

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Report

For the Community Development Committee meeting of July 6, 2021

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of July 14, 2021

Subject: Regional Parks System Equity Grant Program, 2021 Funding Recommendations

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve funding 23 projects totaling \$2,054,000 for the Regional Parks System 2021 Equity Grant Program, as shown in Table 1 of this report.
2. Authorize the Community Development Director to execute the grant agreements on behalf of the Council.

Summary of Commission Discussion/Questions

Jessica Lee, Senior Parks Planner, presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission at its meeting on July 1, 2021. Commissioner Assata Brown asked who served on the review team for the application review process. Ms. Lee responded that members of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the Community Development Committee, the Equity Advisory Committee, and a couple Implementing Agency staff served on the review team.

Commissioner Jeremy Peichel provided feedback around the takeaways from the review team. He emphasized that the review team saw a lot of growth in community and partner engagement from the last application round, especially around engaging with the partners in advance of submitting the applications. He said projects that scored the highest were developed beginning with equity in mind. He also referred to the proposals to hire BIPOC staff with the grant funding and commented that there needs to be a transition plan to hire BIPOC staff permanently after the grant funding ends. This requires an overall goal and commitment of the agencies to diversify staff. Also, Commissioner Peichel commented that he would like to see more emphasis on transit options for residents to access parks and trails beyond the urban core.

Commissioner Bob Moeller was happy to see that some of the funded projects seek to increase awareness of the regional system. He recommends the Council pursue this goal on a system level.

Lastly, Commissioner Brown made a recommendation that in future funding rounds staff should include a short synopsis for each project so that Commissioners not on the review committee are able to better understand the project purposes. It is difficult to know how to vote without this information.

The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission voted 5-1 to recommend the proposed action.

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: July 1, 2021

For the Community Development Committee meeting of July 6, 2021

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of July 14, 2021

Subject: Regional Parks System Equity Grant Program, 2021 Funding Recommendations

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, Chapter 8, Strategy 4

Staff Prepared/Presented: Jessica Lee, Senior Parks Planner (651-602-1621)

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve funding 23 projects totaling \$2,054,000 for the Regional Parks System 2021 Equity Grant Program, as shown in Table 1 of this report.
2. Authorize the Community Development Director to execute the grant agreements on behalf of the Council.

Background

The 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan commits the Council to develop a set-aside, competitive equity grant program to strengthen equitable use of the Regional Parks System. The Regional Parks System Competitive Equity Grant Program (Equity Grant Program) was formally established in 2019 through a pilot program with capital funding that resulted in awards for three Regional Park System equity projects. The pilot program, with feedback from the regional park implementing agencies and 2019 review committee members, illustrated the need for non-capital funding to support equity programming projects. The Council responded by authorizing \$1.4 million in Parks Interest Earnings for the Equity Grant Program. These dollars may be used to fund operating costs, including programming and staff.

The Council adopted the 2021 Regional Park System Competitive Equity Grant Program Notice of Funding Availability ([Business Item 2021-2](#)) after receiving input from the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the Community Development Committee, the Equity Advisory Committee, and regional park implementing agencies' directors, planners, and outreach staff. The 2021 Equity Grant Program emphasizes partnership building, equity programming efforts, internal and inter-agency collaboration, and designing accessible capital projects that not only meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, but provide innovative ways to bring meaningful, rich experiences to users.

Review Process

The ten Regional Parks Implementing Agencies submitted 37 applications requesting a total of \$3.8 million. The applications were reviewed internally for eligibility and completeness and then provided to a formal review committee, comprised of members of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the Council's Community Development Committee, the Council's Equity Advisory Committee, and representatives from the Regional Parks Implementing Agencies. This review committee evaluated and scored the projects and then met on May 14, 2021, to develop the funding recommendations shown below in Table 1. Of the 37 applications submitted, 23 are recommended for

funding, using \$2,054,000 of the available \$2,064,000. All ten agencies are recommended to receive at least one grant.

While agencies were able to apply for multiple projects, there are several limitations to awards, including:

- An agency may not receive more than \$200,000 of available capital funds.
- An agency may not receive more than \$200,000 of available interest earnings funds.
- No individual grant may exceed \$200,000.

Some projects that scored high as shown in Table 2 below are not recommended for funding simply because the Agency has reached their award limit with higher ranked projects. The review team also considered previously funded projects, the geographical distribution of all projects, and made funding recommendations based on the potential equity impact throughout the region.

Table 1. Funding Recommendations

Regional Park Implementing Agency and Project Name	Score	Proposed Capital Funding	Proposed Interest Earnings Funding	Total Grant Amount
Washington County Parks-on-the-Go Outreach Vehicle	96	\$40,000	\$20,000	\$60,000
Saint Paul Wakáŋ Tipi Center Exhibit Concept Plan at Bruce Vento RT	95	\$0	\$55,090	\$55,090
Dakota County Building and Bridging Community by Creating Equitable Spaces along the Mississippi River Greenway RT	95	\$83,500	\$76,500	\$160,000
Saint Paul BIPOC Ambassador Program	94	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$100,000
Washington County Community Outreach Staff Position	92	\$0	\$150,000	\$150,000
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) Youth Employment as a Catalyst for Regional Park Awareness and Increased Visits	92	\$0	\$150,000	\$150,000
Three Rivers Park District (TRPD) Growth of Pathways Internship Program	90	\$0	\$45,000	\$45,000
TRPD Bike Outreach and Engagement	90	\$0	\$80,000	\$80,000
Saint Paul Aquatics Water Safety and Drowning Prevention Program at Como and Phalen RP	90	\$0	\$94,910	\$94,910
TRPD Growth of Recreation Pass Plus Fee Assistance Program	90	\$0	\$61,500	\$61,500
Washington County Paddle Sport Rental Equipment and Learn to Paddle Programming at Square Lake SRF and Cottage Grove Ravine RP	89	\$40,000	\$30,000	\$70,000

Regional Park Implementing Agency and Project Name	Score	Proposed Capital Funding	Proposed Interest Earnings Funding	Total Grant Amount
Bloomington Introducing BIPOC Residents to Regional Parks (Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes RP)	89	\$0	\$33,500	\$33,500
Washington County Accessibility Improvements	88	\$80,000	\$0	\$80,000
MPRB Pathways to Nature: Creating Welcoming Ways to Access Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary at Theodore Wirth RP	87	\$190,000	\$10,000	\$200,000
MPRB Multicultural and Multilingual Advertising Promoting Minneapolis Regional Parks and Programs	85	\$0	\$40,000	\$40,000
Ramsey County Unlocking Winter Recreation - A Robust and Equitable Learn-to-Ski Program at Battle Creek RP	84	\$0	\$161,300	\$161,300
Scott County Equitable Shorefishing Access Improvements Shaped by Community Stakeholders at Cedar Lake Farm RP	82	\$180,500	\$5,000	\$185,500
Scott County Mental Health & Nature-Based Wellness Programming for Disproportionately Impacted Communities	81	\$0	\$162,000	\$162,000
Anoka County Partnerships in Translation	80	\$0	\$20,000	\$20,000
Anoka County Learn to Ride Bike Program (partner with Washington County)	79	\$0	\$34,000	\$34,000
Ramsey County Cultural Liaisons for Parks	78	\$0	\$38,700	\$38,700
Anoka County Inspiring Youth through an Augmented Reality Trail Program	76	\$0	\$52,500	\$52,500
Carver County ADA Assessment(s) Update for the Regional Park Units	71	\$0	\$20,000	\$20,000
	Totals	\$664,000	\$1,390,000	\$2,054,000

Applications that are not recommended for funding are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Projects Not Recommended for Funding

Regional Park Implementing Agency and Project Name	Score	Requested Amount
Saint Paul Wakáŋ Tipi Center Design and Construction at Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary	93	\$200,000
Three Rivers Park District (TRPD) Community and Cultural Liaisons	90	\$45,000

Regional Park Implementing Agency and Project Name	Score	Requested Amount
Anoka County Wargo Trail Accessibility Project at Rice Creek Chain of Lakes PR	83	\$95,000
TRPD Growth of Introductory Camping Opportunities	81	\$60,000
Carver County Outdoor Recreation Equipment Rental Services at Lake Waconia Regional Park	81	\$200,000
TRPD Expand Capacity for Community Engagement Specialist	81	\$81,234
Carver County Permanent Dock/Pier at Lake Waconia RP and Coney Island of the West	80	\$200,000
Carver County Creative & Inclusive Playground Facility for Lake Waconia Regional Park	79	\$200,000
Carver County Expanded Outdoor Recreation Services via Portable Rock-Climbing Wall	78	\$55,000
Ramsey County Universal Signage	78	\$186,000
TRPD Explorer Program Expansion	73	\$85,000
Ramsey County Racial Equity in Nature Center Programming at Bald Eagle-Otter Lake RP	72	\$83,000
TRPD Design of Mississippi Gateway Regional Park	69	\$200,000
TRPD Try-It Events	55	\$21,000
	Total	\$1,711,234

Rationale

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, Finance Chapter 8, Strategy 4 states that equity is a consideration in the Regional Parks System funding and investment. The Regional Parks Equity Grant Program is one Council strategy for advancing equity in the region.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The competitive equity grant program seeks to advance the *Thrive MSP 2040* outcome of equity by increasing the equitable usage of the Regional Parks System by all residents of the region.

Funding

Up to \$2,064,000 is available in the authorized budget for the 2021 Equity Grant Program. This includes \$664,000 in Parks bonds and \$1.4M in Parks Interest Earnings.