

Scenario Planning and Regional Parks and Trails Analysis

Metropolitan Council



Land Use Advisory Committee

September 21, 2023

Presentation Overview



Overview of the Regional Parks System

Regional Parks Policy Plan Update

Connections to Regional Goals

Key Topics and Takeaways

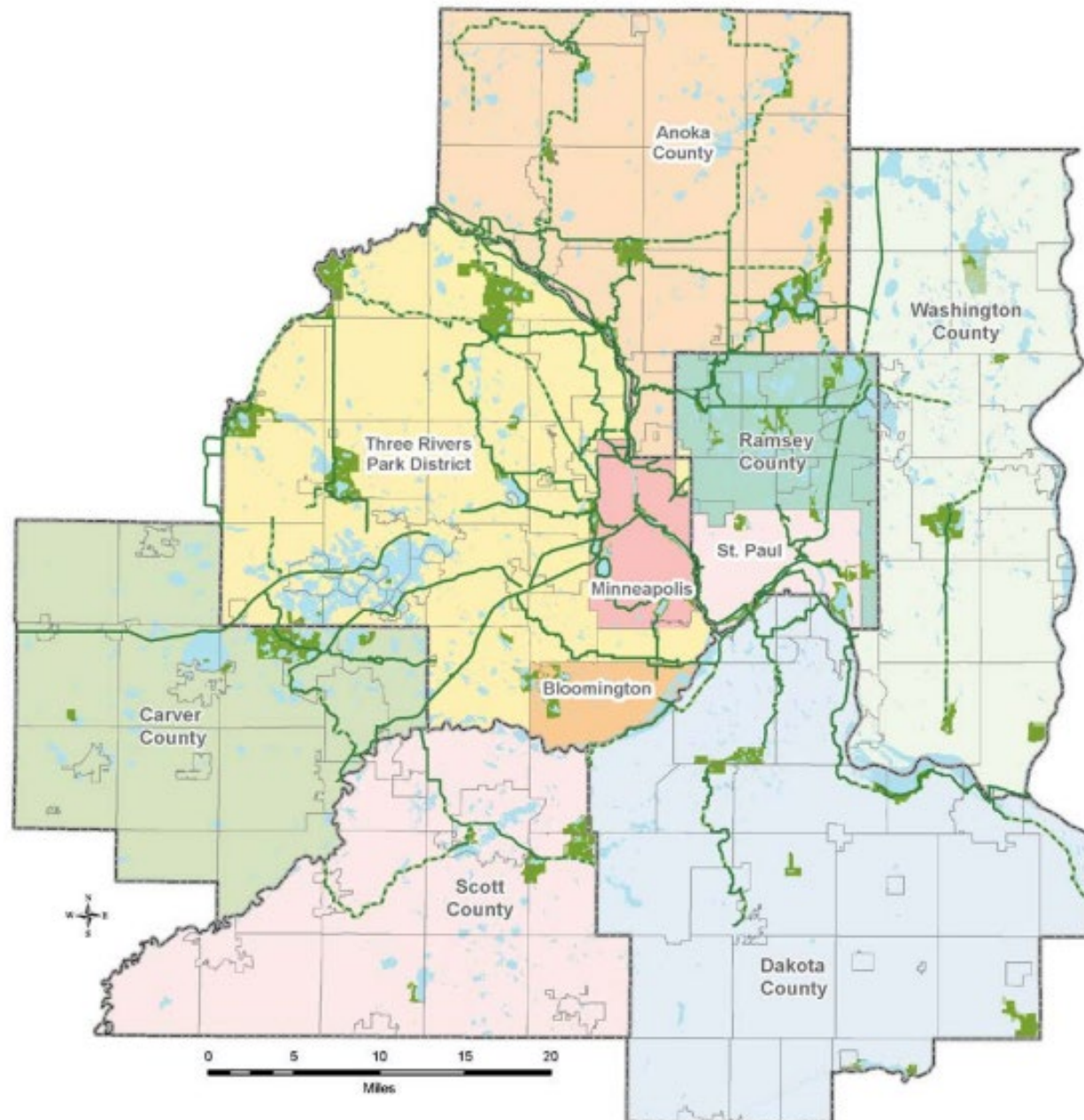
Connections to Land Use

Overview of the Regional Parks System

- Nature-based settings with a focus on water bodies
- Includes opportunities for nature-based recreation
- Serves a regional audience
- Large acreage, generally
- Nationally renowned system of interconnected regional parks and trails



Existing Regional Parks System Facilities



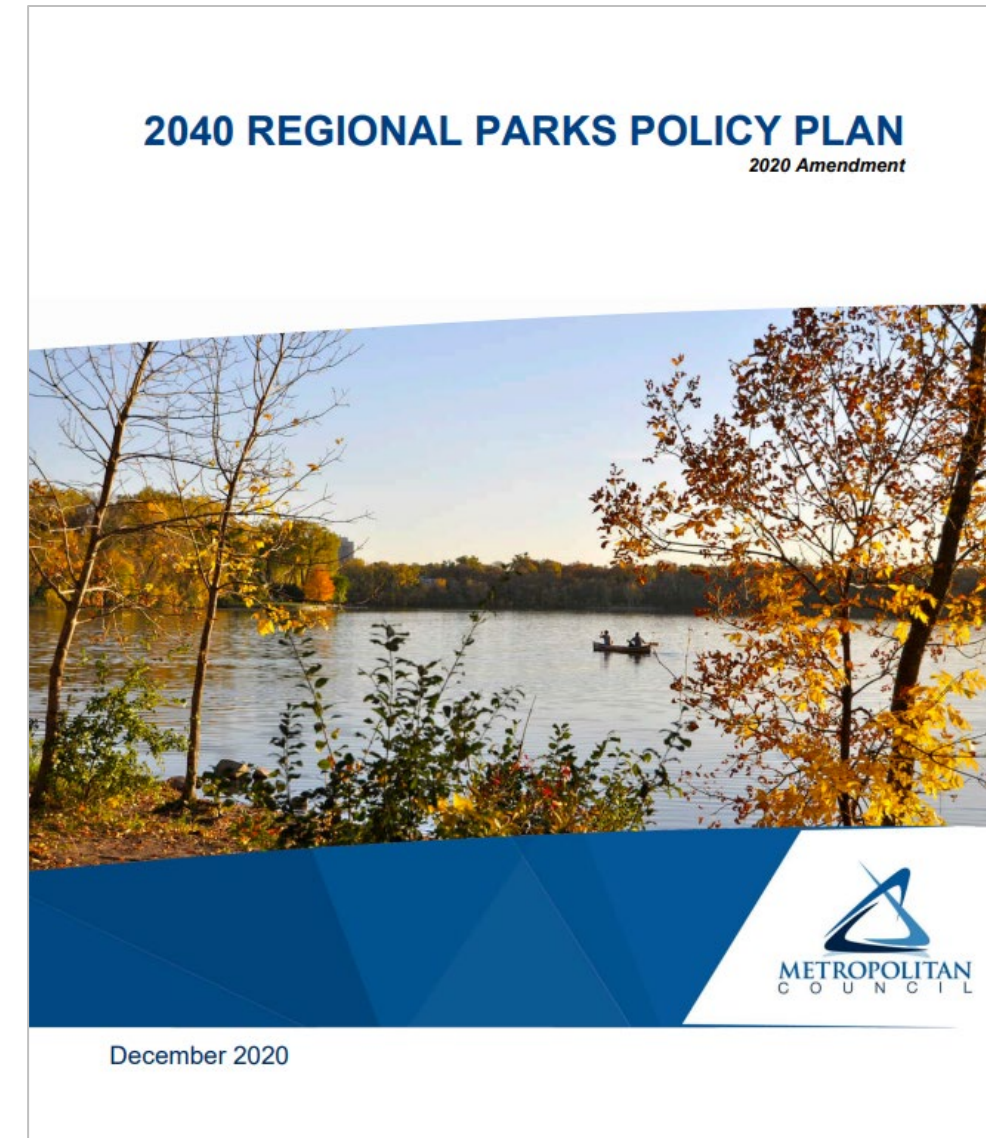
- **44** Regional Parks
- **12** Park Reserves
- **8** Special Recreation Features
- **55** Regional Trails

- **54,465** acres open for public use
- **415** miles of regional trails open to the public

- An estimated **69** million visits in 2022

2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan

- **Siting and Acquisition:** Identify lands with high-quality natural resources that are desirable for Regional Park System activities...
- **Planning:** Promote master planning and help provide integrated resource planning across jurisdictions
- **System Protection:** Protect public investment in acquisition and development...
- **Recreation Activities and Facilities:** Provide a regional system of recreation opportunities for all residents and visitors...
- **Finance:** Provide adequate and equitable funding for the Regional Parks System units and facilities...



Connections to Regional Goals

Parks and Trails Topics	Working Regional Goals				
	Equitable Inclusive Region	Healthy Safe Communities	Dynamic Resilient Economy	Mitigated Adapted Resilient Climate	Protected Restored Natural Systems
Parks and Trails Protection	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
Parks and Trails Acquisition	✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
Parks and Trails Use	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓

Key Parks and Trails Topics

Parks and Trails Protection

- Protecting regional parks and trails is essential for protecting our natural systems.
- Excessive parks and trails use can undermine the quality of these resources.

Parks and Trails Acquisition

- Search areas and corridors define which future parks and trails will be acquired.
- Search areas and corridors take different forms in more mature parks and trails systems versus developing ones.
- Most acquisitions today either fill in existing parks or acquire trail corridors.

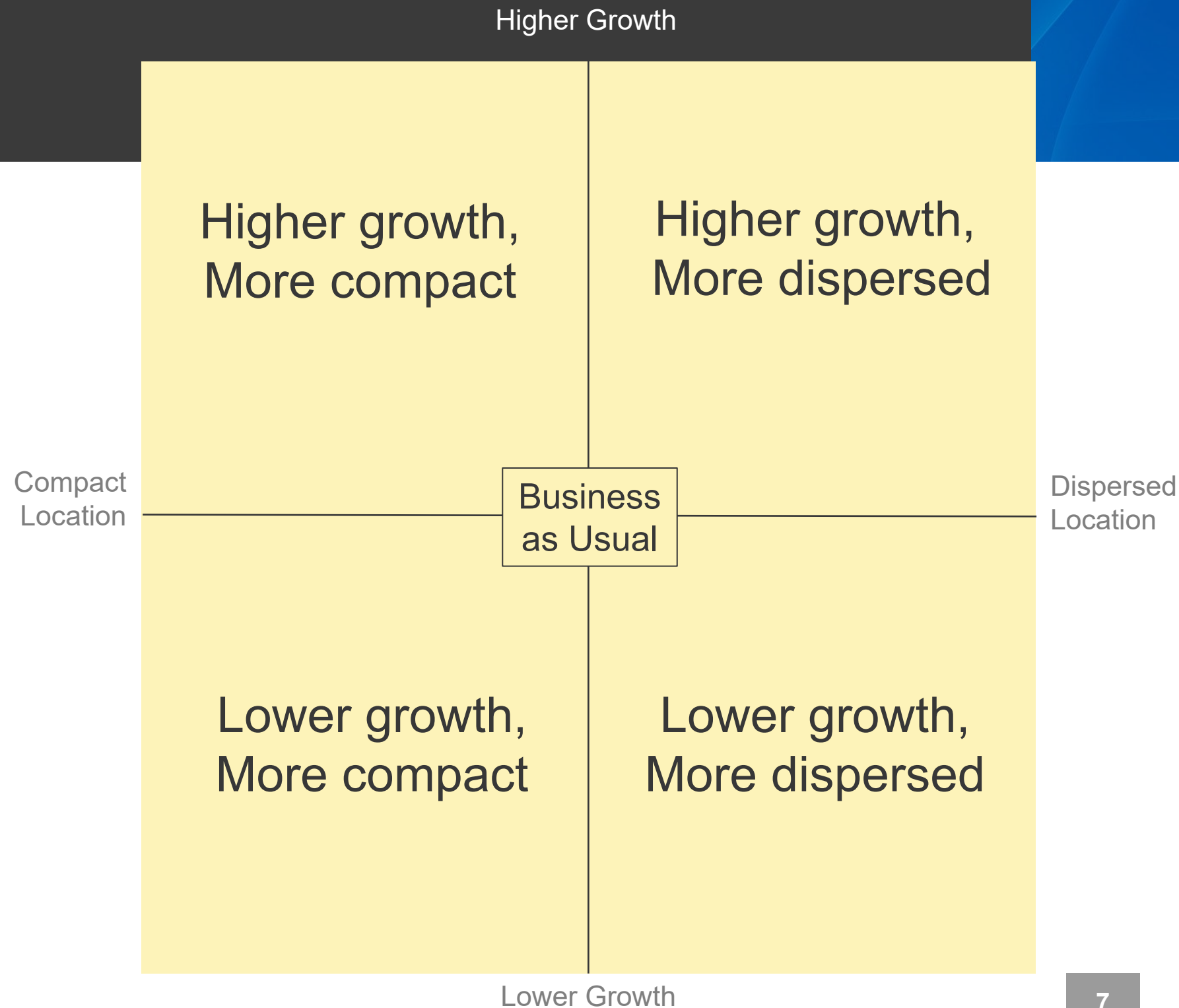
Parks and Trails Use

- Parks and trails use imposes wear and tear on existing facilities and impacts operating and maintenance expenses.
- High versus low growth scenarios produce different opportunities and challenges for the regional park system.
- The demographic make-up of population growth matters because it impacts who is likely to visit parks and trails.

Regional Growth Scenarios

How much? Where?

- Business-as-Usual: recent growth and development patterns continue
- High growth/compact development
- High growth/dispersed development
- Low growth/compact development
- Low growth/dispersed development



Different issues: high vs. low growth

High Growth

- Protection: Higher growth in urban and rural areas constitute a challenge for conservation.
- Acquisition: Cost of acquisition goes up due to high growth pressures.
- Use: Funding and staffing programs to meet high demand would be a challenge.
- Use: Overuse of parks and trails could be an issue.

Low Growth

- Protection: Low growth in rural areas makes it easier to protect natural systems.
- Acquisition: Lower acquisition costs could allow for more park infills and trail development.
- Use: There might be need or opportunities for re-designing programming and cutting certain budget items to address low attendance.

Different issues for different types of parks

Mature Systems

- Protection: Growth might challenge the carrying capacity and natural characteristics of parks and trails.
- Acquisition: Growth will take the form of trail acquisition and reclaiming industrial sites due to limitations on acquiring new parks.
- Use: There is need for appropriate balance between natural and developed resources.
- Use: Regional trails can be used as linear parks.

Developing Systems

- Protection: There are opportunities to protect and develop natural systems and cultural sites (co-management with tribes).
- Acquisition: Land acquisition might lag behind population growth.
- Acquisition: There is an opportunity for acquiring natural system corridors.
- Use: Limited staffing might make programming challenging.

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission takeaways

- A **search corridor** concept that aligns with the scenarios.
- **Different issues** under high versus low growth scenarios.
- **Equity** implications of different scenarios.
 - “Who contributes to growth matters more than how many people move into dispersed areas.”



Implementing Agency Partner Takeaways



- An interest to assess what is happening with these trends across the region related to system needs and funding. *(Possible 100-year horizon)*
- Higher growth in rural and urban areas is a concern.
 - *Low growth in rural areas is critical for natural resource protection.*
 - *We will see growth where the oldest park systems exist.*
- An evolving concept of what regional parks and trails look like may be needed to respond to various futures:
 - Cultural places (Mounds Park)
 - Restoration of industrial areas (Above the Falls)
 - Regional trails may be more possible than parks
 - Natural resource corridors

Connections to Land Use

Authority

Some park implementing agencies do not control land use.

They need to collaborate with those who do to shape development with regards to parks.

Mature Systems, Protection

Growth might challenge the carrying capacity and natural characteristics of parks and trails.

Protecting regional park and trails through Comprehensive Planning is important.

Mature Systems, Acquisition

Acquisitions in mature systems may be limited.

Growth will likely take the form of trail acquisition and reclaiming industrial sites.

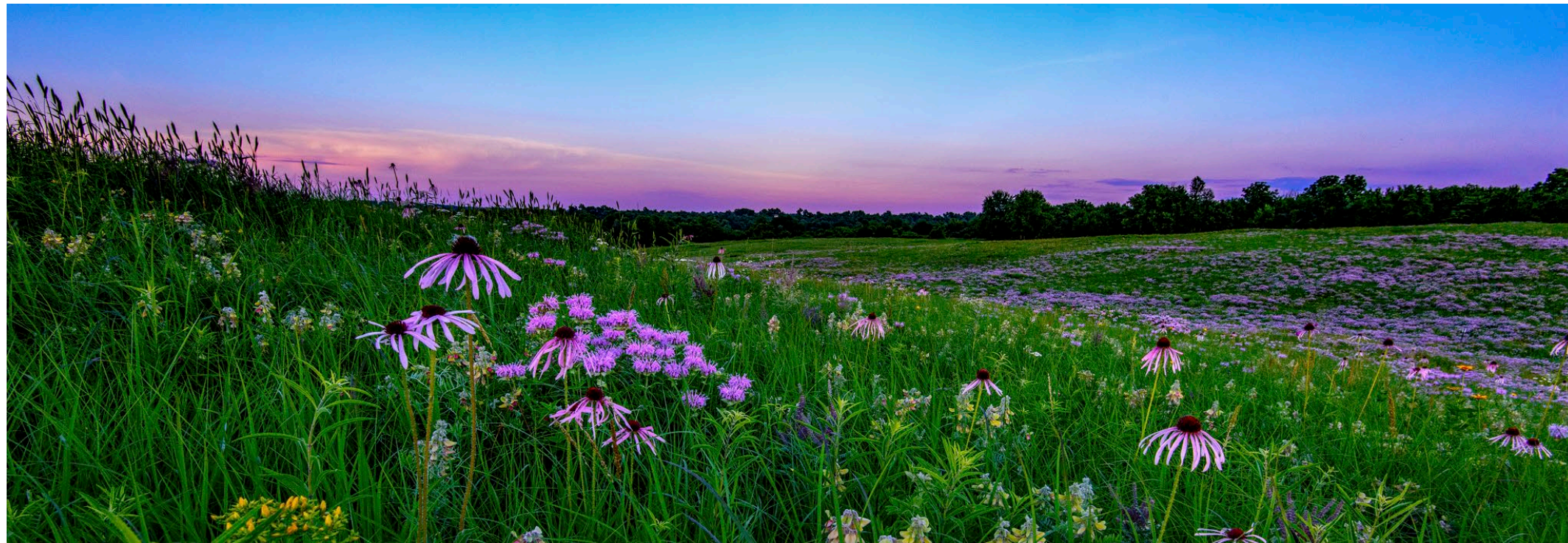
Developing Systems, Acquisition

Developing systems may likely have more opportunity to accommodate growth.

There is an opportunity for acquiring natural system corridors.

Question and Discussion

Reflecting on the connections to land use, what advice do you have for Council staff developing *Imagine 2050* and regional parks policy?



Thank you!

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