

## Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Special Meeting

April 22, 2014

**Subject:** 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Discussion and Confirmation: Recommendations for Strengthening Equitable Usage of the Regional Parks System

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

**Policy/Legal Reference:** MN Statute 473.147

**Staff Prepared/Presented:** Raintry Salk PhD, Senior Parks Researcher (651 602-1669) and Jan Youngquist AICP, Planning Analyst (651 602-1029)

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

### Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council incorporate the set of policies in Attachment A into the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* which aims to enhance equitable usage of the regional parks and trail by all our region's residents, such as across race, ethnicity, class, age, ability and immigrant status.

### Background

Minnesota Statute 473.147 requires the Metropolitan Council to prepare and adopt a long-range system policy plan for regional recreation open space as part of the Council's Metropolitan Development Guide. As per Statute, the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan will:

- Identify generally the areas which should be acquired for the regional parks system
- Estimate the costs of the recommended acquisition and development

The 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan will include policies and strategies for siting and acquisition, finance, recreation activities and facilities, planning, and protection of the regional parks system. It also needs to ensure it conforms to the directives put forward in Thrive MSP 2040.

Thrive MSP 2040 includes policy direction for the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, which states that the Council will collaborate with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, regional park implementing agencies and State partners to:

- Strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents, such as across race, ethnicity, class, age, ability and immigrant status

Staff spent the last six months conducting research and engaging stakeholders to identify a set of alternative policy ideas for the Council to consider. Several activities were undertaken to identify potential policies specifically directed to enhance equitable use of the Regional Parks System. The activities undertaken include (but are not limited to): a) a large stakeholder meeting (with representatives from park implementing agencies, MN Department of Natural Resources, National Park Service and Trust for Public Land), b) one-on-one meetings (e.g., with park implementing agencies, community based organizations, Legislative oversight bodies) and c) polls with Regional Park visitors.

Staff presented a set of stakeholder driven policy ideas at the April 7<sup>th</sup> joint meeting of the Community Development Committee (CDC) and the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC). Staff presented a total of 19 policy ideas. Council and

Commission members discussed the ideas presented. The outcome of that discussion resulted in several policy ideas suggested for continued discussion.

On April 15, staff met with the Thrive Work Group, which is comprised of five Council members, to further discuss the policy ideas that emerged from the joint CDC/MPOSC meeting. The policy ideas presented, and found in Attachment A, were supported in full and recommended for confirmation.

**Rationale**

Minnesota Statute 473.147 states that the Metropolitan Council shall consult with and make maximum use of the expertise of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission in preparing the policy plan.

**Funding**

N/A

**Known Support / Opposition**

N/A

## Attachment A

### Policies Aimed to Strengthen Equitable Usage of the Regional Parks System

The policy ideas which seek to strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents, such as across race, ethnicity, class, age, ability and immigrant status fall into three broad categories: 1) funding and investment, 2) regional parks system planning and 3) convening and information.

#### *Funding and Investment*

- Create a set-aside grant program with Met Council park bonds for capital projects that specifically aim to address strengthening equitable usage of the regional parks system
  - The amount available for the program would vary from year to year
    - Based on the amount remaining after our obligated matches are met (e.g. State bond match, Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant matches)
    - Staying within our \$7 million annual bonding limit and \$40 million overall cap
- Require agencies to identify the direct impact their funding requests would have on strengthening equitable use
  - Through the use of an equity impact analysis
    - Would not to be used as a screening tool, but as a means to get agencies to think about equity in their capital projects, programming, and other Council grant funded expenditures
    - Would apply to capital improvement program (CIP) and Parks and Trails Legacy Fund (PTLF) grant programs
- Require a certain percentage of each agencies' share of their Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations be used to "connect people to the outdoors" (one of the four pillars of the 25 year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan)
  - The types of funding expenditures considered to "connect people to the outdoors" include programming, events, staff, training, among others
  - Since inception, only 3% of metro funding has been spent to "connect people to the outdoors", while 62% has gone toward acquisition and development and 33% has gone to "taking care of what we have"
    - By contrast, the DNR allocated 17% of their PTLF appropriations to "connect people to the outdoors"
- Begin Met Council staff involvement in the prioritization of grant funding for the CIP and PTLF grant funds, using equity as defined by the Metropolitan Council as a lens
  - In drafting the list of how those dollars are spent, the agencies are currently the sole responsible parties for reviewing and prioritizing their respective list

#### *Regional Parks System Planning*

- Revise the description of a Special Recreation Feature to allow a "bridging facility"
  - Could allow for a pilot project to test the waters on accommodating changing recreational preferences
  - Would allow for experimentation to try new things that attract diverse users
  - Would still need to serve a regional audience, but would not require the size commitment of a regional park (100-500 acres) or a park reserve (1,000+ acres)
- Allow and encourage the following design elements to be included in a regional park or trail master plan:
  - Amenities suited for the aging population and those with limited mobility
    - Siting amenities close to parking lots or points of access, such as picnic areas or short, looped trails
    - Providing benches at appropriate intervals

- Picnic areas suitable for emerging recreational patterns of use
  - Picnic areas that accommodate mid-sized groups of 15-25
    - Does not need to be a formal picnic shelter—could be a number of picnic tables that can be grouped together
  - Would not require an advance reservation
  - Does not replace picnic areas that require reservations—both options would be offered
- Large open ball fields that could accommodate a variety of pick-up games
- Clustering of amenities that would allow for multi-generational groups
  - Provide amenities for all ages in a centralized area
    - Such as picnic areas near playgrounds and open ball fields
- In developing a regional park or trail master plan, require regional park implementing agencies to conduct community engagement that seeks to mitigate existing racial, ethnic, cultural or linguistic barriers and includes diverse races, ethnicities, classes, ages, abilities and immigrant statuses
  - The language from the Community Engagement Plan (CEP) may want to be used here instead for consistency across Metropolitan Council plans. The current CEP draft states the following: “Engagement efforts should work to mitigate existing racial, ethnic, cultural or linguistic barriers **and include diverse races, cultures, genders, sexual orientations, and socio-economic and disability statuses**”

### *Convening and Information*

Several ideas were brought forward through stakeholder engagement that may not translate into specific policies as part of the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, but are based in the Thrive principle of collaboration. These activities will require the Metropolitan Council to provide additional funds or resources.

- Provide community engagement assistance to regional park implementing agencies to engage diverse races, ethnicities, classes, ages, abilities and immigrant statuses in developing a regional park or trail master plan
  - Several regional park implementing agencies have indicated they would need assistance to engage these audiences, at least initially
- Provide regional-level research related to changing recreational preferences and demographics
  - Expand prior efforts to include garnering information related to social class, educational status, age cohorts, disability status, etc.
- Conduct region-wide visitor survey on a more consistent basis
  - Currently only conducted once every decade
    - Systematic data collection for all regional park and trail units is costly
- Create a Met Council funded regional parks system ambassador program
  - Intent would be to build awareness of the regional parks system
    - Bringing parks to the people and people to the parks
    - Focus on enhancing participation among non-park users
- Develop an integrated web application with an activity/park finder feature
  - Currently do not have a regionally focused, centralized site that provides regional parks and trail details
    - Links provided to park implementing websites currently, which also include their other system components (e.g., golf courses, city parks, county parks, sports complexes, etc.)
- Conduct quarterly “best practices” meetings with regional park implementing agencies
  - Coupled with an integrated, multimedia platform to facilitate continuous learning, institutional memory and enhanced dialog