

## Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: July 5, 2016

For the Community Development Committee meeting of July 18, 2016

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of July 27, 2016

**Subject:** Sugar Hills Regional Trail Master Plan and Reimbursement Consideration, Anoka County

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

**Policy/Legal Reference:** MN Statutes 473.313 and 473.315; Planning Strategy 1 and Finance Strategy 6, *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*

**Staff Prepared/Presented:** Jan Youngquist, AICP, Planning Analyst (651-602-1029)

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

### Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Sugar Hills Regional Trail Master Plan.
2. Consider reimbursing Anoka County up to \$100,000 from its share of a future Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program for costs associated with trail construction within the project area shown in Attachment 1.
3. Inform Anoka County that the Council does not under any circumstances represent or guarantee that reimbursement will be granted, and expenditure of local funds never entitles a park agency to reimbursement.

### Background

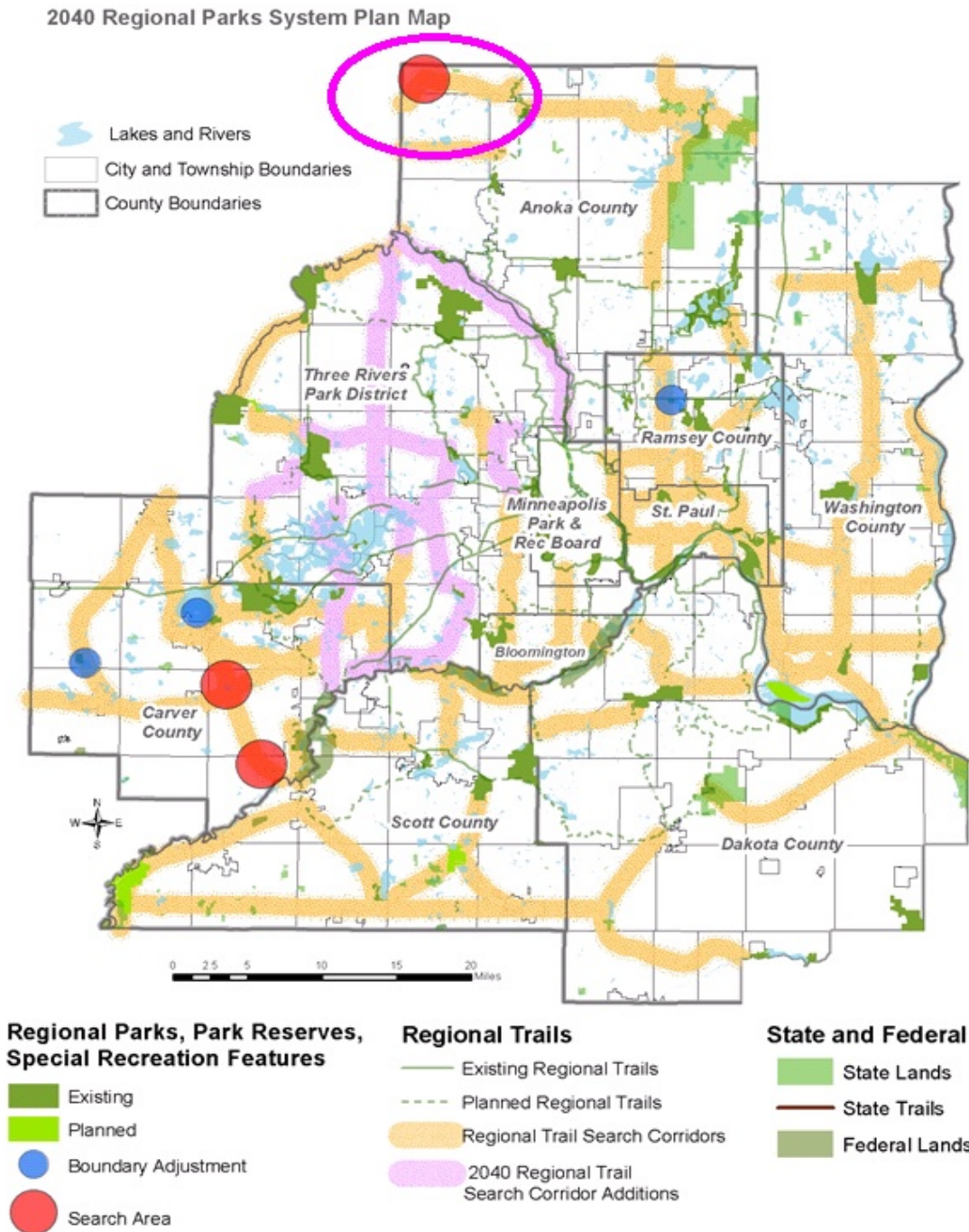
The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* identifies a regional trail search corridor in northwest Anoka County that connects the Rum River Regional Trail and the Northwest Anoka County Regional Park Search Area, as shown circled in pink on Figure 1. Anoka County has submitted a master plan for the Sugar Hills Regional Trail and a request for the Council to consider reimbursing the County up to \$100,000 from its share of a future Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for the costs associated with construction of the trail along CSAH 24 and CSAH 9 in St. Francis.

Once completed, the Sugar Hills Regional Trail will connect the Rum River Regional Trail, Rum River North County Park, the Northwest Anoka County Regional Park Search Area, and the North Anoka County Regional Trail Search Corridor as well as local parks, trails, and schools. The regional trail travels through the communities of Oak Grove, St. Francis, and Nowthen along its 14-mile route. Approximately two miles of the trail exist in St. Francis and Oak Grove, with 12 miles to be developed in the future.

Anoka County is planning on constructing segments of the Sugar Hills Regional Trail in partnership with the City of St. Francis in 2016-2017 as part of the reconstruction of CSAH 24/Bridge Street. The construction project is scheduled to occur before Anoka County would be able to include the project in the Regional Parks CIP. Anoka County is planning to proceed with trail development and seek reimbursement for its costs in a future Regional Parks CIP. Attachment 1 depicts the project area outlined in red and the regional trail alignment in blue.



Figure 1: 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan—Sugar Hills Regional Trail Search Corridor



**Rationale**

The Sugar Hills Regional Trail Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies as described in the *Analysis* section of this staff report.

The request for reimbursement consideration is within the Council’s granting authority outlined in Minnesota Statute 473.315 and is consistent with Finance Strategy 6 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, which states:

*Finance Strategy 6: The Council may reimburse regional park implementing agencies for the costs of acquiring some lands before they have been made part of the Regional Parks System or for development projects undertaken before they can be financed through the Metropolitan Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program.*

Reimbursement will be considered for development provided that: (staff response to the criteria is shown in italics)

1. The project in question is consistent in timing, scale, type, and cost with an approved master plan.  
*The timing, scale and cost for the construction of the trail segments along CSAH 24 and CSAH 9 are consistent with this master plan that is concurrently being considered by the Council for approval.*
2. All information required for the development grant is submitted to the Council prior to the regional park implementing agency undertaking the project.  
*Sufficient information has been submitted in this request regarding what would be financed with a Council grant as described in the Funding section below and in the Development Concept portion of the Analysis section. Anoka County is requesting Council approval for County expenditures prior to undertaking construction, which is anticipated to start late in 2016 and be complete in 2017.*
3. The Council approves the project.  
*Staff is recommending approval of the master plan that includes the project as well as the reimbursement consideration request.*

## **Funding**

The estimated costs to implement the master plan are \$14,136,100, which includes right-of-way and easement acquisition as well as development.

The estimated costs for the trail segments along CSAH 24 and CSAH 9 that are being constructed in 2016 are \$195,000. Any right-of-way needed for this segment of the trail will be acquired as part of the road reconstruction project. Anoka County Parks anticipates paying \$100,000 for the trail construction, with the remaining funds provided by the City of St. Francis.

Approval of the master plan and the reimbursement consideration request does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. The requested reimbursement consideration may be financed from Anoka County's share of a future Metropolitan Regional Parks CIP. However, the Council does not under any circumstances represent or guarantee that reimbursement will be granted, and expenditure of local funds does not entitle a park agency to reimbursement.

The remaining acquisition and development costs based on this master plan 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 the CIP, the Parks and Trails Fund project list, and specific grants to Anoka County.

## **Known Support / Opposition**

The Anoka County Board of Commissioners approved and adopted the master plan amendment on May 10, 2016. The Cities of St. Francis and Nowthen as well as Independent School District 15 passed resolutions of support for development of the regional trail. The City of Oak Grove did not pass a resolution of support, but has committed to working with the County and St. Francis on the trail connection between the two cities. There is no known opposition to the master plan amendment or the reimbursement consideration request.



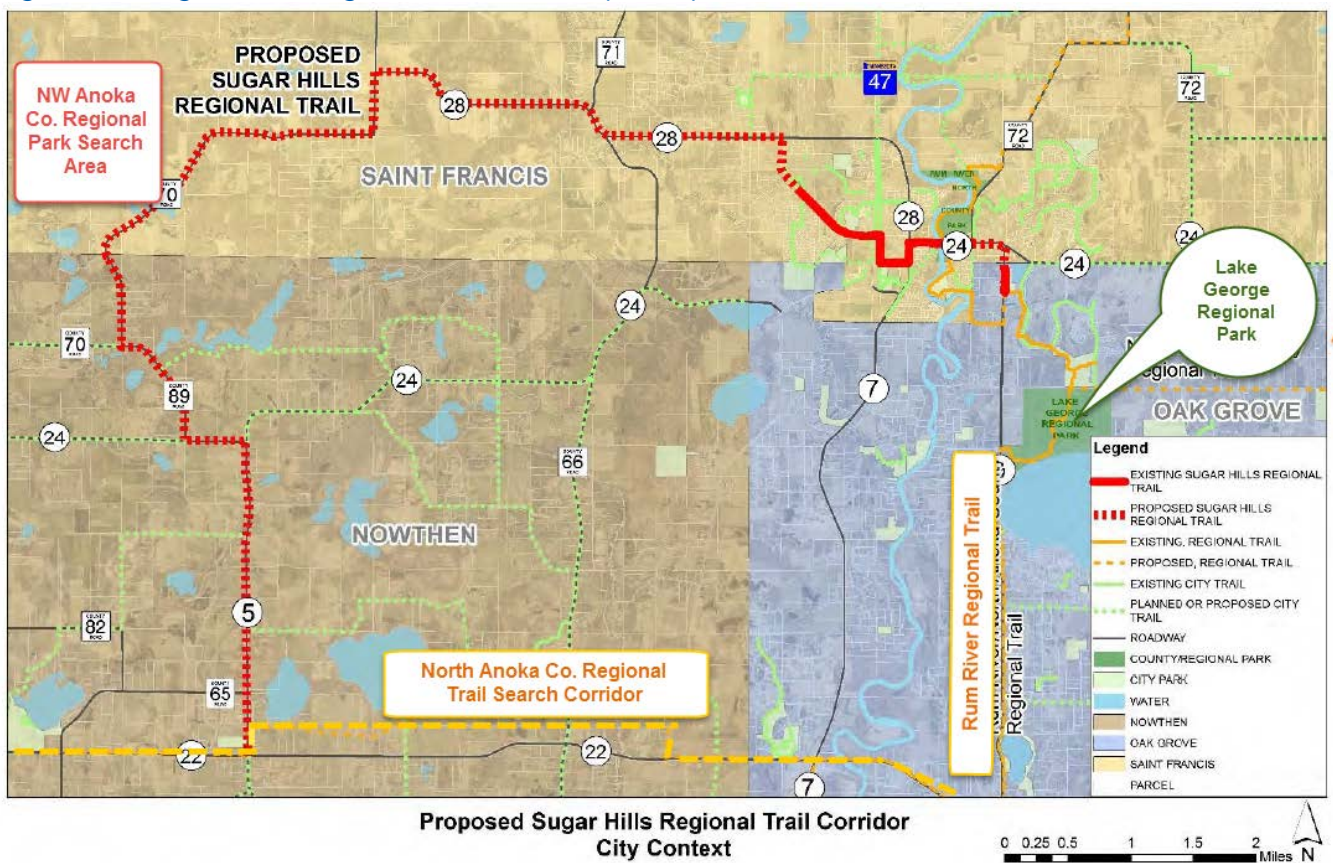
## Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan requires that master plans for linking regional trails address the nine items listed below.

## Boundaries and Acquisition

The Sugar Hills Regional Trail will travel 14 miles through the cities of Oak Grove, St. Francis, and Nowthen. Approximately two miles of the regional trail exist in St. Francis and Oak Grove. The regional trail will connect the Rum River Regional Trail, the Northwest Anoka County Regional Park Search Area, and North Anoka County Regional Trail Search Corridor, as shown in Figure 2. Additionally, the Rum River Regional Trail connects to Lake George Regional Park, just southeast of the Sugar Hills Regional Trail.

Figure 2: Sugar Hills Regional Trail Route (in red)



The easternmost portion of the trail is located in Oak Grove along CSAH 9/Lake George Boulevard. Approximately 0.2 miles of the trail exist and begin at the Rum River Regional Trail. A planned 0.25 mile segment along CSAH 9 takes the trail north to CSAH 24. The planned trail then heads west into St. Francis and connects to St. Francis High School. These two trail segments along CSAH 24 and CSAH 9 are being constructed in 2016 and constitute the trail project for which Anoka County is seeking reimbursement consideration.

Heading west of the high school, the existing trail connects to Rum River North County Park. After crossing the Rum River, the existing trail provides connections to the St. Francis Elementary and Middle Schools. A bicycle/pedestrian tunnel is proposed under Highway 47 for user safety. Segment 1 of the Sugar Hills Regional Trail is depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Sugar Hills Regional Trail Segment 1 (in red)

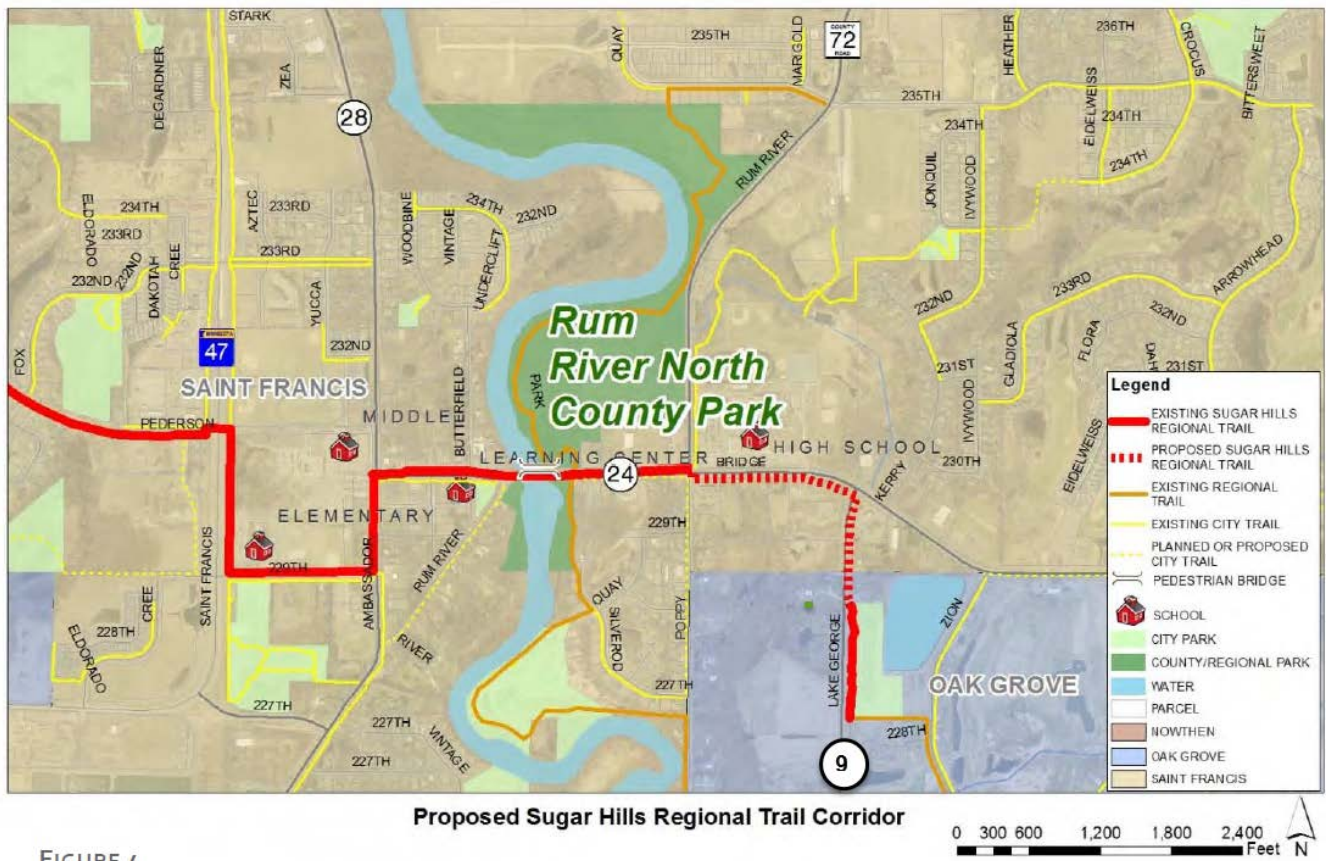
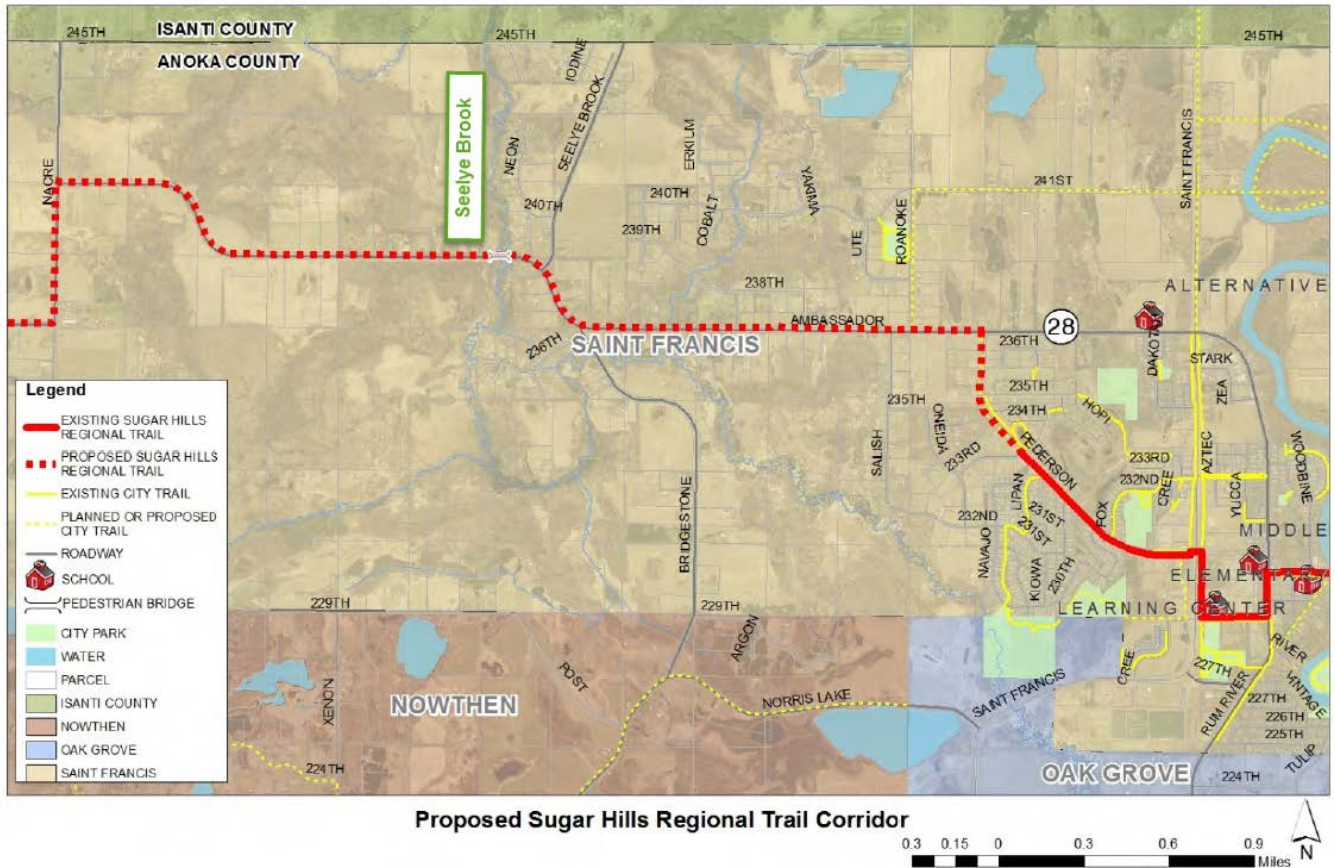


FIGURE 3



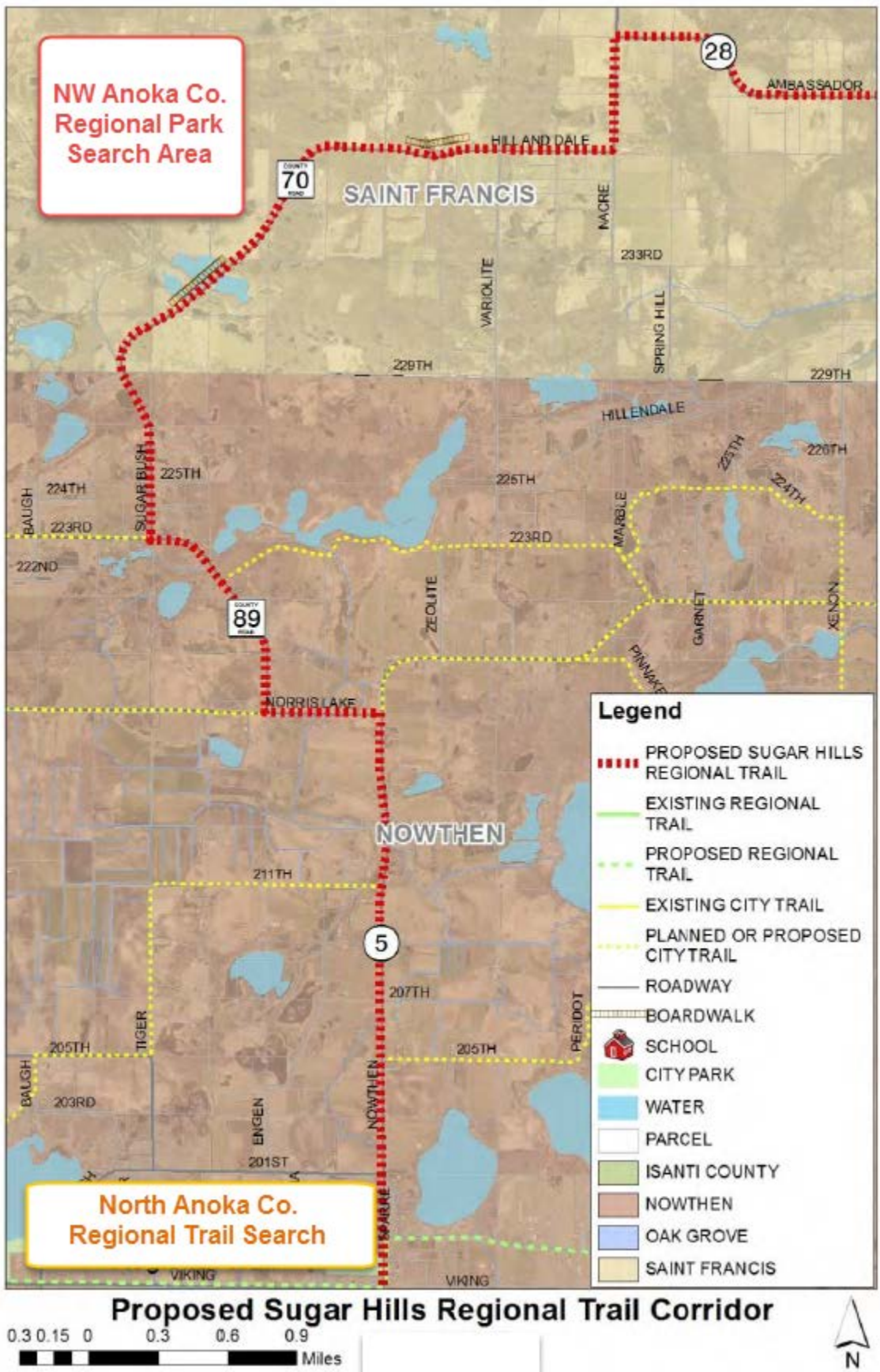
The central segment of the regional trail is planned to continue west through the rural portion of St. Francis and cross Seelye Brook via a proposed small pedestrian bridge. Segment 2 of the Sugar Hills Regional Trail is depicted in red on Figure 4. Existing and planned local trail connections are shown in yellow.

Figure 4: Sugar Hills Regional Trail Segment 2 (in red)



The westernmost segment of the planned regional trail travels south through St. Francis, connecting to the Northwest Anoka County Regional Park Search Area, several planned local trails, and the North Anoka County Regional Trail Search Corridor. Segment 3 of the Sugar Hills Regional Trail is shown in red on Figure 5, with the planned local trails shown in yellow.

Figure 5: Sugar Hills Regional Trail Segment 3 (in red)





Anoka County may need to acquire easements for right-of-way along the trail route. The master plan includes a list of parcels that may be affected. Estimated acquisition costs are approximately \$226,000.

### **Demand Forecast**

Outdoor recreational use patterns in the region have been growing steadily. These use patterns have also been seen in Anoka County. Recreational visits to Anoka County regional trails have increased from 583,000 in 2009 to 1,070,000 in 2014.

Regional parks and trails have been increasing in popularity along with increases in population. As the population in the region continues to grow, recreation resources and amenities should also increase. Anoka County's population is expected to grow approximately 33 percent between 2010 and 2040, when the County's population is estimated to be 440,520. The regional trail travels through the cities of Oak Grove, St. Francis and Nowthen. The population of these three cities combined is anticipated to grow by almost 44 percent between 2010 and 2040, consisting of an additional 8,600 people.

The historical increase in recreational visits to regional parks and trails, coupled with the projected population growth of Anoka County and its communities indicate an increase in future demand for recreational facilities.

### **Development Concept**

The regional trail consists of a 10 foot wide paved trail that is separated from the roadway through grade differentiation. To safely cross the Rum River along CSAH 24, the master plan proposes that a trail be included when the current road bridge is reconstructed. In the short term, a bike lane will be striped along the shoulder of the road. If a trail cannot be included as part of future bridge reconstruction, the County proposes to build a separate 400 foot pedestrian bridge north of the roadway bridge.

The crossing of Highway 47 currently includes Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacons, as shown in Figure 6. The master plan proposes to construct a pedestrian tunnel in the future to provide the safest type of crossing.

*Figure 6: Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacons at Highway Crossing*





Stormwater management for the trail will follow the requirements of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Army Corps of Engineers, Upper Rum River Watershed Management Organization, and other permitting and regulatory agencies. The ownership and maintenance of any stormwater management facilities developed in conjunction with the trail construction will be the responsibility of Anoka County.

The wayfinding signage plan includes trailhead signs at the major intersections and directional signs to be installed at smaller intersections and decision points along the trail. Figures 7 and 8 show examples of trailhead and directional signs, respectively. The wayfinding signage plan is shown in Figure 9, with trailheads signs denoted with a “T” and directional signs denoted with a “D”.

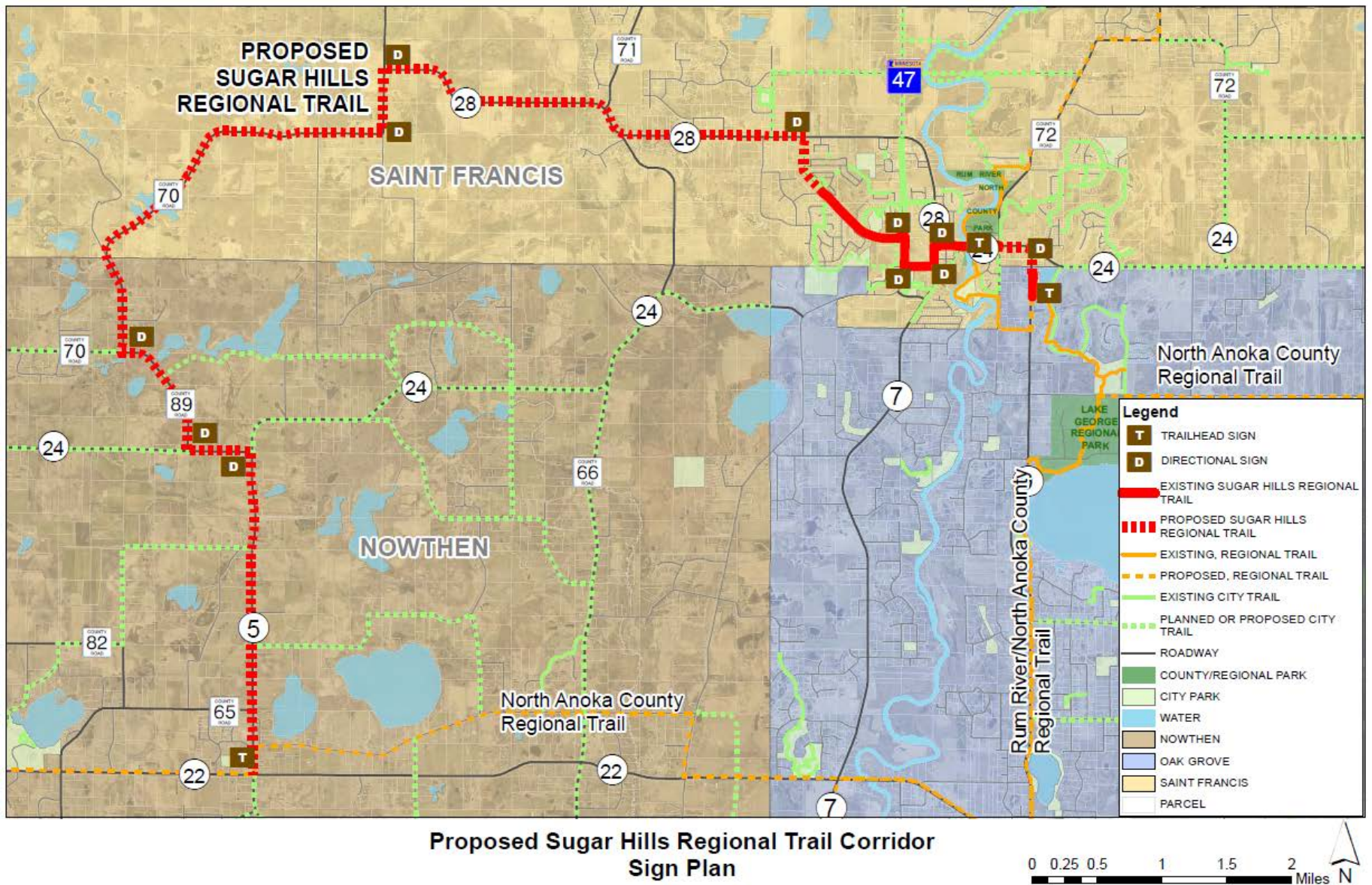
*Figure 7: Trailhead Sign*



*Figure 8: Directional Sign*



Figure 9: Sugar Hills Regional Trail Wayfinding Signage Plan



The estimated implementation costs for the regional trail are \$14,136,100, as shown in Figure 10.

*Figure 10: Sugar Hills Regional Trail Estimated Costs*

Description	Total
Right-of-way/easement acquisition (if necessary)	\$226,000
Design/engineering/project management	\$1,300,000
Archaeological survey	\$325,000
Wetland delineation	\$325,000
Topographic survey/construction staking	\$500,000
Geotechnical survey	\$300,000
Clearing and grubbing	\$500,000
Utility relocations, if required	\$350,000
Bituminous trail construction	\$3,400,000
Boardwalk construction	\$1,000,000
Pedestrian bridge crossing—Rum River	\$2,000,000
Tunnel construction—Highway 47	\$2,000,000
Crosswalk improvements	\$250,000
Lighting	\$100,000
Landscaping and restoration	\$150,000
Signage and striping	\$75,000
Site furnishings	\$50,000
Subtotal	\$12,851,000
Contingency (10%)	\$1,285,100
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14,136,100</b>

### **Conflicts**

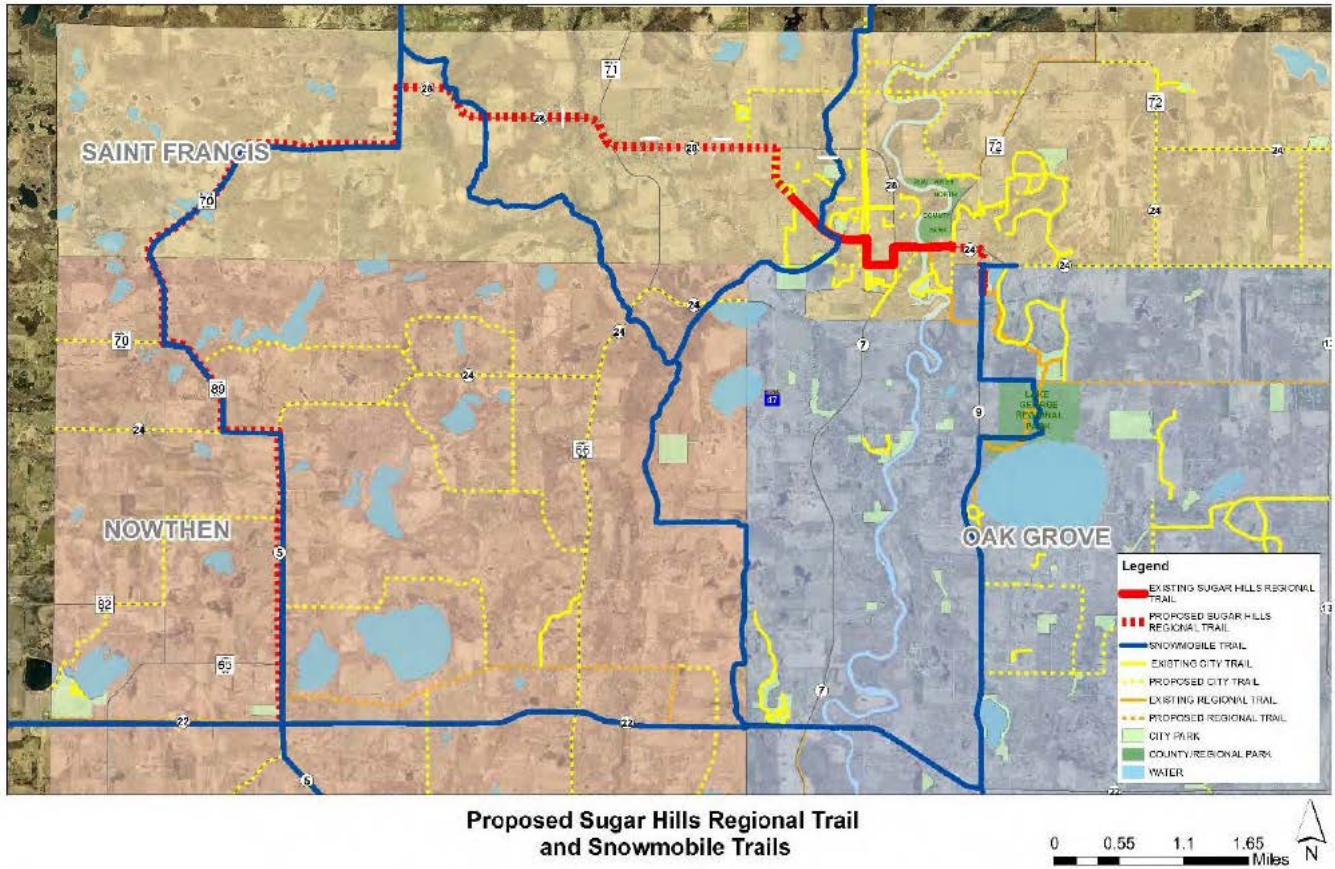
The master plan indicates that there are no anticipated conflicts between the trail and the existing or planned land uses along the corridor. Adjacent land uses range from agricultural, parks and open space, quasi-public, residential, commercial, and light industrial. Safe street crossings and signage will help ensure minimal conflicts between trail users and vehicles.

The transportation plan for the City of St. Francis identifies a future road along the regional trail route near CSAH 24 and Highway 47. The master plan indicates that the City and the County will need to work together to ensure that the road and the trail are complementary to one another.



A portion of the regional trail alignment runs parallel to existing snowmobile trails. Figure 10 shows the planned route of the Sugar Hills Regional Trail in red and the snowmobile trails in blue. The trail corridor is anticipated to be wide enough to accommodate both trails. Anoka County will coordinate with the Sno-Ghosts Snowmobile Club during regional trail construction to minimize any conflicts between the two uses. Signage will alert users to the existence of both trails.

*Figure 10: Sugar Hills Regional Trail (in red) and Local Snowmobile Trails (in blue)*



## **Public Services**

The master plan does not identify any non-recreational public services or facilities that are needed to accommodate the planned trail. Local and regional parks along the trail route will provide parking, drinking fountains and benches for trail users.

## **Operations**

The Anoka County Ordinance, dated January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012, regulates parks and trails under the jurisdiction of Anoka County. Education, monitoring, and enforcement are provided by Anoka County Park Rangers, local police departments, and the Anoka County Sheriff’s Department.

Anoka County partners with local communities to maintain its regional trails. The County typically enters into a Joint Powers Agreement or a Memorandum of Understanding with the affected Cities. These partnership agreements describe the roles and responsibilities of each agency with regard to maintenance and capital improvements along the trail corridor. Anoka County will provide routine

maintenance for portions of the regional trail that travel within county or regional parks. Maintenance activities will include mowing, sweeping, plowing, clearing, debris removal, and patching. Local cities will provide general routine maintenance for the portions of the regional trail that are not within these parks. Anoka County will inspect the trail annually and provide any necessary capital improvements or long term maintenance.

Annual maintenance costs for the Sugar Hills Regional Trail are estimated to be approximately \$15,000, which includes money for sign replacement, minor bituminous repair, and crack-sealing. Annual operating costs are funded through the Anoka County Parks and Recreation Department's annual operations and maintenance budget, which receives its funding from picnic shelter rentals, room rentals, programs, park entrance fees, and the County's general fund. Supplemental funding is received through the Regional Park Operations and Maintenance Grant Program.

### **Public Engagement and Participation**

The public engagement plan identified stakeholders for development of the master plan, which included local governments, business owners, and residents. Engagement activities included open houses, community meetings, and targeted events such as Independent School District #15's Multicultural Festival. The Multicultural Festival was attended by 200 people and included young children, high school students, adults and seniors, including those of diverse races and ethnicities. No written comments were received from festival attendees, although people verbally expressed support for the regional trail to Anoka County staff.

Twenty-one people attended an open house and several written comments were received. Comments ranged from strong support of the trail to concerns about the development costs. One commenter had questions regarding the effect of the trail on Seelye Brook. The master plan proposes a pedestrian bridge over stream to minimize trail impacts.

The Anoka County Board of Commissioners approved and adopted the regional trail master plan. The Cities of St. Francis and Nowthen as well as Independent School District 15 passed resolutions of support for development of the regional trail. The City of Oak Grove did not pass a resolution of support, but has committed to working with the County and St. Francis on the trail connection between the two cities.

### **Public Awareness**

Anoka County uses a number of outreach tools to make the public aware of its regional parks and trails. These include public information maps, websites, social media, publications, and brochures. The County partnered with local cities and Commute Solutions, which is a Transportation Management Organization in Anoka County, to develop a bike/walk map that includes parks and trails throughout the County. Anoka County has also installed wayfinding maps throughout its parks and trails. A portion of the wayfinding trailhead signage project was done in cooperation with Blue Cross/Blue Shield's "do.Campaign", so the signs include a "do" message promoting physical activity.

### **Accessibility**

The regional trail will meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. There will not be a fee for use of the regional trail, which helps to eliminate economic barriers for trail users. Although transit access is limited in the master plan amendment area, the Anoka County Traveler Transit Link and Metro Transit's dial-a-ride provide transportation services for a minimal fee.

*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.

**Local Planning Assistance** (Eric Wojchik 651-602-1330) -- The master plan for the Sugar Hills Regional Trail is in conformance with the Anoka County's 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update (CPU), which identifies the proposed regional trail corridor. The adopted CPU emphasizes intergovernmental cooperation in the continued build-out of the 140 mile county-wide regional trail system.

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



**Attachment 1: Regional Trail Construction Project Area for Reimbursement Consideration Request—Regional Trail Alignment Shown in Blue**

