

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL
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DATE: February 21, 2011

TO: Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

FROM: Jan Youngquist, Planning Analyst-Parks (651) 602-1029

SUBJECT: (2011-xxx) Mississippi West Regional Park Master Plan, Anoka County (Referral No. 50004-1)

INTRODUCTION

Anoka County has submitted a master plan for Mississippi West Regional Park, which is an undeveloped regional park located along the Mississippi River in the city of Ramsey. The master plan proposes recreational amenities including a boat launch and fishing pier, picnic areas, trails, and an interpretive center. The master plan outlines a phased approach to development.

This staff report contains a review of the Mississippi West Regional Park Master Plan based on its consistency with the *2030 Regional 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

Mississippi West Regional Park is an undeveloped regional park located south of Trunk Highway 10 (TH 10) along the Mississippi River in the city of Ramsey. The park is comprised of 273

acres with 1 ½ miles of river shoreline, including two islands. The park is located within the Mississippi River Critical Area and the Mississippi National River Recreation Area (MNRRA). Once developed, the Mississippi River Regional Trail will travel through the regional park and provide a connection to Coon Rapids Dam and Anoka County Riverfront Regional Parks.

The Metropolitan Council approved a concept master plan for Mississippi West Regional Park in 1996, which incorporated the park into the regional parks system. Little recreational development has occurred in the park, although the County has done some natural resource restoration. In 2008, the County partnered with the City of Ramsey on a storm water outlet project related to the development of the Ramsey Town Center, which is located north of the park across TH 10. The project ultimately provided a bituminous trail on top of a storm water outlet to the Mississippi River. This trail and some natural surface walking trails are the only recreational amenities currently in the park.

ANALYSIS

1. Boundaries and Acquisition Costs

Anoka County owns all of the parcels within the park boundary; therefore no acquisition costs are associated with the master plan. Figure 1 shows the boundaries of the regional park.

Figure 1—Mississippi West Regional Park—Anoka County



The Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) and Anoka County have proposed a new interchange at the intersection of TH10 and Ramsey Boulevard (CSAH 56) as part of the

conversion of TH10 from an expressway to a freeway. Development of the interchange and extension of Riverdale Drive to restore access to properties that will lose direct access to TH10 may require the taking of approximately 8 acres of parkland. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Mn/DOT, Anoka County, the Metropolitan Council and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has been signed, which outlines how impacts to the regional park will be mitigated. Conversion of regional parkland is subject to approval by the Metropolitan Council in accordance with the requirements outlined in the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. A copy of the MOU was included in the master plan. This roadway project has not yet been programmed for construction, but is acknowledged in the master plan since it may affect the park boundaries in the future.

2. Stewardship Plan

Management and stewardship of the site has involved natural resource restoration throughout the park. Approximately 50 acres of fallow agricultural fields have been restored to a native prairie, with 23 additional acres to be restored in the future. Other future land stewardship plans includes woodland restoration and bluff/riparian edge restoration. Currently a County Parks and Recreation staff member lives in an existing house on the site and serves as a caretaker for the park. This arrangement has allowed for quick resolution of any maintenance or operations issues that arise.

3. Demand Forecast

Regional parks and trails have been increasing in popularity. From 1995 to 2009, visits to regional parks and trails in Anoka County have increased by almost 70 percent, to its current level of more than 3 million annual visits.

As the population grows, the need for additional recreation sources and amenities grows as well. The population of Anoka County has been growing steadily and is predicted to grow 38 percent in the next 25 years. The population of the City of Ramsey is projected to grow by almost 47 percent from 2010 to 2030.

Figure 2—Population Forecast*

Year	City of Ramsey
2010	30,000
2020	43,000
2030	44,000

**Metropolitan Council 2030 Regional Development Framework—System Statement*

According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources 2004 Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey, nearly 82 percent of Minnesotans surveyed indicated that outdoor recreation is “very important” or “moderately important” in their lives. Popular trail activities include walking, hiking, biking, running, jogging and inline skating.

The Statewide Health Initiative Program (SHIP) aims to help people live longer, healthier lives through the reduction in obesity and increased physical activity. Anoka County has received a SHIP grant to increase access to parks and trails and increase education regarding health, wellness, and outdoor recreation.

The projected population growth, the increase in visits to regional parks and trails, and the emphasis on health and wellness will result in a greater demand for recreational facilities

4. Development Concept

The proposed park development includes a boat launch, fishing pier, picnic areas, playground, and trails as well as support facilities such as restroom buildings, parking lots, and a maintenance facility. The central feature of the regional park will be an interpretive center that will serve as a “living laboratory” that incorporates best management practices in sustainability and natural resource restoration. An arboretum style garden will be located near the interpretive center that will educate visitors regarding the differences between native and non-native plant species and their maintenance. No development has been proposed for the two islands, although some natural resource restoration may occur. Park development is proposed to occur in phases.

Figure 3—Master Plan Conceptual Design



Phase 1 includes the design, engineering and construction of a temporary road, boat/canoe launch and a fishing pier providing access to the Mississippi River.

Figure 4—Phase 1 Estimated Development Costs

Phase 1-Boat Launch Development	Estimated Costs (2010)
Design/engineering (in-kind)	\$ -
Boat launch road/parking lot	\$ 190,000
Boat launch	\$ 40,000
Temporary access road	\$ 50,000
Fishing pier	\$ 40,000
Signs	\$ 5,000
Topographic survey/construction staking	\$ 10,000
Removal/demolition of house and hazardous material abatement	\$ 40,000
Permits (City, Watershed, DNR, COE, NPS)	\$ 5,000
Subtotal	\$ 380,000
Contingency	\$ 20,000
TOTAL	\$ 400,000

Phase 2 will focus on the main infrastructure for the park, including the construction of roadways, parking lots, trails, utilities and a maintenance facility. The existing buildings on the site will be demolished and removed. Some natural resource restoration and the installation of an observation deck are also included in this phase.

Figure 5—Phase 2 Estimated Development Costs

Phase 2—Infrastructure Development	Estimated Costs (2010)
Design/engineering	\$ 170,000
Roadways/parking lots	\$ 950,000
Trails	\$ 250,000
Maintenance facility	\$ 300,000
Utilities—Water/sanitary/electric/fiber	\$ 150,000
Observation decks	\$ 100,000
Natural resource restoration	\$ 25,000
Lighting/signage/site furnishings	\$ 25,000
Geotechnical survey/wetland delineation and assessment	\$ 25,000
Survey/construction staking	\$ 25,000
Material abatement	\$ 60,000
Permits (City, Watershed, DNR, COE, NPS)	\$ 10,000
Subtotal	\$ 2,090,000
Contingency	\$ 200,000
TOTAL	\$ 2,290,000

Phase 3 entails the development of park facilities, including three picnic shelters, one to two restroom buildings, a gatehouse, additional trails, and a play structure, as well additional natural resource restoration.

Figure 6—Phase 3 Estimated Development Costs

Phase 3—Park Facility Development	Estimated Costs (2010)
Design/architectural/engineering services	\$ 120,000
Picnic shelters (3)	\$ 600,000
Restroom Buildings (2)	\$ 200,000
Entrance gatehouse	\$ 100,000
Connector trails	\$ 150,000
Play structure	\$ 100,000
Utilities	\$ 50,000
Natural resource restoration	\$ 25,000
Lighting/signage/site furnishings	\$ 25,000
Geotechnical survey/wetland delineation and assessment	\$ 25,000
Survey/construction staking	\$ 25,000
Permits (City, Watershed, DNR, COE, NPS)	\$ 10,000
Subtotal	\$ 1,430,000
Contingency	\$ 140,000
TOTAL	\$ 1,570,000

Phase 4 includes the development of the interpretive/visitor center with additional parking, trails, interpretive features and an arboretum style garden as well as natural resource restoration.

Figure 7—Phase 4 Estimated Development Costs

Phase 4—Visitor Center Development	Estimated Costs (2010)
Design/architectural/engineering services	\$ 120,000
Interpretive/visitor center	\$ 800,000
Site work and parking lot	\$ 300,000
Trails and interpretive features	\$ 150,000
Natural resource restoration	\$ 40,000
Utilities	\$ 100,000
Lighting/signage/site furnishings	\$ 50,000
Geotechnical survey/wetland delineation and assessment	\$ 25,000
Survey/construction staking	\$ 25,000
Permits (City, Watershed, DNR, COE, NPS)	\$ 10,000
Subtotal	\$ 1,620,000
Contingency	\$ 160,000
TOTAL	\$ 1,780,000

Phase 5 includes a pedestrian overpass for TH10 proposed by the City of Ramsey that would connect the park with Ramsey Town Center. The master plan states that costs for the pedestrian overpass would most likely be shared between Mn/DOT, Anoka County and the City of Ramsey, although details of a cost sharing agreement have not yet been determined. The pedestrian overpass will improve access to the regional park, but may provide more of a local than a regional benefit. Council staff recommends that once a cost sharing agreement is in place for development of the pedestrian connection, Anoka County should submit the agreement to the Metropolitan Council so a determination of costs are eligible for regional funding can be made.

Figure 8—Phase 5 Estimated Development Costs

Phase 5—Pedestrian Connection Development	Estimated Costs (2010)
Design/engineering	\$ 200,000
Pedestrian bridge	\$ 2,000,000
Lighting/signage/site furnishings	\$ 75,000
Survey/construction staking	\$ 50,000
Geotechnical survey/wetland delineation and assessment	\$ 50,000
Permits (City, Watershed, DNR, COE, NPS)	\$ 10,000
Subtotal	\$ 2,385,000
Contingency	\$ 200,000
TOTAL	\$ 2,585,000

Figure 9—Master Plan Estimated Development Costs

Phase	Estimated Costs (2010)
Phase 1-Boat Launch Development	\$ 400,000
Phase 2—Infrastructure Development	\$ 2,300,000
Phase 3—Park Facility Development	\$ 1,575,000
Phase 4—Visitor Center Development	\$ 1,780,000
TOTAL without Pedestrian Connection	\$ 6,040,000
Phase 5—Pedestrian Connection Development	\$ 2,585,000
TOTAL including Pedestrian Connection	\$ 8,625,000

5. Conflicts

Anoka County will work to keep conflicts regarding this park to a minimum through proper planning and community involvement. Common concerns among residents that live near a park include the effect the trail will have on their safety, security and privacy. Generally, regional parks in the metropolitan area do not have high criminal activities related to park use. Anoka County will work with the affected residents to minimize the perceived impacts. The County will

determine the best methods to address these issues, which may include a vegetated buffer or shifting a park trail where possible.

In the areas where the park is in close proximity to Highway 10, additional screening and buffering will be used to enhance the safety and aesthetic quality of the park.

Conflicts between pedestrians and vehicular traffic will be addressed by developing an entrance road to the park at the intersection of TH10 and Ramsey Boulevard. Signage within the park will alert users to street, driveway and pedestrian crossings, and will provide wayfinding and interpretive information.

Park development proposed in the master plan avoids the area of the park which may be impacted by the proposed interchange at TH10 and Ramsey Boulevard to minimize potential conflicts.

6. Public Services

The planned public services and facilities for the park will occur in phases. Initial development will provide a temporary access road, a boat and canoe launch, and a parking lot. Portable toilets will be provided until a restroom building can be constructed in a later phase of the project.

7. Operations

Anoka County Ordinance #2007-1 regulates parks and trails and will be enforced by the local police departments and the Anoka County Sheriff.

Anoka County will be responsible for providing daily and general routine maintenance of the park. These maintenance activities include mowing, sweeping, plowing, clearing and debris removal. Solid waste will be collected from trash and recycling receptacles located at high use areas and at regular intervals along the park trails.

Anoka County will inspect the park and its trails regularly and will provide necessary maintenance and capital improvements, such as bituminous overlays and roof replacement. Park signage will be provided and maintained by the County.

Annual operations and maintenance costs for the park are estimated to be approximately \$140,000. Revenue for the operation and maintenance of the park will come from the Anoka County Parks and Recreation annual operations and maintenance budget, which includes revenues from picnic shelter rentals, room rentals, programs, park entrance fees and the County general fund. Supplemental funding comes from regional operations and maintenance grant program, administered by the Metropolitan Council.

The County will examine implementing sustainable construction and energy efficient methods in development of the park. New building construction will include alternative heating and cooling methods, such as geo-thermal.

8. Citizen Participation

Anoka County worked with regulatory agencies and local government in the master planning process. The National Park Service, which oversees the MNRRA, and the Minnesota DNR were given the opportunity to comment on the master plan. The City of Ramsey staff and Council members were also invited to comment on the plan.

The County hosted a public open house to present the master plan. Eighteen citizens attended the open house, with strong support for the proposed plan. Residents were appreciative of the current and planned protection and restoration of natural resources in the park as well as the plans to minimize impact to adjacent residences through careful design and setbacks. Suggestions received from the open house regarding the boat launch will be addressed and incorporated into the design phase of that project.

The Anoka County Board of Commissioners unanimously passed a resolution to approve and adopt the Mississippi West Regional Park Master Plan at its December 14, 2010 meeting.

9. Public Awareness

As development occurs, Anoka County Parks and Recreation Department will provide public information regarding the regional park through maps, websites, publications and brochures. Since the park is located in the Mississippi National River Recreation Area, Anoka County will also work with National Park Service staff to provide information about the park.

10. Accessibility

Anoka County strives to provide equal access to its parks and trails. There is a nominal vehicle entrance fee to help offset operations and maintenance costs. There is no fee to visitors who access the park by biking, walking, or taking public transportation. The Anoka County "Traveler" provides transportation services for a minimal fee to County citizens who are in need.

The park facilities and amenities as well as its access points will conform to standards mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

11. Natural Resources

In order to manage the natural resources and maintain the park's identity and natural connections to the Mississippi River, Anoka County will:

- Protect, restore and enhance native plant and animal habitats throughout the park
- Protect and improve water and soil resources
- Increase public awareness regarding the diverse natural resources in the area
- Utilize sustainable practices related to park development, operations and maintenance

General natural resource management strategies include identifying and assessing remnant plant and animal communities, monitoring rare species, controlling invasive species, restoring native

plant and animal habitat, controlling detrimental insects and disease, enhancing water quality, controlling erosion and implementing cooperative land stewardship.

Anoka County's Natural Resources Unit will be involved in the design, construction and monitoring of the park development project. An emphasis will be placed on avoiding and minimizing any adverse impacts to the plant and animal habitat as well as to the overall watershed. The County will focus on incorporating local native seed and plant material that will complement the ecology and function of the surrounding native plant communities.

Protection of surface and ground water resources are a top priority for the project. Anoka County will work closely with the City of Ramsey, the National Park Service, the DNR and the Metropolitan Council to ensure that the standards and requirements for resource protection are consistent with the Council's model ordinance for storm water management.

The overall vegetation management goal for Anoka County is to identify restoration needs as well as to define and implement adaptive management strategies that will sustain the biological diversity, production and function of native plant communities. Vegetation management within the regional park will focus on preserving native plants, introducing local native plants, maintaining water quality within the watershed and providing for linear plant and wildlife connections. The DNR's "Guidelines for Managing and Restoring Natural Plant Communities along Trails and Waterways" reference will be used as part of the long term management plan for the trail corridor.

The County uses an adaptive management approach to its ecological restoration and stewardship plan for natural resources, which acknowledges that ecosystems are dynamic and continually changing. This approach includes monitoring, evaluating and adjusting natural resource restoration efforts after design and implementation to ensure a continual cycle of improvement.

The natural resources management and stewardship practices within the park will include prescribed fire management, invasive species surveys, hazard tree assessments, seed collection and propagation, invasive species removal, turf management, brush and tree maintenance, erosion control, forest health assessments and maintenance, wildlife surveys as needed, and interpretive signage.

REVIEW BY OTHER COUNCIL DIVISIONS:

Community Development – Environment, Surface Water Management (Jim Larsen) – The master plan (page 6) states that Mississippi River banks within the park have experienced erosion that "should be repaired to reduce and avoid further sediment loading into the river", but there does not appear to be any mention of this needed project component in the proposed project phases. Council staff recommends that river bank stabilization be incorporated into the earliest proposed construction phase, unless the County plans to undertake this project prior to execution of park improvement phases.

Anoka County response: We are proposing to conduct this restoration work in the early phases of the park development (Phase 2-3). This work has been classified as natural resource restoration in the master plan. We will be seeking funding through a variety of grants, including the Legacy program (Clean Water), National Park Service, and the DNR.

Community Development – Mississippi River Critical Area (Tori Dupre) – The land use goals in Ramsey’s comprehensive plan state that it is the policy of the City to “Ensure projects are consistent with the goals and policies of the Mississippi River Critical Area Plan (MNRRA) and are sensitive to the river’s natural environment.” Ramsey’s comprehensive plan includes a Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Plan that ensures that the program guidelines are city policy. The Critical Area Plan was reviewed by the Metropolitan Council and approved by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. It address both the Critical Area (Executive Order 79-19 and MN Statutes 116G), the Mississippi National River Recreation Area (Public Law 100-696). This stretch of river is also designated a Wild and Scenic River and is governed by MN Rules 6105. The Council needs to remind the regional park implementing agency to work with the City of Ramsey to ensure that these river programs and standards are implemented during the park development phases.

Environmental Services – Sewers (Anna Bessel) – The proposed construction does not coincide with our facilities and consequently will not result in any substantial impact to the regional wastewater system. Thus, we have no objections to the execution of this project.

Transportation (Ann Braden) – An environmental assessment process is underway on a new interchange to replace the at-grade intersection at Trunk Highway 10 (TH 10) and Armstrong Boulevard in Ramsey. The study area is to the west of the regional park; however there is on-going discussion about closing some of the median accesses along TH 10 through Ramsey, which may result in less direct, but safer access to the park.

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 Mississippi West Regional Park Master Plan (Referral No. 50004-1) 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 Phases 1 though 4 of the development outlined in the master plan is \$6,040,000 in 2010 dollars.
3. The estimated costs for development of Phase 5 of the master plan, which includes a proposed pedestrian overpass for TH10, are \$2,585,000 in 2010 dollars. The master plan states that costs for the pedestrian overpass would most likely be shared between Mn/DOT,

Anoka County and the City of Ramsey, although details of a cost sharing agreement have not yet been determined. The pedestrian overpass will improve access to the regional park, but may provide more of a local than a regional benefit. Therefore, once a cost sharing agreement has been negotiated and prior to seeking regional parks funding for the pedestrian overpass, Anoka County should submit the agreement to the Metropolitan Council so a determination of the costs that are eligible for regional funding can be made.

4. 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 Anoka County.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Mississippi West Regional Park Master Plan (Referral No. 50004-1).
2. Require that Anoka County submit a negotiated cost sharing agreement related to the development of the pedestrian overpass described in Phase 5 of the master plan to the Metropolitan Council prior to seeking regional parks funding for the project, in order for the Council to determine the eligible costs for regional funding.
3. Advise Anoka County to work with the City of Ramsey to ensure that the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area and Wild and Scenic River programs and standards are implemented during the park development phases.