

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Report

For the Community Development Committee meeting of December 21, 2020

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of January 13, 2021

Subject: Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Corridor Master Plan Amendment, City of Saint Paul, Review File No. 18118-2

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the City of Saint Paul's Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Corridor Master Plan Amendment, including the supplemental information provided in the submittal memorandum dated October 26, 2020.
2. Require the City of Saint Paul, prior to initiating any new development of the regional trail corridor, send preliminary plans to the Environmental Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division.

Summary of Committee Discussion/Questions

Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst, presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission at its meeting on December 3, 2020.

Council Member Atlas-Ingebretson and Commissioners Moeller, Harris, and Taylor expressed their support for the proposed action.

Chair Yarusso noted that the details of how some of the proposed recreational uses are designed and implemented will be critical to keeping with the character of the Regional Parks System. He cited the pump track/bike skills course as an example. He added that some of the proposed uses (e.g., the Creator's Game) seem to be a better fit with typical, traditional regional system uses than others (e.g., futsal).

Commissioner Taylor noted the quality of the City of Saint Paul's community engagement efforts and that the City is designing for what is perceived as missing in the community and region. He added that if a futsal facility were implemented, hundreds of families would use it.

Commissioner Peichel noted that some of the proposed uses in the plan raise questions about differentiating regional versus local components of the outdoor recreation system, and asked whether the legislature should provide guidance to more clearly delineate what's allowed in regional units.

Council Member Atlas-Ingebretson expressed appreciation for the state's tradition of balancing the leadership and guidance of elected and appointed officials and citizen-based bodies, which helps to ensure that the people of Minnesota have a voice in matters that impact their lives. She suggested the Commission, in partnership with the full Council and regional park implementing agencies, has the ability to determine allowable uses in regional units.

Chair Yarusso suggested this and other topics could be discussed further as part of an evolving 2021 workplan.

The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission voted unanimously to approve the proposed actions.



Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: December 3, 2020

For the Community Development Committee meeting of December 21, 2020

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of January 13, 2021

Subject: Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Corridor Master Plan Amendment, City of Saint Paul, Review File No. 18118-2

MPOSC District, Member: District G, Anthony Taylor

Council District, Member: District 13, Chai Lee

Policy/Legal Reference: Minnesota Statutes § 473.313; *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, Chapter 5, Planning Strategy 1; Chapter 7, Recreation Activities and Facilities strategies 1-3

Staff Prepared/Presented: Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst (651-602-1361)

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

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1. Approve the City of Saint Paul's Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Corridor Master Plan Amendment, including the supplemental information provided in the submittal memorandum dated October 26, 2020.
2. Require the City of Saint Paul, prior to initiating any new development of the regional trail corridor, send preliminary plans to the Environmental Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division.

Background

In 1992, Warner Road, which used to travel immediately adjacent to the Mississippi River near Lowertown in Saint Paul, was realigned to its current location, creating public riverfront park land. The large crescent-shaped open space that resulted from the relocation of Warner Road is Lower Landing Park, now part of the Samuel H. Morgan Regional Trail corridor.

In 1995, the regional trail corridor was formally established and was originally called the East Bank Mississippi River Regional Trail. A trail corridor master plan was created and adopted in 1999 to guide the development of the missing segments of the regional trail.

Now complete, the 5.9-mile-long Samuel Morgan Regional Trail provides a continuous non-motorized, bicycle and pedestrian connection between Hidden Falls-Crosby Farm Regional Park to Battle Creek Regional Park and the Grand Round North Regional Trail (Figures 1 and 2).

The trail connects natural landscapes with urban settings along the Mississippi River and offers a variety of user experiences and amenities including overlooks, plazas and parks. The trail alignment runs through land along the Mississippi River that is significant to the history and spirituality of the Dakota people.

The current master plan amendment is the result of a planning process performed in 2018 to renovate the 21.4 acres of regional trail corridor land that is Lower Landing. This segment traverses the area between the intersection of Sibley Street and Warner Road and Highway 61 and the

Warner Road pedestrian bridge, a distance of approximately 0.6 mile (Figure 3). All of recommendations in this master plan amendment focus on improvements to the portion of the Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Corridor that coincides with Lower Landing Park.

Since this master plan amendment proposes new uses for enhancing the regional trail corridor, it addresses the requirements of Chapter 7 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* for including secondary recreational uses or support activities that complement the primary trail use. The secondary recreational opportunities are intended to strengthen equitable use of the trail corridor by residents of the region and local area. The City has provided a memo including supplemental information on these secondary recreational uses (Attachment 1).

Rationale

The Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Corridor Master Plan Amendment is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, particularly Planning Strategy 1; Recreation Activities and Facilities strategies 1-3; and other Council policies, as described in the Analysis section below.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Corridor Master Plan Amendment advances the Thrive outcome of Livability by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, which enhances quality of life in the region. The master plan also advances the Thrive outcome of Equity by tying preferred development concepts to community engagement outcomes that are tailored to underrepresented groups.

Funding

The total cost to implement the regional trail master plan amendment is estimated at \$9,260,000 for development. Since all the land within the trail corridor is already in public ownership, no land acquisition is needed; therefore, there are no acquisition costs anticipated.

The master plan amendment notes “adding the recommended amenities... will increase the operations and maintenance of this park considerably.”

In 2019, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Outdoor Recreation grant program provided funds to the City of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation for the implementation and construction of some recreation amenities.

Known Support / Opposition

The City of Saint Paul approved and adopted the Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment at its September 23, 2020 meeting.

Figure 1: Regional Trails Open to the Public (2018) and Samuel Morgan Regional Trail location

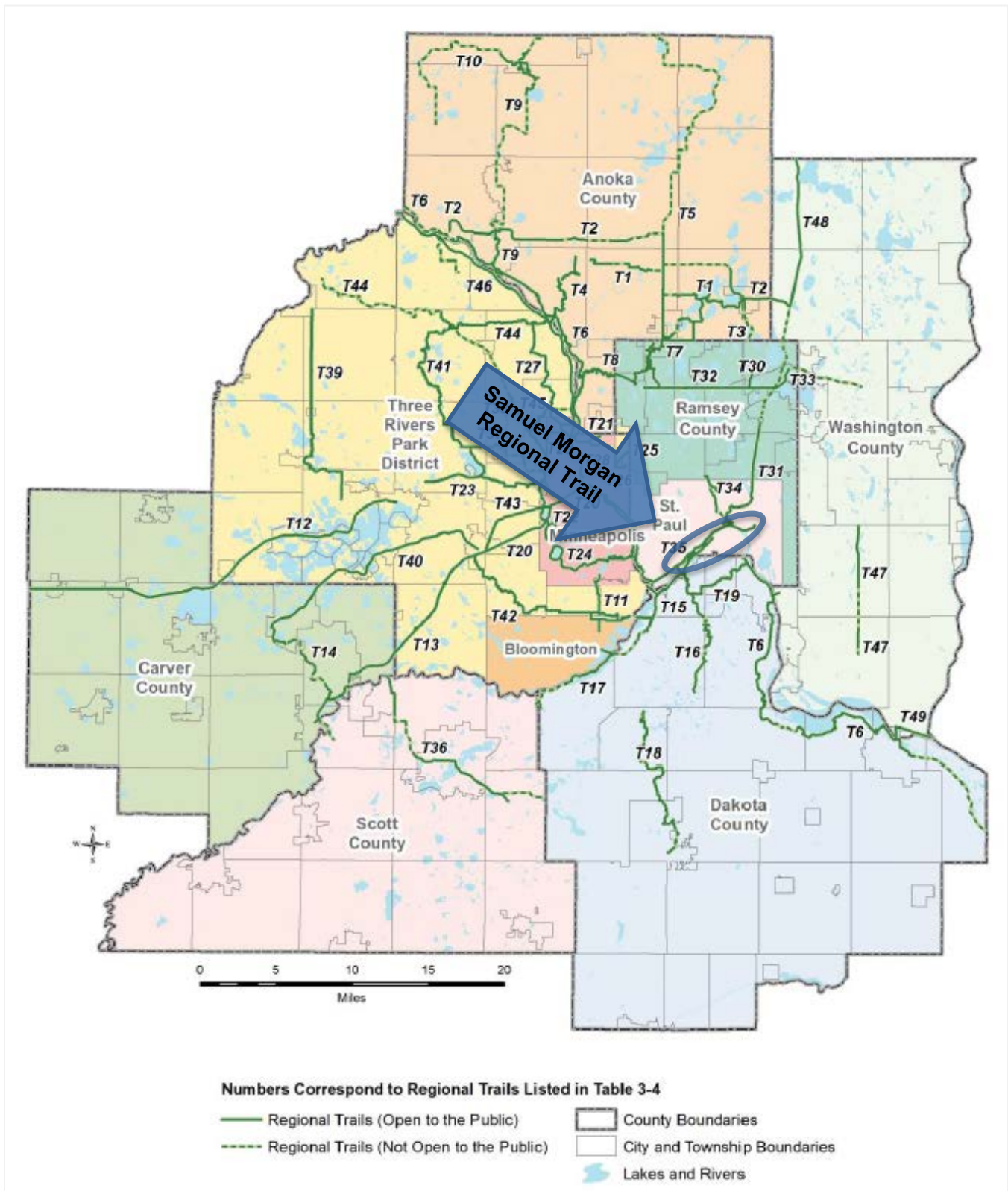


Figure 2: Regional Parks System: City of Saint Paul, Ramsey County and Samuel Morgan Regional Trail location

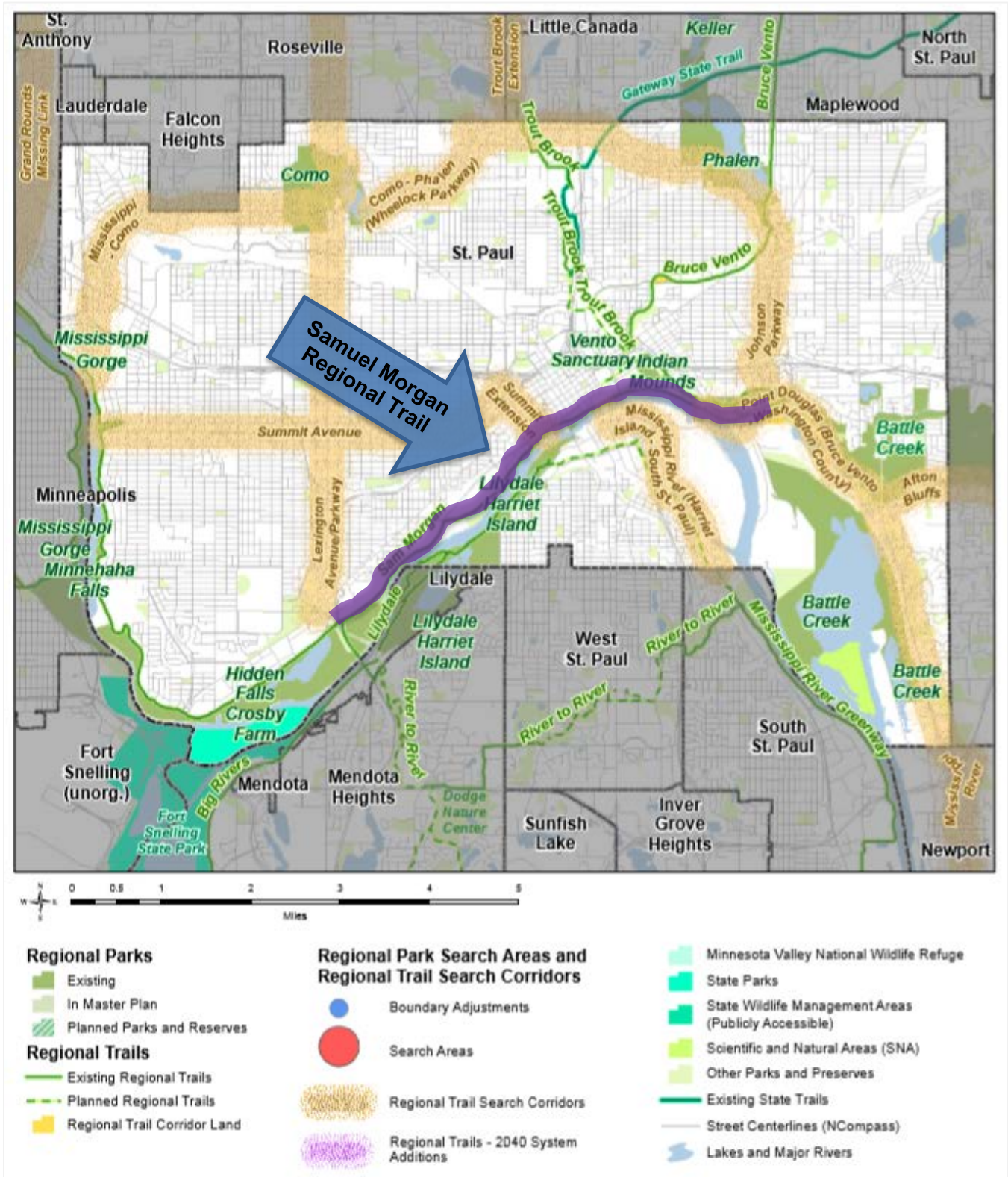


Figure 3: Lower Landing and the Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Corridor (MPA figure, pg. 46)



Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that master plans for linking regional trails address 12 items: boundaries and acquisition costs, demand forecast, development concept, conflicts, public services, operations, partner engagement, public engagement and participation, equity analysis, public awareness, accessibility, and Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area. The following analyzes the master plan against those requirements.

Boundaries and Acquisition Costs

After the realignment of Warner/Shepard Road, the trail was redeveloped. The total regional trail corridor land in this area is 21.4 acres.

Since all the land within the trail corridor is already in public ownership, no land acquisition is needed; therefore, there are no acquisition costs anticipated.

Demand Forecast

Based on the Metropolitan Council Annual Use Estimate of the Metropolitan Regional Park System for 2019, the Samuel Morgan Regional Trail received over 555,300 visits and an additional 89,000 visitors for special events.

Lower Landing and Samuel Morgan Regional Trail corridor land primarily serves downtown Saint Paul residents and regional trail users. The proposed regional trail corridor improvements are expected to enhance the trail users' experience by adding new recreational amenities. The proposed improvements will encourage the use of the trail to access the new and refurbished amenities and decrease the need to access the site by car.

Based on community input from families living in the Upper East Downtown neighborhood (10-minute walk from Lower Landing), there is a high demand for active recreation facilities in the area. Downtown parks are categorized as passive urban parks and do not provide amenities to meet the recreational demand of younger and underrepresented residents.

It is anticipated that younger residents will be drawn into the trail corridor to walk, bike, or run, and will use the proposed amenities to play, with sweeping views of the Mississippi River and the Saint Paul

skyline. Visitor origin data from the Council's 2008 Regional Parks and Trails Survey indicate that regional trails in the metropolitan area are used most by people who live nearby or can reach the trail via a short bicycle trip or drive.

The Landing

The Landing is located adjacent to the trail corridor and Lower Landing Park. Historically named Lambert's Landing, it is likely to be the entry point for excursion cruises bringing regional, state, national and international visitors to the city. It provides temporary mooring for visiting vessels and towboats. The use of this facility is expected to increase with planned Mississippi River-based Viking River Cruises beginning in 2022.

A renovated Lower Landing and Samuel Morgan Regional Trail corridor would complement this service offering a gateway for regional visitors and a destination for residents.

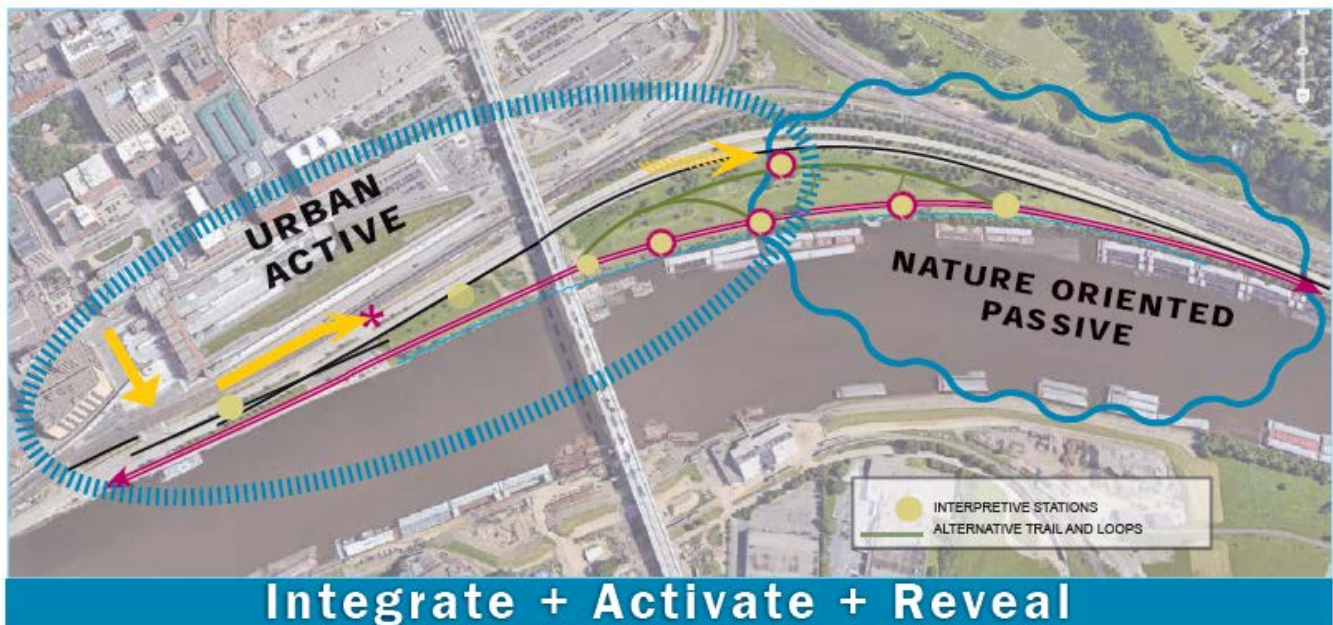
Development Concept

Renovating Lower Landing and the Samuel Morgan Regional Trail corridor would enhance the functionality of the area and encourage more activity in an unprogrammed area of downtown Saint Paul's riverfront.

Based on the result of community input and the assessment of site conditions, opportunities and constraints, three main goals were identified to guide site organization and programming (Figure 4):

1. **Integrate** the regional trail with the adjacent context, spatially and socially, to improve and provide connections to the adjacent and age-diverse communities.
2. **Activate** the regional trail corridor through the addition of trail-oriented activities while respecting and keeping the existing tranquil natural settings along the river corridor.
3. **Reveal** the inherent history of the area by taking advantage of the location of the trail alignment and its connection to relevant historic sites and the river.

Figure 4: Integrate + Activate + Reveal (MPA Figure 9.1)



Four projects were identified as priorities to start activating Lower Landing and the regional trail corridor to make it more welcoming and accessible:

1. Access and park entryway plaza improvement (medium-high priority): The park entryway plaza is on the river side of the existing parking area along Warner Road. The master plan amendment recommends redesigning the plaza to make it more inviting and welcoming to people using the regional trail corridor. The entryway should be enhanced as a resting point or a meeting location with informational signs, benches, and water fountains. This work was completed in the fall of 2020. A portion of the park's primary access – from Sibley Street to the recently renovated plaza – still needs upgrades and improvements.
2. Parking lot expansion (medium-high priority): The master plan amendment recommends expanding the parking space to the east of the existing parking lot. The additional space would serve people using the new and refurbished recreational amenities in the regional trail corridor that are proposed in this master plan.
3. Natural surface trail (medium-high priority): The existing paved regional trail – split into separate bicycle and pedestrian paths – currently travels adjacent to the river. A gravel trail is recommended to provide access to other parts of the regional trail corridor. The alternate trail would run to the top of the slope and along existing ponds thereby providing improved opportunities for bird watching and nature walks. The trail would provide the option to loop back to the entryway plaza.
4. Off-leash dog area (high priority): Compared to the rest of the City, Lowertown residents have high dog ownership. Moreover, dog parks can activate underutilized open spaces and bring neighbors and visitors together. The master plan amendment proposes an approximately one-acre fenced area for off-leash dogs, which would feature shade structures with benches and drinking fountains for people and dogs.

As noted, these projects were all identified as either “high” or “medium-high” priorities in the master plan amendment. Other high priority projects include:

- Resurfacing the existing regional trail from the parking lot to the east side entrance of the regional trail corridor.
- Replacing the lighting along the trail.

Other medium-high priority projects include:

- Improve and provide open multiuse lawns for potential uses including disc golf, native lacrosse, and large events.
- Provide additional drinking fountains and potentially a mister water feature along the trail.
- Restore wetlands: Enhance with wetland species and remove invasive species.
- Rehabilitate or replace riprap along the river's edge.
- Add signage and interpretive artistic features to nodes along the trail to increase awareness of the trail, ecology, and river.

The master plan amendment also identified medium and low priority projects. Medium priority projects include:

- Add futsal court with fence and required equipment.
- Add three half basketball courts.
- Build a pump track course that can be used by bicyclists and skaters. Explore different type of structures or material that best fit the location and is suitable in the flood fringe.

- Add non-traditional play structures and elements that fit into the landscape.
- Study the feasibility of providing a restroom facility or portable bathroom shelter.

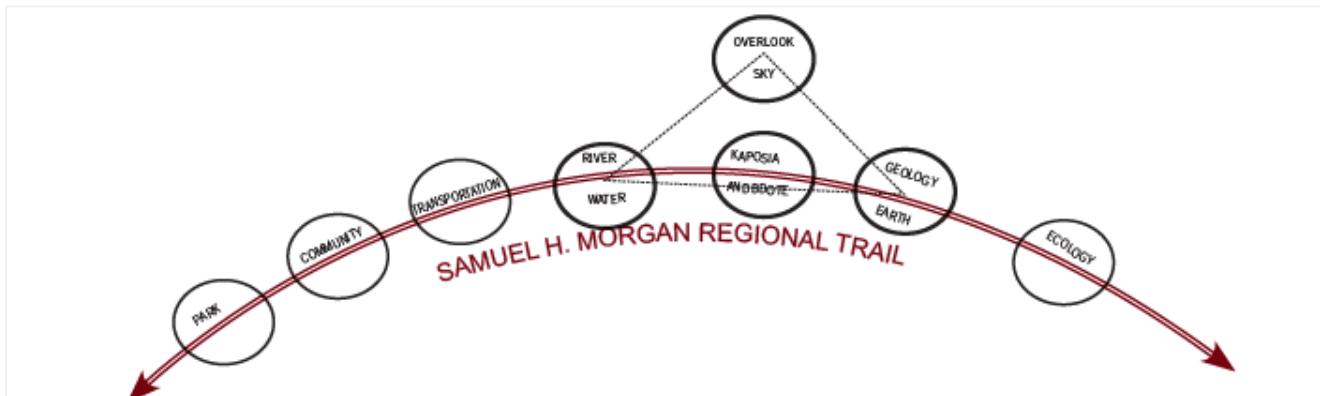
Low priority projects include:

- Add an overlook structure to be integrated with the landscape and connected to the natural surface trail, with potential access from Warner Road.
- Add various interpretive resting nodes with seating, landscaping and shade.
- Add a fitness trail course.
- Add educational features that focus on stormwater and creeks.

As referenced above, the master plan amendment also recommends a series of interpretive resting nodes (Figure 4) in the regional trail corridor. Community input suggests some existing trail users feel the trail is too long and leaves them feeling isolated, or there is a lack of information about the trail and its surroundings. Others suggested there should be more resting points. The interpretive resting nodes would break the regional trail in this area into different spaces that would tell the history of the area and communities that used it. The nodes would be equipped with interpretive features such as public art, signage and benches.

It is recommended that all the interpretive nodes are developed based on one unifying concept and that they are related to each other. The interpretive themes suggested through community engagement are: Bdote (history of the region as told from an indigenous perspective), Working River, Land-Geologic History, History of Immigration, Transportation, and Water-Land-Sky (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Interpretive Resting Nodes concept (MPA figure, pg. 49)



As referenced above, some non-traditional recreation activities and facilities are recommended in the regional trail corridor and have been highlighted in the master plan amendment including pickup game courts (futsal courts, half basketball courts), a pump track, and open lawns for multipurpose activities, including native lacrosse (takapsicapi). The memo provided by the City of Saint Paul (Attachment 1) also provides additional detail into these recommended activities and facilities.

Pickup game courts fulfill the need for active sport amenities that can integrate within the regional trail corridor, and the master plan amendment recommends two futsal courts and three half basketball courts. Futsal – a fast-moving version of soccer on a smaller pitch – and basketball are two of the most popular activities that the implementing agency parks staff see young people playing in passive parks without adequate facilities. These activities are inclusive social games for all genders and races, and community input suggests these and other active sport amenities are desired in this space.

Community input points to a need for more active sport amenities in the downtown area and that people would prefer to access these amenities on foot or by bike, if possible. It was also noted there is a lack

of activities and appropriate space for young people downtown. Further, activating the regional trail corridor space with more people would make it feel safer.

To assure these facilities are used for pickup games, the master plan amendment suggests developing half basketball courts with three different hoop sizes and backboard heights for people of different ages and abilities. The master plan amendment also proposes two futsal courts, which are a low maintenance field alternative to provide a recreational activity that is more aligned to the regional corridor features.

The master plan amendment also recommends developing a pump track or bike skills course in the regional trail corridor. The pump track could be an independent structure mounted on the ground or it could be designed with dirt or concrete. Adding a concrete surface would expand the use of the track by skaters. The design would be integrated into the existing landscape with relatively close access to the regional trail for a safe transition of bikes and skates to the track. Floodplain design requirements would also be taken into consideration. Please note the final design has not been determined and will be developed in collaboration with stakeholders and partners, as referenced in the Partner Engagement section below, when the project is funded.

In addition, the master plan amendment recommends open lawns for multipurpose activities, including to support community events and an interpretive/educational area to learn about and participate in native lacrosse and related indigenous ceremonies.

Implementing a native lacrosse field was suggested during conversations with members of the Native American community who reside in the Dayton's Bluff neighborhood. They mentioned that people practiced native lacrosse at Indian Mounds Regional Park and welcomed the possibility of having a place to play near their neighborhood. The proximity to the river aligns with the traditional way of practicing lacrosse in the past. However, this suggestion still needs more involved consultation with the indigenous tribes, native lacrosse players, and the local community. The plan proposes to use a flexible open space for a native lacrosse field that, besides providing a space for practicing, would teach about the significance of the game and its cultural connection with the indigenous community.

Since this master plan amendment proposes new uses for enhancing the regional trail corridor, it addresses the requirements of Chapter 7 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* for including secondary recreational uses or support activities that complement the primary trail use.

To fulfill the requirements of Chapter 7: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy, Strategy 1: Balance conservation and recreation, the master plan amendment and October 26, 2020 memo (Attachment 1) describe the proposed activities; how the activities fit within the regional trail corridor and relate to other units of the Regional Park System; and how the activities meet the criteria for recreation activities and facilities. The City has also provided a detailed development design concept, identified potential conflicts and known opposition, and provided documentation of their extensive community engagement process and equity analysis work related to these proposed activities.

The secondary recreational opportunities are intended to strengthen equitable use of the trail corridor by residents of the region and local area.

Conflicts

The regional trail corridor land is on the Mississippi Flood Fringe. In Saint Paul, the Flood Fringe District is one of the city's two Floodplain Management Overlay zoning districts, which are designed to guide floodplain development in order to lessen the adverse effects of floods, and to comply with the rules and regulations of the National Flood Insurance Program. The Flood Fringe District regulates areas

within the flood fringe portion of the floodway. That is, the portions of the 100-year floodplain outside the main river channel but still subject to flooding. Development is normally allowed in the flood fringe provided that residential buildings are placed on fill so that the lowest floor is above the flood protection elevation.

Future development will require regular base maintenance. Flyover limitations from the Metropolitan Airport Commission exist due to the regional trail corridor's proximity to the St. Paul Airport. Finally, the site may be subject to potential critical area regulations put forth by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources because of its location along the Mississippi River. The master plan amendment was reviewed for consistency with the *2040 Regional Park Policy Plan* requirements related to the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area. Please see the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area section on pages 16-17 of this business item for additional detail.

The easement under Lafayette Bridge could also pose a conflict for the master plan amendment's proposed uses. Consideration must be given to the need for access and maintenance of the bridge. This could influence the design of the proposed improvements near the bridge.

Public Services

Utility services are currently provided to the park by the City of Saint Paul for sewer and water and Xcel Energy for electricity. Sewer and water utilities may need to be expanded into the regional trail corridor for the location of a new restroom building at the top of the hill by the new overlook. Rehabilitation of some existing utilities may also be required.

There are currently four large power towers in the park. Besides being an eyesore, they occupy considerable space. In coordination with Xcel energy, the City of Saint Paul would consider relocating three quad base towers to the median and north side of Warner Road on a new single base tower. The relocation of the three towers would allow for the elimination of one quad base tower in the middle of the park.

Operations

The City of Saint Paul operates and maintains Samuel Morgan Regional Trail corridor and Lower Landing Park. The existing maintenance of the park consists of:

- Plowing snow (November - April)
- Salt/sand for ice
- Portable toilet rental
- Mow grass (May-October)
- Minor tree maintenance
- Storm damage clean up
- Flooding damage clean up
- Trash pick up

Adding the recommended amenities in this master plan amendment to the regional trail corridor will increase the operations and maintenance of this space considerably.

The City's Natural Resources program manages all natural areas across the City. The natural resource management plan recommendations would require additional funds in the annual budget for park maintenance.

Also, additional budget would be needed to provide the option for recycling and compost facilities to give visitors the ability to responsibly handle waste generated in the regional trail corridor.

Patrolling of the facilities is provided by the Saint Paul Police Department.

Partner Engagement

The City's Design and Construction team engaged several organizations during the planning process for Lower Landing Park and the Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Corridor. The CapitolRiver Council, Mississippi Park Connection, and Mississippi National River and Recreation Area were part of the Project Advisory Committee. The partners valued the idea of thoughtfully and responsibly developing portions of this underutilized green area by the river.

Lower Phalen Creek Project, an east side Saint Paul organization whose mission is to engage people in honoring and caring for natural places and sacred cultural sites, was also involved. The organization and design team discussed including environmental education opportunities near where the 100-year old stormwater sewer discharges water from Lower Phalen Creek into the Mississippi River. Prior to the development of transportation and freight corridors and industrial uses in the area, the original natural flow of the creek would end at the Mississippi River at Lower Landing.

The design team and Lower Phalen Creek Project also discussed using the eastern portion of the regional trail corridor as a natural transition space to the sacred Wakan Tipi site and Indian Mounds burial site. As discussed in the Development Concept section, this part of the regional trail corridor would be designed to acknowledge the significance of the area to the Dakota people through the use of signage, public art and interpretation.

Other organizations, including the Midwest Skateboard Alliance, provided input on the recommended recreation facilities and activities. Providing adequate space for the activities and associated programs would encourage more people to visit Lower Landing and the regional trail corridor and as a result, would improve the perception of a safer space. This would address the barrier that many under-represented families described as an impediment to using Lower Landing during the community engagement process.

The Capitol River Watershed District and Ramsey County were also involved in the planning process. The City will reengage all these organizations when funds become available to implement the improvements and to potentially partner on strategies outlined in the plan.

Public Engagement and Participation

The City followed the Design and Construction Division's Community Engagement Strategy and developed a plan to engaged the community. The process ensured that the current regional trail corridor users and potential future users were informed of and involved in the planning process.

The residential community of Dayton's Bluff is physically separated from the regional trail corridor by Warner Road, rail lines, and steep bluffs. In addition to the physical barriers, many residents are not currently aware of the regional trail corridor because of a lack of information or because of social barriers. To reach a larger number of community members, the engagement plan included a variety of informal pop-up events.

In addition to pop-up events, a Design Advisory Committee was assembled to help guide the design process for the regional trail corridor. The Committee was made up of City residents and regional trail users and met six times in 2018.

Plans for Lower Landing and the regional trail corridor were developed based on the suggestions, input, and revisions made by the community. For example, as a result of the pop-up events, it became clear that most of the households with children live in Upper East Downtown, 10 minutes' walk from the entrance of Lower Landing. Also, a large community of Somali families live in downtown and do not

currently visit the regional trail corridor but could easily do so. Engagement with these families revealed that new activities and enhanced safety measures (e.g., keeping young children away from the riverbank and the road) are two design opportunities that would encourage more use of the space.

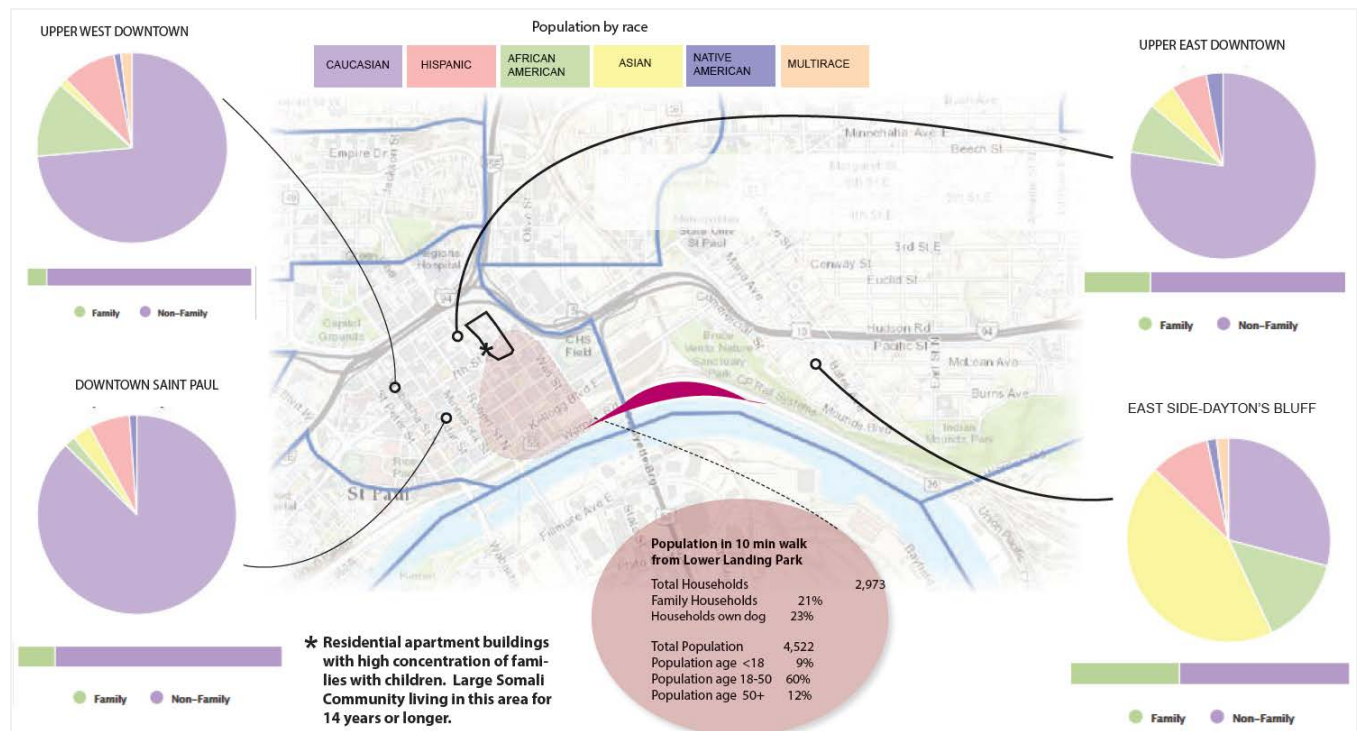
Community members also requested the addition of trails and sitting areas to appreciate the views of the river and nature while kids are using the area for more active recreation.

Equity Analysis

Project Data

The existing Samuel Morgan Regional Trail benefits the different communities it connects along the trail corridor. The trail is used for recreational purposes such as walking, biking, running, and for accessing a variety of urban destinations and regional parks in Saint Paul. Currently, the eastern part of the regional trail is primarily used by Downtown and Lowertown residents and people who work in the area. The demographics of Downtown are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Demographic Analysis (MPA Figure 8.1)



Even though the physical area is considered part of the Dayton's Bluff neighborhood and is close to a neighborhood with many households with families, access to the regional trail corridor from those neighborhoods is difficult. At Lower Landing, the trail corridor is surrounded by Warner Road, rail lines, and steep bluffs. People in Dayton's Bluff will benefit from this section of the corridor once a connection from Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary to the regional trail corridor is built. In the meantime, access from the other side of the bluff is achieved through the trail connection with Indian Mounds Regional Park and through Downtown. Many residents, however, see this as a barrier for those who are unable or are uncomfortable running or biking long distances.

Lower Landing and the regional trail corridor are perceived as isolated from the rest of the urban core. The connection to downtown is still seen as a barrier due to the high-speed traffic on Warner Road along with the lack of information about Lower Landing and the regional trail corridor in this space. The physical barriers and the safety concerns were raised during conversations with the park and trail users

during the community engagement process. This input reinforced the City's intention to reach out to those who are not currently visiting the space but who could potentially benefit from it.

Public Engagement and Participation

To complete an analysis of the current and potential users of the space, it is necessary to look beyond census data and maps. Based on on-site observations, context, and the community engagement process, it was clear that there are people living in the area that have not used the regional trail or Lower Landing due to either a lack of awareness or safety concerns.

The project planning team identified groups that could benefit from the area and what prevents them from using the regional trail corridor. It then engaged them in constructing a vision for the site that better serves and meets their expectations.

During the public engagement process, the project team hosted two meetings with families living in the Sibley Apartment building, a 10-minute walk from Lower Landing and the regional trail. Most of the families interviewed were of East African background. During pop-up meetings at different locations and at the open house, the project team interviewed young people of color who were visiting the nearby parks and were not aware of Lower Landing and the regional trail. Conversations with participants helped the City to identify who would benefit from the improvements to the regional trail corridor.

Downtown Residents

There are many households with families in Upper East Downtown. Most of these residents are of East African, principally Somali, background. All the parks in Downtown are considered passive parks. While residents have adapted those nearby parks for forms of active recreation like soccer or basketball, there is demand for more active recreation opportunities to serve the needs of youth living in the area.

Adjacent Neighborhoods

Another sector that would benefit from improvements to Lower Landing and the regional trail corridor is the area of University Avenue, Rondo, and Frogtown. These nearby places are primarily made up of low-income families with low mobility and limited recreation options. With close access to the Union Depot station on the METRO Green Line and multiple bus stops, people can access Lower Landing and the regional trail corridor via public transit. Improving the park at the proposed location would serve a population that does not have direct access to the river or waterfront.

Regional Users

On a regional level, the addition of more active recreation features to the regional trail corridor would complement other recreation opportunities the regional parks and trails in and around Saint Paul have to offer. Communities in the urban core would become more familiar with the regional network when visiting Lower Landing and the Samuel Morgan Regional Trail corridor for recreation, while people from outside of the urban center would have the opportunity to experience Downtown Saint Paul. The connectivity to other regional and local trail networks would make it easier for communities to experience the benefits of the regional system.

Partnerships

The confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers and the area around Lower Landing is important to the Dakota people. The City has strengthened its outreach efforts with the Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, and indigenous residents in the city.

During the development of the renovation plan for Lower Landing, the Parks and Recreation Department hired a cultural landscape specialist to lead a Cultural Landscape Study with the tribal nations for what is known today as Indian Mounds regional Park, a site visible from Lower Landing. The Cultural Landscape Study's consultation with the tribes helped the City understand the significance of

the area to the Dakota people and to learn the importance of including these groups in any decision making for the land. The renovation plan for Lower Landing and the regional trail corridor provides spaces for interpretation of the land and indigenous history. Maintaining open communication with the indigenous community by including them in the development of implementation projects in this space is strongly recommended.

Public participation outcomes

The City's Parks team started building a connection with the East African communities from Downtown. Meeting in an apartment building lobby with many East African families in residence enabled the engagement with those families that otherwise would be unable to attend a community meeting. The mothers in that building, many of whom did not speak English, felt comfortable coming to the meeting in a location where their children or neighbors could provide translation. Parks materials were translated to Somali.

These families requested safe spaces for their children to be active after school. They were surprised to know there was a wide-open park space so close to their homes. They expressed concerns about having kids running close to the river and asked for safe access to the park. They would also like see additional information about the park and have more natural areas to use while their kids are playing. The activities they preferred were soccer, basketball, and a looping trail for walking.

The Dakota people interviewed during this process requested more information about the history of the site be included in the interpretive signage to be installed, due to its proximity to sacred Dakota sites and the river.

These desired activities and request for more information on Dakota history are directly reflected in the development concept for the regional trail corridor.

Evaluation Summary

The feedback received guided the development of a vision for the park: activation, integration, and revelation. This vision summarizes and addresses the needs and expectations of the community to make the park and trail more accessible and inclusive. The specific input obtained during public engagement combined with the site opportunities guided the development of Park's proposal.

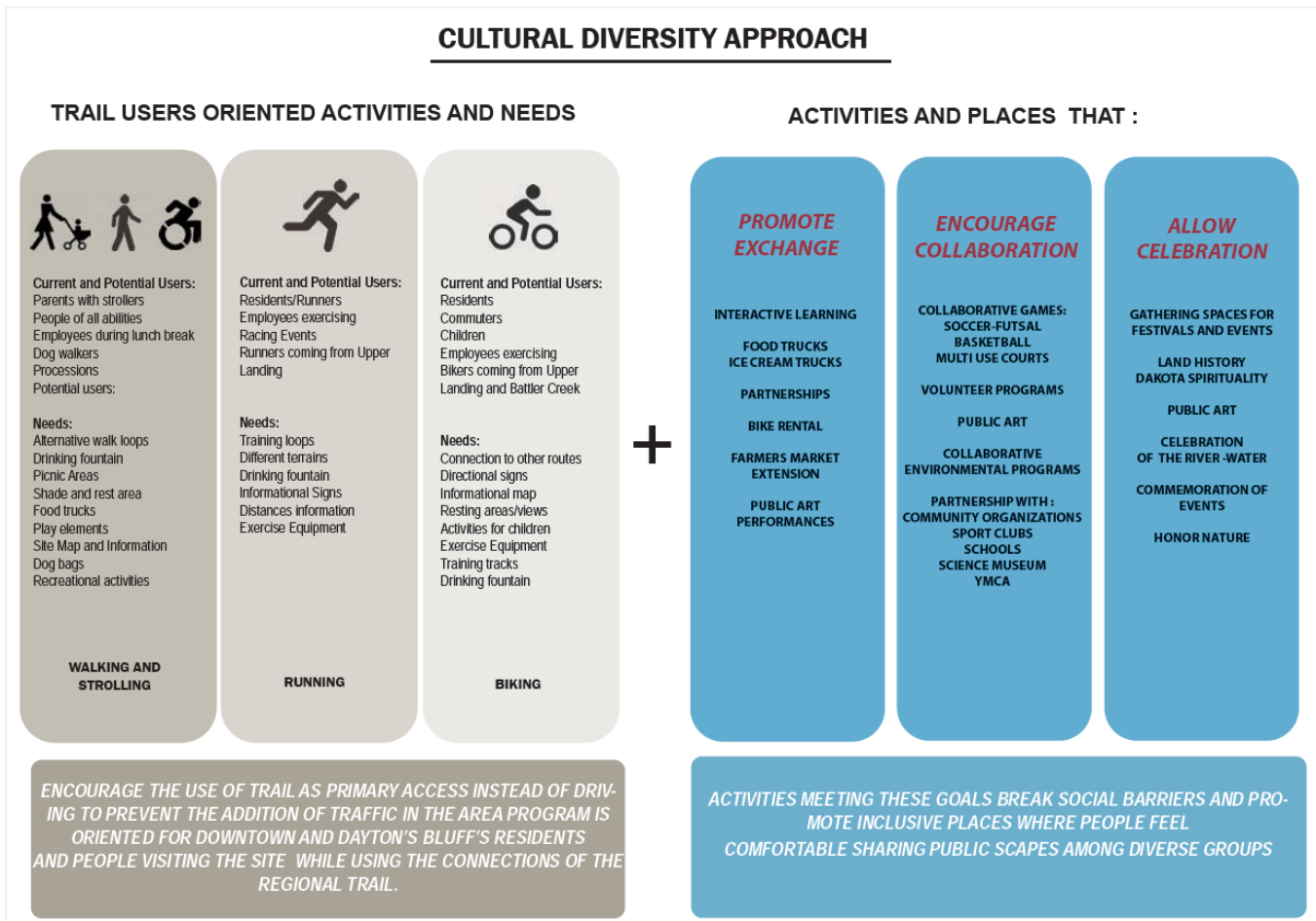
Understanding that the communities who would benefit from the improvements of this park are culturally diverse, it is recommended the implementation of master plan amendment recommendations follow the cultural diversity approach (Figure 7) to assure that the activities implemented bring people from different backgrounds together and prevent any group displacement.

When funding becomes available to implement recommendations, the design team will reach out again to the groups and communities who participated to follow up on the plans and to revise and adapt the proposal.

Diversity and Inclusion Framework

To develop a park program, the needs identified by the community were framed in a multicultural and multi-generational approach. Each proposed activity to be included in the park shall meet the Exchange-Cooperation-Celebration Framework. Activities framed in this context that promote exchanges (information, food, knowledge, skills, etc.), cooperation and that allow for celebration or commemoration are more likely to help break social barriers and make people feel comfortable and safe sharing public spaces (Figure 7). This proposal aims to strengthen equitable use of the trail and trail corridor.

Figure 7: Cultural Diversity Approach and Exchange-Cooperation-Celebration Framework (MPA Figure 8.2)



Public Awareness

One of the master plan amendment's priority projects is to develop a signage network to inform the public about access to Lower Landing and the regional trail corridor. Directional signs will be installed on the trail, streets with pedestrian access, nearby public transportation stations, and in neighboring parks.

Activating Lower Landing will improve public awareness of the Samuel Morgan Regional Trail and vice versa. There are other groups that are interested in expanding their programs and could see opportunities to promote educational, historical markers or add volunteer events to encourage the preservation of the natural environment. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the City's Forestry unit are already planning volunteer events with the community and could potentially partner with Friends of Mississippi River and other similar organizations. These events would bring people to the site and promote the use of the regional trail and its linking destinations.

The City's Park and Recreation Department encourages the support of the Regional Parks System Ambassador Program to strategize awareness events at Lower Landing to promote the use of the regional trail corridor and proposed amenities.

Lower Landing facilities and/or the regional trail may be closed due to a permitted event, high water, or for other reasons. Notices are posted to the facilities websites if closures occur. The park website provides additional information about parks amenities and programs (<https://www.stpaul.gov/facilities/lower-landing-park>).

Accessibility

Any new facilities in Lower Landing and the regional trail corridor in this space will be developed in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Other guidelines, such as the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines will be used when implementing the proposed recreation amenities recommended in the master plan amendment.

Lower Landing is five minutes' walk from the Green Line LRT station at Union Depot. It is the only park by the Mississippi River in downtown Saint Paul that has such direct access to the LRT. The communities that benefit from this connectivity are from neighborhoods along University Avenue like Frogtown, Midway and Rondo.

Community engagement highlighted the issues related to Lower Landing and regional trail corridor access. While this portion of the regional trail corridor offers many opportunities to appreciate and interact with the riverfront, it also has many hard borders that limit access. With Warner Road and the railroad on one side and the Mississippi on the other side, the regional trail has limited access points. Exacerbating the issue, access coming from downtown feels unsafe because of the Warner Road crossing and the unlit and heavily obscured walk under the railroad bridge. The underside of the railroad facility has been abandoned for years and the community indicated the entrance to Lower Landing felt unsafe. More needs to be done, to enhance the appearance and functionality of the gateway. Some ideas, like bike lockers, could be creatively designed to store bikes for commuters using public transit. This area is not under City's jurisdiction. Conversation and partnership with the Union Depot and transit organizations could help advance this effort.

Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area

The Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) is a state-designated land corridor along 72 miles of the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, including 17 miles of river and 26 miles of shoreline in Saint Paul.

The master plan amendment acknowledges the purposes of the MRCCA designation. Per Minnesota Statutes, section 116G.15, subd. 1, the purpose of the designation is to:

1. protect and preserve the Mississippi River and adjacent lands that the legislature finds to be unique and valuable state and regional resources for the benefit of the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of the state, region, and nation;
2. prevent and mitigate irreversible damages to these state, regional, and natural resources;
3. preserve and enhance the natural, aesthetic, cultural, and historical values of the Mississippi River and adjacent lands for public use and benefit;
4. protect and preserve the Mississippi River as an essential element in the national, state, and regional transportation, sewer and water, and recreational systems; and
5. protect and preserve the biological and ecological functions of the Mississippi River corridor.

The MRCCA is an overlay of special regulations to guide planning and development in the river corridor in a way that preserves and enhances the quality of the river corridor.

As required by the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, the master plan amendment also maps the location of Lower Landing and its relationship to the MRCCA designation, and recognizes that the design and construction of trail facilities must comply with the standards contained in Minn. Rules 6106.0010-6106.0180. Further, the plan amendment notes that facilities will be planned, designed and constructed in a manner that protects primary conservation areas and public river corridor views identified by the City of Saint Paul in its comprehensive plan.

The language of the MRCCA chapter within the *2040 City of Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan*, together with the master plan amendment, will serve as the legal guidance for planning, design and maintenance activities within Lower Landing Park and the regional trail corridor. An understanding of what legal protections are in force within the Mississippi River corridor matter in any discussion about future projects at Lower Landing and the Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Corridor.

Consistency with Other Council Policies and Systems

The master plan amendment was reviewed for consistency with other Council policies contained in *Thrive MSP 2040* and the Council's regional system plans. Council staff find the plan amendment consistent with those plans and policies, with additional review comments detailed below.

Community Development – Forecasts (Todd Graham, 651-602-1322) – The Regional Trail Corridor Master Plan and this Amendment are informed by the Council's socioeconomic forecast.

The Park Agency has identified that this segment of Regional Trail will mainly serve the nearby Lowertown, Downtown, and Dayton's Bluff neighborhoods. Demographics of the vicinity are provided as well. Council staff agree with the Park District's assessment that there are nearby populations that will benefit from the park and trail improvement.

Community Development – Housing (Ashleigh Johnson, 651-602-1106) – The Master Plan Amendment (18118-2) and it is consistent with the Council's *2040 Housing Policy Plan*.

The Plan does not require the acquisition of private residential land that could affect single or multi-family housing. However, within a half-mile there are number of affordable housing developments, serving various household income levels at or below 80% of Area Median Income. Many of these developments are in or near Downtown Saint Paul.

There are at least 15 affordable housing developments exist or are being built within 0.5 miles of the Lower Landing segment: Westminster Place, Kendrick Apartments, Salvation Army Booth Brown House, Elders Lodge, Hazelwood Terrace (Ames Lake), Sanctuary at Vandalia, Carleton Lofts, Catholic Charities Midway Residence Project, Union Flats, Raymond Flats, 2700 University, Weyerhauser Project, 808 Berry Place, and Como by the Lake and Greenbrier Project.

This regional trail would directly affect various populations living in these developments - many residents have families with children, are seniors, live with disabilities and/or need supportive services at their residence. Providing and improving access to recreational (and other) amenities such as this regional trail contributes to residents' overall quality of life.

Community Development – Local Planning Assistance (Patrick Boylan, 651-602-1438) – The master plan is consistent with the City of St. Paul's adopted 2040 Comprehensive Plan (Plan) in the Council files. The comprehensive plan identifies the segment between Hidden Falls-Crosby Farm and Battle Creek regional parks and the planned Grand Round North Regional Trail at Johnson Parkway.

The City's planned urban land uses remain compatible with the nature and character of the regional trail. Furthermore, the Regional Trail Corridor Master Plan Amendment as outlined helps implement City plans to develop, support, and program local infrastructure needs, including modes to expand recreational and transportation opportunities.

Thrive MSP 2040 has designated the City as Urban Center and the Master Plan Amendment is consistent with *Thrive* policy of Access, Mobility, and Transportation Choice. Within *Thrive*, cities are directed to develop local policies, plans, and practices that improve pedestrian and bicycle circulation, including access to regional transit services, regional trails, and regional bicycle corridors. The Master

Plan Amendment provides details on connections and physical improvements to existing facilities including Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations. *Thrive* further directs communities to adopt development standards that improve the user experience, circulation, and access for bicyclists and pedestrians. The Master Plan Amendment identifies places for wayfinding and plaza and road crossing infrastructure improvements to enhance the pedestrian and cyclist experience.

It is also noted that the Master Plan Amendment's approach to planning for this facility is consistent with the Metropolitan Council's commitment to the outcome of Equity. Details within the Master Plan Amendment consist of inclusive active sport amenities that were highlighted during the public engagement process by families from immigrant communities and by people of color and by acknowledging the spirituality of Dakota people along the Mississippi River.

Community Development – Stormwater and Natural Resources (Cameran Bailey, 651-602-1496) – The Master Plan Amendment is consistent with Council policies for stormwater and natural resources. Council staff appreciate that the Plan indicates that additional recreational amenities “would be designed with raingardens and bioswales next to them to collect and/or drain storm water into the existing wetlands onsite.”

Regarding the section discussing “Interpretive Native Lacrosse Field in multipurpose lawn” in the Oct. 26 memo and the “Sustainability and Environmental Benefits” referenced, the plan amendment could be strengthened by defining what “sustainable grass” means, and what ecological and maintenance attributes make it sustainable. City staff provided detail in a follow up conversation; Council staff encourage including the information regarding the use of a native pollinator seed mix as part of this section of the master plan.

Environmental Services – Sewers (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – The construction of any new or updating of existing paths, trails, bridges or any other construction project may have an impact on multiple Metropolitan Council interceptors in multiple locations. To assess the potential impacts to our interceptor system; prior to initiating this project, preliminary plans should be sent to Tim Wedin, Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager (651-602-4571) at the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services.

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
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October 26, 2020

Memorandum

From: City of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department. Design and Construction Division

To: Mr. Emmett Mullin, Mr. Colin Kelly. Metropolitan Council

RE: **Submittal of Samuel H. Morgan Regional Trail Corridor Master Plan Amendment**

Subject: Summary and Clarification of Proposed Addition of Nontraditional Regional Recreational Amenities

On October 3 of 2020, the City of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department submitted a master plan amendment for the Samuel H. Morgan Regional Trail Corridor. The master plan amendment addresses the portion of the trail corridor identified as segment 4 in the approved 1999 East Bank Mississippi River Regional Trail Master Plan.

The proposed amendment was informed by community input received during a planning process performed in 2018 for a portion of the corridor known as Lower Landing Park; and updated with the current opportunities and constraints of the site and its context.

The plan proposes improvements to the trail corridor experience by providing safe access, awareness, and recreational opportunities along the Mississippi riverfront. It identifies three main goals that align with the Great River Passage Master Plan: (1) integrate the trail with adjacent context, both spatially and socially, to improve connections to the adjacent culturally and age diverse communities; (2) activate the park and trail corridor through the addition of trail oriented activities while respecting the existing natural setting along the river; and (3) reveal the inherited history of the area through interpretative strategies that emphasize relevant historic and cultural connections of the river and its context.

This memorandum summarizes and clarifies the addition of nontraditional regional recreation uses to strengthen equitable uses of the park by local and regional residents.

Proposed Nontraditional Amenities in the Regional Parks and Trail System

Pickup Game Courts: Half Basketball Courts, Futsal Courts

Proposed area: Approx. 11,200 SF of impervious surface for 2 futsal courts, approx. 8,000 SF of impervious surface for 3 half basketball courts.

Stakeholder and Community Support: Downtown residents, including families of East-African background, who live 10 minutes' walk from the park and who are not aware of the regional parks and trail system

Regional Parks and Trail System Significance:

- The need for inclusive active sport amenities at this location was highlighted during the public engagement process by families from immigrant communities and by people of color. This part of the trail corridor lays in an urban setting where there is a lack of active recreation opportunities, particularly for young people. The trail corridor segment offers the ideal setting for more urban amenities that can connect people to more natural settings including the Mississippi River through the regional trail.
- Families who requested the use of open fields for soccer and basketball amenities for this park emphasized that it would be useful to have areas to walk and enjoy nature while their kids play. Providing amenities for recreational activities for all ages will encourage the use of the park and trail corridor by groups of families.
- Soccer and basketball are the two most popular activities that we currently see young people seeking to play in passive parks without adequate facilities. These activities are inclusive social activities for all genders and races. Soccer is highly popular in Hispanic and many immigrants' communities. If the regional system provides support for these recreation activities, more people of different cultural backgrounds and race are more likely to visit the regional system and become familiar with the trail and other opportunities the regional system offers.
- Active sport amenities can fulfill the need for pick-up games that promote inclusive social activities. The trail corridor segment offers the ideal setting for more urban amenities. To assure these facilities are used for pickup games, the plan suggests developing half basketball courts with 3 different hoops sizes for people with different heights and abilities. It also proposes futsal courts, which are a low maintenance alternates to provide a recreational activity that it is more aligned with the regional corridor features.

Equitable Use and Community Benefits:

- Community Health: Promote active outdoor recreation that will help users release stress and increase their wellbeing.
- Sense of Community: The cooperative nature of these games may bring people together and encourage them to meet and welcome others.
- Inclusion: The proposed activities along this trail are intentionally culturally inclusive.
- Flexibility: These amenities can be adapted to different uses to be used by all genders and ages.
- Youth Development: The activities and amenities proposed in the plan will help younger visitors learn active and healthy skills to serve them well throughout their lives.
- Inclusive Recreation: A great outdoor recreational option for all ages in time of pandemic.

Sustainability and Environmental Benefits:

The open field that incorporates futsal courts occupies a smaller space than soccer fields and are easier to maintain. They would be designed with raingardens and bioswales next to them to

collect storm water from the courts or designed to drain into the existing wetlands onsite. All recreational amenities would follow local and state stormwater requirements.

Pump Track: Skate/Bike Skills

Proposed area: approx., 15,000 SF

Impervious surface square footage: TBD. It will depend on the layout and materials used for the pump track.

Stakeholder and Community Support: Received various emails and letters from the community requesting more space for bike skills and skate courses. Midwest Skateboarding Alliance provided support.

Regional Parks and Trail system significance:

- A bike skills course and pump track would offer cyclists additional opportunities to experience the trail corridor while using their bikes. The tracks are designed for all skill level riders.
- The designs of pump tracks are organic, and can be adapted in a natural setting, integrated in the landscape. A unique design that fits the location will become a destination for cyclists and encourage trail use between regional parks.
- The course may be an independent structure mounted on the ground, or it could be designed with dirt or concrete. Adding a concrete surface would expand the use of the course for skaters. This would activate the park and bring a unique feature to the regional trail system. They would be designed with raingardens and bioswales next to them to collect storm water and/or drain into the existing wetlands onsite.

Equitable Use and Community Benefits:

- Provides another active recreation component for trail users.
- All ages and skill levels can learn in the same location.
- Pump tracks create a fun, positive atmosphere.
- It is viewed as a space that can be used by youth and adults at the same time.

Sustainability and Environmental Benefits:

- It would be designed with the surrounding natural landscape in mind
- The wavy and circuit design provide opportunities for a combination of hard surfaces with vegetation and bioswales
- Promotes the use of bikes for alternative transportation.

Interpretive Native Lacrosse Field in multipurpose lawn

Regional Parks and Trail system significance:

Implementing a Native Lacrosse Field was suggested during conversations with members of the Native American community who reside in Dayton's Bluff neighborhood. They mentioned that people practiced native lacrosse at Indian Mounds Regional Park and welcomed the prospect of having a place to practice near their neighborhood. The proximity to the river aligns with the traditional way of practicing lacrosse in the past. However, this suggestion still needs more involved consultation with the indigenous tribes, native lacrosse players, and the local community. The plan proposes to use a flexible open space for a native lacrosse field that,

besides providing a space for practicing, would teach about the significance of this game and its cultural connection with the indigenous community.

Equitable Use and Community Benefits:

- Supports Native American Community. There is a large Native American community living in Dayton's Bluff neighborhood. The American Indian Magnet School is also in the neighborhood and kids would benefit by having a place dedicated to practice lacrosse.
- Supports appreciation for Native Lacrosse
- Provides a healing sport for the indigenous community
- Promotes a healthy community
- Creates a sense of community
- Acknowledges the spirituality of Dakota people along the Mississippi River
- Promotes mental strength and collaboration through a cooperative sport
- Promotes cultural revitalization

Sustainability and Environmental Benefits:

- The field would be implemented on a multiuse lawn that will be surrounded by trees.
- Connects people to nature. The field doesn't require specific equipment, and would combine recreation with interpretation of the game as previously play by the native people.
- Use of sustainable grass

Lower Landing Park is 5 minutes' walk from Union Depot, a regional transit hub, and the LRT Green Line Station. It is the only area in the Mississippi River's regional trail corridor in Saint Paul that has close access to the LRT. Regional and local communities can benefit from this connectivity when accessing the park by alternative forms of transportation. Activating the regional trail corridor at the proposed location would serve as transition from an active urban core to a more tranquil regional park system with direct access to the riverfront.