

Minutes of the

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE METROPOLITAN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

Tuesday, September 8, 2015

Committee Members Present:

Todd Kemery, Rick Theisen, Robert Moeller, Dean Johnston, Sarah Hietpas, Wendy Wulff, Council Liaison

Committee Members Absent: Michael Kopp, Bill Weber, Anthony Taylor, and Rachel Gillespie

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Johnston called the meeting of the Council's Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order at 4:02 p.m. on Tuesday, September 8, 2015.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Chair Johnson noted that the Information Items will be heard first as there was not a quorum present at this time. He asked for a consensus to approve the amended agenda of the September 8, 2015 meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. Consensus of the members present was obtained.

Chair Johnston noted that the Commission would wait until a quorum was present to approve the minutes.

PUBLIC INVITATION

Invitation to interested person(s) to address the Commission on matters not on the agenda.

None.

INFORMATION

Annual Use Estimate of the Regional Parks System for 2014 – Raintry Salk, Research Analyst

Salk discussed the regional use estimates from 2014 giving background and rationale for doing the counts. She noted there were 48,687,143 visits in 2014.

Salk reviewed the top five most frequently visited parks and showed the percentage of visits by agency. She noted that there is a full report on the Council's website:

<http://metro council.org/Parks/Publications-And-Resources/PARK-USE-REPORTS/2014-Annual-Use-Estimate-of-the-Regional-Parks-Sys.aspx>

Salk stated that a visitor's survey will be conducted in 2016.

Wulff requested that a link to the report be included to the online agenda so people can find it easily.

INTRODUCTIONS

With a quorum now present, Chair Johnston asked Mark VanderSchaaf, Director of Regional Planning to introduce new staff. VanderSchaaf announced several staffing changes. He introduced Emmett Mullin, the new Manager of Regional Parks and Natural Resources. He then introduced Deb Jensen, who will help manage park finances and grants. VanderSchaaf then discussed Jan Youngquist returning to her former position as a Planning Analyst focusing on parks planning and policy work.

Emmett Mullin, Manager thanked staff for the introduction and gave some background on his prior work at the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Chair Johnston thanked Youngquist for her work in the past in all of her capacities.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

With a quorum now present, Chair Johnston asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the August 4, 2015 meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. Hietpas motioned and it was seconded by Kemery. **Minutes were approved.**

BUSINESS

Public Hearing Report and Final 2016-2021 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program – Mark VanderSchaaf, Director Regional Planning

VanderSchaaf gave a presentation on the Public Hearing Report and Final 2016-2021 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program outlined in the materials provided.

Moeller referred to Scott and Carver Counties and noted that they do not have any state bonding allocated to them. VanderSchaaf responded that their total allocation they receive overall is the same (according to the formula) however due to different eligibility requirements for state and Council bonding, they receive no state bond funds. He discussed what is eligible for CIP funding such as land acquisitions.

It was motioned by Moeller seconded by Hietpas to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Accept the public hearing report for the 2016-2021 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP);
2. Adopt the 2016-2021 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program; and
3. Authorize staff to submit a request to the legislature for \$11 million in state bonds for 2016.

Chair Johnston called for a vote. **The motion** passed unanimously.

Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant for Lake Elmo Park Reserve, 10112 10th Street North (Hammes Property), Washington County – Tori Dupre, Senior Planner

Dupre presented the request from Washington County for a park acquisition opportunity fund grant for Lake Elmo Park Reserve as detailed in the materials provided.

It was motioned by Hietpas seconded by Theisen to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Authorize a grant of up to \$707,013 to Washington County to acquire a 33.5 acre property for Lake Elmo Park Reserve. The Metropolitan Council's grant finances up to 75 percent of the total acquisition costs from the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund using the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund account. The grant will be financed as follows:
 - \$424,208 from the Fiscal Year 2016 Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriation, and
 - \$282,805 from Metropolitan Council bonds
2. Acknowledge Washington County's grant match of \$235,671 that finances at least 25 percent of the total acquisition costs. If the total acquisition costs are higher than estimated, Washington County is responsible for the difference.
3. Authorize the Community Development Director to sign the grant agreement including the restrictive covenant.

Kemery asked how long it will take to develop this parcel. John Elholm, Washington County Parks Director stated that the plan is to plant it into prairie. He noted that the trail may be re-routed in the future.

Theisen asked if the plan is to plant it all into prairie or lease it prior to planting it. Elholm stated the plan is to plant it into prairie, to make a more scenic entrance into the park.

Chair Johnston called for a vote. **The motion carried unanimously.**

East Anoka County Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment, Anoka County – Jan Youngquist, Planning Analyst

Youngquist presented a master plan amendment for East Anoka County Regional Trail Master Plan as outlined in the materials provided.

Kemery referred to the trail on the north side as it comes into Isanti County and asked if the County has any connections. Jeff Perry, Anoka County stated that it does connect to local trails in Isanti County.

Wulff referenced a map on page 5 of the handout showing section in Ham Lake and Columbus and asked why we are choosing street rather than the natural area. Perry stated that this is part of the Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and they do not allow trails. He noted that Anoka County did make a request and they were denied.

Theisen asked if the WMA gave a rationale. Perry stated that they indicated it was a public safety issue. He discussed the section where it will pass through two state identified areas and will provide a positive experience.

It was motioned by Hietpas seconded by Moeller to recommend that the Metropolitan Council approve the East Anoka County Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment.

Chair Johnston called for a vote. **The motion carried unanimously.**

Highway 96 Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment, Ramsey County – Jan Youngquist, Planning Analyst

Youngquist presented the master plan amendment submitted by Ramsey County for the Highway 96 Regional Trail Master Plan as outlined in the materials provided.

Kemery referred to the Nature Observation Area and asked if this is a hard trail. Scott Yonke, Ramsey County discussed the changes of the paved trail to a natural trail and noted that the feedback they received was that folks wanted to see a more natural trail. He stated also that in an effort to save many of the natural oak trees it made sense to make trails natural.

Yonke noted that the Nature Observation Area doesn't exist yet, but will be constructed as part of the development plan and stated that there isn't enough width for a paved trail.

Kemery suggested that in the future a boardwalk in the south area might be considered and asked if it will connect to local trails. Yonke stated that it would be a neighborhood trail and that the City of Shorewood would be providing the connection. He stated that he misunderstood Kemery's question and stated that the trail to the boardwalk would be paved.

Theisen asked about the estimated costs and what the factors or unknowns are. Yonke stated that the big variance with the numbers is they they'd like to do wetland restoration on site and the discrepancy is in regards to the amount of restoration that would be done.

It was motioned by Kemery seconded by Theisen to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Highway 96 Regional Master Plan Amendment to include development plans for the Snail Lake Marsh.

2. Require that prior to initiating development, preliminary plans must be sent to Scott Dentz, Interceptor Engineer Manager at Metropolitan Council Environmental Services, for review in order to assess the potential impacts to the regional interceptor system.

Chair Johnston called for a vote. **The motion carried unanimously.**

INFORMATION (continued)

Distributing State Fiscal Year 2016 Appropriations for Metropolitan Regional Parks System Operations and Maintenance – Mark VanderSchaaf, Director Regional Planning

VanderSchaaf presented the operating budget and the distribution of State Fiscal Year 2016 appropriations for operations and maintenance (O&M) as outlined in the materials provided.

Hietpas asked what the position of the state is regarding the smaller percentage of reimbursement for O&M. VanderSchaaf stated that this is a process that needs to be brought to the Governor and the legislature and staff is looking at raising this awareness.

Hietpas asked how the agencies make up the difference. Youngquist stated they use local property taxes and user fees.

Theisen asked (regarding the 40%) if this is permissive or mandatory. VanderSchaaf pointed out the verbiage: "The statute allows for state funding of 40% of each implementing agency's actual annual O&M cost if the legislature has made sufficient O&M money available".

Moeller pointed out that this Commission has little influence over how O&M gets funded – within the formula of what they can receive. VanderSchaaf noted that some formulas are written in state statute however others are written into the parks policy plan and this Commission does have influence over that.

Moeller commented that we have no control over which one of 'the pots' are used for funding and how this influences the Commission's decision to vote for or against a proposal to accept a master plan, etc. Johnston stated this Commission is created by the legislature asking for citizen review and input. He asked if there is a way of leveraging what Moeller is talking about to do more than what we have.

Salk reminded Commissioners that there is a placeholder in the Policy Plan where you will have an enhanced responsibility in the next biennium to conduct discussion related to the prioritization of the Legacy projects and Capital Improvement Program projects.

Theisen noted that this is a controversial placeholder with the implementing agencies.

Hietpas clarified the use of funding vs. the funds available.

Kemery raised the question in what our future duties will be. He asked if we will have influences over having implementing agencies increase user fees. VanderSchaaf stated we would not. Youngquist added that the Metropolitan Council doesn't have the authority to tell the implementing agencies what user fees will be.

Wulff noted that whoever gives the money sets the rules. In regards to O&M funds – we're stuck with what the Governor and legislature says.

Theisen stated that the funding we receive from the legislature is always in proportion to the amount of lobbying and whether or not there is a crisis. He also stated that he feels the implementing agencies guard their authority on how to raise their funds and what to do and not do. He feels they need that flexibility and freedom or they lose their reason for existence.

Youngquist explained that the O&M funds are strictly state funds – bonding cannot be used. Bonding is only used for capital expenses. She noted that the Legacy fund has opened up a new avenue where in the past the Council has focused on capital spending. With the legacy funds there are four pillars. One is connecting people and the outdoors, so that allows for money to go towards programming. She noted

that we weren't able to do that before. Another pillar is taking care of what we have so this pillar does allow us to address maintenance issues.

Theisen stated it would be useful to have some sort of schematic to lay out these types of rules.

Wulff likes that idea. She discussed when we talk about capital and we don't talk about the percent of what is awarded vs. overall costs. She feels the implementing agencies spend more funds on capital projects than taking care of what we already have.

VanderSchaaf stated that this wasn't included in the overview report but if you look at the spreadsheets provided, additional expenses (for O&M) are listed beyond what state and Council bonds cover. Wulff clarified that these are just the projects listed in the CIP. She would like to know beyond these – what the big number is.

Youngquist stated that some agencies front the money for capital projects and then seek reimbursement from the Council. If they spend their dollars on O&M and don't request reimbursement, then we don't know what the big number would be.

REPORTS

Chair: None

Staff: Youngquist reported that the Metropolitan Council approved the Lebanon Hills Master Plan unanimously at their last meeting.

Commissioners: Moeller commented on the park tours (or lack of this summer) and asked if there will be any yet this year. Youngquist stated that staff had all good intentions but with the heavy workload it didn't pan out. She noted that staff can look into arranging a tour for the October meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandi Dingle
Recording Secretary