

**METROPOLITAN COUNCIL**  
**390 North Robert Street, St. Paul, MN 55101**  
**Phone (651) 602-1000 TDD (651) 291-0904**

**DATE:** January 7, 2008

**TO:** Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

**FROM:** Jan Youngquist, Senior Planner-Parks (651) 602-1029

**SUBJECT:** (2008-6) Rush River Regional Trail Master Plan, Three Rivers Park District (Referral No. 20144-1)

**INTRODUCTION**

Three Rivers Park District has submitted a master plan for the Rush Creek Regional Trail for Metropolitan Council review and approval.

The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (Chapter 2 – Policies and Strategies, Section D – Planning, Strategy 4A- Master Plans), describes the role of the master plan in the regional park system. The policy requires that any project proposed for funding in the Metropolitan Regional Parks Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) be consistent with a Metropolitan Council approved regional park master plan.

This staff report contains a review of the Rush Creek Regional Trail Master Plan based on its consistency with the *2030 Parks Policy Plan* and recommends approval of the master plan.

**AUTHORITY TO REVIEW**

Minnesota Statute 473.313, Subdivision 1 requires Regional Park Implementing Agencies to, “prepare, after consultation with all affected municipalities, and submit to the Metropolitan Council, and from time to time revise and resubmit to the council, a master plan and annual budget for the acquisition and development of regional recreation open space located within the district or county, consistent with the council’s policy plan.” (i.e., the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*)

Minnesota Statute 473.313, Subdivision 2 authorizes the Metropolitan Council to review, with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, master plans for the regional park system. Plans are reviewed for their consistency with the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policy plans. If a master plan is not consistent with Council policy, the Council should return the plan to the implementing agency with its comments for revision and resubmittal.

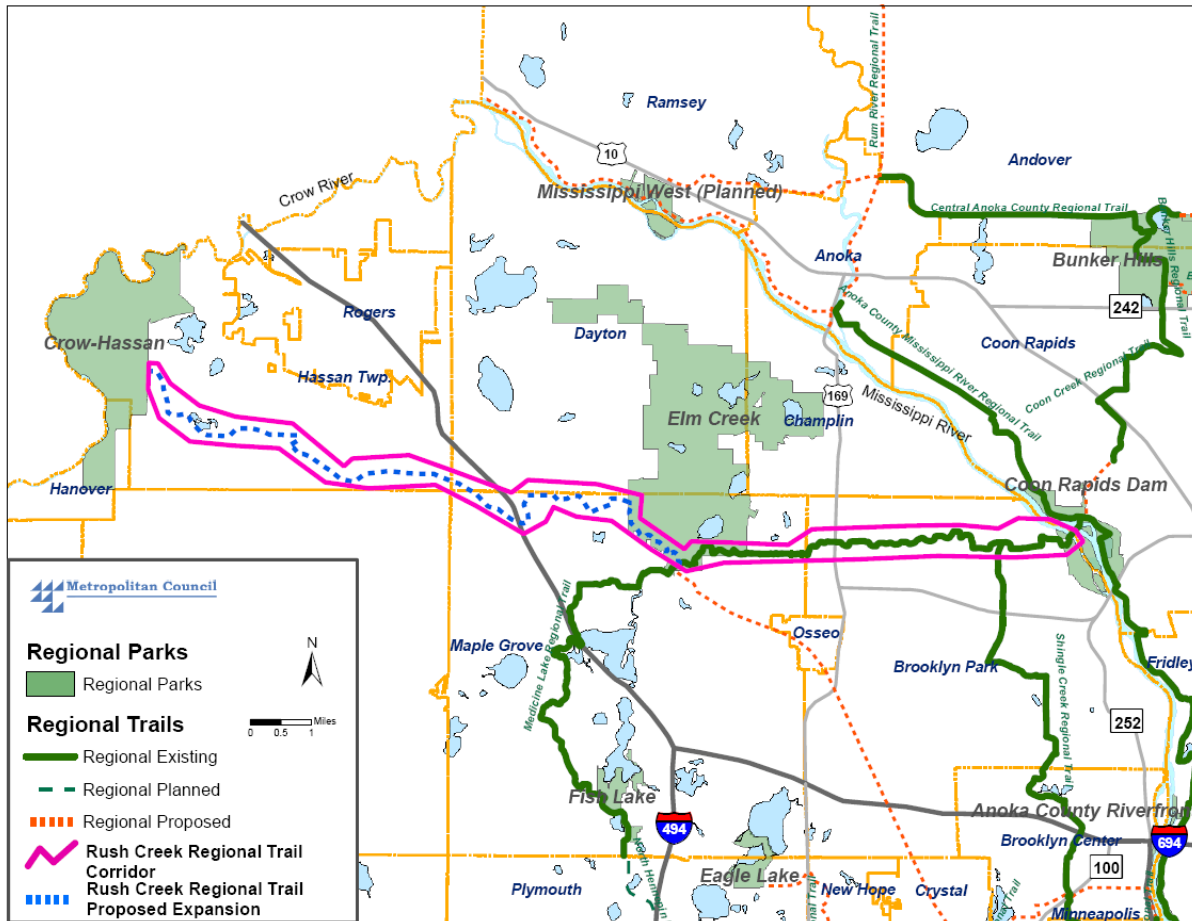
**BACKGROUND**

The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* identifies a regional trail search corridor to connect Elm Creek Park Reserve and Crow Hassan Park Reserve in the northern portion of Hennepin County. Three Rivers Park District has completed the master planning process for the trail corridor, which also incorporates the existing Elm Creek Regional Trail and provides a connection to Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park. The current Elm Creek Regional Trail will be renamed the Rush Creek Regional Trail

and will be referred to as such in this staff report. This existing segment of the trail, which runs from Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park through Elm Creek Park Reserve, is 7.2 miles long. The trail also connects to Anoka County’s Mississippi River Regional Trail at Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, to Three Rivers Park District’s Medicine Lake Regional Trail and Shingle Creek Regional Trail and to the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board regional trail networks.

The proposed trail expansion as outlined in the master plan will add approximately 11.1 miles to the length of the regional trail. When completed, the trail will extend for over 18 miles and will provide a connection between the Mississippi River and the Crow River. The entire trail corridor will traverse the communities of Brooklyn Park, Maple Grove, Dayton and Hassan Township.

**Figure 1 —Rush Creek Regional Trail Corridor**



The Rush Creek Regional Trail is envisioned to serve as both a destination trail and a linking trail. A destination trail is a destination itself that will provide a quality recreation experience through areas with significant natural resources. A linking trail provides connections to two or more regional park units.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **1. Boundaries and Acquisition Costs**

The existing 5.6 mile segment of the Rush Creek Regional Trail through portions of Brooklyn Park and Maple Grove opened to the public in 1981. An additional 1.6 miles of the existing trail is within Elm Creek Park Reserve, for a total existing regional trail length of 7.2 miles.

The proposed 11.1 mile trail extension will connect Elm Creek Park Reserve to Crow Hassan Park Reserve. The trail corridor will follow the north side of the Rush Creek for approximately 6 miles as it heads west from Elm Creek Park Reserve. The trail will remain outside the creek's flood zone, but close enough to maintain a visual connection to the water. After crossing the BNSF railroad, the trail will extend north while still following the Rush Creek drainage. The trail will traverse a proposed residential development following Rush Creek in the southeastern portion of Hassan Township. North of the Corcoran city line, the trail will leave the Rush Creek drainage area and extend northwest toward Henry Lake. Where possible, the trail will follow areas with high quality natural resources. Approximately one mile after the trail passes Henry Lake, it will cross Park Road and enter Crow Hassan Park Reserve just south of the park's main entrance.

Three Rivers Park District approaches land acquisition on a willing seller basis. The Park District will keep an inventory of the trail parcels recommended for acquisition and will maintain communications with the property owners and municipalities. As properties are considered for development, the Park District will work with the City and the developers to formulate a plan that includes a provision for the trail. The following alternatives have been identified for land acquisition:

- Route the trail to use portions of the property with marginal development potential. This could include land adjacent to wetlands or flood fringes.
- Acquire easements for the trail that may allow the developer to apply some or all of the acreage toward development densities.
- Work with the City and developer to secure park dedication lands for the trail in advance of development.
- Acquire an entire parcel, with the intent to resell the property subject to easements for the trail.
- Acquire development rights to the property—the areas of development would then be negotiated with the developer.
- Accept a donation of a portion of the property for a trail corridor.

Projecting the acquisition timeframe and total costs for the corridor is difficult. Actual acquisition costs will reflect the size of the individual parcels, the zoning, and the degree to which the land is developable, as well as negotiations with the property owners, developers and the local community. Assuming an average corridor width of 100 feet for the protection of regionally significant natural resources along the trail corridor, land acquisition costs are estimated be between \$8 and 16 million, in 2007 dollars.

### **2. Stewardship Plan**

Three Rivers Park District incorporates Best Management Practices for the operations and maintenance of all facilities and property. The Park District maintains its facilities and property at a high level of quality in order to extend the life and reduce the amount of resources needed for repair or replacement.

### **3. Needs Analysis**

Studies done by the Metropolitan Council indicate that 50 percent of regional trail users live within .75 miles of the trail and 75 percent live within 3 miles of the trail. The .75 mile area around the trail is considered the core service area and the 3 mile area around the trail is considered the primary service area. The existing portion of the Rush Creek Regional Trail had an estimated 607,000 visits in 2006, making it the most popular Three Rivers Park District regional trail.

Based on the current population density of the service area of the planned section of the trail, if the trail were open today, there would be an additional 134,000 visits, for a projected total of 741,000 annual visits. The 2030 population of the communities in the trail service area is projected to increase by 59 percent. Assuming use rates remain stable, the annual visitation for the entire trail would be approximately 1.2 million in 2030.

### **4. Development**

The Rush Creek Regional Trail will likely develop as a series of small segments as land for the trail corridor is acquired. This strategy will provide the opportunity to locate and build the trail in or adjacent to future development areas prior to construction. Trail segments will have logical beginnings and ends, and will incorporate non-permanent detours as needed to adjoin segments until future acquisition and easement opportunities arise.

The existing trail corridor ranges in width from 55 feet to over 1,000 feet. At a minimum, the proposed extension of the trail requires a 16 foot wide corridor. Ideally, the corridor width should allow for natural screening for trail users and for adjacent property owners. Opportunities to expand the corridor width to include regionally significant natural resource areas may exist. The Park District will consider these opportunities on a case by case basis as they arise. For planning purposes, an average corridor width of 100 foot has been assumed.

The trail will be 10 foot wide paved trail with 3 foot wide grass shoulders on each side. The trail will provide spring, summer and fall use, with winter use at the discretion of the local communities or Three Rivers Park District. Expected trail uses include bicycling, walking, running, inline skating, commuting and dog walking.

There will be twelve at-grade road crossings and one at-grade railroad crossing along the proposed trail segment. These crossings will include safety signage and surface paint marking the trail location. The trail expansion will also cross County Road 81 and Interstate 94. Grade separated crossings, including either a trail bridge over the roadway or a tunnel under the roadway, will be necessary to cross these busy highways.

Trailheads will be located at Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, Elm Creek Park Reserve and Crow Hassan Park Reserve. Rest stops that include benches, bike racks and trash receptacles will be provided along the trail corridor.

Figure 2 provides the estimated development costs for the Rush Creek Regional Trail.

*Figure 2—Estimated Development Costs*

Item Description	Estimated Costs (in 2007 dollars)
<b>Grading/Removals</b>	\$1,385,386
<b>Paving</b>	\$983,610
<b>Bridges</b>	
• County Road 81 crossing	\$3,000,000
• Interstate 94 crossing	
<b>Drainage</b>	\$106,524
<b>Signage and Striping</b>	\$78,158
<b>Landscaping</b>	\$466,756
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$6,020,434</b>
Allowance for Temporary Construction Easements	\$15,000
Design and Engineering (8%)	\$481,635
Construction Administration (10%)	\$602,043
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$7,119,112</b>

## 5. Conflicts

There are no significant conflicts with local community plans. The proposed trail extension alignment was based in part on the trail and natural resource plans for Maple Grove, Dayton and Hassan.

Conflicts concerning acquisition of the trail corridor should be minimized through the willing-seller approach used by Three Rivers Park District. The Park District will work with the local communities, landowners and developers to reach mutually acceptable solutions for trail corridor acquisition.

There is a potential conflict with the proposed grade-separated crossing of Interstate 94. The master plan identifies a crossing location southwest of 105<sup>th</sup> Avenue North where Rush Creek crosses under Interstate 94. The Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MN/DOT) NW Hennepin County I-94 Sub-Area Transportation Study is currently underway, with a goal of identifying future interchanges between County Road 30 in Maple Grove and Highway 101 in Rogers. The final location of a new interchange on I-94 in the vicinity of the proposed trail crossing may affect the final trail route and the I-94 crossing design of the proposed trail extension. Three Rivers Park District will coordinate I-94 trail crossing plans with the local communities and MN/DOT. There are no other potentially significant conflicts with the existing or planned transportation system.

## 6. Public Services

Unlike regional parks and park reserves, regional trail corridors do not require utility services such as electricity, sanitary sewer and water service. Trailheads will be located in Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, Elm Creek Park Reserve and Crow Hassan Park Reserve. The trailhead amenities include parking, restrooms, drinking water and trash receptacles. These regional park units are already developed, so no additional public services are necessary to facilitate the development of the Rush Creek Regional Trail.

## **7. Operations**

### **Rules, regulations and ordinances**

The Three Rivers Park District Board has adopted a set of ordinances which define the Park District's rules and regulations. A copy of the ordinances is posted on the Park District website. Rules and regulations are also posted throughout the Park District's properties and facilities. Posted information includes park hours, permitted and prohibited activities, fees, maps of the park and/or trail, and emergency contact information. Three Rivers Park District Police and Park Service Officers regularly patrol park and trail property and will enforce ordinances via citations when necessary.

### **Operations –Public Safety**

Three Rivers Park District's Safety Section consists of Park Police Officers, Park Service Officers and support staff. Staffing comes from the Elm Creek Division Public Safety office. Current staff assigned to the existing portion of the trail will also provide service to the trail extension. Daily coverage of the trail corridor will continue to be provided.

### **Operations –Maintenance**

In order to create an efficient and cost-effective work force, Three Rivers Park District organizes and budgets maintenance services in three geographic divisions. Within each division are two work clusters that typically provide maintenance service for four to six Park District parks, park reserves and regional trails.

During the growing season, a 3 foot wide shoulder of turf grass will be mowed. Overhead vegetation is maintained to provide a clear zone to a recommended height of 10 feet over the trail and shoulders.

Three Rivers Park District conducts trail inspections to identify possible safety issues, vandalism and non-routine maintenance concerns on the same schedule as trash and litter pickup. These tasks are routinely scheduled during the Memorial Day to Labor Day season and on an as-needed basis during the remainder of the year.

The trail will receive scheduled striping, seal coating and redevelopment under the Park District's pavement management program. Non-scheduled repairs will be performed on an as-needed basis. The Park District will treat for noxious weeds at the request of cities and may spot spray for broadleaf weeds as needed.

### **Maintenance Costs**

The 2007 annual cost for maintaining the existing portion of the Rush Creek Regional Trail is \$45,000. When the master plan is fully implemented and all development is complete, the annual operating and maintenance costs are estimated to increase by \$51,000 to a total of \$96,000 in 2007 dollars.

### **Public Safety Costs**

The current annual cost for public safety services for the existing portion of the Rush Creek Regional Trail is approximately \$80,000. The increase in projected public safety operating costs is minimal, since staffing will be assigned from within the existing public safety services unit. An annual increase of \$5,300 is estimated for equipment operational costs. There is also a one-time expected cost of \$27,000 for trail patrol vehicles in 2007 dollars.

## **Funding Sources**

Annual operating costs are funded through the Park District's general fund budget, with property taxes as the primary source of funds. Revenue is also received from the State of Minnesota as part of the Operations and Maintenance Fund allocation from the Metropolitan Council. Some of the annual rehabilitation costs also may be funded from the Three Rivers Park District Park Maintenance and Rehabilitation Fund, which includes revenues from the State Lottery In Lieu of Sales Tax as well as the Park District's general obligation bonds.

## **8. Citizen Participation**

A task force including a mix of staff and elected officials from the cities of Corcoran, Dayton, Maple Grove and Rogers as well as staff from Hennepin County, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Elm Creek Watershed District and Three Rivers Park District met to help develop the trail plan. The task force assisted in identifying the trail alignment and offered comments and suggestions on the draft master plan.

Copies of the master plan were distributed to the cities of Brooklyn Park, Maple Grove, Dayton, Hassan Township, Corcoran and Rogers for review and comment. Landowners within the trail corridor search area will be invited to a public open house.

## **9. Public Awareness**

Three Rivers Park District's Marketing Communications Section oversees public relations, marketing, media relations, the website, brand management, event planning and promotions. Outreach tools that are used to promote the Park District include an annual district-wide map, website, direct mail, press releases, centralized reservation system, feedback phone lines, brochures, ads and on-site promotion.

The Park District collaborates with a wide array of community, business and government organizations to promote its facilities, programs and services. The Park District also works with the Metropolitan Council and the State Office of Tourism in shared opportunities to create awareness and visibility. Cooperation with county agencies helps to provide information about scholarship programs for those receiving economic assistance.

## **10. Special Needs**

Three Rivers Park District is committed to providing access to all people, including people with disabilities and other special-population groups. Three Rivers Park District uses appropriate facility design and programming to actively address potential barriers to participation.

The Park District has programs to assist in providing access to its facilities for low income people. The "Parks for All People" program provides free passes for swimming and cross country skiing to qualified recipients of Hennepin County economic assistance programs. Discounted camping, equipment rental and educational programs are also available. There is no entrance fee to regional parks, park reserves and trails.

Participation in activities and use of the park facilities is encouraged through promotional outreach programs with special-interest organizations such as Courage Center and Wilderness Inquiry.

## **11. Natural Resources**

### **Natural Resources Inventory**

The three dominant types of vegetation along the trail corridor are classified by the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS) as deciduous forest, woodlands and herbaceous. In the deciduous forest zones, the most dominant tree canopies on dry sites are oak, aspen and birch trees. On moist sites, sugar maple, basswood, elm and ash trees are common. Woodlands are identified as open stands of trees with crowns not usually touching. Herbaceous zones have graminoids, forbs and ferns forming the dominant cover.

The proposed extension of the trail follows Rush Creek for six of its 11.1 miles. The trail also will pass on the north side of Henry Lake in Hassan Township. The trail will use high quality natural resource areas for a significant portion of the corridor. The trail corridor along the Rush Creek drainage contains a large quantity of Type I and Type II wetlands.

### **Vegetation Management**

Woody vegetation along the existing section of the trail corridor consists of coniferous and deciduous trees and shrubs that were planted in the early 1980s to provide screening and landscaping for the corridor. Management of these areas includes the trimming of trees for trail clearance or hazard removal and the removal of invasive species. Periodic shrub bed renovation or replacement is necessary to maintain the effectiveness and appearance of these landscape plantings.

### **Water Resources Management**

Rainfall runoff from the paved trail flows into the adjacent forests, grasslands and wetlands along the trail corridor. The trail corridor and surrounding parkland ultimately drain into the Mississippi River. The new and existing trail sections will be 10 feet wide, constructed in a corridor ranging from 16 to 100 feet wide. Natural vegetation in the corridor will promote the infiltration of stormwater runoff from the impervious trail surface.

### **Wildlife Management**

Most of the existing Rush Creek Regional Trail has dense residential or commercial development just beyond its boundaries. Wildlife consists primarily of edge species that can survive in a relatively narrow band of vegetation adjacent to residential backyards. The section of the trail corridor between Noble and Zane Avenues in Brooklyn Park has two open areas totaling 5.5 acres that have shallow wetlands and mature stands of trees which provide habitat diversity. Wildlife management levels along the proposed trail corridor will appropriately reflect the lands acquired for development of the trail.

## **REVIEW BY OTHER COUNCIL DIVISIONS:**

**Environmental Services – Surface Water Management** (Jim Larsen) –No impacts.

**Environmental Services – Sewers** (Roger Janzig) – Metropolitan Council Environmental Services has several structures within the vicinity of this existing and proposed trail system. To assess the potential impacts to the interceptor system, final plans should be sent to Scott Dentz, Interceptor Engineering Manager (651-602-4503) for review and comment prior to construction of the trail.

**Metropolitan Council Transportation** (Ann Braden) – No impacts.



## **CONCLUSIONS:**

1. The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that master plans include information on eleven items reviewed in the “analysis section” above. It also requires that sufficient information be included on the estimated cost of the acquisition and development proposed in the master plan. This review concludes that the Rush Creek Regional Trail Master Plan (Referral No. 20144-1) contains sufficient information to meet the requirements of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and that it is generally consistent with the requirements of the plan.
2. The estimated cost to implement the master plan, including the development costs of \$7,119,112 and the acquisition costs of \$8 to \$16 million totals \$15,119,112 to \$23,119,112 in 2007 dollars.
3. Approval of this master plan does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. Future development funding based on this master plan would be done through the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Council action is required to approve the CIP and to approve specific grants to Three Rivers Park District.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Rush Creek Regional Trail Master Plan (Referral No. 20144-1).
2. Require that prior to development of new trail segments, final plans be sent to Metropolitan Council Environmental Services for review and comment to ensure the integrity of the interceptor system.