

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

MEETING OF
METROPOLITAN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION
April 10, 2007

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT: Glen Skovholt, Barb Schmidt, Richard Jabs, Gary Botzek, Emily Barbeau, Lars Erdahl, Michael Rainville, Daniel Shlaferman, Robert Wicklund

ABSENT: 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 4:04 p.m. on April 10, 2007.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA & MINUTES

Chair Skovholt stated the need to move Agenda item number 5 to be discussed first under Business, due to Commissioner Rainville's need to leave the meeting early. Commissioner Wicklund motioned to approve the amended April 10, 2007 agenda and the February 13, 2007 minutes. Commissioner Schmidt 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.)

Jenna Fletcher, Trust for Public Land passed out flyers regarding an upcoming workshop to be held on April 19 and again on April 20 on Raising Local Funds to Protect Minnesota Land and Water. She also passed out information regarding a ballot initiative benefiting statewide funding regarding protecting water, parks, and wildlife for future generations.

BUSINESS:

Bunker Hills Regional Park Boundary Correction, Anoka County - Arne Stefferud, Planning Analyst-Parks
Stefferud gave background on the request for the park boundary adjustment of Bunker Hills Regional Park. The adjustment would exclude County land adjacent to the park that has been used for County law enforcement and other non-park purposes since the County acquired the land in 1966.

Commissioner Jabs motioned to recommend:

1. That the Metropolitan Council acknowledge the Federal action to remove a park covenant on 66.7 acres northwest of Bunker Hills Regional Park in exchange for placing a park covenant on 210 acres in Bunker Hills Regional Park not currently protected by a covenant consistent with the park land conversion requirements in Strategy 5(b) of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.
2. That the Metropolitan Council approve a corrected park boundary for Bunker Hills Regional Park as shown on the map in Attachment 1 as an amendment to the 1998 Council approved master plan for the park, and to direct staff to modify any acreage data for the park.

Commissioner Botzek seconded the motion. **The motion carried.**

Continued Discussion on 2008-2013 Regional Parks CIP Structure - Arne Stefferud, Planning Analyst
Stefferud gave a brief update on documents provided including comments from the implementing agencies. He discussed Table 1: Comparison of Parks CIP Share Alternative Methods. This table compares six options for splitting the 2008-13 Parks CIP.

Skovholt stated that he would like there to be information sharing for better understanding. Then, he'd like input from the implementing agencies (IA's) followed by a discussion of the Commission.

Botzek asked what our current formula is and how long the new formula will be in place. Stefferud stated that the 06-07 CIP Share column of Table 1 shows the current formula, or how it has been done in the past. He noted that the CIP is up for review every two years, so the formula could be changed potentially every two years if desired.

Skovholt asked for the IA's comments.

Jim Luger, Washington County clarified that he feels that splitting the CIP based on agency population is his first choice. He feels that Washington County is a growing system and has not gotten its fair share in the past. He stated that he feels there is a need to look at future growth.

Rainville pointed out the history of St. Paul giving Como to the regional park system and also Minneapolis giving the Chain of Lakes. Luger argued that St. Croix Bluffs was acquired by Washington County and also given to the regional park system. He stated that 'fairness' needs to be looked at. He conceded that operations and maintenance (O&M) provisions should be based on use; however, capital spending should be based on population.

Boe Carlson, Three Rivers Park District hit on points made in their letter and their position. He feels transparency and understandability of what the CIP formula should be are very important. He is very much in favor of a percentage allocation per agency, providing each agency an opportunity to utilize those funds based on their own priorities within the existing or adopted master plan. He discussed concern that non-local visitation estimate data is outdated. He gave examples of 2005 data that the Park District has showing significant differences in visitor origin numbers from 1998-1999. He noted that population base and tax base are important factors to be considered in the formula. He stated that the Park District will support whatever the Commission decides.

Botzek asked if other public dollars should be a part of the formula; i.e., LCCMR funds or special bonding projects. Carlson stated that this is a tough question. He feels we might be more successful as a whole (a region) at the Legislature.

Rainville agreed that the non-local visitor origin data is old.

Jabs asked about Three River's 2005 data. Carlson stated that they have a research department that surveys annually and they also track visits with user fees. He noted that they are one of the few agencies that have a research department of its magnitude.

Greg Mack, Ramsey County stated that they prefer Option 2. He stated that his comments were captured in the March 6, 2007 MPOSC minutes. He discussed how non-local use data helps to rectify double counting in the City of St. Paul and Ramsey County in regards to population. He agreed with the need to update the non-local visitor use data.

Schmidt asked for clarification on non-local use for Ramsey County. Mack stated that any resident of St. Paul would be counted as a non-local user for Ramsey County Parks.

Erdahl asked if this is a similar situation for Minneapolis Parks and also Three Rivers Park District. Mack clarified that it is not the same because the Minneapolis Park Board has a separate tax base. He noted that the City of Bloomington has an overlap with the suburban Hennepin park district.

Botzek asked why Mack preferred Option 2 and not Option 3. Mack responded that they looked at the level of the State's participation. He stated that they also looked at the affect Option 2 had on the majority of the IA's, leaving them better off or in no worse condition using that formula.

Brian Rice, Attorney for the Minneapolis Park Board (MPB) asked the Commission to look at this as one metro system. He is concerned with Option 1, as MPB loses money. He urged the Commission to find a medium point for everyone. He agreed with Mack on the importance of looking at non-local visits and stated that there are a significant number of visitors coming from outside that agency. He agreed that an updated visitor study would be beneficial.

Skovholt clarified that regardless of what the Commission recommends, population will be based on current data. He noted that the plan is to have a new survey on park visitor origin done in 2008.

Erdahl asked what the cost is for a new survey and how often will it be re-done. Beckman stated that it was over \$200,000 the last time it was done. She stated that developing a fair methodology is also an important aspect of the survey. The frequency of surveys has not yet been decided but we will want to work with the IA's on this.

Marty Walsh, Carver County feels that user counts are a disparity in our system. In less developed systems, there will be less people attracted to the parks. He felt that weighting visitor use numbers is unfair.

Erdahl discussed the importance of acquiring land before it becomes too expensive but noted that the difficulty becomes having no money left for development.

Walsh asked what the incentive is to look at acquisition if there's no money for development. Then you end up with 'parks' that are not developed and therefore have no visitors. If we are going to look at visitor data heavily, undeveloped parks are a disincentive. He does feel that land acquisition now is the best use of tax payers dollars, however this doesn't add any new visitors to the system as the land (or park) is not developed.

Steve Sullivan, Dakota County noted his appreciation for the tough work of the Commission. He discussed Option 1 as their preference as it tends to reflect new regional system or 'growth agencies'. He asked that if visitation is considered, it be done in moderation. He agreed that the data is antiquated and needs to be updated. Sullivan further discussed a 60/40 formula and stated he feels it hurts the 'growth agencies'. He asked that the Metropolitan Council invest further in the regional system and local agencies do the same.

Mark Themig, Scott County stated he feels there isn't any way to make it fair for everyone, therefore, he recommends looking at making it equitable. He feels that Option 1 is the equitable way to go.

Skovholt discussed the six options given by staff and noted that the Commission is not limited to these. He suggested that if we are looking at visits and/or population we could break the discussion into two parts. He asked should the formula be based on just per capita, or per capita and a percentage of some type of visits.

Rainville stated that he feels that visits are an important part of the formula.

Schmidt stated that there needs a more even distribution of dollars. She feels that population is more transparent and more equitable. She noted that the size of the IA's (how much land they need to protect) isn't shown in the materials we received and may be helpful in the consideration of the formula.

Wicklund noted that fairness is in the eye of the beholder. He feels that the number of visits is important and puts different demands on the system and therefore needs to be considered. He feels we need to be more aggressive with acquisition and the land acquisition opportunity fund. He doesn't feel there needs to be a distinction of local vs. non-local visits. He feels usage is usage.

Jabs stated that per capita is not the way to go. He feels that we need to prioritize updating the visitation data. He feels Option 4 would be a good place to start during this transitioning time. He noted that the formula could be reviewed going forward.

Shlaferman stated he feels per capita is transparent. He acknowledged populations do shift. He suggested limiting the percent of CIP to any one agency, i.e. 15%. He noted that it is difficult to decide what is best and stated that he votes for Option 2.

Barbeau stated she is torn due to the outdated visitation data. She suggested Option 4 or 2.

Erdahl stated that in terms of simplicity, Option 1 makes the most sense. He stated that population is a clearly identifiable and inherently current statistic that is maintained over time. He is concerned with having ongoing good visitation data that is kept current going forward. In terms of making it a regional process, the population will be a current and relevant data going forward.

Botzek shared his concern with the visitation data. He is also concerned that per capita is a leap of faith. He suggested a formula of 50/50 (population/visits) or 60/40 would be a 'middle ground'.

Erdahl felt that Option 1 would make a good transition formula that could be looked at again in two years.

Skovholt felt this is not the best way to allocate funds for acquisition, but good for development/redevelopment. He stated that there needs to be some reference to usage and population. He stated that he's hearing a strong feeling that visits should be a part of the formula. He discussed non-local visits vs. total visits and asked if the Commission is comfortable with using non-local visit data.

Wicklund asked if we have more current data on total visits than we do on non-local. Stefferud stated, yes, the total visit data is updated annually.

Erdahl asked if the data is gathered by each agency and if consistent methodology is used. Stefferud stated it is gathered by each agency under the Council's direction. He noted that the 1998-1999 data is better quality, but it is old. He noted that there is always some variability in the quality of the data.

Youngquist pointed out factors being applied to the annual visit data received, i.e., number of persons per car (this is the average taken from the 1998-1999 survey). Carlson clarified that the persons per car data has changed (since 1998) by roughly 23% according to the Park District's current data.

Rice pointed out that using total visit data (done annually) would disproportionately help some agencies, i.e., Minneapolis (some people walk around the lakes everyday). Using non-local visits would be a more fair allocation.

Erdahl stated he feels that non-local visits will better represent 'regional use'.

Skovholt asked for consensus of the Commission – do we want to use non-local visit data? The majority of the Commission agreed. He then asked the Commission to discuss the ratio to be used in the formula.

Schmidt discussed the formula used that rewards high visitation with O&M funds. She felt this should be remembered as we discuss the importance of visitation.

Rainville motioned and Botzek seconded to recommend that the Metropolitan Council split the 2008-2013 Parks CIP using the formula shown in Option 2 which is based on 60% weight for population and 40% weight non-local visits. The motion failed for lack of a majority vote.

Botzek motioned and Rainville seconded to recommend that the Metropolitan Council split the 2008-2013 Parks CIP using the formula shown in Option 3 which is based on 50% weight for population and 50% weight for non-local visits. The motion failed for lack of a majority vote.

Jabs motioned and Wicklund seconded to recommend that the Metropolitan Council split the 2008-2013 Parks CIP using Option 4 formula which is based on 80% weight for population and 20% weight for non-local visits. **The motion carried** by a majority vote.

Skovholt stated that the Commission will advocate for collecting new non-local visitation data.

Request for Land Acquisition Opportunity Grant and Reimbursement Consideration for Acquiring 1.5 Acre Parcel in Big Marine Park Reserve, Washington County - Jan Youngquist, Senior Planner-Parks

Youngquist gave a PowerPoint presentation describing the request from Washington County for \$9,023 to be granted from the Metropolitan Council's Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund and also a request that up to \$13,534 (financed with Washing County funds) be eligible for reimbursement consideration in a future regional parks CIP.

Shlaferman motioned that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Authorize a grant of up to \$9,023 from the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund to Washington County to partially fund the acquisition of the Hohlt parcel in Big Marine Park Reserve.
2. Allow up to \$13,534 of the acquisition costs of the Hohlt parcel to be eligible for reimbursement consideration in a future regional parks CIP. 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.**

Skovholt stated that this is a small request and discussed the possibility of approving 100%. He stated that he would like this Commission to talk about this in the future.

Wicklund stated one option may be to give agencies an option to receive 80% of the cost to finance acquisition up front and waive the 20% future reimbursement consideration.

Skovholt stated he would like to revisit this discussion at a future Commission meeting.

REPORTS

Staff: Stefferud noted that he has been sending Commissioners a weekly report via e-mail regarding Legislative updates. Stefferud briefly discussed several bills moving through the House and Senate currently.

Chair: Skovholt discussed dedication for funding for parks constitutional amendment. He noted one problem is that 'parkland' sounds like playgrounds and is not inclusive of wet-lands, habitat, etc.

Commissioners: None

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, May 1, 2007 at 4:00 p.m. at 390 N. Robert Street, St. Paul, MN in Room LLA.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Skovholt adjourned the meeting at 5:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandi Dingle, Executive Secretary

U:\PARKS\2007 Minutes\0410-2007 minutes.doc