

## **Community Development Committee**

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of September 28, 2016

**Subject:** Minimum Percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy Fund grant spending to connect people to the outdoors

### **Proposed Action**

That the Metropolitan Council implement a graduated approach to meeting a minimum percentage of ten percent of Parks and Trails Fund appropriations that is to be spent on “connecting people and the outdoors” by FY 2022/23 biennium. This graduated approach would be implemented as follows:

- Agencies will allocate a minimum of 5% of their Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations to “connecting people and the outdoors” for the FY 2018/19 biennium (beginning July 1, 2017)
- Agencies will allocate a minimum of 7% of their Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations to “connecting people and the outdoors” for FY the 2020/21 biennium (beginning July 1, 2019)
- Agencies will allocate a minimum of 10% of their Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations to “connecting people and the outdoors” for the FY 2022/23 biennium (beginning July 1, 2021)

After the FY 2022/23 biennium, the appropriateness of 10% as the minimum percentage of Legacy spending on “connecting people and the outdoors” will be assessed and altered if appropriate.

### **Summary of Committee Discussion/Questions**

Staff presentation included two distinct recommendations for consideration. Council member Dorfman sought clarification on the process in past allocations of Parks and Trails Legacy grant fund spending and information on why there was need for a change. Council member Wulff noted the Chair of the Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee had come to the Committee in the past to express concern over spending of Parks and Trails Funds.

Council member Dorfman noted the letter submitted by Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board Superintendent, Jayne Miller, and their expressed impact of a minimum percentage of funding to go toward “connecting people and the outdoors”, limiting the amount of funds available for capital projects.

Council member Wulff noted her absence from the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting. She also noted the unlikelihood of stakeholders ever coming to a consensus and how the change was foreseeable as discussions of requiring a minimum percentage began as early as 2014.

Council member Chavez noted the staff recommendation is a measured approach and ensures accountability.

Chair Commers provided opportunity for the public to share their perspectives. Adam Arvidson, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board’s Director of Strategic Planning, expressed his support for 5% for the first biennium, but spoke to dissatisfaction of the process and a desire to step back and re-evaluate a solution moving forward.

Council member Wulff voiced her support for the staff recommendation. She suggested staff continue to evaluate the results and noted the importance of the incremental approach over time to allow agencies for their budget planning purposes.

Todd Kemery, Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission member, addressed the Committee. Noting he was not speaking on behalf of the Commission, he wanted the Committee to know he had reflected after the meeting and was supportive of the staff recommendation, given a majority of the regional park implementing agencies were in support of 10 percent.

Council member Wulff moved staff recommendation. Chavez seconded the motion. The motion was supported with a 4-1 vote.

## Community Development Committee

Meeting date: September 19, 2016

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of September 28, 2016

**Subject:** Minimum Percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy Fund grant spending to connect people to the outdoors

**District(s), Member(s):** All Districts

**Policy/Legal Reference:** 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, Finance Strategy 3

**Staff Prepared/Presented:** Rainry Salk, Research Analyst (651-602-1669), Gratia Ratzloff, Parks Policy Intern (651-602-1212)

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

### Proposed Action

#### *Staff Recommendation*

That the Metropolitan Council implement a graduated approach to meeting a minimum percentage of ten percent of Parks and Trails Fund appropriations that is to be spent on “connecting people and the outdoors” by FY 2022/23 biennium. This graduated approach would be implemented as follows:

- Agencies will allocate a minimum of 5% of their Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations to “connecting people and the outdoors” for the FY 2018/19 biennium (beginning July 1, 2017)
- Agencies will allocate a minimum of 7% of their Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations to “connecting people and the outdoors” for FY the 2020/21 biennium (beginning July 1, 2019)
- Agencies will allocate a minimum of 10% of their Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations to “connecting people and the outdoors” for the FY 2022/23 biennium (beginning July 1, 2021)

After the FY 2022/23 biennium, the appropriateness of 10% as the minimum percentage of Legacy spending on “connecting people and the outdoors” will be assessed and altered if appropriate.

#### *Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission's Recommendation*

That the Metropolitan Council implement the following approach to meeting a minimum percentage of Parks and Trails Fund appropriations to be spent on “connecting people and the outdoors”:

- Agencies will allocate a minimum of 5% of their Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations to “connecting people and the outdoors” for the FY 2018/19 biennium (beginning July 1, 2017)
- For the FY 2020/21 and FY 2022/23 biennia, the Metropolitan Council staff will again convene stakeholders including the regional park implementing agencies as soon as practical to work collaboratively to develop a recommendation for a minimum percentage to be spent on “connecting people and the outdoors”.

### Background

In 2008, Minnesotans passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment (also known as the “Legacy Amendment”), which is funded by a 3/8 percent increase in the state sales tax. Minnesota’s parks and trails of statewide and regional significance receive 14.25 percent of the funds generated by the Legacy Amendment, which make up the Parks and Trails Fund. These dollars are then allocated to the Metropolitan Council, the Department of Natural

Resources and Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission who act as the fiscal agents of the fund. The Metropolitan Council's share of the Parks and Trails Fund are allocated to the ten regional park implementing agencies through the Council's Parks and Trails Legacy Fund grant program based on a formula specified in state statute (*MN Statute 85.53, Subd. 3*).

The 2011 statewide [\*Parks and Trails Legacy Plan\*](#), developed with extensive stakeholder involvement, outlines a 25-year long-range plan for Minnesota's state and regional parks and trails, and specifies four strategic directions that are to be pursued with Parks and Trails Fund dollars:

- Connect people and the outdoors
- Acquire land, create opportunities
- Take care of what we have
- Coordinate among partners

The *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* also acknowledges different needs throughout the state and notes a targeted focus in the metropolitan area toward land acquisition and "connecting people and the outdoors", calling for "a focus on close-to-home opportunities with alternative transportation options and programming to attract new visitors" (p. 36). State statute (*MN Statute 85.53, Subd. 3*) requires 10% of the metropolitan's share of Parks and Trails Fund dollars to go toward land acquisition. The remaining funds are provided to the regional park implementing agencies in the form of grants from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund grant program.

As the fiscal agent responsible for the administration of Parks and Trails Fund appropriations to the regional park implementing agencies, the Metropolitan Council plays an important role in ensuring that Legacy dollars are spent in accordance with the strategic directions outlined in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*. Historical spending trends demonstrate that between 2010 and 2015, only three percent of Parks and Trails Legacy dollars have been spent on the strategic direction of "connecting people and the outdoors." While regional park implementing agencies pursue many efforts to connect people and the outdoors, the Parks and Trails Fund was intended to provide funding across the four strategic directions in a balanced manner. Given historical spending trends, the Metropolitan Council put forward a commitment in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* to identify a minimum percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy appropriations to be used to "connect people and the outdoors."

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* states that "in close collaboration with the regional park implementing agencies, the Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee, and other partners and stakeholders, the Metropolitan Council will identify a minimum percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy appropriations that should be used to 'connect people and the outdoors,'" and to "require regional park implementing agencies to adhere to the determined minimum level of spending as it pertains to their annual share of Parks and Trails Fund appropriations" (page 99).

As directed in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, the Metropolitan Council engaged in discussion with stakeholders throughout the region. In sum, 55 stakeholders, representing a range of perspectives provided their input. Several meetings were convened to garner perspective on a minimum percentage of Legacy funds to be used to "connect people and the outdoors." A large variability in feedback was received from the various stakeholders.

Two meetings were held with the regional park implementing agencies. Staff from all ten agencies participated in discussions, and minimum percentage proposals ranged from "as small as possible" to up to ten percent. Of those that provided a specific percentage figure, 66.7% indicated 10% as the

preferred minimum percentage. A majority of agencies agreed that the implementation of a minimum percentage of spending of Parks and Trails Legacy dollars on connecting people and the outdoors should be increased in small increments each biennium until the desired minimum percentage is reached. The strategy was perceived to allow for a realistic adjustment in current spending patterns, as well as accommodate planned expenditures approved by their respective Boards.

Separate conversations were held with staff members from various park and trail non-profit organizations. Those staff members did not feel comfortable specifying a value, but also recommended a gradual incremental implementation strategy. Similarly, discussions with the Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee, the statewide body responsible for the oversight of the implementation of the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*, also suggested an incremental approach. The 17-member body engaged in small group discussions and provided their group's minimum, median, and maximum recommendation for the percentage of Legacy dollars spent in the metropolitan region to "connect people and the outdoors". Among the groups, the minimum, median, and maximum values (6.7%, 11.3, and 18.3%, respectively) were believed to factor in many competing considerations, including the various stages of development across the Regional Parks System, as well as the call for a balanced spending approach in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*. The Parks and Trails Advisory Committee also emphasized assessing the effectiveness of the minimum percentage Legacy funds to be spent on "connecting people and the outdoors" after several years and adjust the minimum as appropriate.

Conversations held at a Regional Park with regional park users showed that they would like more money to be spent on efforts that connect people and the outdoors—71.4% of the suggestions for spending in regional parks involved "connecting people and the outdoors". Previous research conducted by the Metropolitan Council also suggests this. The 2014 study [\*Regional Park Use Among Select Communities of Color\*](#) found that four out of the six top suggestions to enhance regional park visits were efforts that connect people and the outdoors.

The staff recommendation was formulated taking into consideration input from all stakeholders. It is a graduated approach that enables regional park implementing agencies to progressively increase the amount of Parks and Trails Legacy Fund dollars spent on connecting people and the outdoors over the next three biennium. It considers the feasibility of this approach on the implementing agencies given their previous spending commitments and project sequencing. It should be noted, the staff recommendation of the minimum percentage is intended to establish a *minimum threshold*, as directed in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. It is not meant to provide guidance on how much should be spent on connecting people and the outdoors.

## **Rationale**

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* puts forth the commitment to—in collaboration with regional park implementing agencies, the Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee, and other partners and stakeholders—identify a minimum percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy appropriations that should be used to "connect people and the outdoors," and to require regional park implementing agencies to adhere to the determined minimum level of spending as it pertains to their annual share of Parks and Trails Fund appropriations.

## **Funding**

The Metropolitan Council is the fiscal agent for the metropolitan share of the statewide Parks and Trails Fund and is allocated to the ten regional park implementing agencies through the formula specified in *MN Statute 85.53, Subd. 3*.

## Known Support / Opposition

Stakeholder engagement identified a diverse continuum of recommended minimum percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy Fund spending toward “connecting people and the outdoors”. The input ranged from as little as possible to upwards of over two thirds of the total appropriation.

At the September 6<sup>th</sup> Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC) meeting, staff noted that two letters were received after the meeting posting date (Appendix A & B). One letter was from the Superintendent of Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Jayne Miller, and the other was from the Executive Director of Women Observing Wildlife, Catherine Zimmer. Both letters indicated opposition to the staff recommendation.

After the staff presentation to MPOSC, Commissioner Kemery made a motion to approve the proposed action and Commissioner Theisen seconded the motion. After the motion was made, discussion occurred among Commission members. Commissioner Weber proposed a substitute motion, but the motion to amend failed. Subsequent discussion occurred. Commentary by several Commission members indicated an overall support for the proposed action, while others noted reservations based on the submitted letters of concern. Commission members also noted they had many questions. Commission member questions and comments posed to staff were related to purpose, intent, timing, approach, and authority.

Three members of the public spoke when the discussion was opened to audience members. Marty Walsh, Director of Carver County Parks, indicated how Legacy funds have helped to fund staff to provide environmental education programming and leverage other sources of funding. He noted the focus should be on outcomes and performance standards, rather than percentages of spending, indicating that a small amount of money can make a difference.

Jonathan Vlaming, Associate Superintendent of Three Rivers Park District, noted his hesitancy toward the proposed action, noting that the amount of Legacy funds spent on connecting people and the outdoors is only one slice of the funding pie and argued for an assessment of the full spending among each agency toward this aim. Vlaming also noted concerns regarding the involvement of the regional park implementing agencies, the condensed timeframe of the work, and that no consensus was achieved among the partner agencies. Vlaming urged the Commission members to come up with a better plan to achieve the desired aim, encouraging members to ask staff to convene the agencies again in continued discussion.

Adam Arvidson, Director of Strategic Planning for Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board noted the letter previously submitted and used his comment period to speak to concerns about the rapid roll-out and lack of close collaboration between the Council and the regional park implementing agencies. Arvidson proposed an alternative to the proposed action to ask agencies to allocate “something” to connecting people to the outdoors this upcoming biennium or alternatively to put the item on hold to provide time for creative conversations.

After the public provided their comments, Commission members addressed staff with questions. Most notably, questions pertained to timing. Staff noted that the discussions about requiring a minimum percentage of spending for connecting people and the outdoors began as early as 2014 when the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Finance Policy Strategy 3* was being developed and subsequently adopted by the Council in early 2015.

After over a total of 1.5 hours of discussion, Commissioners Theisen and Kemery rescinded their original motion and Commissioner Theisen proposed an amendment to the original proposed action. The proposed action was amended to read as follows (new text underlined):

That the Metropolitan Council implement the following approach to meeting a minimum percentage of Parks and Trails Fund appropriations to be spent on “connecting people and the outdoors”:

- Agencies will allocate a minimum of 5% of their Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations to “connecting people and the outdoors” for the FY 2018/19 biennium (beginning July 1, 2017)
- For FY2020/21 and FY2022/23 biennia, the Metropolitan Council staff will again convene stakeholders including the regional park implementing agencies as soon as practical to work collaboratively to develop a recommendation for a minimum percentage to be spent on “connecting people and the outdoors”.

Commissioner Weber seconded the proposed amendment. The motion to amend the proposed action won on a 7-1 vote. Final vote of amended action was supported unanimously.

## Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: September 6, 2016

For the Community Development Committee meeting of September 19, 2016

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of September 28, 2016

**Subject:** Minimum Percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy Fund grant spending to connect people and the outdoors

**District(s), Member(s):** All Districts

**Policy/Legal Reference:** *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, Finance Strategy 3

**Staff Prepared/Presented:** Raintry Salk, Research Analyst (651-602-1669), Gratia Ratzloff, Regional Parks Policy Intern (651-602-1212)

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

### Proposed Action

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- Agencies will allocate a minimum of 10% of their Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations to “connecting people and the outdoors” for the FY 2022/23 biennium (beginning July 1, 2021)

After the FY 2022/23 biennium, the appropriateness of 10% as the minimum percentage of Legacy spending on “connecting people and the outdoors” will be assessed and altered if appropriate.

### Background

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The statewide [Parks and Trails Legacy Plan](#), which was created in 2011 to outline a 25-year long-range plan for Minnesota’s state and regional parks and trails, specifies four strategic directions that are to be pursued with Parks and Trails Fund dollars:

- Connect people and the outdoors
- Acquire land, create opportunities



- Take care of what we have
- Coordinate among partners

As the fiscal agent responsible for the administration of Parks and Trails Fund appropriations to the regional park implementing agencies, the Metropolitan Council plays an important role in ensuring that Legacy dollars are spent in accordance with the strategic direction outlined in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*. Historical spending trends demonstrate that between 2010 and 2015, only three percent of Parks and Trails Legacy dollars have been spent on the pillar of “connecting people and the outdoors.” While regional park implementing agencies pursue many efforts to connect people and the outdoors, the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund grant program enables them to do more in this regard, such as enhancing what they are currently doing, as well as being creative and innovative to capture and serve a broader and more diverse population. Thus, the Metropolitan Council put forward a commitment in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* to identify a minimum percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy appropriations that should be used to “connect people and the outdoors.”

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* states that “in close collaboration with the regional park implementing agencies, the Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee, and other partners and stakeholders, the Metropolitan Council will identify a minimum percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy appropriations that should be used to ‘connect people and the outdoors,’” and to “require regional park implementing agencies to adhere to the determined minimum level of spending as it pertains to their annual share of Parks and Trails Fund appropriations” (page 99).

As directed in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, the Metropolitan Council engaged in discussion with stakeholders throughout the region. In sum, a total of 55 stakeholders provided their input. Several meetings were convened to garner perspective on a minimum percentage of Legacy funds that should be used to “connect people and the outdoors.” Two meetings were held with the regional park implementing agencies. Staff from all ten agencies participated in the discussions, and allocation amount proposals ranged from “as small as possible” to up to ten percent. Many agencies agreed that the implementation of a minimum percentage of spending of Parks and Trails Legacy dollars on connecting people and the outdoors should be increased in small increments each biennium until the desired minimum percentage is reached. The strategy was perceived to allow for a realistic adjustment in current spending patterns, as well as accommodate planned expenditures approved by their respective Boards. Conversations with other regional park partners as well as the Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee conducted in separate meetings also emphasized this implementation strategy. The Parks and Trails Advisory Committee also emphasized assessing the effectiveness of the minimum percentage Legacy funds to be spent on “connecting people and the outdoors” after several years and adjust the minimum as appropriate.

Conversations held with regional park users showed that they would like more money to be spent on efforts that connect people and the outdoors—71.4% of the suggestions for spending in regional parks involved connecting people and the outdoors. Previous research conducted by the Metropolitan Council also suggests this. The 2014 study [\*Regional Park Use Among Select Communities of Color\*](#) found that four out of the six top suggestions to enhance regional park visits were efforts that connect people and the outdoors.

A large variability in feedback was received from the various stakeholders. Consideration of the feasibility among regional park implementing agencies is warranted given their previous spending commitments and project sequencing. A graduated approach is called for that enables regional park

implementing agencies to progressively increase the amount of Parks and Trails Legacy Fund dollars spent on connecting people and the outdoors. The minimum percentage is not meant to provide guidance on how much should be spent on connecting people and the outdoors. It is solely meant to establish a minimum threshold.

### **Rationale**

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* puts forth the commitment to—in collaboration with regional park implementing agencies, the Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee, and other partners and stakeholders—identify a minimum percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy appropriations that should be used to “connect people and the outdoors,” and to require regional park implementing agencies to adhere to the determined minimum level of spending as it pertains to their annual share of Parks and Trails Fund appropriations.

### **Funding**

The Metropolitan Council is the fiscal agent for the metropolitan share of the statewide Parks and Trails Fund and is allocated to the ten regional park implementing agencies through the formula specified in *MN Statute 85.53, Subd. 3*.

### **Known Support / Opposition**

Stakeholder engagement identified a diverse continuum of recommended minimum percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy Fund spending toward “connecting people and the outdoors”. The input ranged from as little as possible to upwards of over two thirds of the total appropriation.

## Appendix A.



### Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

*Administrative Offices*  
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Anita Tabb

*Vice President*  
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Scott Vreeland  
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M. Annie Young

*Superintendent*  
Jayne Miller

*Secretary to the Board*  
Jennifer B. Ringold



September 2, 2016

Mr. Emmett Mullin  
Parks and Natural Resources Manager  
Metropolitan Council  
390 North Robert Street  
St. Paul, MN 55101

RE: Proposed Minimum Allocations from the Parks and Trails Fund for the "Connecting People to the Outdoors" Pillar

Dear Mr. Mullin:

I am writing to express the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's concerns about the proposal that will be before the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission related to required minimums for the "connecting people to parks" pillar of Parks and Trails Legacy funds.

Because this pillar has been determined to be strictly limited to non-capital expenditures, the high level of spending on this pillar as proposed will have a profound effect on our ability to construct, reconstruct, and rehabilitate our aging park system. We understand the value of connecting people to the outdoors through non-capital means. The fact is, however, that the need in Minneapolis—where most regional parks date from the early part of the last Century—is to ensure that people have high quality infrastructure that is appropriate to their wants and needs.

Our system is already heavily programmed through existing full-time education staff. In recent years, new festivals like La Festival de la Monarca and Owamni have specifically invited people of color into the parks. Under recently passed legislation, we would explicitly NOT be able to supplant our existing education funding with Park and Trails funding, meaning our spending under the "connect people to the outdoors" pillar would have to bring entirely new staff, programs, advertising, etc. into the parks. Of course I understand this is the intent, and we intend to allocate toward this pillar, but the reality is that under the current proposal MPRB would need to spend more than \$300,000 per year on these non-capital efforts. In return, we would reduce our ability—by that same amount—to implement the community-driven master plans that will bring our system into the 21st century and make it more in line with the wants and needs of all users, especially people of color.

Another item of concern for us is the pace of the decision-making and the lack of discussion with implementing agencies that led to this recommendation. Only one meeting was held with agencies to ask our thoughts on this matter, and at that meeting staff from MPRB and other agencies specifically stated that 10% would be far too burdensome a level. The \$300,000+ was referenced at that meeting. MPRB staff related to Metropolitan Council staff that if Minneapolis spent that kind of money on flyers, advertising, programs, etc., instead of reconstructing trails and building the new things the community wants, we would be seriously questioned by our constituents.

Nevertheless, after this one meeting and in direct opposition to the discussion, this is what is being proposed. And quickly. To notify us approximately 10 days before bringing a recommendation to MPOSC, and to share that recommendation without requesting any additional reaction, excludes implementing agencies from the process and leaves us scrambling to find solutions.

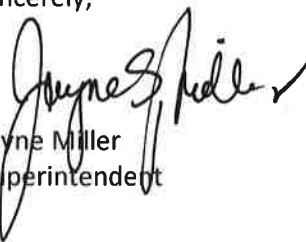
Furthermore, to impose an actual percentage during the biennium for which proposals are due three days after the MPOSC meeting makes our ability to meet your requirements impossible. MPRB has an adopted CIP that drives our decisions on what to fund with Parks and Trails dollars. Those allocations are based on park master plans that were driven by the public. It will be impossible to change them by September 9, and therefore we are being set up for failure in meeting even the first benchmark.

In light of the recent significant reductions in bond funding, capital dollars are at a premium. Further reductions are dangerous. MPRB already spends considerable non-capital funds connecting people to the outdoors. What we need is to ensure a high quality experience once they are there. What we need is to transform the park system—according to our community-driven master plans—to include venues that people of color representing the whole population of Minneapolis want to use. What we need is capital dollars, not a mandate to meet an arbitrary percentage on a particular pillar.

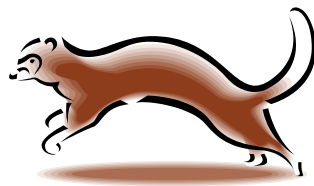
On Tuesday, I will ask the MPOSC members to hold off on making a decision on your recommendation. I will ask them to implement a requirement that some percentage of our 2018-2019 allocation be dedicated to the "connecting people" pillar, but that, as a first step, they hold off on having a percentage mandate. I will ask them to direct Metropolitan Council staff to take more time to empirically analyze the effect of this proposal and to give the implementing agencies more time to begin to incorporate these new rules into our annual budgeting process.

This proposal expects too much too quickly. We believe the percentages in your proposal will actually do more harm than help to the people of color that already use or want to use the Minneapolis regional parks.

Sincerely,



Jayne Miller  
Superintendent



## WOMEN OBSERVING WILDLIFE MINNESOTA

September 5, 2016

Mr. Dean Johnston, chair  
Metropolitan Council Parks and Open Space Commission  
Via email [deanajohnston10@gmail.com](mailto:deanajohnston10@gmail.com)

*Re: 2016-175, Minimum percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy fund spending to connect people and the outdoors*

Dear Chair Johnston and MPOSC commissioners,

Regarding business item 2016-175 Women Observing Wildlife-MN would like to make the following recommendation. Relevant documentation and justification follow on pages 3-5 of this letter.

### RECOMMENDATION

#### *Brief background*

According to MN DNR's *Public Expectations for Minnesota's Parks and Trails Legacy*, Minnesota citizens' primary reasons for supporting the Legacy Amendment are clean water and preserving nature. The overarching vision of the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan focused on protecting natural resources and creating a next generation of stewards.

The past six years spending of Legacy dollars has been unbalanced and biased toward new development and hard surfaces, including trails (to connect people to the outdoors). Business item 2016-175 proposes a 5-10% minimum of Met Council's portion of Legacy dollars be spent on connecting people to the outdoors. If done correctly, with education and programming to help people make a *visceral* connection to nature this can help "create the next generation of stewards". However, if minimum percentages for Legacy funds are to be set, then the lack of spending on natural resource restoration and conservation must be corrected as well.

*Amending the Regional Parks Policy plan*

WOW-MN suggests an amendment to the RPP requiring a minimum spend, 69% of Met Council Legacy dollars for conservation, maintenance and restoration of natural resources as laid out in Table 1 below. We also recommend eliminating the 5<sup>th</sup> pillar of “new development” as this is not part of the Legacy Parks and Trails plan. The percentages are justified based on a review of current spending and restoration related dollars (\$1500/acre) requested by Ramsey county in their most recent parks plan to do natural resource-related work.

Table 1:

**PROPOSED SPENDING PARKS & TRAILS LEGACY FUNDS PER PILLAR**

	CONNECT TO OUTDOORS	ACQUIRE LAND, CREATE OPPORTUNITIES	TAKE CARE OF WHAT WE HAVE/NATURAL RESOURCES	PARTNER	ELIMINATE
ALL AGENCIES	10%	20%	69%	1%	
	examples: nature programs, "I can camp", marketing, education	buy land and habitat	restore and improve degraded natural resources, rehabilitate and repair current trails/infrastructure	collaborate with other agencies	building new is outside the scope of Legacy, there are other sources of funding, e.g. bonding, federal grants for construction & transportation networks

*Justification*

Amending the RPP to require a minimum spend on natural resources falls well within the scope of the RPP, e.g. Finance strategy 3 (spend in a manner that conforms to the statewide plan) and the responsibilities of MPOSC to recommend amendments to the RPP.

**BACKGROUND--PARKS AND TRAILS LEGACY PLAN**

The Minnesota Legislature directed the Parks and Trails Legacy planning effort to be a “collaborative process”. More than 1,000 people across the state participated in regional workshops, and another 1,500 unique visitors participated in the Citizin.org website. The following themes related to natural resources and parks and trails spending emerged<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> MN DNR, Parks and Trails Legacy Plan, 2011.

Minnesotans are truly passionate about nature and parks and trails, “most voters cited reasons such as clean water and preserving nature as their primary reasons for voting “yes”<sup>2</sup> for the Legacy Amendment. In terms of an overarching vision, most participants focused on protecting natural resources and creating a next generation of stewards<sup>3</sup>. (Emphasis added) Participants advocated for a balanced, pragmatic approach to using Legacy dollars, and want an interwoven network for themselves and for our ecosystems.

The Parks and Trails Legacy Plan identifies four strategic pillars:

1. Connect People and the Outdoors
2. Acquire Land, Create Opportunities
3. Take Care of What We Have: *“High-quality natural areas and water resources must be preserved and, in areas where they already have been degraded, they should be restored”*. (Emphasis added)
4. Coordinate Among Partners.

#### LEGACY PARKS AND TRAILS SPENDING 2010-2015

The chart below (Table 2) contains 2010-2015 Legacy parks and trails spending as reported by the Legacy advisory committee<sup>4</sup>. The chart shows the three fund recipients: metro regional parks & trails (Met Council), Greater MN regional parks & trails, and state parks & trails (MN DNR). It shows allocation of spending to the four strategic pillars (as laid out in the 25 year Legacy parks and trails plan) and a fifth pillar, “new development”. Note: this pillar is not part of the Legacy plan.

The bulk of the past six years’ monies have been spent on new development including Met Council’s 49% spend on trails, swimming areas and visitor centers. Additionally, 33% of Met Council’s spend under the pillar of “take care of what we have” has been more construction (parking lot renovations and nature center expansion) rather than restoring natural resources and maintaining habitat. Natural resources (also under “take care of what we have”) has been grossly underserved. For example in *Metropolitan Council Parks & Trails Legacy projects FY 2016-2017*, “manage and restore natural resources equates to just 2.97%<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> MN DNR, Parks and Trails Legacy Plan, *Public Expectations for Minnesota’s Parks and Trails Legacy*, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee, *Celebrating six years of Legacy parks and trails success, fiscal years 2010-2015*, <http://www.metrocouncil.org/Parks/Publications-And-Resources/Celebrating-6-Years-of-Legacy-Parks-and-Trails-Suc.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> Updated Metropolitan Regional Park System Prioritized Project List for Parks and Trails Fund Fiscal Years 2016-2017, updated March 2015, <http://metrocouncil.org/Parks/Publications-And-Resources/Metropolitan-Regional-Park-System-Prioritized-Proj.aspx>

Table 2:

2010-2015 Legacy Parks & Trails percent spending per "pillar" (category) <sup>6</sup>								
Agency	Pillar 1: connect to outdoors	Pillar 2: acquire land create opps	Pillar 3: take care of what we have, incl. natural resources	Pillar 4: partner	(Pillar 5: new development)	Total millions	Annual in millions	Total percent
Met Council	3%	13%	33%	1%	49%	\$93.50	\$ 18.70	99%
Greater MN P & T	0%**	25%	13%	1%	61%	\$32.00	\$ 6.40	100%
DNR P & T	17%	9%	53%***	1%	20%	\$92.50	\$ 18.50	100%
	**currently not an authorized spending category		Examples: reconstruct paved trails and parking lots, beach renovation, expansion of nature center, ***trail renov.		examples: trail development, transportation grants, new swimming area, shelters and showers			

**MET COUNCIL’S 2040 REGIONAL PARKS POLICY PLAN (RPP)**

Throughout the 2040 RPP are references to “protecting natural resources that are the foundation of prosperity (p6)”. On p26 the RPP states, “natural resource restoration and protection is a key objective in the Regional Parks System “. “ Finance – strategy 3 states, “ensure Parks and Trails Legacy Funds are spent in a manner that conforms to the statewide Parks and Trails Legacy Plan” (p87).

Yet, close to 80% of Met Council, spending of Legacy funds have been and are being spent on construction, not restoration and protection.

**MPOSC ROLE**

“The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, appointed by the Council, uses its expertise to advise the Council on the review of regional park and trail master plans, grants for land acquisition and capital improvements. It also provides recommendations on updates and amendments to the Regional Parks Policy Plan”, (p19 of the RPP).

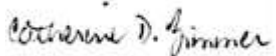
<sup>6</sup> Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee, *Celebrating six years of Legacy parks and trails success, fiscal years 2010-2015*, <http://www.metrocouncil.org/Parks/Publications-And-Resources/Celebrating-6-Years-of-Legacy-Parks-and-Trails-Suc.aspx>



We believe these comments provide adequate justification to amend Met Council's Regional Parks and Trails plan to include a minimum spend (69%) of Legacy dollars on natural resource conservation, protection and restoration.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,



Catherine D. Zimmer  
Executive director

CC: MPOSC members  
Emmett Mullin, Met Council parks  
Jon Commers, Met Council  
Rep. Erin Murphy and Rep. Dean Urdahl, House Legacy committee  
Sen. Richard Cohen, chair Senate Finance committee