

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: June 5, 2018

Subject: 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Update

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: MN Statute 473.147

Staff Prepared/Presented: Emmett Mullin, Regional Parks and Natural Resources Manager (651-602-1360) / Dan Marckel, Planning Analyst (651-602-1548)

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

Information item; no action is proposed.

Background

Minnesota Statute 473.147 requires the Metropolitan Council to prepare and adopt a long-range system policy plan for regional recreation open space as part of the Council's Metropolitan Development Guide. The Council's long range system policy plan, known as the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (RPPP), must include policies, strategies, and a system plan that guide the Regional Parks System, and must also include estimated costs for acquisition and development and a five year capital improvement program. The Council adopted the RPPP on February 11, 2015. Minnesota Statute 473.147 also requires the Council to complete a comprehensive review of the plan every four years. The current update addresses this statutory requirement to complete a comprehensive review.

Staff will provide a high-level overview of the leading policy plan issues as well as share the proposed direction for the updated draft plan. This draft plan will be open for public comment starting at the July 16 Community Development Committee meeting.

At this Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting, staff will pose targeted questions regarding the proposed direction to solicit input and advice. Attachment A summarizes these leading issues, organized around the five *Thrive MSP2040* outcomes. Staff will present an associated PowerPoint, which mirrors the outcomes and issues organization.

Rationale

Minnesota Statute 473.147 states that the Metropolitan Council shall consult with and make maximum use of the expertise of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission in preparing the policy plan.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Regional Parks Policy Plan is one of the main planning tools the Council uses to advance regional priorities outlined in Thrive MSP 2040. The plan update incorporates and balances regional outcomes (Stewardship, Prosperity, Equity, Livability, and Sustainability) through applying the principles (Integration, Collaboration and Accountability) to the Council's involvement in regional parks.

Funding

N/A

Regional Parks Policy Plan Issues, Proposed Direction and Discussion

Today's Meeting Process

1. Review leading issues in the Regional Parks Policy Plan organized around *Thrive MSP 2040* Outcomes.
2. Share proposed policy direction
3. Discussion

Thrive 2040 Outcomes and Proposed Direction

Stewardship: responsibly manage the region's natural and financial resources and make strategic investments in our region's future.

Issues

1. Siting and Acquisition: System Additions

- Because local comprehensive plans are underway and will influence the discussion, this policy plan update does not add units to the Regional Parks System but focuses on enhancing the current criteria to help prepare for the 2019 system addition discussion.
- Consolidate and clarify the system addition criteria.
- Strengthen language regarding lands with restoration potential as acquisition opportunities.
- Clarify the importance of connecting regional parks, trails, and population centers to other trail systems and to significant natural features.

2. Estimated Costs to Complete System

- As required in the statutory language, staff worked with the regional park implementing agencies to develop a cumulative cost estimate to complete the current system. This includes park and trail units that are open to the public, units currently being master planned, and search areas for future additions.

3. Establish a Grant Program and Funding Guide

- Develop a companion program guide to the Regional Parks Policy Plan that houses the financial and administrative information for the Regional Parks System funding programs.
- Provides greater flexibility and ease of administration. Moves language from the current policy plan to a program guide that will be easier to update and improve.

4. Interest Earnings on Regional Parks System Funds

- Incorporate the recent legislative change that re-directs future interest earnings on Regional Parks System funds from the North Mississippi River Regional Park to the broader "betterment and use" of the full Regional Parks System

Prosperity: foster investments in infrastructure and amenities that create regional competitiveness and protect natural resources that are the foundation of prosperity.

Issues

(The Regional Parks System contributes to prosperity by more directly supporting the other outcomes.)

Equity: Connect all residents to the full range of opportunities afforded by the Regional Parks System.

Issues

5. Reinforce the Council’s continued commitment to Equity:

- Regional Parks System Planning
 - Commit to working with community partners and regional park implementing agencies to ensure that the intent of the Equity Toolkit will be applied to regional park and trail master planning.
 - Require community engagement that seeks to mitigate existing racial, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic barriers and includes people from diverse races, ethnicities, abilities, and income groups in developing regional park and trail master plans.
 - Refine the vision for “Bridging Facilities” as a tool to introduce new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks System
 - Allow and encourage design elements that seek to increase equitable outcomes (accessible, flexible, attractive to new audiences).
- Funding and Investment
 - Reiterate the Council’s commitment to establish and fund the Equity Grant Program.
 - The 2017 Legislature directed that the Parks and Trails Legacy funding be spent only on the lists of projects approved by the park implementing agencies’ elected bodies. Existing plan language around prioritization of Legacy projects was removed. Discussion around this Plan update indicated that prioritization of Capital Improvement Program projects was an important discussion topic too. Staff identified ways to advance equitable use of parks without Council prioritization of projects.
 - Commit to working with community partners and regional park implementing agencies to ensure that the intent of the Equity Toolkit will be applied in agency project funding decisions and grant applications, as an equity discussion tool.
 - Commit to advancing measurement and reporting on equity-related issues in funding and investment.
- Convening and Information
 - Reaffirm the Council’s support for the Parks Ambassador Program.
 - Provide technical assistance to regional park implementing agencies to establish public engagement processes that includes people from diverse races, ethnicities, abilities, and income levels.
 - Conduct studies to inform Regional Parks System planning and management.
 - Convene stakeholder meetings with regional park implementing agencies, community groups, and other partners to enhance knowledge and share best practices to support improved engagement work.
 - Conduct a region-wide visitor survey every five years.

Livability: Focus on the quality of our residents’ lives and experiences in our region by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation through the Regional Parks System.

Issues

6. Revise language to establish a Minimum Percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy Funds to Connect People and the Outdoors

- The 2017 Legislature directed that the Parks and Trails Legacy funding be spent only on the lists of projects approved by the park implementing agencies' elected bodies. Existing plan language around establishing a minimum percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy Funds to connect people and the outdoors was removed. During the Plan update, staff identified ways to advance equitable use of parks without requiring a minimum spend on connecting people and the outdoors.

7. Recreation Activities and Facilities

- Begin carefully exploring a performance-based system to evaluate how proposed activities could be consistent with the natural character of the Regional Parks System. Retain the existing approach, including the list of activities, which has served the system well for 40 years.
- Enhance coordination and communication among Regional Trails and the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network planners and stakeholders.

8. Siting and Acquisition

- Clarify that lands with restoration potential may qualify for acquisition.
- Consolidate system addition criteria to set up a 2019 system addition discussion.
- In addition to linking units of the Regional Parks System, regional trails should connect to state and federal facilities and lands, and/or regionally significant natural features.

9. Updated System Plan & Related Maps

- Update the Regional Parks System plan to incorporate recent changes including units newly open to the public, master planned, and/or in search status.
- (This update does not include system additions. In 2019, the Council commits to convening a system addition discussion.)

Sustainability: Protect our regional vitality for generations to come by preserving the integrity of our Regional Parks System today and into the future.

Issues

10. Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Rules (MRCCA)

- As part of the Master Plan requirements (current Chapter 4), add language to reference the MRCCA rules, which were passed into law on January 4, 2017.
- Agencies that operate regional parks and trails in the Mississippi River Corridor will pursue the necessary permits for development to ensure proposed projects are consistent with the new rules.

11. Regional Parks System is a Natural Resource-focused System

- Reinforce that the Regional Parks System is a natural resource-focused system that balances conservation of natural resources with the provision of outdoor recreation.
- Modify language in the plan to capture the importance of balancing conservation with providing access to nature.
Ensure that the Regional Parks System inspires a legacy of participation in the natural world, providing fun outdoor recreational opportunities that strengthen friendships, families, and health.