

POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

Site and Acquisition

Policy: Identify lands with high-quality natural resources that are desirable for regional parks system activities and put these lands in a protected status so they will be available for recreational uses and conservation purposes in perpetuity.

Strategy 1: Lands with natural resource features and/or access to water have priority.

Strategy 2: Funding will follow priorities set in approved master plans.

The priority rating for acquiring park and park reserve lands identified in Metropolitan Council approved master plans is lands that are available for purchase now, which would be lost to the regional parks system if timely action is not taken, and that are:

- Essential to protect the natural resources that define a park or park reserve and make it usable to the public as planned.
- Essential for the park or park reserve to reach its full regional natural resource-based outdoor recreation service potential as defined in the Council's Regional Parks system plan and the park unit's master plan.

Strategy 3: New trails, or trail segments, that serve a regional audience have priority.

To qualify for regional trail status, an existing or proposed trail must serve a regional audience, based on visitor origin and service-area research on regional trails, and should not duplicate an existing trail.

Funding priority for individual parcels of land within a trail corridor is to:

- Lands essential to protect the trail corridor and make it usable to the public as planned.
- Lands considered essential for the trail corridor to reach its full regional service potential as defined in the Council's system plan.

Strategy 4: Special recreation facilities must enhance services and facilities already offered, not compete with or duplicate them.

Special recreation facilities proposed for inclusion in the regional parks system must:

- Be unique and complement or enhance the services already offered by the regional system.
- Be capable of functioning within the existing management structure of the regional parks system.
- Not duplicate or compete with recreation facilities adequately provided by the private sector.

- Not drain funds from other facilities in the system either because they have an existing or committed financial base or because a prior agreement for a public subsidy has been reached that is in the public’s interest.
- Demonstrate the existence or potential for drawing a sizable number of people from throughout the metropolitan area.
- Be approved through the master plan process.

Finances

Policy: Provide adequate and equitable funding for the acquisition, rehabilitation and development of regional parks system units and facilities in a manner that provides the greatest possible benefits to the citizens of the region.

Strategy 1: Only projects included in capital improvement programs will be funded.

Council-administered funds for acquisition and development go only to projects included and ranked by priority in an adopted capital improvement program (CIP). Funding will be consistent with the established CIP priorities. Projects are eligible for inclusion in a CIP only if they are included in a master plan that has been found to be consistent with the policy plan.

Strategy 2: Funds will be granted only to regional park implementing agencies.

Strategy 3: Investment should be balanced between acquisition and development.

Whenever possible, a balance should be struck between investing in acquisition and investing in development. If a decision on fund allocations must be made, the priorities for those allocations are to:

- Acquire those lands essential to protect the natural resource that defines a park, park reserve or trail and to make it usable to the public as planned.
- Develop new or rehabilitated facilities or increase the capacity of existing facilities in places where there is a documented existing or projected high level of use and where the natural resource base will be protected.

Strategy 4: Any development should primarily benefit citizens of the metropolitan area.

Development in regional parks system units should be based on the principle of providing and maintaining quality public park areas and facilities primarily for citizens of the metropolitan area.

Strategy 5: Some emergency funding requests will be considered.

The Metropolitan Council may consider “emergency requests” to finance capital improvement projects for regional parks system land acquisition and development that are not financed in the currently adopted regional parks system capital improvement program, if:

Strategy 6: The Council may reimburse implementing agencies for the costs of acquiring some lands before they have been made part of the regional parks system.

Strategy 7: Trails that may be used for transit in the future should only be acquired if it is clear they will be used as trails for at least 10 years.

Regional parks system funds should only be used to acquire or develop a corridor identified for future transit use in a Council-approved transit implementation plan when there is a guarantee that the trail facility will be operational for its useful design life, as negotiated by the transit provider and the regional park implementing agency.

Strategy 8: The Council will support the activities of its non-profit partner, the Regional Parks Foundation of the Twin Cities in order to raise awareness of the regional parks funds support the regional park system, and raise private funds to help acquire lands.

Strategy 9: The Council actively will seek funding from the state and other sources.

The Council will seek continued state funding for acquisition, development and rehabilitation of all elements in the regional parks system. The Council will also pursue other sources of funding where appropriate. Continued State supplemental support to finance 40 percent of operation and maintenance costs of the regional system will also be sought.

Planning

Policy: Promote master planning and help provide integrated resource planning across jurisdictions.

Strategy 1: Acquisition and improvement projects must be part of approved master plans, or their amendments. Importance of accurate master plans and for local government to guide land shown within master plan boundary as intended for future park use.

Master Plan Content Requirements and Funding Process

Master plans for regional linking trails.

Master plans for regional destination trails or greenways:

Strategy 2: Joint-powers agreements for regional trails are encouraged.

Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to enter into joint-powers agreements with local governments regarding the acquisition and operations/maintenance of regional trails. The joint-powers agreements should address who has control over the trail right-of-way and how that control is exercised, and who will operate and maintain the trail and how operations and maintenance will be accomplished.

Strategy 3: Projects may share costs, if they are consistent with a master plan.

Projects that are consistent with a master plan but exceed regional need as determined by the Council may proceed on a cost-sharing basis. Agencies must obtain Council approval in advance of undertaking cost-shared developments.

Recreation Activities and Facilities

Policy: Provide a regional system of recreation opportunities for all residents, while maintaining the integrity of the natural resource base within the regional parks system.

Strategy 1: Activities in regional parks must be tied to the natural resources of the parks, but not impact them negatively.

Strategy 2: Most heavy recreational use should be in the more urban regional parks.

The development of facilities that attract many users, which require larger capacity roads and connection to a municipal sewage treatment system, should be confined to parks and park reserves located in the urban and urbanizing area of the region unless the demands for heavily used services cannot be adequately met at regional parks system units in those areas. If facilities need to be developed in more rural areas, the master plan should justify facilities that will attract large numbers of users and indicate how support services and facilities, such as roads and sewers, will be provided.

When feasible, transit system elements should be developed to provide access to regional parks system units. Transit planners should prepare specific transit system elements that are sensitive to parks, park users, park development plans and local agencies' rules and regulations.

Strategy 3: Regional parks facilities and programs should encourage use by special populations.

The regional park implementing agencies should act to remove or reduce barriers to use of the regional system by special populations. Barriers may include safety problems, cost, transportation and lack of information. If needed, new facilities and/or programs (including marketing programs) should be designed to increase use of the regional parks system by special populations. Capital improvement funding requests should include strategies for meeting the needs of special populations.

Metro Transit and other transit providers are urged to work with the regional park implementing agencies to identify any transportation barriers for special populations and design programs to increase the level of access to the regional parks system.

Strategy 4: Bicycle and pedestrian access and trails must be part of the regional parks system.

Safe, high-quality, continuous, barrier-free bicycle and pedestrian systems shall be developed, maintained and improved to function as integral parts of the region's transportation and recreation systems.

System Protection

Policy: Protect public investment in acquisition and development by assuring that every element in the system is able to fully carry out its designated role as long as a need for it can be demonstrated.

The Council has in place several mechanisms that protect the integrity of the regional parks system and of individual parts of the system:

- Master plans. The master plan defines acceptable activities within a system unit; the implementing agencies must receive Council approval before proceeding with any activities inconsistent with the existing approved master plan.
- Restrictive covenants. Implementing agencies are required to place restrictive covenants on lands purchased with regional funds, to ensure that all land in the system remains in regional recreation open space use unless a change is agreed to by the Council.
- Land Planning Act. Proposed plans of local governments that have a substantial effect on or represent a substantial departure from the regional parks system plan will be subject to a required modification by the Council to ensure that the system is protected.
- Metropolitan significance. Proposed development projects that have a substantial effect on or represent a substantial departure from the regional parks system plan may be required to undergo a review for metropolitan significance, with up to a year's delay in development if the project is found to adversely affect the system.

These standards in the metropolitan significance rules and in the plan amendment guidelines are currently used to determine an effect on or a substantial departure from the regional parks system:

- Impacts on the use of regional parks system facilities include, but are not limited to: traffic, safety, noise, visual obstructions (for example, to scenic overlooks), impaired use of the facilities or interference with the operation or maintenance of the facilities. Impacts on natural resources include, but are not limited to, the impact on the level, flow or quality of a facility's water resources (lakes, streams, wetlands, groundwater) and impact on a facility's wildlife populations or habitats (migration routes, breeding sites, plant communities).
- A proposed project is considered to have an impact on the system if it may preclude or substantially limit the future acquisition of land in an area identified in the system plan of the Council's Regional Parks Policy Plan.

Strategy 1: Local comprehensive plans may need to be changed if planned land uses would have a negative impact on current or planned regional park lands or facilities.

The Metropolitan Council may require plan modifications to local comprehensive plans, updates or amendments that will more likely than not have adverse and substantial impacts on the current or future intended uses of the regional parks system lands or facilities, or are likely to have adverse and substantial impacts on lands that are officially recommended for acquisition in an adopted policy plan.

Strategy 2: Restrictive covenants on regional parks system lands will only be removed if an equivalent restrictive covenant is placed on park land.

Strategy 3: The Council will pay for contamination cleanup only when there is no real alternative for the park or trail function and/or funding.

Strategy 4: Phase 1 audits must be done for land that may be contaminated or that may have abandoned wells on it.

Strategy 5: Telecommunication towers will only be allowed in regional parks or reserves if there is no alternative site and if mitigation efforts are made to minimize the impact on park lands and users.

Strategy 6: Regional wastewater conveyance facilities and other utilities on park lands should be placed in ways that minimize negative impact on the park, its facilities and its users.