

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL
390 N. Robert Street, St. Paul, MN 55101

MEETING OF
METROPOLITAN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION
March 6, 2007

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT: Glen Skovholt, Barb Schmidt, Richard Jabs, Gary Botzek, Emily Barbeau, Robert Wicklund

ABSENT: Lars Erdahl, Michael Rainville, Daniel Shlaferman, Natalie Steffen, Metropolitan Council Liaison to the Commission

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Skovholt called the meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order at 4:02 p.m. on March 6, 2007.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA & MINUTES

Commissioner Schmidt motioned to approve the February 13, 2007 agenda and the January 9, 2007 minutes. Commissioner Jabs seconded the motion. **The motion carried.**

PUBLIC INVITATION: Invitation to Interested Persons to Address the Commission on Matters Not on the Agenda (Each speaker is limited to a five-minute presentation.)

Cris Gears, the new Three Rivers Park District Superintendent was introduced and welcomed. He succeeds Douglas Bryant, who retired recently.

BUSINESS:

DNR Central Region 2007 Work Plan and its Relation to Metro Regional Park System - Arne Stefferud, Planning Analyst-Parks; Joe Kurcinka, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Joe Kurcinka, Regional Director for the DNR Central Region stated that he feels they need to do a better job of working with other public entities in an attempt to conserve land and natural resources as well as a broader mission of overall outdoor recreation. He introduced Harland Heimstra, DNR who gave an overview of the DNR and its functions including conservation of natural resources, recreation and economic use.

Heimstra discussed that the DNR owns/manages public lands and their regulatory authority. He stated that they are working with local units of government to influence and educate (including technical assistance/workshops) as well as provide financial assistance.

Heimstra discussed the shared mission with the Metropolitan Council for the conservation of natural resources.

Heimstra discussed partnership opportunities such as coordinating acquisition and management for multiple purposes. He gave examples in Anoka and Dakota Counties where there is tremendous opportunities to work together. He suggested land use planning as another opportunity for partnering.

Botzek asked about the growth of the 'central region' (now 23 counties instead of 7) - how that has affected the workload and priorities. Kurcinka responded that there has obviously been an increase in the workload and that management staff has been spread quite thin. He stressed the need to work together for the greater good.

Skovholt asked if the DNR is actively working to protect land in the metro area, for instance, with easements, etc. Kurcinka stated they absolutely are. Skovholt asked specifically about the MN Valley Recreational Area, i.e. development opportunities. Heimstra stated that they are looking at making connections, paved trails, bridges, infrastructure, etc. so that it may be used as a linear recreational corridor.

Skovholt asked about collar counties – does the DNR see a role for the state to play or will individual counties be responsible for infrastructure and land protection. Kurcinka stated that they are encouraging the counties to move forward. Sharon Pfeiffer, DNR spoke about the work on the Natural Resource Digital Atlas that will enhance the current Natural Resource Digital Atlas done by the Metropolitan Council and will include collar counties. Pfeiffer discussed the McKnight Foundation Grant that is helping with this. This will help identify some of these important areas in the collar counties. She discussed efforts where the DNR is involved with Metro Greenways, and Embrace Open Space.

Schmidt asked about the role of the DNR in buying conservation easements around watershed management areas or is the DNR more likely to try to influence the way development occurs. Heimstra stated that a committee at the DNR that has representatives of local units of government and stakeholder interest groups, has looked at this and come up with a set of possible recommendations of how to deal with this issue. Purchasing of conservation easements is one idea; however, funding is an issue. Botzek stated that he served on this committee and noted several ideas working with cities, realtors, etc.

Kurcinka stated that easements have their place, but it's only a partial ownership. He feels that working with local units of government is key.

Pfeiffer talked about conservation development and noted that there is a brochure available for members.

Request for Reimbursement Consideration on Building Removal Costs at Lake Waconia Regional Park, Carver County - Jan Youngquist, Sr. Planner-Parks

Youngquist gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding Scott County's request for reimbursement (up to \$200,000) in a future regional parks capital improvement program for the removal of structures and subsequent site restoration at Lake Waconia Regional Park.

Youngquist shared a suggested revised recommendation (additional language underlined, to include more specifics):

That the Metropolitan Council approve the request to consider reimbursing Carver County up to \$200,000 for the removal of structures, which may include two homes, a pole barn and other related farm buildings, and site restoration at Lake Waconia Regional Park in a future regional parks capital improvement program. However, the Council does not under any circumstances represent or guarantee that reimbursement will be granted, and expenditure of local funds never entitles a park agency to reimbursement.

Schmidt noted that the staff report does not state the 'need' for the reimbursement request. Marty Walsh, Carver County Parks stated they do not have monies available other than one grant that is intended for beach development.

Jabs asked about the urgency to get this done. Walsh stated that public safety is an issue as the buildings are currently empty and dilapidated.

Wicklund made a motion to recommend that the Metropolitan Council approve the request to consider reimbursing Carver County up to \$200,000 for the removal of structures, which may include two homes, a pole barn and other related farm buildings, and site restoration at Lake Waconia Regional Park in a future regional parks capital improvement program. However, the Council does not under any circumstances represent or guarantee that reimbursement will be granted, and expenditure of local funds never entitles a park agency to reimbursement.

Schmidt seconded the motion. **The motion carried.**

Continued Discussion on 2008-2013 Regional Parks CIP Structure, MPRB Input - Arne Stefferud, Planning Analyst-Parks

Stefferdud gave a PowerPoint presentation recapping what has been discussed including analysis addressing the following policy issues:

1. How should projects be ranked and appropriations for the Parks CIP distributed?
2. What should be the basis for determining a park agency's share in the Parks CIP?

Stefferdud stated that the proposal being considered would structure the 2008-13 Parks CIP by distributing appropriations for the CIP based on the population of each park agency and spending those funds on park agency-prioritized lists that have been approved by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and the Metropolitan Council.

The benefits of this proposal are that each agency is assured of receiving its proposed CIP share. In the past, this wasn't the case. They also get their highest priority project at least partially funded and finally, there's no incentive to try and manipulate CIP project ranking in order to improve the chances of receiving a grant from the Council.

Stefferdud reviewed a table that showed what was proposed for an agency to receive and what they actually got. He then discussed the question of how to split the CIP and gave examples using different formulas.

The proposal to split the CIP based on the agency's population provides an equitable distribution of CIP funds to each agency on a per capita basis. But, suggestions were made to consider total visitation and non-local visitation as factors in splitting the CIP in addition to agency population.

Stefferdud discussed three tables found in his memo regarding the continued discussion on 2008-2013 Regional Parks CIP structure dated February 26, 2007:

Table 1: 2005 Park Agency visit and visit origin, population and average repeat visits data

Table 2: Proposal to split CIP based on 60% population, 20% visits and 20% non-local visit percentage of agency

Table 3: Proposal to split CIP based on 60% population, 20% visits and 20% non-local visits to total non-local visits

A concern was raised that grants from the Acquisition Opportunity Fund would provide additional funds to an agency beyond what they would receive from the CIP and therefore some adjustment should be made to an agency's CIP share. The premise for this concern is that LCCMR funds plus Metro Council bonds could potentially provide a grant that could finance 100% of a land acquisition project—similar to the 100% funding of a CIP project. Stefferud discussed the following table (illustrated in the February 26 memo) to address this concern:

Table 4: Analysis regarding Adjusting for Acquisition Opportunity Grants awarded from 2008-09 CIP in 2010-11 CIP.

Wicklund asked if the issue is to increase the size of the CIP are we in effect eliminating the Acquisition Opportunity Fund. Stefferud stated that in order to do that, we would essentially eliminate the Acquisition Opportunity Fund, but we would identify those dollars and they could only be used to buy land. The '06-'07 CIP would stop at '06, because there's no new money going into the CIP for '07. Then we count this new appropriation in '07 (from the LCCMR), and what we would request from the '08 legislature (from bonding), as one biennial package. Stefferud discussed the question of how this 'pot' would then be split. He noted there would be a concern that the '08 money has yet to be appropriated and therefore there is a risk in granting money right away. Wicklund asked if there is the question, that at this point and time, would there be sufficient requests for acquisition to total whatever the Land Acquisition Opportunity Funds amount is. Stefferud responded that at the meeting with the IA's, they talked about what they could spend potentially in 12 months, however, we don't know what the '08 appropriation is going to be therefore, we may not want to offer a grant to an agency that's getting land money until after the '08 legislature has made its appropriation. He noted that since these are state funds matching Council bonds, they should be treated the same way as CIP dollars.

Schmidt clarified that the local match to the State LCCMR appropriation would come from the emergency opportunity fund.

Schmidt asked about unused bonding capacity at the Council. Stefferud stated that there is some unused bonding capacity at the Council for parks funding, but the Council would need to make a decision to issue more bonds and this would have a property tax impact.

Botzek asked for clarification of the two formulas: 60% population, 20% visits, 20% non-local visits vs. 60% population, 40% non-local visits. Stefferud reviewed these two formulas.

Barbeau asked what the benefits for combining the CIP and Acquisition Opportunity Funds vs. not doing this. Stefferud responded that by combining the Acquisition Opportunity Fund with the CIP we assure all funds are spent the same way. There's no potential opportunity for an agency to get more money than 'its share'.

Skovholt suggested the issue of merging these two funds – should be discussed separately to identify consequences of doing this. Also suggested separate discussion of the issue that agencies will know what they're getting and also, how the funds are allocated.

Schmidt asked if we will accept the list of agency's priority projects. Stefferud pointed out that the Council's review and approval of that list is still required of us. He also pointed out the criteria for this list – specifically the project must be consistent with a Council approved Master Plan, and in the case of reimbursements, the Council has approved consideration of the reimbursement.

Skovholt asked to talk about benefits of distributing CIP appropriations based on an agency's share of the CIP.

Schmidt stated that if we're to maintain a partnership, everyone should have a fair share of the CIP.

Skovholt discussed the policy in which the funding should have a balance between acquisition/development. Within this strategy, the first priority should be acquisition and the second should be development.

Wicklund discussed project priorities and noted that every agency's highest priority for the next CIP could (possibly) not involve acquisition, so how do we say it should be acquisition. He does not think we (the Commission) can do a better job of ranking priorities than the agencies. Jobs agreed and stated that we need to give the agencies an amount and then allow them to prioritize.

Skovholt discussed the Council's policy that there needs to be a balance between acquisition and development. The Commission's responsibility is to ensure that there is a balance – how do we do that? Wicklund stated that this may speak to why we can't fold the Land Acquisition Opportunity Fund into the CIP. He suggested one way to deal with this is to say we always have acquisition as a priority and one way to deal with that is to have a special fund for it.

Jim Luger, Washington County Parks read a response to the scenarios presented. He felt that a formula of 100% population or 80% population, 20% non-local visits would be good. He felt that whatever the formula is, it should be simple and transparent. He felt the emergency acquisition fund should not be considered when looking at the general CIP fund.

Schmidt endorsed Luger's concern with visitation inadequacies. She also shared her concern with the age of the visitor origin data and stated that it doesn't reflect what is going on in today's parks. Stefferud stated that it was collected in 1997 & 1998.

Skovholt stated he would like to discuss criteria.

Jabs asked about 'leveling the playing field'. Luger described the 80/20 formula and how he felt this was do that.

Wicklund discussed what is fair in the eye of the beholder and his concern that any formula will not work for all. He stated that population is important; however use is an issue as well. He felt that just counting heads may be the way to go.

Skovholt stated that regional parks are often attracting people from outside of their jurisdictions.

Steffered discussed operating costs vs. acquisition and development costs.

Botzek asked about trends in traffic and usage of parks by people from outside the park's jurisdiction. Stefferud explained that when analysis is done on developing new parks, this is looked at. When looking at special features, this has been looked at separately. All areas of the region are projected to have increased population.

Botzek asked which parks are most used. Stefferud stated Como Park and Minneapolis Chain of Lakes.

Schmidt noted that if the system was funded fully over the years, every agency would have special features.

Wicklund stated that high use of a park equals high need for redevelopment; therefore, he feels visits need to be a part of the formula.

Skovholt summarized the groups discussion that we need to consider more than just population and the formula needs to be kept simple. He suggested having Stefferud get more information from the agencies.

Wicklund suggested a formula of 50% population and 50% non-local visits. Jabs agreed.

Skovholt discussed the Acquisition Opportunity Fund and lumping it into the CIP. He stated he hears skepticism in doing this.

Steffered stated that he could create tables showing formulas of 80/20 and 50/50 and do a side-by-side comparison with the tables he's done previously. Skovholt asked him to include the 2006-07 CIP proposed allocations for comparison.

Schmidt asked if the Commission would need to consider an additional meeting in April. Skovholt stated that he would like to move the April 3 meeting to April 10. All members agreed.

A final suggestion was that a "regional park dedication fee" be imposed to generate new revenue for regional park capital improvements and/or help acquire land. Beckman cautioned that this concept is not liked by Builders Association of the Twin Cities or developers. Schmidt stated we need to continue to search for additional acquisition funds. Skovholt reminded the group that the LCCMR funds are an annual appropriation.

Botzek asked about a sales tax dedication bill. Stefferud discussed what this would mean to metro parks.

INTRODUCTION

Patricia Freeman introduced Mark Themig who has been hired as the Scott County Park Program manager. He is currently the City of Shakopee Parks Director and will work part time for Scott County (8 hours per week) and part time for the City of Shakopee until August 1.

REPORTS

Chair: None

Commissioners: None

Staff: Stefferud gave a legislative update on the following:

- Park Foundation
- Per diem re-instatement
- Lottery in lieu – for park and trail dedication

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, April 10, 2007 at 4:00 p.m. at 390 N. Robert Street, St. Paul, MN in Room LLA.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Skovholt adjourned the meeting at 6:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandi Dingle, Executive Secretary

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