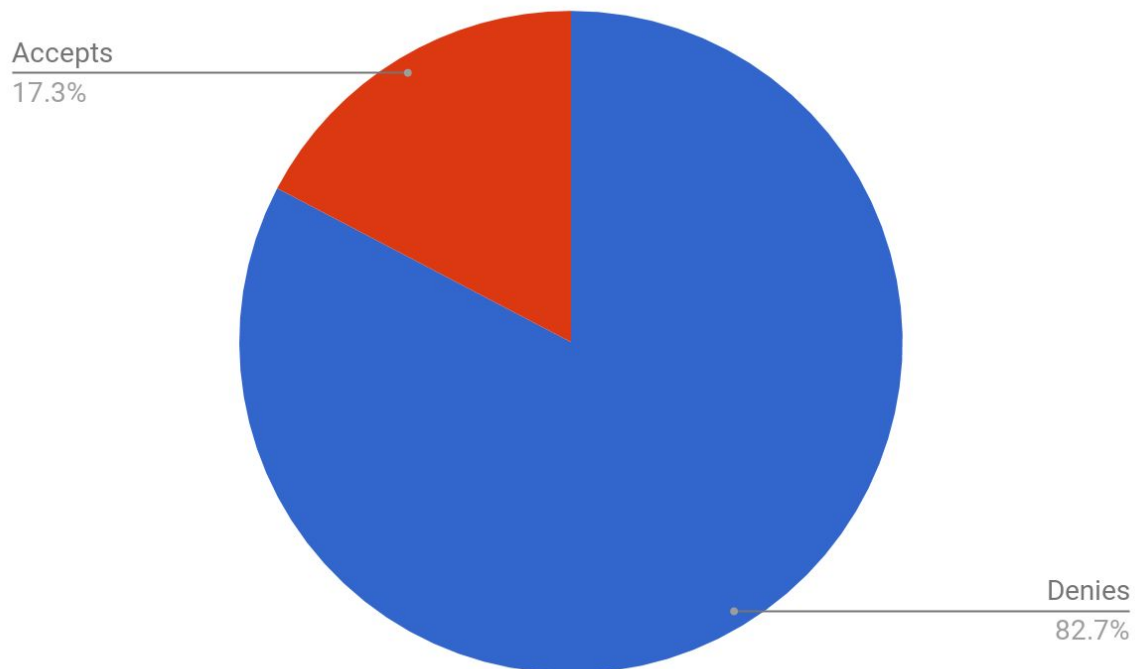
June 2017

Prepared by S.W. Ericson

Summary

- Contributing researchers contacted the landlords or management agents of 379 unique properties for this survey. Researchers searched for and responded to advertisements on Craigslist, Zillow, Apartments.com, HousingLink, and property management websites when the advertised rent was less than or equal to \$200 above the Saint Paul Public Housing Authority Housing Choice Voucher Payment Standard (VPS). If a unit's rent is at or below the VPS, a tenant may use a Section 8 voucher to pay part of their rent. Of those 379 properties, 237 (62.9%) had rents advertised at or below the VPS.

Figure 1: Distribution of properties with rents at or below the VPS by voucher acceptance



- Of the 237 properties at or below the current VPS, only 40 (17.3%) responded “yes” when asked if a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher may be used as a form of rent payment at that property. Lack of participation in the Section 8 program is a major barrier for tenants with vouchers: 191 properties (82.7%) were off-limits due to such source-of-income discrimination by landlords.
- An additional 11 properties that had rents advertised as above the VPS had a landlord or management agent tell a researcher that they accept vouchers. These properties may or may not be considered options for a tenant, depending on their individual circumstances as well as the flexibility available under St. Paul PHA payment standards.

Figure 2: Distribution of properties by ZIP code with rents at or below the VPS

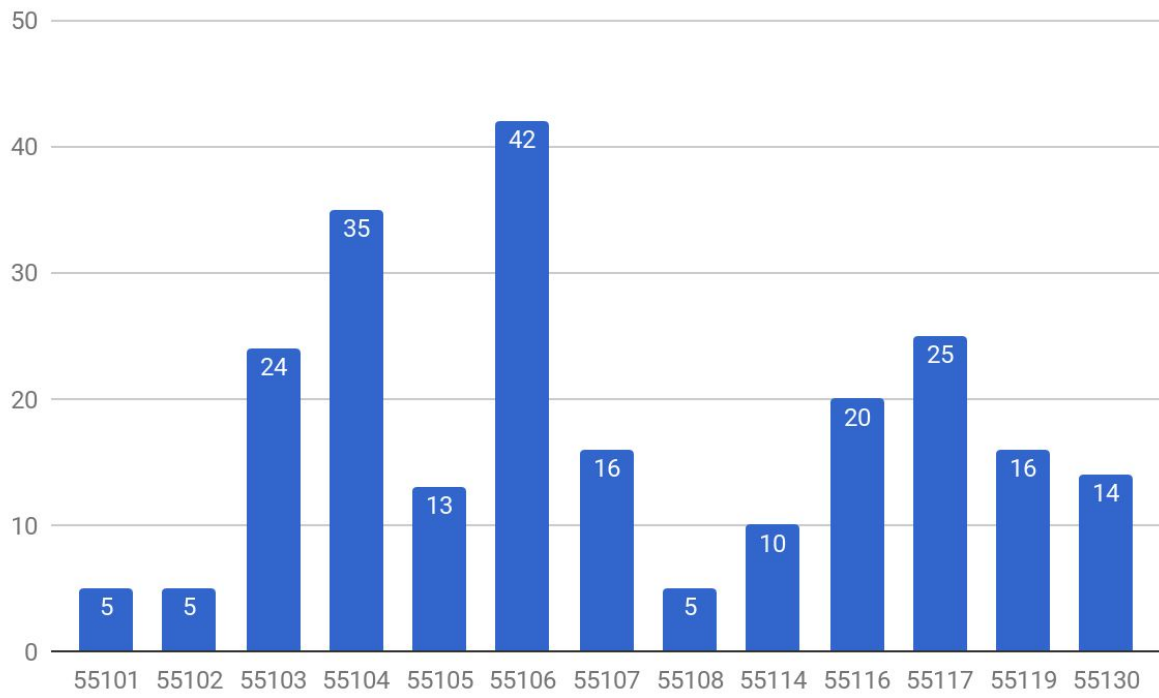
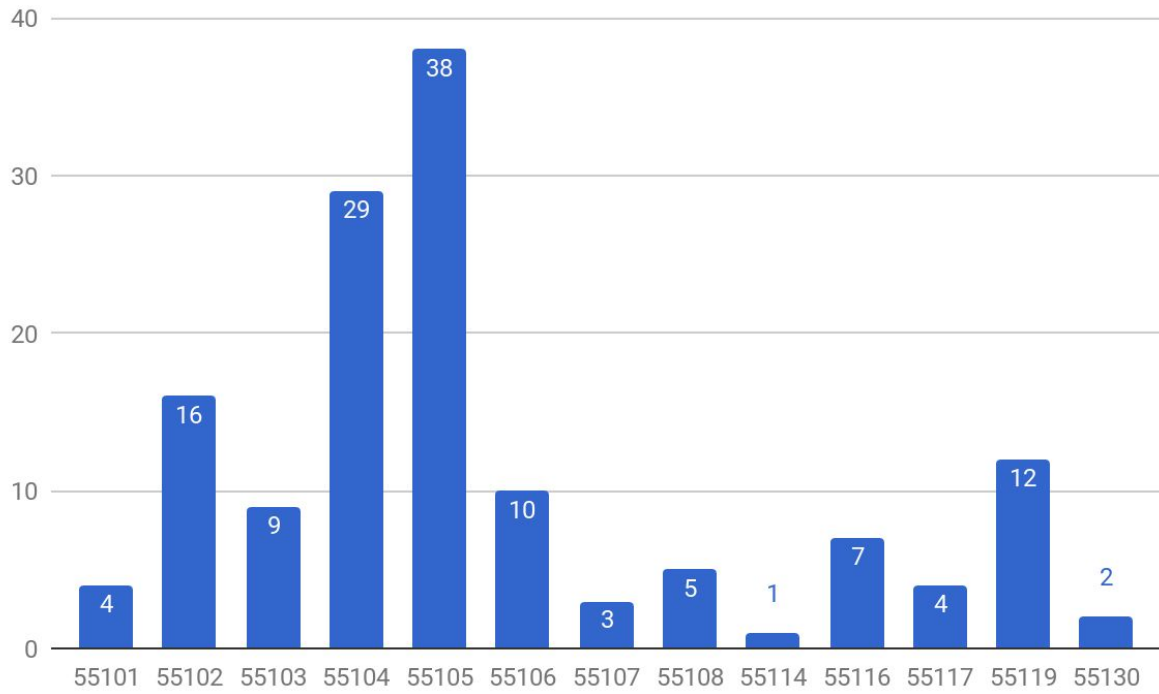


Figure 2: Distribution of properties by ZIP code with rents over (but not exceeding \$200 over) the VPS



- One ZIP code, 55155, had no properties advertised for rent, within the VPS or otherwise. This is likely because it is the smallest ZIP code in St. Paul and is composed mostly of state government facilities.

Figure 3: Distribution of units with rents at or below the VPS by ZIP code and voucher acceptance

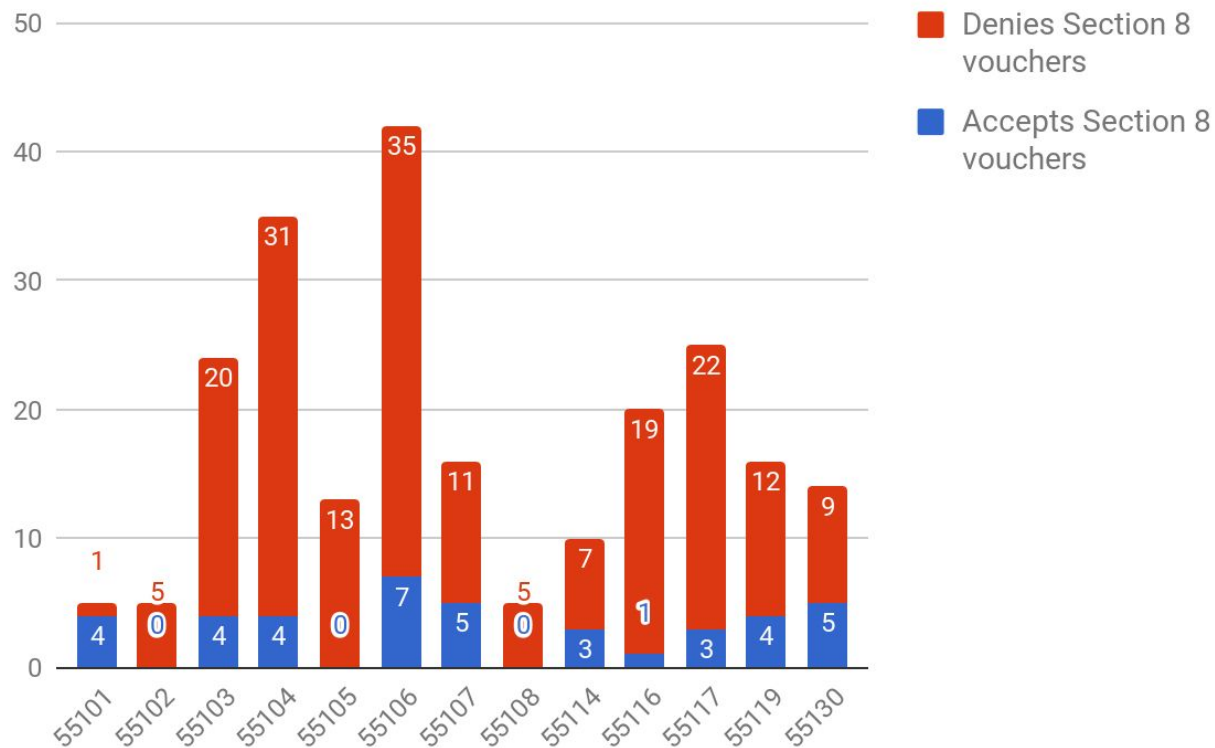
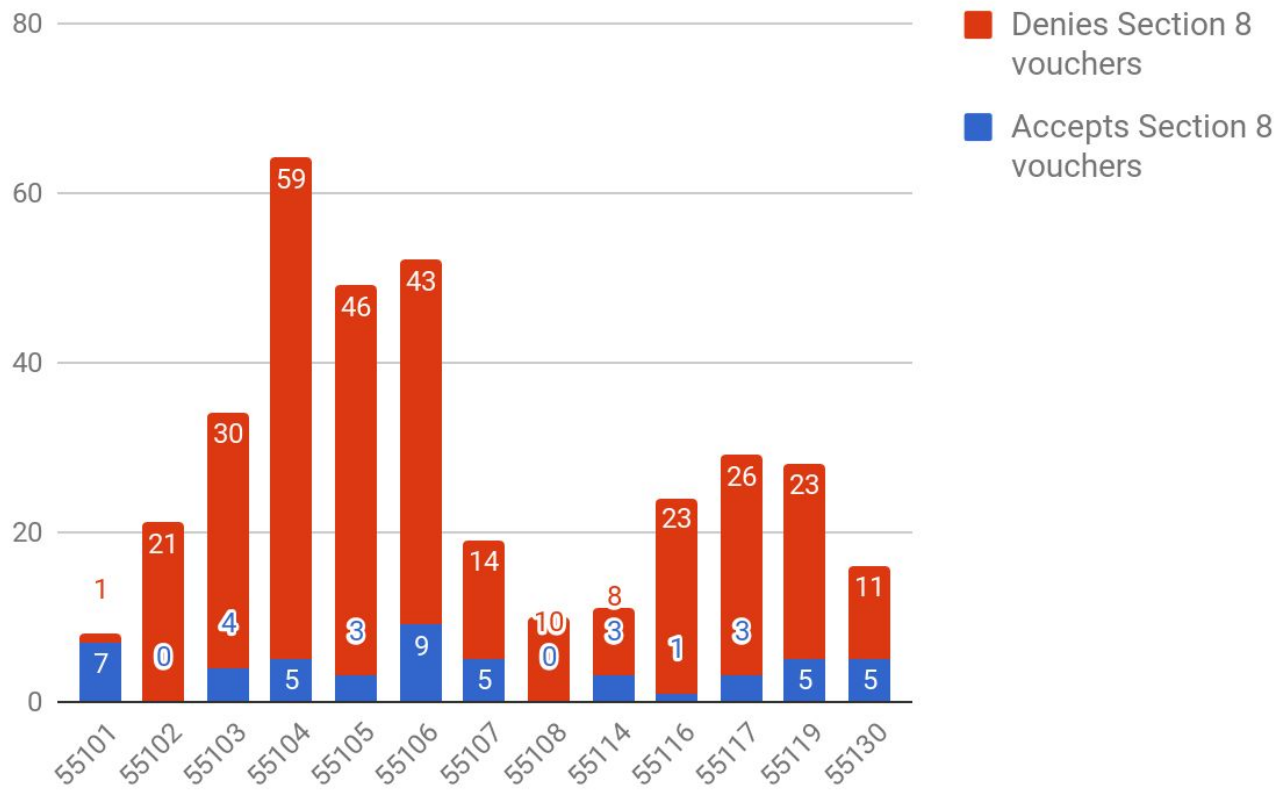


Figure 4: Distribution of units with rents up to \$200 above the VPS by ZIP code and voucher acceptance



- Two ZIP codes, 55102 and 55108, had only 5 properties listed with rents below the VPS, with none of them accepting Section 8 vouchers. At up to \$200 above the VPS, both ZIP codes had significantly more properties available for rent, but still none that accepted Section 8.

Purpose

The purpose of this survey was to replicate the experience of a tenant with a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher in searching for an available dwelling, and to identify trends in the location of rental properties that are available to tenants with vouchers. It was also intended to be compared with similar data previously taken in Minneapolis in 2016, an overview of which can be found at https://homelinemn.org/wp-content/uploads/Mpls_Section8_Report-final.pdf.

Results

The attached series of maps show where a tenant holding a Section 8 Housing Choice voucher could or could not potentially move in Saint Paul between May 30 and October 1, 2017. Each point on each map corresponds with an exact address associated with a property identified in an online housing search. Each property surveyed was categorized according to how the advertised rent

compared to the Saint Paul Public Housing Agency's Voucher Payment Standard. The VPS is usually set between 90% and 110% of what the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development determines as a Fair Market Rent for the area. Fair Market Rent is in turn set at 40% of the median rent for the area. The goal of Section 8 is to make it so that voucher holders don't need to spend more than 30-40% of their income on rent. The listings were placed into the following categories: listings with rent at or below the VPS, up to \$100 above the VPS, and up to \$200 above the VPS. The specific addresses associated with each listing were then used to generate six maps -- one map for each set of "yes" and "no" survey responses.

These three categories were used in order to determine whether or not there would be considerably more choice if Saint Paul prohibited source-of-income discrimination against voucher holders in rental listings, similar to Ordinance No. 2017-010 passed by Minneapolis in March. A similar ordinance in Saint Paul could have a dramatic positive impact on the availability of Section 8 housing in the city -- according to our data, it would increase the number of properties accessible to voucher holders more than fivefold. Of the 237 properties included in the survey with rents listed at or below the VPS, only 40 (17.3%) responded "yes" when asked if they accepted Section 8 vouchers. 191 properties (82.7%) responded "no" despite falling within the VPS.

Unlike in Minneapolis, rental properties in Saint Paul that accepted Section 8 vouchers were not particularly concentrated in any one area of the city. However, the overall percentage of surveyed properties that accepted vouchers, while extremely low in both cities, was somewhat lower in Saint Paul (17.3% vs. 23%).

Methodology

The methods used in this survey were designed to replicate as closely as possible how a prospective tenant would go about finding housing upon receiving a Section 8 Housing Choice voucher in Saint Paul. The goal was to obtain a 1-3% sample of the total number of rental properties for each Saint Paul ZIP code in order to comprehensively represent each area of the city. Initially, rental websites such as Craigslist, Apartments.com, HousingLink, and Zillow were used to find vacancies. Craigslist in particular is the largest available online resource and is commonly used by renters. Additionally, HousingLink is frequently recommended as a tool for low-income renters. Results were filtered by ZIP code and sorted by "newest" first ("newest" meaning most recently listed online). Only when a property's advertised rent for a particular unit size was below \$200 over the current VPS was the landlord or listed management representative contacted. Most were contacted by phone and some by email when no phone number was listed or when a listing specifically requested contact through email only. If no response was received, neither the property's address nor listed rent were recorded. All phone calls were made through a shared Google Voice phone number with a 612 area code and were made between the hours of 9AM and 5PM, Monday through Friday. All calls and emails followed the same script; callers first confirmed the address and advertised rent of the property and then asked if they accepted Section 8 vouchers. Once a response was received, the address, phone number, rent amount, rental

company (if listed), and number of bedrooms was recorded in a spreadsheet. If a listing explicitly stated that Section 8 vouchers would not be accepted at a given property, it was recorded in the spreadsheet as denying Section 8 vouchers without a researcher contacting the owner or representative.

In addition to research on general rental listing websites, several rental companies were contacted directly by email or phone and were asked if, as a uniform policy, they accepted Section 8 vouchers as a form of rent payment. If a definite response was received either way, those properties that were available (provided their rents were with \$200 of the VPS) were recorded in the spreadsheet.

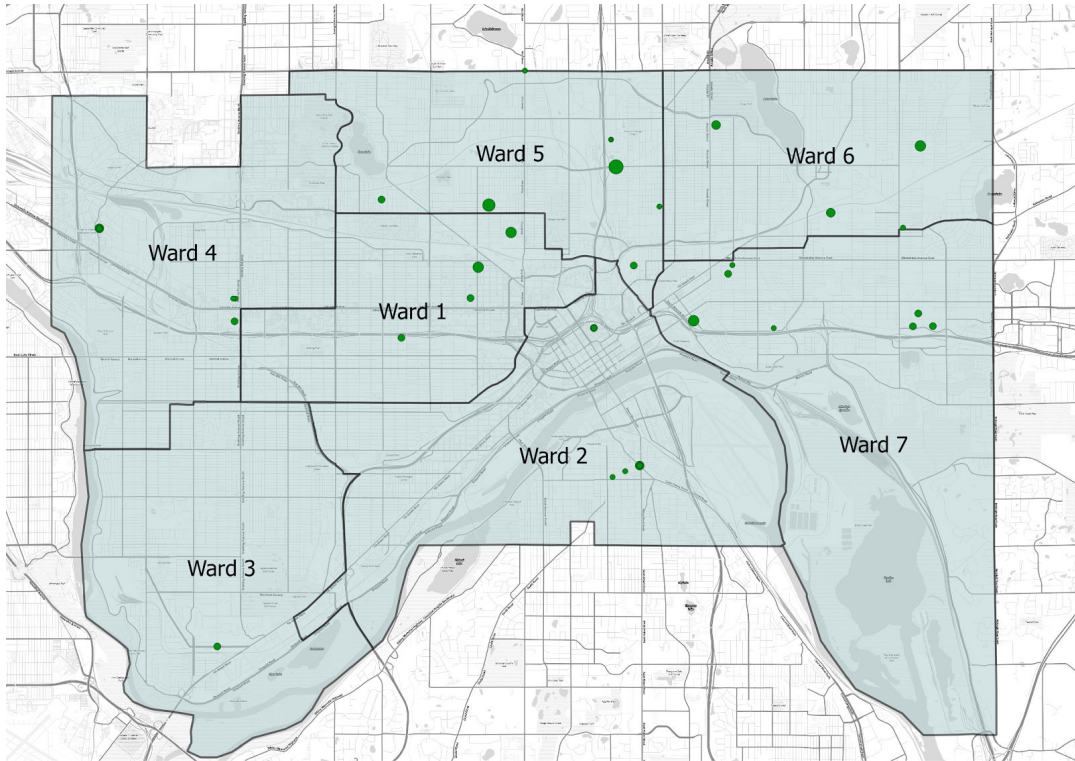
Inquiries were made in May and June 2017. Available move-in dates for surveyed units ranged from May to October 2017.

Each address was converted into GPS coordinates in order to map the location of each property according to the response that was received. The properties range from studio apartments to six-bedroom units; the size of the dot displayed indicates the number of bedrooms. Each GPS coordinate point represents one available listing. Some sets of coordinates had multiple listings, such as in a duplex or apartment building with multiple surveyed units.

Contributing Researchers

Sophia Rigelman (HOME Line): methodology, surveying, mapping

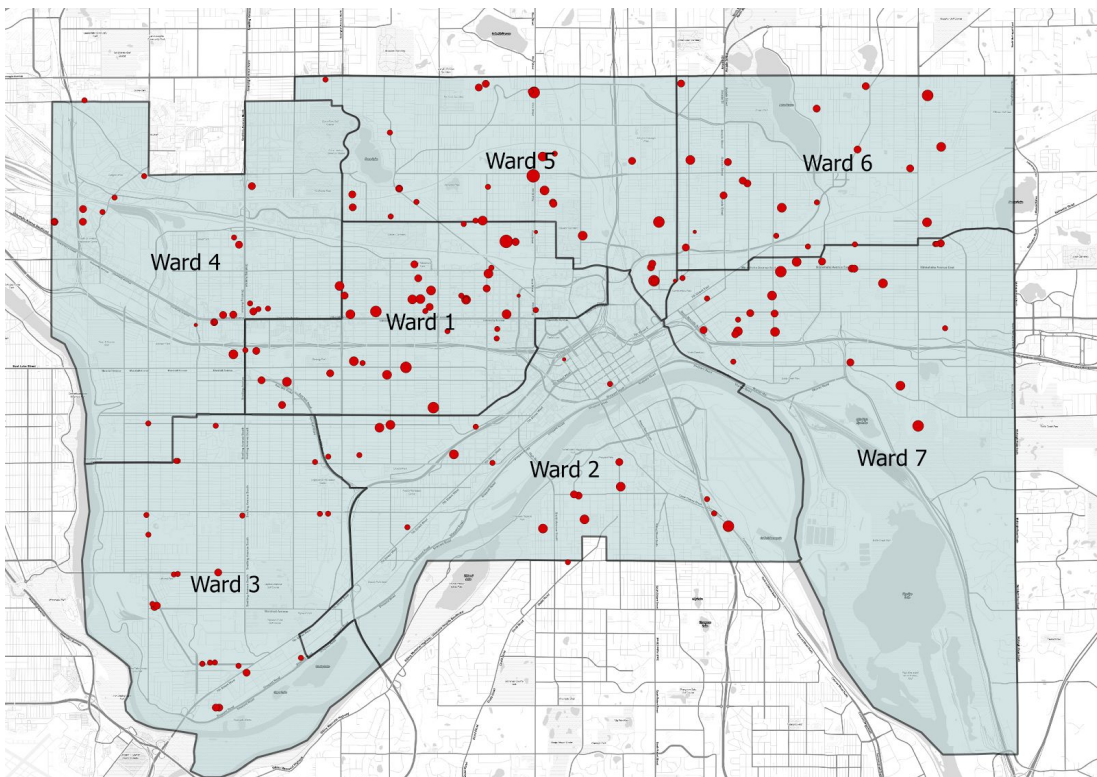
S.W. Ericson (HOME Line): surveying, mapping, production of report

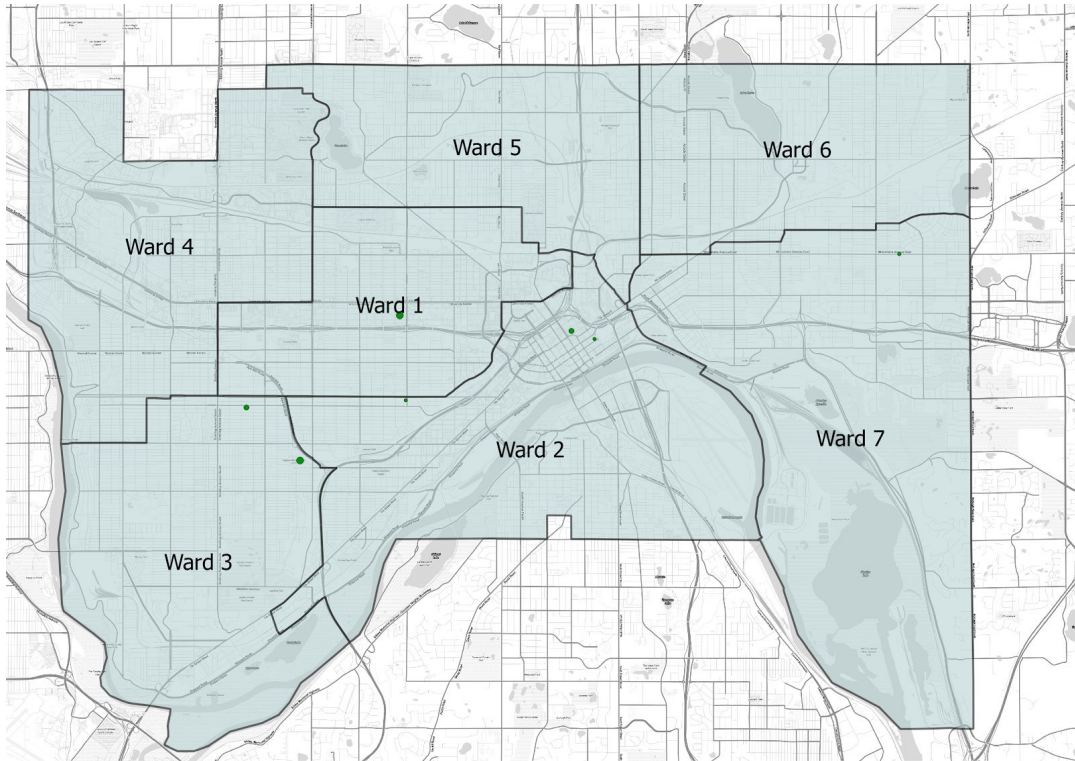


Accepts Section 8 ↑

Rents **at or below** Voucher Payment Standard

Denies Section 8 ↓

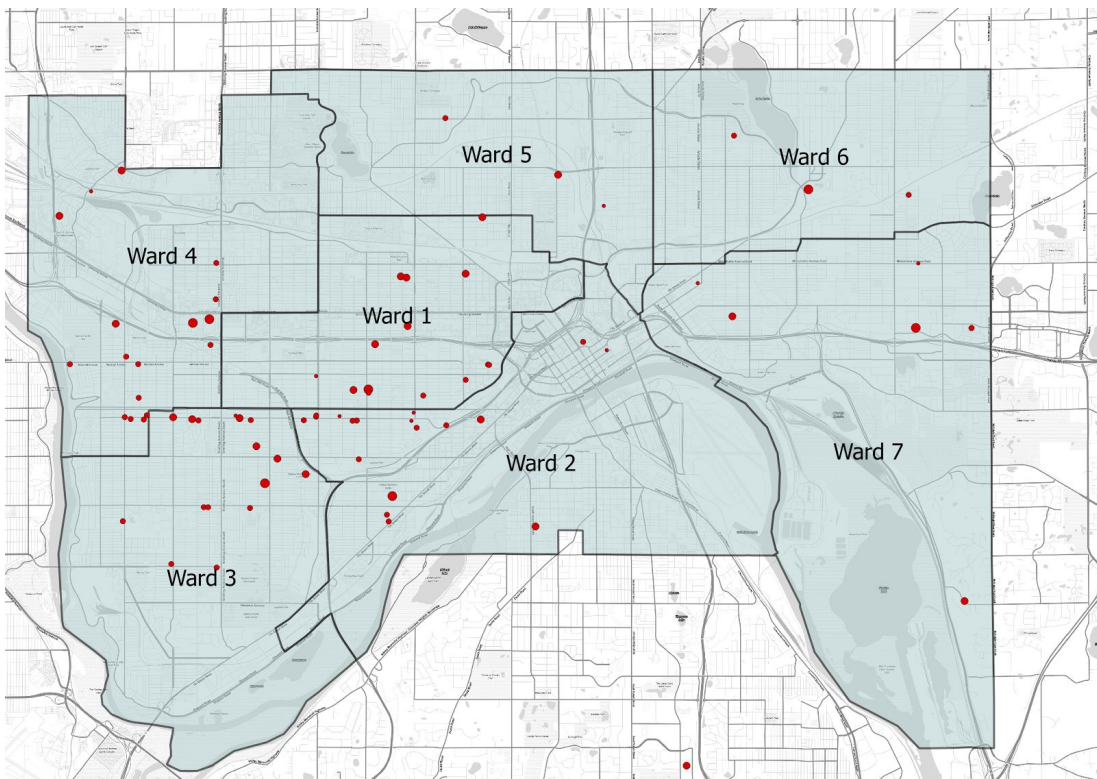


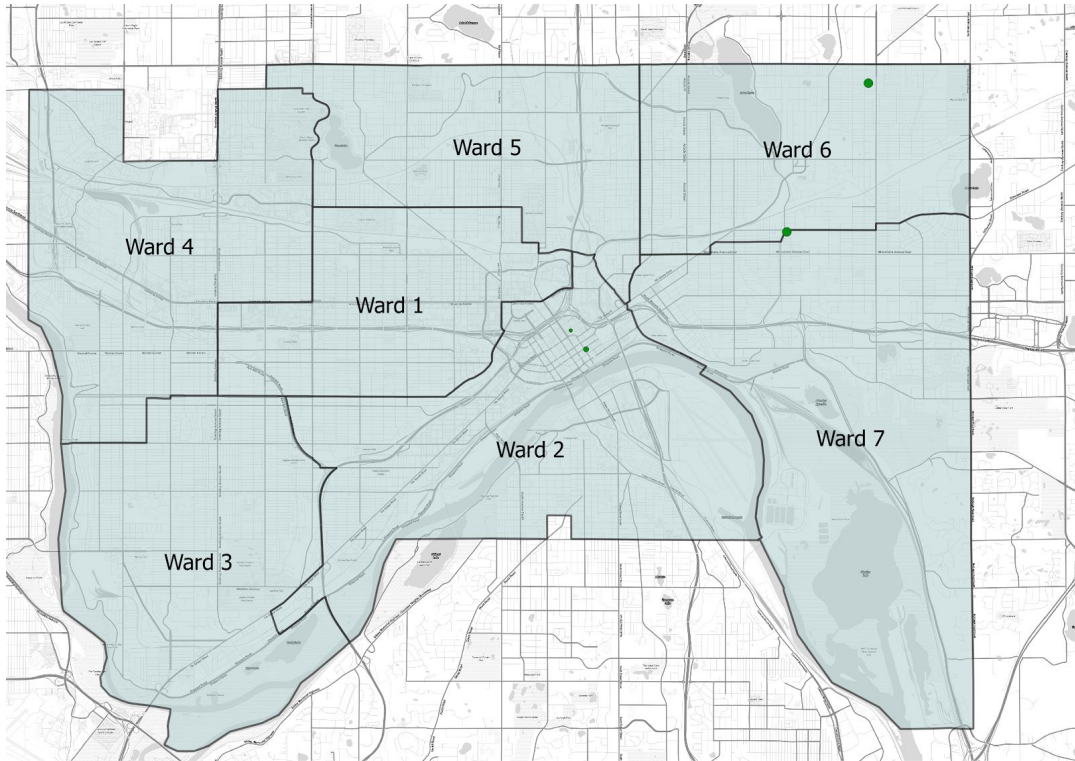


Accepts Section 8 ↑

Rents **up to \$100 above** Voucher Payment Standard

Denies Section 8 ↓





Accepts Section 8 ↑

Rents **up to \$200 above** Voucher Payment Standard

Denies Section 8 ↓

