

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: June 7, 2016

For the Community Development meeting of June 20, 2016

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of July 13, 2016

Subject: Regional Parks System Equity Toolkit Recommendations

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

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council accept the Regional Parks System Equity Toolkit recommendations and direct staff to begin use of the toolkit in the Capital Improvement Program and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund grant program in the manner specified in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

Background

In an effort to strengthen equitable use of the Regional Parks System, the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (adopted February 2015) put forward a commitment to develop a Regional Parks System equity toolkit to be used in funding and investment decision-making. An equity toolkit, also referred to as an equity lens or equity assessment tool, is typically a series of open-ended questions that seek to evaluate projects or programs and clarify both the positive and adverse impacts of the given activity.

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* provides direction on the development and use of a Regional Parks System equity toolkit by stating, “the Council and the Regional Parks and Natural Resources unit staff will work in close collaboration with regional park implementing agencies, partners, community based organizations, advocacy groups and other stakeholder groups to develop a Regional Parks System equity toolkit in 2016” (p. 99). The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* specifies that the Council will use the toolkit in funding and investment decisions for the Capital Improvement Program and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund grant program (for more details, see the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, pp. 100-101). Regional park implementing agencies will answer the questions in the Regional Parks System equity toolkit; the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and the Council will use that information to evaluate proposed projects before the Council forwards funding requests to the appropriate MN State legislative bodies.

To develop the Regional Parks System equity toolkit, staff applied for and received an internal equity grant. Following the normal solicitation process, the Council contracted with CultureBrokers, a consulting firm specializing in diversity, inclusion and equity, to assist Council staff in developing the Regional Parks System equity toolkit. CultureBrokers and Council staff invited a broad array of stakeholders – including members from regional park implementing agencies, regional park partners, community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and park users – to a series of three meetings supplemented with an online discussion board and surveys. CultureBrokers and Council staff asked participants to identify potential questions to be considered for inclusion in the equity toolkit; in the second meeting, participants suggested over 250 potential questions. By the end of the third meeting, participants had narrowed down the list of proposed questions to approximately 50 questions. CultureBrokers winnowed the remaining questions down and surveyed participants for input on the remaining six questions. Based on

feedback received, CultureBrokers clarified the language in the questions and removed one question. The remaining five questions are recommended for inclusion in the Regional Parks System equity toolkit (see Appendix A).

Rationale

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* puts forward the commitment to develop a Regional Parks System equity toolkit for use in specific funding and investment decisions made by the Council and to engage stakeholders in its development.

Funding

Per the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund Program will begin using the adopted Regional Parks System equity toolkit with the 2018-2019 biennium (beginning on July 1, 2017) and the Capital Improvement Program with the 2019 fiscal year (beginning on July 1, 2018).

Known Support/Opposition

After the third meeting, stakeholder participants received an electronic invitation to submit their input on the draft toolkit. Of those that submitted their comments, 75% were supportive.

Appendix A.

Regional Parks Equity Toolkit

Key Recommendations

1. Based on questions, concerns and suggestions from a variety of stakeholders (as well as a review of equity toolkit literature and our own expertise), **CultureBrokers recommends the Regional Parks System Equity Toolkit consist of four components:**

1.1. A set of “equity lens” questions to be added to the current grant application. At this time, there are five recommended questions:

1.1.1. What are the population numbers for the following groups within your agency’s jurisdiction? (Answers would be pre-populated based on responses to an existing question about the park agency jurisdiction.)

1.1.2. Which of populations in Q1 are currently underserved by the Regional Parks System? (Answers would be pre-populated based on results from the 2016 Visitor Survey.)

1.1.3. Which of the underserved populations identified in Q2 will this project serve better? (Checkbox)

1.1.4. What specific aspects of this project will help to better serve the target populations identified in Q3? (Open text)

1.1.5. Exactly how will you verify the target populations identified in Q3 are better served? (Open text)

1.2. A report of responses to the equity lens questions. Use the current report format of a table of grant application responses.

1.3. A set of “equity analysis” questions to guide the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC) and the Council’s conversation about responses to the “equity lens” questions. At this time, there are five recommended questions:

1.3.1. What populations are the currently underserved by the Regional Parks System?

1.3.2. Which of the underserved populations identified above are being served better by these proposed projects? What seem to be the trends across the region? Are there strengths, gaps?

1.3.3. What interesting / promising approaches to better serving targeted populations do you see within these projects?

1.3.4. What does this tell you about where the Regional Parks System is now and where it may need to go in the future?

1.3.5. What suggestions would you make?

1.4. Set of “user sessions” to help regional park implementing agencies, Council staff and MPOSC understand, use and progress toward strengthening equity. User Sessions are learning and education sessions conducted often and regularly in which regional park implementing agencies, staff and MPOSC:

1.4.1. Learn and use the toolkit.

1.4.2. Share toolkit results and insights.

1.4.3. Discuss approaches, good practices, successes.

1.4.4. Engage in continuously improving the current tools.

1.4.5. Co-create new tools to add to the toolkit.

1.4.6. Understand and explore emerging equity issues and advances as they relate to the Regional Parks System.

2. Based on concerns from a variety of participating stakeholders (especially advocates and users from underrepresented populations), as well as a review of what is effective in leading equity, **CultureBrokers recommends MPOSC and Council staff establish a blueprint for continuous improvement and development of the toolkit.** In particular, equity can only be achieved when it is appropriately measured. As the “boots on the ground”, regional park implementing agencies must begin measuring the usage and impacts of their projects on underserved groups. The blueprint should set an immediate course toward the agency ability to deliver measurable outcomes by race, ethnicity, income, ability, age and national origin (at minimum).

A blueprint can lay out a very simple, but effective, course of action, like this:

2.1. After the first biennium, take stock of the inventory of project analyses. Identify areas of strength, weakness and opportunity.

2.2. Make adjustments to the toolkit – adapt/add components; require specific measurable goals.

2.3. Implement adjustments in second biennium.

2.4. Repeat steps 1 – 3.

Equity is a new concept and field of study that is developing every day. Organizations and individuals improve their capacities to manage for equitable outcomes as experts in the field get smarter. The toolkit should adapt and grow, too. Eventually, the toolkit should help implementing agencies and the Met Council be able to answer at any given time:

- What is the proposed project’s equity performance?
- Will the proposed project perform as well as it could against equity measures?
- How do we know?

- What (and how) should the proposed project improve or change?
3. We had more than 70 unique participants join in the effort to develop a set of recommendations. Not all of the contributions were appropriate to the limited scope of this equity toolkit project. But, all the contributions had value to the goal of strengthening equity. To capture that value, and to honor the investment of time and knowledge, **CultureBrokers recommends MPOSC and the Council plan to address the Additional Recommendations that follow, and share those next steps with the Equity Toolkit participants**
- 3.1. Provide additional communications resources and support to Regional Park staff as they work with regional park implementing agencies, MPOSC and the Council to deliver on the Equity Toolkit Recommendations.
 - 3.2. Make the Equity Toolkit work, reports and results easily accessible to the general public on the Met Council website. Don't make us dig for the information.
 - 3.3. Consider how Regional Parks System acquisitions and projects intersect with other strategic goals of the Council, such as efforts to reduce or mitigate areas of concentrated poverty, enhance benefits of Transit-Oriented Development, and enhancing economic competitiveness.
 - 3.4. Work with Council / Metro Transit to thoroughly integrate regional parks into the public transportation system. Provide frequent public transit to regional parks with as much consideration as is provided to business, retail and cultural centers.
 - 3.5. Find ways to encourage regional park implementing agencies to include an abundance of multimodal opportunities in their parks projects.
 - 3.6. Investigate appropriate ways to ensure/help regional park implementing agencies conduct community engagement activities at every level of the AIP2 Spectrum for regional parks projects.
 - 3.7. Investigate appropriate ways to ensure/help regional park implementing agencies use projects to connect regional parks users to other community resources (local places, amenities, people).
 - 3.8. Find ways to support cultural competence and relevance in the regional parks system, such as the inclusion of non-English languages and symbols in regional parks system signage, marketing, surveying, communications, and programming.
 - 3.9. Investigate appropriate ways to ensure/help regional park implementing agencies provide low- and no- income accessible amenities and programming.
 - 3.10. Consider ways to support the use of diverse vendors throughout the Regional Parks System. (This also strengthens the Council's own commitment to utilize businesses owned and controlled by women, minorities and disadvantaged individuals in the procurement of goods and services and the award of contracts.)

- 3.11. Explore issues of personal and cultural safety for all kinds of people as they use the Regional Parks System.