

Committee Report

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Community Development Committee: January 21, 2025

Metropolitan Council: February 12, 2025

Business Item: 2025-6

Adopt the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook

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) Tracey Kinney, Planning Analyst (651-602-1029) Kevin Phan, Planner (651-602-1345)
Division/Department:	Community Development / Regional Parks

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Establish the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook as the administrative guide for regional parks and trails long-range planning requirements.
2. Adopt the attached Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.
3. Authorize Council staff to make administrative changes to the Handbook over time, including additions and updates to related tools and resources.
4. Direct Council staff to bring any updates that directly impact or necessitate implementing agency action related to Sections 3, 5, 6, and 7 of the Planning Handbook to the Council for approval, aligning with any updates to the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan.

Summary of Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Discussion

Colin Kelly and Tracey Kinney, Met Council Planning Analysts; as well as Kevin Phan, Met Council Planner presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission on January 9, 2024.

Commissioner Cecily Harris asked about the wording of the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota, a non-profit organization in Section 2 of the Planning Handbook. Emmett Mullin, Met Council Parks Manager, noted the need for the correct name description. Commissioner Harris asked about the 2021 visitor study finding that the average percentage of non-local visits across the Regional Parks and Trails System was about 38%. Mullin responded that as people become more aware of climate change, they may choose to travel less. Additionally, as more regional parks and trails are open to the public, people will have more regional park and trail options closer to home. Council Parks Staff are watching the non-local visitor findings closely, and they anticipate that non-local visits will continue to go down. Drawing a regional audience is one of the ways that determines regional significance. Commissioner Harris asked if a picture in the handbook presentation was relevant to the regional parks and trails system. Phan responded that the image is from the Met Council's asset library.

Chair Yarusso asked if the Met Council's website mapping will be updated more frequently with the continued advancement of the Regional Parks and Trail GIS Improvement Project. Mullin

responded that we are investing heavily in this dataset with the intent to have improved mapping.

A consensus of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commissioners present voted to forward the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook business item to the Community Development Committee as presented. Additionally, two commissioners not able to attend, District A Commissioner Monica Dillenburg and District B Commissioner Bob Moeller, emailed their support and concurrence with recommendation.



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Background

The Council has substantially completed the development of the 2050 Regional Development Guide, *Imagine 2050*. The regional development guide, along with the Council's system and policy plans, help guide the orderly growth and development of the Twin Cities metropolitan region. The policy plan chapters include Regional Parks and Trails, Transportation, Land Use, Water Resources, and Housing.

The Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook (planning handbook) includes contextual and procedural information about the planning requirement content that is guided by policies from the *Imagine 2050* Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan. The planning handbook was developed as part of the planned integration of the regional parks and trails policy plan into *Imagine 2050*. Council staff shared the draft 90% planning handbook with MPOSC at the December meeting.

Since early December, the draft planning handbook was further developed based on feedback from MPOSC, the Community Development Committee (CDC), and the regional parks implementing agencies. The main changes to the draft planning handbook are predominantly refinements of existing content including:

- Section 1: Introduction and Engagement Summary - Added the process to amend the

planning handbook.

- Section 2: System Plan - Updated National and State Recreation Lands in the Region map.
- Section 5: Planning - Consolidated long-range plan requirements and added checklists.
- Section 6: System Protection - Clarified system protection comprehensive plan review characteristics and added land use examples.
- Section 7: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming - Added desired outcomes that were located in the Policy Plan to the planning handbook. Moved the list of ineligible facilities from the planning handbook to the Policy Plan.

At the January 9, 2025, Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC) meeting, Council staff will provide a high-level summary of advice heard on the planning handbook from recent Council committees and Regional Park Implementing Agency partner meetings. Additionally, staff will provide an overview of the final Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.

Rationale

Minnesota law requires the Met Council to conduct a comprehensive review of the Regional Parks Policy Plan at least every four years (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147). The policy plan was last updated in December 2020. In the 2050 long-range planning cycle, Council staff have proposed relocating long-range plan requirements from the Policy Plan to the planning handbook, along with other administrative procedures, tools, and resources that have been developed over the last several years. Completion of the policy plan update along with the planning handbook, as an integrated part of *Imagine 2050*, is expected in early 2025.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan and Planning Handbook advance the Thrive MSP 2040 outcome of Livability through increasing access to nature-based outdoor recreation, enhancing the quality of life throughout the region. Also, it advances the Thrive outcome of Equity through strengthening equitable use of the regional parks and trails system by reducing barriers to participation across race, ethnicity, income, and ability.

Known Support / Opposition

Met Council committees and Implementing Agency staff provided input throughout the development of the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook. This feedback led to a stronger and more refined planning handbook.

On January 9, 2025, Council staff will share a business item for MPOSC’s consideration, including a summary of significant plan changes, the draft final parks policy plan – including both redline and clean versions – the draft final planning handbook, and a public comment report. Council staff will share the same materials with the Community Development Committee (CDC) on January 21, 2025. *Imagine 2050*, including each of the Council’s policy plans, is proposed for adoption by the Metropolitan Council on February 12, 2025 (Table 1).

Table 1: Schedule for finalizing Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, Planning Handbook and *Imagine 2050*

Date/Timing	Milestone
January 9, 2025	Final Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, Planning Handbook, and Public Comment report (MPOSC business item)
January 21, 2025	Final Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, Planning Handbook, and Public Comment report (CDC business item)
February 12, 2025	Metropolitan Council adoption of <i>Imagine 2050</i> , including the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan (MC business item)



The draft policy plan is the result of over two years of dialogue with numerous stakeholders, including the regional park implementing agencies, MPOSC, CDC, Committee of the Whole, Land Use Advisory Committee, and Metropolitan Council as well as extensive outreach to prioritized communities and the public. Engagement with MPOSC on *Imagine 2050* began in August 2022, with focused discussions on updating the *Regional Parks Policy Plan* beginning in October 2022. A summary of MPOSC engagement appears in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Regional Development Guide engagement with Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Date	Focus
October 6, 2022	Regional vision, values, and goals; kick-off the Regional Parks Policy Plan update process; gather input on key topics and issues to inform policy plan workgroups
March 2, 2023	Council-endorsed regional values and vision statements; Regional Parks Policy Plan project timeline; proposal for regional park implementing agency-Council policy plan workgroups.
April 6, 2023	Small group activities focused on developing vision, mission, and values for the regional parks and trails system.
June 1, 2023	Developing shared regional goals and policy area objectives
August 3, 2023	Regional goals; regional parks and trails system vision, mission, and values; the development of a community, stakeholder and public engagement plan; launch of two more policy plan workgroups
November 2, 2023	Outcomes of policy plan workgroups; draft regional parks and trails objectives; preview remaining policy plan workgroups
January 4, 2024	Proposal for engaging MPOSC in early 2024, schedule for finalizing the Regional Development Guide, revised set of draft parks objectives
February 1, 2024	Revised set of draft parks objectives, subset of the draft objectives surrounding the Climate and Natural Systems topic, local forecasts
March 7, 2024	Revised draft regional parks and trails objectives; emerging ideas on policies and actions; background information on the existing Regional Parks Policy Plan and how components of it may change going forward
April 4, 2024	Revised regional parks and trails objectives; emerging ideas on regional parks and trails policies and actions; emerging thinking on a Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook
May 2, 2024	Overview of the draft 60% Regional Parks and Trails Plan; deeper dives into section 7 (Recreation, Facilities, and Programming) and section 8 (Finance)
June 6, 2024	Overview of the draft Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook; deeper dives into section 3 (Natural Systems) and section 4 (Climate Resilience)
July 11, 2024	Deeper dives into section 2 (System plan), section 5 (Planning), and section 6 (System protection), and associated content in the draft planning handbook
August 1, 2024	Overview of the public comment (90%) draft of the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, with a particular focus on new and



Date	Focus
	different elements of the draft 2050 plan
October 3, 2024	Update on the draft Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook, with a particular focus on section 5 (Planning) and regional trail boundary adjustment criteria
November 7, 2024	Summary of public comments on the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, proposed plan modifications, and next steps
December 5, 2024	Continue summary of public comments on the draft Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan and proposed policy plan modifications (MPOSC information item)

Minnesota law requires the Council to conduct a comprehensive review of the Regional Parks Policy Plan at least every four years (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147). Completion of the policy plan update, as an integrated part of *Imagine 2050*, is expected in early 2025.

