

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL
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DATE: July 10, 2012

TO: Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

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

SUBJECT: (2012-xxx) Point Douglas Regional Trail Master Plan, Washington County
(Referral No. 50018-1)
Metropolitan Parks & Open Space Commission District F (Daniel Shlaferman)

INTRODUCTION

Washington County has submitted the Point Douglas Regional Trail Master Plan for Metropolitan Council review and approval.

The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (Chapter 2 – Planning Strategy 1), 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 Point Douglas Regional Trail 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*)

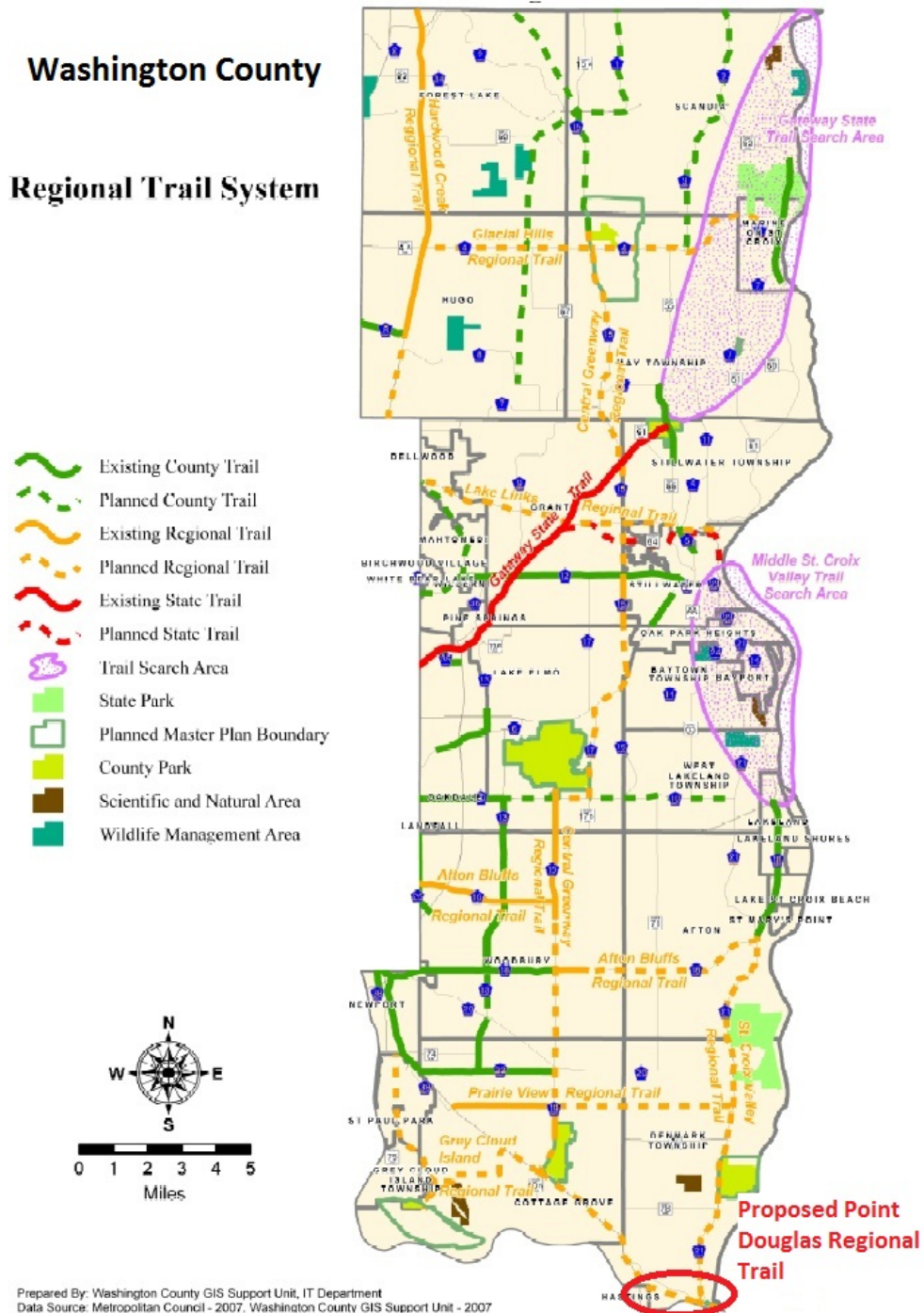
Minnesota Statute 473.313, Subdivision 2 authorizes the Metropolitan Council to review, with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, master plans for the regional parks system. Plans are reviewed for their consistency with the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council 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 through Denmark Township in southern Washington County. This regional trail search corridor was incorporated into the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* as part of the plan update that was adopted by the Council in 2010. The request for the regional trail was based on long

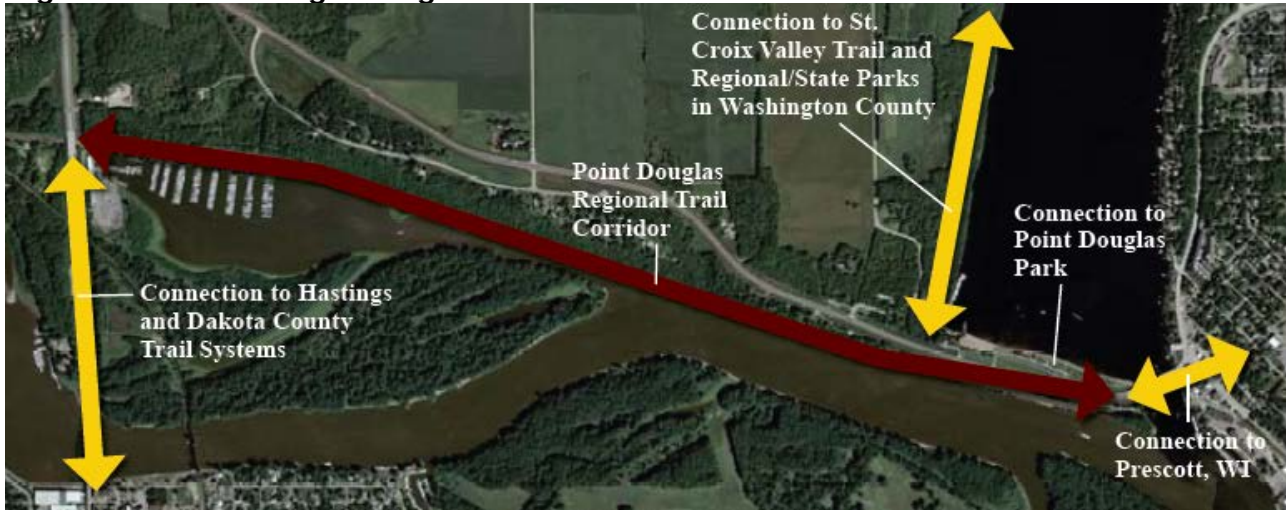
range planning for regional parks and trails as part of Washington County's 2030 Comprehensive Plan.

Figure 1: Point Douglas Regional Trail Location (shown in red)



The Point Douglas Regional Trail will be a destination trail that is approximately 2.5 miles long and will travel along the Mississippi River, near its confluence with the St. Croix River. The trail will provide opportunities for connections to regional trails in Dakota County, the planned St. Croix Valley Regional Trail, Point Douglas County Park, and to trails in Prescott, Wisconsin. See Figure 2 for the trail location and its connections.

Figure 2: Point Douglas Regional Trail and Connections



MASTER PLAN REVIEW ANALYSIS

The 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan requires that master plans for regional destination trails address the eleven items listed below.

1. Boundaries and Acquisition Costs

The Point Douglas Regional Trail begins at Point Douglas Park at the east end. The park is being designated as a regional trailhead as part of this master plan. From the regional trailhead, the trail will cross under an existing bridge of Highway 10 and then will initially follow the south side of the Highway 10 corridor until it ties into an old railroad bed right-of-way currently owned by Washington County, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: East Half of Point Douglas Regional Trail



The trail will leave the former railroad corridor for its final 1,000 feet, traversing up a sideslope to connect with a planned trail at Highway 61, which will cross the Mississippi River and provide a connection to downtown Hastings.

Figure 4: West Half of Point Douglas Regional Trail



Washington County currently owns much of the property needed for the regional trail, including the regional trailhead as well as the former railroad right-of-way. At the west end of the trail corridor, approximately 7 acres of land will need to be acquired to traverse the slope and make the connection to the planned trail along Highway 61, as shown in Figure 5. The tax assessed value of this property is \$71,000.

Figure 5: Proposed Land Acquisition on west end of Point Douglas Regional Trail



At the east end of the trail corridor, the acquisition of approximately 3.9 acres of land owned by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) is necessary, as shown in Figure 6. The master plan states that as of 2011, it is expected that the property would be transferred from MnDOT to Washington County at no cost.

Figure 6: Proposed Land Acquisition on east end of Point Douglas Regional Trail



2. Demand Forecast

Washington County estimates that initial annual visitation to the Point Douglas Regional Trail will be in the 100,000 to 150,000 range, based on comparisons with other similar trails in the region. The master plan cites Metropolitan Council studies, which indicate that 50 percent of regional trail users live within three-quarters of a mile from the trail (the core service area) and 75% percent of users live within 3 miles of the trail (the primary service area). Many of the users will be local residents, but with trail connections to Dakota County and Wisconsin, it is expected that the trail corridor will also draw users from a larger geographical area.

3. Development Concept

Point Douglas County Park is a long and narrow park of approximately 10 acres that sits at the confluence of the Mississippi and St. Croix Rivers. The park includes a picnic area, beach and fishing platform and is a former wayside rest stop. The planned St. Croix Valley Regional Trail and the Point Douglas Regional Trail will connect within the park, therefore, the park is being incorporated into this master plan as a regional trailhead. The master plan includes proposed improvements to address aging and outdated facilities and to accommodate new trailhead needs. See Figure 7 for the proposed development.

Figure 7: Proposed Development-Trailhead



Trailhead Development: A trailhead center is proposed to replace the two existing restroom facilities. It will include a new restroom/changing building, sitting area and information kiosk. This trailhead center will also serve the existing beach, which will remain. The 1,000 square foot building will be built above the typical flood elevations to avoid flooding concerns, which are a current problem.

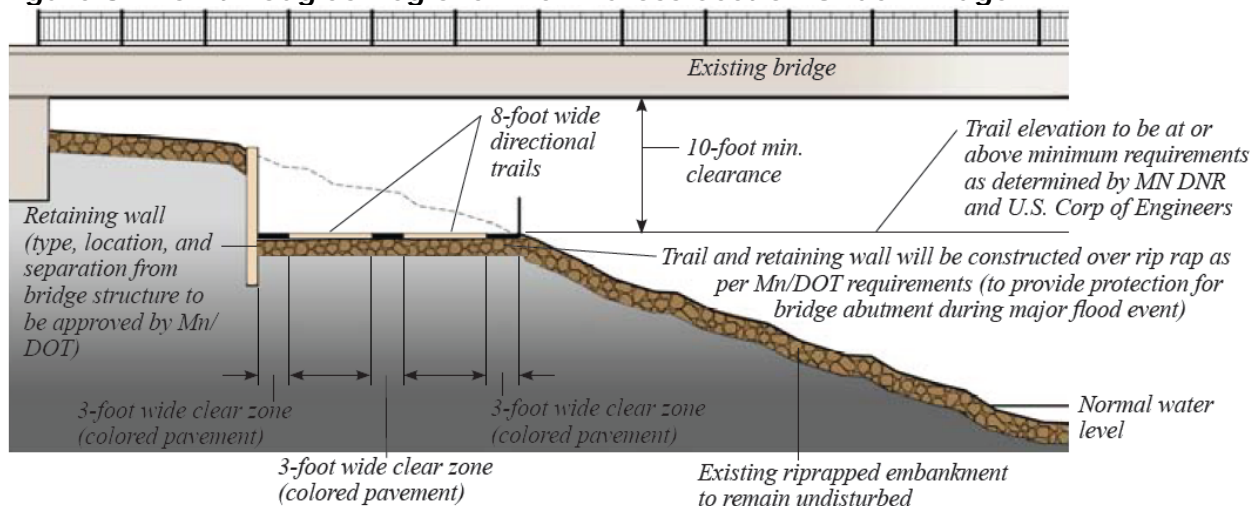
The existing parking lot will be redesigned to provide more parkland along the shore of the St. Croix River. The repositioned parking lot will also provide more room for the regional trail to be located closer to the shoreline and avoid trail crossings of the entrance and exit driveways, which will be safer for users. The parking lot redesign will also address existing draining and grade issues.

The existing restroom facilities are served by holding tanks, which are pumped weekly during the summer season. Ways in which to deal with sewage treatment were examined during the master planning process. The master plan proposes replacing the holding tank system with a septic system if an appropriate location on the site can be found. An optimal area for the septic system is on the south side of the parking lot, which is as far away from the shoreline and main recreational uses as possible. Key factors that will affect this approach include the suitability of soils, relative cost and visual impact to the trailhead. If a septic system is not reasonably feasible, a holding tank system will be used. The tanks will be sized in order to reduce the frequency of pumping during the season of use. If the septic system is not an option, the parking lot can be shifted even further south to provide more parkland between the lot and the shoreline.

The beach area will remain relatively unchanged. Improvements include addressing drainage issues from the parking lot and providing an accessible walkway from the trailhead center to the beach. Worn-out picnic tables and other site amenities such as grills and benches will be replaced over time.

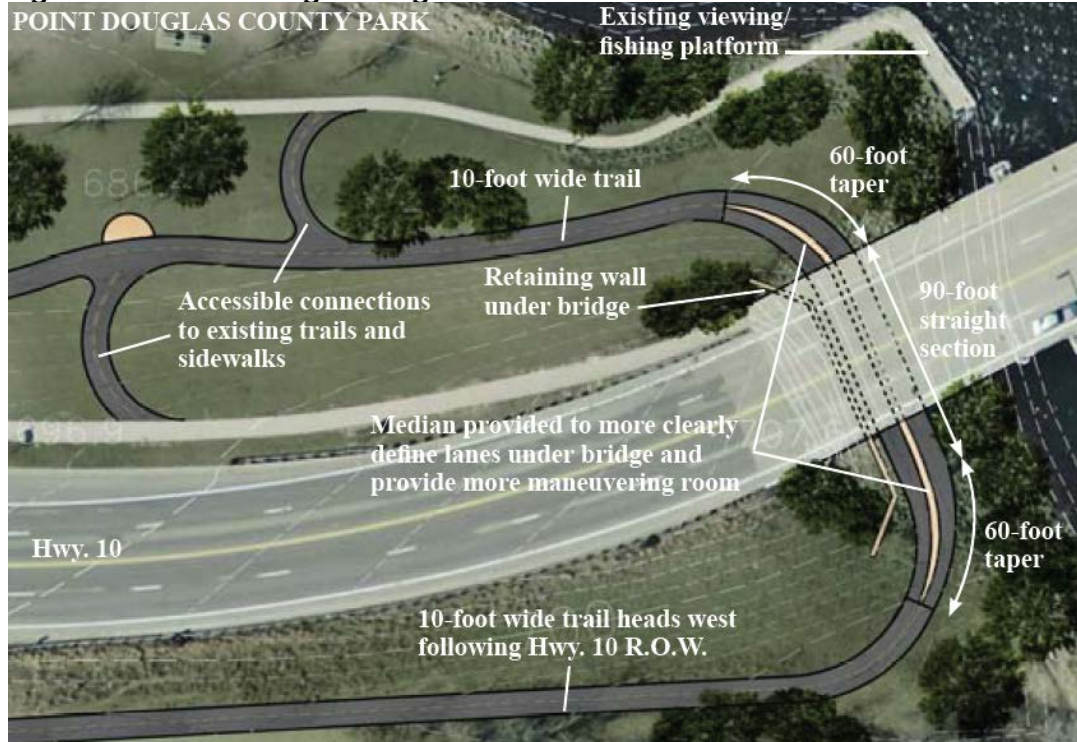
Trail Development: As the trail leaves the trailhead area, it will travel under the existing bridge structure of Highway 10 to get to the south side of the highway. The intent is to keep the trail deck elevation as high as possible to minimize springtime flooding while still maintaining at least a 10 foot clearance under the bridge deck. (See Figure 8)

Figure 8: Point Douglas Regional Trail—Cross Section Under Bridge



Once under the bridge, the trail heads west within the Highway 10 right-of-way for approximately 2,400 feet where it will start to follow the former railroad corridor. Development of the trail under the bridge and within the highway right-of-way will require coordination with the MnDOT.

Figure 9: Point Douglas Regional Trail—East Section



Once the trail reaches the former rail bed, it travels west virtually uninterrupted for 2.5 miles until it approaches Highway 61. This portion of the trail is more visually appealing and less noisy than the segment along Highway 10. There are active rail lines to the south between the regional trail corridor and the Mississippi River; however, the tracks are at a lower elevation and are not visually distracting unless a train is passing through. The steep slopes and vegetation between the trail and the railroad tracks provide a buffer for most of the corridor. Limited grading will be needed in this area. The most important concern will be to ensure proper drainage.

There are three adjacent residential properties to the trail on the east end of the former railroad corridor. The master plan includes provisions to lower the trail grade and add vegetation to provide buffering. Further west from the adjacent residential properties, the bluff line gets higher and homes are farther away from the trail corridor. The topographic change and existing vegetation provide a visual screen to the trail. Wide open views of the Mississippi River and backwater areas are available along this segment.

At the west end of the regional trail corridor, there is an approximately 30 foot grade differential between the elevation of the railroad bed and Highway 61. Therefore, the trail will leave the former rail corridor and traverse the slope for approximately 1,000 feet to reach the planned trail along Highway 61. This allows the trail to maintain a less than five percent slope for accessibility and avoids the need for a costly ramp structure. Acquisition of the seven acre parcel described in the Boundaries and Acquisition Costs

section is needed to make this connection. See Figure 10 for the route of this trail segment.

Figure 10: Point Douglas Regional Trail—West Section



Trail amenities will be concentrated at the regional trailhead on the east end of the corridor. Site amenities along the trail will be limited to select bench locations to take advantage of views of the Mississippi River. Signage and wayfinding will also be provided. The estimated development costs of both the trailhead and the regional trail are \$2,583,000, as shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Point Douglas Regional Trail Proposed Development Costs

Item	Estimated Costs
Trail Development	\$1,251,000
Trailhead Development	\$815,000
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$2,066,000</i>
Contingency (15%)	\$310,000
Design/Engineering (20%)	\$207,000
TOTAL	\$2,583,000

4. Conflicts

The surrounding land uses are primarily residential. During the master planning process, interested property owners were given the opportunity to meet with the design team to review site-specific concerns. Six individual landowner meetings were held, with the following issues being discussed:

- Those with homes in close proximity to the trail do not want a trailhead near their homes and prefer that access be limited to the east and west ends of the trail corridor.

- They felt that signage and wayfinding information was important to emphasize trail rules and dissuade users from inadvertently accessing private property.
- Desired amenities along the trail include benches and overlooks, as long as they are placed away from the areas where homes are adjacent to the trail corridor.

There are three residential properties that are adjacent to the trail corridor. The master plan focused on providing a buffer to maintain a sense of separation for the benefit of the property owners as well as the trail users.

5. Public Services

The master plan states that no additional public services such as roads or sewers will be needed to accommodate the regional trail.

6. Operations

Washington County will be responsible for maintaining the regional trail corridor. Public use of the trail corridor is controlled by Washington County Ordinance 174, which addresses the regulation of:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| • Public use | • General conduct |
| • Parkland operations | • Recreational activity |
| • Use of motorized vehicles | • Parking |
| • Protection of property, structures and natural resources | |

Kiosks and signs will inform the public about the trail rules and regulations. The Washington County Sheriff's Department will respond to emergencies and criminal complaints.

The general maintenance program includes: vegetation management to maintain an acceptable clearance zone and preserve the integrity of the trail surface; asphalt repair to maintain the quality of the trail surface and preserve its lifetime; and seal coating to cover minor surface imperfections and asphalt deterioration from weathering and oxidization. Routine maintenance also includes sweeping to remove loose sand and debris on the trail surface. A routine inspection schedule will also be followed throughout the year to identify maintenance needs and priorities. The maintenance facility at nearby St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park functions as an equipment and supply storage area and will support maintenance activities for the trail.

Washington County estimates that annual operations and maintenance costs for the Point Douglas Regional Trail will be \$15,600.

7. Citizen Participation

The public process for development of the master plan began in April 2011 with the formation of Technical Advisory Committee. The first open house was held in May 2011 to obtain public input before any formal trail planning started. Onsite meetings with adjacent property owners were held to review site specific issues and concerns. After the trail alignment was planned, another public open house was held in September 2011. Five public meetings were held from September to April 2012, including meetings of the County Parks and Open Space Commission, the Denmark Town Board and the Washington County Board.

These meetings were well attended and public comments were extensive. Overall, support for the trail was strong and the majority of people in attendance saw that the trail would add value to the area, both in its connections to Hastings and Prescott, as well as in diminishing the illegal activity occurring along the undeveloped corridor.

8. Public Awareness

Washington County promotes awareness of its regional parks and trails through the following means:

- Brochures and maps
- Website
- Displays at the County Fair
- Articles in the County Commissioner newspaper
- News releases in local newspapers
- Social media

9. Accessibility

The regional trail will be developed at a grade less than 5 percent, making it accessible and meeting the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines. The paved trail and trailheads described in the master plan are located and planned for accessibility for all visitors. Washington County does not charge a fee for use of its trails.

10. Natural Resources

Historically, the area surrounding the trail corridor was ecologically diverse, ranging from aquatic zones along the Mississippi and St. Croix Rivers to upland oak savanna and prairie along the bluff. Over time, the natural resources features have declined and virtually no remnant native vegetation remains within the immediate area. Natural systems in the area were previously disturbed in development of a railroad bed. Washington County's goal for the corridor is to prevent further decline, and over time, work to restore and manage natural resources along the regional trail corridor.

The natural resources protection strategy focuses on managing stormwater associated with the trail in an ecologically sustainable way and aligning the trail to minimize disruption to natural systems. Natural infiltration will be the primary approach to manage stormwater, including the use of infiltration basins on both sides of the trail. Since the trail primarily follows the former rail bed, determining an alignment to minimize disruption to natural systems was not a large challenge. On the west end where the trail will traverse a wooded sideslope to make the grade transition to Highway 61, Washington County will work with project engineers to minimize disruption to mature trees and vegetation. The costs for stormwater management and site restoration are included in the total estimated development costs.

11. Stewardship Plan

A multi-phased stewardship program will be used, with a strategy of segmenting the trail into basic management units where natural areas can be sequentially restored. The stewardship program will focus on four priorities:

- Minimizing potential for erosion during construction
- Buffering adjacent ecological systems
- Enhancing the quality of natural resources within the corridor
- Enhancing the natural scenic qualities of the corridor through native planting

Washington County will manage natural resources stewardship for the regional trail corridor as part of a larger program associated with the parks, trails and natural areas throughout the County. The annual stewardship costs associated with this trail corridor are estimated to be up to \$5,000. A key focus will be controlling invasive species.

REVIEW BY OTHER COUNCIL DIVISIONS:

Community Development – Environment and Surface Water Management (Jim Larsen 651-602-1159) – No concerns.

Environmental Services – Sewers (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – No concerns.

Transportation Planning (Ann Braden 651-602-1705) – No concerns.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. The Point Douglas Regional Trail Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies.
2. The estimated costs to implement the master plan are \$2,654,000, which includes \$71,000 in estimated acquisition costs and \$2,583,000 in estimated development costs. Washington County acquired the former railroad corridor prior to approval of this master plan; therefore those acquisition costs are not eligible for reimbursement through the Metropolitan Council.
3. Approval of this master plan does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. Future acquisition and development funding based on this master plan would be done through the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) or the Land Acquisition Opportunity Fund. Council action is required to approve the CIP and to approve specific grants to Washington County.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Metropolitan Council approve the Point Douglas Regional Trail Master Plan (Referral No. 50018-1).