

Information Item

Community Development Committee



Meeting Date: April 7, 2025

Topic

2025 Work Planning: Met Council Regional Parks and Trails Team

District(s), Member(s):	All
Policy/Legal Reference:	Minn. Stats. §§ 473.145 and 473.147
Staff Prepared/Presented:	Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst (651-602-1361) Zoey Mauck, Senior Planner (651-602-1398) Kevin Phan, Planner (651-602-1333)
Division/Department:	Community Development / Regional Parks and Trails

Proposed Action

Information item; no action is proposed at this time.

Background

Following the adoption of the Regional Development Guide, Imagine 2050, by the Metropolitan Council on February 12, 2025, Met Council staff across the organization are transitioning to the implementation of Imagine 2050.

During the development of the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, Met Council staff created a four-year work plan that incorporates input from Regional Park Implementing Agencies, Met Council committees, the American Indian Advisory Council, and others (Attachment 1). This work plan appears as Section Nine in the policy plan and is intended to be implemented between 2025 and 2028. The work plan outlines 17 projects organized into five themes including Accountability and Research, Protection and Restoration, Culture, Trails, and Finance. Each of these projects is aligned with specific sections of the policy plan.

While general timeframes are identified in Section Nine of the policy plan, continued discussion with Implementing Agency partners, Met Council committees, and others will result in refinement of the work plan and timeline. With Imagine 2050's recent adoption, Council staff is particularly interested in solidifying its work plan for 2025.

Met Council staff meet with Regional Park Implementing Agencies on a monthly basis and work planning has been a key topic for the first two meetings held this year. Council staff asked Implementing Agencies to help prioritize work plan items and to consider whether any additional projects or tasks should be taken up. The "Proposed 2025 Partner Meeting Running Agenda and Bike Rack" shares a snapshot of this discussion and depicts a possible approach for prioritizing work by the Council-Implementing Agency partnership in the remaining months of the year (Attachment 2).

In addition to the items listed in the work plan, Met Council staff have on-going work outlined in the body of the policy plan, including but not limited to the review of long-range plans for regional parks, park reserves, special features, and regional trails; the review of local comprehensive plan updates, comprehensive plan amendments, and environmental reviews; and the review of

Geographic Information Systems data. Met Council staff also helps support Agency work to foster a sense of belonging and building awareness of the Regional Parks and Trails System through the Parks Ambassador Program. In addition, Council staff administer grant programs that ultimately bring the Regional Parks and Trails System to life. This core work is ongoing and will continue to occur as items in the four-year work plan are initiated. A draft of the Council Parks and Trails team's 2025 work plan is included as Attachment 3.

Many projects appear multiple times across the three work plans because their scope extends beyond any one individual group and requires broader discussion. Met Council staff will continue to work with Regional Park Implementing Agencies, the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, and Community Development Committee to share priorities, solicit input, and provide opportunities for dialogue.

At the April 7, 2025 Community Development Committee meeting, Council staff will share a high-level summary of these priorities and are looking for the Committee's advice, reactions, and areas of shared interests on topics they would like to further discuss during 2025.

Attachments

Attachment 1: Table 9-1. 2025 Work Plan for the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

Attachment 2: Proposed 2025 Monthly Partner Meeting Running Agenda and Bike Rack

Attachment 3: Draft 2025 Council Parks and Trails' Team Work Plan



Attachment 1: Table 9-1. 2025 Work Plan for the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

Projects by Theme	Time Frame	Location in Policy Plan
<i>Accountability and Research</i>		
1. Develop a process to create a small set of performance measures at the Policy level to measure progress toward our key Regional Parks and Trails System priorities.	2025-2026	Section One
2. Implement the 2025 Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study.	2024-2026	Not included
3. Explore expanding cost-effective research approaches, including forecasting tools, that provide implementing agencies with the management information at the park and trail unit level.	2025-2028	Section Two, Action 2
<i>Protection and Restoration</i>		
4. Explore establishment of a Special Feature – Historical Landscape subclassification.	2026-2027	Section Two, Action 1
5. Explore the establishment of a Special Features – Open Space/Natural Systems subclassification in consultation with the Council’s Natural Systems workgroup. This effort includes renewal of the Regionally Significant Ecological Area dataset.	2025-2026	Section Two, Action 1
6. Reconvene Climate and Natural Systems Workgroup to discuss implementation steps for Climate Resilience Policy and Actions.	2025-2028	Section Four
<i>Culture</i>		
7. Develop a cultural resources inventory requirement for long-range planning in partnership with key stakeholders.	2025-2026	Section Five, Action 1; Planning Handbook
8. Continue to develop and refine the Cultural Landscape Classification, in coordination with American Indian Tribes, other cultural communities, and regional park implementing agencies.	2025-2026	Section Two, Action 1
9. Develop an inventory of and guidelines for harvestable fruits, mushrooms, and other plants in partnership with regional park implementing agencies, American Indian groups, and other partners and interested stakeholders.	2026-2028	Section Seven, Action 1



Attachment 1: Table 9-1. 2025 Work Plan for the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan *continued*

10. As part of a broader Council effort, develop a training program and learning opportunities for Council and regional park implementing agency staff to explore indigenous land management practices and other related topics.	2026-2028	Section Seven, Action 1
<i>Trails</i>		
11. Continue to convene a trail coordination workgroup, supporting the development of a more coordinated, integrated, and connected regional trails system and Regional Bicycle Transportation Network.	2025-2028	Section Seven, Action 5
12. Create regional guidelines for e-bike use on regional trails.	2025-2028	Section Seven, Action 5
13. Explore systemwide wayfinding and signage minimum requirements.	2025-2028	Section Seven, Action 5
<i>Finance</i>		
14. Explore scoping and development of a systemwide Asset Preservation Plan, or similar.	2025-2028	Section Eight
15. Continue to pursue Pay-Go for greater flexibility to fund a wider range of activities, facilities, and programs. Pay-Go would provide an additional tool for funding the regional system.	2025-2028	Section Eight
16. Explore changing/reducing the local match requirement for the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Program, as state rules allow.	2025-2028	Section Eight
17. Continue discussion of strategic funding for the Regional Parks and Trails System, with a goal to better meet the needs of this growing system.	2025-2028	Section Eight, Actions 5-6



Attachment 2: Proposed 2025 Monthly Partner Meeting Running Agenda and Bike Rack

Date	Location	Proposed Agenda Items	Council-Organized Items
Feb 20 th	Virtual	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop Shared 2025 Slate of Partner Meeting Topics 2. Pay-Go 3. Right of Way Acquisition Loan Fund (RALF) Program 4. Develop March Partner Meeting Topics 	Ongoing Projects for Discussion:
			Informational Topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GIS Improvement Project
March 20 th	Anoka County – Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve (Chomonix Clubhouse, Heron Room)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Funding/Pay-Go/RALF – follow up 2. Purpose and intent of monthly partner meetings 3. Convening/Re-convening workgroups 4. Bridging Facilities – open discussion 5. 2026 Visitor Study - Status Update and Discussion 	Ongoing Projects for Discussion:
			Informational Topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GIS Housekeeping Policy Plan Amend - Reconvening Subcommittee groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trail System Coordination • American Indian Commitments • Strategic Funding • Climate and Natural Systems
April 17 th	Virtual		Ongoing Projects for Discussion:
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RSEA? - Historical Cultural Study. What next? - Policy Plan Performance Metrics Development
May 15 th	Washington County – Lake Elmo Park Reserve		Ongoing Projects for Discussion:
			Informational Topics:
June 12 th <i>(Moved due to Juneteenth)</i>	Dakota County – River to River Greenway Tour, Meeting Location TBD		Ongoing Projects for Discussion:
			Informational Topics:
July 17 th	Scott County – Cedar Lake Farm Regional Park		Ongoing Projects for Discussion:
			Informational Topics:
Aug 21 st	Virtual		Ongoing Projects for Discussion:
			Informational Topics:
Sept 18 th	Ramsey County – Tamarack Nature Center		Ongoing Projects for Discussion:
			Informational Topics:
Oct 16 th	Virtual		Ongoing Projects for Discussion:
			Informational Topics:
Nov 20 th	TRPD – Meeting Location TBD		Ongoing Projects for Discussion:
			Informational Topics:
Dec 18 th	Virtual		Ongoing Projects for Discussion:
			Informational Topics:

Attachment 2: Proposed 2025 Monthly Partner Meeting Running Agenda and Bike Rack *continued*

2025 Bike Rack

This table outlines topics listed as areas of interest by agencies and Council staff. Topics are placed in the “bike rack” as a holding location until they’re ready to be brought out for a meeting discussion or information item.

Agency-Identified Topics:

- Continue brainstorming topics for the next 2-3 years
- Discuss region-wide opportunities to celebrate 50th anniversary of Park and Trail system
- Discuss Long-Range Plan amendments and when updates/amendments trigger a policy plan amendment
- Discuss how to expand regional parks and trails system advocacy in the Council and at the State level
- Identify shared goals and projects at the regional level (e.g. Snowmaking facilities across the region)
- Explore development of a regional awards program (development, education, equity, etc.)

Strategic Funding:

- Pursuing Pay-Go as a future funding strategy
- Explore “Growing the pie” of available funding with coordination from other agencies and organizations (e.g., DNR)
- Discuss existing funding formulas and how they can better support smaller agencies
- Discuss new strategies to increase funding of the system
 - Explore other flexible funding sources
 - Explore strategies to advocate for more state support (Capital Bonding and O&M)
 - Explore collaborative land stewardship grant projects for Outdoor Heritage Funds and/or Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources
 - Explore expanding use of Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
- Discuss improvement opportunities for grant application submittal software and process
- Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Program
 - Continue discussion on how to allow use of unused PTLAF funds by agencies who have met their cap
 - Explore changing/reducing local match requirement for the PAOF Program

Learning Opportunities:

- Park Dedication Learn and Discussion
- Agency spotlights (e.g., sharing parks and trails projects and programs)
- Other learning opportunities

Trail System Coordination:

- Discuss opportunities for region-wide wayfinding and signage
- Explore implementing regional E-bike policies
- Discuss trails as recreational corridors as well as transportation corridors (applying transportation funding to trails)
- Agency trail search corridor timelines

Policy Plan Implementation:

- Sub-Classification Prioritization
 - Continue refining new Cultural Landscape Sub-classification
 - Discuss future implementation of Bridging Facilities
 - Explore establishment of Historical Landscape Sub-classification
 - Explore establishment of Open Space/Natural Systems Sub-classification
- Explore Expanding cost-effective research approaches
 - Discuss Agency needs for proposed forecasting tool
 - Discuss annual use estimate visitor count methods and process
- Explore, implement American Indian Advisory Council commitments, forming an Agency-Council work group

Attachment 3: Draft 2025 Council Parks and Trails Team Work Plan

Planning	
Parks and Trails Policy Plan Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a process to create performance measures at the Policy level to measure progress toward our key Regional Parks and Trails System priorities. (PP work plan #1) Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, Planning Handbook printing. Regional Parks and Trails, Policy Plan web updates. Climate work – Continue to develop, especially Parks and Trails Planning Handbook. Special Features – Subclassification development.
Regional Trail System Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconvene trail coordination workgroup to support development of a more coordinated, integrated, and connected regional trails system and Regional Bicycle Transportation Network. (PP work plan #11) Create regional guidelines for e-bike use on regional trails. (PP work plan #12) Explore systemwide wayfinding and signage min. requirements. (PP work plan #13) Collaborate with the Ambassador Program. Coordinate with Metropolitan Transportation Services Bike/Ped unit, Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, coordination with new sales tax.
Legislative Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with Agencies to coordinate. (Dakota Co. has lead during 2025-26 session.) Support weekly Legislative Partner meetings with Council Government Affairs.
Geographic Information Systems Improvement Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate 2025 Annual Submittal process. Coordinate 2026 Data Request. Prepare Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Policy Plan “Housekeeping” amendment for Council review and adoption. Continue data model evaluation and development. Continue, enhance GIS support in Community Development Division.
Continue Work with American Indian Advisory Council and Implementing Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate with Met Council’s American Indian Liaison. Explore potential Implementing Agency-Council work group. Continue developing Cultural Landscape subclassification. Explore, implement American Indian Advisory Council commitments and related work, including (but not limited to) naming protocols, understanding tribal consultation, education and training, harvesting, mapping sacred sites, etc.
Convening Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly Agency-Council partner meetings Legislative Partner meetings Strategic Funding workgroup Climate and Natural Systems workgroup Trail System Coordination workgroup Outreach staff
Historical-Cultural Study Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore educational opportunities with Implementing Agencies and Council staff Encourage Implementing Agencies to share content via their websites
System Additions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare for next process, to coincide with next policy plan update



Attachment 3: Draft 2025 Council Parks and Trails Team Work Plan *continued*

Art + Policy Program

- Explore how Art + Policy can expand and enhance Ambassador Program, both within and outside the Regional Parks and Trails System
- Implement Community Conversations
- Develop Impact Report
- Coordinate Artist in Residence Program – Parks and Trails Legacy Pilot
- Consider options for next Met Council Art Shanty – Winter 2025-2026

Ambassador Program

- Convene Outreach coordination group
- Consider development of Adventure Guide “2.0” and other outreach tools
- Support implementation of Historical-Cultural Study, including Our Parks, Our Stories (map)
- Update Regional Parks and Trails System map. Partner with CD-Research, MC-GIS, Implementing Agencies.
- Explore American Indian connections
- Partner with Council Communications, others on an enhanced social media presence
- Continue to support, build Collaboration of Regional Trail Initiatives (CRTI) partnership
- Consider options for Regional Parks and Trails Mushing program – Winter 2025- 2026

Finance Program

- Continue Strategic Funding discussion with Council leadership and Implementing Agencies
- Explore better leveraging Council funds into the Regional Parks and Trails System
- Coordinate, implement Equity Grant Program for 2025-26
- Ongoing Programs – maintain and build support for
 - Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Program
 - Parks and Trails Legacy Program
 - Operations & Maintenance Program
 - Bonding Program
 - Equity Grant Program
 - Modernization Program
 - Tree Planting Program

Research

- Coordinate, prepare, and share regional park and trail use estimates.
- Develop a visitation forecasting tool.
- Pursue park ecosystem services, natural system valuation.
- Collaborate with Ambassador program, consider regional park and trail species spotlights.

Ongoing

- Review regional park and trail long-range plans, plan amendments, land conversions, and boundary adjustments, expansions, and equally valuable land exchanges. Coordinate review by Council staff. Prepare business items and present to Council committees.
- Review comprehensive plan updates, comprehensive plan amendments, environmental assessment worksheets (EAWs), and alternative urban areawide reviews (AUARs).

The above workplan is a draft/work in progress and will change.

