

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: May 5, 2015

For the Community Development Committee meeting of May 11, 2015

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of May 27, 2015

Subject: Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant for St. Croix Valley Regional Trail, Carpenter Nature Center Easement, Washington County

District(s), Member(s): MPOSC District F, Sarah Hietpas

Policy/Legal Reference: MN Statute Section 473.315

Staff Prepared/Presented: Tori Dupre, Senior Planner (651-602-1621)

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

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Authorize a grant of up to \$288,172 to Washington County to acquire an easement for the St. Croix Valley Regional Trail.
 - a. The Metropolitan Council will finance the grant through the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund, with Metropolitan Council bonds funding 75 percent of the total acquisition costs.
 - b. Washington County will match the grant with \$96,057, or 25 percent of the total acquisition costs.
2. Authorize the Community Development Director to sign the grant agreement including the restrictive covenant.

Background

St. Croix Valley Regional Trail is a 17-mile planned corridor from Afton to Hastings located along the St. Croix River Valley. When complete, the regional trail will provide non-motorized recreation, and connections to recreation areas including (north to south) Afton State Park, St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park, Carpenter Nature Center, and Point Douglas Regional Trailhead at the confluence of the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers (Attachment 1).

Washington County has requested a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund (PAOF) grant of up to \$288,172 to purchase a 9.86-acre (50-foot wide) permanent trail easement located in Denmark Township for the regional trail (Attachment 2).

The trail easement is located on property owned by Carpenter Nature Center, located at 12805 St. Croix Trail South. Carpenter Nature Center is a private natural area and preserve, planned and zoned for conservancy use. The trail easement meanders through the property generally north to south (Attachments 3, 4). The planned trail continues south of the nature center property and then connects to the Point Douglas Regional Trailhead.

The County's acquisition of this trail easement segment is the first in acquiring and establishing the regional trail with access to the St. Croix River valley, within

the master planned boundary of the St. Croix Valley Regional Trail. This particular parcel is a key link in the regional trail system between St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park and Point Douglas Regional Trailhead. The St. Croix Valley Regional Trail master plan outlines the County's trail development strategy to work from south to north to secure a trail easement from Point Douglas to and through the Carpenter Nature Center.

Washington County provided the Council a signed purchase agreement and an appraisal showing the trail easement's appraised value of \$332,000. The purchase agreement indicates that the closing is scheduled no later than June 1, 2015 to follow the Metropolitan Council's action on the grant request, scheduled for May 27, 2015.

Upon the Metropolitan Council's approval of a PAOF grant, staff prepares a grant agreement that includes an "agreement and restrictive covenant" which park agencies must record to ensure that the property remains in regional recreation use. The Metropolitan Council's action authorizes the Community Development Director to sign the grant agreement and accompanying documents including the restrictive covenant.

The County's grant request is consistent with the St. Croix Valley Regional Trail master plan which the County submitted to the Metropolitan Council for review in September 2005. The Council approved the master plan on December 7, 2005 (MC business item 2005-327).

Rationale

The County's grant request is consistent with the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan (adopted February 11, 2015)*, which contains the rules for PAOF grant requests. The PAOF rules specify that lands must be within Council-approved master plan boundaries to qualify for an acquisition grant. The PAOF rules also define grant-eligible acquisition costs that the Council funds through reimbursements to the park agencies.

Funding

The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund provides grants to park implementing agencies to acquire land for the regional parks system. As of May 2015, the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund has provided more than \$39,459,248 to acquire approximately 3,006 acres.

The Fund has two accounts, the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund. The Council's park bonds provide a 40 percent match to each state fund appropriation. At this time, the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund account balance is \$1,147,387 and consists solely of Metropolitan Council bonds.

The trail easement grant-eligible acquisition costs total \$384,229 and include the purchase price, the appraisal and engineering costs as shown in Table 1. The County's request letter explains that engineering costs included a trail survey and preliminary design needed to determine the trail location through the nature center property for acquisition purposes, as well as to minimize the environmental impacts given the significant slopes in the area.

Table 1: St. Croix Valley Regional Trail Easement Acquisition Costs

Cost Items	Amount
Purchase Price	\$332,000
Appraisal, Engineering	\$52,229
Total Acquisition (Estimated)	\$384,229

The PAOF grant finances 75 percent of the total acquisition costs, with the park agency paying the remaining 25 percent as the required local match. The County's grant request of \$288,172 is 75 percent of the total acquisition costs. Since only Council bonds remain in the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund Account of the PAOF, the grant will be financed solely by Council bonds, as shown in Table 2. The County will fund the 25 percent match amount of \$96,057 and is not requesting future reimbursement from a regional parks capital improvement program.

Table 2: Acquisition Grant Revenue Sources

Revenue Sources	Amount
Estimated Total Acquisition Costs	\$384,229
Grant Total (75% acquisition total; Metro Council bonds only)	\$288,172
Local Match (25% of acquisition total)	\$96,057

The Metropolitan Council's final action on this request and the two grant requests considered by MPOSC on April 7, leaves an available balance of approximately \$603,540 in the Park and Trails Legacy Account of the PAOF until July 1, 2015, the start of the State's fiscal year funding cycle.

Known Support / Opposition

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved the purchase of the regional trail easement on April 7, 2015. There is no known opposition to the County's acquisition of the trail easement or to the grant request.

**Attachment 1: St. Croix Valley
Regional Trail Showing Easement
Location**





Public Works Department
Parks Division

Donald J. Theisen, P.E.
Public Works Director

John D. Elholm, CPRP
Parks Director

March 31, 2015

Tori Dupree
Metropolitan Council
390 North Robert Street
St. Paul, MN 55101

**REQUEST FOR ACQUISITION OPPORTUNITY GRANT FUNDS FOR PURCHASE OF THE
CARPENTER NATURE CENTER PROPERTY IN THE ST. CROIX VALLEY REGIONAL TRAIL**

Dear Tori:

Washington County requests that the Metropolitan Council consider providing acquisition opportunity grant funds to purchase a trail easement over Carpenter Nature Center property in Denmark Township. The corridor will provide regional trail access near the St. Croix River - within the master planned boundary of St. Croix Valley Regional Trail. This parcel is a key link in the regional trail system between St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park and Point Douglas Regional Trailhead, and it lies on the largest non-public property along the route. The acquisition package also includes the purchase of a conservation easement over 85 acres of the property; using Washington County and Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council funds. No regional park funding is being sought to acquire the conservation easement.

The offer presented here was discussed with the Washington County Board of Commissioners on March 24, 2015 with final signature requested at their meeting of April 7, 2015. The landowner signed the purchase agreement. Funding for this project is requested to be 75% from the Metropolitan Council's Acquisition Opportunity Fund with the remaining 25% being funded by Washington County. Due to significant slope in the area, survey & preliminary design costs were expended to determine a location for the trail for acquisition purposes that minimizes environmental impacts.

Estimated Acquisition Costs:

Purchase Price	\$ 332,000
<u>Other costs (identified on spreadsheet)</u>	<u>\$ 52,229</u>
Total Estimated Acquisition Costs	\$ 384,229

Proposed Revenue Sources:

Acquisition Opportunity Fund (75%)	\$ 288,172
<u>Washington County (25%)</u>	<u>\$ 96,057</u>
Total Proposed Revenue Sources	\$ 384,229

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions or need further information, please let me know.

Respectfully

John D. Elholm
Parks Director

C: Don Theisen, Public Works Director
Sharon Price, Acquisition Manager
June Mathiowetz, Land and Water Legacy Program Manager
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Attachment 3: St. Croix Valley Regional Trail Easement Location through Carpenter Nature Center



