

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: May 1, 2018

For the Community Development Committee meeting of May 7, 2018

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of May 23, 2018

Subject: Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Master Plan Amendment, Anoka County, Review File No. 50205-1

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

Policy/Legal Reference: MN Statute 473.313

Staff Prepared/Presented: Jake Reilly, Senior Planner (651-602-1822)

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Master Plan Amendment.

Background

The 5,300-acre Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve is one of the largest in the seven-county metropolitan area and contains some of the most significant native wildlife habitat and water resources in the region. It is also rich in cultural resources with several known significant archaeological sites within its boundary. The park reserve is located in the Cities of Centerville, Lino Lakes, and Columbus.

The park reserve offers a wide variety of amenities, including the Wargo Nature Center, Chomonix Golf Course, Rice Creek Campground, and Centerville Lake Beach. Wargo Nature Center also plays host to the YMCA's Camp Heritage during the summer months and offers the Heritage Living History Lab, where students can participate in hands on activities related to varying historical themes. Other amenities include picnic areas, boat launch facilities, biking and hiking trails, playgrounds and a fishing pier. The park reserve also connects to the Central Anoka County and Bunker-Chain of Lakes Regional Trails.

The original master plan was developed in 1975 and revised in 1999. In 2003, 2012, and 2013, the master plan was amended to adjust the boundaries of the park reserve to what exists today. Refer to Figure 2 for existing park boundary and amenities.

With this amendment, Anoka County proposes to improve Wargo Nature Center based on the master plan developed for the Nature Center in 2015, which is adopted as an appendix to the master plan. The County also proposes to add the following projects to the master plan for the park reserve:

- Improve the Peltier Lake fishing access
- Add alternative camping accommodations to the campground
- Stormwater management improvements to address drainage issues within the campground

- Add a self-service canoe/kayak rental program and establish an access point at the campground for easy water access to and from Wargo Nature Center
- Create an interpretive area for cultural resources
- Add another fishing access/pier on Centerville Lake
- Create additional multi-use trails and connections to local neighborhoods
- Move the existing compost site out of the park, but allow the ingress road to remain within the park reserve boundary
- Continuing to improve the maintenance facilities within the park reserve to optimize operating efficiencies.

Rationale

The Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve 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 Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve 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 total development cost for the projects outlined in this Master Plan Amendment is approximately \$10,725,000.

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 Anoka County.

Known Support / Opposition

Resolutions of support for the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Master Plan Amendment were passed by the Cities of Centerville and Lino Lakes, and Anoka County. There is no known opposition to the master plan.

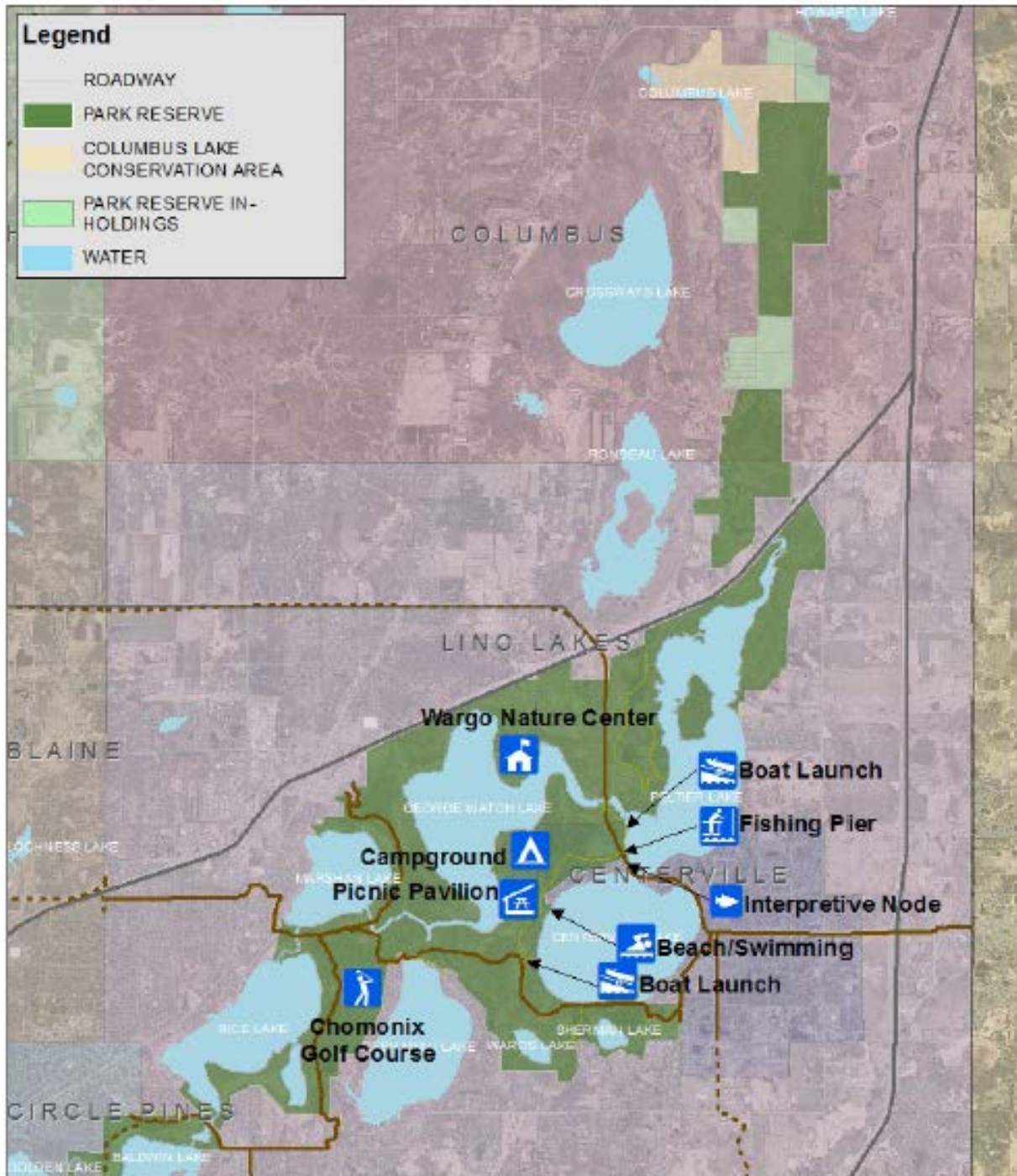
Analysis

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

Boundaries and Acquisition

There will be no boundary modifications related to this master plan amendment. The park boundary will remain as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Master Plan Boundary



Demand Forecast

Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve is a highly used regional facility in Anoka County and as such, the County will continue to manage it as regional recreational open space. The master plan acknowledges and responds to the Council's forecasts regarding the growing racial and ethnic diversity over the next 30 years. In addition, one in five people in the metropolitan region will be age 65 or older. The amendment notes that these shifting demographics require changes to the way the County operates and manages the park system and its amenities.

Anoka County, using results from the Metropolitan Council's November 2016 Regional Parks System Visitor Study Report, identified that fishing and walking are in high demand. Anoka County's own accounting demonstrates demand for additional camper cabins and canoes and kayaks through increased revenue generated by those rentals over the last three years.

These trends will influence park and trail planning and decision making. The master plan discusses the importance of facilities for all ages of people who want to spend time outdoors and stay physically active. The master plan acknowledges differences in usage patterns between new immigrant groups and non-immigrant groups.

Development Concept

The existing park amenities include many recreation opportunities, such as walking and biking, canoeing and kayaking, boating, fishing, picnicking, and playing on the playgrounds within the park reserve. Visitors can also take advantage of Wargo Nature Center, Chomonix Golf Course, Rice Creek Campground and Centerville Lake Beach. Wargo Nature Center also hosts Heritage Lab, which is an outdoor historical program where students participate in hands-on activities related to an historical theme. The projects proposed in this amendment will build upon the approved 1999 master plan and improve and enhance existing facilities within the park reserve.

Wargo Nature Center was built in the early 1990s and will be celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2018.

With this amendment, the County proposes to include all projects outlined in the Wargo Nature Center Master Plan from March 2015 into the park's overall master plan. These projects include:

- Additions and improvements to interpretive elements on the grounds,
- Improvements to the Nature Center Building,
- Additional programming around "essential experiences" like access to water, birding and tree houses, and
- Enhancing the play area.

Figures 2 and 3 show concepts from the 2015 Wargo Nature Center Master Plan.

Figure 2: Wargo Campus Concept Plan



Figure 3: Treehouse and West Entry Gathering Area Rendering

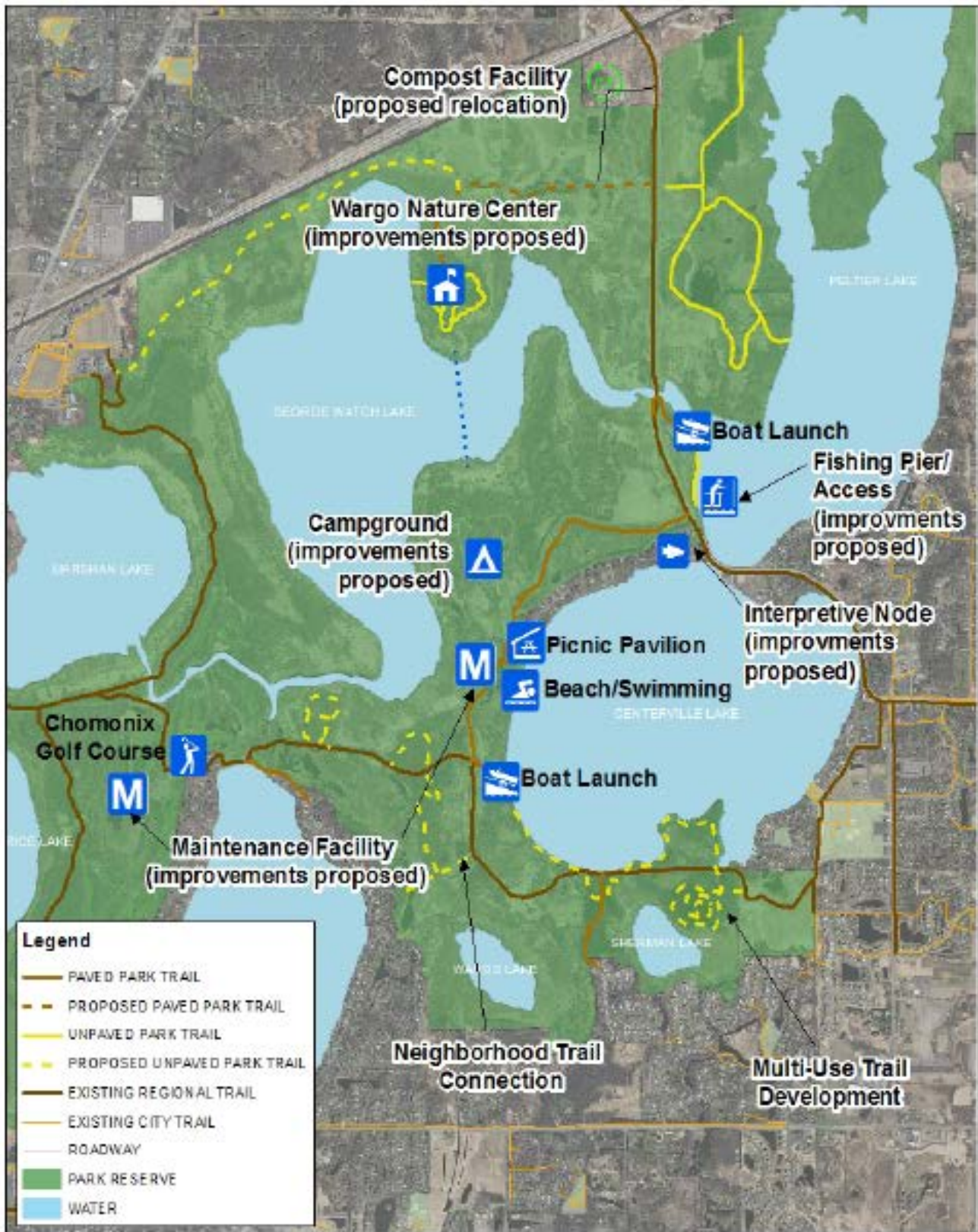


Improvements to the building and surrounding landscape improve the indoor/ outdoor relationship.

The other proposed projects for the park reserve are shown in Figure 4 and include:

- Improve the Peltier Lake fishing access
- Add alternative camping accommodations to the campground
- Stormwater management improvements to address drainage issues within the campground
- Add a self-service canoe/kayak rental program and establish an access point at the campground for easy water access to and from Wargo Nature Center
- Create an interpretive area for cultural resources
- Add another fishing access/pier on Centerville Lake
- Create additional multi-use trails and connections to local neighborhoods
- Move the existing compost site out of the park, but allow the ingress road to remain within the park reserve boundary
- Continuing improving maintenance facilities in the park to optimize operating efficiencies.

Figure 4: Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Development Concept



Conflicts

The greatest potential for conflict related to the proposed projects are the archaeological resources in the area. The amendment notes that the greatest conflict is in relation to the burial mound interpretive site and that the County will be cautious in designing and constructing anything in the area to avoid impacts to the mound. The County will also work with members of the local Dakota community to ensure the plans and design of the interpretive node are respectful of the culture and traditions of the Dakota people.

There are no conflicts anticipated with any of the surrounding land uses, which is mostly residential. Conflicts between pedestrians and vehicular traffic will be minimized by reducing the number of trail and road crossings within the park and by working with the local cities and the County Highway Department to ensure safe crossings at road intersections.

Public Services

Public services are already provided within the park reserve, with the exception of the Heritage Lab at Wargo Nature Center. Ultimately, the County would like city water and sewer services installed at the Nature Center and Heritage Lab, but due to the remote location within the park, that is unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future. The Nature Center currently has a well for water and a sub-surface sewage treatment system. At the Heritage Lab, the County has a functioning well for drinking water and will provide portable toilets when Heritage Lab is in use. The County will continue to operate and manage these services until municipal services become available.

Operations

Anoka County ordinances define the rules and regulations for the use of its regional parks and trails. The Anoka County Sheriff's Department enforces the rules and regulations, while Park Service Specialists provide education to the public around ordinances and other park rules and regulations.

Anoka County annual operations and maintenance costs for the park are estimated to be about \$600,000, including all daily operations of the picnic areas, campground, gatehouses, and mowing, sweeping, plowing, debris removal, sign maintenance, etc.

Public Engagement and Participation

A process to engage stakeholders including the public, affected agencies, and local units of government was identified at the beginning of the planning process and a public participation plan was created. Public engagement and participation activities occurred in 2017 and consisted of a variety of meetings and events, including pop up events in parks and other community facilities. Based on earlier engagement experiences, Anoka County staff identified that seniors/the elderly, elementary age school children and their families, immigrant communities, and communities of color were underrepresented the County targeted outreach to seniors at the local senior center and people of all ages at the public library and Park. A multi-lingual survey was developed and distributed in English, Spanish, and Somali. The survey link was posted on the County's website and social media and reached more than 650 people. In sum, more than 1,100 people were engaged.

Public Awareness

Anoka County will continue community engagement activities throughout the year to not only receive feedback on master plans, but also to provide information on the parks and trails system and promote park amenities and recreational opportunities throughout the County. Other information shared will include information maps, websites, publications and brochures. The County will also continue to work

with the Metropolitan Council's regional parks and trails system program and the Parks Ambassador Program.

Accessibility

The master plan indicates that all regional trail facilities, including the trailheads and amenities will be designed in accordance with the standards mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Many efforts will be focused on making the Wargo Nature Center more accessible, including elevators, signage, restrooms, classrooms and doors.

Natural Resources

The master plan included Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS) maps and identified that Anoka County has a strong commitment to preserving and restoring natural resources within the park, trail, and open space system. Anoka County has a Natural Resources Unit that will be directly involved in design, construction, and monitoring of proposed projects and that the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's (MPCA) best management practices guidance documents will be followed and that the County will continue to work with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as needed on issues such as aquatic invasive species prevention.

Stewardship Plan

Expenses generated from the park reserve are related to the maintenance and operations of the park and amenities. Chomonix Golf Course is budgeted separately from park operations; the only course-related items included within the park budget are the operations and maintenance of the cross-country ski trails that are groomed within the golf course. Park expenses are partially offset through revenues generated through daily and annual vehicle passes, rental fees and special use permit fees in the parks general operating budget. The remaining funds used to offset operations and maintenance are provided by the Metropolitan Council's Operations and Maintenance grant program, the Lottery in Lieu of program, and the local tax levy.

The nominal rental fees for the camper cabins proposed in the master plan amendment are anticipated to offset the operations and maintenance costs related to the cabins. While the other proposed projects will not specifically generate revenue, it is anticipated that the operations and maintenance of these facilities can be absorbed into the general operating budget and be offset with an anticipated increase in revenue through other rental fees and annual and daily pass sales. The Master Plan indicates that the park reserve will be fiscally sustainable.

Review by Other Council Divisions

Community Development – Environment and Surface Water Management (Jim Larsen 651-602-1159) – No comments.

Environmental – Sewers (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – No comments.

Metro Transit (Steve Mahowald 612-349-7775) – No comments.

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

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