

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: September 2, 2014

For the Community Development Committee meeting of September 15, 2014

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of September 24, 2014

Subject: Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan Amendment and Grant Request, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

District(s), Member(s): MPOSC District D, Anthony Taylor

Policy/Legal Reference: MN Statute 473.313 and 473.315

Staff Prepared/Presented: Jan Youngquist, AICP, Planning Analyst (651-602-1029)

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

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan Amendment.
2. Authorize a grant of \$100,000 to further the design, engineering and implementation for Hall's Island within the Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan that is consistent with the amended 2014 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program.
3. Inform the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board that Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) funds are not eligible to be used for remediation of contaminated soils that may be exposed on the Scherer Park site as part of the creation of Hall's Island and the Mississippi River back channel.

Background

Above the Falls Regional Park is located along both sides of the Mississippi River between the Plymouth Avenue Bridge and the Camden Bridge in north and northeast Minneapolis. The Metropolitan Council approved the Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan in February 2002 and a master plan amendment to expand the park boundary in June 2012. In 2010, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) hosted an international design competition to address the Upper Mississippi Riverfront; which led to the winning entry known as RiverFirst. The RiverFirst vision has helped inform the update to the Above the Falls Master Plan by the City of Minneapolis, which provides policy guidance to address future land use and development, as well as an update to the Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan by MPRB. The updated Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan will be submitted to the Metropolitan Council at a future date. At this time, MPRB has submitted a master plan amendment for Above the Falls Regional Park for the development of Hall's Island, which was identified in the RiverFirst vision and was authorized by the Minnesota Legislature in 2013.

The amended 2014 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) includes \$100,000 for Above the Falls Regional Park, subject to Council approval of a master plan amendment that includes Hall's Island. MPRB has submitted a request for approval of the \$100,000 grant, in addition to the master plan amendment.

Rationale

The Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan Amendment and grant request are consistent with the requirements of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies.

Funding

The estimated cost to implement the development described in the master plan amendment for the Hall's Island portion of Above the Falls Regional Park is \$8,539,078. The amended 2014 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program includes \$100,000 for Above the Falls Regional Park, comprised of \$60,000 of State bonds and \$40,000 of Metropolitan Council bonds.

Approval of this master plan makes the remaining development costs eligible for regional parks funding, but does not commit the Council to any additional funding at this time. Future funding based on this master plan may be awarded through the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund. Council action is required to approve specific grants to the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

Known Support / Opposition

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board approved the RiverFirst vision in March 2012 and received letters of support from community groups, public institutions and partner agencies. There is no known opposition to the master plan amendment.

Analysis

The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that regional park master plans address the items listed below.

Boundaries and Acquisition

Above the Falls Regional Park is a linear park located along both sides of the Mississippi River between the Plymouth Avenue Bridge and the Camden Bridge in north and northeast Minneapolis. The regional park consists of several local parks, including Sheridan Memorial Park, Orvin “Ole” Olson Park, Gluek Park, Marshall Terrace Park and the Camden Boat Launch. The Metropolitan Council approved the master plan for Above the Falls Regional Park in February 2002 and approved an amendment to the master plan to expand the park boundary at the planned Scherer Park in June 2012.

This master plan amendment for Above the Falls Regional Park is for the restoration of Hall’s Island within the Mississippi River channel. The original Hall’s Island existed until 1965, when the channel between the island and the mainland was filled in for industrial purposes. The 4.4 acre restored island will be in the same general location as the original island, although its shape and size will be slightly different. The main goals of the island restoration are to:

- Improve biodiversity options
- Create a softer and more accessible connection to the water
- Provide a migratory flyway stopover within the urban area

The Minnesota Legislature authorized the restoration of Hall’s Island in 2013 (Chapter 114, Article 4, Section 98):

“Notwithstanding Minnesota Rules, part 6115.0190, subpart 3 or 5, item E, or 6115.0191, subpart 8, item A, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board is authorized to recreate and restore Hall’s Island or such similar island located at approximately river mile 855 on the Mississippi River, just north of the Plymouth Avenue bridge....”

Restoration of Hall’s Island will create new land within the Mississippi River. The adjacent land at the planned Scherer Park, through which a channel will be dredged for the island, is owned by the MPRB. The Metropolitan Council approved a Park Acquisition Opportunity Grant in the amount of \$1,699,992 for the Scherer site in 2010 and additional acquisition funding in the amount of \$2,898,970 was granted from the FY 2012 and FY 2013 Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations. There are no acquisition costs associated with this master plan amendment.

The boundaries of Above the Falls Regional Park are shown in Figure 1, with the general location of Hall’s Island circled in red. Historical aerial photos and attributes of the site are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 1: Above the Falls Regional Park Map and Boundary

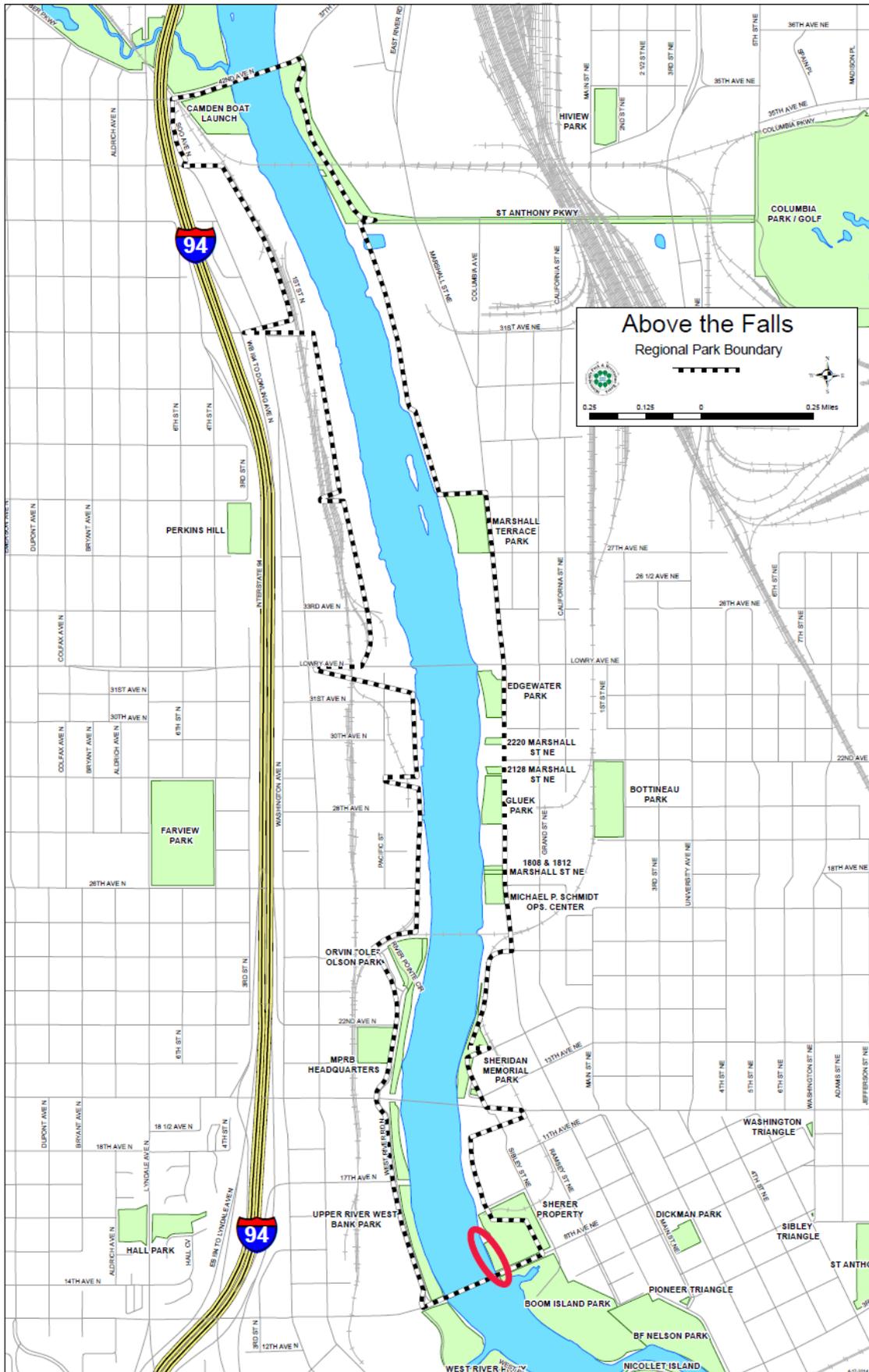


Figure 2: Hall's Island Historical Aerial Photos and Attributes

HISTORY OF SITE

CREATE UNIQUE HABITAT ZONES ALONG ECOLOGICALLY IMPOVERISHED STRETCH OF MISSISSIPPI RIVER



1938

Before 1892 - 1965 : HALL'S ISLAND INTACT



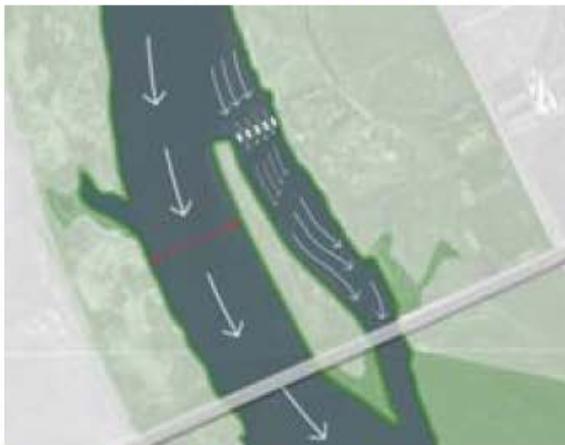
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1966-2010 : SCHERER INDUSTRIAL USE

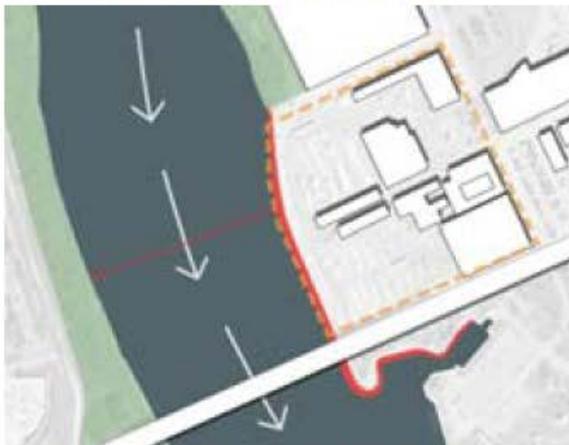


PROPOSED

PROPOSED PLAN

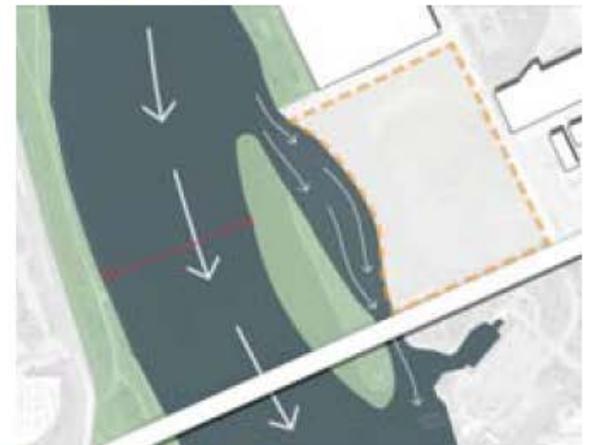


Island Provides Backchannel Habitat
Wetland Habitat along Western Bank
Access to River Edge
Narrower Navigation Channel
Migration Stopping Point along Mississippi Flyway



River Widened
Site Paved
Heavy Industrial Use
No Access to River Edge
Stormwater Runoff

Riprap Armored Edges
Sheet Piles
Harsh connection to River



Improve Biodiversity Opportunities
Create Softer Connection to Water
Provide Migratory Flyway Stopover within Urban Corridor
Maintain Existing Navigation Channel

Stewardship Plan

The primary purpose of the restoration of Hall's Island is to create habitat within the Mississippi River channel in a portion of the urban area that does not have much access to natural resource areas and is dominated by industrial uses. The site will be managed to promote native plant and animal species and MPRB will manage the vegetation on the island.

Demand Forecast

Hall's Island is a key component of Above the Falls Regional Park. It will provide a natural area for enjoying the river, and when combined with future development of the Scherer Park site, will be a regional destination with a swimming beach along the back channel of the Mississippi River. These types of amenities are not currently provided in the underserved areas of north and northeast Minneapolis. Once developed, these amenities will increase visitation to Above the Falls Regional Park. To estimate future visitation to a fully developed Above the Falls Regional Park, it is useful to compare the visit estimates of two adjacent regional parks along the Mississippi River that are similar to Above the Falls, but are fully developed and programmed.

Figure 3: Visit Estimates for Adjacent Regional Parks Along the Mississippi River

Regional Park	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Central Mississippi Riverfront	1,627,400	1,516,000	1,431,100	1,626,600	1,827,000	2,012,400
Mississippi Gorge (Minneapolis portion)	1,126,800	936,100	1,079,800	1,035,900	1,081,400	1,250,600

Development Concept

The restoration of Hall's Island and the creation of a river beach cove between the island and the future Scherer Park is a key priority in implementing the RiverFirst vision. Hall's Island will be designed primarily for habitat. It will include a variety of riverine landscapes, including floodplain forest and xeric, mesic and wet prairie. It will also include habitat features including a sand turtle beach, turtle basking logs, rock and brush nesting areas and standing snags.

Human access to the island will be provided by two bridges, one on the north end of the island connecting to Scherer Park and one on the south end connecting to the Plymouth Avenue Bridge. A pathway will run the length of the island and will be comprised of an at-grade walk as well as an elevated boardwalk. The existing lighthouse from Boom Island Park, which is located south of the Plymouth Avenue Bridge and is part of Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park, will be relocated or reinterpreted at the southern end of the island and will help retain a harbor-like feel at Boom Island Park. The design concept for Hall's Island is shown in Figure 4. The proposed design shown in Figure 4 for Scherer Park, located east of Hall's Island, is not part of this master plan amendment and will be included in the updated Above the Falls Regional Park Master that will be submitted to the Metropolitan Council in the future.

Figure 4: Hall's Island Design Concept



The exact configuration of Hall's Island will depend on hydrologic modeling. It is important to maintain the integrity of the island while also allowing adequate current to de-sediment the channel between the island and the future Scherer Park. The master plan amendment indicates that extensive study will take place to determine the best shape of the island, in order to provide this hydrologic function and augment habitat both on the island and in the river at all flood stages.

The estimated development costs for the Hall's Island portion of Above the Falls Regional Park are approximately \$8,539,078, made up of two phases, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Estimated Development Costs of Hall’s Island at Above the Falls Regional Park

Phase 1 Description	Estimated Cost
Dredge channel, dewater, form island, finish grading	\$878,383
Planting, stabilization, trees, erosion control	\$1,624,360
Contingency, fees	\$858,440
Project costs mark up	\$672,237
TOTAL—Phase I	\$4,033,421

Phase 2 Description	Estimated Cost
Grading	\$53,383
Elevated wood walk, paved walk, granite paving at lighthouse	\$454,607
Pedestrian bridges at north and south end of island	\$1,257,075
Planting, erosion control	\$191,046
Concrete bridgehead, work on existing lighthouse, utilities	\$250,000
Site features—bird blind, walls, steps, signage	\$360,338
Contingency, fees	\$1,188,265
Project costs mark up	\$750,943
TOTAL—Phase II	\$4,505,657

Description	Estimated Cost
Phase I	\$4,033,421
Phase II	\$4,505,657
TOTAL PROJECT	\$8,539,078

The MPRB has dedicated \$13 million in its Capital Improvement Program Budget (CIP) for all Above the Falls Regional Park projects through 2019.

Conflicts

The proposed restoration of Hall’s Island does not conflict with existing or proposed projects. The entire site—both Scherer Park and Hall’s Island—will be owned and operated by MPRB. The island does not currently have zoning, since it does not exist as land area, but parks are a permitted use in any zoning classification in the City of Minneapolis.

Public Services

No new public services are needed for the development concept that is outlined in the master plan. The Scherer Park portion of Above the Falls Regional Park is served by existing public and private utilities. It is not expected that Hall’s Island will be served by utilities.

Operations

The future facilities will be overseen by MPRB professional public safety, operations, and maintenance staff. MPRB Police Officers will provide public safety services. Annual operations and maintenance costs for the Hall's Island portion of Above the Falls Regional Park are estimated to be \$106,000.

Citizen Participation

The concept of Hall's Island was developed through the RiverFirst vision, which included the following interagency and community participation:

- Review and comment by the National Park Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MN Department of Natural Resources, Mississippi Watershed Management Organization and the City of Minneapolis
- More than 42 community meetings
- More than 29 "Youth Ambassador" events where MPRB staff worked with paid youth interns to host informational tables, solicit public comments and answer questions at school open houses, farmers markets and community events
- Three formal Advisory Committees which were comprised of community organization representatives, business owners, staff, and elected officials
- Extensive print, broadcast and social media information providing opportunities for comment
- Review and approval of the RiverFirst Vision document by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board of Commissioners on March 21, 2012

The update to the Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan, which will be submitted to the Metropolitan Council in the future, included an engagement process with a community advisory committee, a technical agency team and public meetings cohosted with the City of Minneapolis and the Department of Health.

As part of these processes, comments from agencies and local government with regard to Hall's Island led directly to major changes in the concept design, which are reflected in this master plan amendment. The original concept for Hall's Island included a swimming pool and hard-surfaced trails. Based on comments from the MN Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the National Park Service, MPRB changed the concept into a more nature-focused design.

The planning process for the updated Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan, which includes the Hall's Island concept, has been available for public comment for more than 45 days, based on MPRB requirements. At the time this master plan amendment was prepared, no agencies or local governments have formally commented on the updated master plan or Hall's Island specifically. MPRB will continue to coordinate with these entities throughout the detailed design and construction process.

Public Awareness

During construction, MPRB will keep the public apprised through news releases, a ground-breaking event for Scherer Park, on site signage and its govdelivery email system. Once the island has been developed, additional press releases and public announcements will be delivered, which will occur

through the MPRB website, email, mailers, newsletters and contact with local press and neighborhood groups.

Accessibility

All facilities described in the master plan amendment will be developed in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. At certain flood levels, the island will be closed for use. MPRB is engaging with the City of Minneapolis and the National Park Service to develop alternative transportation options to help visitors access the island and the remainder of the Scherer Park portion of Above the Falls Regional Park.

Review by Other Council Divisions

Community Development – Environment and Surface Water Management (Jim Larsen 651-602-1159) – This site recently underwent extensive soil remediation to remove and dispose of much of the contamination found to be present – but not all, to render the site usable as a ‘public park’. The 2010 site environmental assessment documents for the Scherer Brothers Lumber Property indicate that much of the soil in the western portion of the site – formerly a Mississippi River side channel that was filled in the late 1960’s, is contaminated with Diesel Range Organics (DRO) which may be associated with that fill, having an unknown source. The recent remediation was not designed and carried out with this current plan of re-excavating a large portion of the remediated site soils to accommodate excavation of a new river channel and construction of an adjacent island within the river in mind. It is apparent from the incorporated design cost estimates that no new clean soils are proposed to be needed to construct the island, so existing channel soils and possibly remediation site soils are intended to be utilized for its construction. It is also apparent that some of the soils that will be dredged from the river channel and/or removed from the remediation site will require off-site disposal as both demolition debris and contaminated soil.

The proposed project ‘will change or diminish the course, current, or cross-section of one acre or more of a public water or public water wetland’, and would trigger a mandatory Environmental Assessment Worksheet State Environmental Quality Board environmental review, according to Minnesota Administrative Rules 4410.4300, Subpart 27.

***MPRB Response:** MPRB has performed extensive soil remediation on the Scherer Park site. It may be possible that re-excavation of the western portion of the site to create Hall’s Island and the new Mississippi River back channel may expose contaminated soils. During the design and analysis process, MPRB will perform any necessary soil testing to determine the quality and/or contamination of soils in this area, and will mitigate soils as required to accomplish the construction of Hall’s Island and the back channel.*

MPRB intends to prepare an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) for the Hall’s Island project. Funding for the EAW will come in part from Regional Parks System funding for Above the Falls Regional Park; therefore this master plan amendment is necessary in order to begin work on the critical analysis that will inform the design of Hall’s Island. Some of the items expected to be examined through the EAW process include:

- *The effect of Hall’s Island on flood elevations upstream and downstream shorelines*

- *The presence of protected species in the river at or near the Hall's Island site*
- *The shape of the island and its effect on Mississippi River currents and sedimentation, its ability to withstand the erosive force of water and ice, and its ability to withstand seasonal flooding*
- *The effect of Hall's Island on the adjacent Plymouth Avenue bridge*
- *The ability of constructed elements on the island, including boardwalks, to withstand various flood stages*

Environmental Services – Sewers (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – No comments.

Transportation Planning (Russ Owen 651-602-1705) – No comments.

Metro Transit (Steve Mahowald 612-349-7775) – No comments.

Conclusions

1. The Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan Amendment is consistent with the requirements of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies.
2. The estimated costs to implement the master plan amendment are \$8,539,078 for development of Hall's Island. The amended 2014 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program includes \$100,000 for Above the Falls Regional Park, comprised of \$60,000 of State bonds and \$40,000 of Council bonds. Metropolitan Council approval of this master plan amendment also allows the Council to approve the \$100,000 grant. Approval of this master plan amendment makes the remaining development costs eligible for regional parks funding, but does not commit the Council to any additional funding at this time. Future funding based on this master plan may be awarded through the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund. Council action is required to approve specific grants to the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.
3. Extensive soil remediation has been conducted on the Scherer Park site; however, it may be possible that additional soil contamination may be exposed as part of the excavation of the Scherer site to create Hall's Island and the Mississippi River back channel. System Protection Strategy 3 of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* states that a regional park implementing agency may use its share of Regional Parks CIP funds for financing soil contamination remediation if specific criteria are met. One criterion is that land already under the control of a regional park implementing agency must have been acquired before Phase I Environmental Site Assessments were required. MPRB purchased the Scherer site in 2010; therefore, this criterion cannot be met, and Regional Parks CIP funds are not eligible to be used for remediation of contaminated soils that may be exposed on the Scherer Park site as part of the creation of Hall's Island and the Mississippi River back channel.