

Community Development Committee Report

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of February 24, 2021

Subject: Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Review
File No. 50224-1

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan.
2. Require Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, prior to initiating any new development of the regional park, to send preliminary plans to the Environmental Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division.
3. Advise the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board to implement the comments in the Analysis for Natural Resources and Transit.

Summary of Committee Discussion/Questions

Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst, presented the staff report to the Community Development Committee at its February 16, 2021 meeting.

Council Member Vento asked whether access issues have been addressed, noting the contentiousness of previous planning processes around Upper Harbor Terminal, and underscoring the importance of community engagement. Kelly responded that the master plan details how Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, the City of Minneapolis and their partners have engaged residents of North and Northeast Minneapolis and others throughout the planning process.

The Community Development Committee voted unanimously to approve the proposed actions.

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Report

For the Community Development Committee meeting of February 16, 2021

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Summary of Committee Discussion/Questions

Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst, presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission at its meeting on February 4, 2021. Adam Arvidson and Emma Pachuta, both from the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB), were in attendance and responded to questions.

Commissioner Moeller referenced the message sent to Commissioners just before the meeting from Ann Laughlin of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis. The message expressed concern that the "Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan fails to protect the high-quality natural resources along the Mississippi River... and does not preserve natural areas for habitat." Kelly acknowledged having read the message and appreciated the expressed desire to protect natural resources. He noted that the master plan proposes the transformation of a highly developed, industrial area to one that restores and protects natural resources and provides for recreational access in an area not well served with parks and trails.

Arvidson also expressed appreciation for the comments from the Audubon Chapter and acknowledged the importance of the Mississippi River flyway. He noted that this part of the city and riverway is currently "hard-armored" and that the master plan calls for re-naturalizing the area.

Chair Yarusso asked whether the master plan was the appropriate document to detail specific habitat needs and designs, to create or enhance wildlife habitat, citing Halls Island as an example. Arvidson responded that, at this scale of planning, MPRB has not fully articulated the habitat design or management plan at Above the Falls Regional Park. He noted an example of an approved Legislative-Citizens Commission on Minnesota's Resources (LCCMR) project that will restore habitat and native mussels to the Mississippi River and its banks within the park boundary, which he said demonstrates the spirit of what MPRB intends to do throughout Above the Falls. Pachuta added that MPRB does not own most of the land in the Above the Falls Regional Park boundary at this time, so it would be premature to develop detailed plans for many portions of the park.

Commissioner Harris raised similar questions to those noted in the message from the Audubon Chapter including whether the master plan seeks to re-green or naturalize the park corridor, expressing that she does not see that goal in the plan. She also

asked for clarification about the third proposed action. Kelly responded the third proposed action encourages the implementing agency to address comments made by staff in master plan review and pointed the Commission to pages 26 and 27 in the business item.

Council Member Atlas-Ingebretson asked whether it would be possible to increase the amount of park space in certain parts of this regional park to better accommodate COVID-era best practices in recreation spacing (e.g., separated bicycle and pedestrian uses, one-way traffic), to provide more space for wildlife and consider the establishment of edible forests. Pachuta responded that space is limited at the regional park and Upper Harbor Terminal in particular. Arvidson cited the East Bank Trail as an example where space constraints only allow a single multi-use trail corridor. The potential for wider trail spacing will be taken into consideration after regional park land assembly takes place, which could take years or decades.

Chair Yarusso noted the Commission could consider adding a fourth proposed action that speaks to some of the topics Commissioners are raising, if they so choose.

Commissioner Theisen noted the inherent conflict in planning for constrained spaces like this and that there will always be challenges in accommodating both wildlife and humans in parks. He noted the situation is not made for an absolute one way or the other.

Commissioner Harris reiterated the idea of adding a fourth proposed action that was specific to the Mississippi River flyway. Commissioner Moeller suggested that, if the Commission was interested in a new proposed action, it should reflect MPRB's commitment to developing flyway-sensitive lands going forward.

Kelly reminded the Commission of its and the Council's review of the Mississippi Gorge Regional Park Master Plan in the fall of 2019 ([2019-316](#)) and noted the associated business item only included the equivalent of the first two proposed actions here even though Mississippi Gorge is also in the Mississippi River flyway. Kelly added that he believes the Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan consistently expresses MPRB's dedication to restoring and protecting natural resources and habitat of the future park space.

With one abstention, seven Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commissioners voted in favor of recommending the proposed actions. No Commissioners voted to oppose the proposed actions.

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: February 4, 2021

For the Community Development Committee meeting of February 16, 2021

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of February 24, 2021

Subject: Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Review File No. 50224-1

MPOSC District, Member: District D, Lolita Davis Carter

Council Districts, Members: District 7, Robert Lilligren; District 8, Abdirahman Muse

Policy/Legal Reference: Minn. Stat. § 473.313; *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* Planning Policy – Strategy 1

Staff Prepared/Presented: Colin Kelly, AICP, Planning Analyst (651-602-1361)

Division/Department: Community Development/ Regional Planning

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan.
2. Require Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, prior to initiating any new development of the regional park, to send preliminary plans to the Environmental Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division.
3. Advise the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board to implement the comments in the Analysis for Natural Resources and Transit.

Background

Above the Falls Regional Park is located near the center of the Regional Parks System (Figure 1). The regional park surrounds and includes 2.75 miles of the Mississippi River in Minneapolis (Figures 2 and 3). The park extends from the Plymouth Avenue Bridge on the south end of the park to the Camden Bridge on the north end. In Minneapolis, this part of the Mississippi River is known as the "upper river."

Roughly 64 acres of the 140 upland acres (45%) within the park boundary is currently under Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) ownership through fee title or easement. In addition, MPRB is working toward an agreement with the City of Minneapolis to assume ownership of roughly 20 acres of the Upper Harbor Terminal property as parkland.

Above the Falls is one of a series of regional parks that encompass the entirety of the Mississippi River's reach through Minneapolis. To the north of Above the Falls is North Mississippi Regional Park. To the south are Central Mississippi Riverfront, Mississippi Gorge and Minnehaha regional parks.

As with other regional parks along the Mississippi River in Minneapolis, Above the Falls Regional Park is comprised of distinctly named park units, some connected by linear park features and trails. These existing park units form the foundation of the Regional Park and will benefit from the implementation of the master plan.

The Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan (Plan) will guide parkland acquisition, park development, and management for the areas along both sides of the upper Mississippi riverfront.

The Plan is based on two earlier plans adopted by MPRB: *Above the Falls: A Master Plan for the Upper River in Minneapolis* (2000) and *RiverFirst: A Park Design Proposal and Implementation Plan for the Minneapolis Upper Riverfront* (2012). It is also based on extensive public engagement over many months. The Plan was updated to reflect the previous plans and other evolving opportunities and priorities and illustrates how land acquisition and parks development can create new destinations for park visitors, expand access to the river and enhance natural resources.

The Plan casts long-term park goals centered on an exceptional recreational and environmental resource: the Mississippi River. Above the Falls Regional Park will be a catalyst for the revitalization of the upper river areas by creating a framework of recreation and restored ecological function.

Unlike the original master plan for Above the Falls, the current Plan is exclusively a park plan. It has been closely coordinated with the City of Minneapolis but does not address land use guidance which is under the jurisdiction of the City. The Plan is aspirational as well as practical and strategic, intended to guide land assembly, park development, and park operations and maintenance activities for the next +/- 15 years.

Land uses in the upper river corridor have evolved since western settlement in response to resource availability, market forces, technology and changing forms of transportation. Until the past 20 years, the constant thread across 140 years of change was to leverage the Mississippi River as a transportation resource in support of an upper river industrial economy. The area was first developed with lumber milling, foundries, breweries, and some agriculture to capitalize on its location just upstream from St. Anthony Falls. As rail transport matched river transport in the late 1800s, rail yards and support facilities were located on both riverbanks above the falls and new rail bridges were constructed across the river. Lumber milling and foundries gave way to metal recycling, retailing, technology, and industrial storage.

Today, MPRB has acquired a significant amount of riverfront parkland, developed several park units on both sides of the river and extended West River Parkway to Ole Olson Park. Many industrial uses continue within and outside the regional park boundary while other formerly industrial structures adjacent to the park are being adaptively reused. Technology, entertainment, and design businesses are moving to the upper river bringing new jobs and property investment with them. The current state of land use transformation can be expected to continue for decades.

The Plan adopts the RiverFirst parks vision for the area and returns to the model championed by Horace Cleveland at the creation of the Minneapolis park system: to secure public access to natural amenities such as lakes and rivers by surrounding them with parks, and to allow economic development to evolve independent of, yet strengthened by, the amenities that parks create. The Plan's bold vision seeks to better serve North and Northeast Minneapolis residents, creating new recreational opportunities within this majestic river corridor.

RiverFirst is a long-term vision for transformation of the Mississippi River in Minneapolis beyond its historically industrial roots to address contemporary opportunities including new forms of recreation that engage the river, ecological stewardship, mobility, and a green economy that employs residents. Within this sweeping vision is a set of design recommendations for phased parks development along the upper Mississippi River.

Upper Harbor Terminal, a 48-acre former barge terminal facility owned by the City of Minneapolis, has been an area of significant focus more recently (Figure 4). Upper Harbor Terminal closed in 2014 and

the City has determined that some of the land will be available for redevelopment as a park. The redevelopment vision includes new development oriented to the river, extension of West River Parkway, creation of linear green space, reshaping of shoreline, habitat enhancements, and the creation

Figure 1: 2040 Regional Parks System Plan Map (2020), Above the Falls Regional Park location

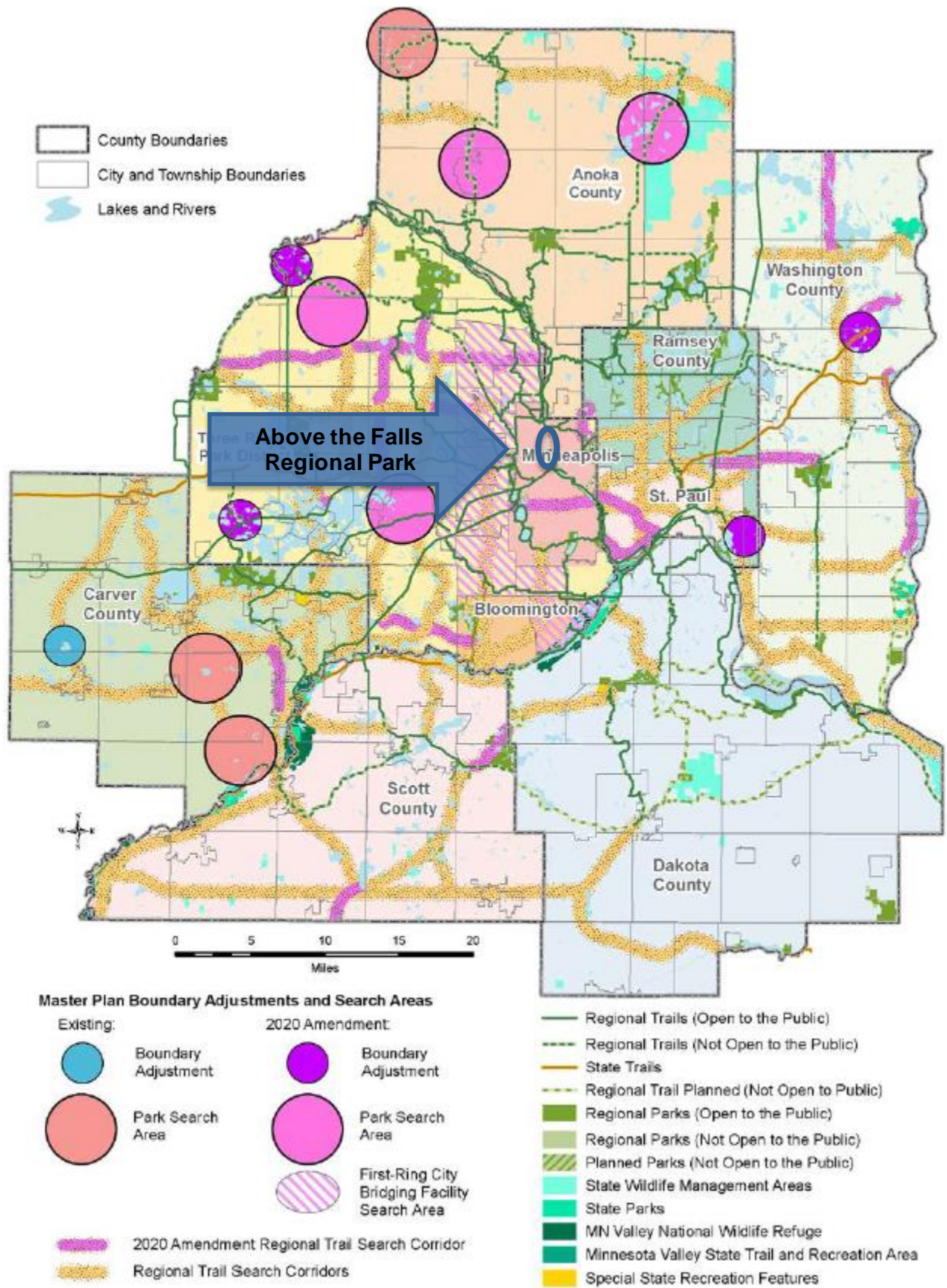
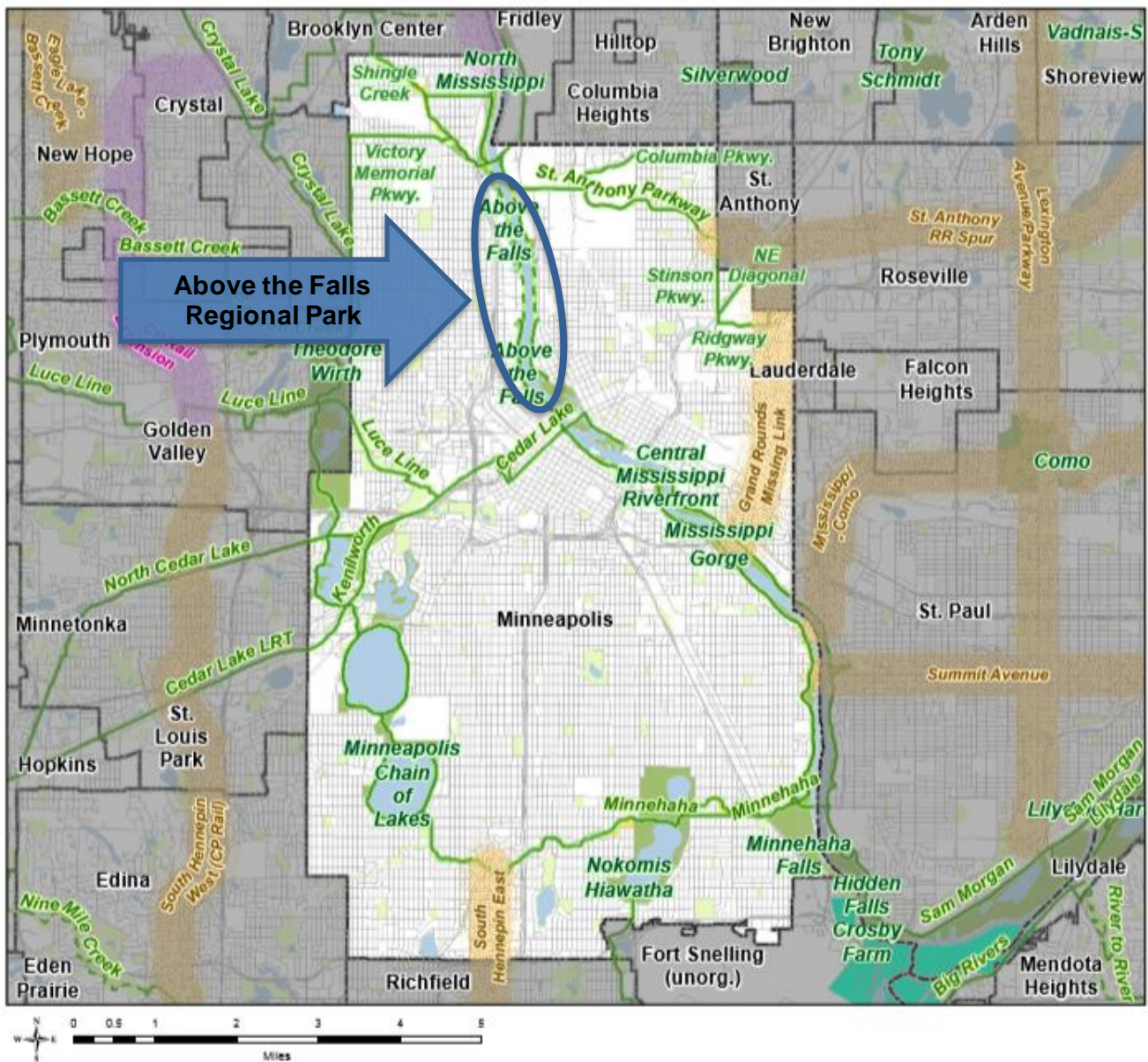


Figure 2: Regional Parks System, City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County



Regional Parks

- Existing
- In Master Plan
- Planned Parks and Reserves

Regional Trails

- Existing Regional Trails
- Planned Regional Trails
- Regional Trail Corridor Land

Regional Park Search Areas and Regional Trail Search Corridors

- Boundary Adjustments
- Search Areas
- Regional Trail Search Corridors
- Regional Trails - 2040 System Additions

- Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge
- State Parks
- State Wildlife Management Areas (Publicly Accessible)
- Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA)
- Other Parks and Preserves
- Existing State Trails
- Street Centerlines (NCompass)
- Lakes and Major Rivers

Figure 3: Above the Falls Regional Park Existing Park Components (MP Figure 2.2)

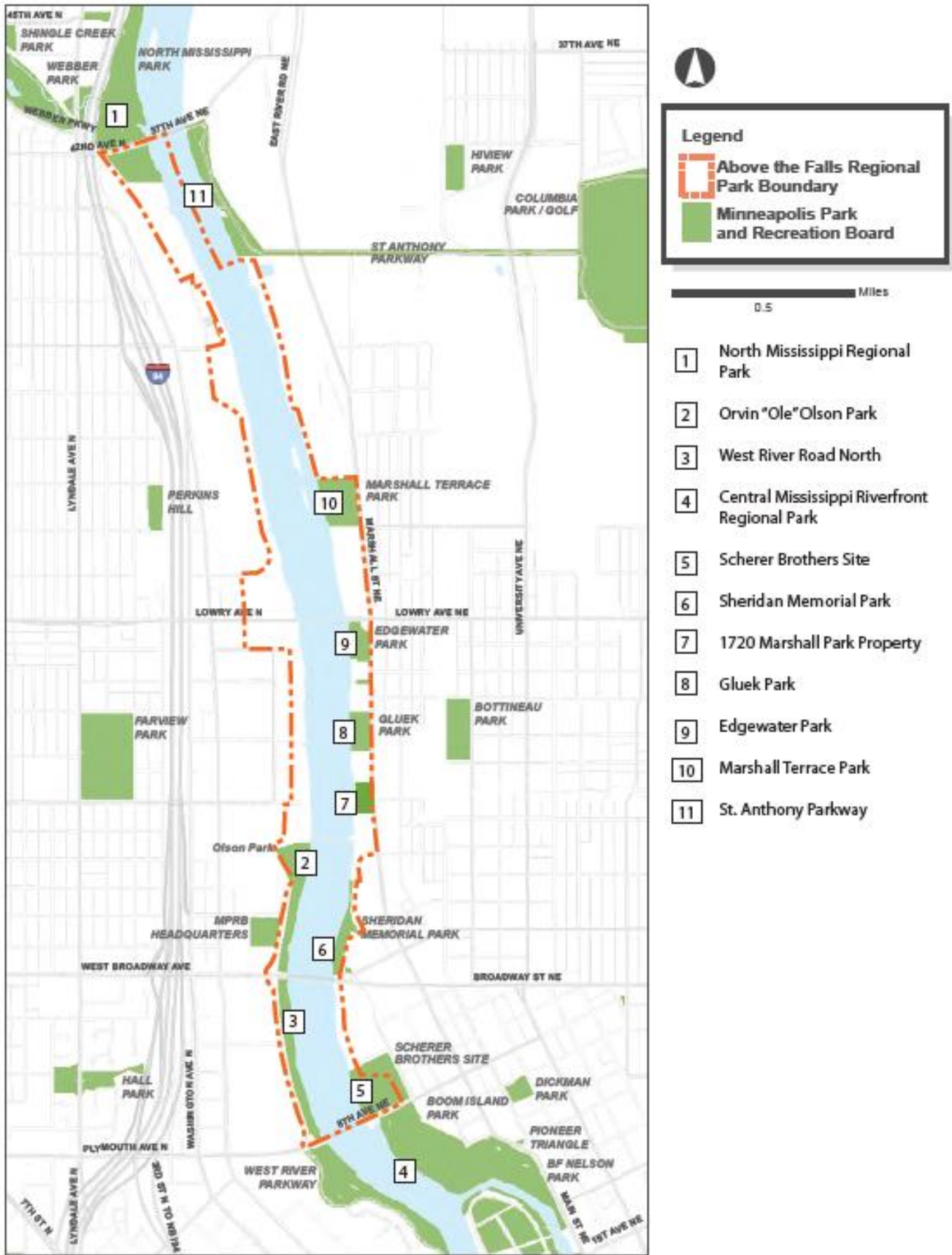
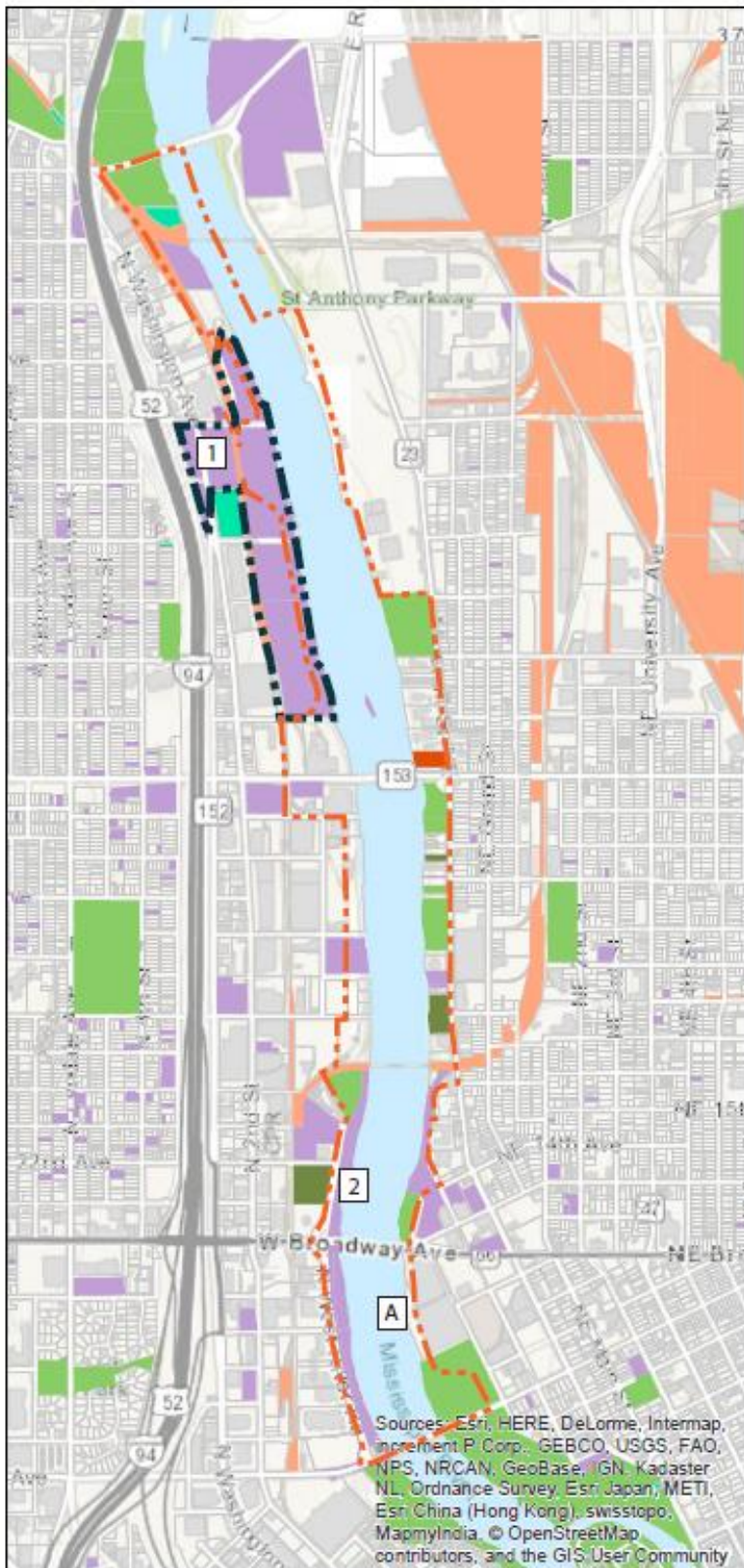


Figure 4: Public Land Ownership and Upper Harbor Terminal, 2019 (MP Figure 2.4)



Legend

- — — Regional Park Boundary
- Private Parcel
- MPRB Non-Parkland Use
- Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- Mississippi Watershed Mgmt. Organization
- Municipal Property
- Railroad
- State Property
- Upper Harbor Terminal

Existing Publicly-owned Facilities

- 1 Upper Harbor Terminal- City of Minneapolis
- 2 Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board HQ

Existing Trail Easements

- A Graco, Inc.

Sources: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), swisstopo, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

of signature gathering spaces. The City approved the Upper Harbor Terminal Development Concept Plan in March 2019.

Implementation of the overall regional park master plan will be a long-term, incremental process requiring patience and consistent policymaking. Property and easement acquisition for parks and trails will require the ongoing cooperative efforts of MPRB, the City of Minneapolis, private landowners, non-profit partners and the Metropolitan Council.

Eventually Above the Falls Regional Park will connect North Mississippi Regional Park and Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park creating a continuous regional park setting along the upper Mississippi River, including park facilities, trails, riverfront access points, and habitat and water-quality enhancements.

Rationale

The Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, including Planning Strategy 1, Master Planning, and other Council policies, as described in the attached Analysis.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Plan advances the Thrive outcome of Livability by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, which enhances quality of life in the region. The Plan also advances the Thrive outcome of Equity by tying preferred development concepts to community engagement outcomes that are tailored to underrepresented groups.

Funding

The Plan estimates \$168,201,200 in acquisition costs and \$16,000,000 in development costs. Together, acquisition and development costs are estimated at \$184,201,200.

Because of the Regional Park's urban setting and the ambition expressed through the Plan to transform the upper river corridor from private land to public park, the activity of land assembly will be an ongoing effort.

The Plan estimates the market value of public, non-MPRB park inholdings to be \$17,254,100 and privately held park inholdings to be \$150,947,100. Together, the market value of inholdings make-up the \$168,201,200 estimate.

The Plan acknowledges the challenges of estimating project budgets for many of the park development concepts in Above the Falls Regional Park because they are long-term goals, the designs are conceptual, and the projects are sited on land yet-to-be-acquired.

In 2012, MPRB invested in schematic design of several projects within the RiverFirst vision. Since then, MPRB has updated budgets for projects that are planned for the near future, including Upper Harbor Terminal (est. \$12,000,000 cost) and Graco Park (est. \$4,000,000 cost). The projected budgets will cover project costs including administration, design and engineering, surveying and testing, construction, and contingencies.

MPRB's development of the Regional Park will rely extensively on partnerships. These partners continue to contribute funding for land acquisition, remediation, and park development within the Regional Park:

- City of Minneapolis
- Minneapolis Parks Foundation

- Mississippi Watershed Management Organization
- Hennepin County
- Metropolitan Council
- U.S. Department of Transportation grant programs
- Federal and State Agencies that assist with land and water conservation and park development

Approval of the Plan does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. The acquisition and development costs based on this Master Plan may be awarded through the Parks Acquisition Opportunity Fund, Regional Parks Bonding Program, and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund Program. Further Council action is required to program and authorize state and Council funds available for Regional Parks Implementing Agencies.

Known Support / Opposition

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board unanimously adopted Resolution 2019-424, a Resolution Approving the 2019 Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan, on January 8, 2020. There is no known opposition to the Master Plan.

To date, several letters of comment have been received as part of the planning process, including letters from:

- St. Anthony West Neighborhood Organization
- Friends of the Mississippi River
- GAF Corporation
- Above the Falls Citizen Advisory Committee, the MPRB designated Community Advisory Committee for the Regional Park master planning process

In general, these letters focus on the City's land-use planning efforts. Where they do reference parks planning, comments generally are supportive of the Above the Falls Park Plan's retention of principles from the 2000 Above the Falls Plan, including continuous parks and trails along the river, improved access to the river for all, and integrating environmental stewardship with park development.

Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that master plans for regional parks address the eleven items detailed below.

Public Engagement and Participation

Community engagement has been an integral component of the Above the Falls Regional Park planning process. While this Plan has its foundation in the 2000 master plan, it has been shaped significantly by the RiverFirst vision for the upper river.

The RiverFirst vision substantially informs the Plan, particularly in terms of parks development recommendations and through the overarching idea of recreation within a functioning ecological framework. RiverFirst emerged from an international design competition hosted by MPRB. The goal was to reinvigorate community energy and imagination around the upper riverfront. In the spring of 2011, MPRB established the Minneapolis Riverfront Development Initiative (MRDI) as a special project to transform the winning proposal from the Minneapolis Riverfront Design Competition to a visionary plan and implementation strategy for development of parks and open space along the upper river. The RiverFirst design team refined the vision through extensive community engagement anchored by three stakeholder committees (Steering, Technical and Advisory) which hosted six large public meetings. The design team and MRDI representatives also met with over 100 individuals in key communities and half as many organizations with relevant expertise and regulatory oversight.

Additional MRDI/RiverFirst engagement included the following:

- A community input survey completed by more than 600 people.
- Promotion and participation in more than 30 community events throughout Minneapolis.
- Three additional public meetings held in association with the City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Riverfront Partnership.
- A website documenting competition entries as well as all public outreach and participation.
- More than 40 presentations and meetings with neighborhood associations, community-based non-profit organizations, agencies and other stakeholder groups; seven paid part- and full-time “youth ambassador” interns represented the MRDI at more than 35 community events.

Following this engagement process and a standard 45-day comment period, the Board approved the RiverFirst vision on March 14, 2012, and directed staff to use RiverFirst as a basis for the Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan.

The Above the Falls planning process was a collaboration among several agency departments and groups, including the following:

- Staff from MPRB, the City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development department, and the City of Minneapolis Department of Health.
- The Above the Falls Citizen Advisory Committee, a standing committee since 1999 that represents neighborhoods, businesses, organizations, and other stakeholders affected by the Above the Falls plan.
- The Riverfront Technical Advisory Committee, a long-standing staff group that guides and coordinates planning and implementation along the river.
- The Minneapolis Riverfront Partnership, which facilitated public forums and assisted with outreach to stakeholders.

Above the Falls planning outreach activities in 2012 included the following:



- Between June and December, each of three large public forums were attended by approximately 70-80 people.
- Web postings and informational articles in community newspapers.
- More than 60 outreach meetings with stakeholder groups (community organizations, churches, schools, seniors, etc.).
- At least one outreach meeting conducted in Lao and at least one conducted in Spanish.

Draft Above the Falls plan documents were presented for public review at the third public forum in December 2012. MPRB solicited public comments on the Above the Falls Regional Park master plan during a 45-day comment period in June-July 2013.

After Upper Harbor Terminal ceased operation and the Saint Anthony Falls Lock and Dam was closed in 2015, engagement about the future of the Upper Harbor Terminal site continued. An emphasis was placed on outreach to North and Northeast Minneapolis residents, especially inclusion of diverse races, ethnicities, income classes, ages, abilities and national origins.

Appendix B of the Plan, spanning 202 pages of text, is a full compilation of community engagement efforts between 2015-2018.

Below are comments typical of those received during the Plan process:

- People want to **experience** and **access** the river
 - Continuous and looping trails with connections to neighborhoods
 - Boat access and gathering places, picnic shelters, etc.
 - Amenities and active destination points at major urban nodes
 - Recreation activities for all ages (walk, bike, ski, fish, swim)
 - Safe parks, “eyes-on-the-street,” and surrounding activity at all hours
- People want to **restore** and **improve** the river
 - Natural and open spaces with restored habitat for ecological health
 - Native plantings and gardens
 - Clean water, stormwater management and shoreline restoration
 - Mitigate impacts of Asian carp and other aquatic invasive species
 - General concerns about proximity of existing industry to parks
- People want **equitable** development
 - Equitable distribution of park access points and park development
 - Design for a diverse population to access the public health benefits of parks
 - Benefits to North and Northeast Minneapolis
 - Draw regional park visitors while respecting existing neighborhoods and zoning
 - Careful, phased implementation using a wide range of funding sources

Partner Engagement

The Plan was developed by MPRB with a coordinated planning effort with the City of Minneapolis and the designated Developer (e.g., United Properties, THOR Companies, and First Avenue Productions). Community engagement and interagency coordination through the RiverFirst Initiative, the Above the Falls Small Area Plan, and Upper Harbor Terminal planning efforts were instrumental and included:

- The General Public
- City of Minneapolis
- Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- Minneapolis Riverfront Partnership

- Hennepin County
- Juxtaposition Arts
- Mississippi Watershed Management Organization
- University of Minnesota
- Friends of the Mississippi River
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Minnesota Historical Society
- National Park Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Equity Analysis

The Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan is rooted in equity as the fundamental goal is to provide parks and access to water in an area of the City that currently lacks these opportunities. Areas around the park in North and Northeast Minneapolis have high poverty rates, a higher than average rate of negative health issues, and a high percentage of minority and youth populations. Transforming the land from industrialized shoreland to ecologically rich, publicly-owned parkland will improve the quality of life in an underserved urban area and have profound benefits for residents and visitors.

The Regional Park will address a serious regional recreational deficiency. The residents of North and Northeast Minneapolis have advocated for more public land and green space along the river. Based on the Hennepin County 2010 Survey of the Health of All the Population and the Environment survey, perceptions of walkability and sense of community were lower among north Minneapolis residents compared to residents in other parts of the city. Adults living near the Above the Falls project area were more likely than residents elsewhere in the city to report fair or poor health (20.0% vs. 10.6%); be classified as obese (30.3% vs. 18.7%); and fail to meet moderate exercise guidelines (27.6% vs. 21.5%). Households in these communities were more likely to include children (27.7% under age 18 vs. 20.3%) and members of ethnic minorities [African American (35.4% vs. 16.7%) Asian (10.5% vs. 5.5%); and multi-racial (4.8% vs. 3.3%)]. In addition, 50% of survey respondents felt that additional parks would improve their health.

The Regional Park will provide amenities for some of the region's highest concentrations of impoverished and minority populations. The short-term goals are for individual projects to support affordable and easily accessible opportunities for outdoor recreation where they will make an immediate positive impact. The long-term benefits are that the park will contribute to sustainable regional growth, support private investments, and foster a healthier and more livable urban environment beyond its physical boundaries. As noted in the City of Minneapolis's Above the Falls Master Plan Update, the existing mix of land uses along the upper riverfront are not capitalizing on the riverfront's potential for recreational amenities and ecological value. Many adjacent neighborhoods struggle with disinvestment and lack of positive economic activity.

While the Plan focuses on transformation of the currently industrialized river, it is important to understand how brief that industry, and all Euro-American history is, when compared to the time that Indigenous peoples spent around the river. The land on which Minneapolis now sits is in the heartland of the Dakota people. To acknowledge the significance of indigenous people's past, present, and future along the river, the Plan recommends further study and interpretive planning that respects and fosters understanding of the deeper history of the area. As MPRB seeks to forge new connections with the river, there is much to learn from the stewardship of the Dakota and Ojibwe People.

The Above the Falls area is part of a network of culturally and spiritually significant sites that include lands outside of Minneapolis, the Falls (St. Anthony Falls downtown), the Bdote, or confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers, and the banks of Bde Maka Ska. Comprehensive interpretive planning can help establish an understanding of history and create consistent messaging to create a memorable narrative. Interpretive planning can also be an engaging tool that helps form a program for building a relationship with the river, which can help guide park design. Through art, communications, food, programming, and more, the layers of meaning can expand the parks ability to meet the needs of those seeking historical, cultural, recreational, and arts-based experiences. Respectfully acknowledging the history, including that which is challenging and difficult, will help Above the Falls Regional Park appeal to a wider audience that is inclusive in terms of age, ethnicity, culture, abilities, and access needs.

The river was and continues to be an important transportation route for economic purposes and a crossroad for cultures. However, Above the Falls Regional Park encompasses an area that epitomizes the negative impact of urban and industrial environments on natural systems and communities. The Mississippi River was foundational to the Dakota and other Indigenous cultures for millennia. From that time to the banishment of the Dakota people from their homeland, to the neighborhoods broken apart by the Interstate in North Minneapolis, and to the heavy industry that damaged the health of the river and the nearby communities, looking backwards is an important part of shaping the future. As the industrial era passes, and the places for people are once again emerging, it is imperative that they be places of inclusion that honor the past and present cultural diversity of Minneapolis.

Demand Forecast

Demands on parks and recreation facilities continue to intensify. Park and trail usage is expected to increase as the population grows and as the trail network expands. According to the Metropolitan Council Regional Population Forecast, the population in the metropolitan area is expected to increase substantially in the next 10-20 years. Further, Minneapolis is expected to grow 15% by the year 2030 to 439,100, up from the 2010 census of 382,578. With an increasing population comes increasing park visitation. According to the Metropolitan Council, use of regional parks and trails increased 9% between the years 2005 and 2020. This increase is in addition to the almost 10% increase in regional park use from 1995 to 2005 and a 12% increase in regional trail use within this same time period.

When the Regional Park is fully implemented, visitors who start in the park will be able to travel south through several other regional parks, along the entire length of the Mississippi River in Minneapolis and on to the regional park system in Saint Paul. Above the Falls Regional Park users will also be able to connect to regional trails which are part of the Grand Rounds National Scenic Byway, including trails associated with St. Anthony Parkway and Victory Memorial Parkway, as well as make connections to trails in Anoka County and the Three Rivers Park District. It is because of this connectivity that an examination of the annual use of the adjacent regional parks and trails (Table 1) can help to provide a picture of the type of visitor demand anticipated for Above the Falls Regional Park.

Table 1: Annual Estimated Visits per year, Regional Park System units near Above the Falls Regional Park

Annual Estimated Visits per year	2011	2016	2019
North Mississippi Regional Park	209,700	422,100	355,400
Shingle Creek Regional Trail	119,800	156,100	148,600
Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail	614,000	651,400	443,700
St. Anthony Parkway Regional Trail	219,300	212,700	260,000
Cedar Lake Regional Trail	381,400	455,800	512,800
Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park	1,626,600	2,182,400	3,564,600
Mississippi Gorge Regional Park (MPRB)	1,035,900	1,068,900	1,717,600

However, it is important to recognize that existing parks and trails within Above the Falls are not currently continuous, and this has inhibited public access and visitation.

It is also important to recognize the role Above the Falls Regional Park plays in the regional system for the north metro area. Anoka County residents can use the Anoka County Mississippi River Regional Trail to reach Above the Falls from the cities of Columbia Heights, Fridley, Coon Rapids, and Anoka. In Hennepin County, residents using Shingle Creek Regional Trail and Twin Lakes Regional Trail can reach Above the Falls from Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center.

While Above the Falls Regional Park will draw visitors from all over the metropolitan area, it is informative to examine the demographics of the communities who live and work in the immediate vicinity of the park. Using the traditional park service area model, analysis was conducted to see how many people live and work within convenient walking distance (0.5 mile), biking distance (1 miles) and driving distance (5 miles). These residents and workers are anticipated to use the park most frequently.

Boundaries and Acquisition

Above the Falls Regional Park comprises roughly 375 acres of Mississippi River and its banks along a 2.75-mile stretch through north and northeast Minneapolis.

The southern boundary is shared with the Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park. The northern boundary is shared with the North Mississippi Regional Park and St. Anthony Parkway Regional Trail. The east and west boundaries are edged by urban development.

One hundred forty (140) acres of the park (37%) are upland and 235 acres (63%) are river surface (during normal river elevation). Minimally, the park boundary has been established to provide for the dimensional needs of shoreline habitat and linear recreation (trails and parkways). In addition to these basic linear demands, the boundary broadens where opportunities exist to provide for larger park spaces at regular intervals along the river. Where possible, the park boundary has been located to align with existing property boundaries and streets. However, there are also instances when the park boundary dissects a given property (such as Upper Harbor Terminal), which will prompt adjacent redevelopment. In all cases, the boundary has been located with an understanding of infrastructure demands and adjacent redevelopment potential.

Because Above the Falls Regional Park is an urban-infill park, acquisition of additional park land will occur incrementally over time, depending on funding and as purchase and easement opportunities arise through MPRB's engagement with willing sellers.

Roughly 64 acres (or 45%) of the 140 upland acres within the Above the Falls Regional Park boundary is currently under MPRB ownership through fee title or easement. In addition, the MPRB is working toward an agreement with the City of Minneapolis to assume ownership of roughly 20 acres of the Upper Harbor Terminal property as parkland.

MPRB is actively pursuing additional land assembly and park development within Above the Falls Regional Park. While land assembly efforts are often private discussions, the Upper Harbor Terminal is an example of one that is public. Active park development efforts include 26th Avenue North Overlook, Graco Park, Upper Harbor Terminal and others.

The MPRB approaches land assembly by building long term relationships with property owners, negotiating land purchases with willing sellers, and considering eminent domain as a mechanism of last resort. The MPRB routinely partners with other agencies and organizations, including the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization and Metropolitan Council in funding the purchase of fee-title land ownership or easements.

Stewardship Plan

All the land within the Above the Falls Regional Park boundary has been previously developed. Many of the parcels have structures on them at the time of acquisition, which require demolition prior to park development. And, a significant majority of land acquisitions demand some level of environmental remediation. The conditions faced in Above the Falls Regional Park of prior industrial development are somewhat unique among parkland in the Twin Cities regional park system. Prior industrial development often results in extraordinary onetime costs in preparation for park development not experienced in rural park settings.

The purchase of the Scherer Bros. site was a rare opportunity to add a significant, free-standing parcel to the regional park. For the most part, acquisition of regional park land is expected to continue through the purchase of small parcels, incrementally over many years. MPRB's strategy for park development is to first assemble large, contiguous or interconnected areas. MPRB plans to hold and maintain land until park development is feasible, as it has in the past. Currently MPRB owns non-park property at 1808, 1812 and 2220 Marshall Street NE along the east bank. These are maintained as vacant lots with no public park use or programming.

In 2012, MPRB acquired the property at 1720 Marshall St. NE. The building and site are well suited to a light-industrial use. The current MPRB north-side maintenance facility, at Victory Memorial Parkway and 45th Ave N, is remote and has outgrown staff needs. MPRB intends to use the 1720 property as a maintenance facility for approximately ten years. Planned improvements for this use are limited to building upgrades, stormwater management BMPs and, potentially, accommodating public access to the riverbank. When adjacent properties have been acquired to create a contiguous stretch of park land, the parcel at 1720 will be included in park development plans.

Conflicts

Above the Falls Regional Park exists in a context of Minneapolis neighborhoods with a broad mix of existing uses. The park is compatible with and, in many cases, a benefit to existing uses. This portion of the Mississippi River inherently has conflicts considering the current railroads, public infrastructure, utilities, and development uses. We anticipate that there will need to be continue dialogue with community and agency partners as MPRB acquires additional park land in the defined areas. This is likely to happen on a case-by-case basis, because implementation of Above the Falls will occur piecemeal over a very long period. MPRB will engage with affected parties as acquisitions and implementation projects become possible. The proposed regional park boundary was developed in consultation with stakeholders and the City of Minneapolis to ensure compatibility with future economic development.

The Xcel Energy Riverside Generating Station at the northeast corner of the regional park is a property where industrial operations, safety concerns and security needs conflict with the park uses shown in the

2000 Above the Falls Master Plan. Based on discussions with Xcel staff, public access along the riverbank at the plant is not feasible due to security and operational concerns. Public access along the east edge of the plant's property, on the west side of Marshall St. NE, is constrained by existing Xcel buildings and other structures. The Above the Falls Regional Park boundary has been adjusted from its original location to exclude the Xcel Riverside Plant riverbank property from the Regional Park.

Development Concept

Above the Falls Regional Park is envisioned as a continuous parks and trails system along both banks of the Mississippi River, offering recreational amenities within a framework of restored ecological function. Above the Falls Regional Park is intended to provide public access to the Mississippi River; enhance the habitat, structure and function of the river and its environs; and become integrated with the broader Minneapolis Grand Rounds. To achieve this, several actions are needed, including the acquisition of additional park land; development of parks with new recreational and public-water access amenities; continued habitat creation and riverbank restoration; construction of new parkways and trails; and robust recreational programming and operations.

Current recreational uses within Above the Falls Regional Park include community gathering in parks; trail use by walkers, runners, bicyclists and in-line skaters; and water-related activities such as boating (motorized and paddling) and angling. Continued recreational development within Above the Falls is planned for both sides of the river.

The park concept proposes new parks as well as continued improvement to existing parks. Community gathering spaces of varying sizes are proposed in several locations. Each will have typical furnishings and amenities including benches, open picnic shelters, drinking fountains, etc. Larger gathering spaces will have public restrooms as funding allows.

Several key improvements are proposed for the west bank. A signature gathering space is proposed for the Upper Harbor Terminal. As shown in the 2006 Above the Falls Phase I plan, modest improvements are proposed at Ole Olson Park: a river overlook, a small multi-purpose building and a catwalk connection to the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad bridge when it is converted to trail use. This catwalk concept is echoed in the RiverFirst vision.

On the east bank, several gathering areas are available at existing parks. These will be enhanced with a new veteran's memorial at Sheridan Memorial Park and at new riverside parks between Broadway and Lowry, and at Graco Park with its beach and carry-in boat launch.

Expanding the system of multi-use trail loops that exists in the regional parks adjacent to the north and south is a focus of the 2000 Above the Falls Plan, the 2006 Above the Falls Phase I plan and RiverFirst; this Regional Park plan reflects that priority.

Approximately 2 miles of the total 6.3 miles of proposed multi-use trails currently exist. Continuous trail development is the long-term goal on both sides of the river, but this depends on significant land acquisition.

Ultimately, trails will connect to North Mississippi Regional Park, Victory Memorial Regional Trail, St. Anthony Parkway Regional Trail and the Anoka County Mississippi River Regional Trail to the north. On the south end of the park, trails will connect to the Central Mississippi River Regional Park through Boom Island Park and along West River Road North.

In addition to providing trails along the river, future trail loops must also make river crossings at regular intervals. Existing bicycle lanes connect across the river at the Plymouth, Lowry, and Camden/42nd Ave bridges. The Plymouth Ave. bridge was recently enhanced with amenities for pedestrians and

bicyclists. The park development concept proposes that the existing BNSF railroad bridge be converted to a pedestrian/bicycle connector to add an additional crossing. This bridge project will depend on significant partnership with the City of Minneapolis.

Graco Park

In 2010, MPRB purchased the former site of the Scherer Lumber Yard, 11.4 acres of riverfront property with a storied history of lumber milling. The site is located at the east bank of the river bounded by Plymouth Avenue, Sibley Street NE and Graco Manufacturing. The property was cleared, and soils remediated in 2011. In 2012, the Metropolitan Council approved a revised regional park boundary through the site to establish 7.8 acres as regional parkland with the remainder held out for supportive redevelopment. The park boundary was determined through a conceptual design process conducted with the RiverFirst Initiative. In 2019, the MPRB made an agreement with Graco Industries under which the MPRB received a riverfront trail easement on neighboring Graco property and a substantial donation toward park development in exchange for Graco receiving development rights on the non-regional park portion of the Scherer property and park naming rights.

The development concept for Graco Park is to establish a primary riverfront recreational destination with a diverse mix of attractions including a pebble beach, park pavilion with refreshments and visitor services, water recreation outfitting, lawn, strolling paths, a regional bike path, and a nature walk across the length of Hall's Island accessed by pedestrian bridges across the newly created channel. The park and island are designed to substantially enhance riverfront migratory, nesting, and feeding habitat. Park design improves river flood conditions through substantial regrading.

In addition to everyday use, Graco Park will be a passive-space adjacent to Boom Island Park during crowd events. Pedestrian and bike paths will connect the two park spaces via the shoreline under the Plymouth Avenue Bridge.

Sheridan Memorial Park

Sheridan Memorial Park is a 3.5-acre riverfront site located on the former Grain Belt Brewery campus. The park is designed as an important recreational attraction that serves surrounding neighborhoods as well as regional visitors. Like all park destinations within the Above the Falls Regional Park, Sheridan Memorial Park is interconnected up and down the riverfront with pedestrian paths and riverfront habitat. The park development concept includes a dramatic public art installation and river overlook plaza (constructed in 2014) memorializing actions of non-violence and peace within conflicts of war, nature-based play, regional bike path, lawn, strolling paths, a play court, stormwater treatment measures, and shoreline habitat enhancements.

The memorial was the first phase of park development completed in 2014. Some preparatory site work including soil remediation, grading and curbing were completed in late 2018. The next phase of construction in 2019 includes the play area, circulation paths, a shelter, basketball court and lawn.

East Bank Trail

The East Bank Trail includes pedestrian and bike connections on the east bank of the Mississippi River through the full length of Above the Falls Regional Park from Plymouth Avenue on the south to the Camden Bridge on the north. Where space allows, pedestrian and bike trails will be separated facilities. The far northern segment of the trail from St. Anthony Parkway to the Camden Bridge has been in place for several decades. Unless land use changes allow for a riverfront trail through the Xcel Energy's Riverside Power Plant from St. Anthony Parkway south to 28th Street NE, this segment of trail will be directly adjacent to Marshall Street NE. The remainder of the trail, except for short segments around existing development will be located away from Marshall Street and toward the river.

In 2017, the most recent segment of trail was constructed between Plymouth Avenue and the BNSF rail bridge through Graco Park, the Graco easement, Sheridan Memorial Park and former rail and utility easement. The trail was partially funded with a million-dollar grant from the Transportation, Community, and System Preservation Program of the US Federal Highway Administration.

Upper Harbor Terminal Redevelopment

The redevelopment of the 48-acre, city-owned Upper Harbor Terminal offers a significant opportunity for both the MPRB and the City of Minneapolis. In 2013 when MPRB created the majority of the Above the Falls Plan, the Upper Harbor Terminal was still an active barging terminal. MPRB defined some recommended adjustments to the 2000 Above the Falls Plan, including additional park area at the southern end of the site. However, the City's 2013 Above the Falls Master Plan Update defined an alternative boundary based on their assessment of redevelopment options. The two plans highlighted the challenge of designing either park land or development in isolation on such a narrow strip of land. In 2015 the City and MPRB embarked on a more collaborative process to examine the full possibilities of the site.

After significant site analysis and conducting various studies, the team released a draft concept for public review in the summer of 2018. MPRB's goal was to identify a park boundary that would allow implementation of most of the community requests for park space, but also to accommodate adjacent development that would help activate the park areas and enhance security. While the concept purposely showed limited park features, such as parkway and trail circulation, staff listed the types of amenities that the park areas could support based on the space provided.

Community members provided mixed feedback on the draft concept. Many people requested more park and public space. Others, however, prioritized employment and housing opportunities. While the draft concept originally included 15.5 acres of park space and some private development between the parkway and the river, many community members were concerned that the riverfront would not feel truly public. MPRB worked with the City and developers to revise the proposed park boundary (Figure 5). The revised park boundary resulted in 19.5 acres of MPRB-owned parkland and consolidated the significant park area by the Dowling Avenue access corridor.

Figure 5: Regional Park Boundary at Upper Harbor Terminal Area (MP Fig. A.1)



MPRB will initiate a process to create conceptual designs for the park during the next stage of planning. The areas shown above are generally designed to accommodate the following types of uses:

The linear riverfront park area will accommodate:

- A parkway, and bicycle / pedestrian circulation with routes separated by buffers if need be
- Shoreline restoration at preferred slopes (around 4:1 typically) except for where the river walls will need to stay to accommodate adjacent private development
- Variation in width which allows for seating, viewing, and other recreational nodes
- Signage, art, and other interpretive and educational elements

The larger park area from the end of Dowling Avenue to the river (#1 on the plan) can provide:

- An immediate and direct link from the neighborhood to the river
- An area with good service access and visibility for pop up attractions such as markets, food trucks, and events
- Park amenities such as fountains/water play and gardens, athletics or an event space, children's play or youth recreation such as skateboard routes, Urban agriculture and educational gardens
- Group picnicking and gathering areas
- Possible public park building

At the south end of the site, the expanded park area may allow for:

- Riverfront beach area
- Water access with possible parking and support facilities

All areas can incorporate site specific practices such as stormwater management and habitat restoration.

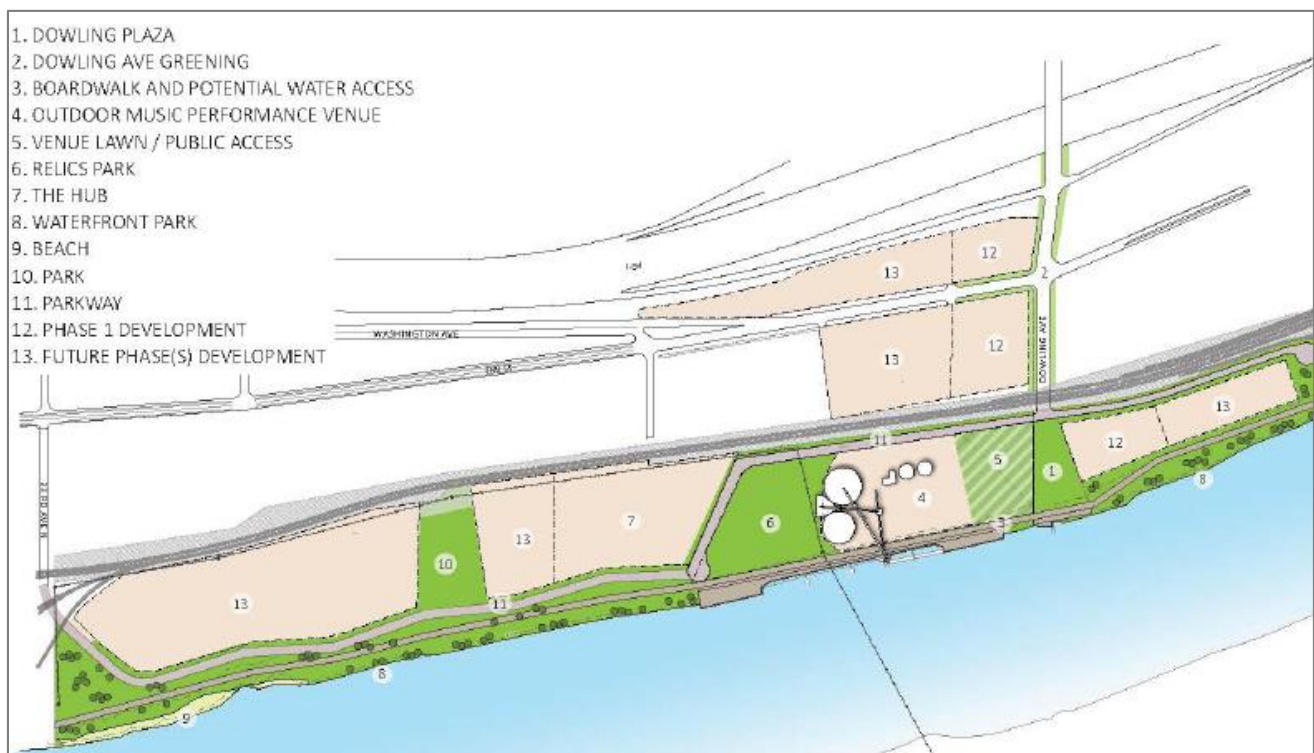
The private redevelopment portions of concept plan are currently being generally reviewed and developed. The concept plan generally includes the following types of private redevelopment (See Figure 6 for the concept plan approved by the City in March 2019; some areas have been updated as of December 2019 including the public park locations):

- An outdoor music performance venue;
- A mix of development uses such as residential, office, hospitality, and light industrial; and
- Parking to support the development.

Development of the remaining parcels would occur at a later phase of implementation; however, staff and the development team will further explore potential concepts in the next phase of planning.

Following approval of the park boundary, MRPB will begin the engagement and design process specifically to determine the overall park concept, the first phase of improvements, and a general plan for additional phases of work.

Figure 6: City of Minneapolis Upper Harbor Terminal Concept (MP Fig. A.2)



Northeast Riverfront Parks

The three existing riverfront park units on the east bank form a strong foundation for Above the Falls Regional Park. Over the long-term this plan envisions a continuous public park along the east bank. The MPRB continues to pursue acquisition of identified private parcels when available and, when not available for acquisition, to secure easements to allow the expansion of park uses along the river, especially trails. In the short-term, the focus in existing parks on the east bank will be to maintain what exists and to improve river access. Planned enhancements include public water access points and trail improvements. As new park land is acquired, park development will include separate trail connections for bicyclists and pedestrians, restoration of riverbanks and ravines, access to the riverbank for pedestrians and carry-in boaters, surface water management features and river overlooks. As described in the City’s Above the Falls Master Plan, existing restaurants along Marshall St. NE are a

benefit to park users and will be encouraged to remain. MPRB will seek trail easements where opportunities exist to make key connections.

Trail Loop System

Central to the recreational concept for Above the Falls Regional Park is the creation of trail loops circumnavigating segments of the river. The trail loop vision includes continuous walking and biking trails along both banks of the river (roughly 6.3 miles of trail corridor) in addition to new or enhanced river crossings. The goal will be to separate walking from biking and other wheeled recreation using two parallel paved pathways. The ability to implement separated trails in all cases will be dependent on space availability, site constraints, and sometimes funding availability. River crossings with enhanced pedestrian and bike experiences are envisioned for the Broadway Avenue and Plymouth Avenue bridges while a new crossing is envisioned for the BNSF rail bridge.

Currently, 2.1 miles of the 6.3 miles of trail corridor have been constructed. On both the west and east banks, trails are in place between Plymouth Avenue and the BNSF rail corridor. While the west bank is constructed to achieve the goal of separated trails, the east bank trail is a combined-use trail due to space and funding constraints at the time of construction. Much of the east bank corridor, however, has the opportunity for conversion to separated trails with future reconstruction.

As in the past, expanded trail development and river crossings will be opportunistic; dependent on land assembly efforts and bridge investments. It is likely that a combination of dedicated trails and on-street segments will be the norm for some time to come until the full land assembly/trail development vision is achieved. Collaboration with the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, and some property owners will be essential to creating alternate routes in the intervening years before full build-out of trails can be achieved.

Accessibility

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board is committed to ensuring that park users are connected to the land and each other. The neighborhoods adjacent to the Above the Falls master plan area have historically been subject to inequities in city planning and development, including allowing industrial development along the river rather than green space and the construction of I-94 that cuts off North Minneapolis from the river. This plan commits to increase access to the river and park land for residents in North and Northeast Minneapolis. To achieve this vision, the MPRB *2007-2020 Comprehensive Plan* identified the following three strategies that are specifically related to accessibility and special needs populations:

- “Build or renew facilities to meet or exceed standards for accessibility.”
- “Ensure recreation opportunities are available for persons with disabilities.”
- “Identify and reduce physical and financial barriers to participation in programming.”

In 2018, MPRB approved the MPRB American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Action Plan (2018-2020) to guide the MPRB ADA Transition planning. The action plan is a living document to assist all departments with tasks that range from capital planning, to rehabilitation of existing facilities, and from recreational programming to communications. The document identifies current best practices and standards and lists a range of action-oriented tasks. As much of the park land will be new, the Above the Falls Regional Park is an opportunity to model park planning and development that sets the stage for inclusive parks and park programming.

In developing new park elements within Above the Falls Regional Park, care will be taken to design facilities that meet requirements for the ADA, as well as principles for universal accessibility. Some existing facilities do not meet ADA, such as the steps to the riverbank at Marshall Terrace Park and Sheridan Memorial Park. These will be rehabilitated to meet ADA as resources allow.

User costs, too, can be a barrier to park use for individuals or groups. Most Above the Falls Regional Park facilities will not require a fee for public use, consistent with MPRB policy throughout its system. Amenities such as multi-use trails, community gathering spots and public water access points are generally provided free of charge. Some of the amenities proposed for Above the Falls Regional Park could require minimal user fees, for example potential boat-storage at the Scherer Bros. site, or event fees to reserve gathering spaces. MPRB offers users the option of purchasing a permit or using meters for parking, and reduced fees arrangements are available for recreational programming.

Public Services

Much of Above the Falls Regional Park can be developed without extensive investment in non-recreational public infrastructure, services and utilities. Within its context of a fully developed urban core, there are sufficient existing roads, electricity, gas, water, and sewer services to implement the vision.

The proposed extension of West River Parkway is the sole major infrastructure project necessary to spatially define and provide access to the park. Land acquisition is the major challenge to implementation. Incremental progress can be made by leveraging existing public connections and by prioritizing acquisition or easements of those parcels that exist between existing network nodes. For example, between 31st Ave N and 33rd Ave N the Lowry bridge offers a western portal designed to accommodate future West River Parkway. Early phases of West River Parkway can focus here and at the 48-acre Upper Harbor Terminal area owned by the City.

At Upper Harbor Terminal, the private economic development projects planned for areas adjacent to Above the Falls Regional Park will require significant extension of nearby infrastructure and services at the district scale. This is consistent with the 2000 Above the Falls Plan already adopted by the City and MPRB as long-term policy. Park design and development at Upper Harbor Terminal primarily will integrate restored river shoreline and naturalized stormwater management facilities, thus reducing reliance on storm sewer piping compared with conventional private economic development.

Operations

MPRB is responsible for providing daily and long-term maintenance and operations on park land within Above the Falls Regional Park. Most typical park maintenance activities are the responsibility of MPRB's Environmental Stewardship Division, which is charged with caring for all aspects of the physical system (e.g., mowing, park patrol, debris removal, lighting, restroom maintenance, cleaning, etc.). Solid waste such as litter or garbage is collected by MPRB staff from parks and from waste containers on a scheduled basis throughout the regional park.

Operations and maintenance expenditures throughout Above the Falls Regional Park will be funded by MPRB's annual operations and maintenance budget with supplementary funding from the State appropriations passed through the Metropolitan Council to Regional Park implementing agencies for operations.

This 2019 Above the Falls Park Plan is intended to guide park development and operations not only for existing park lands but also for potential future park land, much of which has yet to be acquired or designed. Specific operations in future park sub-areas will depend on individual park program and

development. This is a long-term prospect, and therefore it is difficult to quantify operations costs for much of Above the Falls Regional Park.

Maintenance of future trails will include mowing, trash removal, sweeping, plowing and other routine operations. Bituminous surfacing of parkway roadway and trails is anticipated to have a life cycle of 20-25 years, assuming regular sealcoating. In its Capital Improvement Plan, the Park Board will provide for rehabilitation of trail and roadway surfaces at the end of their life cycles. Maintenance costs for the parkway and trails will be determined on an annual basis as the network expands within the regional park. Currently, through an agreement with MPRB, the City of Minneapolis Department of Public Works maintains the parkway roadways and all parkway lighting, including capital replacement.

The MPRB code of Ordinances addresses use, operations, and maintenance of MPRB parkland. The MPRB Ordinances are adopted as part of the Code of Ordinances for the City of Minneapolis.

Public Awareness

The urban context of Above the Falls Regional Park will help to make the public aware of park development as it progresses. As with other parks and facilities throughout its system, MPRB will publicize and promote Above the Falls Regional Park development and programming through a variety of established channels, including the MPRB website and promotional publications as well as through community newspapers and other media. Grand openings, press releases, and integration of parks with school and recreational programs will expand awareness. As required by MPRB policy, trails and destinations within Above the Falls Regional Park will be identified by signs. Existing MPRB system maps will be updated as progress is made in extending trails within Above the Falls Regional Park.

Partner agencies and organizations continue to be an important part of promoting MPRB parks. The National Park Service, for example, conducts programs and events throughout the river corridor and on the water, and will be a critical partner in publicizing the expansion of parks and river access in Above the Falls Regional Park. The Mississippi River Trail (MRT) also designates existing road and trail corridors within Above the Falls Regional Park as vital links of its 3,000 miles of river trail, and the improvements proposed by the Plan will expand the program opportunities promoted on MRT's web site and publications.

Natural Resources

Among the goals identified in the MPRB Comprehensive Plan is the aim to "provide urban forests, natural areas, and waters that endure and captivate." The MPRB is committed to managing natural resources responsibly, connecting people to their natural environment and fostering stewardship. It also identifies a need to balance the distribution of natural areas throughout the City, giving attention to North and Northeast Minneapolis where Above the Falls Regional Park is located. Above the Falls Regional Park provides an opportunity to reclaim the region's connection to this part of the river and to provide recreational opportunities within a framework of restored ecological function.

Given the Regional Park is in an urbanized area, the site has been extensively altered over time. These activities have included river dredging and importation of fill to level and stabilize the ground. The only existing natural features within the park include the water and wetlands associated with the river. Otherwise, the land cover within the Regional Park is comprised of exposed earth/transitional land, short grasses, or altered/non-native vegetation. Although altered, the areas characterized as altered/non-native vegetation should be considered opportunities as they are the open space areas associated with the railroad corridor, Xcel Riverside Plant property, North Mississippi Regional Park, and the land surrounding St. Anthony and Columbia parkways.

Existing riverbank conditions vary considerably from re-naturalized edges to stone riprap to metal sheeting. An important aspect of the vision for the Regional Park is enhancement of the riverfront's ecological integrity by reshaping previously altered shoreline to be less severe and establishing dynamic plant communities that are composed of predominantly native vegetation. Examples of this approach already implemented include West River Parkway from Broadway Avenue to Ole Olson Park, the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization headquarters, and Halls Island.

Beyond the riverbank, most of the nearby neighborhoods are covered with buildings and pavement with more than 75% impervious cover or exposed earth/transitional land. An examination of the Minnesota County Biological Survey Native Plant Communities database shows that there are no native plant communities within the regional park boundary.

Consideration of what is at and below ground is also important. Structurally, soils on the west side of the river are relatively stable and suitable for development. The east bank, particularly in the middle section, has more problematic soils with the potential for water saturation that could add to any structural costs.

Soils contamination within the Regional Park reflects the area's urban, industrial history. Elements like hydrocarbons, ash and sawdust result from its industrial past. Contamination occurred both from a lack of historic standards on how to handle and dispose of toxic substances and from the use of unsafe fill for development.

In response to such contamination, park development projects must account for extensive remediation needs through Phase I and II testing. This has been the MPRB's practice on such sites as Ole Olson Park, Gluek Park, and the Scherer Bros. property. Since the adoption of the 2000 Above the Falls plan, MPRB has remediated 18.6 acres of new parkland within the Regional Park. Funding has been acquired through partnerships with local agencies, such as Hennepin County and the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization, as well as through Federal programs.

While the Mississippi River is a prominent feature in the Regional Park, this stretch of river is part of a much larger system. The Mississippi River drains a watershed of 1.2 million square miles that includes most of the land mass of North America. Thus, the restoration of lands and park development will have a positive but small impact on the system. Significant change in the Mississippi River itself is limited by what occurs in the watershed north of the Regional Park.

Water enters the Mississippi River in this area from several sources. Just north of the Regional Park, Shingle Creek enters the river. Bassett Creek enters just to the south. Water also flows into the river from 33 stormwater outfalls. These drain stormwater runoff from streets, parking lots, yards and buildings, bringing pollutants, organic debris, and trash along the way.

According to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, this stretch of the river is impaired with both fecal coliform and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Fecal coliform is present largely due to animal waste and septic systems and is likely associated with agricultural operations and rural development upstream. This pollutant is found at high levels at various locations and water bodies statewide. PCBs are industrial chemicals that were discontinued in the late 1970's, but still exist in residual amounts in the environment. This pollutant is found at high levels in the Mississippi River as far north as St Cloud. Together, these pollutants have negative implications for recreational use of the river and fish consumption. For example, proposed water access and swimming beaches will need to be closed during periods of acute river pollution, with adequate public notice being a key operations challenge.

The park development plan includes many areas of restored and constructed habitat which will require specialized maintenance. As in other MPRB regional parks, routine maintenance will be performed by MPRB staff, while contractors and agency partners will perform most of the unique ecological services needed in habitat areas.

Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area

The Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) is a state-designated land corridor along 72 miles of the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities Metropolitan, including the 2.75 miles within the Above the Falls Master Plan project boundary between North Mississippi Regional Park and the Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park. The master plan area is within the CA-Urban Mixed (UM) zone, which includes “commercial, institutional, and industrial mixed-use areas as well as parks and recreational areas.”

Per Minnesota Statutes, section 116G.15, subd. 1, the purpose of the designation is to:

- 1) Protect and preserve the Mississippi River and adjacent lands that the legislature finds to be unique and valuable state and regional resources for the benefit of the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of the state, region, and nation;
- 2) Prevent and mitigate irreversible damages to these state, regional, and natural resources;
- 3) Preserve and enhance the natural, aesthetic, cultural, and historical values of the Mississippi River and adjacent lands for public use and benefit;
- 4) Protect and preserve the Mississippi River as an essential element in the national, state, and regional transportation, sewer and water, and recreational systems; and
- 5) Protect and preserve the biological and ecological functions of the Mississippi River corridor.

Per State Rules MR 6106.0010 – 6106.0180, local governments in the corridor must complete a MRCCA plan as part of their comprehensive plans. MPRB works under the purview of the City of Minneapolis’ ordinances. The City is in the process of completing its zoning ordinances and they are nearly complete but have not been fully finalized. MPRB, however, was a reviewer of the City’s proposed rules during the process and we anticipate that improvements envisioned in the Above the Falls Plan will meet the MRCCA zoning requirements. The city’s finalized language and the guidance in this master plan will serve as the driving guidance for the planning, design, and implementation of existing and future park land within the MRCCA jurisdictional area.

The Above the Falls Master Plan will meet State Rules MR 6106.0010 – 6106.0180 that will include:

- The addition of park land, green space, and natural areas where there is currently none
- Restoration of the shoreline throughout the entire project area
- Increasing the addition of ecological and habitat connections
- Decreasing the amount of buildings and nonpermeable surfaces
- Any new public facilities will be consistent with best management practices and protect primary conversation areas

Consistency with Other Council Policies and Systems

Community Development – Housing (Ashleigh Johnson 651-602-1106) - The implementation of the proposed trail would require the acquisition of private residential land with existing single and multi-family housing, however the land in the proposed development area is guided as Parks and Open Space for the 2021-2030 decade. Therefore the proposed trail/park area development does not change the City’s inventory of land guided to support the development of low- and moderate-income housing

(2021-2030), and would not hinder the City in implementing its housing element or efforts to address its share of the region's need for affordable housing.

Within a half-mile there are at least five affordable housing developments, serving various household income levels at or below 30-80% of Area Median Income: 2601 Randolph St, 2632 Grand St, Saint Hedwigs, Gateway Northeast and River Run Apartments. Two of these developments would directly abut the trail. The proposed trail would directly affect various populations living in these developments—many residents have families with children, are seniors, live with disabilities and/or need supportive services at their residence. Providing/improving access to recreational (and other) amenities such as the proposed trail/park area(s) contributes to residents' overall quality of life. The engagement process detailed in the plan did a great job discussing how these groups were engaged, and affordable housing incorporation was mentioned by over 60 stakeholders throughout the engagement process.

Community Development – Local Planning Assistance (Michael Larson 651-602-1407) – The proposed minor adjustments to the regional park master plan boundary are consistent with the guiding land uses of Park that were established the Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan anticipated these boundary changes.

However, Council staff note two inconsistencies between guiding land use and the regional park master plan boundary where there are no proposed boundary changes. These two properties are not fully guided as Park:

- 2522 Marshall Street NE (PID 1002924140174); Owner: Mississippi Watershed Management Organization: Except for a portion of the property adjacent to the river, this property is guided as Corridor Mixed Use.
- 2500 and 2504 Marshall Street NE (PIDs 1002924140008 and 1002924140173); Owner: Daniel Jaros: Except for a portion of the property adjacent to the river, these properties are guided as Corridor Mixed Use.

These are not substantial policy concerns but should be resolved through a modification of the boundary or minor/administrative comprehensive plan amendment after the future release of the City's System Statement.

The Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan represents an extensive and long-term collaboration between various stakeholder groups that include the Park Implementing Agency (MPRB), the City of Minneapolis, Watershed Management Organization, and numerous other public and private entities charged with collaboration around restoration of the riverfront as a natural resource and public amenity that supports economic and community development in the adjoining neighborhoods. This is addressed extensively in the document. As such, this planning effort is consistent with, and support, all of the *Thrive MSP 2040* Land Use Policies of Orderly and Efficient Land Use; Natural Resources Protection; Water Sustainability; Housing Affordability and Choice; Access, Mobility and Transportation Choice; Economic Competitiveness; and Building in Resilience.

Community Development – Research (Todd Graham 651-602-1322) – The Park Board has identified the recent history of park visitation and the citywide population forecast. Council staff agree with the Park Board's assessment.

Community Development – Natural Resources (Cameran Bailey 651-602-1212) – Council staff recommend updating the year in which the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) project in the Above the Falls area is expected to conclude. If it already did conclude in 2012, please include the results of that

project and what implications it bears for the Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan. “At present, the MPCA is conducting a TMDL... in the Above the Falls area related to bacteria... This project is expected to conclude in **2012**” (pg. 5-8).

Council staff encourage an additional stormwater management principle that incorporates Above the Falls Regional Park’s vision to “...enhance the habitat, structure and function of the river and its environs...” (pg. 6-2). Including a stormwater management principle that prioritizes ecological restoration would be entirely complementary to the existing principles of stormwater management infrastructure (pg. 9-2).

Council staff encourage the MPRB to develop partnerships with native communities, such as that demonstrated by the Friends of the Falls in reaching out to the Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI) as part of redeveloping the Mississippi River at the Upper St. Anthony lock and dam. There are currently more mentions of “native” vegetation, wildlife, and wildlife (10) than Native American people (2 residents identifying as “Native” made public comments), the previous (and still current) residents of the Above the Falls Regional Park area. Council staff are happy to provide additional information on this partnership.

Environmental Services – Sewer (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – Require Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, prior to initiating any new development of the regional park, to send preliminary plans to the Engineering Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council’s Environmental Services Division for review in order to assess the potential impacts to the regional interceptor system.

Metro Transit – Service Development (Victoria Dan 612-349-7648) - While transit is not heavily referenced within the main body of the document, there are two items where Metro Transit’s collaboration, coordination, and review would be essential to furthering Above the Falls Regional Park’s goals and aspirations:

- “In partnership with MnDOT, MN-DNR, the City and MPRB, this program [a \$1.5 million initiative by the National Park Service] will add bicycle rental locations, facilitate transit connections to the river, improve wayfinding and enhance programming opportunities.” (pg. 2-11)
 - Efforts to enhance existing or create new transit connections to Above the Falls Regional Park should continue to be explored in coordination with Metro Transit. As the park is developed, Metro Transit staff can provide technical assistance to assess feasibility of improvements and identify issues and opportunities.
- “A proposed system of ‘Riverway Streets’ is intended to lead residents and visitors to riverfront parks... Employing a common palette of streetscape elements would identify the streets leading to and parallel with the river as a unified system... Implementation of the Riverway Street system would be a City of Minneapolis initiative supported by a wide range of agency partners.” (pg. 6-17)
 - Some “Riverway Streets” proposed in this master plan are streets where transit operates today, such as Lowry Ave and West Broadway Ave. As streetscape elements are considered for Riverway Streets, Metro Transit can provide technical assistance with regard to designs that may affect the transit operating environment, such as bike infrastructure and boulevard plantings.