

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL
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DATE: April 28, 2010
TO: Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission
FROM: Jan Youngquist, Senior Planner-Parks (651-602-1029)
SUBJECT: MPOSC Recommendations on Proposed System Plan Changes

INTRODUCTION

State law requires that every 10 years, each city, county and township in the metropolitan region review and update its comprehensive plan to ensure that the local plan conforms to the Metropolitan Council's system plans, including the *Regional Parks Policy Plan*. (MN Stat. 473.864) The latest round of local comprehensive plans was due to the Metropolitan Council in 2008 for review.

Regional park implementing agencies underwent extensive planning processes to prepare their parks system plans that were incorporated into their jurisdiction's comprehensive plan. As part of their planning processes, some implementing agencies identified potential changes to the regional parks system. Council staff advised the agencies that the proposed additions could not be considered regional facilities unless they were identified in the Council's *Regional Parks Policy Plan* and suggested that the agencies seek regional status for their proposals when the Council updates its policy plan. The proposed system changes from Washington, Dakota, Scott and Carver counties as well as St. Paul came from their local comprehensive plans. The proposed additions from Ramsey County and Three River Park District were initiated as part of this policy plan update.

AUTHORITY TO REVIEW

Minnesota Statute 473.147, Subdivision 1, requires that the Metropolitan Council, after consultation with the Parks and Open Space Commission, municipalities, park districts and counties in the metropolitan area, and after appropriate public hearings, prepare and adopt a long-range system policy plan for regional recreation open space as part of the council's Metropolitan Development Guide (i.e., the *2030 Regional Development Framework*).

The Statute also requires that the policy plan identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to provide a system of regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal facilities which, together with state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area.

BACKGROUND

Most of the proposed system changes were presented to and reviewed by MPOSC at its meetings in January through March of this year. The Carver County proposals will be presented at the May 4 meeting. This staff report delineates the requests by implementing agency, indicates the implications of the request to the regional parks system, and follows with a proposed action for each group. The handouts from previous meetings

including the request, staff review and maps are included as attachments to this staff report. Estimated acquisition costs, where available, have been added to these attachments.

GROUP 1-- ST. PAUL

(please refer to Attachment A for additional information)

P-1 Proposed Regional Park Study Area—Highland Park

Designation as a regional park study area does not guarantee that the park would become part of the regional parks system, but would authorize Council staff to work with St. Paul to conduct visitor-origin studies to determine the regional distribution of visitation to the park. Once these studies are complete, information will be provided to MPOSC and the Council for evaluation.

T-1 Proposed Regional Trail Search Corridor—Ayd Mill Trail

This request has been withdrawn by the City of St. Paul.

T-2 Proposed Regional Trail Search Corridor—Johnson Parkway Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

The trail would provide a connection between Phalen-Keller and Battle Creek-Indian Mounds Regional Parks and would recognize all of St. Paul’s Grand Rounds as part of the regional parks system.

PROPOSED ACTION

That the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission make a motion to accept the St. Paul proposals P-1 and T-2 to be incorporated into the draft *Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

GROUP 2—WASHINGTON COUNTY

(please refer to Attachment B for additional information)

T-3 Proposed Regional Trail Search Corridor—Middle St. Croix Valley Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for acquisition and development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

This trail will connect to state, regional and local trails that will provide a continuous trail network following the St. Croix River from Stillwater to the border of Washington and Dakota counties.

T-4 Proposed Regional Trail —Point Douglas Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

Washington County owns this destination trail corridor, which will provide the user with up-close views of the Mississippi River, and will facilitate connections to trails in Dakota County and Wisconsin.

PROPOSED ACTION

That the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission make a motion to accept the Washington County proposals T-3 and T-4 to be incorporated into the draft *Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

GROUP 3—THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT

(please refer to Attachment C for additional information)

P-3 Proposed Special Recreation Feature—The Landing

With inclusion into the regional parks system, The Landing would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding. The Landing is already developed, but upon Council approval of a master plan, it would be eligible for funding of improvements through the regional parks capital improvement program.

Special recreation features are unique facilities; there are currently 6 special recreation features in the regional parks system. The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* defines a special recreation feature as:

Area that preserves, maintains and provides specialized or single-purpose recreational activities such as golf course, nature center, marina, zoo, conservatory, arboretum, display gardens, arena, gun club, downhill ski area, and sites of historic or archeological significance.

The Landing may be considered a site providing historical significance. Visitation to The Landing is low compared to regional parks system facilities, although Three Rivers Park District anticipates that its change in operations removing the admission fee will draw more visitors to the park. Three Rivers indicates that 68 percent of visitors come from outside its taxing jurisdiction, with 28 percent of them coming from outside the seven-county metropolitan area. Based on this information, the Landing clearly demonstrates regional visitation patterns.

PROPOSED ACTION

That the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission make a motion to accept the Three Rivers Park District proposal P-3 to be incorporated into the draft *Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

GROUP 4—RAMSEY COUNTY

(please refer to Attachment D for additional information)

P-4 Proposed Regional Park Boundary Adjustment—Vadnais Snail Lakes Regional Park

The boundary adjustment to Vadnais Snail Lakes Regional Park would allow Island Lake County Park to qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding. Island Lake County Park is already developed; upon Council approval of a master plan, it would be eligible for funding of improvements through the regional parks capital improvement program.

Although Vadnais Snail Lakes is classified as a regional park, in many respects it serves as a park reserve, with large undeveloped areas protecting high-quality natural resources and small areas for recreation. By expanding its boundaries to include Island Lake County Park, more recreational

opportunities will be provided to park visitors, specifically to visitors south of I-694. Island Lake County Park annually hosts a series of waterski events conducted by the Minnesota Waterski Association. These events have a regional draw.

T-14 Proposed Regional Trail Search Corridor—Rice Creek South Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

Ramsey County hopes to have the trail corridor, wildlife corridor and trailhead property transferred to them from the federal government at no cost prior to the public auction for the TCAAP site. This trail will provide connections between the Rice Creek North and Highway 96 Regional Trails as well access to winter recreational activities on the Arden Hills Army Training Site. This proposal provides an opportunity to build a regional trail adjacent to a large-scale future development of housing, offices and retail establishments.

T-15 Proposed Regional Trail Extension—Trout Brook Regional Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for acquisition and development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

The proposed extension of the Trout Brook Regional Trail would create a continuous trail with connections to the Sam Morgan Regional Trail in downtown St. Paul, the Trillium Nature Sanctuary, the Bruce Vento Regional Trail, the Gateway State Trail, Lake McCarrons County Park in Roseville and Vadnais-Snail Lakes Regional Park in Vadnais Heights.

PROPOSED ACTION

That the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission make a motion to accept the Ramsey County proposals P-4, T-14 and T-15 to be incorporated into the draft *Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

GROUP 5—DAKOTA COUNTY

(please refer to Attachment E for additional information)

P-2 Proposed Regional Park Study Area—Thompson-Kaposia-Kaposia Landing

Designation as a regional park study area does not guarantee that the park would become part of the regional parks system, but would authorize Council staff to work with Dakota County to conduct visitor-origin studies to determine the regional distribution of visitation to the park. Once these studies are complete, information will be provided to MPOSC and the Council for evaluation.

T-5 Proposed Regional Trail Search Corridor—Rosemount River Access Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for acquisition and development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

The City of Rosemount has developed a master plan for a segment of this trail from downtown Rosemount to the Mississippi River. Dakota County will plan the alignment of the trail to connect to Lebanon Hills Regional Park. The trail will provide connections between Lebanon Hills Regional Park

in Eagan/Apple Valley, the proposed Vermillion Highlands Greenway Regional Trail, the planned Mississippi River Regional Trail and Spring Lake Park Reserve in Nininger Township.

T-6 Proposed Regional Trail Search Corridor—North Creek Greenway Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for acquisition and development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

The proposed trail will connect Lebanon Hills Regional Park and the Minnesota Zoo to the proposed Vermillion River Greenway Regional Trail in Farmington. The trail will travel through urbanized, suburban and rural areas in Apple Valley, Lakeville and Farmington and provide opportunities to connect to local parks, trails and schools.

Proposed Deletion—Southwest Dakota County Regional Park Search Area

A regional park search area was designated in the southwest portion of Dakota County in the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, which was adopted 2005. The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* indicated that the regional park search area was subject to the outcome of the Dakota County Park System Plan, which was completed in 2008 and was incorporated into the County’s comprehensive plan. The County completed an extensive planning process to develop its Park System Plan; a regional park in this area was not a component of the plan. The County is planning a greenway regional trail corridor in the area, which will provide opportunities for recreation as well as protection of natural resources.

PROPOSED ACTION

That the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission make a motion to:

- 1) Accept the Dakota County proposals P-2, T-5, T-6 to be incorporated into the draft *Regional Parks Policy Plan* and,
- 2) Accept the Dakota County proposal to remove the Southwest Dakota County Regional Park Search Area from the regional parks system as part of the draft *Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

GROUP 6—SCOTT COUNTY

(please refer to Attachment F for additional information)

T-7 Proposed Regional Trail Extension—Big Rivers Regional Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for acquisition and development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

This request would extend the Big Rivers Regional Trail into Scott County, which would facilitate a continuous trail from Lilydale-Harriet Island Regional Park along the Minnesota River through Lilydale, Mendota, Mendota Heights, Eagan, Burnsville, Savage, and connect with the Minnesota Valley State Trail in Shakopee.

T-8 Proposed Regional Trail Search Corridor—Prior Lake Outlet Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for acquisition and development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

The proposed trail will create a connection between the proposed Big Rivers Regional Trail and the Minnesota River in Shakopee and the Scott County West Regional Trail and Lower Prior Lake in Prior Lake.

T-9 Proposed Regional Trail Search Corridor —Louisville Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for acquisition and development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

A portion of this proposed trail, along with Carver County’s proposed trail T-16, consists of the Union Pacific railroad corridor. Opportunities to acquire a dedicated corridor, especially one that crosses a river between two counties, are rare. With other jurisdictions expressing interest in utilizing portions of the corridor in addition to the trail, acquisition of the Union Pacific railroad corridor could provide opportunities to share acquisition costs, as well a result in a number of other public benefits.

T-11 Proposed Regional Trail Search Corridor —Elko New Market-Blakeley-Doyle Kennefick Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for acquisition and development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

This trail would provide a connection between the planned Doyle-Kennefick Regional Park and the proposed Elko New Market-Blakeley Trail in Elko New Market.

T-12 Proposed Regional Trail Search Corridor — Elko New Market-Blakeley Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for acquisition and development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

The trail would traverse the southern portion of Scott County connecting the Blakeley Bluffs Regional Park Search Area on the west, Cedar Lake Farm Regional Park, and would extend approximately 2 miles into Dakota County to connect to the proposed Chub Creek Greenway Regional Trail. Dakota County has suggested that Scott County lead the planning efforts for the trail segment that is within Dakota County during Scott County’s master planning process for the trail.

T-13 Proposed Regional Trail Extension —Blakeley Bluffs Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, the proposed trail from Blakeley Bluffs Regional Park Search Area to the border between Scott and LeSueur counties would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding. Upon Council approval of a master plan, Scott County would be eligible for acquisition and development funding for the trail through the regional parks capital improvement program. A trail connection in LeSueur County to Ney Nature Center would not be eligible for regional park funds, since it is outside of the Metropolitan Council’s seven county jurisdiction.

The trail would facilitate a connection between the Blakeley Bluffs Regional Park Search Area and Ney Nature Center in LeSueur County.

PROPOSED ACTION

That the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission make a motion to accept the Scott County proposals T-7, T-8, T-9, T-11, T-12 and T-13 to be incorporated into the draft *Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

GROUP 7—CARVER COUNTY

(please refer to Attachment G for additional information)

T-10 Proposed Regional Trail Extension—Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for acquisition and development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

This request would extend the Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail further southwest into Carver County, which would facilitate a continuous trail through Hopkins, Minnetonka, Eden Prairie, Chanhassen, Chaska and Carver. The trail may provide opportunities to connect to the new Rapids Lake Education and Visitor Center at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and to proposed regional trails that would cross the Minnesota River into Scott County.

T-16 Proposed Regional Trail Search Corridor—Union Pacific Corridor Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for acquisition and development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

This proposed trail, along with a portion of Scott County's proposed trail T-9, consists of the Union Pacific railroad corridor. Opportunities to acquire a dedicated corridor, especially one that crosses a river between two counties, are rare. With other jurisdictions expressing interest in utilizing portions of the corridor in addition to the trail, acquisition of the Union Pacific railroad corridor could provide a number of public benefits as well as opportunities for cost-sharing.

T-17 Proposed Regional Trail Search Corridor —County Road 10 Trail

With inclusion into the regional parks system, this trail would qualify for regional parks operations and maintenance funding and upon Council approval of a master plan, would be eligible for acquisition and development funding through the regional parks capital improvement program.

The trail will traverse fast-growing portions of Carver County and provide connections between several regional parks system facilities, including the Southwest Regional Trail Connection, the proposed Twin Cities and Western Regional Trail, the Carver County North-South Regional Trail Search Corridor, the Dakota Rail Regional Trail and the Luce Line State Trail.

PROPOSED ACTION

That the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission make a motion to accept the Carver County proposals T-10, T-16 and T-17 to be incorporated into the draft *Regional Parks Policy Plan*.