

2050 REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS POLICY PLAN

Public comment summary

January 2025



IMAGINE²⁰₅₀
the region's plan for an equitable and resilient future

Regional vision

A prosperous, equitable, and resilient region
with abundant opportunities for all to
live, work, play, and thrive.

Regional core values

Equity | Leadership | Accountability | Stewardship

Regional goals

Our region is equitable and inclusive

Racial inequities and injustices experienced by historically marginalized communities have been eliminated; and all people feel welcome, included, and empowered.

Our communities are healthy and safe

All our region's residents live healthy and rewarding lives with a sense of dignity and wellbeing.

Our region is dynamic and resilient

Our region meets the opportunities and challenges faced by our communities and economy including issues of choice, access, and affordability.

We lead on addressing climate change

We have mitigated greenhouse gas emissions and have adapted to ensure our communities and systems are resilient to climate impacts.

We protect and restore natural systems

We protect, integrate, and restore natural systems to protect habitat and ensure a high quality of life for the people of our region.



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Public comment period summary

The Metropolitan Council accepted public comments from August 15 through October 7 through various channels, including email, phone, mail, recorded message, an online comment portal, and a public hearing on September 25, 2024. During that time, nearly 2,000 total comments were received from approximately 500 organizations and individuals. Specifically, the draft Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan received approximately 110 comments from five counties, six cities, and three local and federal parks agencies.

In addition, about 20 people specifically provided parks-related feedback at in-person events, including the Art + Policy events. The art made at these events will be shared in some kind of digital library resource.

For individuals who commented on the draft Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan and provided voluntary demographic data, the following data are available:

Gender

- 78% identified themselves as men
- 22% as women

Age

- 18-24: 14%
- 25-34: 29%
- 35-44: 29%
- 45-54: 0%
- 55-64: 14%
- 65-74: 14%
- 75-84: 0%

Summary of feedback

Selected quotes

“Saint Paul Parks and Recreation wishes to thank the Metropolitan Council’s Regional Parks staff for their months of engagement and focused conversation that led to this draft of the Regional Parks Policy Plan. This plan reflects the evolving nature of the regional parks system and its role of providing access to natural spaces with relevant amenities to all of the region’s residents.”

“Climate – The plan has been beefed up with additional initiatives for climatic resilience but no additional funding source to help combat. These initiatives will require use of existing fund sources that are under-funded and may hinder park and trail improvements without additional funding.”

“Thank you for the opportunity to review and request changes to the draft 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan. The draft is excellent.”
(Three Rivers Park District)

“Washington County and the other Regional Implementation Agencies are experiencing increased demands on infrastructure, land/water management, programs, and services without additional financial resources. **If** funding does not keep up with growing demand and maintenance, the system will experience deterioration. The Regional Parks Policy Plan must set the stage for the Met Council and agencies to address this.”

Major themes

- System classification and designation
 - Concerns about new sub-classifications
 - Need for clearer definitions and implementation guidelines
 - Recommendations for park search areas and trail corridors
 - Questions about minimum size requirements for cultural landscapes
- Research and data
 - Need for unit-level representative data
 - Support for climate and natural systems research
 - Need for comprehensive market studies
- Natural systems and climate resilience
 - Stronger climate action support and specific goals
 - Emphasis on protecting and restoring natural systems for all living things
 - Importance of protecting visual resources and scenic qualities
- Planning and implementation
 - Need for clearer distinction between Metropolitan Council and local government responsibilities
 - Concerns about planning handbook authority and jurisdiction
 - Need for streamlined oversight processes
- Equity and access
 - Focus on breaking down barriers for underrepresented communities
 - Importance of connecting people with disabilities to natural environments
 - Need for culturally relevant recreational amenities
 - Support for BIPOC-specific programming
 - Recognition of Indigenous communities and cultural sites
- Funding and operations
 - Operations and Maintenance funding inadequate and below statutory requirements
 - Current funding formulas considered unsustainable
 - Need for increased bonding limits and funding matches
 - Concerns about funding distribution favoring larger agencies
 - Need for additional support for invasive species management

Summary of proposed revisions

- Typos and inadvertent omissions
- Definitions and clarifications, particularly clarifying review and approval process for the planning handbook that will accompany the policy plan
- Definition of green gentrification and connection to 2050 Housing Policy Plan
- Clarity around the value of ongoing public awareness of regional facilities
- Clarity around requirements for wayfinding plans
- Additional protection from potential visual pollution for parks and trails system
- New clarifications for local planning processes regarding potential departures from the system

Public comment data

The following section provides a full output of all the public comments received during the formal public comment period for the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan.

Online portal participants

There were approximately 20 people who participated in the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan topics on the online portal. Five provided their names:

Anthony Albright
 Anders Kaufman
 Malachi Moser
 Soren Stevenson
 Bill Tiedemann

Data from online comment portal

Question: Which regional parks and trails policies align with your community’s or organization’s priorities

Increase in trails

Question: What questions do we need to ask about the long-range future of the region?

Plan really seems lacking on integration into communities. The long-range future presented here read as if the parks exist in isolation to everything else. There's some transportation in the plans but little in how to connect people to the parks - I've mentioned this in other comments:

Integrating/developing nearby restaurant and retail to provide incentive to visit the area of a regional park should be a consideration - obviously not going to be like a National Park gateway town (Springdale UT, Jackson WY, Medora ND) but more like dinner at a nearby restaurant with a walk to an event (ex., Lake Harriet Bandshell) or a place (ex., Como botanical gardens) and then a stroll in the nearby nature provides a more complete experience. Establish food truck areas inside the parks. Think about how to connect people to sights within these large parks and things outside the park (reasonable e-bike rentals, trolleys, bicycle rickshaws, electric golf cart rides where the driver is fundraising for a charity, etc.).

Thank you for your comment. The Regional Parks and Trails System prioritizes accessibility and connectivity by identifying trail search corridors that connect different regional park and trail units throughout the region. Met Council Parks and Trails staff are committed to working with other Council divisions and regional park implementing agencies to promote multimodal access and to coordinate trail development with the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network. While some regional parks, like Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, are more integrated into local communities, the Regional Parks and Trails System recognizes that not all units are the exact same. Some parks are oriented toward providing a wide variety of amenities to users, while others are intended to focus on conservation and providing a more natural experience.

Accessibility to the parks by trails (biking or walking)

What activities do we want to offer at the parks. (Rope jungle gym for kids, mountain biking, nature preserve, flower gardens, fishing availability, etc).

Thank you for your comment. Existing and proposed policies support the expansion of the regional trail network throughout the region. The System Plan identifies regional trails that are open to the public, planned, or a search corridor. The many Regional Trail Search Corridors in the system plan demonstrates the anticipated future growth of the network. Also, Action 5 of the Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy looks at opportunities for coordinating work between the regional trail network and the regional bicycle transportation network.

As the region continues to grow and diversify, the Met Council will continue to explore and assess which recreational activities and facilities are eligible for regional funding. To account for changing recreational trends and to elevate equitable access, the 2050 plan has removed a static list of allowed recreational uses and has opted to switch to a criteria-based system. This will provide regional park implementing agencies with the opportunity to propose new recreational activities in their regional

	<p>parks and trails.</p> <p>Regarding your perspectives, they align closely with regional policy and priorities. The Met Council prioritizes and invests in multimodal transportation options, including bicycle and pedestrian modes, and developing safe connections between regional and local destinations.</p>
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Question: What perspectives do we need to prioritize?

People without the ability to drive to the parks or bring their bikes to the parks with a car.

Question: What in your experience or perspective drives your view on this?

I have a car and I'm unable to drive to a park with my bike to enjoy the park by bike. I can bike but it's not the easiest nor most convenient route to get there.

Regional Parks and Trails objectives

Question: How well do you feel these objectives support the future you'd like to see?

	Very well	Somewhat well	Neutral	Somewhat unwell	Not well at all
Foster equity and belonging	55%	36%	0%	0%	9%
Take care of what we have	82%	18%	0%	0%	0%
Protect and restore	91%	9%	0%	0%	0%
Adapt and mitigate	73%	18%	0%	9%	0%
Meet future needs	64%	27%	0%	9%	0%

Question: What could we do to strengthen or add to these objectives?

<p>your objectives are strong and comprehensive. Be sure to include the aging population in your work- we all deserve equal access to the natural resources in our region.</p>	<p>Met Council staff have added additional demographic information in a figure associated with the "Vital to people and communities" section preceding the objectives. The "population over 65 years" is also referenced in the "Meet future needs" objective. In addition, the "Engagement, Participation, and Equity Analysis" long-range plan requirement compels regional park implementing agencies to engage with "people 65 years of age and older," along with several other underserved populations.</p>
<p>More of our parks need to be rewilded. Bikes and pedestrian paths should be convenient routes rather than meandering. Parks should allow and facilitate small scale vendors.</p>	<p>Regarding bike and pedestrian paths, regional trails are often intentionally located within corridors that offer nature-based settings for the enjoyment of users. Regional trails also prioritize connections</p>

	<p>between regional parks and other regional trails, as well as other key destinations. Like components of the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, many regional trails also serve a transportation function, connecting to key destinations in and between communities, and facilitating commuting to and from places of employment. Met Council Parks and Trails staff are committed to working with regional park implementing agencies to coordinate the expansion of regional trails to residents and visitors of the region.</p> <p>We also appreciate your comments about small scale vendors. While the Met Council does not prohibit vendors from operating within regional parks, the Council does not provide regional funding for these facilities, as it is assumed that the money generated from these businesses should theoretically pay for facility upkeep.</p>
<p>Obviously, it's extremely difficult to acquire land for new park reserves, but I'd love to see a large amount of expansion to the regional trail system.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. The Met Council works in partnership with the regional park implementing agencies to locate and acquire land for regional parks and trails. In the next update to the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, anticipated for 2029, the Met Council plans to hold a system additions process which will identify future park and trail search areas. Some potential candidates for the 2028 system additions process are listed at the end of Action 1 of the System Plan.</p>
<p>They could be more specific</p>	<p>Thank you for the feedback. The policies are meant to be broader topic areas that encompass multiple actions. As such, the actions (versus the policies) are more specific. Met Council staff intend for the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan to provide high-level guidance. Additional guidance on implementing the policy plan, including detailed procedures, is provided in the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.</p>

Question: Did you find any objectives confusing?

No, I think it's very well laid out/explained.

Question: Additional thoughts?

<p>Maybe shows up later but not much here on improving access to parks and nature nor is there much on integrating more tightly into walkable neighborhoods (Lake Harriet Park is a great example - the bandshell, the rose garden, boats, walking, biking, access to other parks, AND easy walking to retail and restaurants; downtown White Bear Lake is a good example - vibrant retail and restaurant with somewhat easy walking/biking access to White Bear Lake; Como Lake is an ok example - has boating, underutilized pavilion, zoo, conservatory, pool, ball fields, walking, biking but not</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. The Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan prioritizes accessibility and connectivity within the system by identifying regional trail corridors that connect different regional park and trail units throughout the region. The policy plan also promotes multimodal access to the Regional Parks and Trails System and encourages greater coordination with the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network. While some regional parks, like Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, are more integrated into the local community, there is a</p>
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really accessible with public transportation nor is there a vibrant nearby neighborhood with retail and restaurant).	variety of offerings and opportunities across the regional system. Some parks are oriented toward providing a wide variety of amenities to users, while others are intended to focus on conservation and providing a more natural experience.
I'm glad I read this, because it makes me more confident in where my tax money is going. I would love to see more transparency like this. It was very concise and informative. Thanks!	

Policy 1: Regional Parks and Trails System Plan Policy: Maintain a robust and current set of data, maps, plans, processes, and applications to support regional parks and trails planning.

- Action 1: Review and update system plan and classifications
- Action 2: Identify and conduct research
- Action 3: Annually update map datasets

Question: How well do you feel this policy and these actions support the future you'd like to see?

There were only a handful of respondents to this question. All the respondents identified the policy and related actions as supporting future actions very well or they were neutral on the question.

Question: Additional thoughts?

Providing access to the parks should be a priority. Integrating/developing nearby restaurant and retail to provide incentive to visit the area of a regional park should be a consideration - obviously not going to be like a National Park gateway town (Springdale UT, Jackson WY, Medora ND) but more like dinner at a nearby restaurant with a walk to an event (ex., Lake Harriet Bandshell) or a place (ex., Como botanical gardens) and then a stroll in the nearby nature provides a more complete experience. Establish food truck areas inside the parks. Think about how to connect people to sights within these large parks and things outside the park (reasonable e-bike rentals, trolleys, bicycle rickshaws, electric golf cart rides where the driver is fundraising for a charity, etc.).	Thank you for your comment. The Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan prioritizes accessibility and connectivity within the system by identifying regional trail corridors that connect different regional park and trail units throughout the region. The policy plan also promotes multimodal access to the Regional Parks and Trails System and encourages greater coordination with the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network. While some regional parks, like Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, are more integrated into the local community, there is a variety of offerings and opportunities across the regional system. Some parks are oriented toward providing a wide variety of amenities to users, while others are intended to focus on conservation and providing a more natural experience.
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Policy 2: Natural Systems Policy: Identify lands with high-quality natural features and/or with high restoration potential that are desirable for Regional Parks and Trails System activities and put these lands in a protected status, so they will be available for recreational uses and preservation purposes in perpetuity.

- Action 1: Locate and acquire land
- Action 2: Research natural systems
- Action 3: Coordinate support for natural systems

Question: How well do you feel this policy and these actions support the future you'd like to see?

There were only a handful of respondents to this question. All the respondents identified the policy and related actions as supporting future actions somewhat well.

Policy 3: Climate Resilience Policy: Adapt and enhance the Regional Parks and Trails System to promote resilience to climate change, including the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions.

- Action 1: Advance climate action
- Action 2: Research climate impacts
- Action 3: Drive awareness
- Action 4: Climate and environmental justice

Question: How well do you feel this policy and these actions support the future you'd like to see?

There were only a handful of respondents to this question. All the respondents identified the policy and related actions as supporting future actions somewhat well or were neutral on the question.

Policy 4: Planning Policy: Promote long-range planning and help provide integrated resource management across jurisdictions in order to create a seamless system that connects everyone to the outdoors.

- Action 1: Long-range plan requirements
- Action 2: Enhanced multi-modal access

Question: How well do you feel this policy and these actions support the future you'd like to see?

There were only a handful of respondents to this question. All the respondents identified the policy and related actions as supporting future actions somewhat well or were neutral on the question.

Question: Additional thoughts?

These parks don't exist in isolation. Integrating/developing nearby restaurant and retail to provide incentive to visit the area of a regional park should be a consideration - obviously not going to be like a National Park gateway town (Springdale UT, Jackson WY, Medora ND) but more like dinner at a nearby restaurant with a walk to an event (ex., Lake Harriet Bandshell) or a place (ex., Como botanical gardens) and then a stroll in the nearby nature provides a more complete experience. Establish food truck areas inside the parks. Think about how to connect people to sights within these large parks and things outside the park (reasonable e-bike rentals, trolleys, bicycle rickshaws, electric golf cart rides where the driver is fundraising for a charity, etc.).

Thank you for your comment. The Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan prioritizes accessibility and connectivity within the system by identifying regional trail corridors that connect different regional park and trail units throughout the region. The policy plan also promotes multimodal access to the Regional Parks and Trails System and encourages greater coordination with the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network. While some regional parks, like Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, are more integrated into the local community, there is a variety of offerings and opportunities across the regional system. Some parks are oriented toward providing a wide variety of amenities to users, while others are intended to focus on conservation and providing a more natural experience.

Policy 5: System Protection Policy: Protect public investments in acquisition and development by assuring that every component in the system is able to fully carry out its designated role.

- Action 1: Local comprehensive plans
- Action 2: Conversions
- Action 3: Telecommunication towers
- Action 4: Placement of utilities

Question: How well do you feel this policy and these actions support the future you'd like to see?

There were only a handful of respondents to this question. All the respondents were neutral on this question.

Policy 6: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy: Foster a sense of belonging by providing a wide spectrum of leisure and play opportunities while connecting people, places, and the natural world.

- Action 1: Increase equity in programs, activities, and places
- Action 2: Build the relationship between people and natural systems
- Action 3: Establish and broaden cross-sector opportunities
- Action 4: Raise awareness
- Action 5: Trail system coordination

Question: How well do you feel this policy and these actions support the future you'd like to see?

There were only a handful of respondents to this question. All the respondents identified the policy and related actions as supporting future actions somewhat well or very well, or were neutral on the question.

Policy 7: Finance Policy: The Met Council administers and provides financial oversight of the state and regional funding to the 10 regional parks implementing agencies in support of the Regional Parks and Trails System.

- Action 1: Regional and state bonds funding formula
- Action 2: Improve equitable use of the Regional Parks and Trails System
- Action 3: Parks acquisition opportunity fund
- Action 4: Regional funding commitment
- Action 5: Other funding
- Action 6: Transit corridors

Question: How well do you feel this policy and these actions support the future you'd like to see?

There were only a handful of respondents to this question. All the respondents identified the policy and related actions as supporting future actions very well or somewhat well, or were neutral on the question.

In-person and anonymous feedback

Attendees at several in-person community and youth events were asked what their vision for the region of the future is? Below are their responses.

Comment	Response
Transit systems accessible to all different types of housing available throughout the community, parks trails places to work that are in close proximity to where you live proximity to lakes, open spaces and transit	Thank you for your comment. We agree - Imagine 2050 outlines plans to do all these things.
Rent control apartments, more affordable housing, more co-op, grocery stores, more parks, more	Thank you for your comment.

transportation, options and more affordable, transportation options, less pollution, equal rights for everyone more art in the community,

<p>More activities and more parks, intergenerational learning from kids to grandparents more bus stops, peace</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment.</p>
<p>Less trash in the streets, more education on future money and savings for kids, better education and less littering better technology less homeless people less trash everywhere more parks</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment.</p>
<p>Wildflowers alternative transportation - bicycles /trails Public art Community grown Amplified voices (native/etc) at the table and visible</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. Policies in Imagine 2050 address providing guidance for plantings, as well as expanding and planning for bicycle transportation on roads and trails. We also appreciate your advocacy for native voices. We anticipate the work of the American Indian Advisory Council will continue beyond creating Imagine 2050.</p>
<p>Make sure most people are happy with parks include adaptive and inclusive exercise stations more things to climb, biking, and scooter trails make more ponds and have more fish art sculptures that are connected to different cultural backgrounds,</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. Accessibility to our regional parks is a priority. There are aspects of Imagine 2050 that identify this and additional exploration around accessibility. We also agree that reflecting the cultural richness of the region is an important goal for our regional facilities.</p>
<p>add more parks and trails more play equipment swings more access to hiking more flowers more wildlife</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. Our trails and natural areas are among the most popular aspects of our system and we're working to increase access to those areas.</p>
<p>bike trails + parks right at doorstep! Had in Minneapolis, wants in Eagan!</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. Existing and proposed Met Council policies support the expansion of the Regional Parks and Trails System throughout the region. The System Plan identifies regional parks and trails that are open to the public, planned, or in search status. The many Regional Trail Search Corridors in the system plan demonstrates the anticipated future growth of the network. Also, Action 5 of the Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy looks at opportunities for coordinating work between the regional trail network and the regional bicycle transportation network.</p>
<p>More tree canopy, more bike lanes, more trains</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. We agree - Imagine 2050 outlines plans to do all these things.</p>
<p>More trains, bike paths and parks</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment</p>
<p>I would love more walking trails, I appreciate when there is art in nature</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. Imagine 2050 shows plans to expand Regional Parks and Trails. We agree art in nature is beautiful.</p>
<p>Good bus system Clean drinking water More park activities (especially for young kids) (I like to learn the learn to paddle class)</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. Policies throughout Imagine 2050 support additional transit system investment, making sure we have drinking water for generations to come, and supporting regional parks agencies in programming for families.</p>
<p>increasing water access and planting more trees, having different types of housing and connected roadways and connected transit</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. We agree - Imagine 2050 addresses resources and guidance to address climate concerns, including our tree canopy in the region, as well as ensuring housing choice and access to transit.</p>

It would be nice to have a posting about how to take transit to parks - I'd like to go to Como park concerts but #83 doesn't go to Pavillion

Thank you for your comments. The Met Council will share them with the appropriate transit agency staff.

More trees - everywhere
More public transit

Thank you for your comment, which is supportive of elements within this plan.

Neighborhoods that are connected by bikeways and waterways places for all people to live proximity to lakes and parks

Thank you for your comment. We agree - Imagine 2050 outlines plans to do all these things.

More sidewalks and trails to parks with lots of trees and flowers and greenery

Thank you for your comment. Imagine 2050 has many policy areas that also prioritize these items.

Better parks, better transit, better schools, better trails, better lakes, better houses better stores, better jobs better food for a better region

Thank you for your comment.

More flowers and homes for butterflies more mountains for rock, climbing scooter, trails parks and biking on a trail biking on the trails more flowers and bikes on trails.

Thank you for your comment. Imagine 2050 includes guidance on plant and natural areas throughout the region.

Feedback from government, nonprofit, parks, and other partner organizations

The following pages include full output of public comment from various organizations who provided their feedback during the public comment period. Comments are organized, alphabetically, by organization name.

Comment**Response****Carver County**

Total Trail Miles. The total number of regional trail miles varies in the plan. Page 2 indicates 457 miles of regional trail are open to the public while page 17 indicates there are 560 miles of regional trail.

Cultural Landscape Subclassification (page 31). A minimum size is not indicated. Additionally, if examples of cultural landscapes other than burial mounds exist they should also be included in the classification.

Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Action 1 (page 81). In reference to the statement, "A static list of eligible activities no longer sufficiently encompasses the needs of our future Regional Parks and Trails System," often we are compared to the state park system in terms of providing outdoor based activities. While understanding the need to evolve recreation opportunities for greater inclusion of other cultures, our uses should be consistent with that of the state park system if we are going to make the comparison relevant in the eyes of Legislators.

Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Action 3 (page 85). In reference to the statement, regional parks "play an important role in our physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and mental health," is there more direct term other than emotion or can specific emotions be called out? What emotions are we working to satisfy?

Finance Policy – Regional and State Bond Funds (page 91). The legislature has been unreliable in matching the capacity of Council bonds. The regional system has grown significantly since this amount was initially created. The Council should consider new funding methods to increase the ability to fund capital investments in the regional system.

Finance Action 1 (page 93). The funding formula does not recognize what it takes to create a new regional park. Emerging regional park agencies are not able to fund initial development costs under this funding formula. Other metrics are needed to bring a new regional park online to a service level that provides roads, parking, utilities, shelter, restrooms, and a level of amenity to attract users. Other metrics should be incorporated to advance the ability of emerging regional park agencies to fund capital costs beyond a formula basis. Without development, the ability for an emerging regional park agency to attract visits is diminished.

Finance Action 3 (page 94). Eligibility for the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund should be broadened to include Phase I Development for new park areas to provide infrastructure of roads, parking lots, utilities, and restrooms.

Finance Action 5 (page 95). Regarding Federal funding for regional trails, there is a need to develop a two-tier system which allows urban/suburban projects to compete against one another and a second tier for the suburban/rural areas to compete for the funding.

Thank you for catching that discrepancy. Trail mileage has been confirmed to be 487 miles total. The policy plan has been updated to reflect this figure.

Thank you for your comment and suggestion. Continued development and refinement of the Cultural Landscape subclassification during 2025-2026 was added to Section Nine, Work Plan to the Policy Plan.

Thank you for your comment. The 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan strives to start with a natural systems basis while facilitating the recreation needs specific to urban, suburban, and exurban areas.

Thank you for your feedback. The statement in the policy plan refers to emotional health or well-being, which is a part of mental health that centers around processing and expressing emotions in a healthy way.

Thank you for your comment. This topic is captured in the Section Nine Work Plan under "Strategic Funding" discussion.

Thank you for your comment. The topic about how to meet the needs of younger Regional Park Systems such as Carver County, will be included in the "Strategic Funding" discussion, which is captured in the Section Nine Work Plan.

Thank you for your comment. The topic about how to meet the needs of younger Regional Park Systems such as Carver County, will be included in the "Strategic Funding" discussion, which is captured in the Section Nine Work Plan.

Thank you for your comment. This topic is captured in the Section Nine Work Plan with "convening a trail coordination" workgroup in the 2025-2027 timeframe.

City of Bloomington

Comment

Appreciation for Input Opportunities. Bloomington Parks and Recreation and Utilities staff have been meeting regularly with Metropolitan Council staff. We are very thankful for the meetings and the opportunity to contribute to the development of both the Regional Parks and Trails and Water Policy Plans. Given these past input opportunities, we have no additional comments on these draft plans.

Response

Comment noted. Met Council staff appreciate the guidance that you and other stakeholders from across the region contributed to the draft Water Policy Plan and Metro Area Water Supply plan.

City of Brooklyn Park

The draft Imagine 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan clearly focuses on breaking down barriers for underrepresented communities. While the draft plan encourages universal design, in support of people with disabilities the City of Brooklyn Park would like to highlight the importance of connecting people with disabilities with the natural environment through accessible design and programming.

Thank you for your comment. The policy plan has been revised to discuss more about accessible design and programming for underserved groups, including those with disabilities.

City of Hugo

Thank you for identifying the existing portion of the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail as a regional trail open to the public. Figure 2-2 correctly identifies the southern portion of the trail as a trail that is not yet open to the public as it is planned but not constructed. However, Table 2-6 and Figure 2-4 should include this missing segment of the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail.

Thank you for your comment and for tracking on the City of Hugo's portion of the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail. The open regional unit lists track on regional trails that may only have a portion of trail that open-to-the-public and may have other portions in a planned state. The planned unit list show units that are entirely planned. At this time, the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail has segments that are open-to-the-public, so the listing for this unit will remain solely in the current open list.

Washington County is preparing a long-range plan for the Glacial Hills Regional Trail which will be finished in the near future. We anticipate that the final RPPP will include the trail as planned and not available to the public. Additional discussion and consideration should be given to Section Seven: Recreation, Facilities and Programming Policy Actions. The "desired outcome examples" and quotes in section seven are not in keeping with high level policy language in the rest of the RPPP. Guidance on recommended facilities and programs would be useful to the implementing agencies.

Thank you for your comment. Once the Met Council approves the Glacial Hills Regional Trail, it will be shown in Section Two, System Plan, Policy Plan as a planned trail that is not open to the public.

Thank you for your comment. Certain outcome content was moved to the planning handbook for clarity.

City of Lakeville

The 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan has no significant implications for Lakeville to address with the 2050 Lakeville Comprehensive Plan update process.

Thank you for your comment. Noted.

City of Richfield

Comment

The City of Richfield and Three Rivers Park District have a strong collaborative partnership in serving the outdoor recreational needs of our residents and visitors to our community. Richfield is identified in the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan as part of the First-Ring Cities Bridging Facility Search Area and we look forward to continuing to collaborate with Three Rivers Park District in planning for a bridging facility. We see opportunities to partner with Three Rivers Park District to include a programmatic element in one of our facilities and request that the 4th bullet under site attributes for bridging facilities on page 31 be revised: Include a programmatic element embedded in a partner facility, such as a local park, school or non-profit organization, allowing the implementing agency to access and build on the organization's existing relationships with communities.

Page 6. Parks and Trails: The first sentence of this section states "the amount of growth rather than its location plays a more important role in determining park and trail acquisition, protection, and use outcomes." The last sentence states "the specific challenges and opportunities associated with acquisition, protection, and use of parks and trails depend on where growth happens..." These sentences appear to be contradictory. This section also states: "higher growth could imply higher visitation, which might lead to increases in funding appropriations." Higher visitation may lead to the need for increases in funding appropriations but does not necessarily lead to actual increases in appropriations. Visitation is a factor in the distribution of appropriations but is not necessarily tied to the actual appropriation amount. Parks and Trails Legacy Funds are tied to sales tax revenues; State bonding is tied to the political will of the Legislature with Council bonds issued as a match; Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund appropriations are subject to the will of the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources and the Legislature; and unfortunately, the Legislature has never met its statutory obligation for operations and maintenance appropriations (of which visitation is a factor). Consider stating that "higher growth could imply higher visitation, which might lead to the need for increases in funding appropriations for capital projects and operations and maintenance."

City of Saint Paul

General comments:

Objectives could be better differentiated and clearer. For example, some overlap between "take care of what we have" and "protect and restore" as well as "foster equity and belonging" and "protect and restore".

System Protection – Action 1 (page 75) states that local comprehensive plans may need to be changed if planned land uses would have a negative impact on current or planned regional park lands or facilities. Local jurisdictions may benefit from additional information on the land uses that would be considered negative and the proximity to the park resource that would be considered directly impactful.

Response

Thank you for your comment. Bridging facility site attributes were clarified to include local parks as a possible location to house a temporary mobile bridging facility. Participants in mobile programming events outside of a regional unit are not counted as part of the annual use estimate.

Thank you for your comment. Met Council staff have made the revision as suggested.

Thank you for your feedback. The Regional Development Guide and the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan has a hierarchical system of translating broad visions into concrete actions and implementation steps. As a part of this hierarchy, objectives operate at a higher level and will typically provide broad and visionary statements. More detailed and clear interpretations of the objectives can be found at the policy and action level.

Thank you for your comment. Examples of land use departures from the Regional Park and Trail System have been added to Section Six, Action 1 of the policy plan.

Comment

Saint Paul Parks and Recreation wishes to thank the Metropolitan Council’s Regional Parks staff for their months of engagement and focused conversation that led to this draft of the Regional Parks Policy Plan. This plan reflects the evolving nature of the regional parks system and its role of providing access to natural spaces with relevant amenities to all of the region’s residents.

Equity is at the heart of all work Saint Paul Parks and Recreation does. We know that a diverse and dynamic community interacts with regional parks and trails differently than park visitors may have in the past. We are committed to continuing to add culturally-relevant recreational amenities, and more broadly, active recreation that is increasingly desired by our community, to our regional parks and trails in a way that is also sensitive to the surrounding natural features. For this reason, we are very thankful that this draft of the policy plan takes a progressive and forward-looking approach to the balance of amenities in regional parks throughout the metropolitan area. Action 2 of Section 7 is a welcome refresh of the regional policies around how we consider these amenities.

Maximizing the impact of these investments is achieved by matching programming to bring new visitors to our regional parks and trails and to introduce returning visitors to new experiences. BIPOC-specific programming has been a tremendous success in great part due to the Metropolitan Council’s equity grant program and the ability to use Parks and Trails Legacy funding for this work. Our residents are getting first-hand experience with outdoor recreational activities like camping and fishing in our parks, many for the first time in their lives. This continues to cultivate a community that treasures the outdoors.

Another aspect of our equity work has been the engagement and relationship-building we have done with indigenous communities. Saint Paul contains significant Dakota cultural sites and the stewardship of those locations demands the involvement and leadership of the communities that hold these places in such importance. The draft policy plan’s creation of a new “cultural landscape” classification in the regional parks system acknowledges that there are these locations with a regional, and even statewide or national, importance and visitation, with a natural resource base, that rightfully should not have a recreational focus. We appreciate the engagement that has led to the creation of this designation and welcome the continued conversation as the details of implementing such a special feature continue to be developed.

Response

Thank you for your support and partnership with the Parks and Trails Policy work. We look forward to strengthening our partnership and support of the City of Saint Paul’s work, especially your equity work.

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Comment

We finally want to applaud the dedication of an entire section of the draft plan to climate resiliency. The plan rightfully acknowledges the role that parks play in combating the effects of climate change including the cooling effects of the tree canopy and natural vegetation's slowing and managing of stormwater. As climate change continues to worsen, residents of the region will increasingly rely on our parks as places to cool themselves; gather with friends, family, and neighbors; and relieve the mental health stresses that come with a warmer, less predictable climate. We also know that parks will serve as resilience hubs where assistance and services can be provided to the community following extreme weather events. We look forward to sharing the work that Saint Paul has done on climate resiliency and learning from our colleagues at the other implementing agencies.

Response

Thank you for your support and partnership with the Parks and Trails Policy work. We look forward to strengthening our partnership and support of the City of Saint Paul's work, especially your equity work.

Dakota County

A public and staff engagement process in 2024 identified many potential names for renaming the Mendota to Lebanon Hills Greenway. Dakota County Communications staff followed best practices for naming parks, such as looking at dominant physical characteristics, historic features or events, and appropriate individuals or groups after whom to name the trail. Three options were presented to the County Board on September 24, 2024, and each one had broad appeal, was descriptive of the trail, was memorable, and worked well with the other park system names and the Park's brand identity. Based on best practices and research, the County Board selected Lebanon Hills Greenway as the new name and voted unanimously to approve the official change.

Thank you for your feedback. The plan has been revised to reflect this change.

Regional Goal #5. "We protect, integrate, and restore natural systems to protect habitat and ensure a high quality of life for the people of our region." The natural systems protection, integration, and restoration work that counties do ensures a high-quality of life for all living things in the region. This is supported later in the plan on page 19 in an objective that states "Protect and restore: Protect and restore natural systems to safeguard the well-being of all living things." Dakota County recommends changing the regional goal to take a more holistic approach.

Thank you for your comment. The description accompanying this regional goal states, "Imagine 2050 takes a holistic approach to natural systems, recognizing that natural systems possess intrinsic value, that development and natural systems are intertwined, and that the benefits and consequences of natural system policies are felt by all communities and residents." In response to your comment, Met Council staff propose modifying this language: "Imagine 2050 takes a holistic approach to natural systems, recognizing that natural systems possess intrinsic value; that people, development and natural systems are intertwined; and that the benefits and consequences of natural system policies are felt by all communities, residents, and living beings."

Dakota County appreciates the acknowledgement of system growth impacting the need for additional operations and maintenance costs in the Growing Pains section on page 17. Operations and Maintenance (OM) funding as required by Statute has never been realized. Dakota County supports the full funding of OM need.

Thank you for the comment. Noted.

Comment

Dakota County requests additional clarification in the plan on how to designate a bridging facility.

Response

Thank you for your comment. Currently, there are no bridging facilities that are open to the public, and the only bridging facility is listed as a Search Area. Since this is a new area of exploration for the Regional Parks and Trails System, the Met Council is working collaboratively with implementing agencies to identify future bridging facilities in the region. Since bridging facilities are considered to be Special Features, they would be added through the system additions process that is outlined in Action 1 of the System Plan. Further details on the system additions process and how to propose units for addition can be found in the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.

Dakota County supports counting bridging facilities in annual park user counts.

Thank you for your comment. The bridging facility classification description was clarified to read "bridging facilities that are nested within an existing unit of the Regional Parks and Trails System may be included in the annual use estimate."

Dakota County suggests that the Metropolitan Council partner and consult with tribal communities in order for a landscape to be designated as a Cultural Landscape.

Thank you for your suggestion. Met Council staff have added this item to Section Nine, Work Plan to the policy plan. The cultural landscape subclassification will continue to be developed and refined in coordination with American Indian tribes, other cultural communities, and regional park implementing agencies. This item is planned to be developed during 2025-2026.

Dakota County has identified some geographic gaps in regional park service areas as part of the County's draft 2050 Parks System Vision Plan, particularly in the northern areas and in the western areas of the county where more residents are underserved by regional parks. Additional time is needed to complete this analysis and the County may propose new units in these areas after study completion. Dakota County's current plan from 2008 identified Thompson County Park as a potential joint opportunity for a regional park. Dakota County recommends that the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan show the area around Thompson County Park and the northern and western portions of Dakota County as park search areas.

Thank you for your comment. Dakota County's Thompson County Park was added to Section Two, System Plan, Future 2028/2029 System Additions Process candidates. Met Council staff encourage Dakota County to bring forth proposals during the next system additions process.

The existing OM funding formula is inadequate for funding natural resources management. Dakota County recommends consideration of establishing a dedicated fund, particularly for long-term maintenance after restoration.

Thank you for your comment. In the Finance Policy Section, Section Eight of the Parks Policy Plan, Action 4 commits the Met Council to actively analyze its regional funding budget strategy and pursue increasing its regional funding commitment for the Regional Parks and Trails System whenever possible. Additionally, the Work Plan Section, Section Nine includes a commitment to continue the strategic funding discussion, with a goal to better meet the needs of the growing regional system.

Metropolitan Council's American Indian Advisory Council

The Council will develop a cultural landscape designation and related policies grounded in Tribal sovereignty and recognition of Dakota homelands and sacred sites.

Thank you for your suggestion. Met Council staff has added this item to Section Nine, Work Plan in the Policy Plan. The Cultural Landscape subclassification will continue to be developed and refined in coordination with American Indian tribes, other cultural communities, and regional park implementing agencies. This item is planned to be developed during 2025-2026.

The Council will support waived fees for entry, activities, and events for the American Indian communities and facilitate conversations with implementing agencies to that end.

Thank you for your feedback. This item will be discussed in further detail in the future as the Met Council and regional park implementing agencies explore training courses and learning opportunities.

Comment

The Council will work with partners to do a historical and cultural inventory of the regional parks and trails system, including surveying the location, name, and history of the parks as well as cross-referencing locations with inventories of possible burial mounds.

The Council will develop a training program for staff from parks implementing agencies about indigenous land management practices.

The Council will assess the regional parks Equity Grant Program to encourage pilot programs that develop harvesting practices and policies.

The Council will convene conversations with American Indian partners and implementing agencies to develop policies and processes to ensure harvesting is respectful and meets community needs.

The Council will partner with American Indian organizations and Tribes to lead an inventory of harvestable plants in regional parks to increase understanding of existing resources and open conversations with implementing agencies.

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

I am writing to inform you that the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board will be unable to submit detailed comments at this time on the 90% complete Regional Parks Policy Plan document. We appreciate that many of our verbal/narrative edits on the 60% plans were incorporated in the 90% plan. However, many of our more substantive comments—related to, among other things, facility allowances and the “tone” of the financial section—went unheeded. I am unconvinced that commenting again at this time will lead to changes in the adopted version. Therefore, I would like you to consider all MPRB’s unaddressed 60% comments to also be comments on the 90% plan. I am not clear on the Met Council process for communicating back acknowledgements or responses to comments received, so I am left to trust you (and I do) that our earlier comments will be forwarded into the current ones.

The reasons for our inability to comment at this time have mainly to do with timing. In part, this is due to other commitments here at MPRB (our budget, Metro Transit’s Blue Line Extension) that have prevented adequate availability to review the documents in a timely fashion. Also in part, it has been difficult to fully analyze the RPPP document in the context of the Planning Handbook, when the latter arrived to us so close to the review deadline. I appreciate the extra time to review the Handbook, but these two documents must really be considered together, and there simply was not time to do so.

Overall, our largest concerns with the current parks policy planning direction are generally the following:

Response

Thank you for the recommendation. Some implementing agencies have already completed such inventories for regional parks and trails in their jurisdiction. In addition, the policy plan's workplan (Section Nine) includes "Develop a cultural resources inventory requirement for long-range planning in partnership with key stakeholders." This approach would require a cultural resource inventory (in addition to natural resources) when an agency creates or updates a long-range plan for a park or trail.

The Met Council plans to develop staff training for a range of topics around American Indian practices and goals. There is a desire to extend this type of training to partner agencies, including the regional park implementing agencies.

Thank you for the comment. Met Council staff will share this priority with regional park implementing agencies who are the eligible applicants for the Equity Grant Program.

Thank you for the comment. We have added an action to Section Nine Work Plan to capture this topic.

Thank you for the comment. We have added an action to Section Nine Work Plan to capture this topic.

Comment

Continued uncertainty around the authority and jurisdiction of the Planning Handbook. We and other agencies have been expressing this concern since the inception of the idea of this handbook, and the questions remain unresolved.

Continued lack of recognition of the differences between park systems, which leads to facility prohibitions that are unsupported by facts. MPRB believes that public process and equitable engagement should determine what is desired, beneficial, and allowable in regional parks and trails. We believe activities should not be singled out for inclusion nor elimination based on a general litmus test of regional park appropriateness included in a 1974 statute. The current prohibited list feels even more arbitrary and exclusionary than before.

Serious concerns about the evolution of the financial policies away from collaboration and advocacy toward pure management. Older language called for “providing adequate and equitable funding,” while new language says Met Council will “administer and provide oversight for state and regional funding.” Throughout the funding section are references to specific dollar amounts and match ratios that have remained the same at these levels for a decade or more. This is not visionary. We believe that like other state agencies, the Met Council has the responsibility to advocate for full funding, seek additional sources, and creatively address the realities of funding shortfalls. This document commits Met Council to exactly what it’s doing now (\$40 million bond max, 2:3 match), which is not working to adequately and equitably fund the system. We are disappointed that current unsustainable funding realities will be enshrined for another decade. We are frustrated that instead of exploring visionary partnerships, Met Council parks staff are opting to continue the evolution toward exclusively providing financial oversight.

I do have one specific technical item that was not picked up from our earlier comments. In Section 2, MPRB must be listed as an agency with responsibility for the Nokomis-Minnesota River Regional Trail. Years ago, we discovered and documented for Met Council that Three Rivers had turned the Minneapolis portion of this facility over to MPRB after construction. We are currently performing visitor counts there. I hope this is a mere oversight and that it will be corrected.

I know your staff have spent countless hours on this document, and it pains me a little to provide harsh criticism. I do thank you and your team for the engagement with the agencies and the regular communication with us. I appreciate having had the opportunity to review the 60% plan document. And I will leave it there, and let the approval pathway run its course.

National Park Service

Response

Thank you for sharing this concern. Additional narrative has been added to page nine of the policy plan and page one of the draft planning handbook to help clarify the authority of the planning handbook. In short, requirements and processes detailed in the planning handbook carry the same authority as those outlined or previewed within the policy plan.

Thank you for your comment. The Met Council agrees that public and partner engagement should shape the future of recreational facilities and amenities at regional parks and trails. The newly redrafted "Recreation, Facilities, and Programming" policy and actions (Section Seven) of the policy plan and the planning handbook aim to clearly make this point. Still, a distinction remains between the regional system and local ones, with some recreational activities and facilities remaining ineligible for regional funding because they are more closely aligned with the role of local and other recreational providers. These activities and facilities include formal ball fields, athletic complexes, tennis courts, golf facilities, and a few others. For additional details on ineligible activities and facilities, see Section Seven, Action 6: Ineligible Activities and Facilities in the policy plan.

Thank you for your comment. Finance policy language has been revised to capture collaboration.

Thank you for your comment. The system plan lists have been updated.

Comment

Natural Systems Protections

While the Draft 2050 Policy Plan aligns well with NRRRA's goals, we recommend including more explicit language ensuring that development within the Mississippi River Corridor adheres to the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) policies and the NRRRA Comprehensive Management Plan. The Natural Systems section in the Parks and Trails Plan highlights the importance of acquiring and protecting lands with high quality natural features and restoration potential, particularly lands with access to water. We suggest further emphasizing how future acquisitions in the river corridor can serve both conservation and recreational purposes, aligning with NRRRA's objectives of safeguarding the river's ecological health while enhancing public access. The NRRRA Comprehensive Management Plan calls for undeveloped areas above the 1694 bridge to be acquired to support a more continuous public open space along the river. Additionally, highlighting the importance of habitat and open space connectivity will greatly benefit the ecological health and biodiversity of the Twin Cities region into the future, especially as we enter potentially unstable and unpredictable climate regimes.

The Parks and Trails Plan's goal of acquiring significant waterfront lands and other high value natural systems properties should be elevated in sections of the Land Use Policy as well to ensure that developments within the Mississippi River corridor prioritize these acquisitions, especially given the increasing value and ecological significance of these areas. The Plan's focus on geographic distribution and equity should also account for underserved areas along the river corridor to ensure fair access to natural spaces.

Visual Resources

The NRRRA Comprehensive Management Plan as well as State MRCCA rules place significant emphasis on preserving the visual integrity and scenic vistas of the Mississippi River corridor, ensuring that development respects the natural beauty and cultural landscapes that define the river in the Metro area. We recommend that the 2050 Policy Plan similarly prioritize visual protections to maintain the region's aesthetic and scenic qualities which are integral to the public's connection to the river and its resources.

Emphasizing Alternative Transportation and Water Resource Protections

In addition to public transportation enhancements, we encourage the 2050.Plan to expand its focus on alternative transportation networks, including pedestrian and bicycle pathways. This would align with NRRRA's mission to increase sustainable, low-impact public access to the river, minimizing environmental impacts while promoting recreational use of the corridor. The Water Policy Plan's focus on protecting water quality and reducing stormwater impacts further supports this objective, particularly in sensitive riverfront areas where development pressure could threaten water resources.

Response

Thank you for your recommendations. The Met Council acknowledges and recognizes the significance of the Mississippi River Corridor in many parts of Imagine 2050 and the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan. Additional narrative has been added to the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area section of the draft planning handbook, part of a broader section on national parks and federal lands. Requirements for long-range plans, including units that interact with the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area, are also outlined in the draft planning handbook. Further, Met Council policy aligns with intentionally engaging and investing in underserved areas along the river corridor and throughout the region.

Thank you for your comment. "Visual" protections were added to the list of significant departures in Section Six, Action 1 of the policy plan. "Projects that impair the use and enjoyment of the Regional Parks and Trails System unit due to excessive visual, noise, air pollution, or water pollution."

Thank you for your comment. The Mississippi River is included in the Met Council's Priority Waters List for multiple reasons, and we will continue to coordinate with local partners to protect and improve its water quality. Additionally, we are stressing the importance of equitable access to the waters in the region.

The Imagine 2050 Transportation Policy Plan includes objectives specifically supporting expanded multimodal travel options, including increased connections to community, cultural resources, and opportunities to walk, roll, or bike.

Comment

Highlighting the Mississippi National Water Trail
The Mississippi National Water Trail is a unique National resource that should be featured within the Parks and Trails and Water Policy Plans. This nationally recognized water trail offers recreational, educational, and economic opportunities that can strengthen residents' connections to the river. Highlighting the Water Trail within the framework of expanding access to water-based recreation will promote deeper engagement with the river and encourage stewardship of this invaluable natural resource.

Response

Thank you for your comment. We will look for ways to highlight this valuable resource in our plan.

Ramsey County

Section 1 (Overview of 2050 Plan) Page 11 - Table 1-1 - would it be beneficial to include next to this table a table or additional language for local investment in the system to continue the conversation on the 40% funding shortfall?

Thank you for the question. The policy plan references this shortfall and need for continued effort in multiple locations. The "State of the Regional Parks and Trails System" section following Table 1-1 includes a discussion of "Growing pains," including additional narrative referencing the perennial operations and maintenance funding shortfall, as well as Figure 1-7 "State of Minnesota funding for regional parks and trails operations and maintenance," which calls out a 29.8% average shortfall since 2022." Further, this topic is referenced more broadly in Section Nine: Workplan: "continue discussion of strategic funding for the Regional Parks and Trails System, with a goal to better meet the needs of this growing system."

Comment

Section 4 (Climate Resilience Policy and Actions) Section 4 could be defined more around Climate Action Support - There really is not much around this topic besides indicating continuing coordination for improving climate resilience. Met Council should be a leader in this area and provide steps for achieving goals along with working with implementing agencies. There really needs to be a climate action goal around MCES sanitary sewer installation within regional parks/trails. (could be in Section 9 as well).

Section 5 (Planning Policy and Actions) Cost Sharing (either section 5 or section 8) ▪ The plan doesn't incorporate co-sharing measures to expand cross-over recreational uses with adjacent non-regional parks. This would be extremely helpful in creating new partnership with local agencies.

Section 7 (Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy and Actions) Regional Parks – ▪ The plan identifies the need for equitable amenities but has limited information for introducing new uses or amenities within parks that are non-traditional.

Response

Thank you for your comment. Climate resilience is a priority for the Met Council and within the Regional Parks and Trails System. Most actions in the Climate resilience policy are currently focused on convening regional park implementing agencies and other partners as this policy is brand new. Additional collaboration is needed to determine appropriate implementation steps at the regional level.

The Met Council also prioritizes protection, restoration, enhancement, and maintenance of regional park and trail lands, and has multiple actions in place to minimize impacts to natural areas. System Protection policy, Action 4 references the Met Council's commitment to working with implementing agencies to minimize impacts to regional park and trail lands.

The Environmental Services' Customer Level of Service is our commitment to work with those impacted by our construction and maintenance of the wastewater conveyance system. We commit to restoring work sites to as good or better condition when compared to existing conditions. We partner with regulatory agencies, communities, property owners, and others to ensure projects are implemented such that impacts to neighbors and the natural environment are minimized.

The Water Policy Plan supports coordination for thoughtful land management and restoration. Specifically, the Water-Centered Growth and Development Policy and Climate Change Mitigation, Adaptation, and Resiliency Policy acknowledge the impacts development and redevelopment have on the land and our role in climate-focused land management. We welcome input from parks agencies as we seek to improve how we evaluate projects for environmental impacts to ensure that our work is in alignment with our policies. Thank you for your comment. In reviewing the existing 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, the cost-sharing strategy (Planning, Strategy 4) was deemed unnecessary. Regional park and trail projects may share costs if they are consistent with a Met Council-approved long-range plan. Met Council staff encourage agencies to develop joint powers agreements between entities. Please see the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook for additional information on joint powers agreements.

Thank you for your response. The 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan is oriented its approach to include new recreational facilities and programming in regional units. The new plan elevates public engagement advice to determine these amenities as compared to a list of allowable amenities.

Comment	Response
<p>Regional Trails ▪ Additional language could be included on how to expand and improve regional trails such as increase different types of amenities through corridor, making linear parks, attracting more users, etc. (The plan does not explain steps or initiatives to improve).</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. Regional trails and trail system coordination are a priority. The newly drafted Section Seven, Recreation, Facilities, and Programming, Action 5, Trail System Coordination seeks to establish a more integrated and collaborative planning approach between the Met Council and regional park implementing agency partners for the good of regional trails and the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network. Each of the topics you identified as important, including park-like amenities along regional trails and working more effectively with railroads and the regional bike network, are important topics Met Council staff intend to take up during policy plan implementation. The policy plan's workplan (Section Nine) includes three regional trail-related items.</p>
<p>Railways – Additional language could be included to identify the need for additional support to reduce barriers and restrictions with Railways.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. Regional trails and trail system coordination are a priority. The newly drafted Section Seven, Recreation, Facilities, and Programming, Action 5, Trail System Coordination seeks to establish a more integrated and collaborative planning approach between the Met Council and regional park implementing agency partners for the good of regional trails and the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network. Each of the topics you identified as important, including park-like amenities along regional trails and working more effectively with railroads and the regional bike network, are important topics Met Council staff intend to take up during policy plan implementation. The policy plan's workplan (Section Nine) includes three regional trail-related items.</p>
<p>Regional Bike Transportation Network (RBTN)– The plan could be expanded to include how regional trails really support the backbone of the RBTN system.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. Regional trails and trail system coordination are a priority. The newly drafted Section Seven, Recreation, Facilities, and Programming, Action 5, Trail System Coordination seeks to establish a more integrated and collaborative planning approach between the Met Council and regional park implementing agency partners for the good of regional trails and the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network. Each of the topics you identified as important, including park-like amenities along regional trails and working more effectively with railroads and the regional bike network, are important topics Met Council staff intend to take up during policy plan implementation. The policy plan's workplan (Section Nine) includes three regional trail-related items.</p>
<p>Urban Agriculture – There is no language in the plan that talks about the need for urban agriculture. Please add policy language at least in alignment with Ramsey County's own language: ▪ Ramsey County Parks & Recreation Ordinance, Regulation 4. Protecting Natural Resources, subsection a. "Removing, altering, or damaging any plant or animal is not allowed. Fruits, nuts, and mushrooms on park property may be foraged and harvested for personal use."</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. The policy plan's workplan (Section Nine) includes, "Develop an inventory of and guidelines for harvestable fruits, mushrooms, and other plants in partnership with American Indian groups, regional park implementing agencies, and other partners." Also, the new Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook includes desired outcome examples for multiple actions related to Recreation, Facilities, and Programming, including encouraging agencies to develop policies and procedures around harvesting and community gardens.</p>

Comment	Response
<p>Ramsey County “Parks & Recreation System Plan” - Energy & Resilience: “Cooperative community agriculture projects, such as community gardens and urban farms, provide access to fresh, healthy food for residents of multi-family housing or who otherwise may not have access to such resources. As the steward of thousands of acres of parkland and open space in a largely developed county, Parks & Recreation is in a unique position to facilitate these types of projects.”</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. The policy plan's workplan (Section Nine) includes, "Develop an inventory of and guidelines for harvestable fruits, mushrooms, and other plants in partnership with American Indian groups, regional park implementing agencies, and other partners." Also, the new Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook includes desired outcome examples for multiple actions related to Recreation, Facilities, and Programming, including encouraging agencies to develop policies and procedures around harvesting and community gardens.</p>
<p>Ramsey County “Parks & Recreation System Plan” - Parks & Recreation Analysis: Healthy Food Options. Many Ramsey County residents do not have access to healthy food options. Parks & Recreation facilities can help overcome this problem by providing healthy food options in vending machines or concession stands, supporting farmer’s markets (such as at Aldrich Arena), and providing opportunities for urban agriculture (such as community gardens or urban farms).</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. The policy plan's workplan (Section Nine) includes, "Develop an inventory of and guidelines for harvestable fruits, mushrooms, and other plants in partnership with American Indian groups, regional park implementing agencies, and other partners." Also, the new Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook includes desired outcome examples for multiple actions related to Recreation, Facilities, and Programming, including encouraging agencies to develop policies and procedures around harvesting and community gardens.</p>
<p>Programs. Both fee-based programs and non-fee programs were analyzed in this section. Ramsey County offers non-fee programs in regional parks through the Parks and Trails Legacy Amendment such as canoeing, fishing, and gardening.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. The policy plan's workplan (Section Nine) includes, "Develop an inventory of and guidelines for harvestable fruits, mushrooms, and other plants in partnership with American Indian groups, regional park implementing agencies, and other partners." Also, the new Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook includes desired outcome examples for multiple actions related to Recreation, Facilities, and Programming, including encouraging agencies to develop policies and procedures around harvesting and community gardens.</p>
<p>Section Eight (Finance Policy and Actions) Regional Trails – The plan talks about the need to expand regional trails but does not provide additional funding mechanisms in order to implement. This is the same for search corridors as well.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. This topic is captured in the Section Nine Work Plan under "Strategic Funding" discussion.</p>
<p>Climate – The plan has been beefed up with additional initiatives for climatic resilience but no additional funding source to help combat. These initiatives will require use of existing fund sources that are under-funded and may hinder park and trail improvements without additional funding.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment and concerns regarding expansion of initiatives without funding. This concern is captured in the Section Nine Work Plan under "Strategic Funding" discussion.</p>
<p>O&M - The plan identifies the need of maintenance but does really provide any steps for reducing the shortfall of O&M funding. State law indicates this should be 40% but it is much lower.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. This topic is captured in the Section Nine Work Plan under "Strategic Funding" discussion.</p>
<p>Section 9 (2025 – 2028 Work Plan for the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan) It would be beneficial to include a climate change adaptation/mitigation goal in this section.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. We will add this action to the Section Nine Work Plan. The Met Council is committed to conducting additional research and support in Climate and Natural Systems work.</p>

Scott County

Comment

This Board desires continued dialogue with the Metropolitan Council on use of the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund. This Fund is extremely important in the County's ability to purchase land in our regionally recognized Park Reserves; land that may not be developed for active park use for several decades. Purchasing these parcels today and holding them for future use is a prudent use of these Funds, but it has been discovered that the Funds limit the County's ability to rent the land for continued agricultural use during the interim period. It is our understanding that this limitation is because these Funds are partially financed with tax-exempt Council bonds, which restricts the ability to generate income from Bond-financed land acquisitions. We hope that the County can work with the Metropolitan Council and State to find a solution to this limitation.

It is noted that the plan proposes changes to the regional park system classifications. Existing classifications include - Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special Recreation Features (examples include The Landing and Silverwood), Bridging Facilities (none exist) and Regional Trails. o Changing 'Special Recreation Features' to 'Special Features;' and o Adding a sub-classification of 'Cultural Landscapes' to the new 'Special Features' sub-classification.

The description and policy guidance are underdeveloped, and this causes concern around not understanding the intent and more importantly the unintended application of the policy. There is concern that unintended consequences will arise.

Additionally, there is concern around the inclusion of the word "organizations" in the description on page 31 "(Cultural Landscapes recognize lands with significant cultural value to American Indian Tribes, organizations, and communities. Cultural landscapes of significance:)" and request that it be removed.

The Board requests further development of this policy prior to becoming part of a Policy Plan.

Response

Thank you for raising this concern with the Met Council. Met Council staff are actively engaged with Scott County staff to discuss possible solutions for supporting the agency's goals to acquire land ahead of the development and opening their parks or park reserves.

Thank you for your comment. Met Council staff are recommending modifying the cultural landscape subclassification. While there remains a commitment to keep it in the plan, there is recognition that continued development and refinement of the cultural landscape subclassification is needed. This item was added to the Section Nine Work Plan for 2025-2026. Additionally, the cultural landscape description was clarified to read "Cultural Landscapes recognize lands with significant cultural value to American Indian tribes and other cultural communities." The word, "organizations" has been removed from the text.

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Comment

The plan mentions two additional sub-classifications being considered for the future - Historical Landscapes and Open Space/Natural Systems

- o The Board is concerned about scope creep beyond the public need for regional recreation here.
- o Portions of existing classifications, such as Parks and Park Reserves, can have areas of historical, cultural and natural significance. Long-range planning uncovers these items and through that the community prioritizes protection, interpretation etc. Adding the sub-classification is unnecessary and adds confusion.

The plan includes the Metropolitan Council's intention to provide a substantial amount of new research projects related to climate and natural systems and includes language indicating the climate and natural systems research priorities identified by the regional park implementing agencies. Identification of these priorities occurred without consideration of research needs in other areas of the regional park system. The Board requests that prior to starting these research projects they be reviewed and prioritized in a context that includes other regional parks system research needs. The Board further comments that leadership of the implementing agencies is the appropriate group to work with the council to determine research project priorities.

Three Rivers Park District

Three Rivers Park District comments on the Draft 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to review and request changes to the draft 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan. The draft is excellent. Three Rivers requests seven specific changes (shown in bold); and makes four addition recommendations that will help clarify the intent of the section being discussed.

Response

Thank you for your comment. The historical landscape and open space/natural system subclassifications have been added to the Policy Chapter's Section Nine, Work Plan, to be explored in 2025-2027. There is recognition that both these ideas need further development and dialogue, including with implementing agency partners.

Thank you for your feedback. While the Met Council has placed an emphasis on natural systems and climate resilience research, the Council intends to consider and take on research that focuses on other aspects of the Regional Parks and Trails System. Section Two: System Plan, Action 2 focuses on identifying and conducting research to inform park policy, funding, and operations. This action includes other important research, such as annual use estimates, visitor surveys, as well as other research in response to emerging trends and agency needs.

Thank you for the comment. Noted.

Comment

The requested changes will provide significant benefits to the regional parks and trails system:
Page 24, Special Features subclassifications.
Three Rivers requests that the Open Space/Natural System subclassification of Special Features be added to the Policy Plan.
The Plan notes three new sub-classifications of Special Features are being considered as part of the Imagine 2050 process: Cultural Landscape, Historical Landscape, and Open Space/Natural. The narrative then indicates that the Historical Landscape and the Open Space/Natural Systems sub-classifications need further discussion and will be added to the workplan but that they are not proposed for inclusion in the system plan.
The intent of the Open Space/Natural Systems subclassification as discussed among the 10 implementing agencies was to create a method for preserving/creating important ecological corridors that could co-exist with future adjacent development. The details needed to describe this subclassification can be found in Section 3: Natural Resources policy and actions.
Imagine 2050 has a strong focus on natural resource protection, as well as on mitigating climate change. The Open Space/Natural Systems subclassification is an important tool to help achieve those goals. Addition of this subclassification is needed now so that agencies can start developing partnerships to make these ecological corridors a reality. In addition, further detail can be worked out through experience as we all move forward towards shared goals, and the subclassification definition in the 2028 System Plan can be updated to reflect what those experiences have taught us.

Response

Thank you for your suggestion. The Open Space/Natural System subclassification idea emerged during the Climate and Natural Systems Workgroup discussion. There was considerable interest in this concept but not adequate time to have dialogue to create a more robust recommendation. As such, Met Council Staff added this item to Section Nine, Work Plan in the Policy Plan. The Open Space/Natural System subclassification will be explored during 2025-2026 in consultation with the Met Council's Natural Systems workgroup project to renew the Regionally Significant Ecological Area dataset. The Regional Park Implementing Agencies will be an important partner in this process.

Pages 48-50 – System Plan – Regional Trail Search Corridors

Three Rivers requests that the West Minnehaha Creek Regional Trail search corridor be added to the System Plan.

Dating back to 2014 Three Rivers Park District has been requesting that Council add a search corridor for the West Minnehaha Creek Trail Corridor. The search corridor is approximately 5.5 miles long and extends from its planned connection to the Dakota Rail Regional Trail at Minnetonka City Hall east to the planned CP Rail Regional Trail near Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park, with the route following Minnehaha Creek. To date, the search corridor request has not been denied due to lack of merit, and instead due to capacity to add a new search area in the System Plan. For this update, Three Rivers was informed that no additions to the System Plan were allowed, and that the addition of the West Minnehaha Creek Trail search corridor would have to wait until 2028 (as noted on Page 54). Delay hampers potential partnerships with the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, the Cities of Minnetonka, Hopkins, and St. Louis Park, and with the private and non-profit sectors. Three Rivers respectfully requests that the West Minnehaha Creek Trail Search Corridor be added to the System Plan list and map on Pages 50/51 and removed from the 2028 list of future considerations (Page 54).

Thank you for your comment. As noted, System Additions are not being taken up during this update. Three Rivers Park District has an existing Regional Park Search Area called Minnetonka/Minnehaha Creek that appears to have significant overlap with this proposal and may offer a path forward.

Comment

Page 61 – System Plan – Identify and conduct research.

Three Rivers requests that the Council upgrades data sampling in the Council's 5-year visitor studies so that data is representative at the individual park and trail unit.

The research expertise of the Metropolitan Council provides great value to the regional parks system. Providing research for data-driven decision-making is one of the foundational principles on which the Council was established. The Council currently conducts park & trail visitor studies every five years and the study is designed to provide representative data at the agency level for each of the ten regional park implementing agencies. Ideally the data would be collected so that the data is representative at the individual park and trail unit level. Doing so would provide great service to the implementing agencies, allowing for much more specific data-based decision making at the unit-level.

Page 69 – Section 5: Planning Policy and Actions

Three Rivers requests that the any and all future revisions to the Regional Trails and Parks Planning Handbook be required to obtain approval by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, and by the Metropolitan Council.

Section 5 references the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook. The Handbook provides significant detail and interpretation of the policies outlined within this chapter. It is an extension of the policy plan and is essentially the book of rules on planning requirements for each of the park agencies.

The proposed Planning Handbook needs to have the protocol for how it is modified noted in the Policy Plan at the start of this section. Modification of the Handbook should require approval by the Metropolitan Parks and Opens Space Commission and the Metropolitan Council. Doing so guarantees input and review by the implementing agencies, as well as coordination across the Council.

Response

Thank you for your comment. Included within the new Section Two, System Plan, Action 2, "Identify and conduct research", there is a commitment for the Met Council to pursue more extensive visitor data valid at the park and trail level. Additionally, in the Section Nine Work Plan, Met Council staff are committed to developing a forecasting tool to pursue this type of information.

Thank you for the request that future revisions to the planning handbook be required to obtain approval from the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and the Metropolitan Council as a committee. Staff plan to carry the planning handbook through both of these Met Council committees, as well as the Community Development Committee, as a business item requiring approval, in parallel to the adoption of Imagine 2050. In the future, staff will seek Met Council approval of the planning handbook for any updates that directly impact or necessitate implementing agency action. However, staff will not seek Met Council approval for minor changes to the resources, tools, or contextual information within the planning handbook. Such updates are meant to provide implementing agency staff, Met Council staff, and others with helpful information that facilitates planning processes and accomplishing shared goals. Staff will share these types of modifications or updates with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission as an information item at the time such changes are proposed. Staff also appreciate the suggestion to include the protocol for how the planning handbook is modified within the draft policy plan. Language that is consistent with the "Amending the Handbook" section of the draft planning handbook (pg. 2) has been added to the draft policy plan (pgs. 9, 75).

Comment

Pages 70-72: Boundary adjustments & Amendments to the Parks Policy Plan Three Rivers requests removal of all references to any need for amending the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan when a park or trail long-range plan is amended or updated.

Response

Thank you for your comment. A policy plan amendment is only required when the Met Council conducts a system additions process or the regional park implementing agency proposes a change to an existing unit that exceeds the thresholds described in Figure 5-1: Boundary Adjustment Threshold Summary in the draft Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook (pg.24, bottom row). Council Parks staff have worked with Council Members and Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission members to find an acceptable threshold for changes that require a policy plan amendment. The 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan provides more flexibility and clarity on boundary adjustments than previously provided. For regional parks, this means a policy plan amendment is needed for additions greater than 100 acres or ones that are more than 20% of the total management boundary acreage, whichever is greater. For trails this means realignments that exceed 1.5 miles from the original alignment or the proposed trail extension is greater than one mile from the original terminus.

The Policy Plan has a System Plan, which as the name intends, focuses on the system of parks and trails across the region. Each of the parks and trails within the system then has a Long-Range Plan that is developed to determine the park boundaries and appropriate facilities needed to best meet the needs of the public and the natural environment. The Long-range Plan focuses on the specific park or trail unit. It includes substantive public input and cross-jurisdictional input. Historically, if a Long-range Plan changed the boundaries of a park, those changes were then noted in the next update of the System Plan portion of the Policy Plan.

The draft Policy Plan (and Planning Handbook) indicates that “Major boundary adjustments are handled through the system additions process, which requires amending the regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan.” However, “Major boundary adjustments” is not defined in the Policy Plan. The draft Planning Handbook does define “Major,” along with varying other degrees of change that would trigger a Policy Plan Update.

Amending the Policy Plan, or waiting for the Plan to be updated, takes considerable time and can result in lost acquisition opportunities. The Policy Plan’s System Plan is intended to provide guidance at the system level – not at the individual park/trail unit level. The proper place for determining the boundary of a park is through the long-range plan amendment process. That amendment process involves stakeholders, community members, Council staff, Metropolitan Parks and Opens Space review, and ultimately Council approval. While a boundary modification of a regional park or reserve may seem “major” (e.g., over 100 acres), systemically there is minimal change.

Section 7: Recreation, facilities and programming

Action 1 narrative (Page 81, line 8):

Thank you for your comment. A policy plan amendment is only required when the Met Council conducts a system additions process or the regional park implementing agency proposes a change to an existing unit that exceeds the thresholds described in Figure 5-1: Boundary Adjustment Threshold Summary in the draft Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook (pg.24, bottom row). Met Council Parks staff have worked with Met Council members and Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission members to find an acceptable threshold for changes that require a policy plan amendment. The 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan provides more flexibility and clarity on boundary adjustments than previously provided. For regional parks, this means a policy plan amendment is needed for additions greater than 100 acres or ones that are more than 20% of the total management boundary acreage, whichever is greater. For trails this means realignments that exceed 1.5 miles from the original alignment or the proposed trail extension is greater than one mile from the original terminus.

Comment

Please change “The Met Council develops” to “the Met Council supports” to accurately reflect the Council’s role in this Action.

Action 2:

This section provides a list of banned facilities, and then a lengthy list of examples of interesting ideas intended to help promote Action 2 and the associated policy narrative. It then ends with a reference to the legislative intent on appropriate facilities/activities in the regional park system.

Consider splitting this into two actions: 1) the original Action 2 with its list of illustrative ideas, and 2) a separate stand-alone action that focuses solely on what is specifically banned in legislation, and guidance on how to deal with “grey area” facilities/activities. Make this “banned” action and process the last action in this section.

Action 3 narrative (page 85,line 14) :

Please change “The Met Council provides” to “the Met Council supports” to accurately reflect the Council’s role in this Action.

["Section 7 - Action 5: Trail system coordination" split for separate response]

Section 8: Finance Policy and Actions

Three Rivers requests that the any and all future revisions to the Grant Administration Guide be required to obtain approval and review by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, and by the Metropolitan Council.

The Finance Section of the Policy Plan used to be one of the most detailed and complex sections of the Parks Policy Plan. Much of the section detail (and rules) have been moved to the Grant Administration Guide. Staff of the agencies appreciate that move. However, the Guide provides significant detail and interpretation of the policies outlined within this chapter. It is an extension of the policy plan.

The Grant Administration Guide needs to have the protocol for how it is modified noted in the Policy Plan at the start of this section. Modification should require approval by the Metropolitan Parks and Opens Space Commission and the Metropolitan Council. Doing so guarantees input and review by the implementing agencies, as well as coordination across the Council.

Section 9: Work Plan

Response

Thank you for your comment. The policy plan has been updated to reflect this change.

Thank you for your comment. The policy plan has been updated to include a separate action that focuses solely on ineligible activities and facilities.

Thank you for your comment. The policy plan has been updated to reflect this change.

Thank you for your comment. The Grant Administration Guide was specifically created to capture the administrative steps that the Met Council must do, to allow for more timely updates as state statute, Minnesota Management and Budget Guidance, and appropriation law changes. For these reasons, the Grant Administration Guide does not follow the same process as a policy document that is reviewed and approved by the Met Council. The Grant Administration Guide is updated annually and agency staff are encouraged to provide feedback on content throughout the year and leading up to each annual update.

Comment

The list is ambitious, but is it achievable? It is not clear if this is a comprehensive list of all work actions proposed in the Policy Plan or if it is a boiled down list of the highest priority items. The section would benefit from a discussion of how work plan tasks were identified and prioritized, and how it is updated between the 5-year cycle of Policy Plan updates.

Section 7 - Action 5: Trail system coordination

Three Rivers requests that the Council recognize the Regional Trails System as an arterial component of the Active Transportation Network, in both the Parks and Trail Policy Plan and Transportation Chapters of Imagine 2050.

Regional trails serve an important role in the Active Transportation (AT) Network as evidenced by the recent federal Surface Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) solicitation conducted by the Metropolitan Council. The majority of the Multiuse Trails and Bicycle Facilities Category projects considered were for regional trail system projects, and they all scored very well, often with composite scores above roads and transit projects. This is by design – modern regional trail planning strives to maximize trail use through connections to home, work, play, and services. Regional trails are recognized by the interested public as being safe – they are road-separated and offer grade-separated crossings of busy roads. In addition, the regional trail system serves as the “training wheels” of the biking public – the vast majority of whom are not comfortable biking on busy streets. The success of the Active Transportation Network rests on building the base of users, and that is done through recognizing and promoting development and use of the regional trail system.

The Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (RBTN) and the regional Active Transportation Network are two separate concepts. The Imagine 2050 plan should focus on the Active Transportation Network and all of its components. Much has changed since the RBTN was conceptualized 8 or so years ago. It is time to bring all of the transportation implementors together to figure out where we want to go with the Active Transportation Network, and to develop a logical implementation plan for development and operations. As envisioned in the Parks and Trails Policy Plan, the regional trail system will provide over 1,300 miles in the AT network. Regional Park Agencies need to be at that table.

Washington County

- Acknowledging Park and Trail System Variability
- Policies should acknowledge the changing condition and circumstances that arise when owning and operating a park and trail systems. Regional Implementation agencies require the freedom and ability to react, as needed.
- Policies should acknowledge the different contexts that exists across the regional - urban, suburban, and rural parks and trails all require different management and strategies. Agencies should be given a wide discretion on implementation.

Response

Thank you for your comment. This is an ambitious and challenging work plan. In partnership with regional park implementing agencies, Met Council committees, and others, these topics will be taken up during the implementation period. Implementing agencies will have opportunities to inform the timeline and priorities for these items during plan implementation.

The Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (RBTN) is the established regional network vision for integrating off-road trails and on-road bicycle facilities to serve the region's daily bicycle travel needs between established Regional Destinations and provides the primary routes that connect between local bicycle networks. Many regional trails play a critical role within this network.

The Met Council is committed to continued participation by its regional parks and transportation planning staff in regular coordination meetings with regional park and trail implementors. Staff will also facilitate meetings, as needed, between regional park and transportation planning agencies to discuss and coordinate on regional transportation and regional trails planning and funding-related issues. Clarifying text has been added in the Bicycle Investment Plan to highlight this commitment. In addition, Action 15D has been added to further consider improved RBTN connections to rural communities beyond changes currently considered through the established RBTN update process.

Thank you for your comment. Assessing the relationship between community designations and geographic distribution to inform future regional trail planning in suburban and rural contexts was added as a topic to the Regional Trail Workgroup workplan for 2025-2028 in Section Seven of the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.

Comment

- The Regional Parks Policy Plan (RPPP), Planning Handbook, and Grants/Funding Handbook are steps towards streamlining oversight processes that can be staff and time intensive. We support continued improvement in this area.

Coordination in New Initiatives and Implementation

- As implementation of the workplan provided in the 2050 Regional Parks Policy Plan begins, Washington County is looking for continued coordination with Regional Implementation agencies. As the owners and operators of the park and trail systems, we want to be involved early and often in the new initiatives and efforts - specifically The Historical Landscape and Open Space/Natural Systems sub-classifications.

- Coordination is needed to increase Met Council services across different departments

Addressing Increased Demands and Funding Challenges

- Washington County and the other Regional Implementation Agencies are experiencing increased demands on infrastructure, land/water management, programs, and services without additional financial resources. If funding does not keep up with growing demand and maintenance, the system will experience deterioration. The Regional Parks Policy Plan must set the stage for the Met Council and agencies to address this. For example: Washington County would like Section 8 policies (State and Met Council bonding 3-2 match and the 40M bonding limit) to be increased.

- Some policies proposed in the RPP may directly or indirectly obligate agencies to increase investment. This must come with the financial resources to offset this.

- From Washington County perspective, the existing funding formulas are not sustainable. It favors higher resourced agencies - and it allows these systems to continue grow at the expense of smaller agencies. We want to explore this conversation more in depth during 2050 RPPP implementation.

Response

Thank you for your comment. Noted.

Thank you for your willingness to be involved in work plan implementation. Met Council staff will be actively seeking participation from regional park implementing agencies and others as we ramp up initiatives outlined in the workplan and that emerge in coming years. Open communication and collaboration are cornerstones of the regional park implementing agency-Met Council partnership.

Thank you for your comment. Noted. The desire to continue the strategic funding conversation is identified as a priority in the 2025-2028 Work Plan, Section Nine.

Comment**Focus on High-Level Regional Guidance**

- Washington County encourages the focus of the RPPP to be on high level regional guidance. The RPPP should focus on what Met Council's role is and how the partnership will work together. Some of the proposed policies provide direction that best left to agencies who are operating the system.
- Additional narrative is proposed to be added to the RPPP. There needs to be balance struck between providing necessary context while remaining focused on the regional policy language. Additional narrative can be provided in other documents or reports produced by the Met Council and available to agencies as needed.
- Encourage redrafting Section 7. Comments, examples, ideas, and quotes within this section are superfluous and would be better served in a separate document/appendices. Implementation agencies need this section to provide a specific framework for what is included as a recreational use within the regional system and what is not. Without a detailed framework, agencies and the Met Council will be set up for difficult decisions - likely decided politically and not objectively.

Areas for Additional Support

- Met Council and the regional parks implementation agencies can improve coordination around marketing and supporting the park system's potential for tourism.
- Invasive species management (in the water and on the land) continues to threaten the natural resources that the regional park system was founded to protect. Additional support and resources are needed to mitigate this regional threat.
- Investment in improving accessibility and mobility will be needed to serve our aging population.
- Washington County's Land and Water Legacy program has helped acquire and protect some of the best land in the east metro area, including parkland. With other park agencies also doing this work across the region, coordination is needed to share resources and best practices.

Response

Thank you for your comments. We are working to focus the content in the policy plan on the higher-level parks and trails policy. The new Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook will be for more procedural information, including guidance, best practices, and research.

Thank you for your comments. In partnership with regional park implementing agencies, Met Council committees, and others, workplan items and other actions identified in the policy plan will be taken up during the implementation period. Implementing agencies will have opportunities to inform the timeline and priorities during plan implementation.



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