

Information Item

# **Discussion of Public Comments received on the 2018 Update to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan***

October 1, 2018

Special Joint Meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space  
Commission and the Community Development Committee



# Overview of today's discussion

- Summary of what was heard in the public comment period
- Review of issues where the public comments suggest remaining tension and direction to staff to inform revisions to the draft plan
- Brief overview of consensus themes from the comments
- Timeline of next steps

# Who we heard from:

During the public comment period (July 26 to September 27, 2018), the Council heard from over 100 unique individuals and organizations:

- 15 individuals commented at the September 17 public hearing
- 8 regional park implementing agencies submitted written comments
- 1 local elected official submitted written comments
- 10 organizations submitted written comments
- 84 residents submitted written comments
- 7 residents left comments on voicemail

# First, some gratitude...

*I would like to commend all who have worked on this plan as well as the Plan Update. It is thanks to your work that we currently, and our descendants will later, enjoy such wonderful amenities. Thanks to your forward looking vision we rest assured that generations to come will be able to get away from the day-to-day urban life and take advantage of green space.*

*It takes courage and hard work.*

*Thank you!*

*Lorenzo Tunesi*

# Comment Themes for Today's Discussion

- Allowable Recreation Activities
- Balancing Natural Resource Conservation and Facility Development
- Coordination with Transportation Planning
- Priorities for 2019 System Additions
- Equity Toolkit Use and Project Prioritization



# What the plan says on Allowable Recreation Activities

Background: Chapter 7 Recreation Activities and Facilities (pp. 91-99)

- Strategy 1 calls for a balance of conservation and recreation
- Primary activities include activities that date to the inception of the Regional Parks System such as bicycling, hiking, camping and picnicking
- Secondary activities should complement the primary use.
- Strategy 2 describes a range of recreation opportunities from developed to rustic

# Comments on allowable “secondary activities”

Eliminate language for expansion of undefined recreation amenities (*Anne Shadrick, Farmington Resident*)

The question is not WHAT activities should be included or excluded, but HOW activities are appropriately designed into the natural character of the regional park. (*MPRB staff*)

The County supports the establishment of clear definition and performance criteria for secondary or support facilities in coordination with park agencies, other partners, and stakeholders (*Dakota County*)

# For example of what vs. how: should regional parks allow and fund skateparks?

City of Skate ... would ask that this 2040 Plan will include language to support and FUND skateparks within regional parks. Skateparks should be designed to complement the landscape and with the possibility to use as water management. Two Minneapolis regional parks (Nokomis & Bde Maka Ska) already have community approved skateparks in their master plans that will serve youth from throughout Minneapolis and the metropolitan area. A 2013 MPRB survey, with 1400 respondents, found the #1 location for a desired skatepark was within the Bde Maka Ska regional park. Skateboarding as an Olympic sport is an equity activity that serves a youth demographic that needs to be encouraged to use and discover our regional parks. *(City of Skate)*



## **Discussion:**

**How should allowable activities be defined?  
By whom? With what specificity?**

# What the plan says on natural resources

## Background:

- Chapter 2 calls on the Regional Parks System to “Provide a comprehensive regional park and trail system that balances the conservation and restoration of natural resources with the provision of nature-based recreational opportunities.”
- Chapter 5 outlines that Master Plans must include a plan for natural resource management
- Chapter 7 calls for balancing conservation and recreation
- Chapter 8 describes funding priorities for the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan

# Comments on the tension between natural resources and development

We would like to see the Legacy funds used more for conservation of natural areas, and less for bricks and blacktop. Nature should be supported for its own existence. Currently too much money is being spent to accommodate humans to the detriment of nature.

*Thomas M Hazen, Saint Paul resident*

The region's shifting demographics suggest reexamining the types of activities allowed in the Regional Parks System. All active recreation is being pushed into local parks. Look for opportunities to provide for active recreation in the Regional Park System.

*Emmanuel Ortiz, Minneapolis resident*

# Comments on the tension between natural resources and development

I read with dismay the plans to expand new construction of infrastructure and adding more asphalt (with chemical treatments) throughout our park system. Why can't wild stay wild?

*Pewter1of6, resident*

This draft of the plan would enable expanded development in the park system that would arguably marginalize and degrade the system's natural green infrastructure.

*Jeff Strate, resident*

The Met Council should consider more bike facilities, bike skills parks and off-road trails to augment current regional parks and help with their interconnectedness.

*Michael Torres, resident*





# Changes in the language

“Activities in regional parks must be tied to the natural resources of the parks, but not adversely impact them.”

-- 2015 Plan, as adopted

“Activities in regional parks should balance the conservation and restoration of natural resources with the provision of recreational opportunities”.

-- 2018 Plan, as drafted

???

-- 2018 Plan, as proposed for adoption

**Discussion:**  
**How should the plan balance  
natural resources and development  
in regional parks?**

# What the plan says on developing trails

## Background:

- Chapters 3, 4 and 5 describe regional trails as “recreational opportunities along linear pathways throughout the metropolitan area”
- Chapter 7, Strategy 1 identifies biking as an allowable use
- Chapter 7, Strategy 3 calls for equitable use of regional parks and trails by all our region’s residents across ability
- Chapter 7, Strategy 4 encourages coordination of bicycle and pedestrian facilities between Regional Parks System and the transportation system

# Concerns expressed in public comments

## Public Comments

- Developing trails changes peaceful nature experience, endangers wildlife and natural resources, and fragments ecosystems
- Critical to establish safe place for all to ride including people of all abilities



# Comments on the tension between developing regional trails and natural resources

“I sincerely hope your policies regarding regional parks makes a priority for species recovery...biking trails can be developed in other areas but nurturing Blanding turtles cannot.”  
*(Janet Nash – Minneapolis Resident)*

“Metro trails in parks give commuters access to a low cost, low stress network that most people prefer. Additionally, as our metropolitan area works towards equity, it is critical that our park systems emphasize trails that give people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds a place where they can have access to free physical activity as a part of daily lives.”

*(Nick Mason, MNBike.Org)*

“I would support revisions that... eliminate any potential for transportation planning within regional park boundaries.”

*(Wendy Paulsen, Stillwater Resident)*

**Discussion:**  
**How should the plan balance developing trails and protecting natural resources?**

# What the plan says on Priorities for 2019

## System Additions

### Background:

- Chapter 4, Siting and Acquisition : Park units have varying acreage requirements (i.e., regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features including bridging facilities)
- Chapter 4, Strategy 2: Geographic balance or proportionate distribution tied to population distribution patterns shall be a consideration when exploring system additions.
- Chapter 4, Strategy 4: New regional trails must serve a regional audience and provide connections between regional parks, park reserves, and regional trails without duplication of an existing trail

# Comments on “geographic balance”

System additions based on geographic balance and population distribution has merit but is not exclusive to other considerations such as: 1) establishing destination parks and trails outside population centers that protect high quality natural resources and provide high quality nature based recreation and 2) providing access to regional parks and trails to a developing and lower population regional park system. *(Dakota County)*

We support the strategy of geographic balance and would look forward to better articulating what geographic balance means, including how it aligns with population distribution and access to a range of recreational opportunities. *(Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission)*



## **Discussion:**

**Should the language around priorities for 2019 system additions be sharpened around “geographic balance”?**

# What the plan says on use of the equity toolkit

## Background:

- Chapter 8, Strategy 4: “The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and Council will use the equity toolkit to review, assess and, on occasion, shift the order of the prioritized list of capital projects submitted to the state for state and regional bonds and other funding sources as appropriate and allowable, not including the Parks and Trails Legacy projects.”

# Comments on the use of the equity toolkit

The ability to reprioritize projects is of great concern to Anoka County. At the time of action, the Metropolitan Council may not have been aware that projects submitted to the Metropolitan Council for funding have already gone through a significant vetting process and been approved by the County Board of Commissioners through the Five-Year Capital Improvement Budget and the Parks Department Ten-year Capital Improvement Plan. A change or shift in priorities for the submitted projects will render the existing County Board action useless and require further County Board action thus delaying the overall approval process (*Anoka County*).

The Ramsey County Parks & Recreation Commission supports maintaining and strengthening the language in the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan regarding the Equity Toolkit... Furthermore, the Ramsey County Parks & Recreation Commission recommends establishing comprehensive guidelines, instructions and support (such as training and mentoring) for how the Equity Toolkit is expected to be used by implementing agencies, noting that the Metropolitan Council may reprioritize project if the toolkit is not used effectively (*Ramsey County Parks & Recreation*).

# Comments on the use of the equity toolkit

...I am concerned about the unannounced change in direction by the council involving the wording that allows the council to prioritize projects so that there is a "stick" or penalty that can be applied for failure to implement equity practices. I believe that negative reinforcement or creating pathways to punishment do not foster the open, thought provoking discussions needed to overcome serious issues like lack of equality and access. An equity lenses is important and needed unless it is used as a magnify glass that only burns what it is aimed at. (*Barb Hedstrom, Resident*)





**Discussion:**  
**What language should the plan include around equity and the use of the equity toolkit?**

# Changes in the language

“Strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region’s residents, such as across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability.” -- 2015 Plan, as adopted

“Promote equitable use of regional parks and trails by all our region’s residents, such as across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability.” -- 2018 Plan, as drafted

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2018 Plan, as proposed for adoption

# Additional Themes

- Broad support for increasing the equitable use of the system
- Broad support for developing the Equity Grant Program in 2019
- Interest in a future discussion about the interest earnings on Regional Parks System funds
- Concerns about transparency of Draft Policy Plan process
- Interest in long-term sustainable financing of the Regional Parks System
- Interest in defining “measurable outcomes” for the Regional Park Policy Plan goals and strategy

# Next steps

- November 8: Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission recommends adoption
- November 19: Community Development Committee recommends adoption
- November 28: Metropolitan Council adopts the 2018 Update to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*

