

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: June 2, 2015

For the Community Development Committee meeting of June 15, 2015

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of June 24, 2015

Subject: Land Exchange and Boundary Amendment for Rice Creek North Regional Trail, Ramsey County

District(s), Member(s): MPOSC District E, Michael Kopp

Policy/Legal Reference: System Protection Strategy 2, 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan

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

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

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the conversion of 2.48 acres of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail corridor needed for transportation purposes in exchange for 2.48 acres adjacent to the trail corridor, as described in Attachments 1 and 2, and depicted in Attachment 3.
2. Approve a master plan boundary amendment to the Rice Creek North Regional Trail corridor that removes the 2.48 acres needed for transportation purposes and adds the adjacent 2.48 acres as depicted in Attachment 3.

Background

The Rice Creek North Regional Trail is located in Anoka and Ramsey Counties and extends 14 miles from Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve in Lino Lakes to Long Lake Regional Park in New Brighton.

A portion of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail corridor includes 113 acres of the former Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant (TCAAP) site in Arden Hills. The development and operation of the 2,370 acre TCAAP site as a federal small arms ammunition plant began in 1941 and lasted until 1976. Between 1974 and 1985, the federal government started decommissioning the property. Production of special munitions continued on a limited basis until 2005. The 113-acre property for the regional trail corridor was transferred to Ramsey County in 2006 through the National Park Service as part of the Federal Lands to Parks Program.

Ramsey County purchased 427 acres of the former TCAAP site adjacent to the Rice Creek North Regional Trail corridor in 2013, which is shown in orange on **Figure A**. The existing Rice Creek North Regional Trail corridor is shown in yellow and the green area is a wildlife corridor and planned extension of the regional trail that Ramsey County is in the process of acquiring.

Figure A: TCAAP Site and Rice Creek North Regional Trail Corridor Map



The County has a Joint Powers Agreement with the City of Arden Hills that establishes a partnership with the goal of remediation and productive reuse of the 427 acre site. Redevelopment of the site is anticipated to include a mix of residential, mixed use, retail, and office space. Critical transportation improvements are needed to facilitate redevelopment. These proposed improvements require modifications to land associated with the Rice Creek North Regional Trail corridor.

Ramsey County has submitted a request to exchange 2.48 acres of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Corridor for an equal amount of land adjacent to the trail corridor. Ramsey County's request letter is included in **Attachment 1**. Since the land proposed for the transportation improvements was transferred to Ramsey County from the National Parks Service (NPS) through the Federal Lands to Parks Program, the NPS also needs to approve the land exchange. A memo from Ramsey County to the NPS outlining the benefits of the land exchange is included in **Attachment 2**. One of the key benefits is the construction of a 1,600 linear foot extension of the regional trail with grade separated crossings of Interstate 35W and Highway 10. This trail extension closes the remaining trail gap between Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve in Lino Lakes and Long Lake Regional Park in New Brighton. Full funding for design and construction of the trail extension is being provided by the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

Figure B depicts the entire extent of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail corridor. The portion of the regional trail corridor traveling through the former TCAAP site is shown in red and the area of the land exchange and transportation project is circled in black.

Figure C shows the proposed transportation improvements including an off-ramp from Interstate 35W, a roundabout, and reconstruction of County Road H and its bridge over I-35W. The southern roundabout in Figure C is located in the proposed land exchange area.

The land exchange results in a conversion of regional parkland to another use and is subject to review based on System Protection Strategy 2 of the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan. Details regarding this review are outlined in the “Analysis” section at the end of this staff report.

Figure B: Rice Creek North Regional Trail Corridor Map

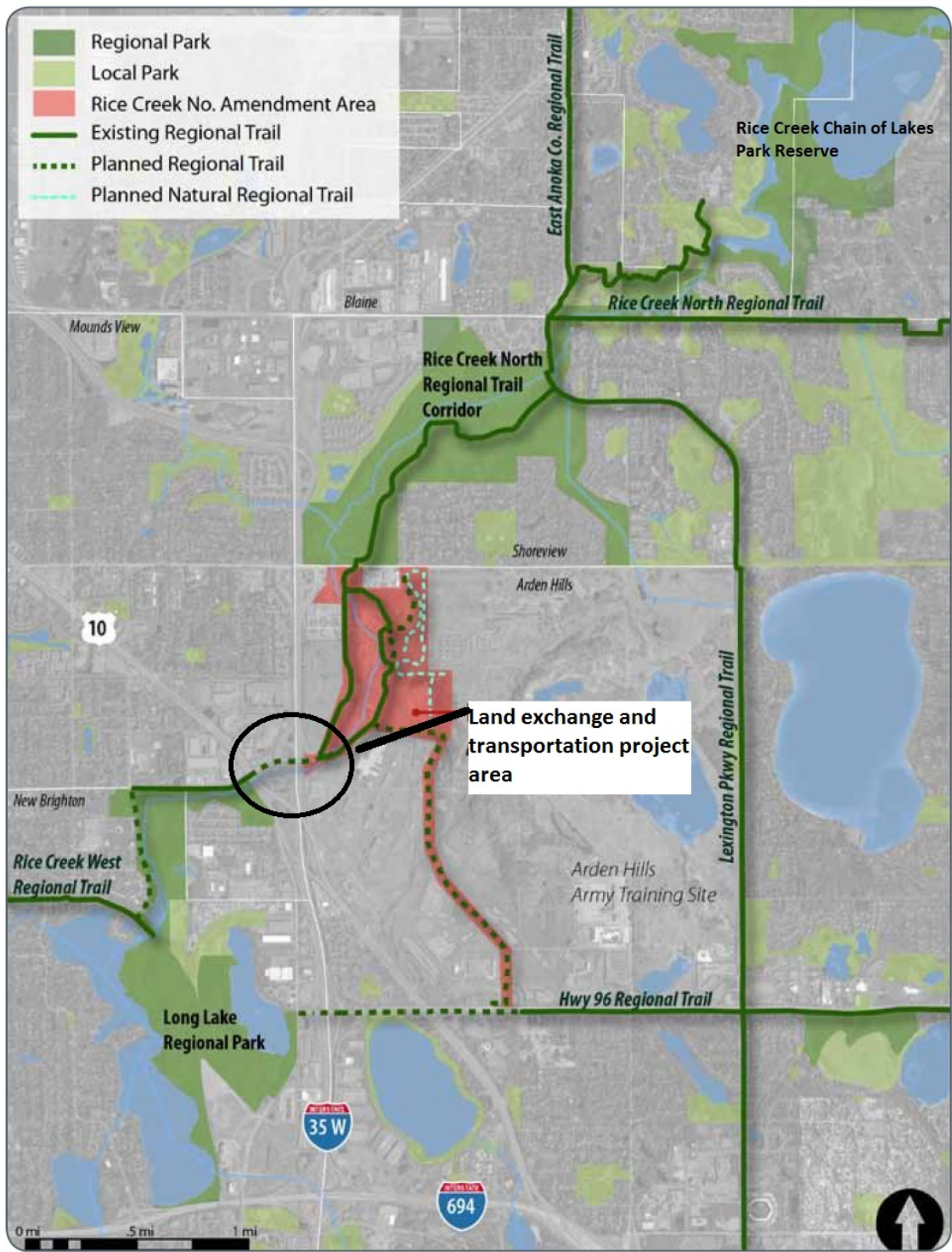
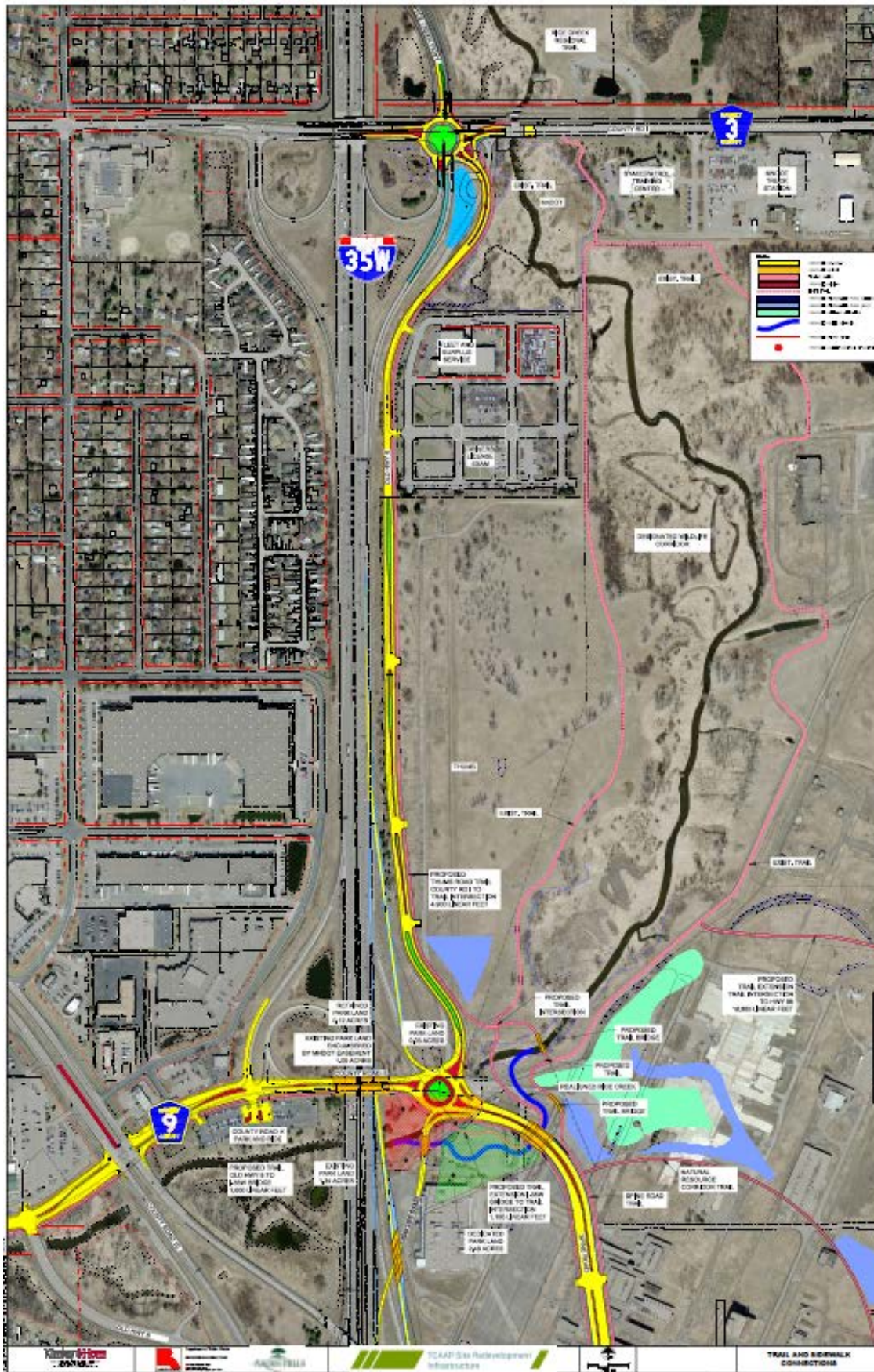


Figure C: Proposed Transportation Improvements



Rationale

The land exchange is consistent with System Protection Strategy 2 as outlined in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* which requires an equally valuable land or facility exchange to be approved in order to convert Regional Parks System lands to another use. The land exchange also necessitates a minor amendment to the boundary of the regional trail corridor. Approval of the land exchange should also include an amendment to the boundary of the regional trail corridor to remove the 2.48 acres for the transportation project and add the adjacent 2.48 acre replacement land.

Funding

No Regional Parks System funding is involved in this request.

Known Support / Opposition

In 2012, Ramsey County and the City of Arden Hills entered into a Joint Powers Agreement that establishes a partnership with the goal of remediation and productive reuse of the 427-acre portion of the former TCAAP site. The Minnesota Department of Transportation supports the land exchange and has awarded funding to Ramsey County for construction of the interchange, with a project description that includes the land exchange. There is no known opposition to the land exchange or boundary amendment.

Analysis

System Protection Strategy 2 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* relates to the conversion of Regional Parks System lands to other uses and states:

Lands in the Regional Parks System will only be converted to other uses if approved by the Metropolitan Council through an equally valuable land or facility exchange as defined below:

“Equally valuable land” is defined as land that:

- *is contiguous to the Regional Parks System unit containing the land proposed to be exchanged (within the same park/trail unit*
- *has comparable or better natural resource characteristics, and*
- *could provide comparable or better recreation opportunities than the land being released*

“Equally valuable facility” is defined as an exchange of land for facilities when recreational benefits and/or natural resource benefits are increased as a result of the exchange. For example, some land within a regional trail corridor may be exchanged to widen a highway if a highway department constructs a trail overpass or underpass of the widened road at no cost to the regional park implementing agency.

In this case, an equally valuable land exchange has been proposed. Additionally, the transportation project necessitating the land exchange will provide recreational benefits to the Regional Parks System with the construction of an extension of the regional trail.

System Protection Strategy 2 also requires that the following criteria be evaluated to determine whether Regional Parks System lands may be exchanged for other lands or a facility. Staff evaluation is shown in italic font.

Issues with respect to the existing park system unit:

1. Whether the park system unit can continue to meet Council site and site attribute standards established for the particular type of park system unit (regional park, park reserve, trail greenway or special recreation feature).

The Rice Creek North Regional Trail is designated as a destination trail. The 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan requires that destination trails include sufficient corridor width to protect natural resources and safely accommodate trail use. Destination trails are preferably located adjacent to high quality natural areas, are of a sufficient length to serve as a destination itself, and connect Regional Parks System units.

The proposed land exchange will not impact the width or length of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail corridor. The land exchange will facilitate the remeandering of Rice Creek and will improve access to the creek for trail users. The roadway project associated with the land exchange will complete the missing link in the regional trail’s connection between Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve in Lino Lakes to Long Lake Regional Park in New Brighton.

2. Whether the Rice Creek North Regional Trail will continue to function as originally planned.

The land exchange will not negatively impact the function of the trail, but will facilitate additional trail connectivity, including a 1,600 linear foot off-road trail extension from the County Road H bridge over Interstate 35W to Old Highway 8, where no trail connection currently exists.

3. Whether environmental features (wildlife habitat, water quality) of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail will be adversely affected.

The land exchange will improve wildlife habitat and water quality by providing an additional flood plain area and allowing for site restoration. The land exchange also facilitates the realignment of Rice Creek, which will improve water flow and recreational watercraft navigation along this portion of the regional trail corridor. The land exchange will also provide more of a buffer for the regional trail from Interstate 35W.

4. Whether the loss of site or function will be made up through acquisition of a site with comparable characteristics adjacent to or in the immediate area of the current location.

The proposed replacement land has better site characteristics than the property being exchanged, since it is at a higher elevation, is drier, and will provide better access to Rice Creek for fishing and water navigation. The replacement land is adjacent to the immediate area of the trail corridor.

5. Whether the need for the conversion, as in the instance of transportation improvements, is generated by the Rice Creek North Regional Trail.

The need for the conversion is generated by the transportation improvements to serve future redevelopment of the TCAAP site. The conversion is not generated by the Rice Creek North Regional Trail, although the conversion will help facilitate the safe extension of the regional trail over Interstate 35W bridge to Old Highway 8.

Issues with respect to the alternate use:

1. The land area needs of the proposed project.

The proposed project requires 2.48 acres of regional parkland that will be replaced with an equal amount of adjacent land.

2. Whether the specific site requirements for the proposed project are unique to the area proposed for conversion.

The site requirements for the proposed transportation improvements are unique to the area proposed for the conversion, due to its proximity to County Road H and Interstate 35W. The interchange and roundabout need to be developed in the proposed conversion area to improve safety and facilitate redevelopment of a portion of the former TCAAP site.

3. Whether the proposed project is consistent with Council policies.

The proposed project does not conflict with Council policies.

4. Whether the proposed project is of greater benefit to the regional than having the Regional Parks System unit remain in place.

The proposed project benefits the region by improving transportation safety, helping facilitate redevelopment of a brownfield site, and constructing the missing link of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail to complete its connection between Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve in Lino Lakes to Long Lake Regional Park in New Brighton.

Attachment 1: Request Letter from Ramsey County



May 8, 2015

Jan Youngquist
Manager/Regional Parks and Natural Resources Unit
Community Development
Metropolitan Council
390 Robert Street North
Saint Paul, MN 55101

RE: Rice Creek North Regional Trail – Land Exchange

Dear Ms. Youngquist

Land Exchange

Following approval of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan, Ramsey County and the City of Arden Hills through a Joint Development Authority (JDA) began to refine plans for mixed-use redevelopment of the Ramsey County Property (former Twin cities Army Ammunitions Plant, (TCAAP)). Improvements to the interstate, regional and county roadway system are critical elements to accommodate the redevelopment. Design of these roads require some modification to the proposed regional trail boundaries, but overall provide greatly enhanced trail connectivity. Construction of the new I-35W and County Road H interchange will impact approximately 2.5-acres of land that was previously transferred to Ramsey County from the National Park Service (NPS). Ramsey County will compensate for this transportation related impact by transferring an equal amount of adjacent land through the NPS for the regional trail corridor. A memorandum was issued to the NPS for Parks benefit of the land exchange (see attached memo to NPS, Parks Benefit for Land Exchange and supporting graphics, Trail & Sidewalk exhibit, and Regional Trail Land exchange Exhibit).

Ramsey County respectfully requests approval of the land exchange with the National Park Service. Thank you for consideration of this request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 651-748-2500, extension 330 or email me at scott.yonke@co.ramsey.mn.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Scott A. Yonke'.

Scott Yonke, PLA | Director of Planning and Development
Ramsey County
Parks and Recreation Department
2015 North Van Dyke Street
Maplewood, MN 55109-3796
651-748-2500 x 330
www.co.ramsey.mn.us

Green Spaces • Fun Places • Active Lives

2015 North Van Dyke St.
Maplewood, MN 55109
Phone: (651) 748-2500
parks.co.ramsey.mn.us

Attachment 2: Park Benefit Memo from Ramsey County



MEMORANDUM

To: Elyse R. LaForest, Program Manager, National Park Service
From: Jon Oyanagi, Director, Ramsey County Parks and Recreation
Subject: Parks Benefit for Land Exchange
Date: April 16, 2015
CC: Jim Tolaas, Ramsey County Public Works
Beth Engum, Ramsey County Public Works
Scott Yonke, Ramsey County Parks and Recreation
Greg Mack, Ramsey County

Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Department (RCPRD) supports the proposed land exchange for impacted land within the Rice Creek corridor. RCPRD understands there are necessary infrastructure improvements which are critical elements to accommodate the Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant (TCAAP) redevelopment however, benefits gained from these impacts will provide greatly enhanced trail connectivity and recreation value.

Benefit:

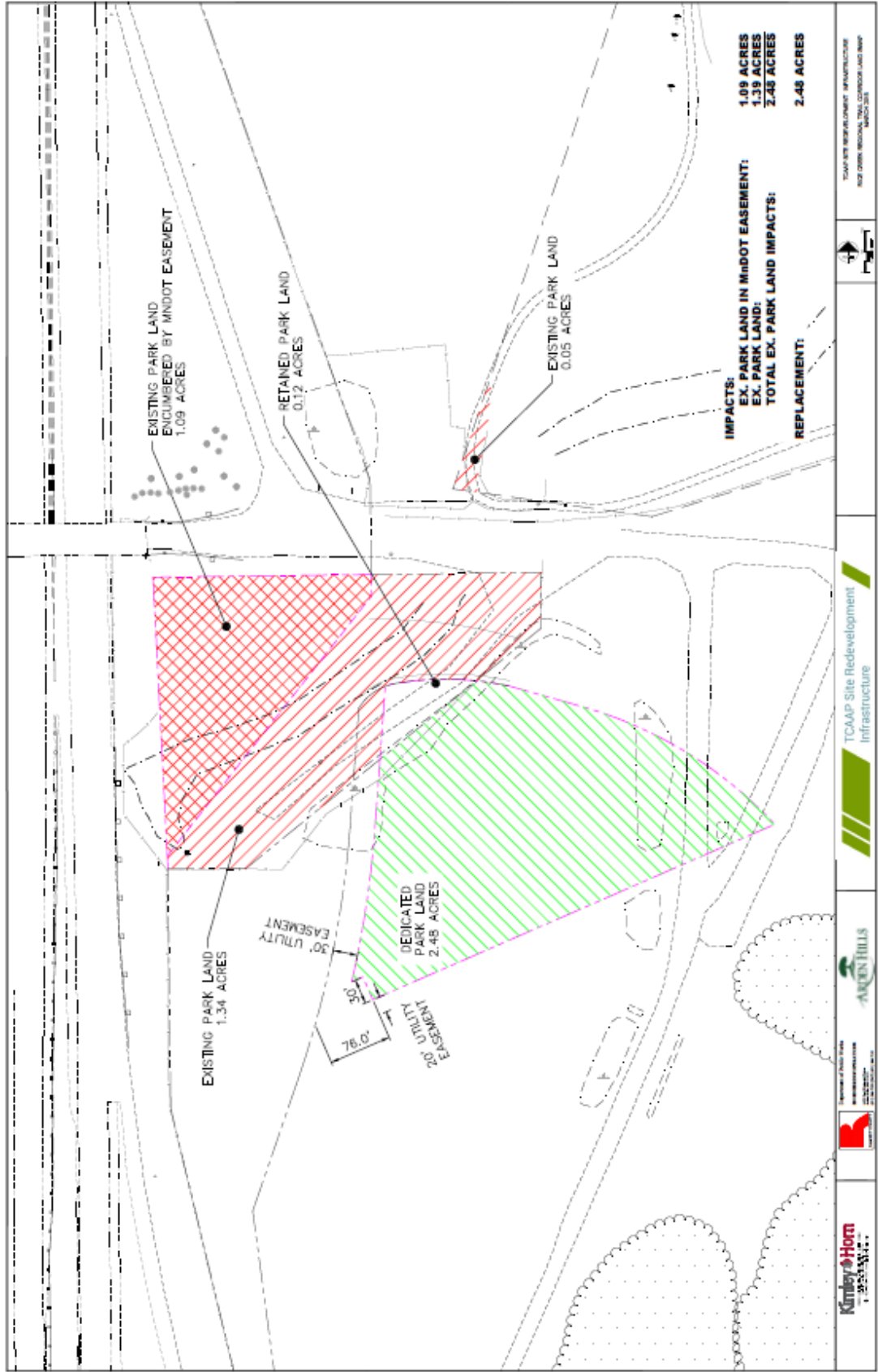
The land exchange will result in replacement of land of equal size and character, and provide the following recreational benefits.

- Safe grade trail crossing: A safe grade separated trail crossing will be provided for the crossing of I-35W and STH 10 (see attached Trail and Sidewalk Exhibit).
- Design and Construction: Full funding for design and construction of the trail extension is provided by the Transportation Department.
- Rice Creek Meander: Realignment of Rice Creek will improve water flow and recreational watercraft navigation in this section of trail (see attached Trail and Sidewalk Exhibit).
- Trail connectivity: A 1,600 LF off-road trail extension with grade separated crossings is provided from the County Road H Bridge interchange at I-35W to Old Highway 8. No trail connection exists in this corridor today. This extension is an essential element for completion of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail between the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Regional Park Reserve and Long Lake Regional Park. Additionally, other trail improvements as part of the roadway infrastructure design will include a trail adjacent to the new Rice Creek alignment and better connectivity between the east and west trail sections with a pedestrian bridge crossing over Rice Creek (see attached Trail and Sidewalk Exhibit).
- Rice Creek Access: the land exchange and realignment of Rice Creek will improve trail and foot access to Rice Creek for fishing and water navigation.

- Buffer: the land exchange will increase the distance and add additional buffer from I-35W (see attached Regional Trail Corridor Land Swap Exhibit). Additionally, the original triangle section between I-35W and the north bound I-35W exit lane will be restored to natural state which will offer additional recreation value.
- Unencumbered Land: The proposed land exchange parcel will be unencumbered by roadway easements (see attached Regional Trail Corridor Land Swap Exhibit). This will provide flexibility in park design.

Parks and Recreation staff have been involved through the design of the trail extension and believe the final design will provide safe and enjoyable recreational experience for trail users.

Attachment 3: Proposed Land Exchange



TOWNSHIP REDEVELOPMENT INFRASTRUCTURE
 1025 CHERRY RIDGEWAY, TALL CREEK, MI 48063-2025



TOWNSHIP Site Redevelopment
 Infrastructure

