

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: Theodore Wirth Regional Park Master Plan and Grant Request, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

District(s), Member(s): MPOSC District C, William Weber and District D, Anthony Taylor

Policy/Legal Reference: MN Statute 473.313 and 473.315

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 Theodore Wirth Regional Park Master Plan.
2. Require that the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board submit estimated land acquisition costs that were not quantified in the master plan as part of a master plan amendment for Metropolitan Council review and approval prior to seeking future grants for land acquisition.
3. Require that prior to initiating development within the regional park, preliminary plans must be sent to Scott Dentz, Interceptor Engineering Manager at Metropolitan Council Environmental Services for review in order to assess the potential impacts to the regional interceptor system.
4. Inform the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board that costs associated with modifications or improvements associated with the golf courses are not eligible for regional parks funding.
5. Approve a grant in the amount of \$1,743,000 from the 2011 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program, comprised of \$1,569,000 in State bonds and \$174,000 in Council bonds. This grant shall be used for design and construction consistent with the North Wirth concept in the master plan, including trail development, bridges, landscaping, grading, parking areas, lighting, downhill infrastructure, utilities, surveys and site investigations, design, and project management.

Background

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board has submitted a master plan and grant request for Theodore Wirth Regional Park for Council review and approval. Theodore Wirth Regional Park is a 720 acre park that is owned and operated by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) and is located in the cities of Minneapolis and Golden Valley. The regional park was named in honor of Theodore Wirth, who was Superintendent of the MPRB for 30 years. A number of trails provide connections to the park, including the Luce Line, Bassett Creek, and Victory Memorial Regional Trails. The proposed Bottineau Light Rail Transit (LRT) corridor is adjacent to the regional park.

The Metropolitan Council approved the original master plan for the regional park in 1980. The MPRB has completed an extensive process to update the regional park master plan, which will guide development and use of the park for the next 20 years.

The Council's 2011 Regional Parks Capital Improvement program (CIP) included a \$1,743,000 allocation to the MPRB to be used for projects consistent with the updated master plan. The CIP indicated that no grant will be awarded until the Council has approved the updated master plan and specific projects that are consistent with the updated master plan. The MPRB's request for a grant in the amount of \$1,743,000 is shown in Attachment 1.

Rationale

The Theodore Wirth Regional Park Master Plan 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*.

The grant request is consistent with the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, the 2011 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP), and with the updated master plan being considered as part of this action.

Funding

The estimated cost to implement the master plan is \$21,031,345 for development. The master plan includes estimated development costs of \$4,805,090 associated with modifications or improvements to the golf courses, which are not eligible for regional parks funding. Therefore, the estimated development costs that are eligible for regional parks funding are \$16,226,255. Land acquisition costs are not quantified in the master plan, since the inholding parcels are currently owned by railroad companies and do not have a tax assessed value to be used as a basis for an acquisition estimate.

The Council is being requested to issue a grant in the amount of \$1,743,000 from the 2011 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program, comprised of \$1,569,000 in State bonds and \$174,000 in Council bonds as part of this action.

Approval of this master plan makes the remaining development costs eligible for regional parks funding, with the exception of costs associated with modifications or improvements to the golf courses, but does not commit the Council to any additional funding at this time. Future development funding based on this master plan may be awarded through the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund.

In order to be eligible for future funding for acquisition of inholding parcels, a master plan amendment that includes estimated acquisition costs must be approved by the Metropolitan Council. Future acquisition funding based on an approved master plan amendment may be awarded through the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund, the Regional Parks CIP, and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund.

Council action is required to approve specific grants to the MPRB.

Known Support / Opposition

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board of Commissioners adopted the master plan on March 4, 2015. The Council has not been contacted regarding opposition to the master plan.

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. Because the Theodore Wirth Regional Park Master Plan was submitted to the Council prior to July 1, 2015, it was 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

Theodore Wirth Regional Park is located in the cities of Minneapolis and Golden Valley and is generally bounded by Golden Valley Road on the north, Interstate 394 on the south, Xerxes/Russell Avenues on the east, and France Avenue on the west. *Figure 1* shows the park location circled in red, in relation to the city of Minneapolis. *Figure 2* shows the regional park boundaries.

Figure 1: Theodore Wirth Regional Park location (circled in red) in relation to the City of Minneapolis

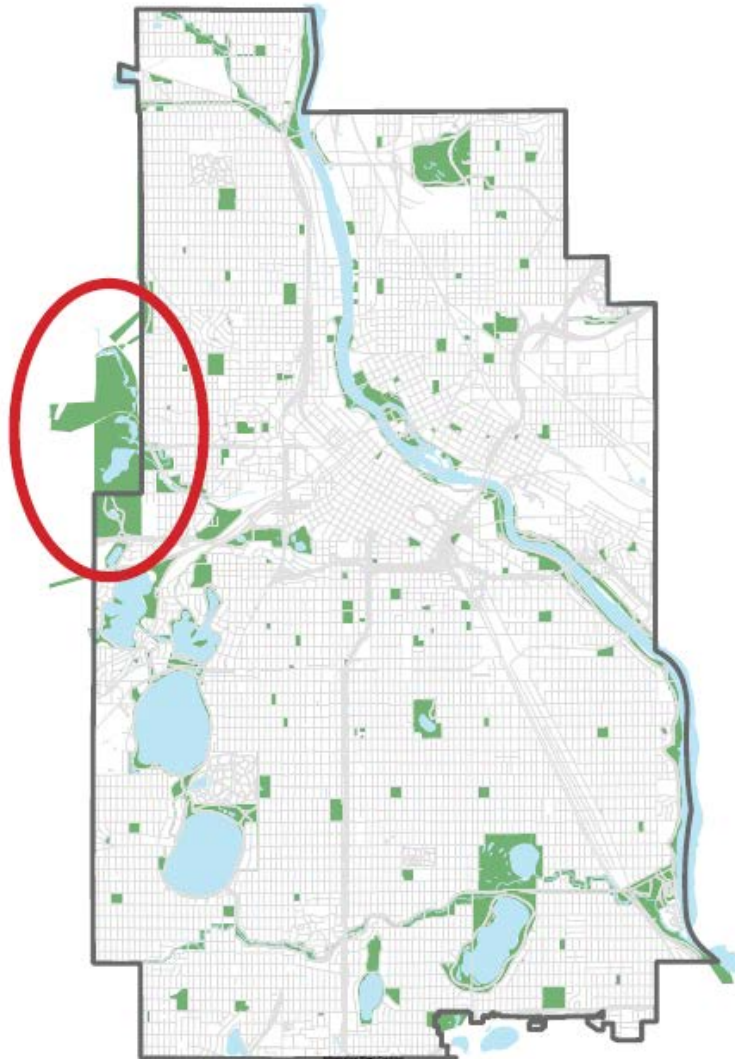


Figure 2: Theodore Wirth Regional Park boundaries

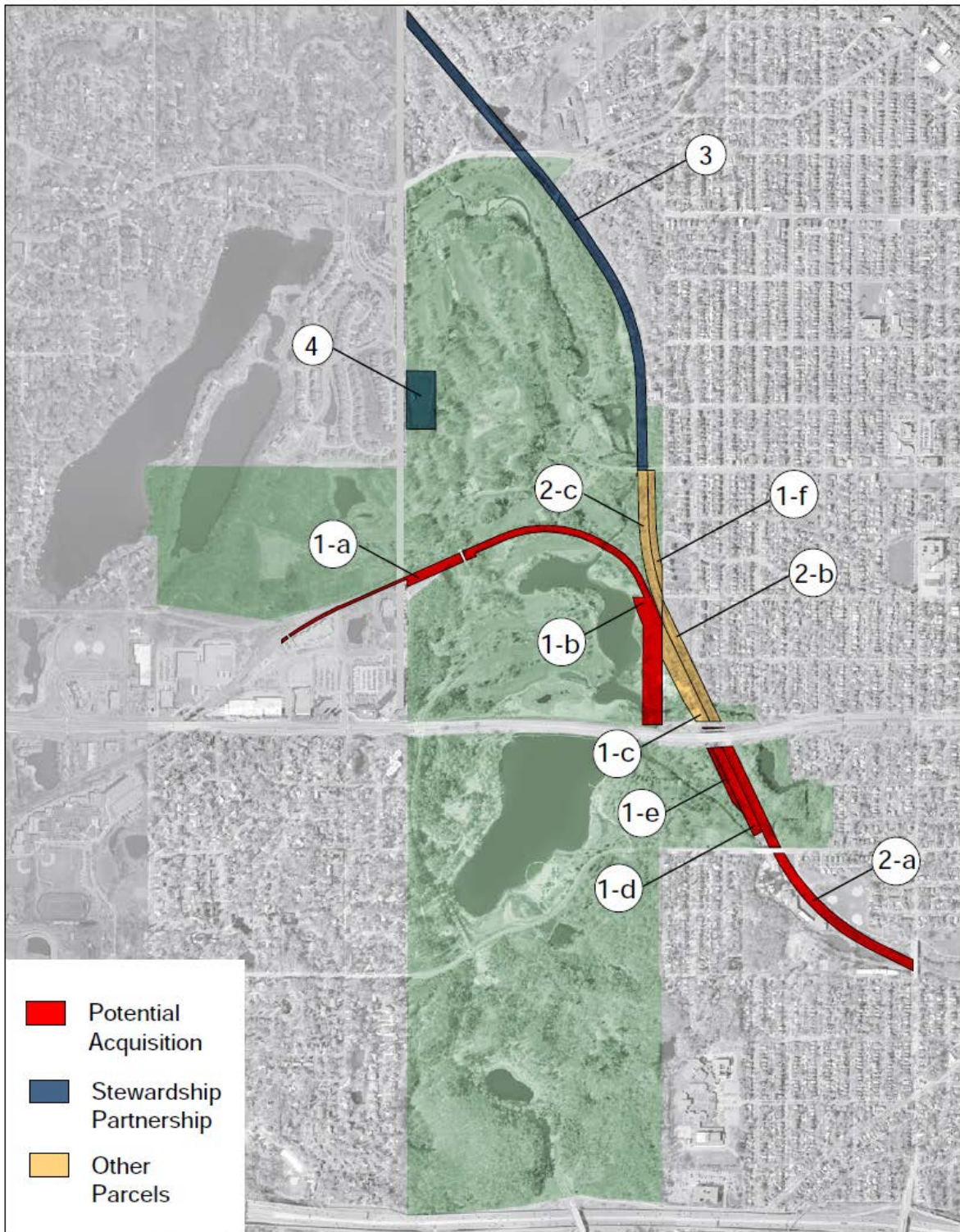


Theodore Wirth Regional Park consists of 720 acres that include lakes, woodlands, prairies, and views of the downtown Minneapolis skyline. Land acquisition for the regional park began in 1889 with a 64-acre parcel that was purchased for \$100,000. The park was originally called Saratoga Park and was renamed as Glenwood Park in 1890. In 1938 it was renamed for Theodore Wirth, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) Superintendent from 1906-1936. In his early days as Superintendent, he was drawn to the potential of the land in and around the future park and told park commissioners:

“If Minneapolis grows to build up the entire territory within the corporate city limits, a large park of this size and character will be needed.”

Theodore Wirth Regional Park is largely established with few, if any future acquisitions anticipated. There are parcels that lie within and adjacent to the regional park that are associated with rail operations that the MPRB will continue to monitor for availability. The MPRB has identified some acquisition and partnership opportunities for parcels, which are depicted in Figure 3 and described in Figure 4.

Figure 3: Theodore Wirth Regional Park Acquisition and Partnership Opportunities



Potential acquisition: Parcels 1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, and 2a are owned by railroad companies and would be considered for potential acquisition if/when the rail is no longer in use. The master plan does not include estimated acquisition costs, since these inholding parcels do not have a tax assessed value to be used as a basis for an estimate.

Other parcels: Parcels 1c, 1f, 2b, and 2c are currently planned as part of the Bottineau LRT corridor. These parcels will be monitored by MPRB, in case they become available for uses other than freight or transit in the future.

Stewardship Partnership: Parcel 3 is currently planned as part of the Bottineau LRT corridor and the master plan has identified it to have an impact on the quality of the visitor experience of the park. Parcel 4 is owned by the MPRB, but is subject to an agreement with the City of Golden Valley to allow for water reservoir maintenance and a monitoring well. The master plan recommends close coordination on these parcels to enhance conservation and stewardship practices as well as recreational use management in order to lessen negative environmental impacts on the park.

Figure 4: Theodore Wirth Regional Park Acquisition and Partnership Opportunities

Parcel	Type	Acres
1-a	Potential acquisition	2.36
1-b	Potential acquisition	9.86
1-c	Other parcels—Bottineau LRT	3.43
1-d	Potential acquisition	2.29
1-e	Potential acquisition	.78
1-f	Other parcels—Bottineau LRT	2.02
2-a	Potential acquisition	7.01
2-b	Other parcels—Bottineau LRT	2.92
2-c	Other parcels—Bottineau LRT	3.35
3	Bottineau LRT and stewardship partnership	12.59
4	Stewardship partnership	4.48

Stewardship Plan

The 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan requires that a master plan include a plan for managing land prior to developing the property for recreation purposes. Since Theodore Wirth Regional Park is an established park, this requirement does not apply to the master plan.

Demand Forecast

According to the Council's annual use estimate reports, in 2013 there were 459,800 visits to Theodore Wirth Regional Park, up from 376,700 visits in 2009. The master plan discusses the projected population growth in Minneapolis, Golden Valley and Hennepin County as well as the changing demographics of the region with growth in ethnic and racial diversity as well as an aging population. By 2040, 40 percent of the region's population will be people of color and 21 percent of the population will be seniors. These demographic trends may affect recreational use and demand. As described in the Development Concept section that follows, proposed improvements such as the addition of walking trails and picnic shelters may appeal to the recreational preferences of the changing demographics of the population.

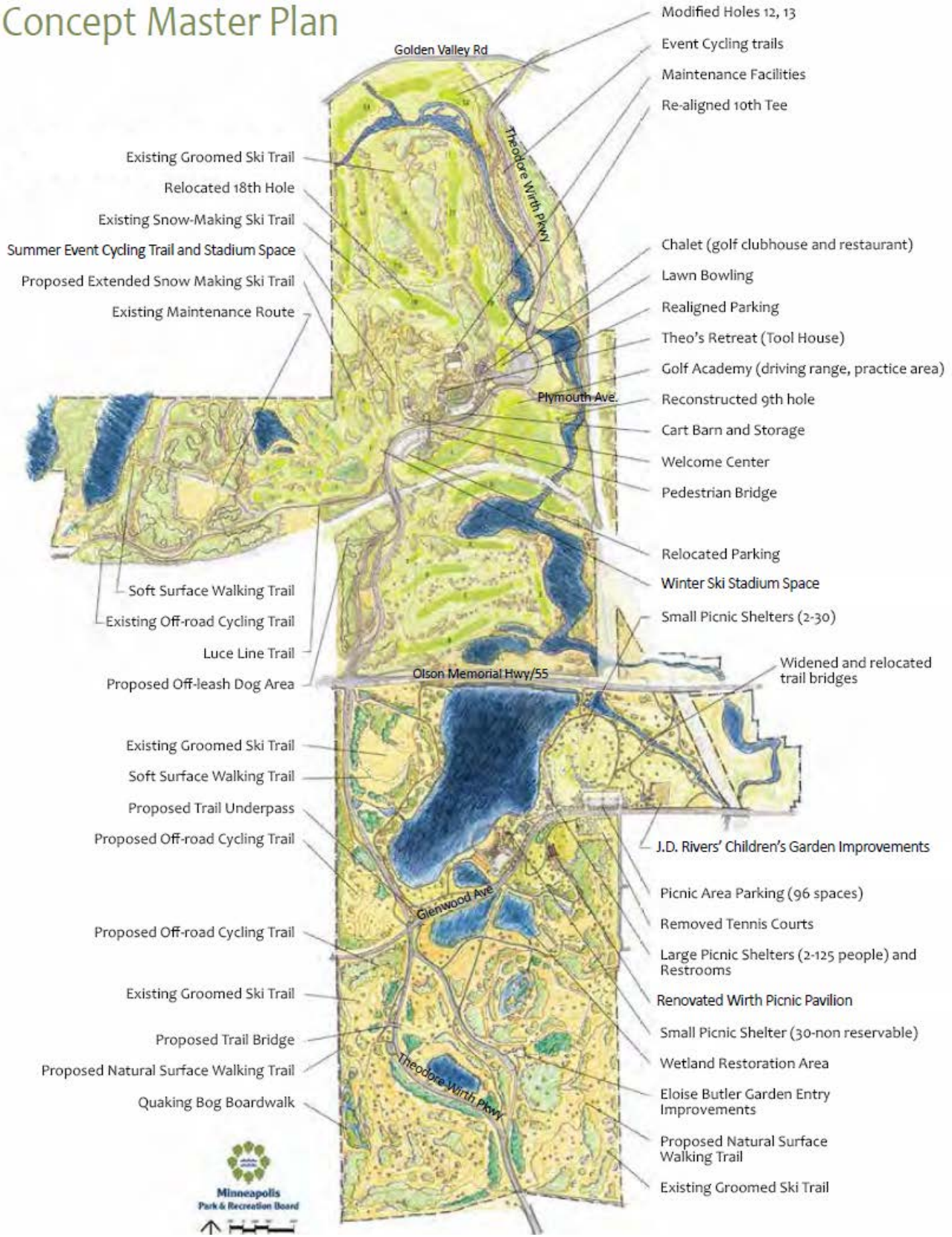
The regional park offers a number of recreational activities that are increasing in use, including walking and biking on paved trails, cross-country skiing, off-road cycling and trail running. Environmental education programs are also popular. Park visitors and residents have expressed interest in a variety of programming and day camps focused on developing outdoor recreation skills, such as canoeing and orienteering, as well as education, including natural resource protection, plant identification, gardening and beekeeping.

Development Concept

The overall development concept for Theodore Wirth Regional Park is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Theodore Wirth Regional Park Development Concept

Concept Master Plan



For planning purposes, the regional park has been categorized into three areas: North Wirth, Central Wirth, and South Wirth, as shown on Figure 6.

Figure 6: Theodore Wirth Regional Park Planning Areas



North Wirth: North Wirth is characterized by rolling topography, framed meadow views and wooded hilltops. The programmatic theme includes a mix of summer golf and winter sports including cross-country skiing, ski jumping, sledding and ice skating. The predominant land use in this area includes a nine-hole Par 3 golf course and an 18-hole golf course. Golf is considered an enterprise facility and is not acknowledged as an activity in the regional parks system. Golf course land is included in several regional parks, however, because of the cross-country skiing opportunities provided in the winter. The golf courses in Theodore Wirth Regional Park were described in the master plan, since there is an effect on the regional park master plan recommendations.

An off-leash dog recreation area is proposed at the western boundary of the park, adjacent to land owned by the Golden Valley Animal Humane Society. This location offers partnership opportunities for dog training, dog rehabilitation, and operations and maintenance.

An event trail loop is proposed to meander through North Wirth, largely in woods and roughs adjacent to the golf holes. The trail is intended to accommodate off-road cycling as well as walking and trail running events. The approximately 5-mile loop will be a combination of trail types, including single-track, broader earthen trails, and paved trails. Sustainable trail design techniques will be used to minimize tree impacts, prevent erosion, and reduce maintenance needs.

A 2.3 kilometer snowmaking and lighted ski loop currently exists on hilly terrain through portions of the Par 3 and 18-hole golf courses. The master plan recommends extending the loop farther into the Par 3 and adjacent areas to establish an approximate 5-7 kilometer loop.

North Wirth includes a natural snow cross-country ski trail network, a snowboarding hill, and a mountain bike loop. The master plan proposes to add a network of soft-surface pedestrian trails in the same vicinity as the mountain bike loop.

Tubing is a fee-based activity that is currently located on the 10th fairway of the 18-hole golf course. The master plan proposes to relocate tubing to the proposed Welcome Center area and using the current tubing hill for free sledding.

The central proposal for North Wirth includes establishing Wirth Village, which will include the Wirth Chalet, Tool House (Theo's Retreat) and the Welcome Center. These three facilities will establish a singular destination for North Wirth and support visitor activities, varied winter and summer recreation, large and small group events, and dining options.

The grounds around the existing Wirth Chalet will be altered to improve landscape connections to the building, modify the parking lot to reduce its visual impact and improve circulation, and adjust the 10th tee to improve the golf holes and to provide space for a recreational amenity such as lawn bowling or croquet. New landscape, trail, and promenade connections will be made to the side and rear of the Chalet leading to the Tool House.

The 1930 Tool House will be rehabilitated and adaptively reused as "Theo's Retreat" for meetings, small gatherings, and catered events. An outdoor terrace and small garden space is envisioned. A new maintenance facility is planned slightly north of the Tool House.

The Welcome Center will be a new signature addition to the regional park and will replace the current Par 3 golf clubhouse. The facility will be the primary destination for all ticketed winter recreation, summer and fall trail events, and Par 3 golf. The building is envisioned to include visitor services, a ski and bike shop, golf counter, food and refreshments, office and meeting spaces, and an outdoor terrace. A broad event start and finish lawn (called a stadium) will be established adjacent to the building where spectators can watch race events. Other site improvements include relocated and expanded parking, drop-off facilities, enhanced parkway pedestrian crossings and parking lot entry, and a bridge over the parkway between the building and parking for pedestrian/ski/bike use.

Central Wirth: Central Wirth is characterized by Wirth Lake. The programmatic theme for Central Wirth is largely self-directed recreation, including beach activities, playground use, group picnicking, and walking.

Significant investment has been made over the last decade at Wirth Lake, including a new beach house, rehabilitated sand beach with shade structures, seating, and a 1.3 mile walking trail circling the lake, which includes a floating boardwalk. The beach area also includes a playground, picnic facilities, and sand volleyball courts. The master plan proposes a 30 person non-reservable picnic shelter near Wirth Beach.

Groomed ski trails using natural snow cross the lakes and picnic area in Central Wirth. The master plan proposes two bridges over Bassett Creek for the trails.

The J.D. Rivers Children’s Garden is a focal point of outdoor programming at the park. The master plan recommends improvements such as fencing, improved access for materials delivery, water connections, and smaller shelters for tool storage.

New open-air picnic shelters are planned, including two group shelters on the east side of the lake and two small shelters on the northeast side of the lake. The picnic area will be complemented with year-round restrooms, a small open play area, and cultural resource interpretation. The master plan proposes adding a 96 space parking lot near Glenwood and Xerxes Avenues, which would include 52 bays of paved parking and an additional 44 bays that could be added over time as warranted by use. An alternative to pavement will be explored for the additional parking bays.

South Wirth: South Wirth is characterized by its hilly topography, wetlands, and dense woods. The programmatic theme of South Wirth is nature based recreation, learning and silent sports. Most activities are linear, and include ski, hiking and bike trails with a focus on sustainable trail design as well as maintenance, interpretation, and wayfinding. The master plan proposes trail improvements in the area that are characterized by creating a deliberate soft surface sustainable trail system that removes unauthorized trails and replaces them with fewer, ecologically sensitive multi-use trails.

Trails will connect the Quaking Bog, Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary to Wirth Picnic Pavilion and J.D. Rivers Children’s Garden in Central Wirth as part of a “learning corridor.” Proposed improvements include a new all-season bridge over Theodore Wirth Parkway to allow visitors to safely travel along the learning corridor.

The Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary is a focal point of the park. The master plan recommends main entry access improvements, path, bridge/boardwalk improvements, and enhancement to building and facilities. These improvements will increase access, protect or enhance the garden’s plants and infrastructure, provide an enhanced self-directed experience, and support potential expansions in programming.

The estimated development costs to implement the master plan are shown in Figure 7. Figure 8 shows the estimated development costs organized by priority and potential funding sources. The master plan indicates that the MPRB will need to identify new funding sources and donors to achieve the master plan vision. Strategic use of partners and volunteer will also be needed.

Figure 7: Theodore Wirth Regional Park Estimated Development Costs

Packaged Elements		Capital Budget
Theo's Retreat and Maintenance Facilities		
A-1	Park Maintenance Facilities-(new garage/office, yard, access drive)	\$1,750,080
A-2	Theo's Retreat (rehabilitated Tool House for meeting/event facility)	\$1,436,400
A-1a	Golf Maintenance Facilities (cart barn, yard and portion of maint office/shop)	\$971,700
	Subtotal	\$4,158,180
Chalet and Welcome Center for Par-3 Golf, Winter Rec, Event Trail, Trails		
A-3	Chalet Rehab and Site Improvements (18-hole clubhouse, restaurant lease, parking, landscaping)	\$1,451,400
A-5	Welcome Center (Par-3 clubhouse, Winter Rec, Event Trail, Trails)	\$4,932,300
A-4	Welcome Center Parking (135 stalls)	\$1,011,675
	Subtotal	\$7,395,375
Back 9 of 18-hole Golf Course, Event Trail and Winter Recreation Facilities		
A-6	Re-located tubing hill (near 17th fairway)	\$150,060
A-7	Cycling Event Trails (events & individual use)	\$78,720
A-10	Ski Trail Improvements	\$584,250
A-11	Back-9 Golf Course Modifications	\$1,534,120
	Subtotal	\$2,347,150
Front 9 of 18-hole Golf Course with Driving Range		
A-12	Front 9 Golf Course Modification & Driving Range	\$2,299,270
	Subtotal	\$2,299,270
		Capital Budget
North Wirth		
A-8	Walking Trail Improvements (upaved in Twin Lake area, paved along Bassett)	\$565,800
A-9	Natural Resource Management	\$184,500
A-13	Dog Park	\$51,660
	Subtotal	\$801,960
Central Wirth		
B-1	Lake Area Shelters and Parking (1 - 250 cap w/restrooms, 2 - 30 cap, gazebo)	\$1,316,100
B-2	Lake Area Trail improvements and Features	\$399,750
B-3	JD Rivers Garden Enhancements	\$239,850
B-4	Natural Resource Management	\$116,850
	Subtotal	\$2,072,550
South Wirth		
C-2	Trail Improvements	\$894,173
C-3	Eloise Butler Improvements (trails, build maint, habitat)	\$669,087
C-4	Natural Resource Management	\$307,500
	Subtotal	\$1,870,760
Whole Park		
C-1	Wayfinding (full park)	\$86,100
	TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET	\$21,031,345

Figure 8: Theodore Wirth Regional Park Estimated Development Costs by Priority

Project	Priority	Funding Source	Capital Budget
A-8 Walking Trail Improvements	First	Traditional Public Funding	\$565,800
A-9 Natural Resource Management	First	Traditional Public Funding	\$184,500
A-13 Dog Park	First	Traditional Public Funding	\$51,660
B-1 Lake Area Picnic Shelters and Parking	First	Traditional Public Funding	\$1,316,100
B-2 Lake Area Trail Improvements and Features	First	Traditional Public Funding	\$399,750
B-3 JD Rivers' Garden Enhancements	First	Traditional Public Funding	\$239,850
B-4 Natural Resource Management	First	Traditional Public Funding	\$116,850
C-2 Trail Improvements	First	Traditional Public Funding	\$894,173
C-3 Eloise Butler Improvements	First	Traditional Public Funding	\$669,087
C-4 Natural Resource Management	First	Traditional Public Funding	\$307,500
C-1 Wayfinding	First	Traditional Public Funding	\$86,100
A-3 Chalet Rehab and Site Improvements	First	Public-Private Partnership and Donor Funding	\$1,451,400
A-4 Welcome Center	First	Public-Private Partnership and Donor Funding	\$1,011,675
A-5 Welcome Center Parking	First	Public-Private Partnership and Donor Funding	\$4,932,300
A-11 Back 9 Golf Course Modifications	First	Public-Private Partnership and Donor Funding	\$1,534,120
A-6 Relocated Tubing Hill	First	Public-Private Partnership and Donor Funding	\$150,060
A-7 Cycling Event Trails	First	Public-Private Partnership and Donor Funding	\$78,720
A-10 Ski Trail Improvements	First	Public-Private Partnership and Donor Funding	\$584,250
A-1 Park Maintenance Facilities	Second	Traditional Public Funding	\$1,750,080
A-1a Golf Course Maintenance Facilities	Second	Public-Private Partnership and Donor Funding	\$971,700
A-2 Theo's Retreat	Third	Either Funding Source	\$1,436,400
A-12 Front 9 Golf Improvements	Fourth	Either Funding Source	\$2,299,270

The total estimated development costs to implement the master plan are \$21,031,345. The master plan includes estimated development costs of \$4,805,090 associated with modifications or improvements to the golf courses, which are not eligible for regional parks funding. Therefore, the estimated development costs that are eligible for regional parks funding are \$16,226,255.

Conflicts

Potential conflicts with land uses and solutions that were discussed in the master plan include:

- Winter hiking and skiing at times encounter conflict. Although not allowed, some people hike with their dogs on ski trails in the winter because these are the only maintained, packed trails available for easy hiking. The master plan proposes introducing a new trail type for year-round walking in South Wirth. The trails will be snow-packed in winter for walking, the first time this will be done in the MPRB system.
- During transitional seasons sometimes there are conflicts between uses, such as ski trails maintained with artificial snow that retain their snow cover and wet conditions into the spring preventing the preparation of these areas for golf. The master plan proposes to relocate two golf holes and the tubing hill in order to lessen seasonal overlap of use.

- When fee-based snow tubing was moved to the 10th fairway just outside of the chalet, it displaced what had been used as a free sledding hill. The master plan proposes to relocate the tubing hill, tow-rope and snowmaking to west of the 17th fairway, returning free sledding to the 10th fairway.
- Overflow parking has been an issue on winter evenings during the multiple weekly high school cross-country ski practices, meets, and events as well as during summertime events. Proposed development in the park could bring parking shortages. A new parking lot is proposed for the Wirth Lake area.
- During cleanup from tornado damage in 2011-12, many park visitors expressed concerns about the loss of quiet recreation areas for walking and birding due to the loss of mature tree cover. The master plan proposes dedicated trails for quiet recreation. Trails within the wooded sections of the park will be realigned and will result in fewer conflicts with other recreational activities.
- Transportation systems split the park into separate areas and can result in barriers when traffic levels are high and fast moving, such as along Highway 55. The railroad corridors also create barriers. The master plan suggests that transitway planning for the Bottineau LRT look at strengthening formal access points to the regional park for north Minneapolis residents.

Public Services

The master plan indicates that no additional public services such water or sewer are needed, since the regional park is located in an urban area. Proposed construction projects can utilize existing road and infrastructure networks. Stormwater will be treated onsite or diverted into existing city stormwater systems. New facilities will access existing sanitary sewer, water, and electrical networks.

Operations

Ordinances: Theodore Wirth Regional Park is operated under the MPRB Code of Ordinances which address the use of MPRB parkland, park hours, enforcement, construction, permitting, community engagement, and environmental protection. The MPRB Code of Ordinances are part of the Code of Ordinances for the City of Minneapolis. The Minneapolis Code of Ordinances may affect the regional park by addressing streets and sidewalks, traffic, sewers, zoning and heritage preservation. The Golden Valley City Code of Ordinances address land use regulation and zoning, as well as shoreland management.

Staffing: Theodore Wirth Regional Park is operated and maintained by professional recreation, environmental stewardship and public safety staff. The recreation staff manages golf and winter recreation. Environmental stewardship staff provides maintenance of golf, winter recreation, trees, habitat, general park areas, and environmental programming. MPRB Park Police provide public safety services, such as general patrol of the park, parking enforcement, and issuing administrative tickets. The Park Police are sworn officers who have the authority to arrest and detain criminal offenders and enforce a variety of traffic laws. The Minneapolis and Golden Valley Police Departments also respond to emergency calls within the regional park.

Groups such as Friends of Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, Loppet Foundation and Minneapolis Off-Road Cycling Adventures provide resources and volunteer hours that supplement the operations of the regional park.

Maintenance: General maintenance activities include cleaning the picnic pavilion, picnic area and Wirth Beach House; emptying garbage and recycling cans; picking up garbage in areas where people gather; cleaning debris from the water's edge and removing weeds; mowing developed areas on a 10 day schedule and blowing debris off paths weekly; conducting storm damage or diseased tree removal; and planting and pruning trees as needed.

Routine maintenance for the Winter Recreation Area includes making snow for cross-country ski trails, snowboarding and tubing; maintaining and repairing cross-country ski trail lights; grooming ski trails, relocating snow to connect trails beneath bridges or other covered areas; trimming trees; and maintaining snow guns and other equipment as needed.

Maintenance staff checks paved trails periodically and fills cracks and patches minor holes as needed. The bike trail that follows Theodore Wirth Parkway is plowed during the winter and becomes a combined bicycle and pedestrian path. The Luce Line Regional Trail within the park is not plowed in order to accommodate the cross-country ski trail alignments.

The alignments of new soft surface trails are designed with appropriate grade and cross slopes to ensure year-round sustainability. Informal trails and trails with unsustainable design are closed and restored to native plant communities. MPRB partners with Minneapolis Off-Road Cycling Advocates (MOCA) to sustainably design, build, and maintain the park's off-road cycling trails to minimize erosion and land disturbance. MOCA members do trail building and weekly maintenance. The Loppet Foundation recruits volunteers for seasonal trail maintenance events in spring and fall for the ski and running trails. The Loppet Foundation also participates in improvement work such as trail alignment modifications, erosion control and tree planting.

Estimated costs: The total current annual operations and maintenance costs to MPRB for Theodore Wirth Regional Park are approximately \$610,000. This includes staff time, equipment rental, water quality monitoring, environmental programming, administration, and other activities. It does not include golf course operations and maintenance.

The expected increase in annual operations and maintenance costs upon full build-out of the Master Plan is estimated at \$1,020,000, for a total annual O&M burden at build-out of \$1,630,000. This estimated cost is based on the assumption that annual maintenance should cost 10% of a project's development cost, to ensure high quality facilities and sustainable replacement after an average 10 year life. This figure reflects the understanding that some plan elements, like ski trails or cycling trails, will require more regular or ongoing maintenance while others, like parking lots and buildings, will have little annual maintenance but will require major capital inputs over time. This figure does not include golf course modifications envisioned in the Master Plan.

Annual operating costs are primarily funded through the MPRB general fund budget, with property taxes as the main source of funds. Revenue is also received from the State of Minnesota as part of the Operations and Maintenance Fund allocation administered by the Metropolitan Council. Facilities that are shared by the MPRB's golf operations at the park are also supported by the MPRB's Enterprise fund or general fund. All operations and maintenance costs are subject to annual operating budget development that is administered by the MPRB Superintendent and approved by the Board of Commissioners.

Citizen Participation

The MPRB community engagement process for development of the master plan included a number of efforts. A Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was appointed, which set the vision for the regional park that focused on recreational, natural, and cultural/historic resources. The CAC consisted of 19 members who were appointed by the following:

President of the MPRB Board (appointee was Chair of the CAC)	Each MPRB Commissioner
Mayor of Golden Valley	Bryn Mawr Neighborhood
Harrison Neighborhood	Northside Residents Redevelopment Council
Ward 5 Minneapolis Council Member	Ward 7 Minneapolis Council Member
Youth Coordinating Board (Youth)	Mayor of Minneapolis

The CAC met 20 times to develop recommendations for the master plan. The CAC Chair led the community meetings, which included opportunities for public comment. Several meetings included interactive sessions.

Significant community controversy developed around the perceived conflicting potential uses in the North Wirth/Chalet area of the park regarding golf, winter recreation, and cycling trails. In response to this controversy, a multi-day design charrette was conducted to generate new ideas and seek solutions. The design charrette included a team of expert consultants on golf, trails, winter recreation, cultural and environmental resources, and site design. The CAC and public were invited to participate in the charrette, which resulted in overall concepts for the area and included winter recreation, golf, and cycling changes.

An online survey was conducted to gain information on the needs and interests of North Wirth users regarding winter recreation and silent sport activities. The survey did not provide information on the needs and interests of the Par 3 or 18-hole golfers. Three focus groups were subsequently held to better understand their needs and interests.

Study teams comprised of MPRB staff, staff of non-profit organizations, consultants, and neighborhood representatives met to analyze options for trail development in South Wirth as well as golf and winter recreation in North Wirth. The MPRB also engaged technical experts as part of a Technical Advisory Committee in the design process.

Throughout the planning process, public comments were submitted by mail, email, and electronically through the MPRB project webpage. The MPRB conducted a public hearing on the concept plan and CAC recommendations on June 20, 2011. The draft master plan was available for a 60 day comment period in late 2014, which was extended by the MPRB into early 2015. The MPRB held a public hearing for the master plan on February 18, 2015 and adopted the master plan on March 4, 2015.

Public Awareness

The MPRB uses a number of outreach tools to make the public aware of its regional parks and trails, including websites and social media, event planning, and promotional materials. The MPRB will use its website and govdelivery system to provide regular updates on the progress of the plan to interested stakeholders and the general public.

Accessibility

The master plan indicates that the MPRB will comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The MPRB will provide, upon request, appropriate aids and services leading to effective communication for qualified persons with disabilities so they can participate equally in MPRB programs. The MPRB will also make information and communications accessible to people who have speech, hearing or vision impairments, whenever possible. The master plan indicates that the MPRB will make all reasonable modifications to policies and program to ensure that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to enjoy all of its programs, services and activities.

Many activities within the regional park are free of charge, including hiking and biking, off-road cycling, swimming, bird-watching, wildflower walks, nature tours, photography, archery and others. Some of these activities require special equipment; the MPRB is continuing to establish partnerships with organizations that help youth access equipment. MPRB staff provide low and no-cost gardening instruction at the JD Rivers Children's Garden.

Winter activities at the regional park often require a fee, although there are some free dates. Affordable or free activity options are provided through camps, field trips, ski and mountain bike instruction through MPRB's partnership with the Loppet Foundation and other funding partners.

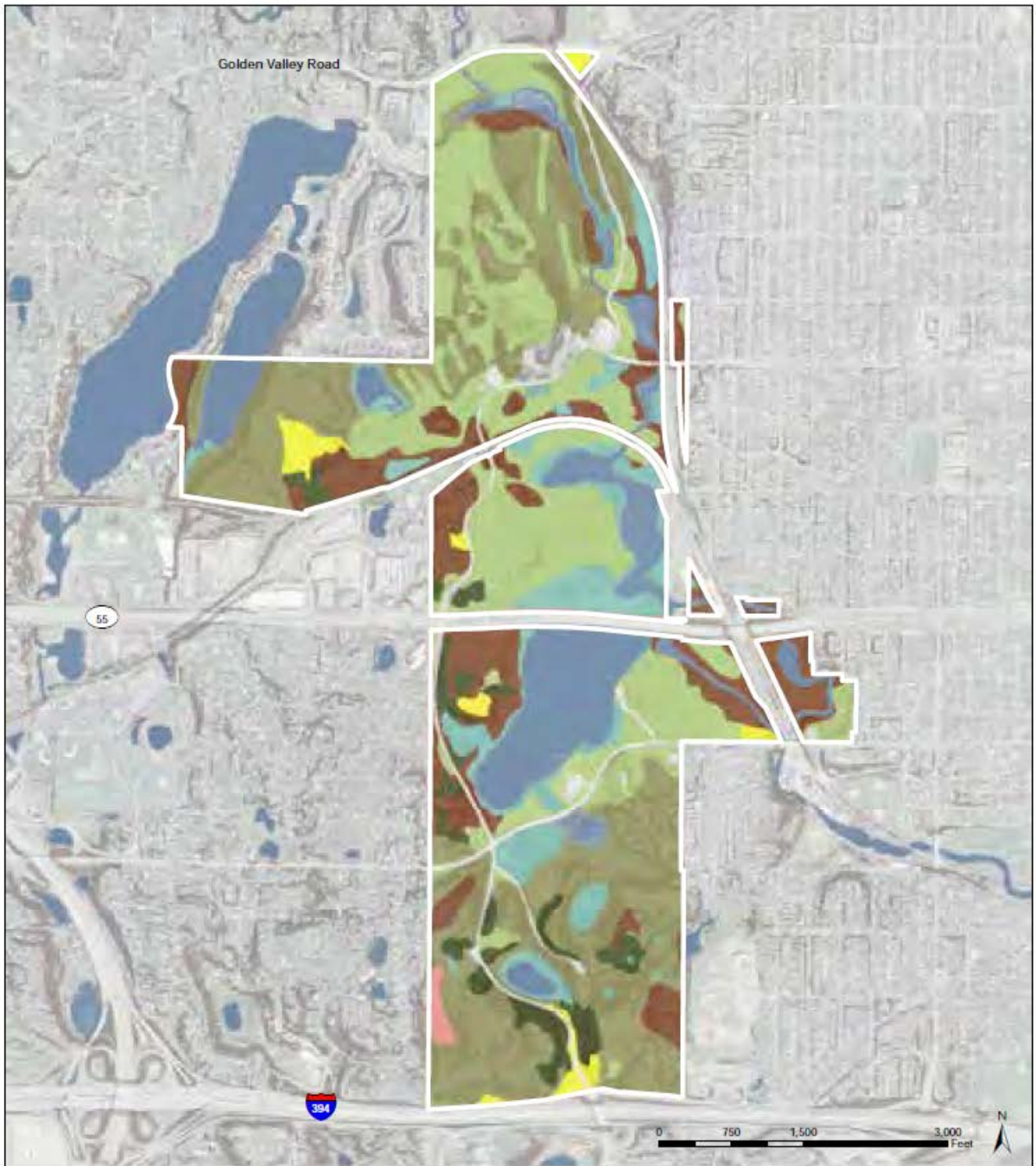
Natural Resources

Theodore Wirth Regional Park consists of varied topography, water bodies, and natural resources. The northeast portion of the park has steep, but mostly stable wooded slopes covered by dry oak vegetation. The southern third of the park is woodland and contains the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, which is an oak woodland that developed from a savanna. The western side of the park has conifer planting and ravines, with 30 feet of topographic relief, mesic oak woods, and a 5-acre tamarack swamp.

The regional park contains many types of water resources, including lakes, streams and wetlands. Lakes include Sweeney Lake on the western boundary of the park; Twin Lake, which is partially located in the park; and Wirth Lake, which is completely within the park and is adjacent to wetlands that provide waterfowl habitat. A 2012 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources survey recorded the presence of painted, smooth soft-shell, and snapping turtles in Wirth Lake. Other water bodies include a 7-acre lagoon, Birch Pond, and the Quaking Bog, which is a remnant native plant area that is home to a very old stand of tamarack trees and remarkable vegetation.

Native plant communities within the regional park include oak forest, tamarack swamp (Quaking Bog), a small maple basswood forest in and around a kettle basin south of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, prairie /savanna, and second growth mixed forest. The existing plant communities are shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Theodore Wirth Regional Park—Existing Plant Communities Map



Legend

- | | |
|--|--|
|  Conifer Plantings |  Prairie |
|  Oak Forest / Savanna |  Tamarack Swamp |
|  Managed Turf Grass |  Wetlands |
|  Second Growth Mixed Forest |  Water Bodies |

The master plan includes the following recommendations for managing the park's natural resources:

- Strategically approaching vegetation management, including maintaining the highest quality ecological areas, maintaining areas where large woody material has been removed, removing invasive species along trail corridors and highest use areas, and using primarily native species for new vegetation and tree plantings (exception for Cultural Landscape features including evergreen tree masses)
- Implementing recommendations of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary Management Plan 2010-2015, which provides guidance for the maintenance and operation of the garden
- Controlling invasive species such as buckthorn and garlic mustard
- Allowing for new succession processes after a natural disturbance
- Preserving old native trees and encouraging regeneration
- Enhancing the desired woodland community throughout the park with new tree plantings
- Working with partners to enhance water quality throughout the park

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) – This regional park is located within the cities of Minneapolis and Golden Valley, just south of Robbinsdale. Any construction may have an impact on Metropolitan Council Interceptors in multiple locations. To assess the potential impacts to our interceptor system, prior to initiating any proposed project, preliminary plans should be sent to Scott Dentz, Interceptor Engineering Manager (651-602-4503) at the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services (MCES) for review and comment.

Metro Transit (Michael Mechtenberg 612-349-7793) – Staff offers the following comments:

- The list of existing bus routes serving the regional park described in the master plan should include Route 7, with service along Plymouth Avenue ending at the Chalet.
- The master plan indicates that public bus access to the regional park is limited, which is something that could be improved upon if buses could operate on Theodore Wirth Parkway between Plymouth Avenue and Golden Valley Road.
- The master plan states that the proposed Bottineau Transitway will further limit neighborhood connections to the park. I assume the MPRB is referring to illegal crossings over the BNSF railroad tracks, something that should be actively discouraged. Bridges or other pedestrian infrastructure to improve legal access to the park is encouraged.

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

Conclusions

1. The Theodore Wirth Regional Park Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies.

2. The regional park is located in the vicinity of several Metropolitan Council Environmental Services facilities. Any construction may have an impact on these MCES Interceptors. In order to maintain the integrity of the regional sewer interceptor system, preliminary development plans for the regional trail must be submitted to Metropolitan Council Environmental Services for review and comment.
3. The total estimated development costs to implement the master plan are \$21,031,345. The master plan includes estimated development costs of \$4,805,090 associated with modifications or improvements to the golf courses, which are not eligible for regional parks funding. Therefore, the estimated development costs that are eligible for regional parks funding are \$16,226,255.
4. The Council's 2011 Regional Parks Capital Improvement program (CIP) included a \$1,743,000 allocation to the MPRB to be used for projects consistent with the updated master plan. The CIP indicated that no grant will be awarded until the Council has approved the updated master plan and specific projects that are consistent with the updated master plan. The MPRB indicates that the grant request for \$1,743,000 would be used for design and construction consistent with the North Wirth concept in the master plan, including trail development, bridges, landscaping, grading, parking areas, lighting, downhill infrastructure, utilities, surveys and site investigations, design, and project management. This project description is consistent with the updated master plan being considered as part of this action.
5. Approval of this master plan and grant request 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 MPRB.
6. Land acquisition costs are not quantified in the master plan, since the inholding parcels are currently owned by railroad companies and do not have a tax assessed value to be used as a basis for an acquisition estimate. A master plan amendment that includes estimated acquisition costs will need to be approved by the Council before the MPRB may seek future grants for land acquisition. Future acquisition funding based on an approved master plan amendment may be awarded through the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund, the Regional Parks CIP, and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund.

Attachment 1: Grant Request Letter from the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board



**Minneapolis
Park & Recreation Board**

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Superintendent
Jayne Miller

Secretary to the Board
Jennifer B. Ringold



April 29, 2015

Jan Youngquist
Manager, Regional Parks and Natural Resources
Metropolitan Council
390 Robert Street North
St. Paul, MN 55101

Dear Ms. Youngquist:

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board has approved a master plan for Theodore Wirth Regional Park and now requests review by Metropolitan Council staff and consideration for approval by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and the Metropolitan Council.

The Master Plan as transmitted digitally was approved by the MPRB Commissioners on March 4, 2015. It is MPRB's hope that it can be considered at the May 5 meeting of the MPOSC, to facilitate prompt release of funding dedicated to projects in the park that are currently in the schematic design phase.

MPRB would also like to request the following grant for Wirth Park:

- \$1,743,000 from 2011 State and Met Council bonds

This grant will be used to implement an adventure area and Welcome Center as envisioned and described in the Master Plan as North Wirth, as well as other trail improvement projects throughout the park. The adventure area is an outdoor sport venue focused on cross-country skiing, downhill snowboarding and skiing, tubing, and mountain bike event trails. An associated building (the Welcome Center) will serve as an entry point to the entire regional park and also specifically serve the adventure area.

The grants requested would be used for design and construction consistent with the North Wirth concept in the Master Plan, including trail development, bridges, buildings, landscaping, grading, parking areas, lighting, downhill infrastructure, utilities, surveys and site investigations, design, and project management.

MPRB staff appreciates your consideration of this request and looks forward to answering any questions you or MPOSC members may have.

Sincerely,

Adam Regn Arvidson, PLA, FASLA
Interim Director of Strategic Planning
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board