

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: April 4, 2017

For the Community Development Committee meeting of April 17, 2017

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of April 26, 2017

Subject: Land Exchange and Boundary Amendment for Rice Creek West Regional Trail, Anoka County

District(s), Member(s): MPOSC District A, Rick Theisen

Policy/Legal Reference: System Protection Strategy 2, 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 a land exchange between Anoka County and the City of Fridley that exchanges 1.8 acres of regional parkland at the Rice Creek West Regional Trail for 1.9 acres of City-owned land adjacent to the trail corridor as described in Attachment 1 and depicted in Attachment 2.
2. Approve a master plan boundary amendment to the Rice Creek West Regional Trail corridor that removes 1.8 acres and adds the adjacent 1.9 acres as depicted in Attachment 2, adds trailhead parking, and shifts the trail alignment approximately 100 feet south of its current location as depicted in Attachment 3.
3. Require that the City of Fridley ensure that an easement of acceptable width to Anoka County for the relocated regional trail alignment is granted at no cost to Anoka County.
4. Determine that the costs associated with relocation of the Rice Creek West Regional Trail are not eligible for regional parks funding from the Council.

Background

The Rice Creek West Regional Trail travels east from the Mississippi River in Fridley to Long Lake Regional Park in New Brighton. The regional trail is jointly managed by Anoka County and Ramsey County. Within Anoka County, the trail mostly winds through parkland that is part of the regional trail corridor, although some segments of the trail do not have associated parkland, as shown in Figure 4.

The regional trail is adjacent to the site of the former Columbia Ice Arena and the Public Works Facility in Fridley, which is located southeast of University and 71st Avenues. The City of Fridley is proposing to redevelop the site into a Civic Center Complex, which will include a new city hall, police station, fire station, and public works building on the north portion of the site and mixed-use/housing on the south and east portion. The redevelopment site will include a centralized stormwater retention pond that will be designed as a water feature amenity and is proposed to include a promenade, central lawn, and public gathering space. The stormwater pond will help protect nearby Rice Creek by collecting and treating stormwater runoff. The City of Fridley's conceptual site design is shown in Figure 5.

In order to facilitate the redevelopment, the City is proposing a road connection between the frontage road that parallels University Avenue and 71st Avenue. The road is proposed to follow the route of an

existing regional sewer interceptor, which would provide access to the interceptor without impacting the proposed adjacent development. Figure 6 depicts the location of the interceptor and the Rice Creek West Regional Trail in relation to the redevelopment site. The road would impact parkland within the Rice Creek West Regional Trail corridor adjacent to the existing Public Works Facility. In exchange for the 1.8 acres of parkland, the City of Fridley is proposing to add 1.9 acres of adjacent wooded land to the regional trail corridor and build a parking lot that would serve as a trailhead, as shown in Figure 2.

Most of the regional trail that travels through the redevelopment site is not located on parkland and does not have an easement that establishes the official rights to its use. As part of the site redevelopment, the City of Fridley is proposing to relocate the regional trail to the south side of the new road.

Rationale

The land exchange is consistent with System Protection Strategy 2 as outlined in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* which requires an equally valuable land or facility exchange to be approved in order to convert Regional Parks System lands to another use. The land exchange also necessitates a minor amendment to the boundary of the regional trail corridor. Approval of the land exchange should also include an amendment to the boundary of the regional trail corridor to remove the 1.8 acres for the parkway project and add the adjacent 1.9 acres of replacement land.

The proposed redevelopment requires that a segment of the Rice Creek West Regional Trail be relocated. In order to ensure that Anoka County has an interest in the property on which the trail will be located, the City of Fridley should ensure that a trail easement is granted to the County. Since the proposal requires the relocation of an existing trail, associated costs should be borne as part of the redevelopment and not through the use of regional parks funding through the Council.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The request advances the Thrive outcomes of prosperity and livability through helping facilitate the redevelopment of an underutilized site in a first-ring suburb, while ensuring that the regional trail is not negatively affected. Additionally, the Thrive principle of collaboration is supported through the Metropolitan Council, Anoka County, and the City of Fridley working together to advance the redevelopment and protect the regional trail.

Funding

No regional parks system funding is involved in this request, as it involves an equally valuable exchange of land. Costs related to the relocation of the Rice Creek West Regional Trail as proposed are not eligible for regional parks funding.

Known Support / Opposition

The Anoka County Board of Commissioners approved the land exchange on February 14, 2017. There is no known opposition to the land exchange or boundary amendment.

Analysis

System Protection Strategy 2 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* states that lands in the Regional Parks System will only be converted to other uses if approved by the Metropolitan Council through an equally valuable land or facility exchange.

In this case, an equally valuable land exchange has been proposed. The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* defines equally valuable land as land that:

- *is contiguous to the Regional Parks System unit containing the land proposed to be exchanged (within the same park/trail unit)*
- *has comparable or better natural resource characteristics, and*
- *could provide comparable or better recreation opportunities than the land being released*

System Protection Strategy 2 also requires that the following criteria be evaluated to determine whether Regional Parks System lands may be exchanged for other lands or a facility. Staff evaluation is shown in italic font.

Issues with respect to the existing park system unit:

- 1. Whether the park system unit can continue to meet Council site and site attribute standards established for the particular type of park system unit (regional park, park reserve, trail greenway or special recreation feature).**

The Rice Creek West Regional Trail is designated as a destination trail. The 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan requires that destination trails include sufficient corridor width to protect natural resources and safely accommodate trail use. Destination trails are preferably located adjacent to high quality natural areas, are of a sufficient length to serve as a destination itself, and connect Regional Parks System units.

The proposed land exchange will not impact the ability of the Rice Creek West Regional Trail corridor to safely accommodate trail use. The land being removed from the trail corridor is mostly mowed turf, which is being replaced with land that is comprised of a moderately mature mixed hardwood forest community. The replacement land complements the regional trail, upholds the character of a destination trail, and will be managed as part of Anoka County's ongoing nature resources management plan.

- 2. Whether the Rice Creek West Regional Trail will continue to function as originally planned.**

The project proposes to relocate a segment of the Rice Creek West Regional Trail, which will allow it to function as originally planned.

- 3. Whether environmental features (wildlife habitat, water quality) of the Rice Creek West Regional Trail will be adversely affected.**

The land exchange will not negatively impact the environmental features of the regional trail. The forested replacement land will provide a buffer to the trail corridor and will allow Anoka County to protect the land from being developed in the future.

- 4. Whether the loss of site or function will be made up through acquisition of a site with comparable characteristics adjacent to or in the immediate area of the current location.**

The proposed replacement land has better site characteristics than the property being exchanged, as it replaces a mowed turf area with a moderately mature mixed hardwood forest community.

5. Whether the need for the conversion, as in the instance of transportation improvements, is generated by the Rice Creek West Regional Trail.

The need for the conversion is generated by the proposed development and the current location of a regional interceptor. The conversion is not generated by the Rice Creek West Regional Trail.

Issues with respect to the alternate use:

1. The land area needs of the proposed project.

The proposed project requires 1.8 acres of regional parkland for development of an access road that will be replaced with 1.9 acres of adjacent land.

2. Whether the specific site requirements for the proposed project are unique to the area proposed for conversion.

The site requirements for the proposed access road are unique due to the location of an existing regional interceptor, which creates efficiencies for the co-location of public infrastructure.

3. Whether the proposed project is consistent with Council policies.

The proposed project does not conflict with Council policies.

4. Whether the proposed project is of greater benefit to the region than having the Regional Parks System unit remain in place.

The proposed project benefits the region by helping facilitate redevelopment of an underutilized site and improving access to a regional interceptor. With the relocation of a trail segment, the project allows the Rice Creek West Regional Trail to remain intact and will add trailhead parking.

Attachment 1: Request Letter from Anoka County



Anoka County

PARKS & COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION

Parks and Recreation

Parks and
Recreation Office
763-757-3920

Park
Maintenance
763-755-0067

Park Rangers
612-719-4875

Natural Resources
763-767-2896

Bunker Beach
Water Park
763-767-2895

Chomontz
Golf Course
651-482-8484

Wargo
Nature Center
651-429-8007

March 2, 2017

Jan Youngquist
Metropolitan Council
390 Robert Street
St. Paul, MN 55101

Re: Rice Creek West Regional Trail Corridor Land Exchange

Dear Jan:

Anoka County staff met with City of Fridley staff to discuss the City's proposed redevelopment project of the old Columbia Area site located near University and 71st Avenue's, which is adjacent to the County's Rice Creek West Regional Trail Corridor. The City of Fridley is proposing to redevelop this site into a new Civic Center Complex, which is to include a new City Hall, Police Station, Fire Station, and Public Works Building on the north half of the site and park facilities and housing on the south half of the site.

As a component of the redevelopment project, the City is proposing to create a road connection between 73rd and 71st Avenues, construct a parking lot and reroute the regional trail. The regional trail connection is proposed to remain, but be relocated to better accommodate future redevelopment. Refer to enclosed Exhibits A - D for reference.

The road connection is anticipated to impact parkland within the regional trail corridor. Anoka County has negotiated with the City of Fridley a land exchange that staff believes will satisfy the Regional Park Policy Plan, System Protection Strategy 2, which requires parkland converted to other uses to be exchanged for equally valuable land or facilities.

The proposed land exchange will remove 1.8 acres of parkland adjacent to railroad tracks and the City of Fridley Public Works facility from the regional trail corridor and replace it with 1.9 acres immediately adjacent to the western boundary of the corridor. Refer to the attached Exhibit B for reference.

The existing natural resources of the impacted parkland consist mostly of mowed turf and some shade trees. There is about (.15 acres) of native grasses that will be removed as a result of the project. The proposed replacement land is comprised of a moderately mature mixed hardwood forest community represented by species such as bur oak, northern pin oak, basswood, hackberry, cottonwood, boxelder, and green ash canopy trees. The shrub layer is moderately dense comprised of raspberry, dogwood, prickly ash, European buckthorn and honeysuckle. The ground layer is comprised of cool season

Activities Center, Bunker Hills Regional Park ▲ 550 Bunker Lake Blvd NW ▲ Andover, MN 55304
Office: 763-757-3920 ▲ www.anokacounty.us ▲ www.anokacountyparks.com

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grasses, woodland sedges, Virginia waterleaf, and large-leaved aster. The County will manage the replacement area for invasive species as part of the County's on-going natural resources management plan.

In addition to the land exchange, about 1400 feet of the Rice Creek West Regional Trail is proposed to be removed and reconstructed roughly 100 feet south of its current location. The new trail alignment will be adjacent to a new proposed parkway that will connect 71st Avenue to 73rd Avenue.

Also enclosed with this letter and exhibits is a resolution in support of the proposal adopted by the Anoka County Board of Commissioners. Staff believes this proposal will not only benefit trail users by providing additional amenities along the regional trail system, but also improve the overall trail experience.

Therefore, Anoka County respectfully requests that the Metropolitan Council review the proposal and approve the proposed land exchange and rerouting of Rice Creek West Regional Trail.

Please review the enclosed information and let me know if you have any questions or need further information regarding this request. I can be reached at karen.blaska@co.anoka.mn.us or 763-767-2865.

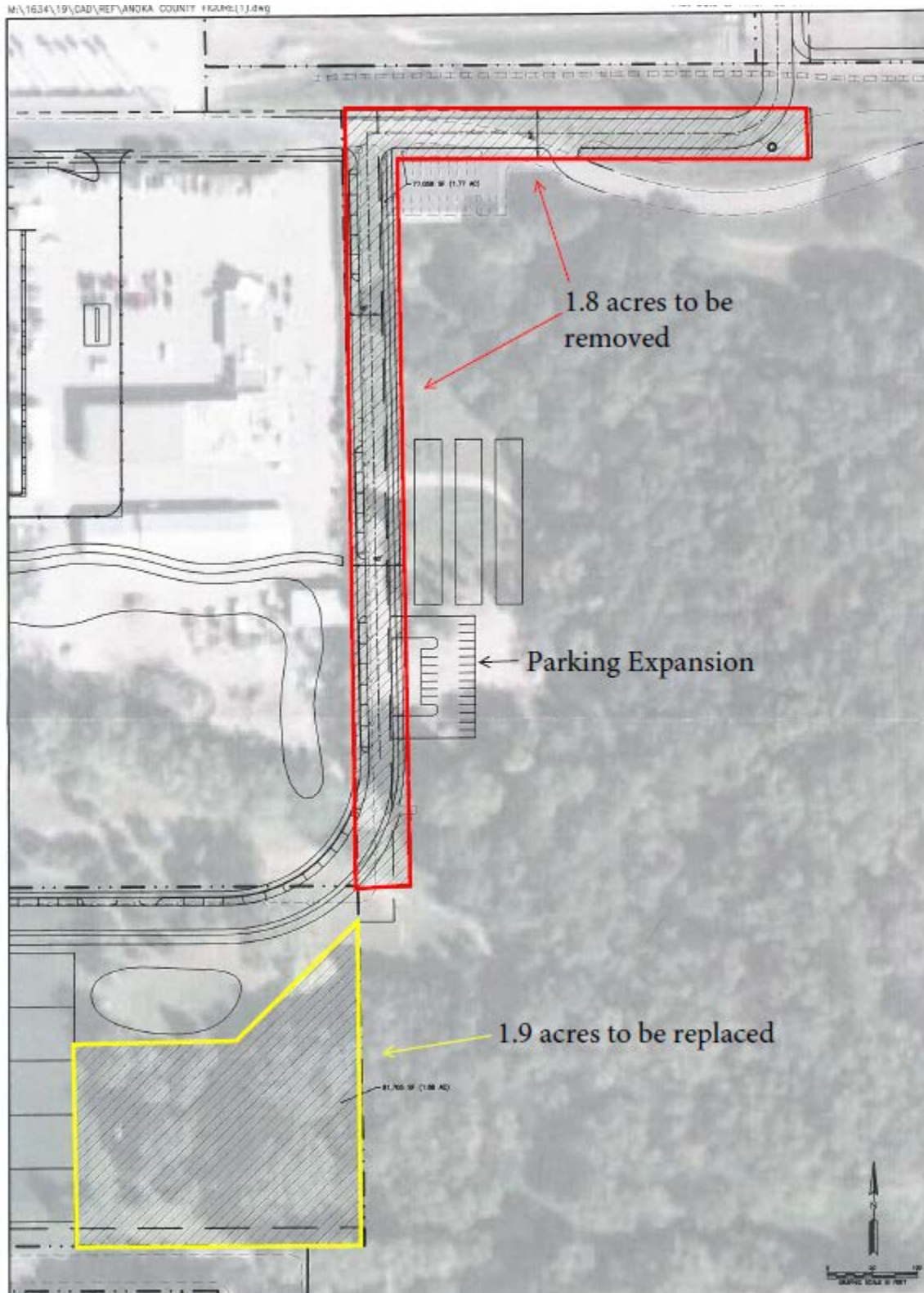
Thank you and regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Karen Blaska', with a stylized flourish at the end.

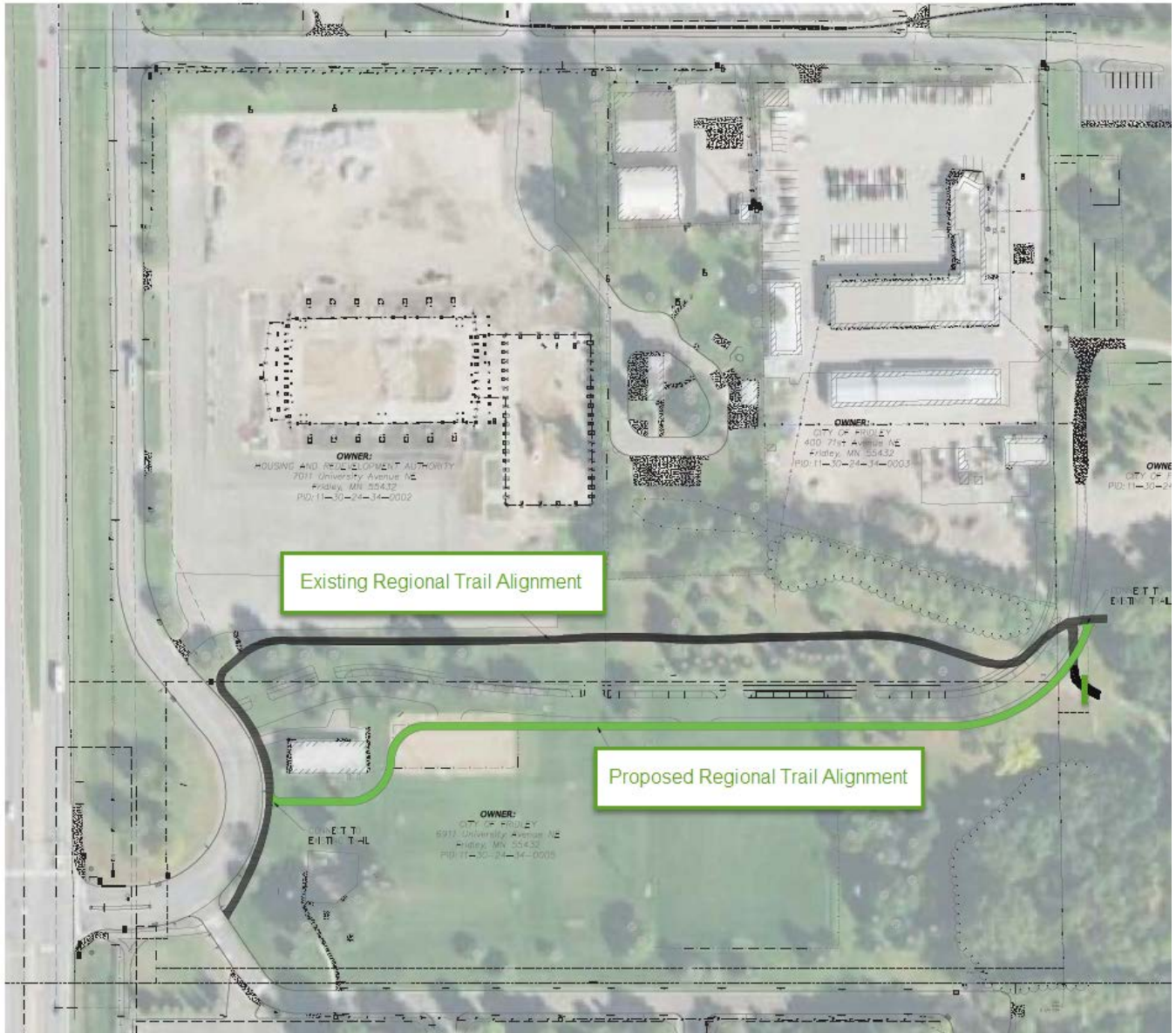
Karen Blaska, Park Planner

Cc: Jeff Perry, Resource and Planning Manager

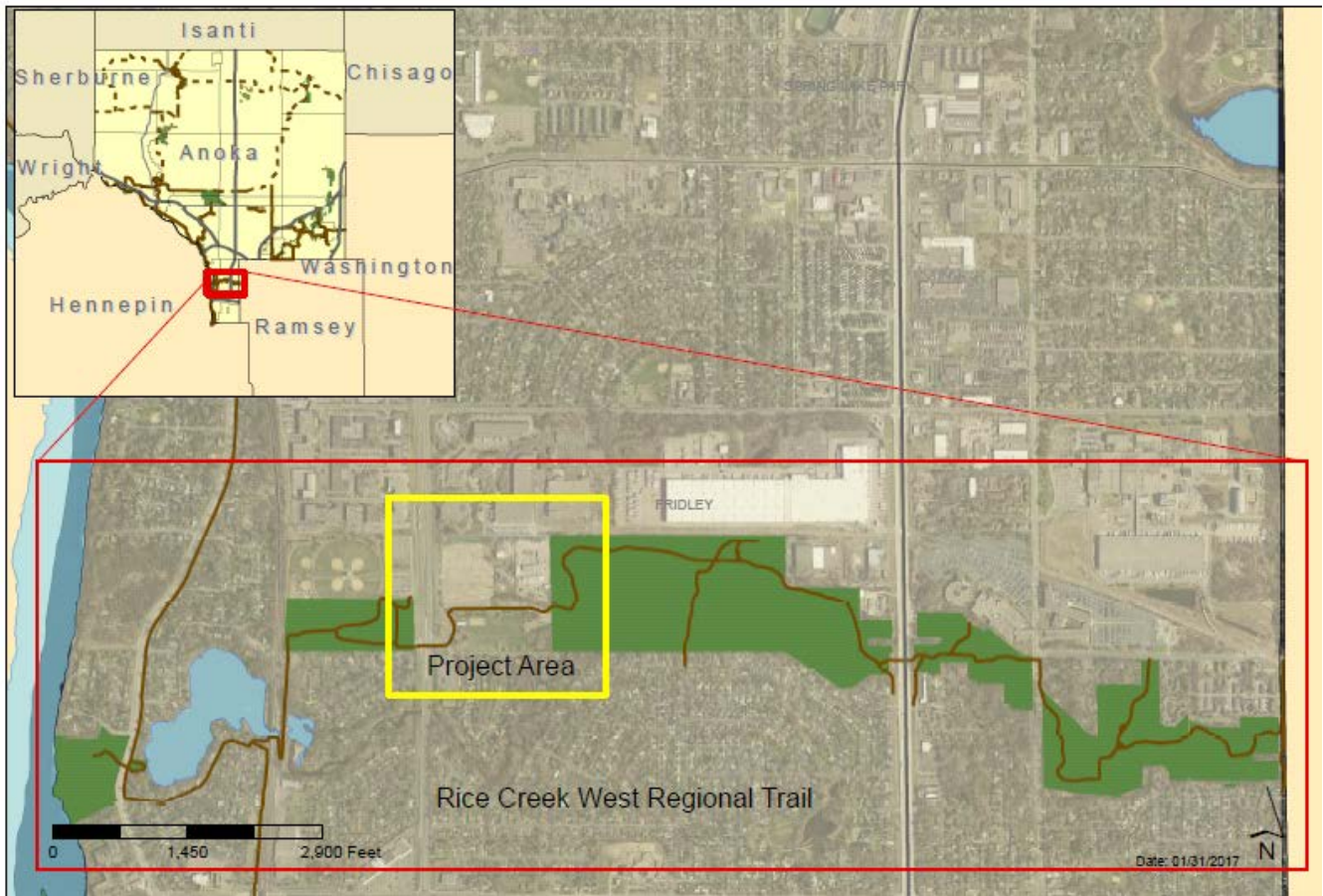
Attachment 2: Land Exchange Parcels



Attachment 3: Existing and Proposed Alignments for Rice Creek West Regional Trail



Attachment 4: Rice Creek West Regional Trail Corridor and Project Area



Attachment 5: City of Fridley Civic Center Complex Redevelopment Concept Plan



Attachment 6: Location of Regional Sewer Interceptor, Rice Creek West Regional Trail, and Project Site

