

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: April 10, 2018

For the Community Development Committee meeting of April 16, 2018

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of April 25, 2018

Subject: West Mississippi River Regional Trail and Elm Creek Park Reserve Trail Connector Master Plan, Three Rivers Park District

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

Policy/Legal Reference: MN Statutes 473.313; Planning Strategy 1 *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*

Staff Prepared/Presented: Jan Youngquist, AICP, Planning Analyst (651-602-1029) / Raya Esmaeili, Senior Planner (651-602-1616)

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the West Mississippi River Regional Trail and Elm Creek Park Reserve Trail Connector Master Plan.
2. Require that Three Rivers Park District, prior to initiating development of the regional trail, send preliminary plans 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.

Background

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan (RPPP)* identifies a regional trail search corridor that generally follows the Mississippi River through northern and eastern Hennepin County, connecting the planned Crow River Regional Trail, Mississippi Gateway Regional Park (formerly known as Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park), Rush Creek Regional Trail, Twin Lakes Regional Trail, and North Mississippi Regional Park. The *RPPP* also identifies a regional trail search corridor that travels south from the West Mississippi River Regional Trail Search Corridor to Elm Creek Park Reserve.

Three Rivers Park District (Three Rivers) completed a planning process to determine the alignment of the West Mississippi River Regional Trail and the Elm Creek Park Reserve Connector and has submitted a master plan for Council review and approval. The West Mississippi River Regional Trail will travel over 20 miles through the communities of Dayton, Champlin, Brooklyn Park, and Brooklyn Center. The Elm Creek Park Reserve Connector travels 3.9 miles through Dayton.

The West Mississippi River Regional Trail has been planned as a destination trail that connects several local and regional parks and includes “touchpoints” that offer river vistas, opportunities to enjoy natural resources, and access points to touch and feel the water. The Elm Creek Park Reserve Connector will provide a critical connection to trails within Elm Creek Park Reserve, which also connect to the Medicine Lake Regional Trail, thus providing a continuous trail corridor from Dayton south to the Luce Line Regional Trail in Plymouth.

Rationale

The West Mississippi River Regional Trail and Elm Creek Park Reserve Trail Connector Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, including Planning Strategy 1, and other Council policies.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The West Mississippi River Regional Trail and Elm Creek Park Reserve Trail Connector Master Plan advances the Thrive outcome of Livability through increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, which enhances quality of life in the region.

Funding

The estimated acquisition and development costs to implement the master plan are \$17,910,000, which include \$15,291,000 for the West Mississippi River Regional Trail and \$2,619,000 for the Elm Creek Park Reserve Connector.

Approval of the master plan does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. The acquisition and development costs based on this master plan may be awarded through the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund, the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund. Council action is required to approve the CIP, the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund project list, and specific grants to Three Rivers Park District.

Known Support / Opposition

Resolutions of support for the West Mississippi River Regional Trail and Elm Creek Park Reserve Connector Master Plan were passed by the Cities of Dayton, Champlin, Brooklyn Park, and Brooklyn Center. Three Rivers Park District Board of Commissioners will adopt the master plan after it is approved by the Metropolitan Council. There is no known opposition to the master plan.

Analysis

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

Boundaries and Acquisition

The West Mississippi River Regional Trail will travel through Dayton, Champlin, Brooklyn Park, and Brooklyn Center. The regional trail will connect several regional parks and trails along its 20-mile route, including the planned Crow River Regional Trail, Mississippi Gateway Regional Park (formerly known as Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park), Rush Creek Regional Trail, Twin Lakes Regional Trail, and North Mississippi Regional Park. Additionally, the trail will connect to several local parks such as Goodin, Stephens Farm, Cloquet Overlook, Donnie Galloway, Mississippi Point/Chandler Parks, and indirectly to Sarah McClean, Wildwood Springs, and River Parks.

The West Mississippi River Regional Trail corridor was split into four segments for planning purposes. The general alignment of the four segments of the West Mississippi River Regional Trail is shown on Figure 1.

Figure 1: West Mississippi River Regional Trail Route



Segment A: This 6.1-mile segment is located entirely within Dayton and begins at the confluence of the Mississippi and Crow Rivers. Approximately 0.63 miles of the trail currently exists, with 5.47 miles to be developed. Easements may be needed along this route and opportunities for land acquisition exist along Dayton River Road, which would allow Three Rivers to create a wider, more scenic trail corridor. Segment A connects to Goodin Park, which is a minimally developed local park with access to the Mississippi River. The regional trail will travel through Stephens Farm Park, which will be developed for recreational use in the future, and the trail currently exists through Cloquet Overlook Park, which includes views and access to the river. The route for Segment A is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: West Mississippi River Regional Trail Segment A



Segment B: The 5.8-mile long segment B is located within Champlin and includes 1.9 miles of existing trail and 3.9 miles identified for future construction. Opportunities for future trail construction have been identified as part of future road reconstruction and property redevelopment. Easements may be needed along this route. There are opportunities for acquisition of large lots directly on the river along West River Road. The regional trail connects to Mississippi Point and Chandler Parks, which are local parks located where Elm Creek daylights to the Mississippi River. Segment B's route is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: West Mississippi River Regional Trail Segment B



Segment C: This 5.6-mile trail segment is located entirely within Brooklyn Park and provides many destination-quality areas of high scenic value, including large wooded areas, pedestrian scale lighting, and a mature tree canopy. Most of the trail route already exists, and there are no acquisition costs associated with this segment. Segment C passes through Mississippi Gateway Regional Park, which will allow trail users to access the river. The route for Segment C is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: West Mississippi River Regional Trail Segment C



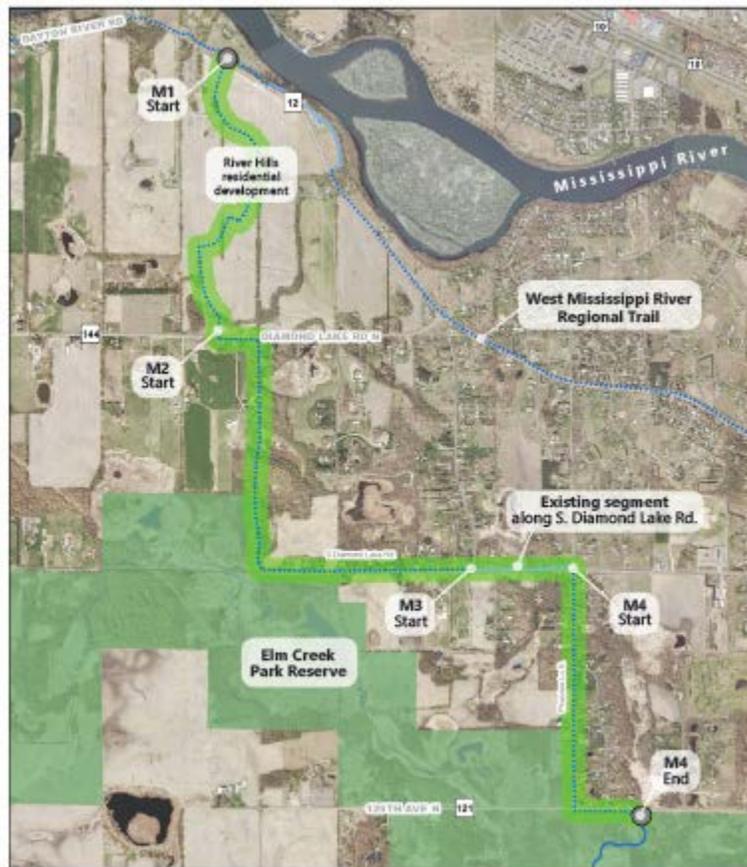
Segment D: This 2.7-mile segment is located in Brooklyn Center and makes its terminus at North Mississippi Regional Park. Approximately 2.35 miles of the trail exist, with 0.35 miles for future development. Construction of the segment along Willow Lane may require the street to be narrowed and utility poles to be relocated to accommodate the regional trail. The route for Segment D is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: West Mississippi River Regional Trail Segment D



Segment M: The Elm Creek Park Reserve Connector (which is known as the future Medicine Lake Regional Trail extension) is identified as Segment M in the master plan. This 3.85-mile trail travels south from the planned West Mississippi River Regional Trail in Dayton to Elm Creek Park Reserve. Approximately 1.3 miles of the trail exist, with 2.55 miles identified for future construction. While a connection to Elm Creek Park Reserve may appear to be straightforward, the park reserve’s northwest corner is a sensitive natural resource area following the Diamond Creek waterway. This area of the park reserve also includes several high-quality wetland complexes and intact native forest communities. Introduction of a paved trail within this area of the park reserve was limited to the park’s upland periphery, so the trail travels east along Diamond Lake Road and then south along Pineview Lane to connect to trails within the park reserve. Opportunities may exist to coordinate the trail with future subdivision development or road reconstruction projects. The route for Segment M is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Elm Creek Park Reserve Connector Segment M



Acquisition Needs: The regional trail alignment includes a combination of trail segments adjacent to roads, through public property, and through private property. Acquisition costs could be reduced by waiting for the regional trail to be realized through land use development and/or road reconstruction. Due to Three Rivers’ willing-seller approach, land acquisition for the trail may take years to fully realize. There may be additional opportunities to acquire a wider trail and ultimately create a more desirable user experience by buffering the trail from surrounding development, creating and improving river touchpoints, and by incorporating areas of natural or cultural resource significance. The minimum

estimated acquisition costs for the West Mississippi River Regional Trail and Elm Creek Park Reserve Connector are \$500,700.

Demand Forecast

Three Rivers Park District estimates that once fully developed, the West Mississippi River Regional Trail and the Elm Creek Park Reserve Connector will generate approximately 240,000 and 38,000 annual visits respectively. These estimates are based on methodology that considered the trails' connectivity to existing recreational amenities, their destination trail aesthetic qualities along the corridor, and their connections to commercial areas. Significant use of the trail is anticipated to occur in spring, summer, and fall. Winter use of the regional trail will be dependent on weather conditions and the assistance of local communities in maintaining the trail. It is anticipated that local communities will maintain the trail during the winter months as resources allow and as demand warrants.

Three Rivers Park District user data indicates that biking is the predominant summer activity on regional trails (72%), followed by walking (18%) and running (8%). Inline skating and other miscellaneous uses make up the balance of trail uses. Three Rivers' data shows that biking falls to 28 percent of winter use, with walking and running making up 71 percent of winter use.

The master plan discusses the regional population trends forecasted by the Metropolitan Council, including:

- Population will grow by 824,000 and the number of households will grow by 419,000 between 2010 and 2040
- More than 20 percent of the population will be age 65 and older in 2040
- Approximately 40 percent of the population will be people of color in 2040

These trends will influence park and trail planning and decision making. The master plan discusses the importance of multi-use trails for all ages of people who want to spend time outdoors and stay physically active. The master plan acknowledges that outdoor recreation participation is far greater for white and non-Latino populations in the state and region than for people of color. Further, new immigrant groups are not participating in regional trail use at the same rate as non-immigrant groups. The master plan states that Three Rivers will study this issue with the goal of attracting regional trail users that represent the demographics of the region.

Development Concept

Planning for the regional trail route was guided by principles that were developed by the Agency Stakeholder Committee and Advisory Committee, which are described in the Public Engagement and Participation section of this business item. These guiding principles stated that the West Mississippi River Regional Trail must:

- Engage with the Mississippi River
- Connect to local destinations, such as parks and trails, schools, employment, and entertainment
- Be politically supported
- Be fiscally responsible
- Be direct and not duplicative of efforts led by other agencies
- Be environmentally sustainable (avoid traveling through wetlands and sensitive areas)
- Promote trail user safety

The West Mississippi River Regional Trail and Elm Creek Park Reserve Connector will be designed as off-road, 10-foot wide, non-motorized, paved multi-use trails. A bituminous trail surface is preferred because it is cost effective, less prone to erosion than aggregate surfaces, provides a desirable trail experience, and is appropriate given its expected visitation and its connections to other paved facilities. The regional trail will be designed with a preferred maximum trail grade of 5 percent, with a 2 percent cross-slope for drainage purposes.

In instances where the trail will not initially meet the preferred design, alternative trail design will take into account a number of factors to determine the best fit for the situation. Unless the alternative design is an acceptable long-range solution, it is anticipated that these sections would be improved as funding, right-of-way, or other opportunities become available.

Much of the trail will be an independent trail corridor separate from roadways. In areas where the trail will be located adjacent to a roadway, the trail design will seek to maximize the boulevard width to provide for sign placement, snow storage, and potential trees or other enhancements. In circumstances where right-of-way is limited, the trail is still planned to be off-road and will include a minimum paved two-foot-wide clear zone separating it from the roadway to buffer trail users from motorists.

Portions of the regional trail corridor may cross wetlands and floodplains. In these instances, the trail design may incorporate boardwalks and bridges to minimize potential impacts to natural resources and maintain a continuous trail corridor. Boardwalks and bridges will be coordinated with appropriate regulatory agencies to ensure requirements are met and any potential impacts are minimized.

Wayfinding signage will support the regional trail. Wayfinding structures will include system kiosks, regional trail kiosks, and directional signs. System kiosks will be located at the beginning, end, and halfway point of the regional trail corridor and will include a map of the agency partner's trails systems, regional trail rules, and general information about the agency partnership. Regional trail kiosks will be located approximately every 2 miles along the route and will provide an aerial map, a description of trail highlights, and a map of the entire trail corridor that depicts local trails, amenities, and services nearby. Directional signs will be located approximately every mile along the route and will depict the direction, the name, and the distance to major destination and points of interest along the trail. The exact location and content of the wayfinding signs will be determined within the context of local community input and the availability of public right-of-way.

Other amenities along the trail route include trailheads, Mississippi River touchpoints, rest stops, and bicycle repair stations. Trailheads were identified at large regional and community parks as well as public facilities along the trail route that can provide water, parking, restrooms, and picnic facilities. Rest stops will generally be provided every mile and will include amenities such as trash receptacles, benches, and bike racks. Bicycle repair stations that provide air pumps and tools to perform basic bike repairs are recommended to be located at the system kiosk locations.

The development costs for the West Mississippi River Regional Trail are estimated to be \$14,790,300 and the costs for the Elm Creek Park Reserve Connector are estimated to be 2,619,000. Additional cost estimate details are provided in the master plan.

Development of the regional trail will be phased and coordinated with opportunities that utilize external funding sources, road reconstruction projects, development initiatives, as well as local and regional political support.

Conflicts

The master plan did not identify any conflicts between the West Mississippi River Regional Trail-Elm Creek Park Reserve Connector and any existing or proposed projects or land uses. National Park Service staff ensured consistency between planning efforts through the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area Water Trail Plan and its Trails and Open Space Partnership, which is a coalition of agencies working to achieve a continuous linear trail, open space, and alternative transportation system along the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The regional trail route is also consistent with the Hennepin County 2040 Bicycle Transportation Plan.

Public Services

The master plan does not identify any non-recreational public services or facilities that are needed to accommodate the proposed regional trail.

Operations

Three Rivers Park District ordinances define the rules and regulations for the use of its regional parks and trails. The trail hours will be 5 am to 10 pm.

Three Rivers Park District's maintenance of the trail will include mowing, sweeping, and trash clean-up as well as specialized services such as non-paved trail repair and grooming. Three Rivers will maintain the trail from April 1 to November 14. Local municipalities may choose to operate and maintain the trail during the winter months with a winter use permit.

The maintenance plan also includes seasonal condition assessments and periodic inspections, with subsequent maintenance actions when necessary. Routine maintenance throughout the year will include sign inventory and replacement, spring cleanup, and minor bridge and underpass repair (April-May); erosion repair, fence repair and sign replacement (July-September); and bituminous patching and striping replacement (October-November), as needed. Three Rivers' regional trail maintenance crews will maintain the trail. An additional .5 FTE maintenance position will be needed to provide regional trail maintenance services.

Three Rivers Park District Public Safety Officers and volunteers will patrol the regional trail corridor, with the goal of educating trail visitors on the use of the trail as well as promoting Three Rivers Park District opportunities. No additional staffing or operational costs are anticipated to provide public safety services along the trail.

Operations and maintenance costs will be primarily funded through Three Rivers Park District's Operating 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. Some of the costs associated with trail surface maintenance also may be funded from the Three Rivers Park District Park Asset Management Program, which includes revenues from the State of Minnesota as well as Three Rivers Park District's general obligation bonds.

When the regional trail corridor within the Three Rivers Park District's authority is fully developed, routine operations and maintenance costs are estimated to increase by \$48,180 per year (2018 dollars). Additional costs for trail surface preservation and rehabilitation are estimated to increase by \$67,360 per year (2018 dollars), assuming a 30-year pavement life. The combined annual operations and maintenance costs are \$115,540 annually (2018 dollars).

Public Engagement and Participation

A process to engage stakeholders including the public as well as affected agencies, and local units of government was identified at the beginning of the planning process. Public engagement and participation activities occurred in 2015-2016 and consisted of a variety of meetings and events.

Three Rivers Park District formed an Agency Stakeholder Committee to discuss opportunities to coordinate the regional trail master plan with current trail, bikeway, recreation, and capital improvement plans along the corridor. The committee included staff from Anoka County, Hennepin County Department of Transportation, National Park Service, West Mississippi Watershed Commission, Metropolitan Council, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and Minnesota Department of Transportation.

An Advisory Committee was also formed to understand local municipality issues and opportunities for comprehensive community outreach. The Advisory Committee was comprised of staff representatives from each community along the regional trail route.

The community outreach process explored using alternative venues and methods instead of holding traditional open houses. The following community groups were contacted: Black Girls Do Bike Twin Cities, Major Taylor Bicycling Club, Capable Partners, Izaak Walton League, Create Community Church, Riverway Church, Riverview Apartments, Riverwood Estate Apartments, and Northwest Hennepin Human Services Council. Participation varied across groups. Most groups were supportive of the regional trail, but many provided noncommittal responses regarding outreach participation.

Opportunities for public engagement occurred at community events including Brooklyn Park's Tater Daze, Brooklyn Center's Earle Browne Days, and Dayton Design Team Visits. Pop-up events occurred at the Champlin Farmer's Market, Riverview Apartments, Coon Rapids Dam reopening, and at the Mississippi Gateway Regional Park. During these events, the public was asked to vote on their preferred route for the regional trail and give feedback on trail amenities. Over 150 people provided feedback at these events. Participants were of various ages, social statuses, and ethnic groups.

A project website was established that included information on the project, schedules and maps, alerts for in-person participation activities, survey results, and committee meeting agendas and minutes. From June 2015 to March 2016, over 4,200 visits to the website were recorded.

A mySidewalk webpage was established to provide an online engagement forum. Over the course of a year, the webpage received over 8,450 views, but resulted in only 9 responses and interactions. An online survey was created to solicit feedback regarding route evaluation principles and proposed routes. The survey was posted from August to November 2015. The survey received 19 responses with respondents generally indicating that this type of trail facility adjacent to the Mississippi River is desired. A report of survey responses was included in the master plan.

A traditional open house was also held to garner input on the trail route. Approximately 45 people attended. Attendees were generally supportive of the West Mississippi River Regional Trail route. However, the Elm Creek Park Reserve Connector received a lot of attention, with some community members expressing the desire to grow and develop, while other residents not wanting change. Three Rivers heeded the direction from City of Dayton staff, elected officials, and city parks committee members to continue the Elm Creek Park Reserve trail connector route selection process and recommended the preferred route described in the master plan that was developed through group consensus.

The master plan was available online from February 9 – March 12, 2018 for public review and comment.

Public Awareness

Three Rivers Park District builds awareness of its facilities, programs, and services through the website, direct mail, press releases, a District-wide map, brochures, ads, and on-site promotion.

Accessibility

The master plan indicates that all regional trail facilities, including the trailheads and amenities will be designed in accordance with Americans with Disabilities (ADA) standards and guidelines. Three Rivers works with special interest organizations, including the Courage Kenney Rehabilitation Institute and Wilderness Inquiry to encourage participation in activities and use of park and trail facilities. Three Rivers does not charge entrance fees for use of its trails, making the regional trail available for all users.

Natural Resources

The master plan included Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS) maps for each regional trail segment. Most of the regional trail corridor will be located within road right-of-way, with the MLCCS maps showing artificial or impervious surfaces for these areas. Pockets of forest, woodlands, shrublands and herbaceous land cover exist along the route in Dayton. The portions of the trail that travel through local parks and Mississippi Gateway Regional Park provide opportunities for trail users to enjoy the natural resources.

Stewardship Plan

Much of the regional trail route is along existing public road right-of-way with limited natural resources. To account for minimal natural resource management along the trail corridor, additional seasonal or contract staffing, such as with the Conservation Corps of Minnesota, is anticipated.

The master plan indicates that Three Rivers will use best management practices to minimize impacts on natural and cultural resources, work with adjacent property owners regarding how to protect and manage natural resources and incorporate opportunities to enjoy and interpret the resources.

If Three Rivers acquires additional property along the regional trail corridor that includes significant natural or cultural resources, Three Rivers will develop a stewardship plan specific to those resources.

Review by Other Council Divisions

Community Development – Environment and Surface Water Management (Jim Larsen 651-602-1159) – The Community Development Division review raised the question of whether the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources staff has been or will need to be consulted, due to most if not all, of the trail segments being located within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA). Three Rivers Park District staff informed Council staff that the Minnesota DNR has been included in the master plan review process. They have not made comments to date.

A second question was raised about why there was no cost breakout for revegetation work along the new trail construction segments. Examples of this concern include the need to replant trees due to significant slope alteration was needed to obtain a wide enough flat corridor on which to construct the

trail. Another concern included reseeding with appropriate seed mixes, depending upon the adjacent native plant regimes. Three Rivers Park District added a notation to Appendix E that said bituminous costs include any necessary site restoration work including but not limited to erosion control and revegetation (seeding and landscaping).

Environmental – Sewers (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – This project extends 20 miles through the communities of Dayton, Champlin, Brooklyn Park, and Brooklyn Center. The construction of any new or updating of existing trails may have an impact on several 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, for review and comment.

Metro Transit (Steve Mahowald 612-349-7775) – The master plan states: “A Metro Transit park and ride lot exists along Highway 252 which services bus routes 765, 766 and 768 to/from Minneapolis. Currently this park and ride is closed, however should this lot reopen, WMRRT access to mass transit is obtained.” Please note that Metro Transit has no plans at this point to reopen the lot.

Transportation Planning (Russ Owen 651-602-1724) – No comments.

Local Planning Assistance (Eric Wojchik 651-602-1330) – No comments.