

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: March 3, 2014

For the Community Development Committee meeting of March 16, 2015

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of March 25, 2015

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

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

Policy/Legal Reference: MN Statute 473.313

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 approve the Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan Amendment.

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, a master plan amendment to expand the park boundary in June 2012, and a master plan amendment in September 2014 to include development of Hall's Island. 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, pending discussions between MPRB and the City of Minneapolis regarding the Upper Harbor Terminal site.

At this time, MPRB has submitted a master plan amendment for Above the Falls Regional Park to expand the park boundary to facilitate the acquisition of property on the west bank of the Mississippi River.

Rationale

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. The master plan requirements outlined in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* have an effective date of July 1, 2015, so master plans submitted to the Council prior to July 1, 2015 will be reviewed subject to the requirements outlined in the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

Funding

The estimated cost to implement the land acquisition described in the master plan amendment for Above the Falls Regional Park is \$2,777,000. Approval of this master plan amendment makes the acquisition costs eligible for regional parks funding, but does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. Future funding based on this master plan amendment may be awarded through the Parks Acquisition Opportunity Fund and the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP). 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 effective date for the master plan requirements outlined in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* is July 1, 2015 in acknowledgement of master plan planning processes that were already underway when the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* was adopted, on February 11, 2015. Master plans submitted to the Council prior to July 1, 2015 will be reviewed subject to the requirements outlined in the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. 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 regional park boundaries as part of the Above the Falls Regional Park master plan in February 2002 and approved an amendment to the master plan to expand the park boundary at the planned Scherer Park in June 2012.

The existing boundaries of Above the Falls Regional Park are shown in **Figure 1**, with the proposed boundary expansion area circled in red. **Figure 2** shows the detail of the boundary expansion area—the existing park boundary is depicted by the black and white line, the area proposed to be added to the regional park boundary is shown in red. Parcels 1, 2, and 3 are known as the Andrews property, which the MPRB is currently in negotiations to purchase. Estimated acquisition costs for the Andrews property are \$2,777,000.

The remaining land in the boundary expansion area consists of parcels owned by Hennepin County as well as railroad right-of-way for a spur line that currently serves one riverfront business. MPRB has had discussions with Hennepin County regarding park use of its property. The parcel was used for construction staging for the Lowry Bridge project; it is now home to a stormwater pond. Ongoing discussions will occur with the County during future implementation of regional park development. MPRB may at some point in the future look to acquire the railroad right-of-way, although current land valuation is not available since the property is not taxed and does not have an assessed value.

Figure 1: Existing Above the Falls Regional Park boundary with expansion area circled

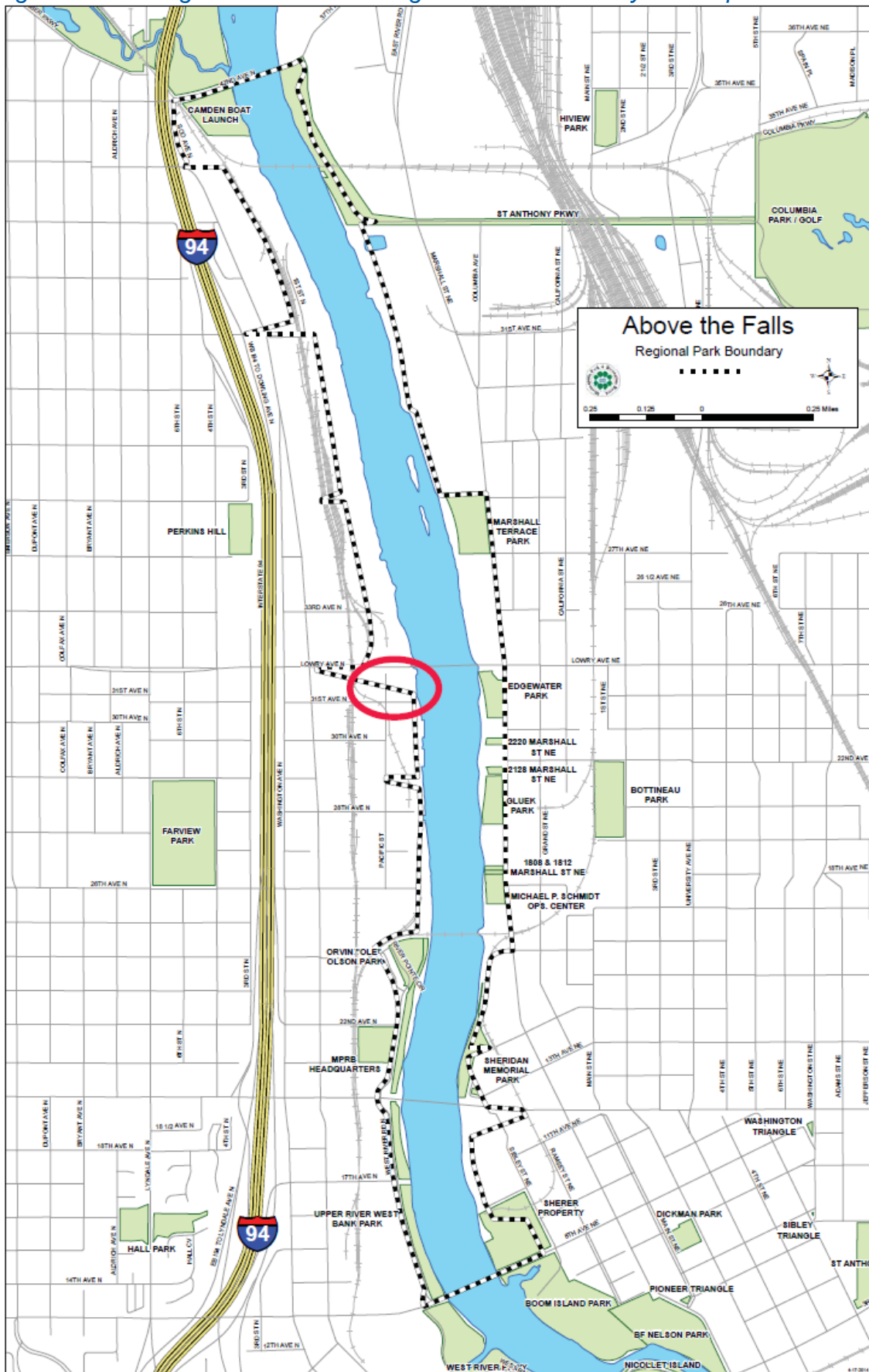
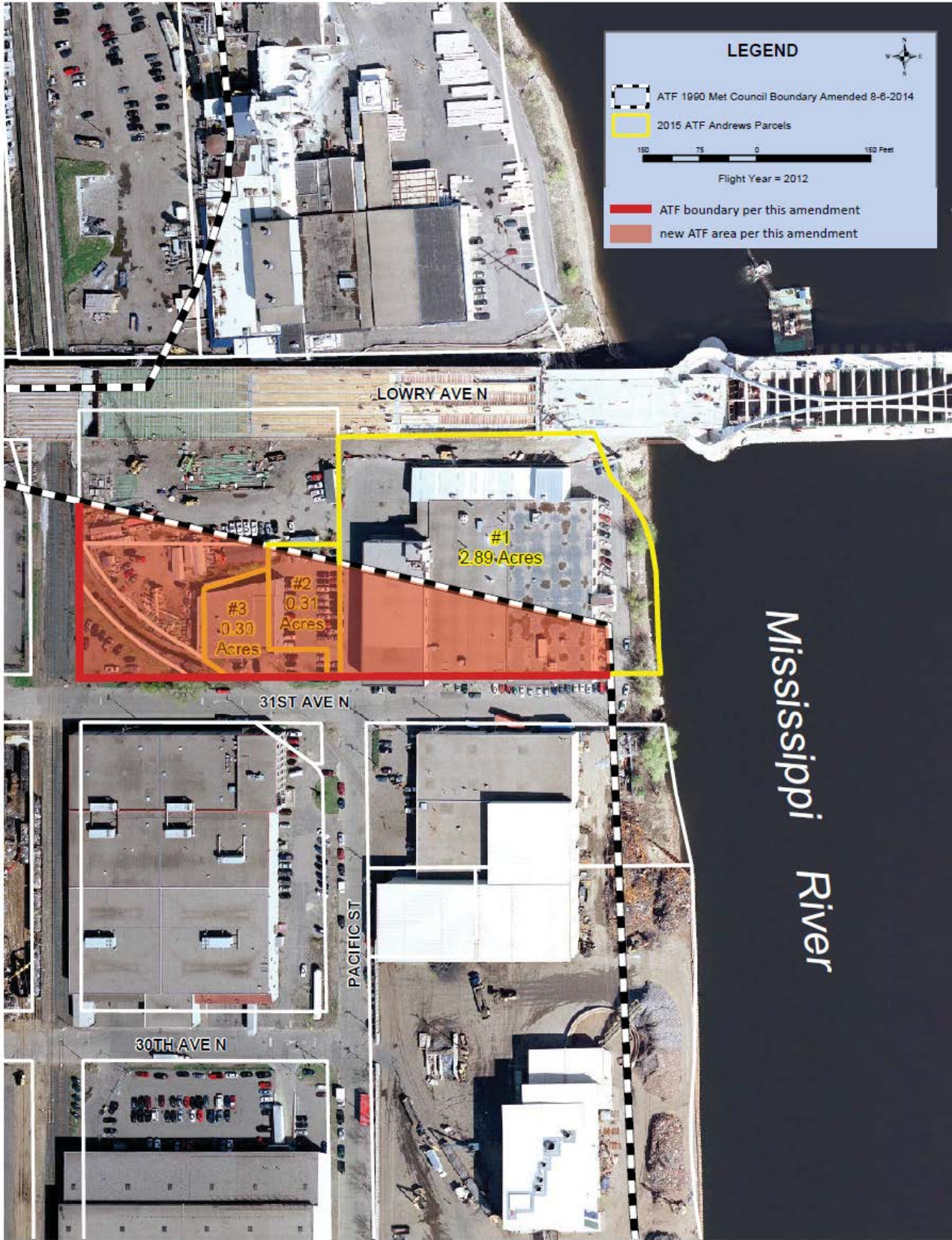


Figure 2: Proposed Boundary Expansion Area



Stewardship Plan

The boundary amendment area is currently in industrial use. Upon acquisition of the land, it is not likely that it would be immediately developed as parkland, since additional adjacent land would need to be acquired to consolidate into a park site. Immediate stewardship of the site would be limited, and would remain generally with the existing property tenants, with oversight by MPRB and/or a building management company.

Demand Forecast

The boundary expansion area is a key component to the overall vision of Above the Falls Regional Park. Future park development will include a riverside trail loops and continuous parkland. 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** shows the estimated annual visits to Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park, which is adjacent and south of Above the Falls Regional Park; and Mississippi Gorge Regional Park, which is adjacent and south of Central Mississippi Regional Park.

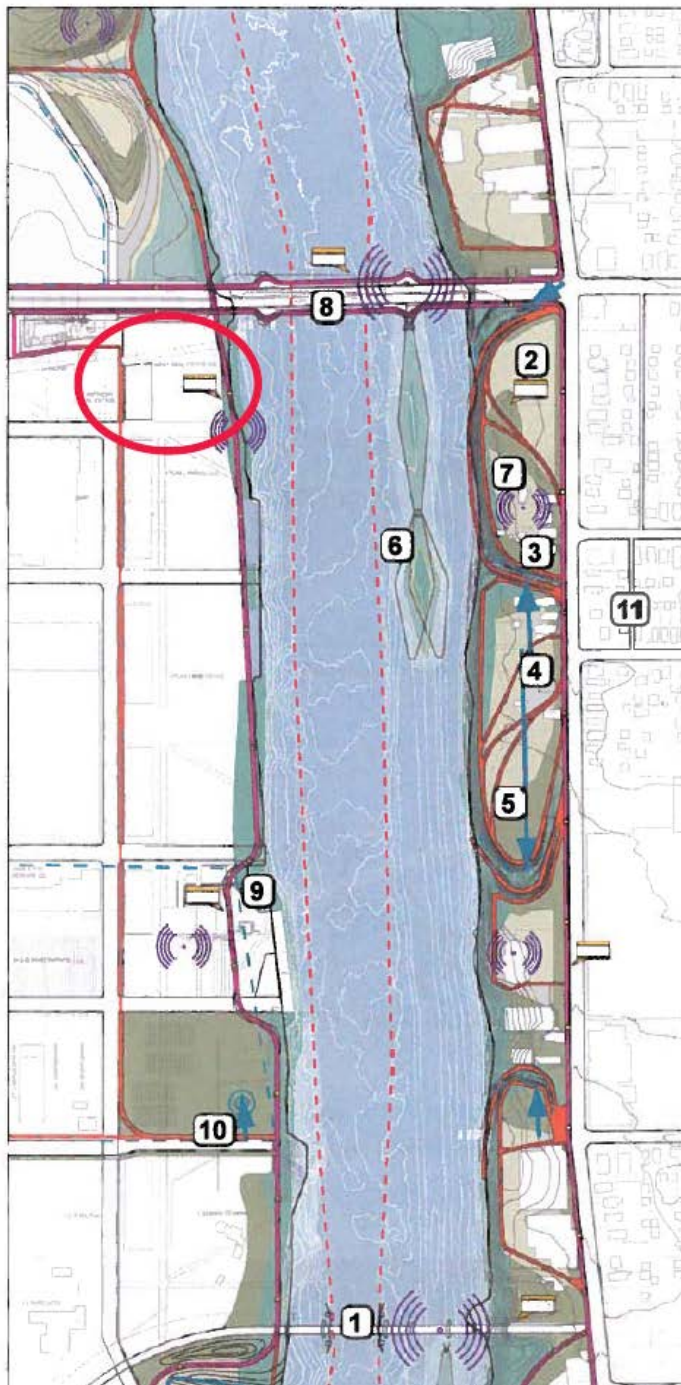
Figure 3: Visit Estimates for Adjacent Regional Parks Along the Mississippi River

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 boundary amendment area will become part of a riverside loop trail system and will also provide a connection to the Lowry Avenue Bridge. The bridge connection is essential for the BNSF to Lowry Loop, which is depicted in **Figure 4**. The boundary amendment area is circled in red on the map. Once developed, the riverside trail system will provide a number of loops of varying length, which will allow park users to cross the Mississippi River, and visit portions of Above the Falls Regional Park in both north and northeast Minneapolis. In addition, the boundary amendment area will provide green space adjacent to the Lowry Avenue bridge approach. No detailed design or cost estimates have been developed for these trail loops or green space at this time.

Figure 4: BNSF to Lowry Loop with Boundary Amendment Area Identified



The Andrews Property is included in one RiverFirst Priority Project: the BNSF to Lowry Loop of the Riverfront Trail System.

KEY

- 1. BNSF Pedestrian Bridge
- 2. Edgewater Park
- 3. New Ravine Trail
- 4. Gluek Park
- 5. New Ravine Trail
- 6. Biohaven Island
- 7. Children’s Art Camp
- 8. Lowry Bridge
- 9. Flyway Bridge
- 10. North 26th Avenue Greenway
- 11. 22nd Avenue NE Bike Route

Conflicts

The master plan amendment does not conflict with existing or proposed projects. The boundary amendment area will be owned and operated by MPRB. The site is currently zoned I-2, Medium Industrial District, but parks are a permitted use in any zoning classification within the City of Minneapolis.

Public Services

No new public services are needed for the master plan amendment area. The property within the boundary expansion area is currently served by public utilities.

Operations

The current and future facilities within the boundary expansion area will be overseen by professional public safety, operations, and maintenance staff. MPRB Police Officers will provide public safety services. Acquisition of these properties is not anticipated to increase the operations and maintenance costs for Above the Falls Regional Park, which are currently included in MPRB's general operating funds.

Citizen Participation

The concept of riverside trail loops 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 co-hosted with the City of Minneapolis and the Department of Health.

The planning process for the updated Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan include a public comment period that was open 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.

MPRB is continuing to coordinate with the City of Minneapolis regarding the design of the Upper Harbor Terminal site, which lies several parcels north of the master plan amendment area. This master plan amendment does not affect the ongoing discussions, as it does not include any boundary changes for the Upper Harbor Terminal site. The City of Minneapolis has been notified of this master plan amendment.

Public Awareness

Future land acquisition associated with this master plan amendment will be considered by the MPRB Commissioners as part of an advertised open meeting. The meeting includes a designated open time for public comments. Once the regional park has been developed, 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

The regional park boundary amendment area will not be made available to the general public immediately after purchase, but will be held under restricted access. Upon development of the area as parkland, it will become accessible to all. MPRB will follow federal accessibility guidelines under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Since the boundary amendment area will be used as part of a continuous trail along the river and as unprogrammed park space, access will be free of charge.

Natural Resources

The boundary amendment area is currently in industrial use; therefore, natural resources are generally nonexistent on the site. However, the site is desirable due to its adjacency to the Mississippi River. Future development of the site as parkland will entail removal of the industrial uses and restoration of vegetation across the site. Although the riverside trail loops have not yet been designed, it is expected that there will be a combination of managed turf grass and naturalized areas design to provide habitat benefit and protect the river from stormwater runoff. The boundary amendment area and other properties along the river will serve as land-side habitat from migratory birds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates.

Review by Other Council Divisions

Community Development – Environment and Surface Water Management (Jim Larsen 651-602-1159) – No comments.

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 \$2,777,000. Approval of this master plan amendment makes the acquisition costs eligible for regional parks funding, but does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. Future funding based on this master plan amendment may be awarded through the Parks Acquisition Opportunity Fund and the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Council action is required to approve specific grants to the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.