

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL
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DATE: July 25, 2012
TO: Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission
FROM: Jan Youngquist, AICP; Planning Analyst-Parks (651) 602-1029
SUBJECT: Information regarding criteria for regional parks system facilities

This information is in response to a request from Vice Chair Wasley regarding the “rules” or criteria for regional parks system facilities, based on the presentation of the *Annual Use Estimate of the Metropolitan Regional Parks System for 2011* report at the July MPOSC meeting.

The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* defines four major components of the regional parks system, including regional parks, park reserves, regional trails and special recreation features, as described below:

Regional Parks

Areas selected for regional parks should contain a diversity of nature-based resources, either naturally occurring or human-built. The recreational quality of a regional park is measured by the presence or absence of outstanding resources and the ability to provide adequately for a wide range of natural resource-related recreational opportunities. Access to water bodies suitable for recreation – such as swimming, boating and fishing – is particularly important and most of the regional parks are focused on lakes, rivers or streams.

A regional park should be large enough to accommodate a variety of activities, preserve a pleasant natural aspect, and buffer activity areas from each other and from surrounding areas. This is interpreted as 200 to 500 acres of land. Occasionally, because of the quality of the resource, an exception may be made and a regional park may be as small as 100 acres. Experience has shown this to be the minimum size acceptable for the range and type of activities expected to be accommodated.

Component	Regional Park
Use	Area of natural or ornamental quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation such as picnicking, boating, fishing, swimming and camping uses.
Service Area	3-5 communities
Size	200-500 acres (100 minimum)
Site Attributes	Complete natural setting contiguous to water bodies or watercourses where possible.
Site Location	Where natural resource occurs—particularly water.

Park Reserves

Park reserves, like regional parks, are expected to provide for a diversity of outdoor recreational activities. The major feature that distinguishes the park reserve from a regional park is that the reserve is also intended to provide, protect and manage representative areas of the original major landscape types in the metropolitan area to permit appreciation and enjoyment of the natural resources that influenced the region's development.

Park reserves are substantially larger than the parks because they are to contain a diversity of natural resources with adequate space for protection and management of natural resources and for the pursuit of compatible outdoor activities. The minimum size for a park reserve is 1,000 acres, but larger park reserves are desirable. To establish and maintain an uncompromised sense of nature and protect high quality natural resources, at least 80 percent of each park reserve should be managed as wild lands that protect the ecological functions of the native landscape. This would permit up to 20 percent of a park reserve to be developed for compatible recreational activities.

Component	Park Reserve
Use	Area of natural quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation such as viewing and studying nature, wildlife habitat, conservation, picnicking, hiking, boating, swimming, camping and trail uses.
Service Area	County, multi-county area
Size	1,000+ acres; sufficient area to encompass the resource envisioned for preservation.
Site Attributes	Diversity of unique resources, such as topography, lakes, streams, marshes, flora, fauna.
Site Location	Where natural resource occurs.

Regional Trails

Trail corridors are intended to provide for recreational travel along linear pathways throughout the metropolitan area. They are selected to follow natural or linear features that traverse areas of scenic appeal and/or historical, architectural and developmental interest while assuring that the trail treadway will have no adverse effect on the natural resource base. The regional trails are selected to pass through or provide connections between elements in the regional parks system. The parks and park reserves perform the important function of providing places for parking, comfort facilities and safe water supplies. Trails also are selected for their ability to intersect with local trail networks, with the regional trails functioning much like regional highways that interconnect with more local arterials and collector streets. The regional trail network, especially in the urban areas, serves as commuting routes for bicyclists. As the regional trail and transit systems expand, opportunities to provide connections between these forms of travel should be explored. People can ride the bus or light rail to access a regional trail, and conversely, people can use regional trails to access transit.

Regional trails can also be developed as greenways, or linear parks, where the trail itself is a destination. These greenways typically include wide corridors that provide opportunities for improving wildlife habitat, protecting natural resources, and providing recreational opportunities.

Component	Regional Destination Trail
Use	Area developed for one or more varying modes of nonmotorized recreational travel such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing and canoeing.
Service Area	The entire metropolitan region
Size	Sufficient corridor width to protect natural resources and can safely accommodate trail use. Sufficient length to be a destination itself, or to serve as a link between regional parks system units.
Site Attributes	When feasible, off-road trails that utilize human made and/or natural linear resources such as utility corridors, railroad and highway rights-of-way, stream/river valleys, or at the edges of forest or prairie. On-road trails are acceptable when off-road trails are not feasible.
Site Location	Preferably adjacent to high quality natural areas. The trail treadway should be placed where it has no adverse impact on the natural resources base.

Component	Regional Linking Trail
Use	Area developed for one or more varying modes of nonmotorized recreational travel such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing and canoeing.
Service Area	The entire metropolitan region
Size	Sufficient corridor width to protect natural resources and can safely accommodate trail use. Sufficient length to link regional parks system units.
Site Attributes	When feasible, off-road trails that utilize human made and/or natural linear resources such as utility corridors, railroad and highway rights-of-way, stream/river valleys, or at the edges of forest or prairie. On-road trails are acceptable when off-road trails are not feasible.
Site Location	Linkages between components of the regional parks system. When feasible, linking trails should attempt to connect to population, economic and social centers along its route. The trail treadway should be placed where it has no adverse impact on the natural resources base.

Special Recreation Features

The special recreation features, which are called for in state legislation, are defined as regional parks system opportunities not generally found in the parks, the park reserves or the trail corridors. Special recreational features often require a unique managing or programming effort on the part of the regional park implementing agency.

Component	Special Recreation Features
Use	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 site of historic or archaeological significance.
Service Area	Local—municipalities, townships. Regional—metropolitan area.
Size	Specific standard applicable to desired feature.
Site Attributes	Appropriate to particular special feature.
Site Location	Where advantageous for the special feature and the overall park system.