

Community Development Committee

Meeting date: July 20, 2020

Subject: Regional Parks Policy Plan Amendment and Draft System Additions Recommendation

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: Minn. Stat. § 473.147, *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*

Staff Prepared/Presented: Emmett Mullin, Regional Parks Unit Manager (651-602-1360); Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst (651-602-1361)

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

None; information and discussion only.

Background

Minnesota Statutes 473.147, subd. 1 directs the Metropolitan Council (Council) to plan for the Regional Parks System. The updated *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (RPPP) commits the Council to convene a region-wide discussion about system additions in 2019 (see Attachment 1 for description of the scope of the update). As such, this effort began in October last year. Council staff is in the process of engaging Regional Park Implementing Agencies, the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC) and the Community Development Committee (CDC) in the development of this draft recommendation.

Council staff provided updates on the system additions project to MPOSC at its meetings in December 2019, March, April, and May 2020. In June, over the course of two meetings, eight of the ten Regional Park Implementing Agencies presented summaries of 28 system addition proposals to MPOSC for feedback. Additionally, Council staff reviewed each of the proposals in light of the Commission's feedback and based on criteria in Chapter 4 of the RPPP. On July 15, Council staff shared an overview of the proposed RPPP Amendment and a draft system additions recommendation with MPOSC.

At the July 20 CDC meeting, Council staff will share an overview of the proposed RPPP Amendment and a draft system additions recommendation, and seek the Committee's guidance and direction. The proposed RPPP Amendment will go beyond integrating recommended regional park and trail system additions to include updated language on bridging facilities and regional park and trail boundary adjustments; Council-adopted language on the equity analysis requirement for master planning; an updated estimate of costs to complete the system; an updated workplan; and other components (see Attachment 1).

Review Process

Council staff initially reviewed each of the system addition proposals to ensure they responded adequately to the questions posed in the application. This initial scan for completeness was followed by a review for eligibility for addition to the Regional Park System based on the criteria in Chapter 4 of the RPPP. Council staff also carefully considered feedback and guidance on individual proposals provided by MPOSC at the two June meetings, as well as guidance provided by MPOSC, CDC, and the Land Use Advisory Committee in meetings in April and May, prior to delving into a deeper level of analysis focused on regional significance. This additional analysis led to the development of a staff-facilitated draft recommendation, which is a key part of this information item. Following the July 15 MPOSC

meeting, Council staff will present a condensed version to the CDC at its July 20 meeting and seek the Committee's guidance and direction. In August, Council staff will return to MPOSC, CDC and the full Council to share a business item focused on the RPPP Amendment and the recommendation for system additions that results from the July MPOSC and CDC meetings, and to initiate a public comment period on August 26.

Staff Eligibility Review

Following the June MPOSC meetings, Council staff reviewed each of the proposals for their *eligibility* to be added to the Regional Parks System, based on an evaluation of the criteria in Chapter 4 of the RPPP. Council staff find that all 28 of the proposed additions submitted are eligible for inclusion into the System Plan of the RPPP (see Attachment 2). The one caveat is that some of the proposed units may require adjustment in unit type or an adjustment to the proposed unit's size or extent, and additional policy development precede master planning for some proposed units.

Examples of proposed additions that may require an adjustment in unit type are the proposal to recognize the regional status of Rum River North and South county parks and to combine those units with Rum River Central Regional Park to form a single Rum River "Complex" Regional Park (Anoka County) and the Minnetonka and Minnehaha Creek Corridor Regional Park Search Area (Three Rivers Park District). Given both of these proposals center on waterways, there is a need to develop policy that relates to Regional Water Trails ahead of initiating master planning for these units, and to potentially reclassify these proposals as such.

Staff-Facilitated Draft Recommendation

Prior to the eligibility review, MPOSC provided review and comment on the 28 proposals during their two June meetings. Council staff listened carefully to these comments and feedback and conducted further analysis into areas of expressed Council priority. The staff-facilitated draft recommendation is based on an evaluation of the proposals for regional significance. This analysis is made up of three foundational priorities that are rooted in *Thrive MSP 2040* and the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*: natural resources, geographic balance, and equity. In order for the proposed addition to be deemed regionally significant, it must receive at least one high rating in one of these three Council priority areas. Council staff find that 24 of the 28 proposed additions submitted are *recommended* for inclusion into the System Plan of the RPPP with the caveat that some of the proposed units may require adjustments, as described above.

Four proposals are not currently recommended for addition into the System Plan of the RPPP (see Attachment 3). They include County Road 40 and Highway 5 regional trail search corridors (Carver County) and Gray's Bay Regional Trail Extension and Purgatory Creek Regional Trail Extension search corridors (Three Rivers Park District). These proposals did not receive a high rating in any of the three priority areas.

Council staff propose initiating a system-wide discussion about the long-term vision for the Regional Trail System as part of the 2050 regional planning process, including the future of regional trails and corridor spacing requirements that may have a closer relationship to the population density and development characteristics of specific implementing agency jurisdictions.

Public Comment Period

In August, Council staff propose opening a public comment period to gather input on the proposed RPPP Amendment, including the system additions recommendation. The public comment period would remain open through October, with a public hearing scheduled in the second half of October (see Attachment 4).

The public comment period of the RPPP Amendment is an opportunity to increase equitable access to the Regional Parks System by inviting advice from across the region. Staff proposes enlisting the help of MPOSC, the Parks Ambassador Program, and the Council's Youth and Parks Research Study to implement a targeted public engagement initiative aimed at consulting a range of parks and youth-serving organizations and informing the broader public.

Staff requests the leadership of MPOSC and CDC to engage and share information with organizations in their networks. The Council's Parks Ambassador will collaborate with the Implementing Agencies to engage and share information with their partner organizations. The Council's Youth and Parks Research Study recommendations and the Council's communications staff will help develop materials and approaches respective of specific audiences. Additionally, Youth and Parks Research Study collaborators will be consulted.

Advice received will help shape the RPPP Amendment and invite participation for the next major update of the Policy Plan in 2024. The comments received during the public comment period will be documented by commenter and sorted by themes in order to have the strongest impact. Each participant will be informed of the RPPP Amendment's Public Comment Received Report that lists all of the commenters and the Public Comment Report that documents the impact of the advice and includes a staff response. These reports will also inform the 2024 RPPP update.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The System Additions project will advance Stewardship, Equity, and Livability. Stewardship advances the Council's mission of orderly and economic development by responsibly managing the region's natural and financial resources, and making strategic investments in our region's future. Additions to the Regional Park System that protect natural resources, adapt to changing conditions, and serve future residents advance this outcome.

Equity connects all residents to opportunity and creates viable housing, transportation, and recreation options for people of all races, ethnicities, incomes, and abilities so that all communities share the opportunities and challenges of growth and change. System additions that consider the context of geography and demographics have the potential to positively impact a variety of underrepresented groups. Bridging facilities are a strategy that has strong potential to help advance the Equity outcome.

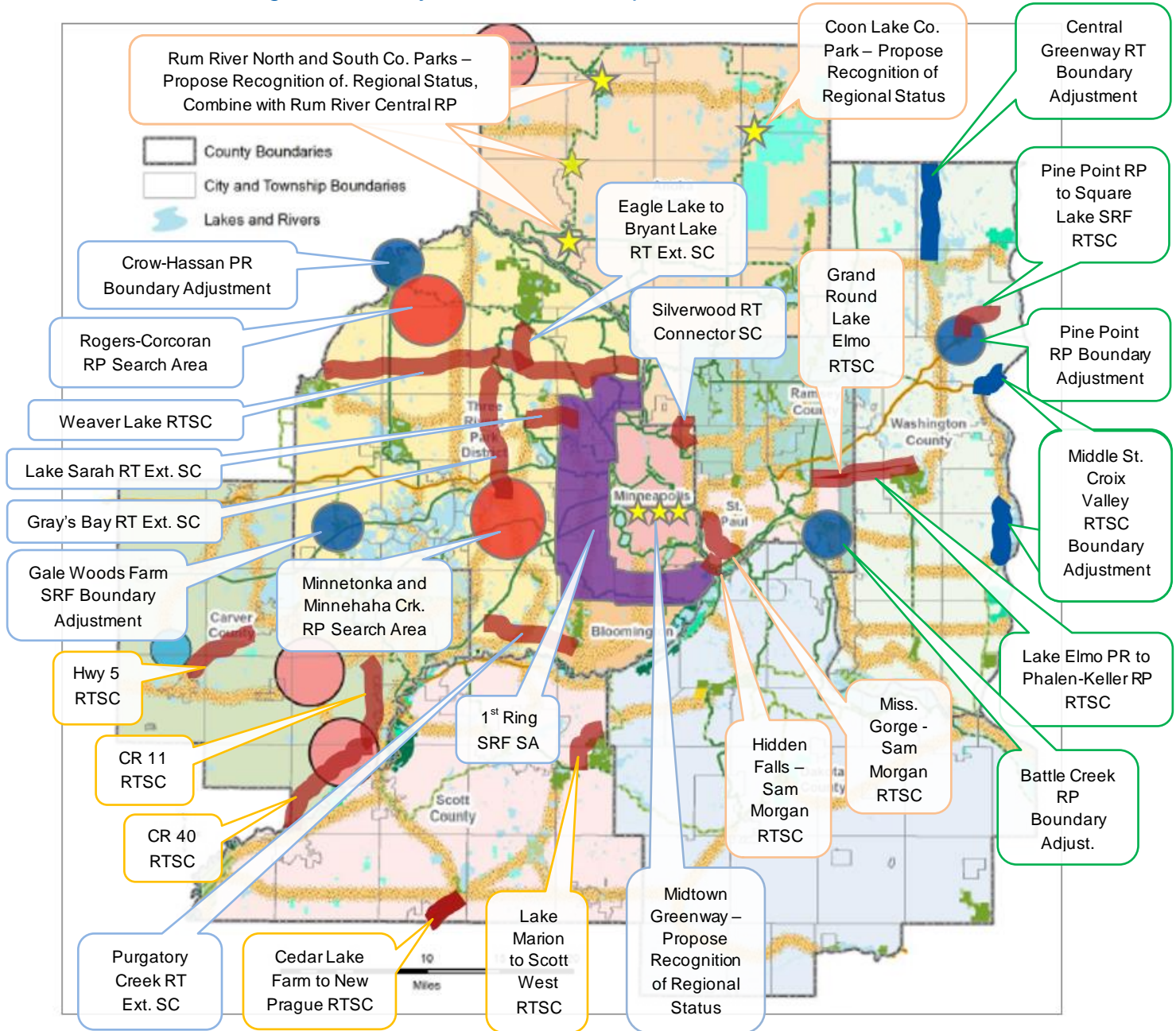
Livability focuses on quality of life and experiences in our region, and how places and infrastructure create and enhance the quality of life that makes the Twin Cities metro area a great place to live. System additions that create more opportunities for residents to recreate in the regional park system also improve the quality of life for the region's residents.

2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan: Summary of Current Update

The 2040 RPPP commits the Council to amend the Policy Plan for a substantial revision. Regional designation of new Regional Park System components is considered a substantial revision. At the August 6 MPOSC meeting and the August 17 CDC meeting, the Committees will consider a request to amend the RPPP and to initiate a 60-day public comment period beginning on August 26. The RPPP Amendment will include new regional designations, policy development, and studies.

1. **Regional designations:** The Council convened an evaluation process where the agency proposals may be considered within a larger regional context. As a result of this process, the designation of system elements may occur, including regional park search areas, special recreation feature search areas, regional trail search corridors, and boundary adjustments. These elements may be added to Chapter Three, System Plan.
2. **Boundary Adjustments Policy Clarification:** Existing regional parks and trails have Council-approved master plan boundaries. There are instances when a regional park implementing agency has an opportunity to add, modify, or remove land holding from one of its units, resulting in a change to its master plan boundary. This new policy 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. The addition of this policy will affect Chapter Five, Strategy One, Master plan requirements.
3. **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. New guidelines for bridging facilities are proposed for Chapter Four, Siting and Acquisition, Strategy Five: Special Recreation Features.
4. **Estimated Costs to Complete the System:** State law requires that the RPPP 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 RPPP. The 2020 update will include the proposed new regional designations and other park and trail updates. Updates for the Estimated Costs to Complete the System will be proposed in Chapter Eight, Finance, Strategy Nine: Other funding.
5. **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. The addition of this policy will affect Chapter Five, Strategy One, Master plan requirements.
6. **Workplan for the Regional Parks Policy Plan:** Chapter Nine: 2019 – 2022 Workplan for the Regional Parks Policy Plan will be updated to reflect new topics, including studies, to be determined.

Overview of 2020 Regional Park System Addition Proposals



2020 System Addition Proposals

- Boundary Adjustment
- Regional Trail Search Corridor
- Propose Recognition of Regional Status
- Regional Park Search Area
- Special Recreation Feature Search Area

Regional Park Search Areas and Regional Trail Search Corridors

- Park Boundary Adjustments
- Park Search Areas
- Regional Trail Search Corridors
- Existing State Trails

- Regional Parks (Open to the Public)
- Regional Parks (Not Open to the Public)
- Planned Parks (Not Open to the Public)
- Regional Trails (Open to the Public)
- Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)
- Planned Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)
- State Wildlife Management Areas
- State Parks
- MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge
- Minnesota Valley State Trail and Recreation Area
- Special State Recreation Features

Designation of Regional Significance

2020 Regional Park and Trail System Additions - An Assessment of Regional Significance Using Council Priorities

Note: Recommended additions must have a “High” rating in one or more of the three Council priority areas.

Implementing Agency, Proposal	Natural Resources	Geographic Balance	Equity	Recommend addition?
Anoka County – 2 proposals				
Coon Lake County Park – Propose Recognition of Regional Status	High	Medium	Medium	Yes
Rum River North, South County Parks – Propose Recognition of Regional Status, Combine with Rum River Central Regional Park	High	Medium	Medium	Yes
Carver County – 3 proposals				
Highway 5 Regional Trail Search Corridor	Medium	Medium	Low	No
County Road 11 Regional Trail Search Corridor	Medium	Medium	High	Yes
County Road 40 Regional Trail Search Corridor	Medium	Low	Low	No
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board – 1 proposal				
Midtown Greenway – Propose Recognition of Regional Status	Medium	High	High	Yes
Ramsey County – 1 proposal				
Battle Creek Regional Park Boundary Adjustment	High	Medium	High	Yes
Saint Paul – 3 proposals				
Mississippi Gorge – Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Search Corridor	Medium	Medium	High	Yes
Hidden Falls – Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Search Corridor	Medium	Medium	High	Yes
Grand Round – Lake Elmo Regional Trail Search Corridor	Medium	High	High	Yes
Scott County – 2 proposals				
Lake Marion to Scott West Regional Trail Search Corridor	High	High	High	Yes
Cedar Lake Farm to New Prague Destination Regional Trail Search Corridor	High	Medium	Medium	Yes

Implementing Agency, Proposal	Natural Resources	Geographic Balance	Equity	Recommend addition?
Three Rivers Park District – 11 proposals				
Weaver Lake Regional Trail Search Corridor	Medium	Medium	High	Yes
Eagle Lake to Bryant Lake Regional Trail Extension Search Corridor	Medium	Medium	High	Yes
Gray's Bay Regional Trail Extension Search Corridor	Medium	Low	Low	No
Silverwood Regional Trail Connector Search Corridor	Medium	High	High	Yes
Purgatory Creek Regional Trail Extension Search Corridor	Medium	Medium	Medium	No
Lake Sarah Regional Trail Extension Search Corridor	Medium	Medium	High	Yes
Rogers-Corcoran Regional Park Search Area	High	Medium	Medium	Yes
Minnetonka and Minnehaha Creek Regional Park Search Area	High	Medium	High	Yes
First-Ring Special Recreation Feature Search Area	Low	High	High	Yes
Crow-Hassan Park Reserve Boundary Adjustment	High	Medium	Low	Yes
Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature Boundary Adjustment	High	Low	Medium	Yes
Washington County – 5 proposals				
Pine Point Regional Park Boundary Adjustment	High	Medium	Medium	Yes
Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail Search Corridor Boundary Adjustment	Medium	High	Low	Yes
Central Greenway Regional Trail Search Corridor Boundary Adjustment	High	Medium	Low	Yes
Lake Elmo Park Reserve to Phalen-Keller Regional Park - Regional Trail Search Corridor	Medium	High	High	Yes
Pine Point Regional Park to Square Lake Special Recreation Feature - Regional Trail Search Corridor	High	High	Medium	Yes

Definitions for Designation of Regional Significance, Ratings

Natural Resources

High = Acquiring lands with natural qualities most desirable for outdoor recreational activities AND Protecting an important natural resource feature, such as linking other natural resource areas or water bodies together, which in turn provide a larger natural habitat opportunity; help protect or improve water quality, or provide habitat for protected or endangered species

Medium = Links designated federal, state, and regional natural resource areas together.

Low = limited ability to contribute to natural resource improvements or management or links only trails together.

Geographic Balance

High = Proposal demonstrates how the proposed unit will provide geographic balance or fill a gap for the seven-county Metropolitan Area (not just within the agency's jurisdiction), or such balance is supported by spatial analysis (i.e., how proposed additions relate to existing, planned, and search areas in the overall Regional Parks System) or Metropolitan Council population forecasts to 2040.

Medium = Proposal demonstrates how proposed unit will provide geographic balance or fill a gap within the agency's jurisdiction, or such balance is supported by spatial analysis (i.e., how proposed additions relate to existing, planned, and search areas in the overall Regional Parks System) or Metropolitan Council population forecasts to 2040.

Low = Proposal does not clearly demonstrate how proposed unit will provide geographic balance or fill a gap within either the seven-county metro area or the agency's jurisdiction and/or there is little/no evidence that the proposal would provide for geographic balance or fill a gap in the regional park and trail system.

Equity

Proposals earned a race/income equity rating based on evaluations of *who lives close to the systems investment, how/if equity-focused engagement happened, whether the systems investment is proximate to transit.*

High = Proposed trail or park has a significant potential for building a more equitable Regional Park System. Area is close to census tracts with higher proportions of underserved users. Census tracts near the park or trail have a population that is less than 90% white (racial equity) *or* with a median household income of less than 85K (income equity); and/or evidence of strong equity-focused community engagement and/or close to transit.

Medium = Proposed park or trail addition has a small equity impact. The census tracts near the proposed system addition have populations that are between 90-95% white or under 100K median income, no evidence of equity focused community engagement effort, no access to transit.

Low = Nearby census tracts were over 90 percent white and over 100K median income, no evidence of equity-based community engagement, aggregated data asserted to represent entire community, no transit access.

2020 Regional Parks System Additions, Regional Parks Policy Plan Amendment Timeline

