

Community Development Committee

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of August 26, 2015

Subject: Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve Acquisition Master Plan Boundary Amendment, Scott County

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council approve a boundary amendment to the Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve Acquisition Master Plan.

Summary of Committee Discussion/Questions

The Community Development Committee recommended approval of the proposed action as part of its consent agenda with no discussion.

Community Development Committee

Meeting Date: August 17, 2015

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of August 26, 2015

Subject: Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve Boundary Amendment, Scott County

District(s), Member(s): District 4, Deb Barber

Policy/Legal Reference: MN Statute 473.313

Staff Prepared/Presented: Michael Peterka, Intern (651-602-1361)

Jan Youngquist, Manager (651-602-1029)

Division/Department: Community Development, Regional Parks and Natural Resources

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council approve a boundary amendment to the Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve Acquisition Master Plan to add three parcels totaling 105 acres as shown in Appendix A.

Background

Scott County is requesting an amendment to the Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve Acquisition Master Plan to add property to the park reserve boundary. The original acquisition master plan was approved by the Metropolitan Council in 2012. Acquisition master plans are typically prepared to determine the boundaries of a new regional park and enable the regional park implementing agency to begin acquiring parkland. Once an implementing agency has acquired land for the regional park, subsequent planning processes determine the type of development and recreational amenities to be provided. Scott County intends to prepare a development master plan for Blakeley Bluffs in the future.

Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve is located along the Minnesota River in Blakeley Township. The existing planned park reserve boundary contains 2,440 acres. Blakeley Bluffs is currently in the acquisition and stewardship phase and is not open to the public at this time. Scott County has acquired approximately 550 acres for the park reserve.

Scott County is proposing to add three parcels, totaling approximately 105 acres, to Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve. This will bring the total park reserve acreage to 2,545. The proposed parcels are located along the park reserves' northeast boundary. Appendix A shows the proposed amended park reserve boundary outlined in red, with the proposed parcels to be added outlined in yellow. Appendix B shows the two Schmidt parcels totaling 76 acres in blue (PID 29090010 and a portion of PID 29080030) and the 29-acre Schendlinger property in white (PID 29090022). During the acquisition master plan process, these three parcels were initially considered to be included in the boundary due to their natural resources, scenic views, and connectivity to the hamlet of Blakeley. However, Scott County did not include the parcels in the park reserve boundary. This was largely due to the residence on the Schendlinger property.

In June of 2014, several disastrous rain events took place in Scott County. These rain events caused a landslide to break away from a bluff within feet of the home on the Schendlinger property. A geotechnical engineer determined that there was imminent danger to the home within the next five years. After the disaster, the County worked to assist impacted property owners, including the

Schendlingers. Scott County reviewed the buyout as a potential opportunity for the park reserve. It was concluded that the Schendlinger property and the two adjacent Schmidt parcels, located between the park reserve and the property, should be incorporated into the park reserve. Detailed images of the landslide and site erosion can be seen in Appendix C.

Given the events surrounding the Schendlinger property, Scott County was able to successfully apply for FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Program. This program will cover a majority of the project's costs to acquire the Schendlinger property and remove the home.

When the park reserve acquisition master plan was approved in 2012, the plan included a stewardship approach that would preserve acquired property for future park use, compliment the current agricultural land use vision of the township, and protect natural resources. After acquisition, anticipated stewardship activities for the three parcels include boundary marking and enforcement, property monitoring, ordinance enforcement, and noxious weed management. Crop fields will be rented through the County's crop rental program or will be restored to natural cover.

The proposed properties consist of 78.27 acres of native forest. This includes 52.2 acres of maple-basswood forest, 20.01 acres of oak forest, 4.85 acres of lowland hardwood forest, and 1.21 acres of aspen forest. These habitats and native plant assemblages are of high quality and are noted in the State's Natural Heritage System Database.

Although Scott County will prepare a development master plan in the future, the goals to guide acquisition and future development as articulated in the acquisition master plan include:

- Preserve the scenic character historic landscapes and opportunities for scenic viewing of the Minnesota River valley.
- Enhance native plant communities and expand core wildlife habitat areas.
- Protect opportunities for destination hiking trails, river access, canoeing and kayaking, and bike trail connections.
- Protect cultural resources and Native American history.
- Protect and enhance opportunities for nature and cultural exploration.
- Partnership with Ney Nature Center in Le Sueur County
- Create opportunity to improve water quality of Minnesota River.
- Create possibilities for economic growth in Blakeley—"Little Lanesboro" concept).

The proposed boundary amendment and acquisition were discussed as part of meeting agendas at two Scott County Park Advisory Commission meetings, two Blakeley Township meetings, and a Scott County Board meeting. The Parks Advisory Commission and County Board are in support of the boundary amendment and acquisition.

The Blakeley Township Board expressed concerns over increasing the park reserve acreage, citing losses in tax revenue and lack of citizen support. The Township Board requested that if the proposed acquisition occurs, parcels within the current boundary be removed to keep the park reserve at its

current size of 2,440 acres. Additionally, the Township Board requested that Blakeley Township citizens be invited to sit on the future Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve development master plan team.

In order to address the feedback, Scott County is committed to review the lands and park boundary as part of the future development master plan process to take a comprehensive look at recreational needs, natural resources, feedback from citizens with respect to the goals for the park reserve. Additionally, Scott County is committed to inviting Blakeley area residents to participate on the future development master plan team and throughout the public process. Previously, three Blakeley Township residents were members of the Citizen Design Team, which guided the acquisition master planning process. Furthermore, close to 70 Blakeley Township residents participated in tours, workshops, and open houses during the acquisition master plan process.

Rationale

The Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve Acquisition Master Plan Boundary Amendment is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies.

Funding

The estimated total cost for the acquisition of the three properties in the boundary amendment area is \$775,000. The FEMA Hazard Mitigation Program will contribute \$398,027 toward the Schendlinger property.

Approval of this boundary amendment to the master plan makes the acquisition costs eligible for regional parks funding, but does not commit the Council to any funding. Scott County has requested a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant for the Schendlinger property, which is being considered under a separate action. Additional future funding based on this master plan boundary amendment may be awarded through the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund. Council action is required approve specific grants to Scott County.

Known Support / Opposition

The Scott County Board authorized the submittal of the boundary amendment for Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve at its January 20, 2015 meeting.

On August 3, Council staff was contacted by the Blakeley Township Supervisor, who indicated that the Town Board did not object to the acquisition of the Schendlinger property, but was opposed to adding three parcels to the boundary of the park reserve without removing an equal amount of acreage in another location, keeping the planned park reserve at 2,440 acres. Council Staff explained that Scott County intends to take a comprehensive look at the park reserve boundary as part of a future development master plan process and that this boundary adjustment was being done now due to the timing of the FEMA Hazard Mitigation grant and the need to stabilize the Schendlinger property. The Township Administrator requested a letter from Scott County outlining its intentions. Council staff shared the request with Scott County staff.

This business item was considered by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC) at its meeting on August 4. A citizen of Blakeley Township addressed MPOSC in opposition to the boundary amendment, with concerns regarding increasing the size of the park reserve.

MPOSC unanimously recommended approval of the proposed action.

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: August 4, 2015

For the Community Development Committee meeting of August 17, 2015

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of August 26, 2015

Subject: Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve Boundary Amendment, Scott County

District(s), Member(s): MPOSC District B, Robert Moeller

Policy/Legal Reference: MN Statute 473.313

Staff Prepared/Presented: Michael Peterka, Intern (651-602-1361)

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Scott County is proposing to add three parcels, totaling approximately 105 acres, to Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve. This will bring the total park reserve acreage to 2,545. The proposed parcels are located along the park reserves' northeast boundary. Appendix A shows the proposed amended park reserve boundary outlined in red, with the proposed parcels to be added outlined in yellow. Appendix B shows the two Schmidt parcels totaling 76 acres in blue (PID 29090010 and a portion of PID 29080030) and the 29-acre Schendlinger property in white (PID 29090022). During the acquisition master plan process, these three parcels were initially considered to be included in the boundary due to their natural resources, scenic views, and connectivity to the hamlet of Blakeley. However, Scott County did not include the parcels in the park reserve boundary. This was largely due to the residence on the Schendlinger property.

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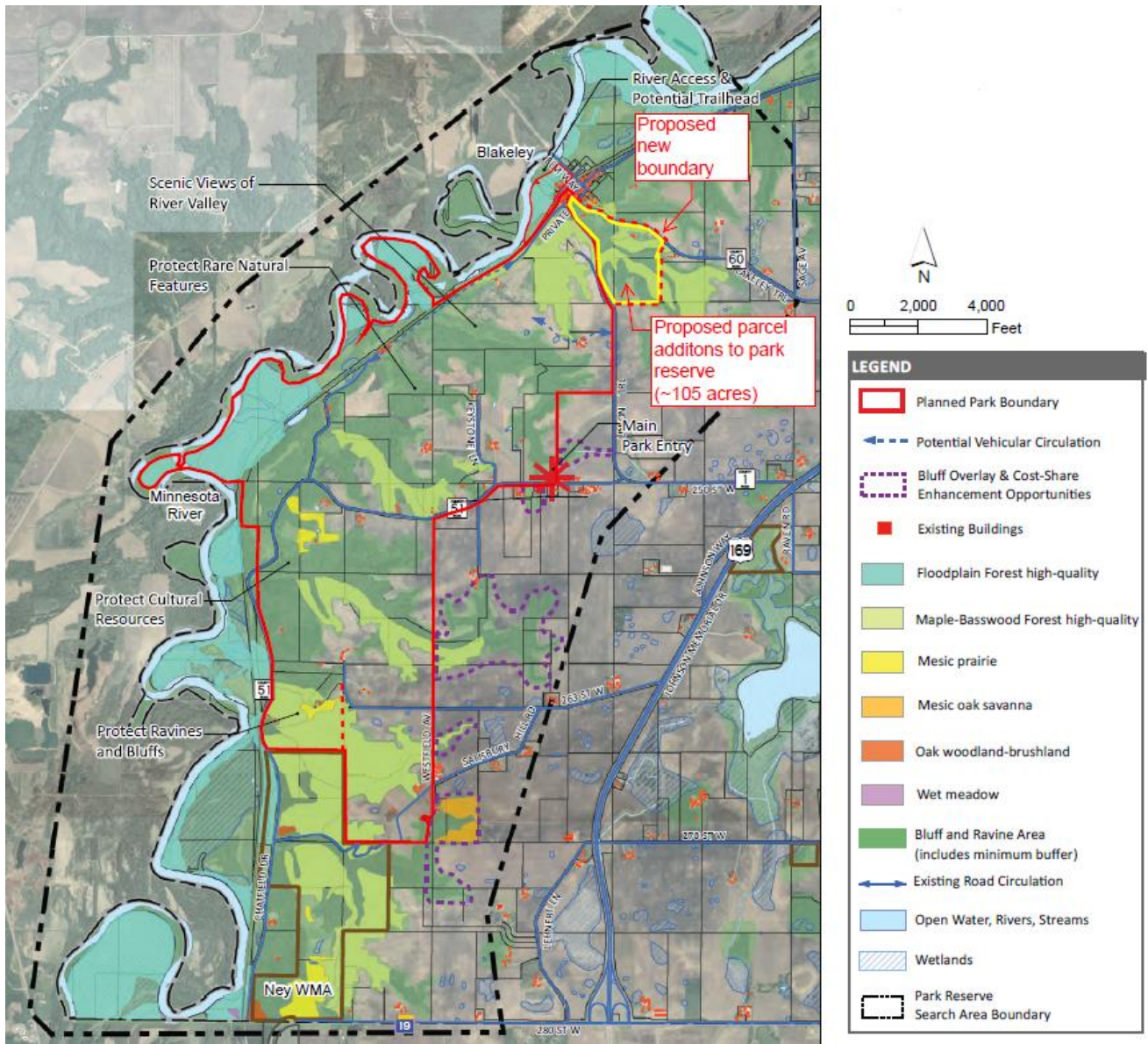
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Known Support / Opposition

The Scott County Board authorized the submittal of the boundary amendment for Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve at its January 20, 2015 meeting. The Council has not been contacted regarding opposition to the boundary amendment.



Appendix A: Proposed Amended Park Boundary in Red and Proposed Parcels to be Added in Yellow

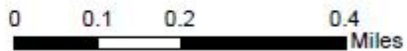


Appendix B: Detailed view of proposed parcels with Schendlinger property in white and two Schmidt parcels in blue.



Legend

-  County Owned Future Blakeley Parks Bluff Reserve
-  Planned Blakeley Parks Bluff Reserve Boundary



Map to be
dated 8-1-2012
1:50,000 scale
GPO for sale
\$4.50

Appendix C: Photos documenting landslide and erosion on the Schendlinger property



Photo 2: Erosion just below Schendlinger residence



Photo 3: Erosion just below Schendlinger residence





Photo 1 Oblique View of Slide Area with House and Blakeley Trail in the Background



Photo 2 View of Slide Area with House in the Background Looking Squarely at Face of Scarp