

Committee Report

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Community Development Committee Meeting: Sept. 16, 2024

For the Metropolitan Council: Sept. 25, 2024

Business Item: 2024-222

Rice Creek West Regional Trail Long-Range Plan, Anoka County

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve Anoka County's Rice Creek West Regional Trail Long-Range Plan.
2. Approve the removal of a 0.1-acre, non-contiguous parcel of land within Rice Creek West Regional Trail corridor in exchange for a trail reconstruction project of greater value that will meet or exceed Americans with Disabilities Act standards within the regional trail corridor.
3. Require Anoka County, prior to initiating any construction, to send preliminary plans to the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager.
4. Advise Anoka County to coordinate planning and work with Metro Transit and the Minnesota Department of Transportation to improve crossing safety at the 69th Street intersection before committing to a tunnel at this location.
5. Advise Anoka County to consider implementing the recommendations for solar and transportation in the Advisory Comments section of the business item.

Summary of Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Discussion

Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst, presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission on September 5, 2024. Karen Blaska, Anoka County Planner, was in attendance and responded to questions.

Commissioner Harris asked whether the 0.1-acre land-for-facility was really an equal exchange. Kelly responded that the value of the facility was approximately four times greater than the value of the land. Blaska noted that a land-for-land exchange of the same value was not possible in the regional trail corridor. Additionally, she clarified that the parcel in question is not contiguous with the trail corridor and has experienced problems with people dumping trash.

Commissioner Moeller said he was pleased with the overall analysis, particularly the long-range plan's equity analysis.

Commissioner Yakes asked about annual use on the Rice Creek West Regional Trail. Kelly responded the annual use on the trail is estimated to be over 300,000 visitors.

Commissioner Dillenburg sought clarification on how investments in the trail corridor would be sequenced and when the facility proposed to be exchanged for the 0.1-acre parcel would be completed. Blaska responded that the specific trail accessibility project initially conceived of for an exchange, in Segment 6, may not be implemented for 10 years. This specific location was chosen for its proximity to the proposed parcel removal. However, Blaska said that the County is open to modifying the specific location of the facility exchange as the County intends to take on similar trail accessibility improvements throughout the corridor. A similarly scoped project in Segment 4 will be implemented within the next one to two years.

Chair Yarusso asked multiple questions. First, he asked whether the trail easements in the corridor

were perpetual. Blaska responded that they were. Yarusso also sought clarification on the limited use agreement the County had with BNSF railroad in Segment 2. Blaska responded that this agreement is similar to an easement is considered “limited” to approximately 100 years. Related, Yarusso asked whether Anoka County had any concerns about corridor control (i.e., whether the County had any concerns about its ability to continue to operate and maintain the regional trail facility into the foreseeable future). Blaska responded that the County did not have concerns. Finally, Yarusso asked about the City of Fridley’s concerns with water recreation in the corridor. Blaska responded that a water trail had previously been established on Rice Creek between Long Lake Regional Park and the Mississippi River, but issues related to water flows, downed trees, and access to remove fallen trees has created challenges for full implementation of the water trail concept.

Motion by Commissioner Dillenburg, seconded by Commissioner Moeller, the Commission voted unanimously to pass the proposed action.



Business Item

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District(s), Member(s):	District A, Monica Dillenburg District 2, Reva Chamblis
Policy/Legal Reference:	Minnesota Statutes § 473.313; <i>2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan</i> : Chapter 5, Planning Strategy 1; Chapter 6, System Protection Strategy 2
Staff Prepared/Presented:	Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst, 651-602-1361
Division/Department:	Community Development / Regional Planning

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Background

Anoka County has submitted a long-range plan for the Rice Creek West Regional Trail for Council review. Rice Creek West Regional Trail is located near the center of the Regional Parks and Trails System in southern Anoka County and the City of Fridley (Figure 1). The Rice Creek West Regional Trail connects to Mississippi River Regional Trail to the west and to Long Lake Regional Park and Rice Creek North Regional Trail to the east, in Ramsey County (Figure 2). The specific focus of this long-range plan is Anoka County's portion of the Rice Creek West Regional Trail, between the Mississippi River and Manomin Park to the west and Stinson Boulevard NE and the Ramsey County border to the east, a span of approximately four miles (Figure 3). The westernmost portion of the regional trail corridor is within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area.

Rice Creek provides a scenic backdrop for the Rice Creek West Regional Trail corridor. Many portions of the trail are immediately adjacent to the creek within the steep valleys of the floodplain, providing a natural habitat corridor which connects natural communities and provides access to

scenic terrain along the creek.

The original long-range plan for the regional trail dates to 1980. While the Met Council approved a long-range plan amendment for the trail in 2012 (Business Item 2012-68), the regional trail corridor has not been reviewed since. The updated plan is intended to meet the needs of changing populations and demographics in the metropolitan area.

In November 2023, the City of Fridley invoked the termination clause of the Joint Powers Agreement with Anoka County. As a result, the City has taken over the operations and maintenance of Locke Park. This new long-range plan does not include or propose improvements to Locke Park. Anoka County retains responsibility over the trail corridor as it traverses this local park. The updated Plan adds clarity and reflects the new agreements between the City and the County as it pertains to ownership and responsibilities for trail maintenance and care of the adjacent properties. The City of Fridley provided Anoka County with easements for the trail corridor as it intersects the local parkland. Additionally, the City assumed responsibility over all amenities formerly managed by Anoka County outside of the trail corridor. The final arrangement was approved by Minnesota Management and Budget, the Fridley City Council, Anoka County, and the general counsel at the Metropolitan Council.

Rationale

The Rice Creek West Regional Trail Long-Range Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, particularly Planning Strategy 1 and other Council policies.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Rice Creek West Regional Trail Long-Range Plan advances the Thrive outcome of Livability by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, which enhances quality of life in the region.

Funding

The total estimated development and improvement cost associated with the Rice Creek West Regional Trail Long-Range Plan is \$27,130,000. No acquisition of additional parcels is proposed within this long-range plan. The estimated annual operating cost for the trail is approximately \$40,000.



Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires long-range plans for regional linking trails to address 13 items: boundaries, acquisition costs, demand forecast, development concept, conflicts, public services, operations, partner engagement, public engagement and participation, equity analysis, public awareness, accessibility, and Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (where applicable). The following analyzes the trail plan against those requirements.

Boundaries

The existing four-mile-long Rice Creek West Regional Trail corridor follows the creek through Anoka County. Manomin Park, Locke Lake Park, Plaza Park, Community Park, the Fridley Civic Campus, and Locke Park are a few parks and facilities it connects.

For planning purposes, the regional trail is divided into six segments from west to east (Figure 4).

The regional trail and its boundaries are already established. The westernmost portion of the trail corridor is within Manomin Park (Segment 1), which is owned and operated by Anoka County. The trail travels east-west along Rice Creek and underneath East River Road before a short (400 foot) north-south segment on the sidewalk on the east side of East River Road. The trail continues its east-west orientation with an on-street segment on Rice Creek Way NE, where the trail overlaps the Mississippi River Trail (Segment 2). The trail enters Locke Lake Park near the eastern end of the lake, where the trail traverses land owned and operated by the City of Fridley there and at Plaza Park, on the opposite side of two rail lines. From this point, the trail travels north-south and then east-west, through land owned by the County at Community Park (Segment 3). Trail easements have been provided by the City of Fridley to Anoka County, to ensure the integrity of the trail across city property. The 95 acres that make up Locke Park, located in the middle section of the trail (Segment 4), are owned by the City of Fridley. The easternmost portion of the trail corridor, from Highway 65/Central Avenue to Stinson Boulevard and the Ramsey County border (Segments 5 and 6), is owned and operated by Anoka County.

There is one 0.1-acre parcel, #13-30-24-14-0044, that is proposed to be removed from the trail corridor boundary in Segment 6 (Figure 10). This parcel is non-contiguous and cut off from the trail corridor by City right-of-way and has become a maintenance nuisance from people dumping their waste on the site. Therefore, through the long-range plan, the County proposes the parcel be removed from the regional trail corridor boundary and replaced through an equally valuable facility exchange. As stated in the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, Section Six: System Protection Policy and Strategies, conversions of parkland are allowed only if the unit is able to continue to function as originally planned, no environmental features are adversely affected, and the exchange occurs within the same area as the parcel being replaced.

Because of the relatively small assessed value of the parcel (\$8,600) the County was not able to secure a land-for-land exchange. Therefore, the County is proposing an equally valuable facility exchange, where proceeds of the land removed would be used for a portion of a trail reconstruction project of greater value, that will enable the trail to meet or exceed ADA standards within the regional trail corridor. The overall development trail improvement costs are anticipated to be \$950,000. Reconstruction and regrading the trail for ADA access on the eastern end of Segment 6, approximately 0.25 mile northeast of the parcel proposed to be removed from the trail corridor boundary, is estimated to cost \$34,000.

The long-range plan notes that the regional trail corridor can continue to function as originally planned and will meet Council standards for regional trails. No environmental features will be adversely affected by the removal of the parcel and the improvements planned will occur within the same regional trail segment as the parcel proposed for removal.

With respect to the alternate uses of the proposed facility exchange, the project will lessen steep grades throughout on the regional trail, making it more accessible for people with disabilities and it will provide an overall benefit to the Regional Parks and Trails System. The land area needs of the proposed project are relatively small, spanning approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of trail. The specific length and acreage required will be formally determined as the project moves into the design phase. The steep grades are unique to the specific facility improvement location and other locations within the

regional trail corridor where steep graders are present.

The proposed ADA improvements will improve the existing facilities, increase overall access of the regional trail, and will provide better access to the surrounding natural resources in the area. The proposed project is near Rice Creek, but the site requirements for the improvement project will not impact the creek. Lastly, the proposed ADA improvements are consistent with Council policies and will ultimately provide a greater benefit to the regional trail system than if the parcel were to remain in place.

Council staff reviewed the land-for-facility request against the criteria outlined in System Protection, Strategy 2: Conversions of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. Staff find that the County's request meets the criteria for a land exchange. No Council or State dollars were used on this parcel.

Upon completion of the improvements, Anoka County will continue to own and operate the trail corridor and land through this segment. This Plan reflects the updated agreements and ownership between the City and the Council for the portions of the trail that traverse City-owned property.

Acquisition Costs

There are no parcels proposed for acquisition within the long-range plan. Trail easements are discussed in individual segments, both where they exist and where they may be needed.

At the intersection of Rice Creek Way and East River Road, on the west side of Segment 2, the trail is routed on street following Rice Creek Way to Locke Lake Park, which is owned and operated by the City of Fridley. The trail easements granted from the City of Fridley to Anoka County will ensure the regional trail route is maintained through the city park. From there, the trail travels east under the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad and heads south for about 200 feet. This section of paved trail is eight feet wide and within the BNSF railroad right-of-way where space is limited. The County has a limited use agreement with the railroad for the trail and operates and maintains the trail through the railroad right-of-way.

In Segment 3, the County is proposing to construct a pedestrian tunnel under, or a bridge over, University Avenue about 300-400 feet south of the intersection with 10-foot-wide paved trails connecting to the existing trail. The proposed work will need to occur within the road right of way, so planning and construction of the tunnel or bridge will involve the Minnesota Department of Transportation and the County Transportation Division. It is assumed a trail easement, Right of Entry Agreement, or some other form of contract will be required to install the new trails and tunnel in accordance with MnDOT standards. According to the long-range plan, the cost of a permanent easement from the state is estimated to be between \$0- \$55,000.

Demand Forecast

The long-range plan includes information on outdoor recreation trends, public health, and population forecasts in this section. Some highlighted trends included: Three in four adults in the U.S. want public walking, hiking and biking trails close to home and 84% of millennials say it's important to have access to trails. Other generations reported slightly lower levels of importance, but none lower than 74%. (2021 National Recreation and Parks Association Park Pulse Survey).

With regard to public health, the plan noted that only 22% of adults in Anoka County meet the recommended physical activity levels for moderate exercise and only 14% meet the recommended physical activity levels for vigorous exercise (2020-2022 Anoka County Community Health Improvement Plan). The plan connects access to parks and trails to healthy communities, noting these spaces provide physical and mental benefits.

Finally, this section of the plan references recent population estimates and forecasts to the year 2040. Anoka County's population was 368,280 in 2022, making it the fourth most populous county in the state (2022 Minnesota State Demographic Center). With a forecasted population of 409,080 by 2040 (2024 Met Council Long-Range Forecasts), the population is expected to grow by more than 11 percent. As the population grows, so will the demand for trails for recreation and transportation purposes.



Development Concept

Segment 1

While Manomin Park serves as trailhead and has parking, a newly rebuilt restroom building and access to drinking water, the plan notes that the remaining facilities and amenities need redevelopment or replacement (Figure 5).

One of the unique features of Manomin Park is the Banfill Locke Historic House, which is a 175-year-old house that is on the National Register of Historic Places. According to the plan, the Banfill Locke House is a long-standing community asset, previously providing space for an art center for more than 30 years. The art center moved to a different location, which provided the County with a unique opportunity to ensure its use as a community space into the future. Through the long-range plan, the County proposes that the structure serve as a staffed Visitor Center and Trailhead Facility for Rice Creek West Regional Trail, which typically has more than 300,000 visitors per year.

The building needs improvements to ensure the structural integrity and energy efficiency of the building envelope, as well as updates to accommodate the new trailhead use. There are foundation issues that need to be addressed before the siding, roof, windows and doors can be replaced. Interior renovations will be required to accommodate staff and make it a more inviting public building. Most of the building work is anticipated to be completed in the next few years, depending on available funding.

Public engagement indicates an interest in outdoor recreation rental equipment at this location. As a result, the County proposes to offer fishing equipment, snowshoes, and other recreational equipment for rent.

Other proposed improvements in Segment 1 include reconstruction of the two parking lots, and trail and bridge improvements and/or reconstruction. A portion of the trail needs to be reconfigured and improved for access. The two existing pedestrian bridges providing access to Rice Creek and the Mississippi River are in relatively good condition and under normal weather/water conditions, it is estimated that they would not need to be replaced for approximately 15-20 years. The bridge decking is anticipated to be replaced sooner. In addition, public engagement indicates interest in an accessible trail to the Mississippi River. As a result, the County proposes a bituminous trail for access to the river and to create shore fishing opportunities when the bridges are replaced.

The existing metal gazebo is in relatively good condition but will require a new roof in 5-10 years. With the roof replacement, the County proposes improving lighting throughout the park. Other improvements – including the reconstruction of the fishing deck and a canoe/kayak boat access structure – would likely occur on the same timeframe as the gazebo roof.

Natural resource management work is proposed to include continued buckthorn suppression, reseeding with native species, continued removal of Emerald Ash Borer hazard trees, and continued planting of diverse species of shade trees.

Segment 2

Since most of the trail is on street or sidewalk in this segment, the development concept for the regional trail is relatively simple here (Figure 6). The priority is to ensure that signage and wayfinding for the trail through this segment is clear and easily understood. This work would be done in partnership with the City of Fridley.

Through Locke Lake Park and the adjacent railroad right-of-way, the trail needs to be reconstructed and slope reduced for access. Temporary easements will be required for trail reconstruction and the trail alignments may be changed to increase accessibility. New legal descriptions will be determined and updated for the required trail easements.

The land cover through this segment is mostly impervious surface because of the railway, but the Locke Lake Park parcel consists of maintained turf grass with mixed coniferous and deciduous trees. The park provides a boat access to Locke Lake.

Segment 3

The development concept of Segment 3 consists mostly of trail reconstruction and softening the curves for safety and improved sight lines as well as increasing the trail to a 10-foot width in locations where the existing trail is currently 8 feet wide (Figure 7). In addition, the County proposes to increase the turning radii of the trail around the pond for safety and access purposes. The east/west approach from the pond to State Highway 47/University Avenue is proposed to be regraded and straightened for safety and slopes will be improved for access. Prior to the intersection, the regional trail will veer south about 400 feet to a proposed pedestrian tunnel or bridge for safe crossing of a high-speed road. It is anticipated that the tunnel or bridge will be 10 or 12 feet wide, although the exact design has yet to be determined. Exiting out of the pedestrian tunnel/bridge, the trail will then head north to connect back up to the existing trail route. The existing segment of trail along 69th Avenue will need to be reconstructed and grades adjusted to allow better access.

Land cover through this segment is mostly mowed turf immediately adjacent to the trail. Within Community Park, a native prairie has been planted and is currently maintained. Natural resource management with Segment 3 will continue with prairie restoration best management practices, such as prescribed burning, removal of invasive woody plant species and additional native seeding.

Segment 4

Anoka County is responsible for the regional trail that traverses the park and will have permanent trail easements over the trail to provide access for operations and maintenance. The development concept for Segment 4 provides for the reconstruction of the trail and lessening of slopes to provide greater Americans with Disability Act (ADA) accessibility (Figure 8). These trail improvements are scheduled to be completed within three to five years. The City will be responsible for the other trails and amenities within Locke Park.

The regional trail pedestrian bridge will need to be replaced as well, but that is not anticipated to occur for 10-15 years. The Rice Creek Watershed District advises that there are unusual drainage and seepage patterns in the northeast corner of the park and any design for reconstruction should take those factors into account and avoid routing surface water to the creek bank to ensure its stability. Other improvements through this segment include additional wayfinding and directional signage along the trail.

The active use areas are mostly maintained turf with scattered deciduous trees. There are some native prairie plantings along the roadway and the more natural areas of the park include oak forests, altered deciduous forest, and temporarily flooded altered deciduous forests, which makes the site suitability for a regional trail excellent, according to the long-range plan.

Segment 5

The development concept for Segment 5 includes improving the existing pedestrian tunnel through resurfacing, improving drainage, and increasing lighting efficiency (Figure 9). The trail is proposed to be reconstructed to lessen slopes and increase accessibility. Sight lines and safety are an issue on some sharp curves, and in those locations the trail is proposed to be realigned to improve safety and visibility. The trail crosses Rice Creek with a pedestrian bridge that will eventually need to be replaced. The County is proposing to construct a natural surface trail to offer a different hiking experience in the corridor. A few nodes or stopping points for visual and/or physical access to the creek are also planned.

A major improvement planned for the trail through this segment is a pedestrian tunnel or bridge underpass to allow safe passage under CSAH 35. The tunnel or bridge underpass would eliminate the steep slopes involved in getting to and from the existing intersection, which is a grade change of approximately 30 feet. The tunnel or bridge underpass will also create a safe crossing under the county highway. Adding the tunnel or bridge underpass will eliminate vehicle conflicts and allow for better trail accessibility. The 30-foot steep slope is proposed to be addressed through reconstruction of the trail that includes several switchbacks that meet or exceed accessibility requirements.



From the tunnel or bridge underpass, the trail will continue east as discussed in Segment 6.

Natural resource management for Segments 5 and 6 will include continued buckthorn suppression, removal of Emerald Ash Borer hazard trees, removal of other invasive woody plant species, and replanting of native species appropriate for the habitat.

Segment 6

The development concept for Segment 6 includes the reconstruction of the trail to lessen slope grades, widen the trail to 10 feet and improve accessibility (Figure 10). Sight lines and safety are an issue in some areas of the trail through this segment, so the County is proposing to realign the trail to reduce the sharp curves and provide better visibility. This will also help improve the biking experience through this section.

The County is also proposing to relocate and reconstruct the existing parking lot, with a 20-25 stall capacity, off 69th Avenue along with construction of a new restroom building and trailhead facility with drinking water available. This will support use of the regional trail and will support the County's proposed four-mile-long singletrack trail. Public engagement on the long-range plan showed there is demand for a singletrack trail in the area. The intent of the trail is to provide a nice easy family-friendly ride, but also offer certain challenges that more experienced riders can choose to experience if they desire. The City of Fridley has some safety concerns with this area and has requested that improvements include gates to restrict access to the parking area after closing, security cameras, lights, and emergency telephone connections. The County has incorporated these improvements into their plan.

Conflicts

Since the regional trail has been open to the public for many years, any conflicts with different adjacent land uses have been addressed. The existing land use surrounding the trail is predominately residential with some industry and civic uses.

The most concerning conflict raised during the engagement process was related to the trail crossing high-speed roads. As a direct result of these comments, two grade-separated crossings are proposed in the development concept.

Other conflicts referenced during the public engagement process were also safety related. Some people voiced concerns about feeling unsafe on the trail and having to deal with unleashed dogs, as well as homelessness, vandalism, crime, loitering, and trash.

Public Services

There are no non-recreation related public services and facilities needed to accommodate the regional trail. The public services required are specifically recreation related, which is to establish a new trailhead facility for the regional trail off 69th Avenue in Fridley. The County has consulted with the City of Fridley's Engineering and Planning Departments on proposed connections for water and sanitary services and will continue to work with the City on these facilities.

Operations

Anoka County Ordinance dated January 30, 2018, regulates the parks and trails under the jurisdiction of Anoka County. The County will continue to encourage safe and enjoyable user experiences through education, monitoring, and collaboration between the County and City of Fridley. Safety and security along the trail will include increased patrols and lighting in strategic places.

The County currently employs a remote building automation system that saves the department \$5,000-\$10,000 annually compared to traditional energy systems, by realizing energy reductions in heating, cooling, lighting, and water use during unoccupied and off-peak periods. The program allows staff to monitor, adjust, and troubleshoot building mechanical systems at multiple park facilities from a single location, aiding in prompt management and repair.

The County is also converting lighting in key facilities to LED technology to reduce energy demands. The Maintenance and Parks Services units utility vehicle fleets include a growing



number of electric vehicles. Turf irrigation systems employ rain sensor technology to avoid using valuable water during periods of precipitation and the County has encouraged employees to go digital to reduce the amount of paper in the workplace, by utilizing smaller, more portable laptop computers and tablets.

The County employs a refuse and recycling program that requires recycling of paper, plastics, and other recyclable materials. Trash and recycling receptacles are placed along the trail in strategic locations for easy access by trail users and maintenance staff.

Partner Engagement

Anoka County placed significant emphasis on engaging the City of Fridley during the Rice Creek West Regional Trail planning process. The County engaged the City through their City Council, Parks Commission, Police Citizens Advisory Committee, Environmental Quality and Energy Commission, and Community Network. The County also engaged the Rice Creek Watershed District, County Highway Department, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation during the planning process. In addition, County planners reached out to the Target Distribution Center and Medtronic as they are large job centers proximate to the trail.

The Fridley Parks Commission would like to see Rice Creek Regional Trail better maintained to allow for water recreation. This topic is specifically discussed in the plan as it relates to the Rice Creek Water Trail.

The Rice Creek Watershed District provided comments on the plan as well, reviewing different rules in light of the proposed improvements. The watershed district noted the sediment accumulation in Locke Lake, which is outside the County's jurisdiction, but within the City of Fridley's to address. Previously the eastern lobe of Locke Lake had been maintained as a sedimentation basin by the watershed district, but future maintenance is unclear. In addition, the watershed district has completed some streambank restoration projects upstream that will perhaps slow the sedimentation, but noted the sedimentation could influence the City's plans for a canoe and kayak launch at Locke Lake Park.

The County will continue to work with the City of Fridley and Rice Creek Watershed District as individual projects within the plan move toward implementation.

The Anoka County Board of Commissioners and the City of Fridley City Council both provided resolutions of support for the Rice Creek West Regional Trail Long-Range Plan (Attachments 1 and 2).

Public Engagement and Participation

The County engaged with the public on multiple occasions during the long-range planning process and used a variety of methods, including in-person meetings, events, surveys, and social media. The County asked for initial feedback on the trail, reported back to the community what was said, and then sought additional input and feedback on the development concept. Near the end of the planning process, the long-range plan was available for public review over a 30-day comment period. Surveys and social media posts worked well for engaging the general public, but in-person meetings and events were best for engaging targeted groups. In all, the County reached more than 15,000 people through in-person meetings, online surveys, and through social media.

The issue or topic raised most often was trail safety. Nearly every group the County engaged brought up some aspect of safety along the trail corridor. The high-speed road crossings are a major concern for trail users and area residents. These issues are specifically addressed in the development concept through the proposed regrading and reconstruction of the trail in certain sections and two proposed grade-separated crossings. Bicyclists had concerns about sharp curves and sight lines, while walkers had more concerns about safety, trash, graffiti, homelessness, and loitering.

Based on discussions with community members, the Plan proposes to add lighting in higher use areas, continue to remove buckthorn – for better sight lines and to provide users a better sense of safety by being able to see their surroundings easier – and increase safety patrols.



Another proposed solution for fostering a greater sense of safety is to create a video of a Rice Creek West Regional Trail “ride along” that can be posted to the trail’s webpage and shared on social media. This would give people an opportunity to take a virtual tour before they try it in-person.

Equity Analysis

Project Data

According to the long-range plan, the majority of Anoka County’s population is between 25 and 64 years of age (Minnesota Compass). People of color make up 20% of the County’s population and people with disabilities make up 12%. This data provides an initial indication of who may be underserved and who should be consulted during the regional trail planning process: those under the age of 25 and over the age of 65, people of color, and people with disabilities.

Public engagement focused on residents and neighborhoods that are up to one mile away from the regional trail, including a portion of Ramsey County. By using the Metropolitan Council’s Regional Parks Equity Tool, Anoka County was able to identify specific groups to engage on the long-range plan. Within a one-mile radius of the trail corridor, those under 25 years of age comprise up to 37% of the population, which represents a substantial number of future stakeholders who should be engaged in the planning process. Those over age 65 are about 24% of the population. About 8% of the population in the area are people with disabilities. The City of Fridley is more racially diverse than other parts of the County, with Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) making up anywhere from 14% to 53% of the surrounding population. These identified stakeholders were engaged to provide the County with a better understanding of their needs and wants for parks and recreation.

To ensure the legacy and stewardship of parks, trails, and open space, it is important to provide memorable experiences for younger generations that they can carry with them throughout their lives. Other stakeholders and underserved populations may not feel welcome in the parks, or they may not know what there is to do in the parks. Reaching out to and engaging underserved populations, and seeking a dialogue with them regarding parks, trails and recreation, can introduce them to the Regional Park System and promote the activities and opportunities that the system offers. This also allows for changes and improvements to those parks, trails, and recreation activities; changes that could make those spaces more welcoming and inviting to underserved populations. Anoka County will continue to strive toward making Rice Creek West Regional Trail – and all of the regional parks and trails in the County – welcoming and inclusive spaces for all to enjoy.

Public Engagement

In addition to the City of Fridley Commissions and Committees referenced above, the County reached out to Outdoor Latino and Outdoor Afro groups during the planning process, as well as the Disability and Aging Network.

Using the International Association for Public Participation’s Public Participation Spectrum, the County’s approach for public engagement was to inform and consult with the public. This approach encourages the County to listen and acknowledge concerns and aspirations about certain projects and to keep the public informed about how their feedback influenced the plan.

All groups, but specifically the Disability and Aging Network, brought up the steep trail grades and the potential for vehicle conflicts at major road crossings, which make the trail less accessible to people with mobility restrictions or other disabilities.

The plan acknowledged that the County did not receive a lot of feedback from Outdoor Latino or Outdoor Afro, but staff learned that providing park and trail information in Spanish would help make the Latino population more welcome and comfortable using the trail.

Evaluation Summary

The public participation and engagement conducted during the planning process provided valuable information that influenced the long-range plan. Most proposed improvements are a direct result of



that engagement and include grade-separated crossings of high-speed roads, trail segment reconstruction for improved access, and a singletrack mountain bike trail to serve a wider spectrum of potential users.

The public engagement and planning efforts have created a long-range plan that will provide a better regional trail that will be smoother, safer, and more aesthetically pleasing. The trail should draw more people locally and from the region and provide them with a unique trail experience. The long-range plan, once approved, will be shared with the public and the specifically identified groups the County has worked with during this process.

The planning process should create better outcomes since most of the proposed improvements are a direct result of public engagement. The engagement process allowed the public to learn how the County plans its parks and that everyone's input matters. The County will continue to work with the public and groups as resources become available and implementation of the improvements occur. The intent is that by seeing the improvements as they are implemented, the public can feel a sense of ownership of those improvements and realize that the County listens and responds to public input.

Public Awareness

Public awareness efforts, including communications and marketing, are important factors in encouraging use of the Regional Parks and Trails System. The County will continue to work with the Metropolitan Council's Regional Parks and Natural Resources Department to create awareness of the regional system through public information, maps, websites, social media, publications, and brochures.

Community engagement activities will continue throughout the year to provide information on park amenities and recreational opportunities throughout the Anoka County Parks and Trails System, and to seek feedback on individual long-range plans. The Anoka County Parks website will also host transit route information to promote access into the regional parks and trails via mass transit, where it is available.

Accessibility

The County is currently undertaking an update to the Parks ADA Transition Plan, with the intent to ensure that any new development along the trail will eliminate existing barriers, to the extent feasible, and ensure that the trail and any facilities and amenities will conform to or surpass the standards mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act. In this plan, several sections of the trail are called out to be redeveloped, and the pedestrian bridges along the trail are all proposed to be replaced in order to update those to current ADA requirements. The ADA Transition Plan is expected to be completed in 2024.

According to the long-range plan, Anoka County continually strives to provide equal access to all residents of the County and the region. The regional trails, such as Rice Creek West, are free to use.

There are several transit stops near the trail located mostly at major road intersections. Access to the trail can be gained through transit stops at East River Road and Harmon Circle on Route 852; at Highway 47 and 69th Avenue on Routes 10, 824, and 854; at Highway 65 and 68th Avenue; and along CSAH 35 and 69th Avenue.

While transit access to the trail is available, the Anoka County Traveler Transit Link and Metro Mobility dial-a-ride services also provide transportation for a minimal fee. Transit Link will pick up and drop off passengers anywhere there is an address or cross street, or anywhere along the regional trail if the vehicle does not have to back up. Currently all the vehicles are equipped with bike racks so passengers wishing to bike on the trail could use Transit Link to preschedule a trip to/from anywhere along the trail that a large vehicle can access.

Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area

The Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) is a State-designated land corridor along 72 miles of the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Minn. Stat. § 116G.15

establishes Minnesota policy and authority for administrative rules for the MRCCA. The MRCCA Administrative Rules (6106.0010–6106.0180) establish standards and guidelines for all plans, regulations, capital improvements, and public facilities for the MRCCA. These guidelines and standards apply to public facilities, private facilities, vegetation management, land alteration and stormwater management, subdivision and land development, and exemptions.

The purpose of the MRCCA is to:

1. Protect and preserve the Mississippi River and adjacent lands that the legislature finds to be unique and valuable state and regional resources for the benefit of the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of the state, region, and nation.
2. Prevent and mitigate irreversible damages to this state, regional, and natural resources.
3. Preserve and enhance the natural, aesthetic, cultural, and historical values of the Mississippi River and adjacent lands for public use and benefit.
4. Protect and preserve the Mississippi River as an essential element in the national, state, and regional transportation, sewer and water, and recreational systems; and
5. Protect and preserve the biological and ecological functions of the Mississippi River corridor.

The Rice Creek West Regional Trail Long-Range Plan acknowledges that all future development of the regional trail within the MRCCA will need to comply with all applicable MRCCA standards and guidelines.

Consistency with Other Council Policies and Systems

Council staff have reviewed and found the proposed long-range plan to be consistent with the other plans and policies of the Council, including *Thrive MSP 2040*, the *Water Resources Policy Plan*, the *Transportation Policy Plan*, and the *Housing Policy Plan*. Additional review comments are included below.

Community Development – Forecasts (Todd Graham, 651-602-1322) – The long-range plan is consistent with policy.

The County Parks Department provides a demand forecast analysis on p. 23; the analysis includes Met Council’s recently proposed forecast: 409,080 population in Anoka County in 2040.

Community Development – Solar (MacKenzie Young-Walters) - Staff appreciates the County’s commitment to energy efficiency, particularly the steps to incorporate electric powered vehicles into the utility vehicle fleet and use of technology to reduce the energy needs of buildings. Building on this demonstrated commitment to sustainability, the proposed reconstruction of the parking lot in Segment 1 of the trail could provide an opportunity to include electric vehicle charging infrastructure and the planned restroom building in Segment 6 could provide an opportunity to utilize solar panels to further reduce the building’s carbon footprint.

Environmental Services – Water Resources (Steve Christopher, 651-602-1033) - The proposed long-range plan from Anoka County for the Rice Creek West Regional Trail appears to avoid all surface water resource impacts. We are encouraged by the inclusion of conservation practices such as native prairies, invasive species management, and native seed mixes. We would recommend continued coordination with the Rice Creek Watershed District and Anoka Conservation District.

Transportation (Joe Widing, 651-602-1822) - This portion of the Rice Creek West Regional Trail is a Regional Bicycle Transportation Network Tier 2 alignment for the entire extent from East River Road to the Ramsey County border. The trail segment traverses two Regional Bicycle Barriers (TH47 and TH 65), however where the trail crosses these facilities are not within identified Expressway Barrier Crossing areas.

In Segment 2, the Plan notes that there is a 12-foot sidewalk on the east side of East River Road. This sidewalk facility appears to narrow on the bridge over Rice Creek to as little as six feet. Opportunities to improve the comfort and safety of users along East River Road should be considered. Additionally, the Plan should consider additional safety improvements at the



intersection of East River Rd and Rice Creek Way like reducing the wide turn radii, installing bump-outs or other traffic calming measures that would benefit trail users.

In Segment 3, the Plan proposes a new trail tunnel or bridge to more safely traverse TH 47 at 69th Street. While TH 47 is noted as an Expressway Barrier in the regional bicycle barriers study, the 69th Street intersection is not included in an expressway barrier crossing area. Additionally, Metro Transit is planning and designing safety improvements and transit investments at station areas for the upcoming [F-Line aBRT project](#) along TH 47, which will have a station at 69th Street. It is recommended that Anoka County Parks coordinate planning and work with Metro Transit and MnDOT to improve crossing safety at the 69th Street intersection before committing to investing in a costly tunnel at this location.

In Segment 5, another tunnel is proposed to traverse a roadway. This roadway today is a 2-lane section with a dedicated right turn lane with just under 5,000 vehicles per day. There is not a safety analysis that accompanies this proposal so it is difficult to ascertain if a grade-separated crossing is warranted here from a safety perspective, but existing roadway characteristics would indicate that there is not. However, the grade and accessibility concerns are noted and understood.

If regional funding is sought for the proposed crossing improvements in the future, it is recommended additional analysis be performed to better indicate the need for grade-separated crossings.



Figure 1. Rice Creek West Regional Trail location within the Regional Parks System

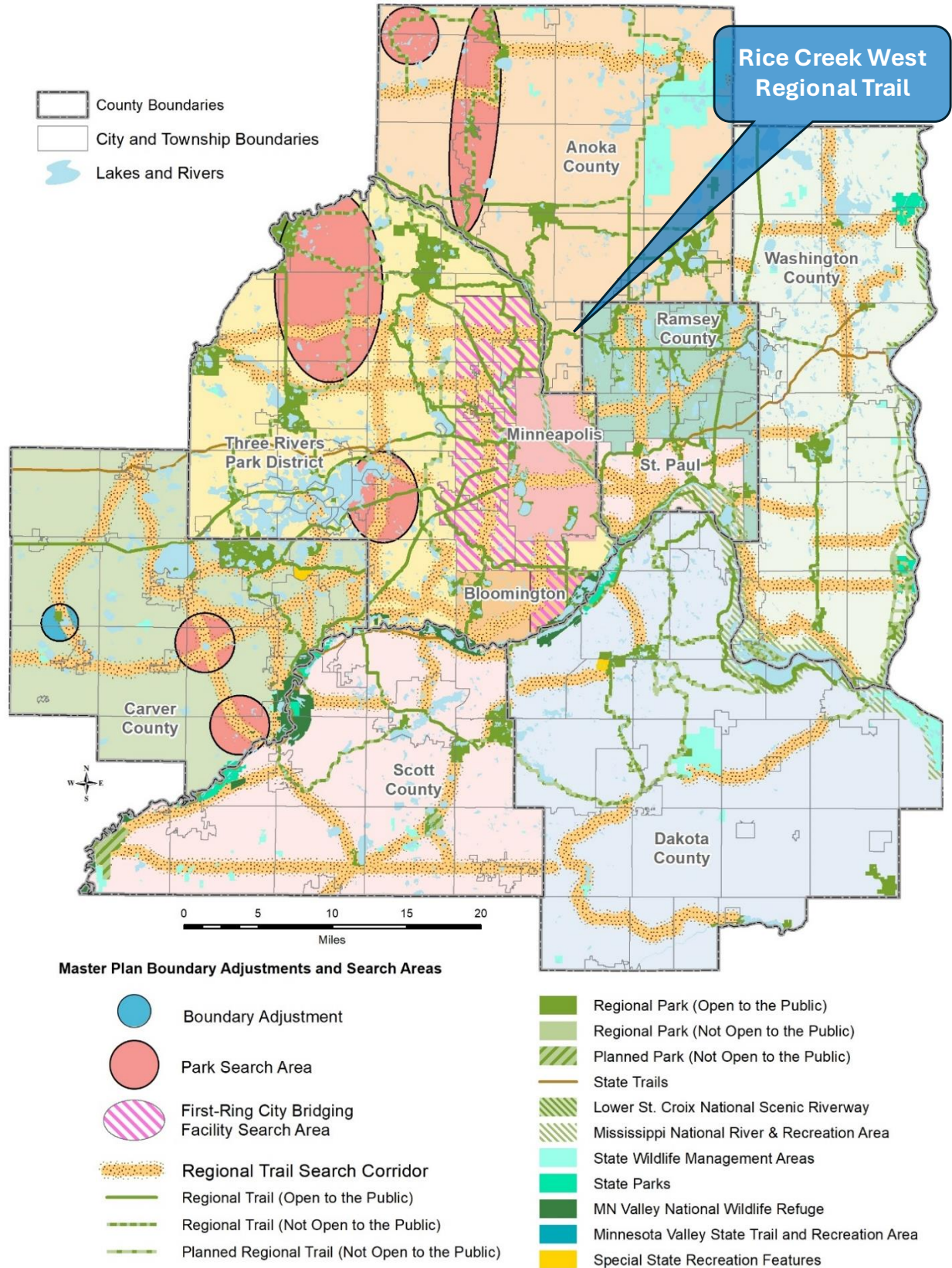


Figure 2. Rice Creek West Regional Trail location within Anoka County

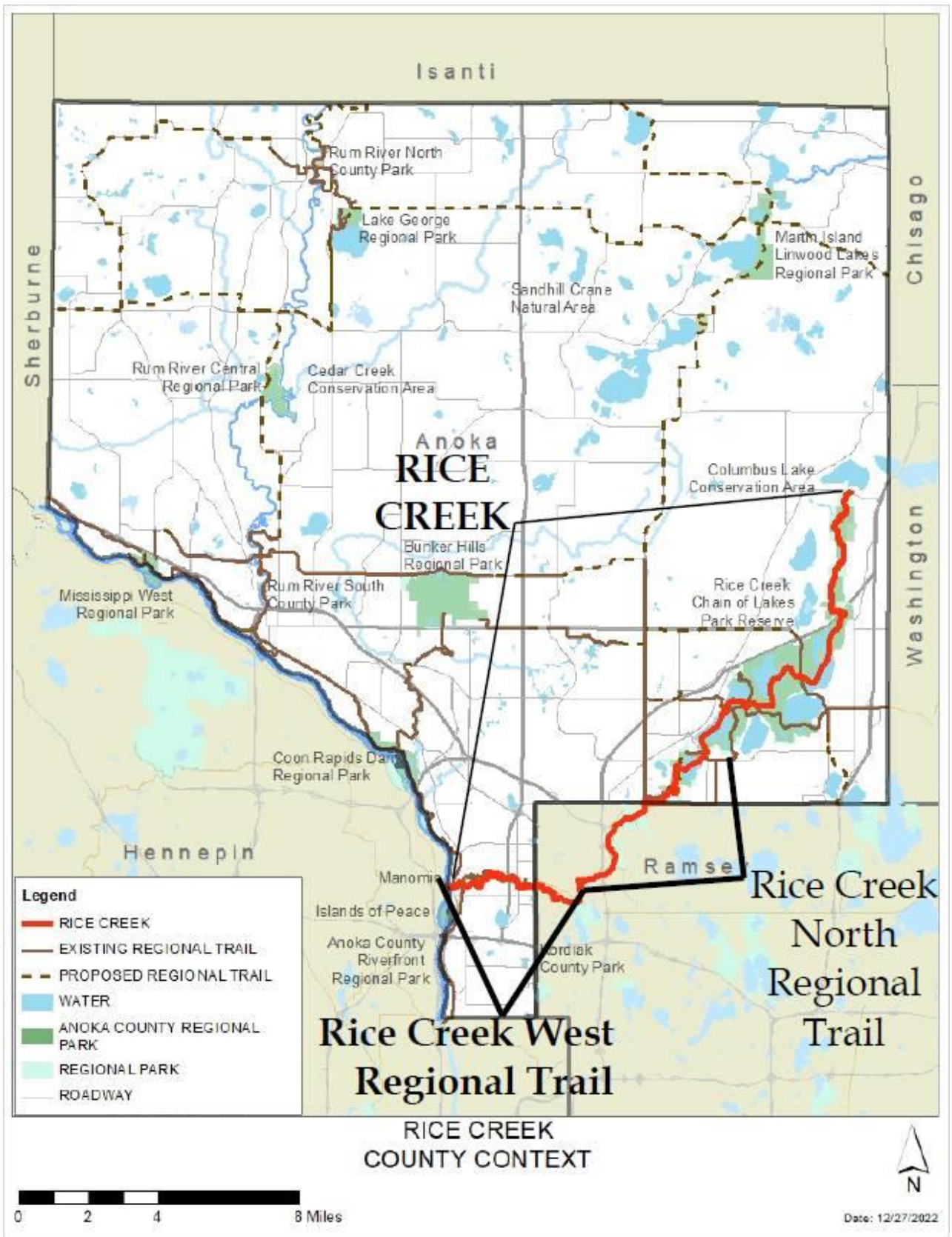


Figure 3: Rice Creek West Regional Trail Corridor (LRP, pg. 17)

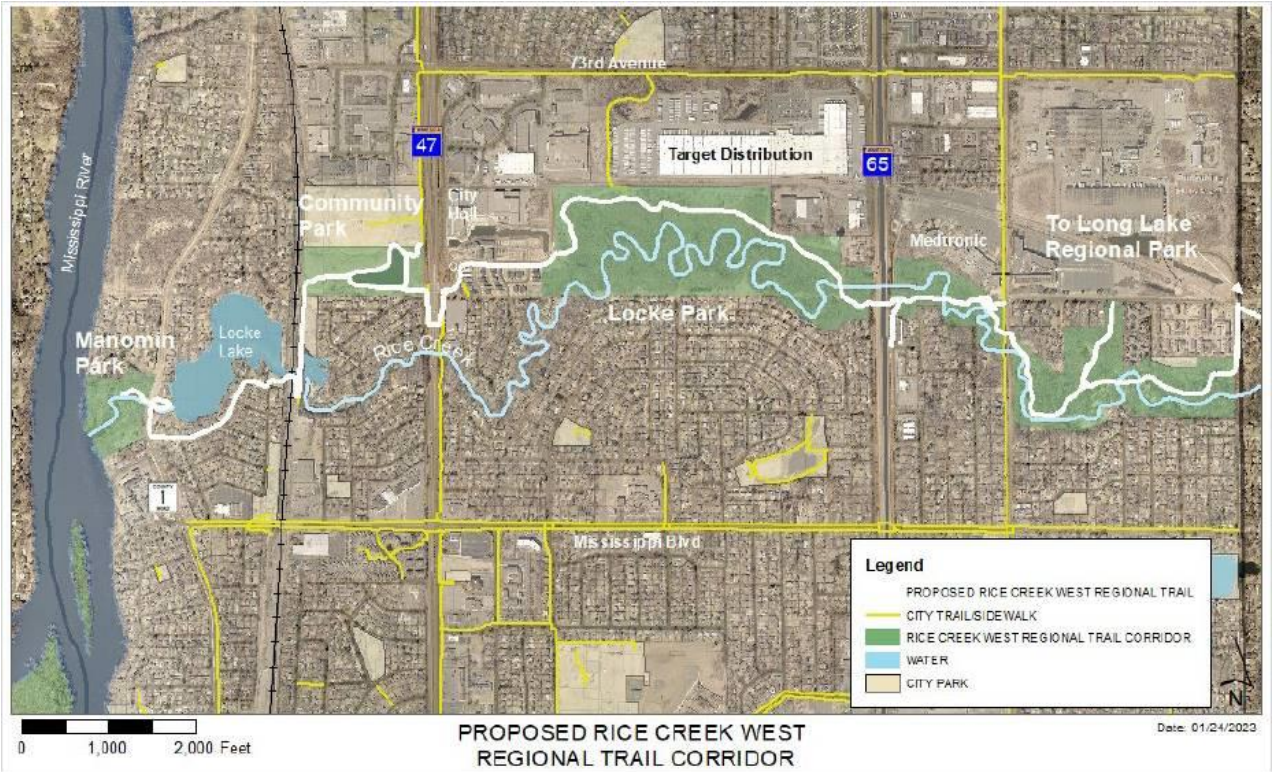


Figure 4: Rice Creek West Regional Trail segments (LRP, pg. 6)

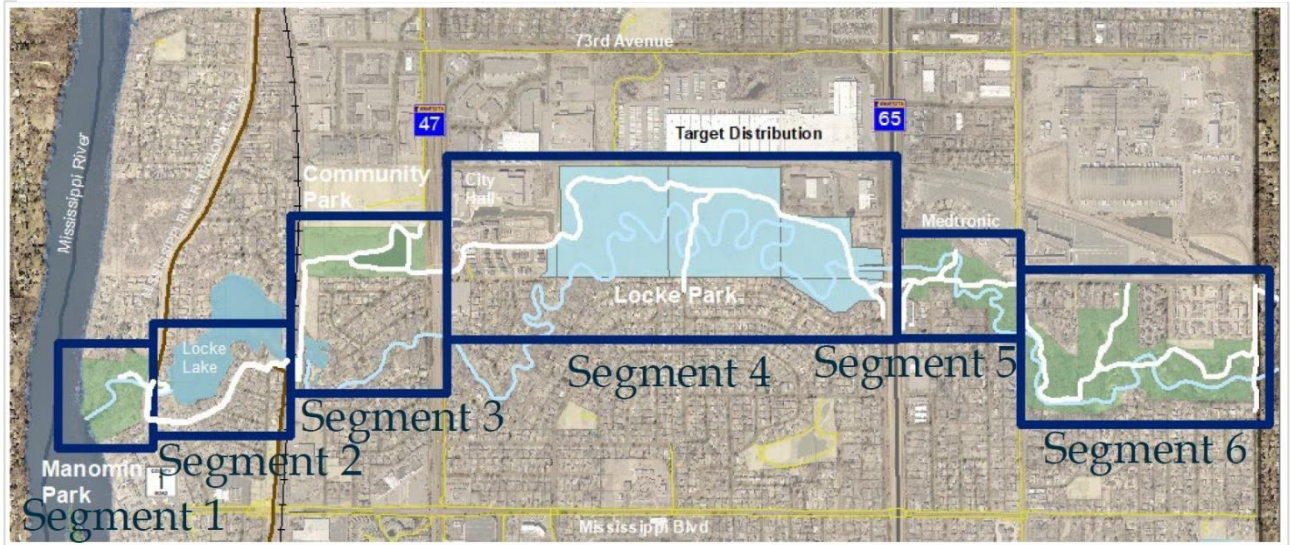


Figure 5: Rice Creek West Regional Trail, Segment 1 (LRP pg. 8)

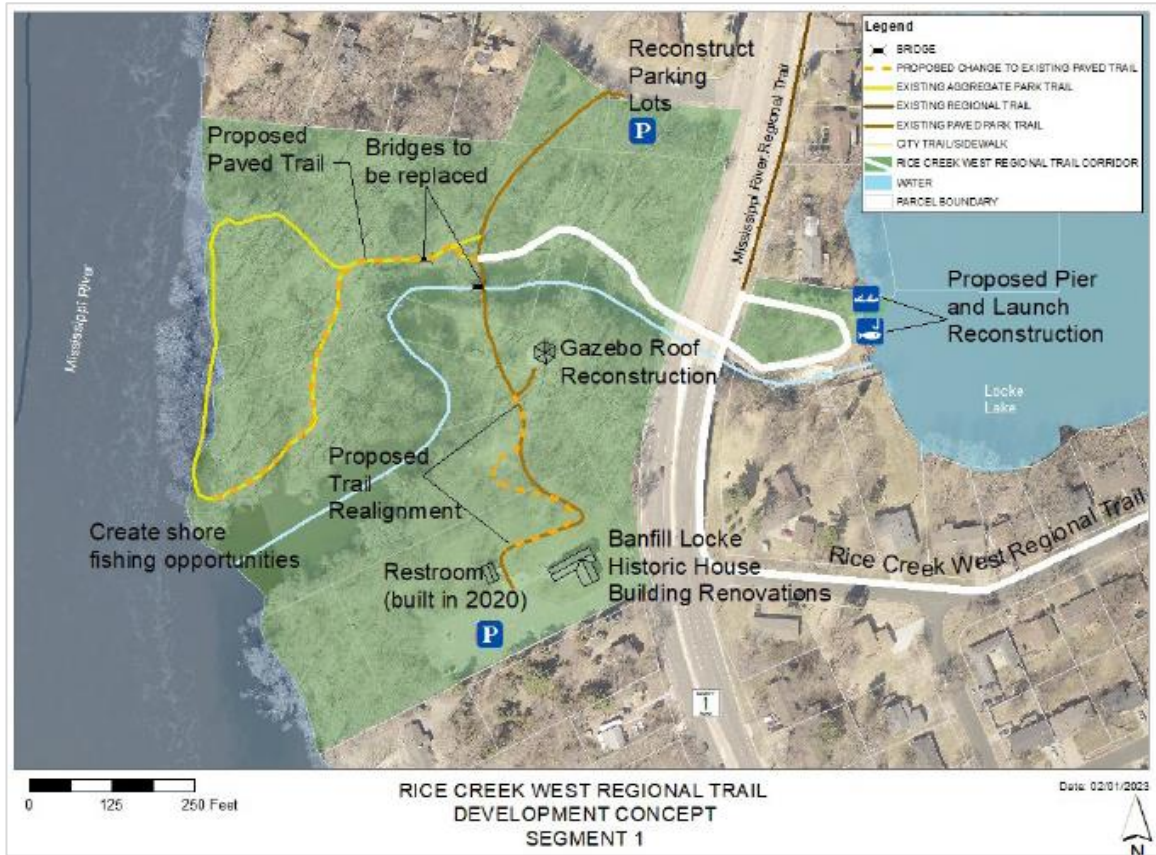
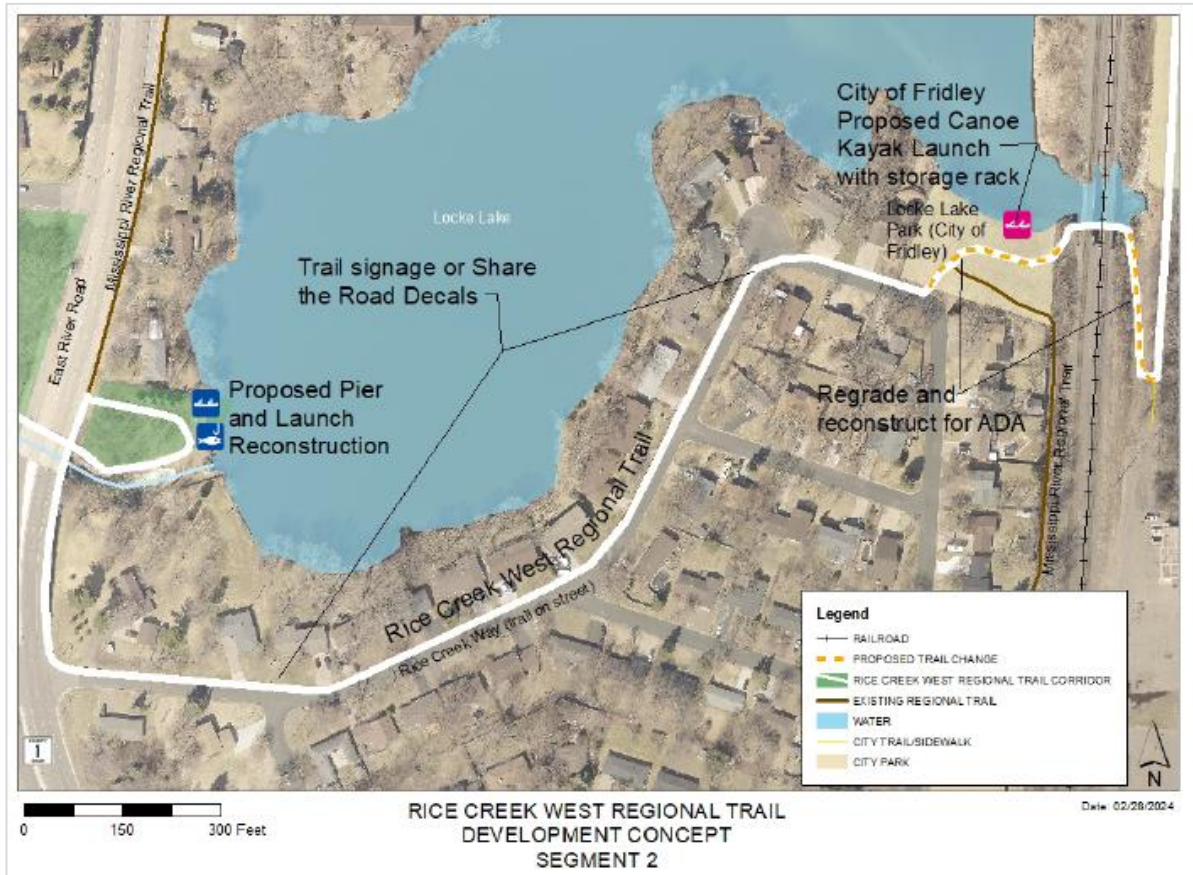


Figure 6: Rice Creek West Regional Trail, Segment 2 (LRP pg. 10)



Metropolitan Council

Figure 7: Rice Creek West Regional Trail, Segment 3 (LRP pg. 12)

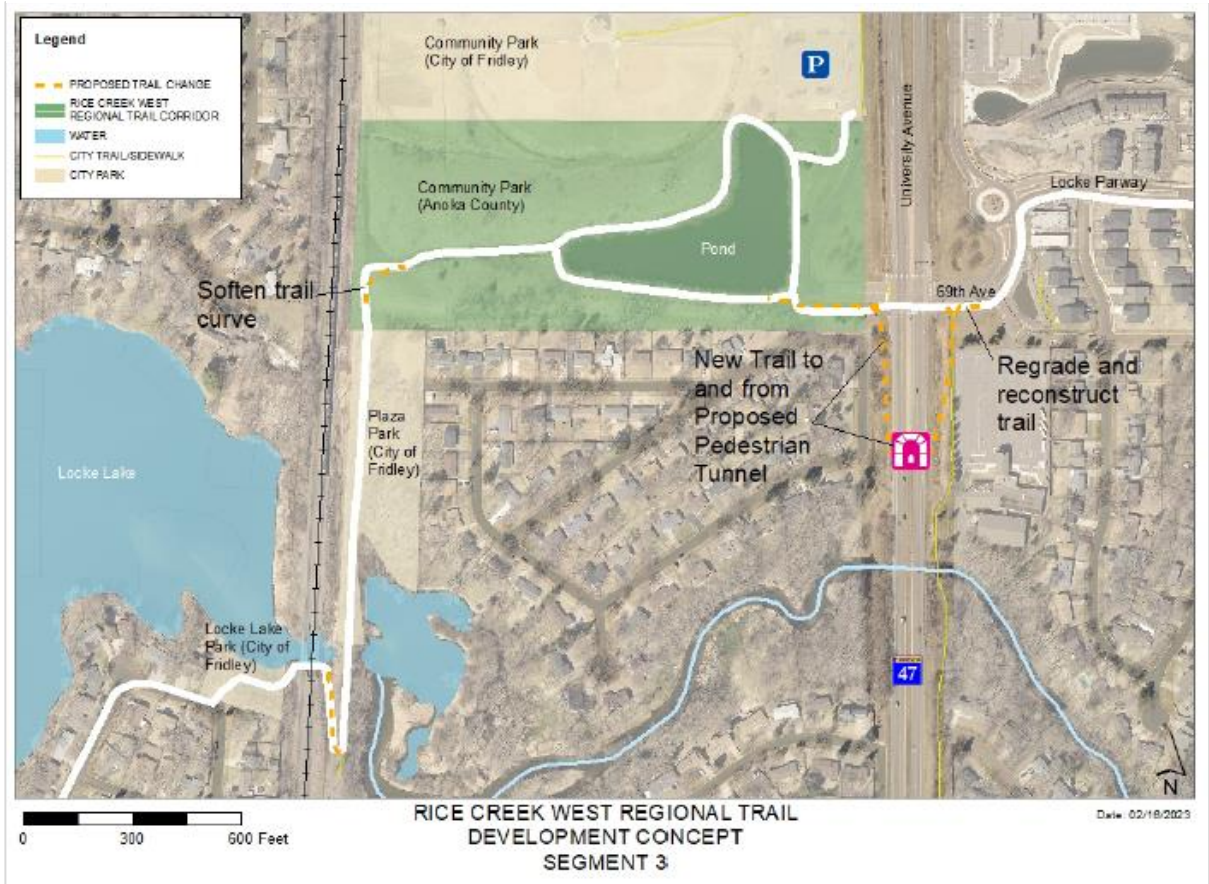


Figure 8: Rice Creek West Regional Trail, Segment 4 (LRP pg. 13)



Figure 9: Rice Creek West Regional Trail, Segment 5 (LRP pg. 15)

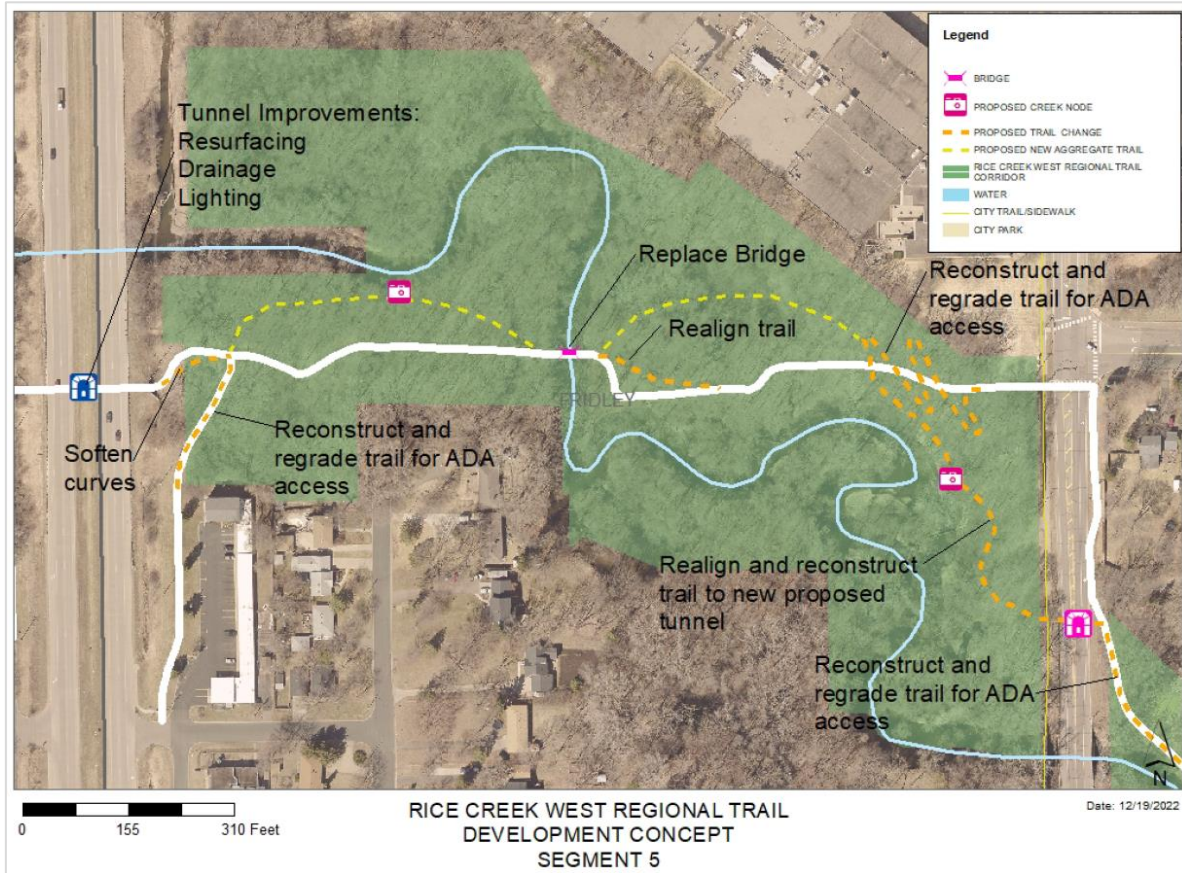
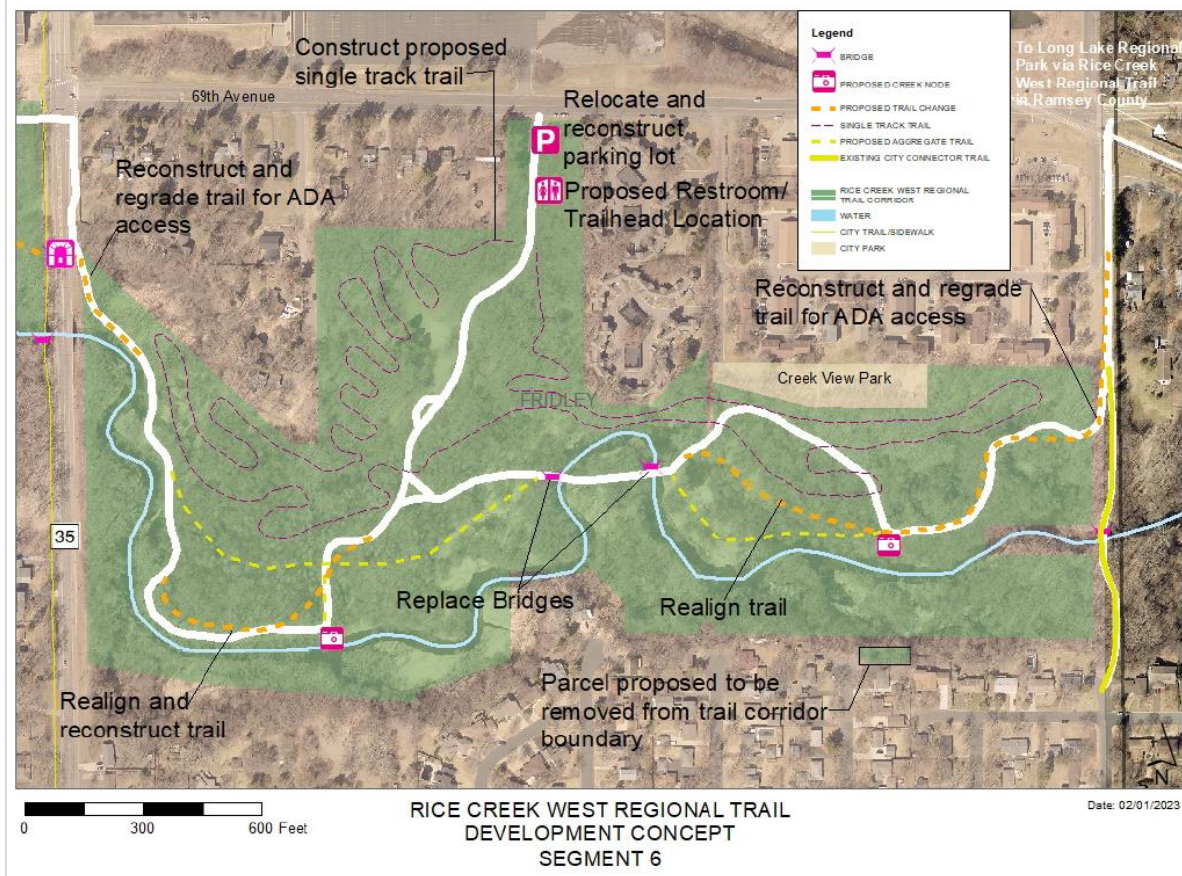


Figure 10: Rice Creek West Regional Trail, Segment 6 (LRP pg. 12)



Metropolitan Council

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Anoka County, Minnesota

DATE: May 14, 2024

RESOLUTION #2024-60

OFFERED BY COMMISSIONER: Meisner

RESOLUTION RELATING TO THE APPROVAL AND ADOPTION OF THE RICE CREEK WEST REGIONAL TRAIL LONG-RANGE PLAN AMENDMENT

WHEREAS, it is necessary and in the public interest for the County of Anoka to provide open space recreational facilities within the county; and,

WHEREAS, the County of Anoka has, through studies and evaluations, developed a countywide park and trail development program which has been approved by the Metropolitan Council; and,

WHEREAS, the County of Anoka, in cooperation with the City of Fridley and the Metropolitan Council, have designated a regional trail corridor through the city of Fridley; and,

WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Council requires an accurate and updated long-range plan for this regional trail corridor; and,

WHEREAS, this amendment addresses updates and future projects for the regional trail and adjacent areas through property owned by the city and the county; and,

WHEREAS, Anoka County conducted numerous public engagement activities and gathered input from public to ensure the success of future improvements planned for the trail; and,

WHEREAS, the local city representatives have reviewed and commented on the long range plan amendment:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Anoka County, by and through its Board of Commissioners, does hereby adopt the Rice Creek West Regional Trail Long-Range Plan Amendment, a copy of which is on file in the office of the Anoka County Administrator, and authorizes its submission to the Metropolitan Council for approval.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Metropolitan Council and the City of Fridley.

STATE OF MINNESOTA)
 COUNTY OF ANOKA) ss

I, Dee Guthman, Interim County Administrator, Anoka County, Minnesota, hereby certify that I have compared the foregoing copy of the resolution of the county board of said county with the original record thereof on file in the Administration Office, Anoka County, Minnesota, as stated in the minutes of the proceedings of said board at a meeting duly held on May 14, 2024, and that the same is a true and correct copy of said original record and of the whole thereof, and that said resolution was duly passed by said board at said meeting.

Witness my hand and seal this 14th day of May 2024.


 DEE GUTHMAN
 INTERIM COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

	YES	NO
DISTRICT #1	_____	_____
DISTRICT #2 – BRAASTAD	X	_____
DISTRICT #3 – REINERT	X	_____
DISTRICT #4 – SCHULTE	X	_____
DISTRICT #5 – GAMACHE	X	_____
DISTRICT #6 – JEPSON	X	_____
DISTRICT #7 – MEISNER	X	_____



Resolution No. 2024-70

Supporting a Long-Range Plan for Rice Creek West Regional Trail Corridor

Whereas, the County of Anoka is pursuing the development of a multi-purpose regional trail system that would link local and state trail systems, regional parks, and provide safe and convenient routes for non-motorized traffic to traverse the County; and

Whereas, in 2015, the Metropolitan Council adopted the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, which supports the implementation of corridors which provide access to high quality natural resources, regional parks, park reserves, and local areas of interest; and

Whereas, the proposed alignment of the Rice Creek West Regional Trail Corridor would link the Mississippi River, Rice Creek and the City of Fridley; and

Whereas, the Regional Trail Corridor is strategically located to provide pedestrian access to the recreational resources along its route; and

Whereas, the Long-Range Plan proposes to include improvements to the regional trail and amenities within the corridor that will enhance user experience and improve safety; and

Whereas, improvements within Locke Park have been financed by State of Minnesota bonds; and

Whereas, the Long-Range Plan acknowledges Anoka County is no longer responsible for Locke Park, Locke Lake Park and Plaza Park upon termination of a joint powers agreement in November of 2023; and

Whereas, the City of Fridley provided easements to Anoka County for segments of the Rice Creek West Regional Trail within Locke Park, Locke Lake Park, and Plaza Park; and

Whereas, in recognition of its support, the City of Fridley accepts the planned timeline and cost estimate found in item 10 of the Long-Range Plan pertaining to trail accessibility; and

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the City of Fridley hereby offers its support to Anoka County for the Rice Creek West Regional Trail Long Range Plan in the City of Fridley.

Passed and adopted by the City Council of the City of Fridley on June 24th, 2024.



Scott J. Lund – Mayor

Attest:


Melissa Moore – City Clerk

