

# Regional Parks System Additions Project: Process Update

May 18, 2020

Community Development Committee



# Today's Discussion

- Policy foundation for Regional Parks System
- Bridging Facilities
- Boundary Adjustments

# Key Minnesota Legislation for the Regional Parks System



- Regional Recreation Open Space (Minn. Stat. § 473.121, subd. 14)

“Regional recreation open space’ means land and water areas...and facilities determined by the Metropolitan Council **to be of regional importance** in providing for a balanced system of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area, including but not limited to park reserves, major linear parks and trails, large recreation parks...and other special use facilities.”



# Key Minnesota Legislation for the Regional Parks System *continued*



- Regional Recreation Open Space System Policy Plan (Minn. Stat. § 473.147, subd. 1)

“The policy plan shall identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to provide a system of regional recreation open space...which, together with state facilities, **reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area...**”



# Overview of the Regional Parks System

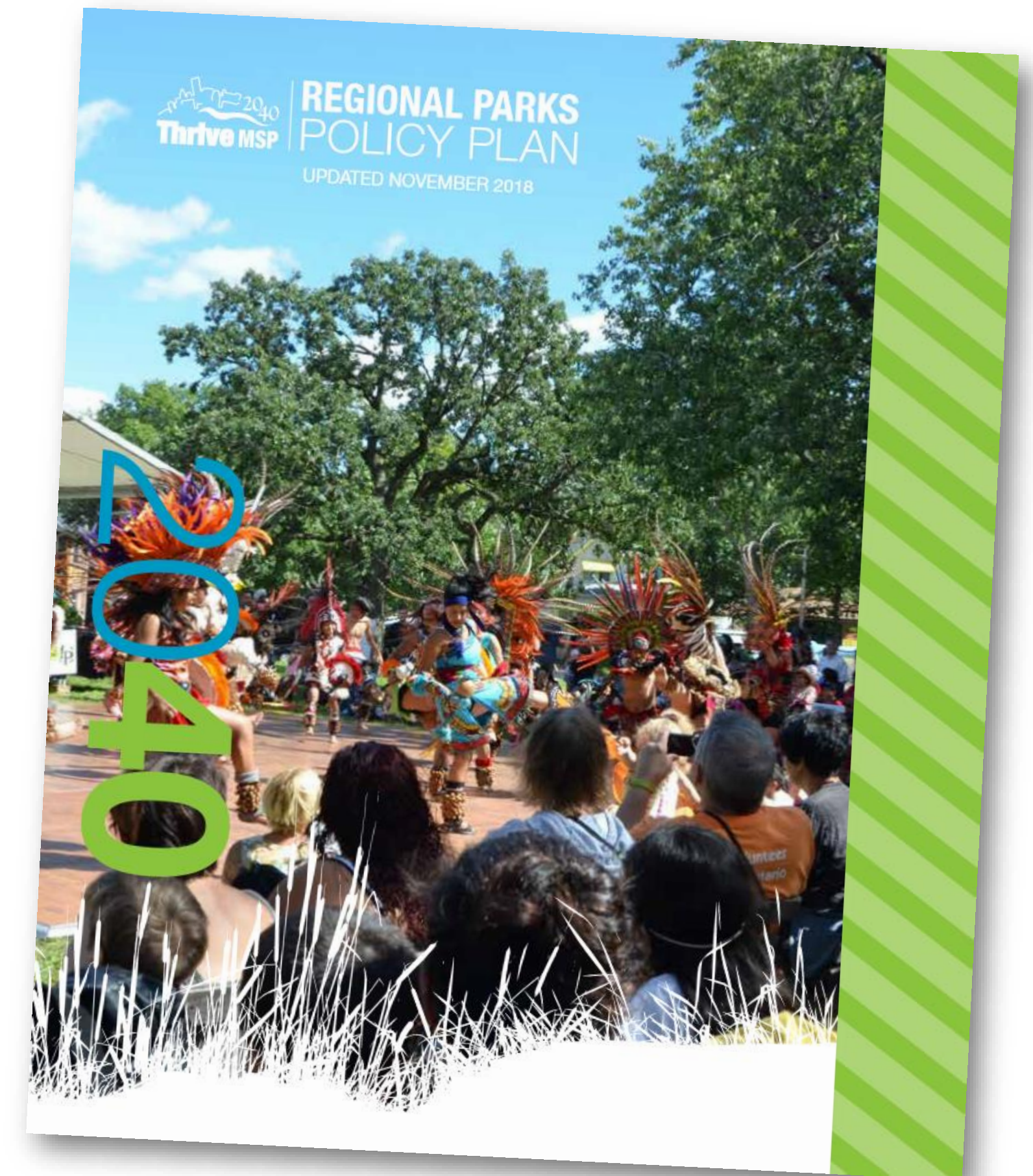
- Natural resource-based settings
  - Focus on water bodies
- Natural resource-based recreation
- Serve regional audience
- Large acreage
- Nationally renowned system of interconnected regional parks and trails





# 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan

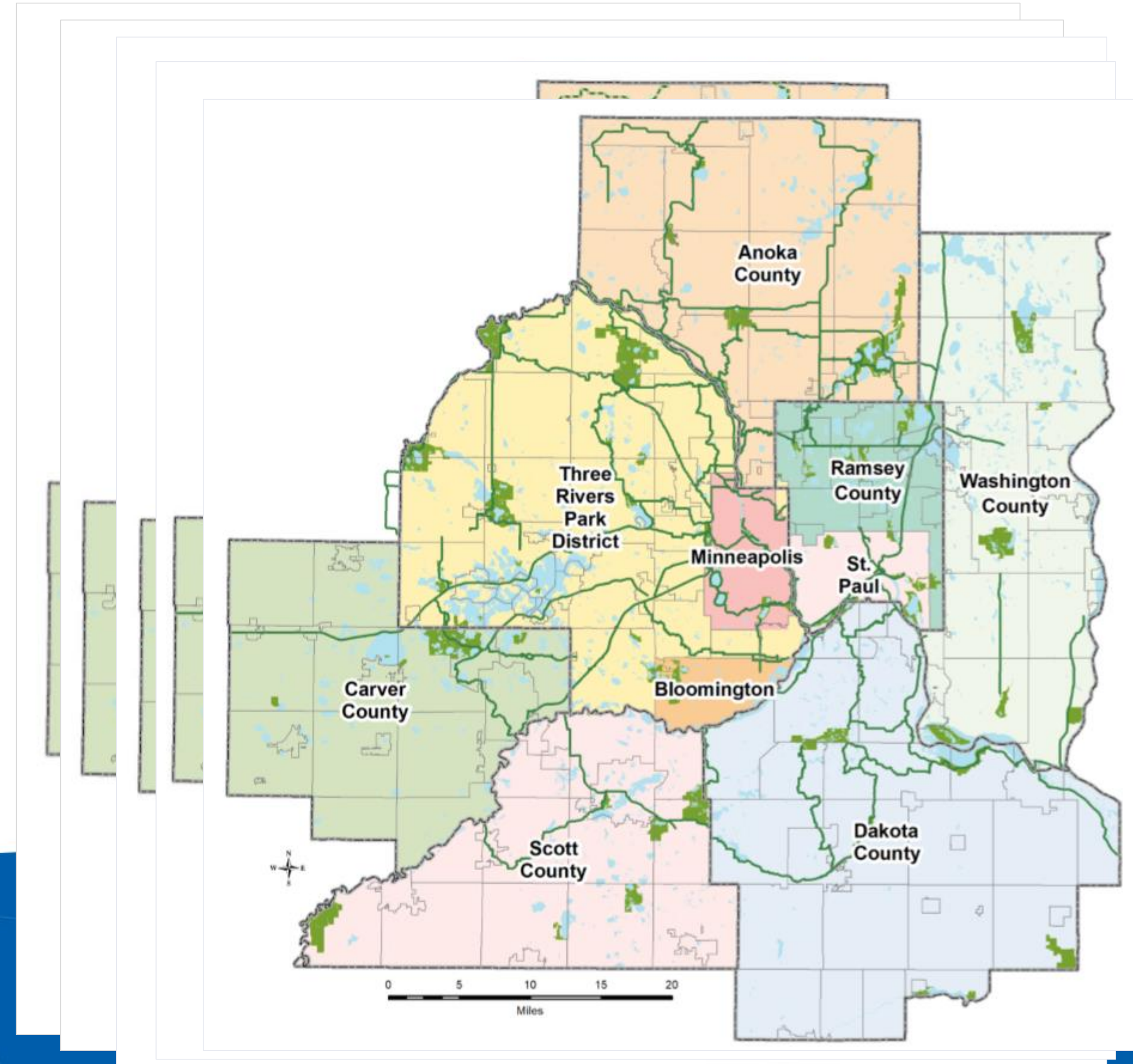
- **Siting and Acquisition:** Identify lands with natural resource and recreation potential, and put in protected status
- **Planning:** Promote and support master planning and integrated resource planning across jurisdictions
- **Recreational Activities and Facilities:** Provide a regional system of recreation opportunities, while maintaining the integrity of the natural resource base
- **Finance:** Help fund the development and maintenance of the system so that all residents of the region have the opportunity to share in the benefits
- **System Protection:** Protect the public investment in the system



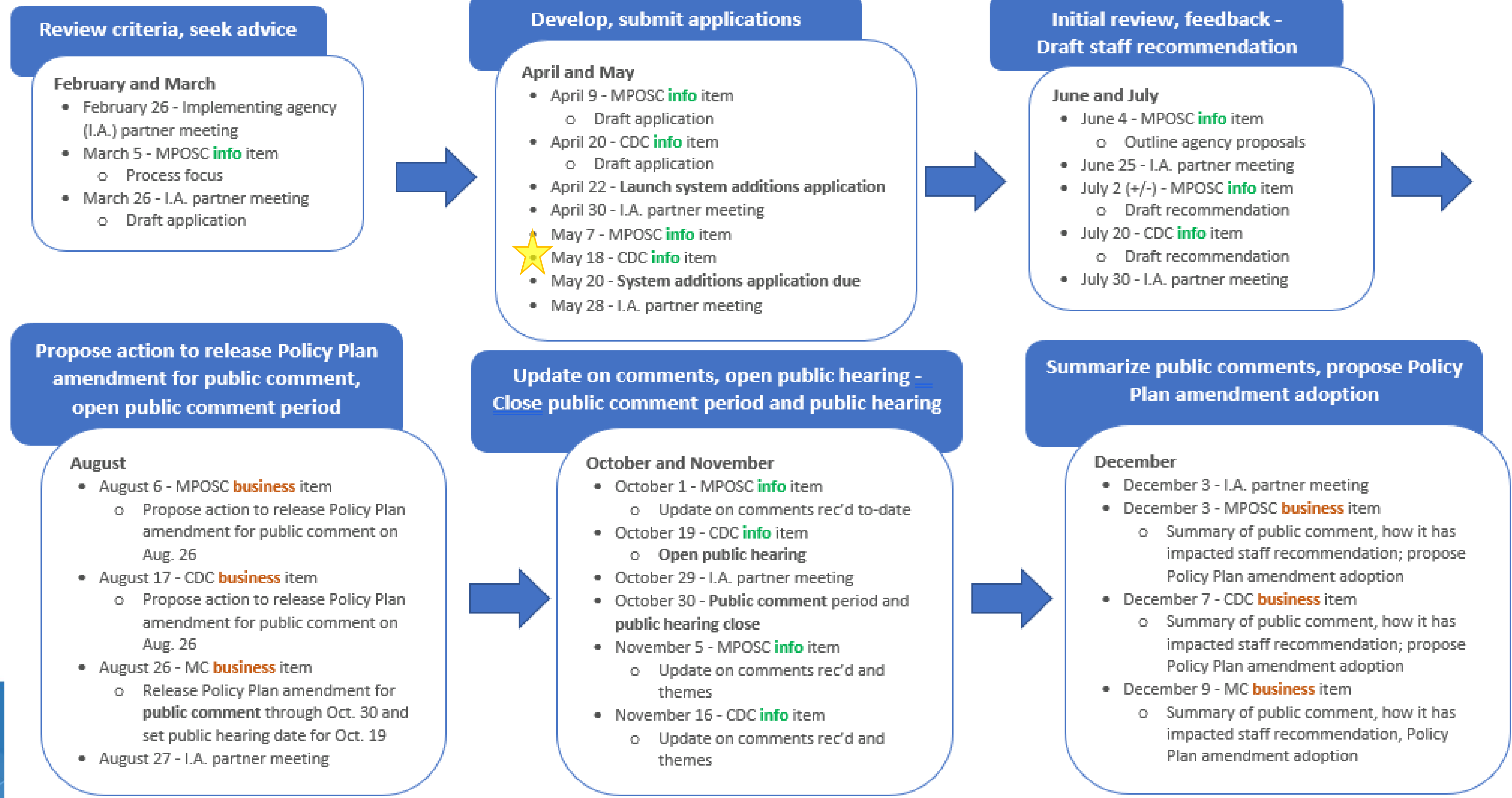


# Regional Parks System

- **44** Regional Parks
- **12** Park Reserves
- **8** Special Recreation Features
- **49** Regional Trails
- **10** Implementing Agencies



# 2020 Timeline for Regional Park System Additions





# Chapter 4: Siting and Acquisition Policy

“Identify lands with high-quality natural resources that are desirable for Regional Parks System activities and put these lands in a protected status, so they will be available for recreational uses and conservation purposes in perpetuity.” (pg. 65)

| Regional Parks<br>Units must meet all criteria   | Park Reserves<br>Units must meet all criteria  | Special Recreation Features<br>* Required  |
|--|--|--|
| Draws visitors from across the region  | Draws visitors from across the region  | Draws visitors from across the region  |
| Provides for geographic balance  | Provides for geographic balance  | Provides for geographic balance  |
| Conserves a diversity of high-quality natural resources, either naturally occurring or human built, that support outdoor recreation activities | Conserves a diversity of high quality natural resources that support outdoor recreation activities | * Provides a unique high-quality outdoor recreation experience   |
| At least 100 acres; typically, 200-500 acres   | At least 1,000 acres   | * Provides a natural resource-based and scenic setting offering a compelling sense of place                                |
| Accommodates a variety of outdoor recreation activities  | 80% of unit managed as natural lands that protect the ecological functioning of a native landscape | * Demonstrates the existence or potential for drawing a regional audience  |
|  |  | Serves as a bridging facility, intended to attract and introduce new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks System |
|  |  | Has a unique managing or programming effort  |
|  |  | * Complements the Regional Parks System  |

(pg. 66)

| Regional Trails: General<br>* Required  | Regional Trails: Destination (also known as Greenways)<br>* Required   | Regional Trails: Linking<br>* Required   |
|---|--|--|
| Draws visitors from across the region   | Draws visitors from across the region  | Draws visitors from across the region  |
| * Benefits the regional trail system and does not duplicate an existing trail   | * Provides high-quality natural resource-based "destination" trail experience  | Links two or more units of the Regional Parks System   |
| Connects two or more units of the Regional Parks System   | * Highly scenic and/or natural setting   | Links to or complements national, state, regional, and/or other local trails   |
| Serves as backbone to local trail network, with regional trail functioning much like regional highway that interconnects with more local arterials and local streets                        | * Extensively visually separated from road system (more than 50% off-road)   | Links to or complements federal, state, regional, or multiple local parks, recreation facilities, and natural resource areas   |
| * Fills a gap in the regional recreation system   | No spacing minimums  | * Should be at least 1.5 miles apart so as not to overlap the localized service area of those trails. There are times when meandering linking trails will come in closer proximity to one another, but broadly speaking are not parallel |
| Connects to multiple public interest destinations such as schools, job centers, tourist destinations, historical, cultural, and architectural buildings and sites, and commercial districts | * Provides opportunities to conserve, enhance, or restore natural resources  | May be on-road separated treadway  |
| May utilize surface rights of utility corridors such as large sewer lines   | May contain natural features in the greenway or adjacent to the trail treadway that provides important ecological services |  |



# Chapter 4: Siting and Acquisition Policy *continued*

- Strategy 1: Priorities (pg. 67)
  - “Future Council designation of lands... should emphasize... natural resource features, access to water bodies...”
- Strategy 2: Geographic balance (pg. 68)
  - “Proportionate distribution tied to population distribution patterns will be an important consideration when exploring system additions.”
  - “Legislative directive is clear that regional parklands should be of ‘regional importance’... Lands that serve only a municipality or neighborhood are not considered to have ‘regional importance’”





# Chapter 4: Siting and Acquisition Policy *continued*



- Strategy 4: New regional trails (pg. 69-72)
  - “Must serve a regional audience”
  - “Should not duplicate and existing trail”
  - “Should connect two or more units of the Regional Park System”
  - “Should connect state or federal recreational units”
- Strategy 5: Special recreation features (pg. 72)
  - “Be unique and complement or enhance the services already offered by the regional system”
  - “Not duplicate or compete with recreation facilities adequately provided by the public or private sector”



# Discussion

- What does a mature or complete Regional Park System look like? (a.k.a., “What do we want to be when we grow up?”)
  - Are certain elements from previous slides more important than others?
- What is your guidance for MPOSC and staff as they review and evaluate system addition proposals?



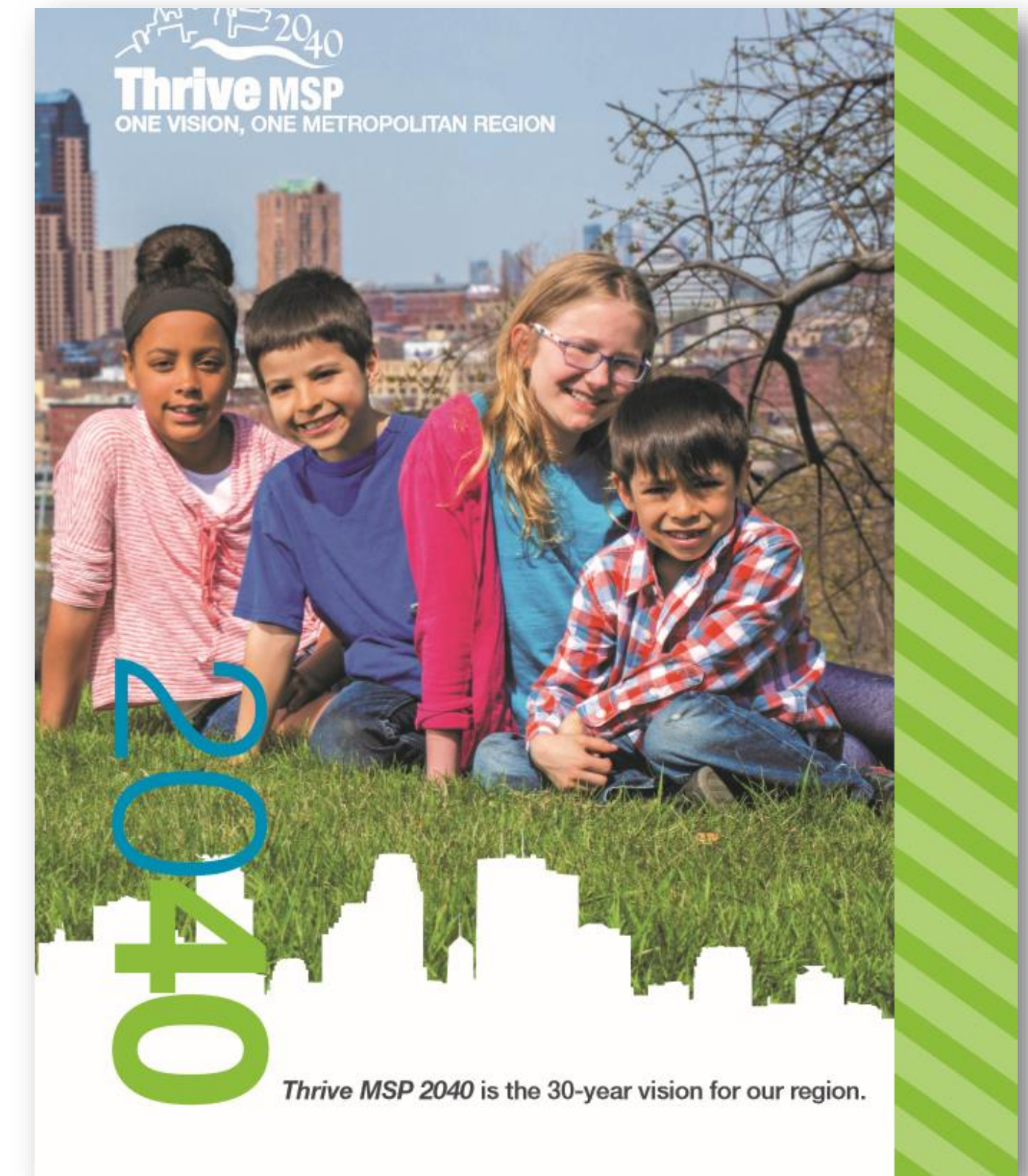
# Next Up: Bridging Facilities



# Bridging Facilities

How we got here:

- *Thrive MSP 2040 – Equity Outcome*
- *2015 Regional Parks Policy Plan Update*
  - Subset of special recreation feature
  - Focus on attracting and introducing new users
- *2018 Regional Parks Policy Plan Update*
  - Specifically call out underserved communities
- *2020 Agency-Council Staff Discussions*





# Bridging Facilities *continued*

## Proposed Language Addition for 2020 Regional Parks Policy Plan Update

**Goal:** Bridging facilities introduce and link new regional park visitors and trail users across race, ethnicity, national origin, income, ability, age, and other pertinent characteristics. These facilities engage people with the wide array of opportunities that exist across the Regional Parks System, through innovative strategies and partnerships.



# Bridging Facilities *continued*

## Proposed Language Addition for 2020 Regional Parks Policy Plan Update

*Amend Chapter 4, Siting and Acquisition, Strategy 5: Special Recreation Feature*

### ***Background***

- Different from local parks and community centers
- Purpose tied to introducing new visitors to the Regional Park System through intentional and dynamic strategies
- Help address inequities that exist in our region, such as lower participation rates from some communities.
- Encourage greater participation by the future stewards of our region – youth!
- Site close to target audience, including historically underserved communities
- Not designed as a one-size-fits-all approach



# Bridging Facilities *continued*

## Proposed Language Addition for 2020 Regional Parks Policy Plan Update

### *Bridging facilities will:*

- Provide a clear statement of purpose for what it is intended to accomplish
- Identify the population to be served and the inequity addressed
- Site the facility close to the desired population
- Have a Council approved master plan
  - Include awareness-building or marketing plan
  - Include a programming plan - active and passive
- Not be included in the annual use estimate.



# Bridging Facilities *continued*

## Proposed Language Addition for 2020 Regional Parks Policy Plan Update

### *Bridging facilities may:*

- Be a stand-alone facility, located in an area not currently well-served by existing regional parks, park reserves, and trails.
- Be nested within an existing regional park, park reserve, special recreation feature, or trail.
- Have a mobile element, to allow outreach to extend beyond the existing boundaries of the Regional Parks System, going into communities that have been historically underserved.



# Bridging Facilities *continued*

## Takeaways from April 30, 2020, Agency partner meeting

- Strong support and excitement for increasing equitable use
- Some concerns remain for Bridging Facilities:
  - Have we clearly defined what bridging facilities are?
    - Adequately differentiate bridging facilities from local parks and community centers?
    - How to ensure “regional significance”?
  - Are Special Recreation Features adequate? What does the subset of Bridging Facilities add to the system?
  - Should bridging facilities be included in the annual use estimate? Current proposal does not recommend conducting counts. If the facility is successful, it will drive users to regional parks and trails.



# Bridging Facilities *continued*

## Takeaways from May 7, 2020 MPOSC meeting

- Generally, MPOSC voiced support for Bridging Facilities. This idea emerged in 2015, let's move it forward.
- Clearly articulate the intent behind the unit, including who it seeks to better serve.
- Don't open the door to funding local parks and community centers.
- Evaluate bridging facilities. Measure success!
  - Ensure the facility is reaching its target audience
  - As such, include bridging facility in the annual use estimate



# Bridging Facilities *discussion*

- Does the proposed language clearly define the bridging facility concept? Suggestions for strengthening?
- How do we ensure that bridging facilities do not open the door to local parks or community centers?



Tamarack Nature Center  
Bald Eagle-Otter Lake Regional Park



# Next Up: Boundary Adjustments



# Boundary Adjustments

- Most boundary adjustments are considered through the system additions process
- Minor boundary adjustments can be accomplished through a master plan amendment or acquisition master plan amendment to provide a more timely and simplified process
  - Minor adjustments are sometimes needed for land exchanges, utility crossings, boundary corrections, and/or new acquisition opportunities
- There is a need to establish clear guidance on what constitutes “minor”



# Boundary Adjustments *continued*

- Minor boundary adjustments will meet the following criteria:
  1. Be a maximum of 20 acres
  2. Be contiguous to a Council-approved master plan boundary
  3. Be consistent with the *Siting and Acquisition Policy* general criteria listed in tables 4-1 and 4-2 of the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan



# Boundary Adjustments *continued*

## Takeaways from April 30,2020 Agency partner meeting

- Whether 20 acres is too much or too little may depend on the size of the park.
- Would using a percentage be better? For example, allow boundary adjustments up to 10% of the total approved master plan acreage.
- For existing units, should boundary adjustments be handled through the master plan amendment process and not the systems addition process? This would allow for boundary adjustments to occur as they are needed, rather than just every four years.
- What about trails? What would be a “minor” trail boundary adjustment?



# Boundary Adjustments *continued*

## Takeaways from May 7, 2020 MPOSC meeting

- Should boundary adjustments be handled through the master plan amendment process and not the systems addition process? This would allow for boundary adjustments to occur as they are needed, rather than just every four years.
- Conversely, should boundary adjustments only be allowed for necessary land exchanges, conversions, or utility changes?



# Discussion

- Given the MPOSC questions, what direction for boundary adjustments does the Committee have?
  - Is 20 acres as a size threshold too much or too little?
  - Would using a percentage of the park area be better? What implications does that have for managing cost of the system?
  - Should boundary adjustments only be allowed only for necessary land exchanges, conversions, or utility changes?
  - Conversely, should boundary adjustments be handled through the master plan amendment process and not the systems addition process?
  - Question about balancing doing boundary adjustments on an as-needed basis versus every 4-year update process





METROPOLITAN  
C O U N C I L

Thank you!