

**METROPOLITAN COUNCIL
390 N. Robert Street, St. Paul, MN 55101**

**MEETING OF
METROPOLITAN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION**

July 10, 2012

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT: Barb Schmidt, Tony Yarusso, Bob Moeller, Jeff Lee, Daniel Shlaferman, Carrie Wasley, Seyon Nyanwleh, Emily Johnson Piper,

ABSENT: Wendy Wulff, Metropolitan Council Liaison to the Commission

CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chair Wasley called the meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order at 4:00 p.m. Tuesday, July 10, 2012.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA/MINUTES

Commissioner Moeller motioned and Commissioner Piper seconded to approve the July 10, 2012 Agenda. **The motion carried.** Commissioner Schmidt motioned and Commissioner Lee seconded to approve the June 5, 2012 minutes.

PUBLIC INVITATION:

None.

BUSINESS

Point Douglas Regional Trail Master Plan, Washington County - Jan Youngquist, Planning Analyst-Parks

Youngquist gave a presentation outlining the master plan for Point Douglas Regional Trail submitted by Washington County for review and approval as outlined in the materials provided. This master plan describes the alignment and associated development costs. The trail is along an abandoned railroad right of way and provides a link from the end of the St. Croix Valley Regional Trail east to Point Douglas County Park and Prescott, Wisconsin and west to Hwy. 61 where it links to a bridge crossing over the Mississippi River to Dakota County and regional trails in the City of Hastings. The total estimated cost to develop the trail and related trailhead facilities at Point Douglas County Park is \$1,019,000.

Piper asked how the trail will run across the rivers. Youngquist noted that Highway 10 to Prescott has an existing bridge and noted that the bridge going to Hastings on Highway 61 is currently being rebuilt (using Federal funding).

Nyanwleh asked why several departments within the Met Council offered 'no comments'. Youngquist explained how master plans are routed to technical reviewers throughout the agency, each specializing in a different area, i.e., transportation, environmental services, to look for potential impacts to Council Systems, i.e., stormwater management. When there are no potential impacts, they have 'no comments'.

Yarusso asked how long a trail is required to be in order to be designated as 'regional'. Youngquist responded that there is no length requirement. There are other criteria, however, such as connections.

Yarusso asked why Washington County has only proposed this portion of the trail in the master plan at this time. John Elholm, Washington County Parks explained that the St. Croix Valley Trail was planned for in 2000 and the section going to the northwest will require more extensive planning. He noted that the alignment of this portion has not been determined yet. Yarusso asked if it would become an amendment and added at a later time. Elholm stated this is a possibility.

Shlaferman made a motion and it was seconded by Moeller to recommend that the Metropolitan Council approve the Point Douglas Regional Trail Master Plan (Referral No. 50018-1).

Chair Wasley called for a vote. **The motion carried.**

2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan Amendment - Jan Youngquist, Planning Analyst-Parks

Youngquist discussed the amendments and reviewed the process and schedule as outlined in the materials provided. She began with the proposed system additions including the Minnetrista Regional Trail Search Corridor and the Intercity Regional Trail Corridor. She then discussed the policy clarification, where language was erroneously omitted from the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. Youngquist also discussed proposed minor revisions – considered 'housekeeping changes'.

Yarusso asked about the historic Cedar Avenue bridge crossing. Jonathan Vlaming, Three Rivers Park District explained that a multi-agency examination of the Cedar Avenue Bridge is being done. He noted that it cannot be rehabbed. If it is to be reconstructed, it would need to be done so in a way the replicates its current historical form which would be very expensive. The issue is funding and what is really needed.

Nyanwleh asked why the amendments should be approved if decisions haven't been made yet. Youngquist explained that this is not a request for funding. It is just a request to consider adding these trails to the system. This is why they are called 'search corridors'. By having them in our parks policy plan, we are saying go ahead and prepare a master plan.

Moeller made a motion and it was seconded by Piper to recommend that the Metropolitan Council adopt the amended *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

Chair Wasley called for a vote. **The motion carried,** with Nyanwleh abstaining.

Update on Analysis to Eliminate Local Match for Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grants, Change Maximum Grant Amount and Refine Grant Eligible Costs - Arne Stefferud, Acting Manager—Regional Parks and Natural Resources Unit

Stefferdud gave a presentation based on a request from the Commission at their June 5th meeting to prepare tables illustrating the amount of past Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grants that have been awarded sorted by park agency and by MPOSC District. Regional park agencies have also submitted lists of possible acquisitions that would occur in the next two fiscal years to illustrate potential demand for grants. He noted that he will be meeting with regional park agency staff on this issue on July 11, therefore no consensus recommendations are being proposed at this time.

Moeller asked about the timing and current requests. Stefferud stated that it would obviously be in an agency's best financial interest to wait. The downside to that being it will take time and noted that there is a public hearing process that must be followed so the new rules would not be adopted until late in 2012.

Moeller asked if we could retro the new rule to past grants. Stefferud stated we could not.

Lee clarified that the state currently does not require a local match. Stefferud indicated this is correct but the state does require a match of Metro Council bonds.

Information Item: Annual Use Estimates of the Metropolitan Regional Parks System for 2011 - Jan Youngquist, Planning Analyst-Parks

Youngquist gave a presentation on the Annual Use Estimates of the Metropolitan Regional Parks System for 2011. Every year, the Metropolitan Council estimates the amount of visits to each regional park and trail unit based on random sample count data based on sample schedules prepared by the Metro Council staff and from other data provided by the regional park implementing agency that manages that park or trail unit. The annual visit estimates for each park implementing agency are used as one factor in formulas used to determine the amount each park implementing agency receives in grants for capital improvements and operations/maintenance purposes. Youngquist reviewed the report provided. She noted that there were nearly 44 million visits to the regional park system in 2011.

Wasley asked, regarding page 29 of the report, what the 'dips' in people going to parks was. Youngquist explained that the estimates are done over four years to try to eliminate factors that would influence the counts, i.e., weather, gas prices, etc. She indicated that there is no way of knowing for sure why there were dips.

Yarusso asked, regarding page 32, if it would be possible to get a breakdown of local vs. non-local visits by district. Youngquist stated that the local and nonlocal visits are delineated by implementing agency, not by MPOSC district. To break it down by district would not result in reliable information.

Nyanwleh asked how use estimates are determined and how winter is estimated. Youngquist explained the process, as outlined in the staff report.

Wasley asked how top activities were determined. Youngquist explained the survey process done back in 2008 in which survey respondents stated what activities they did.

Wasley asked about increased biking in the Twin Cities and if it is represented. Youngquist stated they are really focused on trails in our long term planning and explained the difficulty in 'stopping' folks that are biking. Many are commuters and on a schedule so they do not wish to stop and talk with folks doing the counts/surveys.

Piper asked if the counts include people just driving on the parkways. Youngquist stated they are not and explained that the counters are given very specific instructions on who is counted.

Nyanwleh asked for more current information on why folks are using our parks. Youngquist explained that this survey is only done every 10 years because it is very labor intensive and expensive to do. She noted that of late the minority usage has been discussed and there has been talk about establishing some focus groups to look at this.

Wasley commented that a Hmong man once told her that he thought the regional parks were private and did not know they were open to the public. She suggested signage in multiple languages.

Wasley asked if there is a visit per acre. Youngquist stated they could do this calculation but cautioned that park reserves only utilize 20% of their acreage for recreational development, so this type of thing

would skew the numbers. Wasley asked if the Commission could get this type of information along with rules, such as the rules for park reserves.

Information Item: Presentation on RiverFirst Plan, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board - Bruce Chamberlain, Assist. Supt. for Planning, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

Chamberlain gave an overview of the RiverFirst Plan being done by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB). He noted that the plan covers roughly 5.5 miles of the river corridor. He discussed key elements based on 1999 Above the Falls Master Plan and stated this is becoming the basis for master plan updates, i.e., the upcoming Above the Falls Master Plan update.

Chamberlain stated it is a comprehensive park vision for the river corridor from downtown to the northern city limits. He noted that there are seven priority efforts and the estimated cost is \$175 million. He discussed modeling the Central Riverfront.

Chamberlain stated this is an 'umbrella initiative' and discussed the themes:

- Pride and Design
- Interact with Water
- Bring the Kids
- Come in the Winter

Chamberlain discussed the components of the plan – trail loops/knot bridges. He discussed the 'downtown gateway' from the Library to the river (2 blocks over). He then discussed the current status of projects and the RiverFirst Initiative.

Piper asked about the Plymouth Avenue bridge and if they were planning construction with the city. Chamberlain stated they are working with the city.

Piper asked what happens to the Port of Minneapolis. Chamberlain stated that the City of Minneapolis is thinking about closing the port (Upper Harbor Terminal). The MPRB is expressing their interest in this land.

Moeller discussed the book *The White City*, which talks about a grand vision. He stated this is needed in order to start a project and complimented Chamberlain for the work that has been done on this plan.

REPORTS

• **Chair** – None.

• **Commissioners** – Yarusso brought up his concern with Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) limiting water access points to prevent and manage aquatic invasive species. He specifically asked about limiting access of canoes and kayaks.

Debra Pilger, MPRB discussed action taken by the MPRB in June. She noted that there will be a task force put together and noted these actions are only for 2012.

In 2012, the MPRB will spend nearly \$3 million on initiatives to prevent or manage invasive species. Effective July 13, 2012 all boats, watercraft and watercraft equipment launching from the public boat launches on Lake Calhoun, Lake Harriet and Lake Nokomis will require inspections for aquatic invasive species. Sailboats moored on the lakes, or canoes and kayaks entering the water from storage racks or other access points *are not affected*, and watercraft may exit the lakes through the public boat launch at

any time without penalty. She gave the following schedule in which boat launches will be open and inspectors will be present through September 30, 2012:

- Monday–Thursday: 6–10 a.m. and 5–9 p.m.
- Friday, Saturday, and Sunday: 6 a.m.–9 p.m.

Yarusso stated that good communication regarding access points that are not affected is important.

Yarusso asked about Wirth Lake. Pilger discussed the current development at Wirth Lake and the involvement of a Citizen Committee. She noted there has been discussion of closing the lake to motorized traffic and therefore closing the boat launch. She noted people will still be able to use canoes and kayaks.

Yarusso asked about working with the DNR. Pilger stated that she does foresee working with them in the future.

Yarusso suggested soliciting feedback from the region, not just Minneapolis. Pilger discussed the public outreach/interface that will be taking place.

Nyanwleh asked if we know where the aquatic invasive species are coming from. Pilger stated that they come from many, many sources, however, the DNR has identified trailered boats as the number 1 source and this is why they are focusing their efforts in this area.

• **Staff** – Stefferud reported that on Thursday, July 12 he and Council Member Wendy Wulff will be interviewed about the regional parks system, along with Three Rivers Park District Associate Superintendent Boe Carlson. The public affairs program, hosted by the Richfield League of Women Voters, appears on cable access Channel 15, serving Bloomington, Richfield, Edina, Eden Prairie and St. Louis Park.

Discussion topics will include legislative history of the regional parks system, respective roles of the Council and the 10 implementing park agencies, financing, relationship to state and local parks, park visitation, public appreciation of parks and natural areas as revealed in surveys, and availability of more information about the system. The program will air at least five times in August, and the Council will receive a copy of the program.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was moved to August 14 (due to National Night Out); however, staff now has a conflict and asked the group to move the meeting back to August 7. The Commission agreed to move it back. The next meeting will be August 7, 2012 beginning at **3:00pm**. Meet at Reidell Mansion at Anoka County Riverfront Regional Park for orientation and to begin tour of Anoka County regional parks and trails along the Mississippi River. **Tour bus departs at 3:15 p.m.** Tour ends at Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park and business meeting begins at 4:30pm at the Visitor Center.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandi Dingle
Executive Assistant
Community Development