

Committee Report

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Community Development Committee Meeting: April 15, 2024

For the Metropolitan Council: April 24, 2024

Business Item: 2024-91

2024 Regional Parks and Trails System Competitive Equity Grant Program Funding Recommendations

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve funding 22 projects totaling up to \$2,055,500 for the Regional Parks and Trails System 2024 Equity Grant Program, as shown in Table 1 of this report.
2. Authorize the Executive Director of Community Development to execute the grant agreements and associated amendments on behalf of the Council.

Summary of Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Discussion

Jessica Lee presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission on April 4, 2024.

Commissioner Cecily Harris asked to include MPOSC in a future presentation of existing equity grants and lessons learned. Commissioner Bob Moeller stressed the importance of awareness of the regional parks system in equity work.

Commissioner Monica Dillenburg asked about the two projects that received partial funding. Lee explained that one project had \$100,000 in ineligible costs because the agency was proposing a capital construction component outside of the regional park system. The second project was reduced by \$10,000 because the agency had reached their programming funding limit.

There was expressed support for funding all projects, and observations that the projects and program has matured since its inception.

Motion by Commissioner David Yakes, seconded by Commissioner Bob Moeller. The Commission voted unanimously to pass the proposed action.

Business Item

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District(s), Member(s):	All
Policy/Legal Reference:	2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, Chapter 8, Strategy 4; Chapter 8, Finance Policy- Strategy 7. FM 15-2 Grant/Loan Approval Policy, FM 14-2 Expenditures for the Procurement of Goods and Services Policy.
Staff Prepared/Presented:	Jessica Lee, Senior Planner, 651-602-1621
Division/Department:	Community Development / Regional Planning

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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 and Trails System. The Equity Grant Program was formally established in 2019 through a pilot program with capital funding that resulted in the awards for three Regional Park System equity projects. In 2021, the Council dedicated \$664,000 in Council bonds for capital projects and \$1,400,000 in parks interest earnings for programming or a mix of non-capital and capital projects. The competitive grant round resulted in the funding of 23 capital and non-capital projects.

Similar levels of funding have been set aside for the 2024 Competitive Equity Grant Program. \$658,000 is available in Council bonds for capital projects, and \$1,410,000 in parks interest earnings is available for programming/non-capital. The interest earnings may be used for capital projects if funds remain after awarding programming projects.

The Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) was approved by the Council on October 25, 2023. The WebGrants application was open from November 1, 2023, to January 15, 2024. Eight Regional Park Implementing Agencies applied for 22 projects totaling \$2,075,500. A technical review committee comprised of members of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the Community Development Committee, and Agency representatives met in February and again in

March. Between meetings they individually read and scored each project. At the second meeting, the projects were discussed and ranked according to their scores. One project was deemed to have an ineligible component and the budget was reduced by \$100,000, which then resulted in enough funding for all projects. While some capital projects will need to be funded with interest earnings to accommodate funding all projects, none of the agencies went over their \$200,000 cap in either category of capital or noncapital requests except for one Agency, which will receive partial funding for one project as a result. The review committee agreed that all applications had merit and that they should all be funded. The project scores and funding amounts are shown below in Table 1, Funding Recommendations. Project summaries are available in Exhibit 1.

Table 1. Funding Recommendations

Implementing Agency	Project Name	Score	Capital Amount	Non-capital Amount	Total Grant Request
City of Saint Paul	Saint Paul Water Safety and Drowning Prevention Program	93.9	\$ -	\$100,000	\$100,000
Anoka County	Mobilizing inclusivity: Adaptive Equipment Solutions	92.6	\$ -	\$131,500	\$131,500
Three Rivers Park District	Water Safety Education	92.5	\$ -	\$65,000	\$65,000
Three Rivers Park District	Expanding Engagement with Latino Communities	89	\$ -	\$60,000	\$60,000
Ramsey County	Premiere Tuj Lub & Sepak Takraw Courts at Keller Regional Park	88.6	\$200,000	\$ -	\$200,000
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	Loppet Adventures Outdoor Programs	88.5	\$ -	\$150,000	\$150,000
Washington County	Inclusive Playground with Sensory Features at St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park	87.9	\$100,000	\$ -	\$100,000
City of Saint Paul	Rec Check Outdoors	87.3	\$ -	\$100,000	\$100,000
Washington County	Water Safety Outreach Programs	87.1	\$ -	\$20,000	\$20,000
Scott County	Phase II - Mental Health & Nature-Based Wellness Programming for Disproportionately Impacted Communities	87	\$ -	\$192,000	\$192,000
City of Saint Paul	Hmong Plaza at the Saint Paul Changsha China Friendship Garden in Phalen Keller Regional Park	86.3	\$200,000	\$ -	\$200,000

Implementing Agency	Project Name	Score	Capital Amount	Non-capital Amount	Total Grant Request
Three Rivers Park District	Brooklyn Center Farm to School Outdoor Classroom and Internship Program	86.3	\$ -	\$75,000	\$75,000
Washington County/Anoka County Joint Application	Social Media Influencer Awareness Campaign for Regional Parks and Trails	86	\$ -	\$20,000	\$20,000
Washington County	Washington County Parks-American Indian Historical Cultural Study	85.8	\$ -	\$125,000	\$125,000
Washington County	Action Trackchair Outdoor Accessibility Wheelchair	85.8	\$25,000	\$ -	\$25,000
Three Rivers Park District	In-Park Bike Rental Stations	83.7	\$50,000	\$ -	\$50,000
Washington County	Mountain Bike Beginner Skills Area at Lake Elmo Park Reserve	83.3	\$75,000	\$ -	\$75,000
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	Minnehaha Parkway Bike Skills Park	83.1	\$40,000	\$ -	\$40,000
Ramsey County	Art Engagement Across Regional Parks in Ramsey County	83	\$ -	\$67,000	\$67,000
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	Re-envisioning Minneapolis Grand Rounds Kiosk Graphics	82.3	\$140,000	\$20,000	\$160,000
Washington County	Washington County Cultural Arts Festival	80.1	\$ -	\$45,000	\$45,000
Carver County	Outdoor Recreation & Community Outreach Expansion - Portable Rock-Climbing Unit	78	\$55,000	\$ -	\$55,000
			\$885,000	\$1,170,500	\$2,055,500

Rationale

The 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, Finance Chapter 8, Strategy 4 states that equity is a consideration in the Regional Parks and Trails System funding and investment. The equity grant program is one key 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 and Trails System by all residents of the region.

Funding

Up to \$2,068,000 is available in the authorized budget for the 2021 Equity Grant Program. This includes \$658,000 in Council capital bonds and \$1,410,000 in Parks Interest Earnings.



Exhibit 1 – Project summaries

Implementing Agency	Project Name	Project Summary
City of Saint Paul	Saint Paul Water Safety and Drowning Prevention Program	Expansion of the St. Paul Aquatic Response Team: a team comprised of local BIPOC and multilingual young people who are trained in lifeguard skills, de-escalation, conflict resolution, youth engagement/development, and water safety. To expand their work teaching water safety education courses at Como and Phalen Regional Parks and in school and community settings (providing free vouchers to Como Pool), recruiting/training lifeguards and welcoming everyone into our shared public aquatic spaces.
Anoka County	Mobilizing inclusivity: Adaptive Equipment Solutions	This project proposes to purchase a variety of adaptive equipment for use throughout Anoka County Regional Parks to increase participation of individuals with differing abilities, especially children.
Three Rivers Park District	Water Safety Education	This proposal builds on community feedback to provide family-focused water safety workshops in partnership with V3 Sports, Inc, and connects communities back to water-based activities in the regional park system. It also provides opportunities for partners to participate in a Lifeguard Prep (Swim to Earn) course to then encourage and teach water safety within their communities and hopefully at regional park locations.
Three Rivers Park District	Expanding Engagement with Latino Communities	This project aims to expand engagement efforts and resources targeting Latino and Spanish-speaking community members and partners across the Park District. By employing additional Spanish-speaking staff, specifically part-time Community Liaisons, who focus on engagement within targeted geographic regions, this initiative grows culturally relevant programs and events hosted by bilingual staff, increases translated materials, and expands staff capacity to respond to Spanish inquiries.
Ramsey County	Premiere Tuj Lub & Sepak Takraw Courts at Keller Regional Park	The Hmong Tuj Lub Association of Minnesota and Ramsey County are partnering to make significant improvements by redesigning the existing tuj lub courts and adding sepak takraw courts at Keller Regional Park. Improvements to the existing tuj lub courts and the addition of takraw courts to the regional park system will make these the premiere courts in the Metro Area.
MPRB	Loppet Adventures Outdoor Programs	The Loppet Foundation will provide youth programming opportunities in Theodore Wirth Regional Park for elementary, middle, and high school aged youth during and after school through Loppet Adventures, which is an array of programs focused on providing quality outdoor recreation programs to youth and adults of all abilities and backgrounds.
Washington County	Inclusive Playground with Sensory Features at St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park	Washington County seeks to build accessible and sensory playground elements as part of a new play area at St Croix Bluffs Regional Park.

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City of Saint Paul	Rec Check Outdoors	Rec Check Outdoors will connect youth from Saint Paul Parks and Recreation's free out-of-school time program, Rec Check, to our regional parks.
Washington County	Water Safety Outreach Programs	Washington County plans to host large free water safety programs. These programs will instruct how to stay safe in and around water.
Scott County	Phase II - Mental Health & Nature-Based Wellness Programming for Disproportionately Impacted Communities	This project aims to provide free mental health and nature-based wellness programming in Scott County to promote and improve access to Regional Parks with a focus on community partnerships.
City of Saint Paul	Hmong Plaza at the Saint Paul Changsha China Friendship Garden in Phalen Keller Regional Park	Fabrication, commissioning, assembly, and installation of Hmong Qeej artwork (wind instruments) at the Hmong Plaza in Phalen-Keller Regional Park
Three Rivers Park District	Brooklyn Center Farm to School Outdoor Classroom and Internship Program	Three Rivers and Brooklyn Center Schools will expand the garden space on the grounds of the Brooklyn Center Secondary School to include a pollinator plot and teaching shelter. Three Rivers Horticulture staff will oversee the installation and planting of the gardens, and Gale Woods Farm staff will partner with the school to employ students to plant and maintain the gardens. Under the guidance of Three Rivers staff, students will learn horticulture, gardening, and cooking skills.
Washington County	Social Media Influencer Awareness Campaign for Regional Parks and Trails	Washington County and Anoka County seek to plan and implement an influencer partnership as part of a social media marketing campaign to increase awareness of regional parks and trails.
Washington County	Washington County Parks-American Indian Historical Cultural Study	Washington County seeks to conduct an American Indian Historical Cultural Study. This study will cultivate a relationship with the Native stakeholders and communities, document historical and present-day perspectives, and provide guidance on authentic Indigenous interpretation, programming, and natural system stewardship.
Washington County	Action Trackchair Outdoor Accessibility Wheelchair	Washington County seeks to acquire the Action Trackchair, an all-terrain electric wheelchair that helps make outdoor recreation accessible. Offered as a free service to park users, this tool would give users with mobility challenges the opportunity to explore regional parks and trails safely and independently.

Implementing Agency	Project Name	Project Summary
Three Rivers Park District	In-Park Bike Rental Stations	Expanding on the success of the Bike Outreach and Engagement project funded through the 2021 Met Council Equity Grant program, this initiative will provide opportunities for new riders to bike on Three Rivers trails anytime, without needing to rely on the offering of a bike-focused program. This project will pilot bike rental options within the parks (free for Rec Pass Plus participants) by installing bike stations in a couple park locations.
Washington County	Mountain Bike Beginner Skills Area at Lake Elmo Park Reserve	Washington County is proposing a new mountain bike skills area at Lake Elmo Park Reserve to reduce barriers and introduce new users to the activity.
MPRB	Minnehaha Parkway Bike Skills Park	Conversion of obsolete and degraded tennis courts into a bike skills park designed for youth to learn and build bicycle skills along Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail.
Ramsey County	Art Engagement Across Regional Parks in Ramsey County	An artist-in-residence program that will engage with community focused on racially and ethnically diverse residents, as well as a range of ages and abilities
MPRB	Re-envisioning Minneapolis Grand Rounds Kiosk Graphics	Create new maps and interpretive panels for the 55 kiosks located along the Grand Rounds Scenic Byway System. Map panels will be updated to reflect name changes of Bde Maka Ska and others, and interpretive panels will include key messages in multiple languages; an Indigenous land, people, and nations acknowledgement statement; and site specific historical and contemporary stories and photos representing the rich diversity of Minneapolis and the Metropolitan Area.
Washington County	Washington County Cultural Arts Festival	Washington County proposes hosting a Cultural Arts Festival. This event will invite communities from around the metro and beyond to celebrate and share diverse perspectives and backgrounds within a regional park setting.
Carver County	Outdoor Recreation & Community Outreach Expansion - Portable Rock-Climbing Unit	This project allows for an additional activity of rock climbing to be added to the 200+ programming events already in place and would allow the Department to continue to provide new & exciting opportunities to the approximately \$1 million users it serves annually.

