

## Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Report

For the Community Development Committee meeting of November 15, 2021

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of December 8, 2021

**Subject:** Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan, Dakota County, Review File No. 50228-1

### Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve Dakota County's Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan.

### Summary of Committee Discussion/Questions

Tracey Kinney, Senior Planner, presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission at its meeting on November 4, 2021. Nikki Geisler, Lil Leatham, and Jeff Bransford, all with Dakota County, were in attendance and responded to questions.

Council Member Sue Vento shared that Spring Lake Park Reserve is a hidden gem along the Mississippi River. She encouraged everyone to visit it.

Commissioner Peichel asked about the ability of the master plan to engage residences outside of the park reserve to ensure that measures are being taken to improve erosion within the park reserve. Emmett Mullin, Parks Manager, responded that steps are being taken to work with adjacent landowners. Additionally, since the land is within the Mississippi River Critical Corridor Area, regulations are in place to guide development while protecting the river and its ravines in the park reserve. Leatham responded that one of the contributing properties is a current private inholding that Dakota County would like to acquire or protect with a conservation easement. The adjacent properties are included within the 2020 [Land Conservation Plan](#) as preliminary Conservation Focus Areas. As a matter of practice, Dakota County contacts landowners to determine their interest in voluntary land protection and natural resource management opportunities through the County's Land Conservation program. Commissioner Peichel asked if there are peer groups that could encourage better management of agricultural land to improve erosion in the park reserve. Jeff Bransford, Parks Management Analyst for Dakota County, stated that he did not know and would be happy to get back to Commissioner Peichel regarding other efforts to work with adjacent landowners after the meeting.

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

## Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Committee

Meeting date: November 4, 2021

For the Community Development Committee meeting of November 15, 2021

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of December 8, 2021

**Subject:** Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan, Dakota County, Review File No. 50228-1

**MPOSC District, Member:** District H, Todd Kemery

**Council District, Member:** District 15, Phillip Sterner; District 16, Wendy Wulff

**Policy/Legal Reference:** Minn. Stat. § 473.313; *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan: 5*, Planning Policy Strategy 1, Master Plans

**Staff Prepared/Presented:** Tracey Kinney, Senior Planner (651-602-1029)

**Division/Department:** Community Development/ Regional Planning

### Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve Dakota County's Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan.

### Background

Dakota County's Spring Lake Park Reserve is located within the southeast part of the Regional Parks System and in the northeast part of Dakota County (Figures 1 and 2).

Spring Lake Park Reserve is within the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA), located on the south shore of the Mississippi River's Spring Lake located in the City of Rosemount and Nininger Township.

Spring Lake Park Reserve offers expansive views of the Mississippi River Valley and high-quality natural landscapes. Visitors can travel the park, along the river, and connect to the planned Rosemount Regional Trail using the Mississippi Greenway Regional Trail.

Dakota County's master plan focuses on recreation and natural resource improvements, programming, and partner coordination (Figure 3). No changes are recommended to the park reserve boundary which includes 4 inholdings (Figure 4). Highlights of the master plan include improving access to the Mississippi River with The Landing river use area, reintroducing bison to the prairie ecosystem, and building a collaborative relationship between Dakota County and Indigenous communities associated with the park reserve to address decision-making related to the park's Indigenous sites and cultural landscape.

This Master Plan paired with the Spring Lake Park Reserve Natural Resource Management Plan replaces the earlier planning documents approved by the Council from 1984, 2004, and 2015 (amendment) and will act as the guiding document for this park reserve. When the master plan is fully implemented, the existing 1,128 acre-park reserve will move from 12 percent developed to 15 percent developed, which is well within the 20 percent allowance for park reserves, as guided by the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

## **Rationale**

Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (RPPP) Chapter 5, Planning Policy Strategy 1, Master Plans.

## **Thrive Lens Analysis**

The Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan advances the Thrive outcome of stewardship by investing in natural resource restoration and protection. In addition, it advances the Thrive outcome of Livability by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, which enhances quality of life in the region.

## **Funding**

The estimated cost to implement the improvements in the Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan is \$26,096,000 and the estimated cost to operate the park reserve over the next 10-years is an additional \$349,683. The costs associated with acquisitions were not included in the master plan to maintain flexibility in the method of conveyance and since the length of time to acquire the parcels most likely exceeds the life of the master plan.

## **Known Support / Opposition**

The Dakota County Board of Commissioners approved a Resolution (21-313) on June 22, 2021, in support of the Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan (Attachment 1).

Figure 1: Spring Lake Park Reserve (Dakota County) location in the Regional Parks System

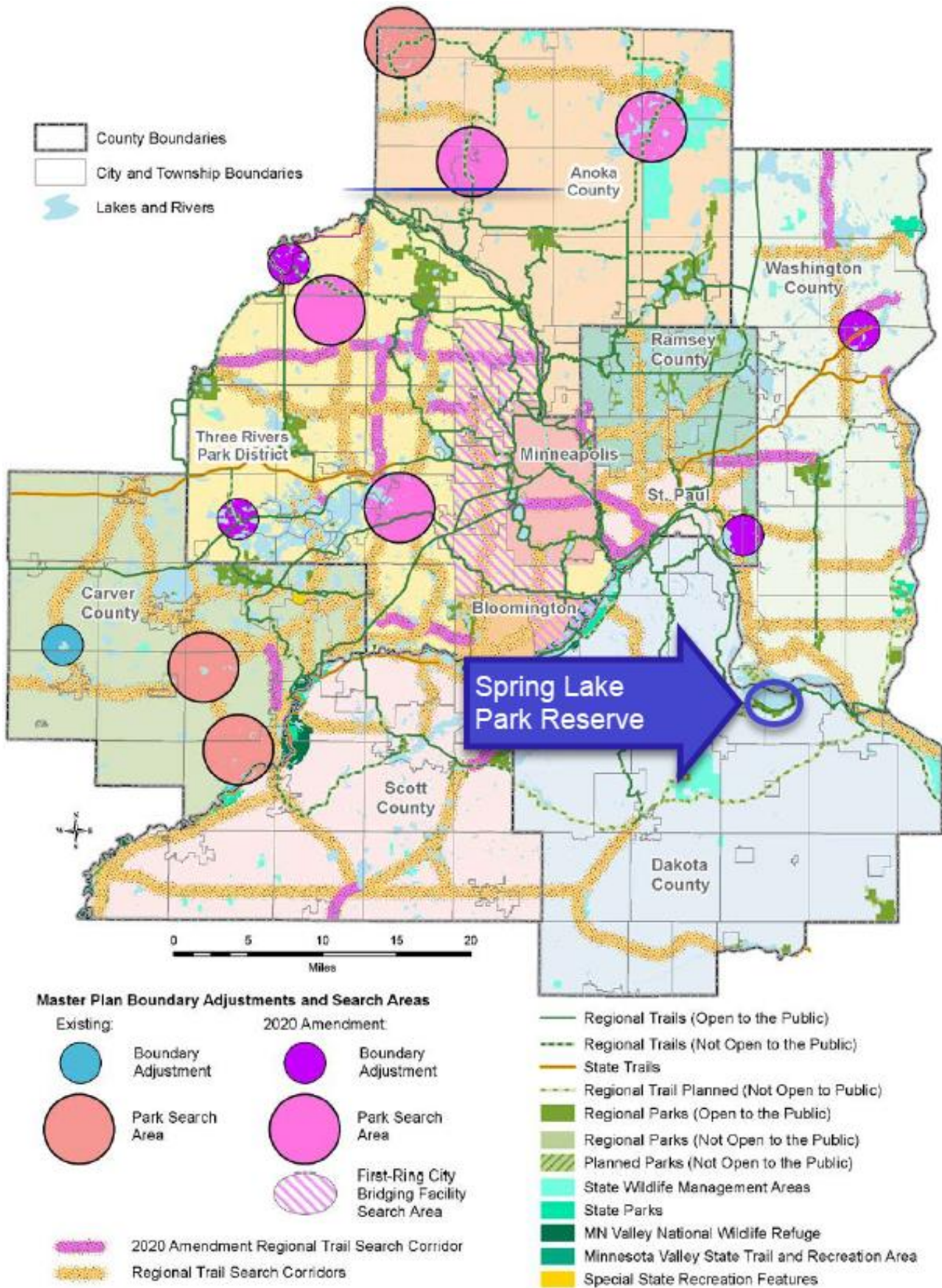




Figure 2: Location of the Park Reserve with Dakota County

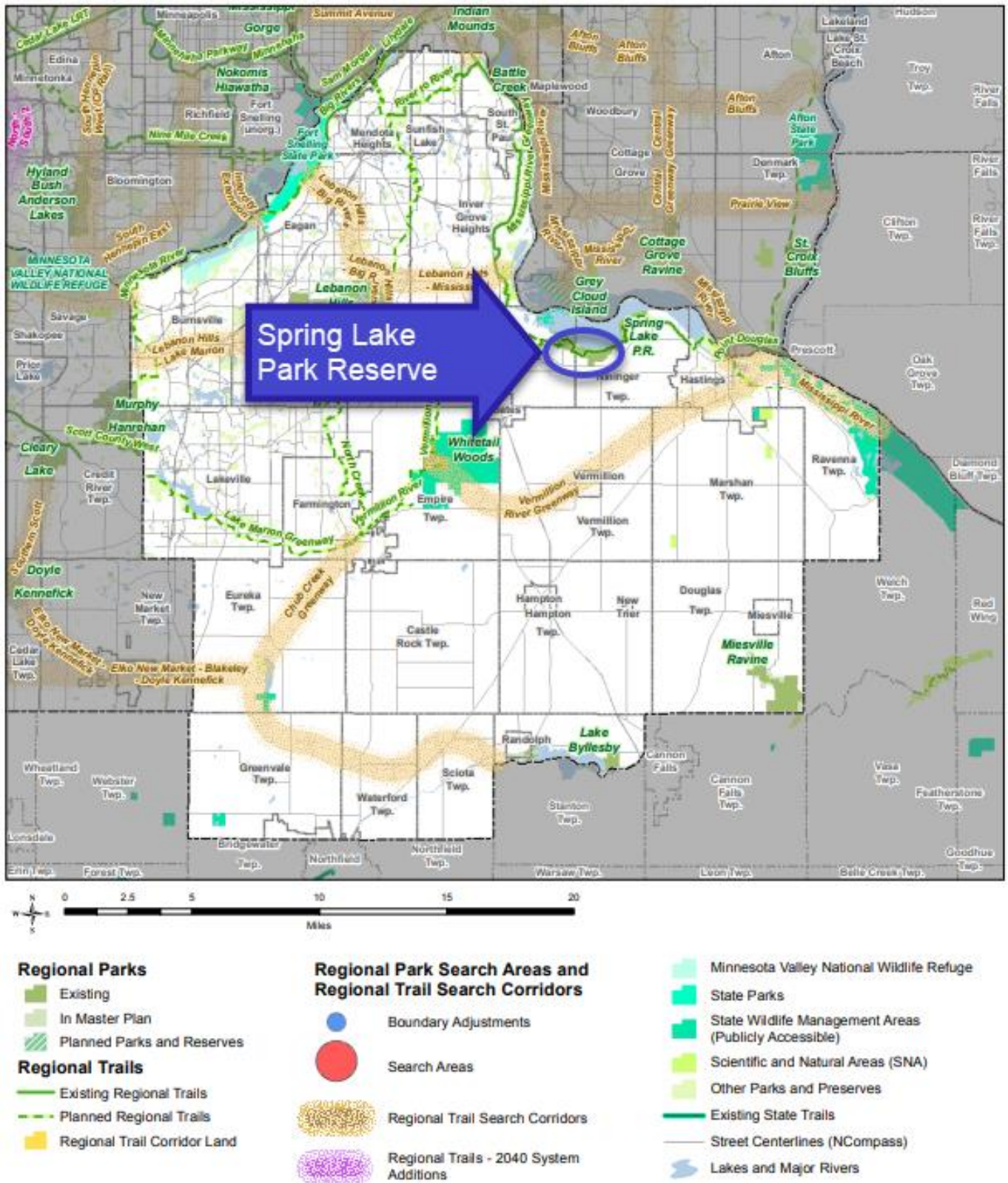
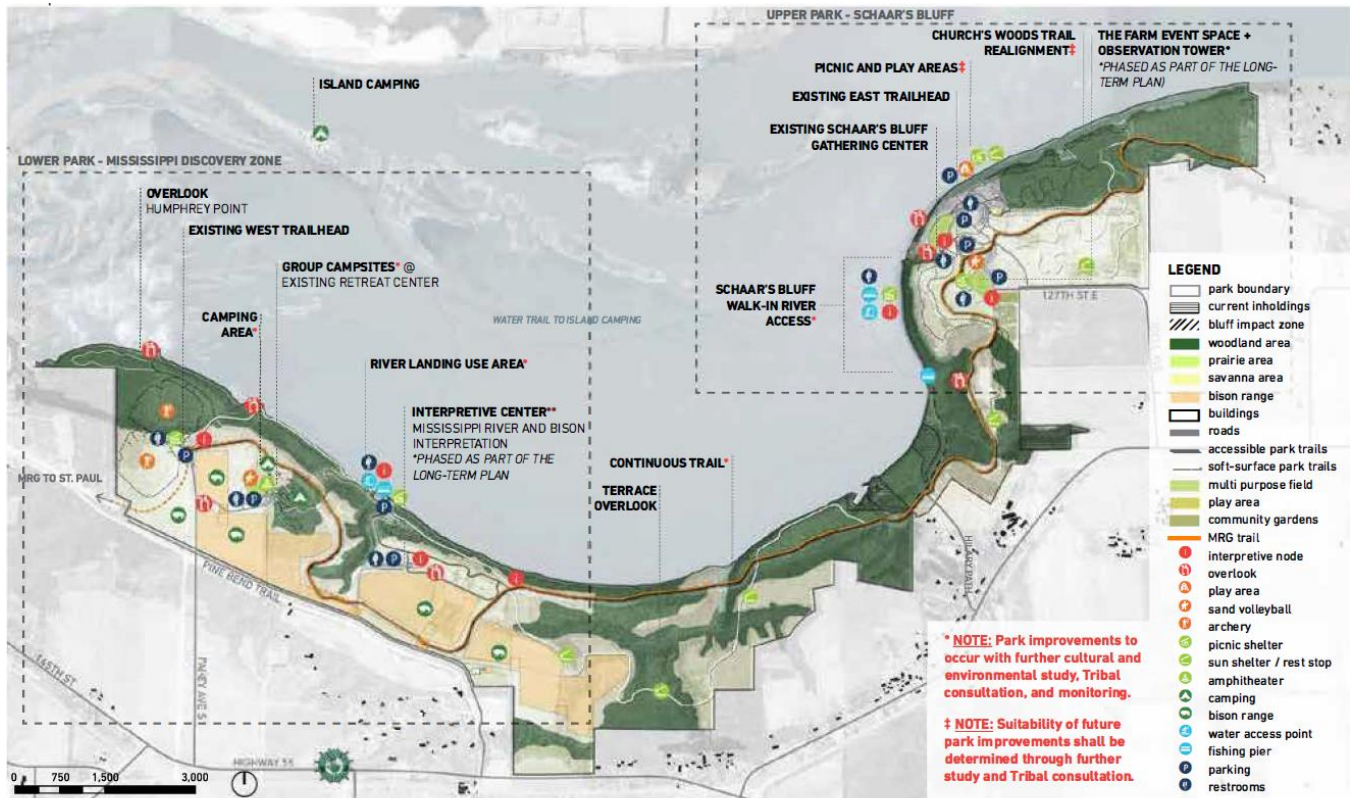
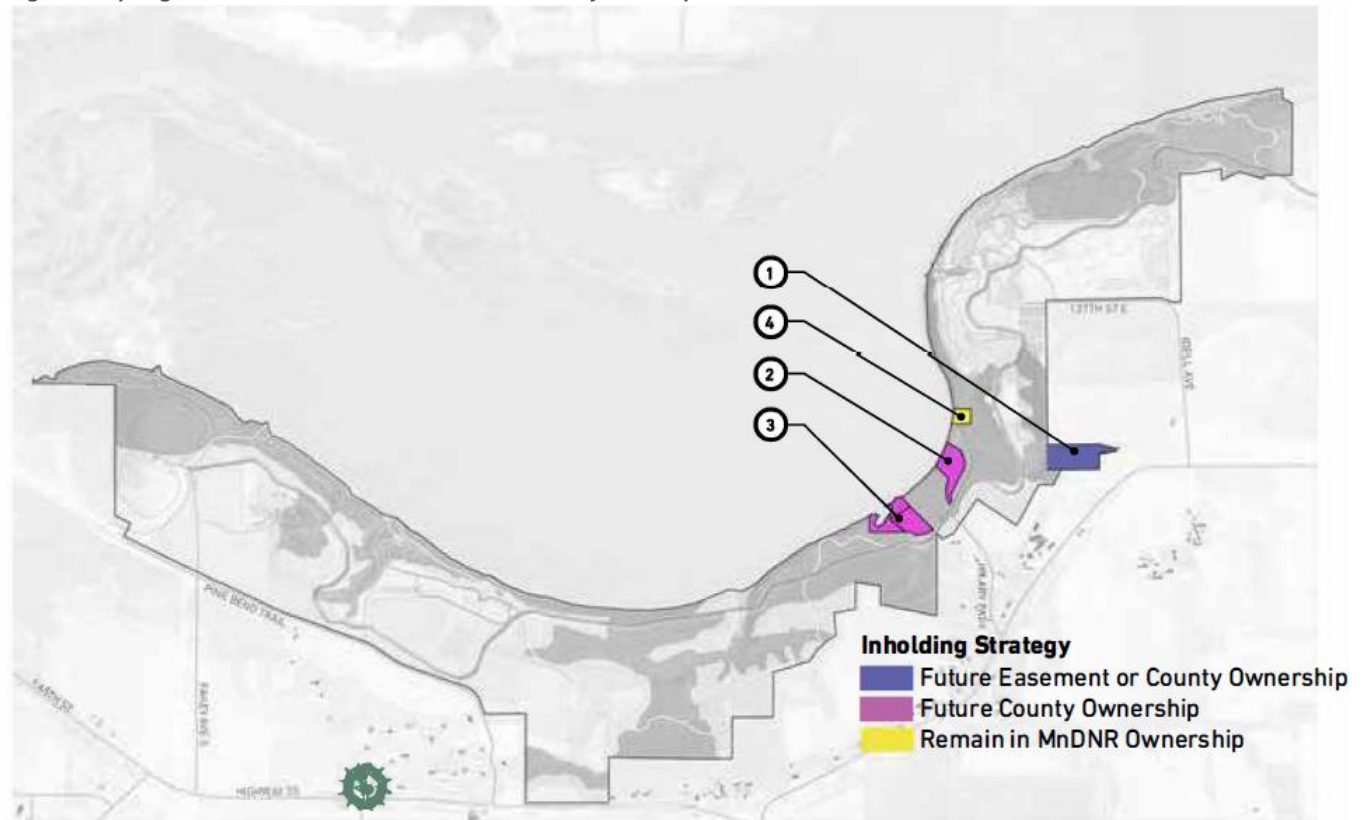


Figure 3. Master Plan Development Concept



Site-wide Concept Plan, Long-Term Development Plan

Figure 4: Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan Boundary and Acquisitions





## Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (RPPP) requires that master plans for park reserves address the eleven items detailed below.

### *Boundaries*

Dakota County's Spring Lake Park Reserve is located within the southeast part of the Regional Parks System and in the northeast part of Dakota County (Figures 1 and 2).

Spring Lake Park Reserve is within the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) and within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA), located on the south shore of the Mississippi River's Spring Lake and in the City of Rosemount as well as Nininger Township.

Spring Lake Park Reserve offers expansive views of the Mississippi River Valley and high-quality natural landscapes. Visitors can travel the park, travel along the river, and connect to the planned Rosemount Regional Trail using the Mississippi Greenway Regional Trail.

The existing 1,128 acre-park reserve will move towards 15 percent developed acres which is within the RPPP's park reserve criteria of ensuring at least 80 percent of the park reserve is managed for conservation and up to 20 percent of land can be developed.

No changes are recommended to the park reserve boundary which includes four inholdings (Figure 4).

### *Acquisition Costs*

The current boundary encompasses 19 acres not owned by the County (inholdings) including three private properties and one public property. The costs associated with acquiring these parcels are not included in the master plan to maintain flexibility in the method of conveyance and since the time horizon to acquire the parcels most likely exceeds the life of the master plan. The parcels are described below.

- Private Inholding 1: Portions of two parcels (5 acres). The County would like to retain flexibility in either acquiring a conservation easement or fee title.
- Private Inholding 2: Portions of two parcels (5 acres). An existing easement prevents expansion of the cabin, there is no intention to acquire the property unless the family contacts the County as a willing seller.
- Private Inholding 3: Portions of two parcels (8 acres). Based on an existing agreement, the County has the right to acquire fee title no sooner than 2034 to this parcel and to not place any park reserve improvements until 2054.
- Public Inholding: Public water access that is owned by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (1 acre). The DNR will continue to own the property as a public water access.

### *Stewardship*

The master plan includes a Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP), historic preservation guidelines, and cultural landscape stewardship guidance.

The Spring Lake Park Reserve NRMP was developed in tandem with this development master plan and includes detailed descriptions of natural resources existing conditions, desired improvements, and action items.

The historic preservation guidelines include specific application of the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's (SOI) standards for treatment of historic properties.

Cultural landscape stewardship guidance includes Tribal Historical Preservation Officers (THPOs) consultation guidance protocols, building a collaborative relationship between Dakota County and Indigenous communities associated with the park, and Traditional Cultural Properties and Archaeological Sites guidance.

### *Demand Forecast*

According to the Metropolitan Council's 2019 Use Estimate, Lebanon Hills is the most visited regional park in Dakota County. Additionally in 2019, Spring Lake Park Reserve attracted approximately 11 percent of the visitation of Lebanon Hills.

### *Development Concept*

This plan focuses on recreation and natural resource improvements, programming, and partner coordination improvements. The plan integrates the park reserve's Traditional Cultural Properties (TCP) Study that identifies "numerous highly sensitive TCPs of importance to the Dakota People and their ancestors for time immemorial" as well as identifies additional study, consultation, and monitoring by associated Indigenous communities that must occur to finalize design concepts. Improvements are organized into the Upper Park (Schaar's Bluff/east) and Lower Park (west) (Figure 4). When fully developed the master plan will reach 15 percent development which is consistent with the RPPP's 20% development guideline for a park reserve.

Upper Park (Schaars Bluff/east): The Upper Park long-term plan enhances picnicking, play areas, the Scharr's Bluff Gathering Center, community gardens, parking, water access, trails, interpretation, and restoration areas. New features include the Farm and the Schaar's Bluff River Access and Use areas (Figure 5). The Farm Use Area includes a four-season pavilion for event rental and silo observation tower. The Schaar's Bluff River Access will connect the River Use Area via a trail leading from the Mississippi River Greenway Regional Trail and a potential connection between the upper bluffs and lower shoreline.

Lower Park (west): Major improvements for the lower (west) park include bison reintroduction and redeveloping an historic access as the River Landing with educational and recreational connections at the river's edge. An indoor interpretive center will be the nexus for guided programming on interconnections among the prairie ecosystem and bison, the river, and the landscape of Spring Lake Park Reserve. Other improvements include new hike-in campsites, river access points and overlooks, outdoor classrooms, pavilions, interactive interpretation, trail extensions, and restoration areas (Figure 6).

Reintroduction of bison, a keystone prairie species, will help establish a diverse, resilient, and sustainable prairie ecosystem as well as provide opportunities to view and learn about bison, the prairie ecosystem, and the strong historical relationship that the animal had with Indigenous culture. The County is currently scheduled to reintroduce bison in 2022. If bison are not reintroduced, the prairie ecosystem would be managed with fire and mowing, and facilities specifically related to bison would not be implemented.



Figure 5. Upper Park (Schaars Bluff/east) Development Plan

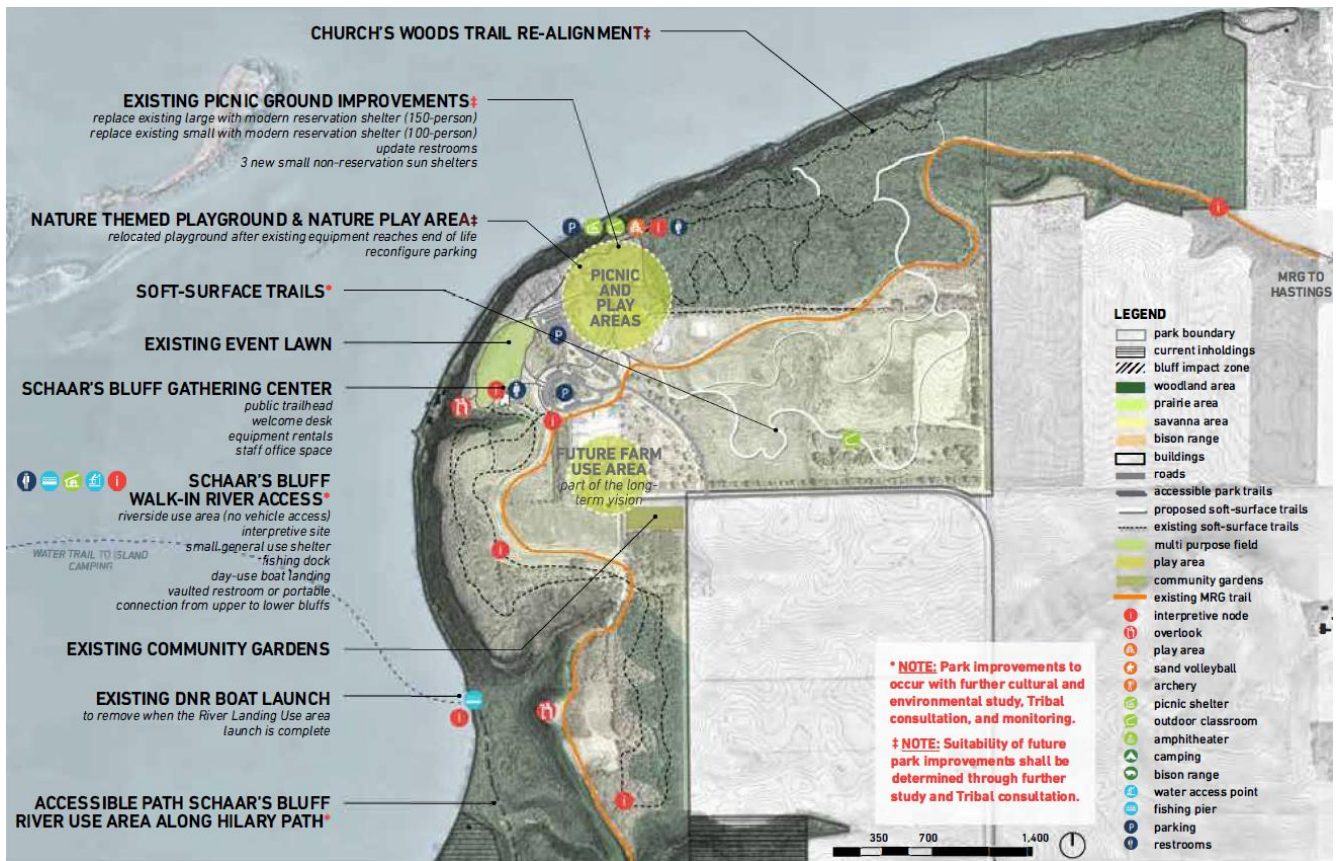
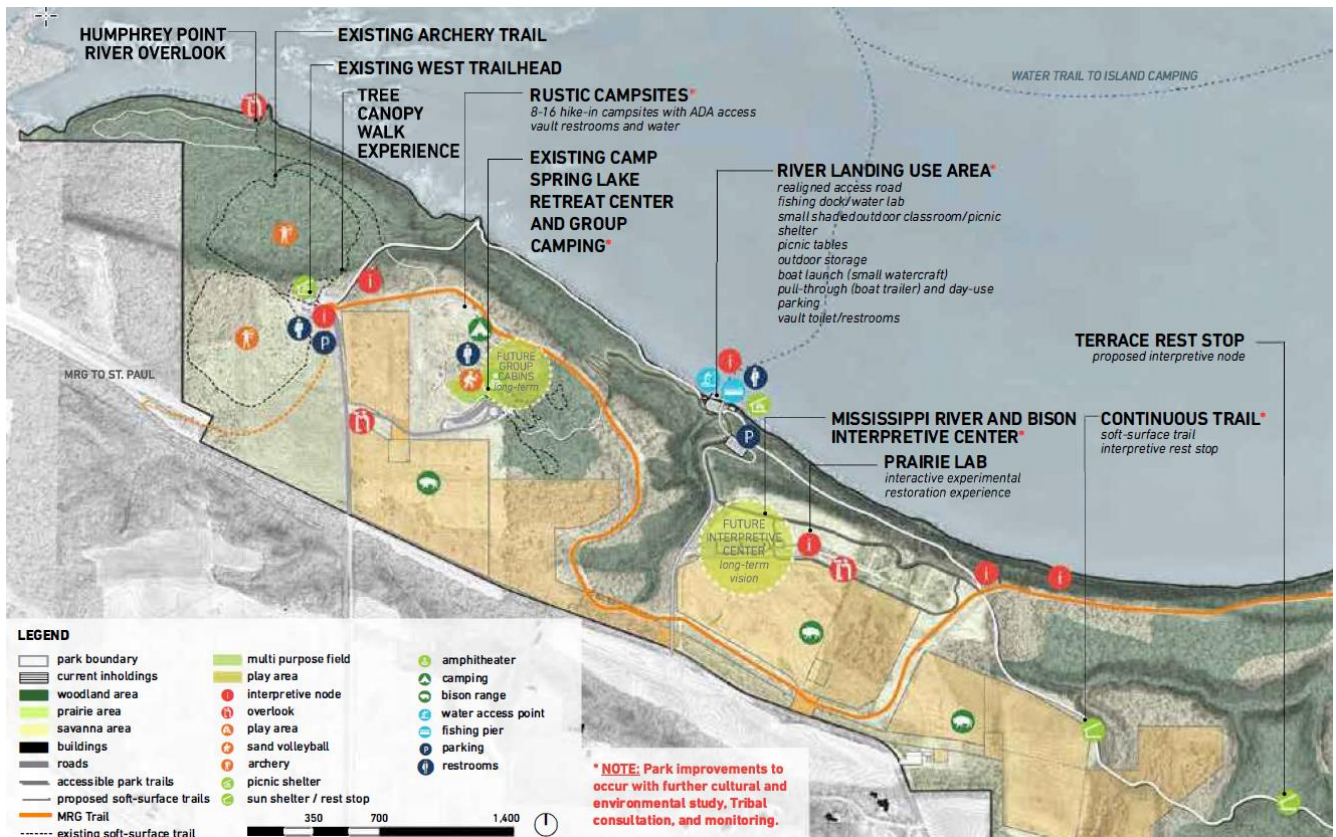


Figure 6. Lower Park (west) Development Plan



### *Conflicts*

The master plan includes mitigation for stormwater runoff and environmental clean-up sites that are located outside of the park reserve.

Stormwater runoff from adjacent landowners south of the park boundary is contributing to erosion within the park. The master plan recommends protection and management of these lands to enhance the park reserve. Landowners will be contacted to determine their interest in voluntary land protection and natural resource management opportunities through the County's Land Conservation Program.

Additionally, there are known and suspected environmental clean-up sites on lands adjacent to the park boundary and within park reserve's vicinity. The County will work with these landowners on a voluntary basis on additional investigation and potential cleanup of these sites. Depending on the nature of the site, the clean-up may improve surface water quality, ground water, public health, and habitat resources within the park.

### *Public Services*

To implement the master plan, additional septic treatment, water services, and utilities are needed. Additional septic treatment will be needed for the Interpretive Center and Farm Use Area and for future restrooms at the Landing River Use and Mill River Use Areas. New utility services are needed at the future Interpretive Center and Landing River Use Area off of Fischer Avenue.

### *Operations*

Dakota County Parks owns and manages Spring Lake Park Reserve. To implement the master plan, operational costs are an additional \$349,683 over the next 10 years.

### *Partner Engagement*

The project team engaged Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs), the City of Rosemount, Nininger Township, the City of Hastings, the National Park Service, the MnDNR, and the YMCA. The THPOs expressed comfort with the goals for natural resource restoration, recreational programming, and interpretation within the park reserve, and strongly recommend further study and planning to understand and protect the cultural areas in the park reserve from additional disturbance. The other agency partners were generally supportive the plan.

### *Public Engagement and Participation*

Community engagement began in 2019 and shifted to online engagement opportunities in March 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic stay-at-home order and social distancing best practices. A targeted engagement process focused on consulting visitors based on their familiarity with the park reserve. These groups included Indigenous, Hispanic/Latinx, people living with disabilities, people with low incomes, youth, and older adults. Some of the themes that emerged from the public engagement process include bison reintroduction, nature-based recreation, wayfinding, sustainable design principals, and concern for over-development. The public participated in the development of the master plan through a number of events and engagement methods that are described below.

In Phase 1, 1,000 people participated. Engagement methods included Met Council Youth and Parks Research Study events (Latinx, youth), Latino Health / Salud Latina Community Health Fair, Burnsville (Latinx, youth), Reality Store Resources Outreach event, Dakota County Technical College (people living with disabilities, youth), Sharks event (people living with disabilities, youth), Hastings Y Pop-up event (older adults), South St. Paul Early Childhood Education event (Latinx), and Hastings Family Service event (People with low incomes).



In Phase 2, 1,000 people participated. Engagement methods included evaluation of the concepts online via Social Pinpoint, survey, online open house, social media mini polls, email responses, and stakeholder meetings.

In Phase 3, over 350 people participated, and Facebook participation reached an additional 22,000 people. Engagement methods included email outreach to stakeholders and past participants in the planning process, questionnaire, online open house, social media, and Dakota County staff and stakeholder meetings. The meetings engaged the YMCA, DNR, Wilderness in the City, Legacy of Nature Alliance, Hastings Environmental Protectors, Public Art Citizen Advisory Committee, Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, Minnesota State Office of Archeology, Hastings City Council, Rosemount Parks and Recreation Commission, and Hastings Rotary Club.

### *Equity Analysis*

The master plan's equity analysis described the demographics, public engagement, and evaluation of the public engagement process for underserved communities within 20-miles of the park reserve.

### **Project Data**

In general, demographics of census blocks closer to the park reserve are less diverse and wealthier than the larger service area. Many of these closer census blocks encompass rural farmland with limited populations. People of color, people with disabilities, seniors, and those with lower household income comprise a smaller share of park visitors than would be predicted by their proportion of the general resident population.

Dakota County demographics of those living within the 20-mile service area in 2019 are white (83%), Black (7.58%), American Indian (0.54%), and Asian (6.34%). Eight percent of the population is Hispanic. Median Income in the service area is \$85,000. Fourteen percent of the population is over 65, and 28% is under 18.

Current reasons for underrepresentation include distance from home, lack of awareness, time, and transportation options. In addition, safety concerns, language barriers, weather, cultural or religious insensitivity and discrimination, and lack of desired recreation facilities contribute to inequity in park use. The historic reasons for this inequity are numerous. Reasons can be traced to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 after which many Dakota people living in the area were sent into exile. In the 150 years that have followed, government programs and policies have enabled white settlement and discouraged people of color from living in the rural areas and suburbs surrounding Spring Lake Park Reserve. In addition, government policies, institutional racism, and personal discrimination have discouraged generations of people of color from visiting parks. Additionally, people who were not raised going to parks tend to not visit parks as adults or take their children to parks.

### **Public Engagement and Participation**

Engagement activities for youth, Latinx, people living with disabilities, Indigenous people, and people with low incomes are listed in the public participation section of this report. Recurring themes expressed throughout the process included preserving and protecting natural resources, increasing access to the Mississippi River, providing access to more of the park reserve with low-impact natural surface trails, emphasis on cultural interpretation, and adding visitor amenities such as more restrooms, improved playground, equipment rentals, and picnic facilities.



## **Evaluation Summary**

The Master Plan was directly shaped by the community input received both from the general public engagement approaches and the underrepresented audiences' approaches. Below are comments from specific participant groups that are included in the plan. One item that did not make it into the plan was a stargazing observatory since light pollution would interfere. Stargazing was advocated for by people living with disabilities, youth, Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, and low-income people.

- Tribal Historic Preservation Officers advocated for the bison reintroduction
- Latinx participants advocated for additional river valley overlooks, camping, and restrooms
- People living with disabilities advocated for accessible restrooms
- Latinx participants and older adults advocated for river use areas
- People living with disabilities, youth, and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers advocated for keeping archery in the park
- Tribal Historic Preservation Officers and older adults advocated for cultural interpretation
- Latinx participants advocated for the Mississippi River Greenway
- Tribal Historic Preservation Officers and older adults advocated for further study around Traditional Cultural Properties.

As part of the engagement process, Latinx participants, youth, older adults, and low-income people advocated for better awareness of park reserve opportunities. Dakota County recognized that barriers to park use among underrepresented demographic groups include lack of awareness of the park reserve and the park reserve's distance from most of the County's residents. In response, Dakota County is developing a Parks Awareness and Promotion Plan in 2021 to provide recommendations to raise park system awareness across the County.

### ***Public Awareness***

Dakota County builds awareness of its parks system through a newsletter, social media, limited advertising, and news releases. Dakota County is developing a marketing plan in 2021 to raise awareness of their system and its offering among targeted audiences by using effective, relevant, and inclusive communication techniques.

### ***Accessibility***

Dakota County recognizes the need to provide accessible facilities and amenities to all park users, regardless of resources, age, or ability, and is committed to Universal Design. Future facilities will be designed to be ADA and State Code compliant and use U.S. Access Board guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas. This plan seeks to create a welcoming environment that consistently gives all visitors opportunities for a full and supportive experience.

Visitors are able to access the park reserve by car from the north and south via US Highway 52 or by State Highway 61 to Highway 55 and County Road 42. Local visitors may access the park reserve from the City of Hastings on the Mississippi River Greenway (MRG) regional trail. The Rosemount Greenway will provide future trail access to Spring Lake Park Reserve.

### ***Natural Resources***

The improvements in this master plan were designed in support of the Park Reserve's natural resources shown in the plan's natural resource inventory. The main natural resource improvements identified in this master plan are:

- Restoring a diversity of native plant communities through phasing
- Reintroducing bison or other large grazing animals to manage vegetation
- Restoring the ecological services through active management and agency coordination

- Curtailing the erosion in the park's ravines by stabilizing ravine slopes and reducing the accumulation of sediment in ravine bottoms
- Regenerating soils by reducing negative impacts
- Protecting water resources by working with neighboring property owners to reduce stormwater runoff and integrating rain gardens, bio-retention swales, and stormwater ponds into the site to manage stormwater.

The master plan acknowledges that the park reserve is within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area's (MRCCA). Most uses in this master plan are allowed under MRCCA rules. All new features will be designed and constructed to comply with the standards stated in Minn. Rules 6106.0130. To provide a level of visitor service consistent with Dakota County park standards, this plan recommends restroom facilities for the Schaar's Bluff River Use Area, the Landing River Use Area, and the bike-in/walk-in camp sites. To build these facilities, zoning variances will be sought from Nininger Township and the City of Rosemount. The County will also seek approval from the MN DNR approval.

### **Consistency with Other Council Policies and Systems**

**Department of Natural Resources – Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA)** (Dan Petrik 651-259-5697) – The master plan is very thorough, informative, and provides clear direction for future park development. Overall, the design and planned future developments are consistent with the purpose and intent of the MRCCA statute and rules

**Community Development - Demographics** (Todd Graham 651-602-1322) – The "Demographics and Trends" discussion provides a "US Census Bureau" forecast of "over 500,000 in 2040." (Page 14) Council staff advise that: the U.S. Census Bureau does not produce state nor county projections. The discussion continues: "population within the service area for Spring Lake Park Reserve is projected to steadily grow, from 532,884 in 2010 to 554,464 in 2019, and to 610,087 by 2024." A source for the 2024 projections is not cited; but it is not the Met Council forecast.

Council staff understand the service area is generally defined as a "20-mile drive" radius. We are not able to validate the assertion of 10% population growth over 5 years. We do conclude the County is not using Met Council local forecasts; 10 percent growth over 5 years is significantly faster than the Met Council forecast of 1 percent per year growth in Dakota County and surrounding areas.

Council staff advise Dakota County to utilize Met Council's forecast. Met Council's current local forecast can be obtained here: <https://gisdata.mn.gov/dataset?q=taz+forecast>. Council staff are available to discuss further at the County's request.

**Environmental Services - Sewer** (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – The Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan outlines a variety of improvements that are contained within the park boundary. The park is located along the south shore of the Mississippi River, across from the Eagles Point Wastewater Treatment Plant, in Nininger Township and the City of Rosemount about 4 miles north and west of the existing Hastings Wastewater Treatment Plant.

The Metropolitan Council has no existing facilities, nor have any long-term plans for regional wastewater service in this area.

**Metro Transit - Service Development** (Steve Mahowald 612-349-7775) – The park is outside the Transit Capital Levy district and has no regular route service nearby. The following statement from the report is accurate.

“Due to low population density surrounding the park, it is unlikely there will be regular transit service to the park in the foreseeable future.”

## **Attachments**

Attachment 1: Resolution 21-313, a resolution supporting the Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan, Dakota County Board of Commissioners



**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
DAKOTA COUNTY, MINNESOTA**

June 22, 2021

Resolution No. 21-313

Motion by Commissioner Mary Hamann-Roland

Second by Commissioner Mike Slavik

**Adoption Of Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan And Natural Resources Management Plan**

WHEREAS, by Resolution No. 19-524 (May 21, 2019), the Dakota County Board of Commissioners (County Board) approved the consultant contract to update the 2003 Spring Lake Park

WHEREAS, by Resolution No. 19-524 (May 21, 2019), the Dakota County Board of Commissioners (County Board) approved the consultant contract to update the 2003 Spring Lake Park Reserve (SLPR) Master Plan (MP) and to create the first SLPR Natural Resources Management Plan NRMP; and

WHEREAS, together, the plans present a long-range vision for the park and will guide five and 10-year priorities for recreation development, natural resource management, visitor services, and park operations; and

WHEREAS, the MP addresses community-identified needs and desires, including enhancing natural habitat, reintroducing bison, improving access to the Mississippi River, offering more hiking opportunities and interpretation; and

WHEREAS, the MP further recognizes Indigenous sacred places are located within the park and the need for future stewardship partnership with associated Indigenous nations; and

WHEREAS, the NRMP is a technical guide to restoration and management of the park’s natural areas; and

WHEREAS, by Resolution No. 21-086 (February 16, 2021), the draft plans were released by the Dakota County Board for Public Review; and

WHEREAS, the plans were posted on the Dakota County website with the ability for the public to submit comments from February 17, 2021, to April 17, 2021, email notices were sent to project stakeholders, a virtual Open House was held on March 23, 2021, and a digital scavenger hunt was held March 12 to April 11, 2021; and

WHEREAS, the SLPR MP and NRMP have been revised to address staff, stakeholder, and public comments; and

WHEREAS, estimated Dakota County costs for the five-year plan are \$4.9 million dollars for recreation development, natural resource restoration, and bison reintroduction; and

WHEREAS, the County Board will determine implementation priorities and funding levels during the annual Parks Capital Improvement Program budget process; and

**STATE OF MINNESOTA**  
County of Dakota

	<u>YES</u>		<u>NO</u>
Slavik	<u>  X  </u>	Slavik	<u>      </u>
Gaylord	<u>  X  </u>	Gaylord	<u>      </u>
Halverson	<u>  X  </u>	Halverson	<u>      </u>
Atkins	<u>  X  </u>	Atkins	<u>      </u>
Workman	<u>  X  </u>	Workman	<u>      </u>
Holberg	<u>  X  </u>	Holberg	<u>      </u>
Hamann-Roland	<u>  X  </u>	Hamann-Roland	<u>      </u>

I, Jeni Reynolds, Clerk to the Board of the County of Dakota, State of Minnesota, do hereby certify that I have compared the foregoing copy of a resolution with the original minutes of the proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners, Dakota County, Minnesota, at their session held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of June 2021, now on file in the County Administration Department, and have found the same to be a true and correct copy thereof.

Witness my hand and official seal of Dakota County this 22<sup>nd</sup> day of June 2021.

*Jeni Reynolds*

Clerk to the Board