

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Report

For the Community Development Committee meeting of December 7, 2020

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of December 23, 2020

Subject: Accept the Public Comment Report and Adopt the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* Amendment, System Wide.

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Accept the Public Comment Summary Report on the draft amendment to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*; and
2. Adopt the revised final *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Amendment*.

Summary of Committee Discussion/Questions

Emmett Mullin and Tracey Kinney of the Community Development Division presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission at its meeting on December 3, 2020.

Commissioner Anthony Taylor discussed the need for bridging facilities to provide progressive nature-based experiences that use programming and designed development to intentionally welcome new visitors into the bridging facilities and then transition them into regional parks and trails. Mullin responded that the definition of bridging facilities will continue to evolve as we move forward. Three Rivers Park's District Mississippi Gateway Regional Park is a good example of both programming and design that transitions visitors from more developed areas to more nature-based experiences.

Commissioner Bob Moeller agreed that progressive, nature-based experiences are a great way to build awareness of the Regional Parks System. Council Member Atlas-Ingebretson stated that the key to a progressive experience is the entry point. The entry point is where we have the most disparities, and may be as simple as a meal at a park, without going any further. It's an opportunity to create a welcoming, inclusive, and safe experience. Equity work should not focus on engagement solely.

Bridging facilities add programming at a different point in the process. Commissioner Taylor agreed that equity is not engagement. He would like to see efforts for the Implementing Agencies to diversify their boards and for communities to have shared power by being involved in the decision-making process.

Commissioner Peichel requested information on the statute's definition of regional recreation of open space and suggested that language should be added to help clarify the role of regional recreation.

Chair Yarusso stated that a spectrum of regional recreation and open space could be discussed at a future meeting.

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

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: December 3, 2020

For the Community Development Committee meeting of December 7, 2020

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of December 23, 2020

Subject: Accept the Public Comment Report and Adopt the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* Amendment.

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: Minnesota Statute § 473.147

Staff Prepared/Presented: Tracey Kinney, Senior Planner (651-602-1029) and Emmett Mullin, Regional Parks Manager (651-602-1360)

Division/Department: Community Development/ Regional Parks

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Accept the Public Comment Summary Report on the draft amendment to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*; and
2. Adopt the revised final *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Amendment*.

Background

Minnesota Statutes 473.147, subd. 1 directs the Metropolitan Council (Council) to plan for the Regional Parks System. As part of the 2018 update of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (RPPP), the Council committed to convening a region-wide discussion about system additions in 2019. This effort began in October 2019 and continues to the present day through the public comment period on the draft amendment to the RPPP. In addition to adding or expanding regional parks and trails, this draft amendment adds new policy language to strengthen equitable access and proposes a new future study on the history of the land where the parks and trails are located.

The Council has consulted with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (Commission), Community Development Committee (Committee), Land Use Advisory Committee, and Regional Park Implementing Agencies. The subject of these discussions includes system additions and the other policy additions included in the draft amendment to the RPPP. This amendment builds on the policy direction established in the most recent policy plan update adopted in 2018, as well as the direction provided in *Thrive MSP 2040*.

At the recommendation of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the Council released a draft amendment to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* for public comment on August 26, 2020. The Council held a public hearing on the draft for public comment at the October 19, 2020 Community Development Committee meeting, and the public comment period concluded on October 30, 2020. During the public comment period, the Council received comments from 180 residents, organizations, local units of government, regional park implementing agencies, and Council staff via surveys, letters, e-mails, phone messages, videos, and public testimony. At the November 16, 2020 joint meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and Community Development Committee, Commission and Committee members provided policy direction on some of the overarching comments received. After this meeting, staff finalized the

language with this guidance in mind. Attachment 1 includes a summary of changes to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Amendment*. Attachment 2 highlights the changes using a strike-through version of the Policy Plan. Attachment 3 includes the Final *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Amendment*.

Public Comment Summary Report

The Public Comment Summary Report (Attachment 4), draws from the Public Comment Log ([MPOSC November 5, 2020 Information Item](#)), which includes all comments received during the public comment period), as well as provides an overview of the “select segment” demographic analysis, public engagement pilot, and comment themes and staff responses.

The report includes 24 themes (Table 1) and over 200 Council Staff responses. The comment themes range from the amendment process itself to equity initiatives to specific regional parks and trails. Each public comment was reviewed on individual merit with the majority of comments pooling on support for proposed regional trail search corridor systems additions. Attachment 2 describes staff recommendations of Policy Plan changes as a result of the public comment period.

Traditional Engagement Select Segment Demographic Analysis

The traditional engagement demographic analysis summarizes a segment of the public comment respondents’ age, race, and gender summarized from voluntarily provided survey data. This analysis covers only the survey respondents. It does not summarize the participants who took part in the engagement pilot. The analysis provides a glimpse into who took the survey on the draft amendment and approximately where in the region they live. It provides a baseline description of survey respondents and identifies which communities are over and underrepresented in the public comment process. From the beginning of this effort, Council Members and Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commissioners recognized that there are limitations to conventional outreach approaches. With this intent in mind, staff undertook the engagement pilot.

Public Engagement Pilot

For the public engagement pilot, Council staff worked to expand participating voices in shaping the future of the Regional Parks System. The strategies for the pilot included engagement with prioritized groups, new plain language engagement materials, a social media campaign, intentional outreach and accountability goals, and leveraged expertise within our leadership networks.

Table 1. 24 Public Comment Themes

Public Comment Themes	
Amendment Process	Park Reserves
Bridging Facilities	Policy Plan Section Comments
Climate Resiliency and Natural Resource Management	Programming and Education
Engagement Process	Regional Bicycle Transportation Network
Equity Initiatives	Reconsidering History
Funding	Recreation or facility requests
Future Regional Parks System	Regional Parks System - Oppose
Geographic Balance	Regional Parks System
Land Acknowledgement	Regional Trails
Master Plan Requirements	Specific Parks or Trails
Natural Resources Prioritized Before Development	Systems Addition
Other	Water Trails

Rationale

Minnesota Statutes 473.147, subd. 1 directs the Metropolitan Council (Council) to plan for the Regional Parks System. As part of the 2018 update of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (RPPP), the Council committed to convening a region-wide discussion about system additions in 2019. This effort began in October 2019 and continues to the present day through the public comment period on the draft amendment to the RPPP.

The proposed amendment updates the regional system and responds to comments received during the process.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The RPPP draft amendment advances the *Thrive MSP 2040* Outcome of Livability through increasing access to natural resource-based outdoor recreation, which enhances the quality of life throughout the region. It also advances the Thrive Outcome of Equity through strengthening equitable use of the regional parks system by reducing barriers to participation across race, ethnicity, income, and ability. These two outcomes were key considerations in scoring proposed additions to the regional parks and trails system.

Known Support / Opposition

The public comment period provided an opportunity for input on the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* update. The Public Comment Report documents both comments indicating support and opposition to sections of the draft plan, along with revisions in response to the comments. The Public Comment Report provides a list of individual comments received during the public comment period.

Attachment 1. 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Amendment Summary of Changes

This Summary of Changes attachment provides an overview of the significant changes being proposed as part of this Policy Plan amendment. This summary should be used to help navigate the draft Policy Plan. This amendment features the inclusion of 26 new regional designations, including four regional park search areas; 17 regional trails, regional trail search corridors or search corridor extensions; one special recreation feature – bridging facility search area; and four park expansions (boundary adjustments). The amendment also includes new policy language for regional park and trail boundary adjustments; an expanded description of the special recreation feature – bridging facilities; the Council-adopted master plan equity analysis requirement; and other components outlined below.

Chapter 1: Planning for the Twin Cities Region

Location in Draft	Summary of Changes
Chapter 1	No significant changes to Chapter 1. Updated Regional Parks system facts, figures, and maps.
Page 5 Lines 4-29	Regional Growth and Demographics: Updated the demographics data with Metropolitan Council's <i>2019 Twin Cities Regional Forecast to 2040</i> .

Chapter 2: Overview of the Regional Parks System and the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan

Location in Draft	Summary of Changes
Chapter 2, Page 22 Lines 6-10, Page 23 Lines 7-8	Regional Parks System Fund Distribution Plan: The Fund Distribution Plan continues to provide high level information on the parks funding programs. Work is underway on a Regional Parks System Grant Program Manual that will provide additional detailed descriptions of the grant program operations, administrative information and requirements.
Page 26, Lines 17-28	Boundary Adjustments: Added clarifying language that a Policy Plan amendment is required for a major boundary adjustment to an existing or planned unit in the Regional Parks System.

Chapter 3: System Plan

Location in Draft	Summary of Changes
Pages 65 - 79	<p>Regional designations: The Council convened an evaluation process where implementing agency proposals were considered within a larger regional context. As a result of this process, 26 new regional designations are recommended, including four regional park search areas; 17 regional trails, regional trail search corridors or search corridor extensions; one special recreation feature – bridging facility search area; and four park expansions (boundary adjustments). These elements have been added to the Regional Park System map changes as shown in the next line item.</p>
Pages 40 - 79	<p>Regional Parks System map changes: Updated Regional Parks system maps and system totals, including the following facts about the Regional Parks System units open to the public:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 44 Regional Parks (no change) • 12 Park Reserves (no change) • 8 Special Recreation Features (no change) • 55 Regional Trails (increase of 6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Carver County’s Highway 5 ○ Saint Paul’s Robert Piram Regional Trail ○ Scott County’s Spring Lake Regional Trail ○ Three Rivers Park District’s Baker/Carver Regional Trail ○ Three Rivers Park District’s Crow River Regional Trail ○ Three Rivers Park District’s CP Rail Regional Trail Segment A • 2 Planned Regional Parks (no change) • 1 Planned Park Reserves (no change) • 8 Planned Regional Trails (2 less than 2018) • 5 Boundary Adjustments (increase of 4) • 7 Regional Park Search Areas (increase of 4) • 1 Special Recreational Feature - Bridging Facility Search Area (increase of 1) • 53 Regional Trail Search Corridors (increase of 8)
Page 49, Line 9	<p>System Plan: Policy refinement to describe the “desirable” services that regional parks and park reserves provide to regional trails.</p>
Page 50 and 50, Table 3-4	<p>Regional Trails Open to the Public: Proposed name change of Dakota County’s Mississippi River Regional Trail to Mississippi River Greenway Regional Trail.</p>
Page 61, Table 3-7	<p>Planned Regional Trails: Proposed name change of Rich Valley Regional Trail to Veterans Memorial Greenway Regional Trail.</p>

Pages 65, Lines 5-10	Regional Park Search Areas: Added clarifying language to describe regional park search areas as general areas and locations that will be defined through future master planning.
Page 67, Table 3-10	Special Recreation Features Search Area: Clarified that the number of future bridging facilities will be determined through public engagement and master planning for the Three Rivers Parks District First-Ring Cities Bridging Facility.

Chapter 4: Siting and Acquisition Policy and Strategies

Location in Draft	Summary of Changes
Page 81 Line 12-17 and Page 85 Lines 24 - 26	Boundary Adjustments: If a parcel adjacent to the park becomes available that is not in a current master plan boundary, a boundary adjustment may be considered. Major boundary adjustments require a Policy Plan amendment, while minor boundary adjustments can be accomplished through a master plan amendment.
Page 90 - 91	Bridging Facilities: The Regional Parks System includes four regional designation types including regional parks, park reserves, special recreation features, and regional trails. Bridging facilities are a type of special recreation feature that are intended to attract and introduce new outdoor recreation users to regional parks and trails. Bridging facilities are designed to prototype new ideas that advance equitable usage, focusing on underserved groups in the Regional Parks System. This new section further defines the goal and requirements for Bridging Facilities.

Chapter 5: Planning Policy and Strategies

Location in Draft	Summary of Changes
<p>Page 92 Lines 30-34, Page 93, Lines 1-10, Page 96, Lines 20-36</p>	<p>Master Plan Requirements: New master plan boundary definition and other refinements to master plan requirements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boundaries and Acquisition Costs: Added clarifying language addressing an administrative boundary, acquisition information, and agency ownership arrangements. • Development Concept: Added mapping to support the description of the master plan’s development concept.
<p>Pages 94-95 and 97-98</p>	<p>Equity Analysis Requirement: Approved by the Council in February 2020, the Equity Analysis Requirement for master planning is designed to ensure that questions of who benefits and who is affected by the development of a regional recreational resource will be addressed in master plans, which are developed by implementing agencies to guide the development of Regional Parks System components. The Equity Analysis Requirement is an examination of the public engagement process and outcomes for stakeholders by race, ethnicity, national origin, income, ability, age, and other pertinent characteristics.</p>
<p>Page 96, lines 34-36:</p>	<p>Regional Trail Boundaries: Added language that regional trail boundaries must include public inholdings and anticipated acquisitions (private inholdings) associated with the trail route.</p>
<p>Page 96, lines 23-28</p>	<p>Regional Trail Acquisition costs: Removed a regional trail master plan requirement for a schedule of anticipated acquisitions to reflect timelines that are subject to waiting for a willing seller and generally unknown.</p>
<p>Page 99, Lines 38-41, Page 100, Lines 1-25</p>	<p>Acquisition Master Plans: Clarified the purpose and requirements of an acquisition master plan, including adding the need for mapping to support the proposal and agency board support.</p>

Pages 100-101	<p>Boundary Adjustments Policy Clarification: Existing regional parks and trails have Council-approved master plan boundaries. There are times when a regional park implementing agency has an opportunity to add, modify, or remove land from one of its units, resulting in a change to its master plan boundary. This new policy language clarifies the threshold for major and minor boundary adjustments. Major boundary adjustments may be considered through the every-four-year system addition process, while minor boundary adjustments may be considered through a master plan amendment request.</p>
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Chapter 6: System Protection Policy and Strategies

Location in Draft	Summary of Changes
Page 108, Lines 19-36, Page 109, Lines 8-11	<p>Land conversions: The Council will review land conversion requests using the criteria in Chapter 6, Strategy 2. The updated criteria clarify requirements.</p>
Page 109, Lines 31-38, Page 110, Lines 1-5	<p>Equally Valuable Exchanges: Clarification on when the Metropolitan Council will consider a conversion of regional park land to other uses, including an enhanced description of the process for determining an equally valuable exchange.</p>
Page 111, Lines 23-24 and Page 112, Lines 1-2	<p>Regional Parks System Sub-Recipient Administrative Guide: The sub-recipient guide has transitioned into an online draft Grant Program Manual, which is currently under development. It will provide detailed program specific information for each of the parks funding programs.</p>

Chapter 7: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy and Strategies

Location in Draft	Summary of Changes
Page 119, Lines 2-11	<p>Regional designations: The Council convened an evaluation process in 2019 where implementing agency proposals were considered within a larger regional context. As a result of this process, 26 regional designations of system elements are recommended, including regional park search areas, regional trail search corridors, boundary adjustments, and a special recreation feature search area.</p>

Location in Draft	Summary of Changes
Page 120 lines 19-20	Equitable Use: Added language to broaden the description of disabilities.

Chapter 8: Finance Policy and Strategies

Location in Draft	Summary of Changes
Page 134, Lines 17-18	2019 Competitive Equity Grant Program: Updated current policy plan language to clarify that the Competitive Equity Grant Program was established and implemented in 2019. The Council provided three grants to three agencies for equity related projects in 2019 For more information about these projects, see Business Item 2019-332 .
Pages 137 - 151	Estimated costs to complete the system: State law requires that the Policy Plan estimate the cost of the recommended acquisitions and development of the park system (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, subd. 1). This estimate was comprehensively updated with the 2018 Policy Plan update. The 2020 amendment will include the proposed new regional designations and other park and trail updates. The estimated build-out of the entire system is roughly \$2.1 billion, an increase of \$200 million from 2018. This updated estimate reflects acquisition land values with 2020 data.

Chapter 9: 2020-2021 Workplan

Location in Draft	Summary of Changes
Pages 152–153	<p>Workplan for the Regional Parks Policy Plan: Chapter Nine: 2020– 2024 Workplan for the Regional Parks Policy Plan is updated to reflect new topics, including new studies, which will be informed by the Council’s work to prepare the 2050 metropolitan development guide. This workplan will continue to evolve over the next four years. A few highlights include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct a cultural-historical study that describes and documents the impacts inequitable policies have had on the development of the Regional Parks System. Included in this study is a land acknowledgement study to recognize the Native American communities’ role in the history and the region today. This study explores the development of a land acknowledgement that recognizes and respects Indigenous residents and the histories of the land where our regional parks and trails are located.• Develop a long-term vision for regional trails that explores geographic balance, spacing, equity, character, and natural resource values.