

Information Item

Metropolitan Council



Meeting date: April 21, 2025

Topic

Grounded and Growing: A living history of our region's parks and trails

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| District(s), member(s): | All |
| Policy/legal reference: | 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, Chapter 9 |
| Staff prepared/presented: | Jessica Lee, Planning Analyst (651-602-1621); Krysten Ryba-Tures, Research Manager (651-602-1821); Raven McKnight, Data Visualization Specialist (612-747-4733) |
| Division/department: | Regional Parks and Trails / Community Development |

Background

Grounded and Growing: A living history of our region's parks and trails (formerly referred to as the Regional Parks System Historical-Cultural Study) first began in 2021. Since then, Met Council staff has worked with Regional Park Implementing Agency staff, consultants, and residents of the region to develop this project. The project's initial goal was to establish a baseline understanding of and historical context around the formation of the Regional Parks and Trails System. More importantly, the project highlights the impacts of past inequitable practices and how they gave rise to current-day disparities in both visitation and experiences within our system. Grounded and Growing strives to find ways to acknowledge this past in order to build a more empathetic, inclusive, and equitable system moving forward.

The Council hired two consultants to support this project: 1) Historical consultants, Hess, Roise and Company and 2) engagement experts Zan Associates. Hess Roise led the initial historical research component of the project, while Zan led an integrated engagement approach for the project, with the idea of present-day experiences guiding the scope of historical research. They delivered a series of summaries, multimedia, and other resources which were then turned over to Community Development Research's Strategy and Product Design Team in 2024 to create digital products on Met Council platforms.

Project launch

This project is an invitation for Met Council, Regional Parks Agencies, residents and visitors to develop a shared understanding of where we've been, where we are today, and the future we can build together.

We caution visitors to the website that this is not a comprehensive or complete accounting of how we arrived at this moment. Rather, Grounded and Growing calls us to reflect on the journey of our system (even before it was one) and asks us to consider what future paths we will chart. While growth and change are certainties over the next 30 years, disparities are not predestined—they are decided.

As we continue to explore the information in Grounded and Growing—and enhance the depth and breadth of its offerings through partnership and continued engagement—we commit to strengthen equitable use of the regional parks and trails system anew. We hope to spark and support

meaningful conversations that encourage the deliberate actions needed to address the varied experiences with the project's five themes: Access, Feeling safe, History of our lands, Sense of belonging, and Outdoor experiences.

Project components

The Grounded and Growing project, available at <https://metro council.org/parkslivinghistory>, consists of the following tools and resources:

1. Interactive dashboards
 - Historical information
 - Visitation trends and population characteristics
2. Interactive mapping platform
 - Ongoing story collection of outdoor experiences
3. Videos, documents, and images describing experiences of residents and visitors

The project offers flexibility to use the information in tailored ways, and multiple avenues for continuous development and improvement, which we are excited to explore with our current partners as well as new ones.

