

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: November 8, 2018

For the Community Development Committee meeting of November 19, 2018

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of November 28, 2018

Subject: Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail Acquisition Master Plan Amendment and Boundary Adjustments, Carver County, Review File No. 50034-2

District(s), Member(s): District B, Robert Moeller

Policy/Legal Reference: MN Statutes 473.313; Planning Strategy 1, Planning Strategy 3, Joint Powers Agreements, *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*

Staff Prepared/Presented: Tracey Kinney, Planner (651-602-1029), Regional Parks and Natural Resources

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve Carver County's Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail Acquisition Master Plan Amendment.
2. Approve the boundary adjustments transferring the following two regional trail segments to Carver County's Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail Master Plan including:
 - 0.75-mile portion of Carver County's Southwest Regional Trail from County Road 61 in the City of Chaska to Bluff Creek Drive in the City of Chanhassen.
 - 2.25 miles of Three River Park District's Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail from Bluff Creek Drive in the City of Chanhassen and extending to the eastern county line near Pioneer Trail in Eden Prairie.
3. Direct Carver County to work with Three Rivers Park District to develop a timeline and use agreement outlining the transfer of management responsibilities to Carver County of the 2.25 miles of Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail.
4. Inform Carver County that it must submit the Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail Development Master Plan Amendment for Metropolitan Council approval prior to requesting funding for development.

Background

Carver County is developing an agreement with Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority to purchase 90 acres of railroad corridor for an existing three-mile trail segment at the transition between Carver County's Southwest Regional Trail and Three Rivers Park District's Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail. Part of this trail segment has been closed since 2014 due to a slope failure on a land bridge for the trail, requiring trail users to be rerouted. Carver County is working with Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority and Three Rivers Park District to ensure the repair of the closed portion of the regional trail prior to the transfer of the land. Additionally, Carver County's is working with Three Rivers Park District to eventually transfer management of the regional trail to Carver County.

The Council approved Carver County’s Southwest Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment in 2016 and approved the original master plan in 2006. The remaining trail segment is part of the Three Rivers Park District-managed Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail that is recognized as part of the Regional Park System, albeit without a Council-approved master plan. Carver County and Three Rivers Park District are working collaboratively on the formal transfer of this remaining trail segment to Carver County’s Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail Master Plan that was last amended in 2013 and originally approved in 2011.

Rationale

This acquisition amendment and boundary adjustment to the Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail Master Plan are consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, including Planning Strategy 1 – Master Planning, Planning Strategy 3 – Joint-Powers Agreements, and other Council policies.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail Master Plan Acquisition Amendment and boundary adjustments advances the Thrive outcome of Livability through increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, which enhances quality of life in the region.

Funding

Carver County undertook an initial appraisal process that estimated acquisition for the following four parcels at \$5,480,000:

- 259990600
- 259990500
- 259990700
- 309990310

Approval of this master plan amendment and boundary adjustment does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. The approval will allow Carver County to request acquisition funding through the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Program. Future development funding will be contingent on an approved development master plan

Known Support / Opposition

The Carver County Parks Commission reviewed and approved the Minnesota Bluffs Regional Trail Acquisition Master Plan Amendment at their meeting held August 22, 2018.

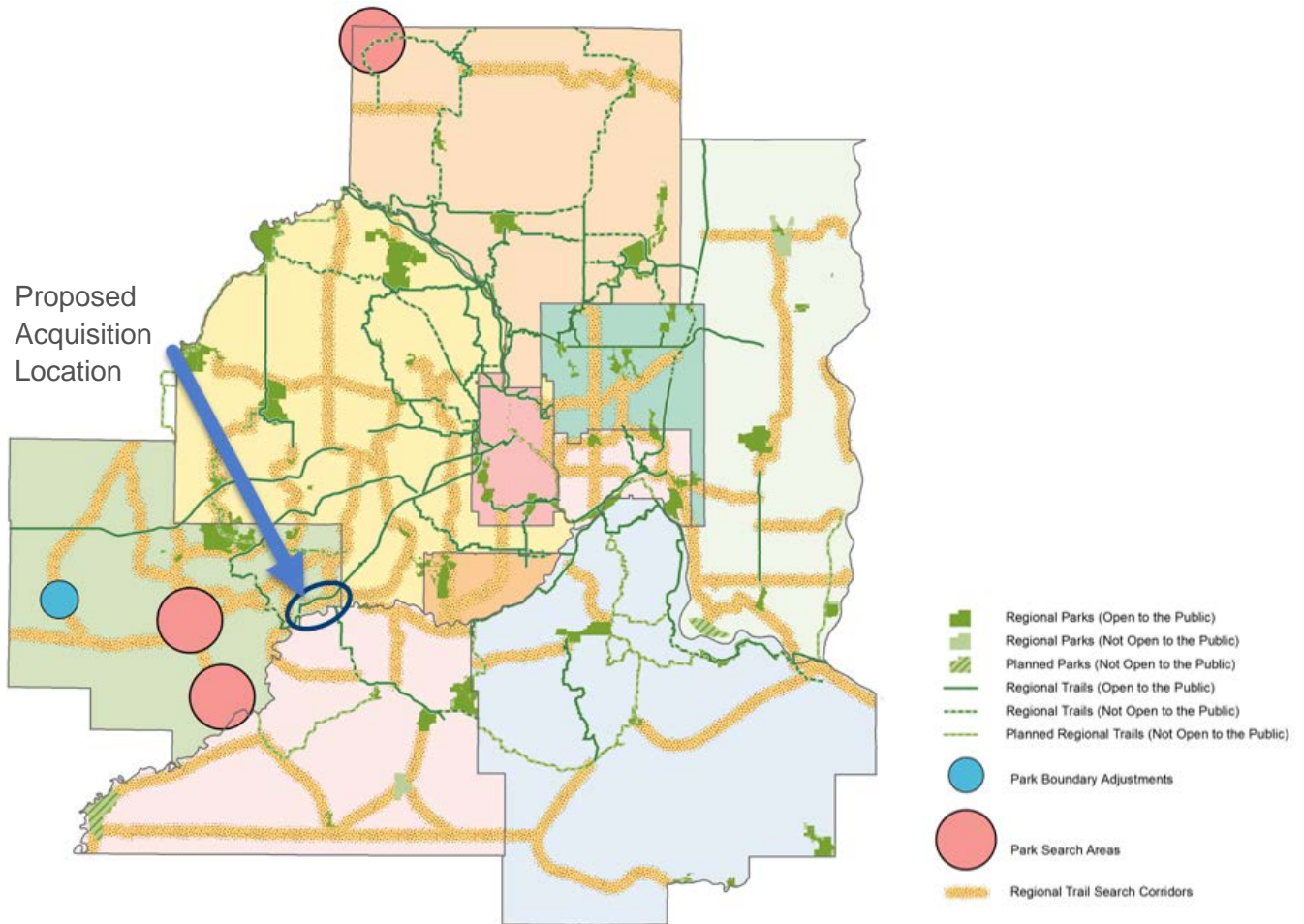
Analysis

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

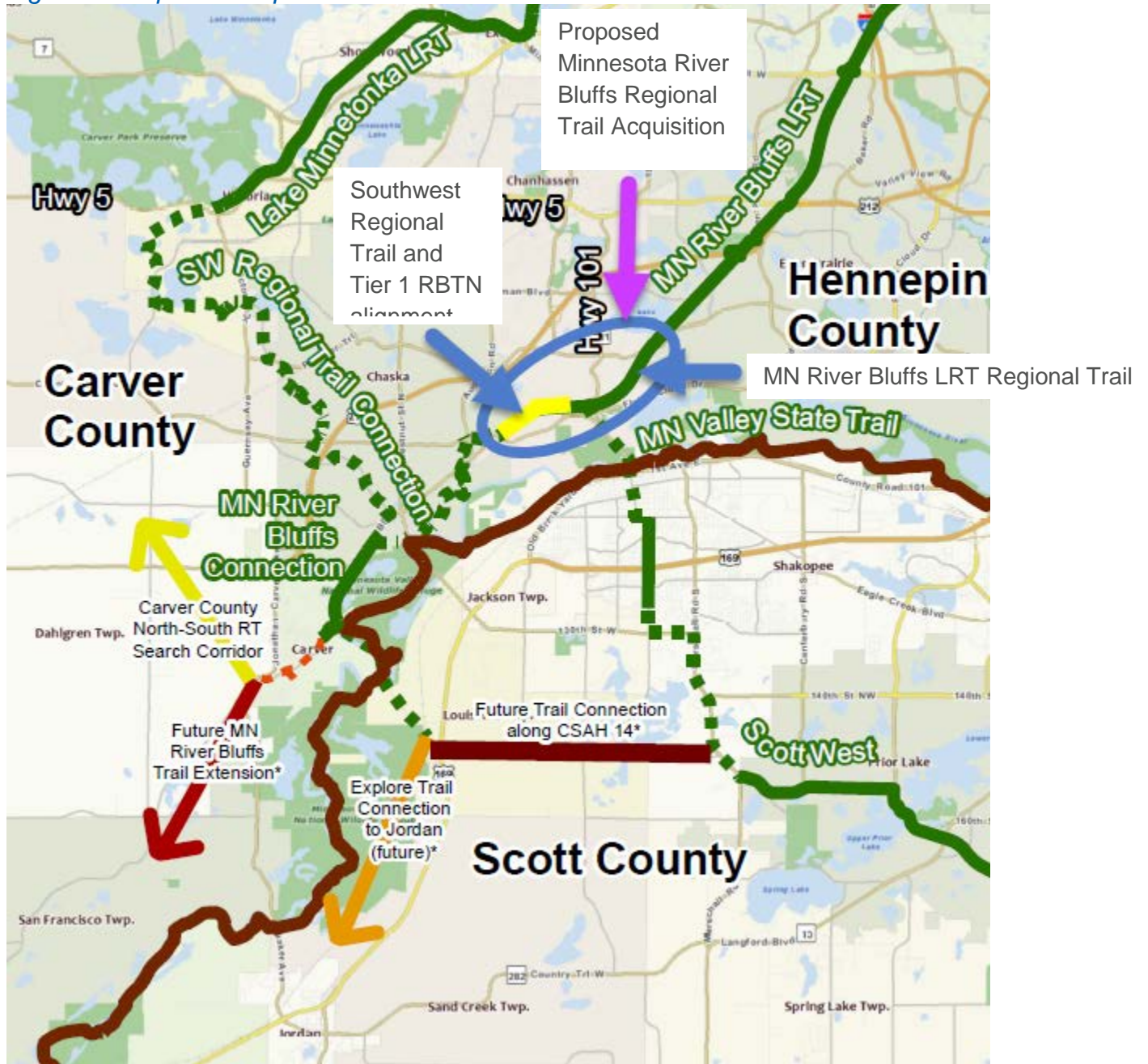
The proposed parcels for acquisition are located in the northeast corner of Carver County at the transition of the existing Three Rivers Park District's Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail and Carver County's existing Southwest Regional Trail (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Proposed Acquisition Location



The proposed Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail segment includes Three Rivers Park District's Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail that transitions to Carver County's Southwest Regional Trail, also recognized by the Metropolitan Council as a Tier 1 Regional Bicycle Transportation Network Designation alignment (Figure 2).

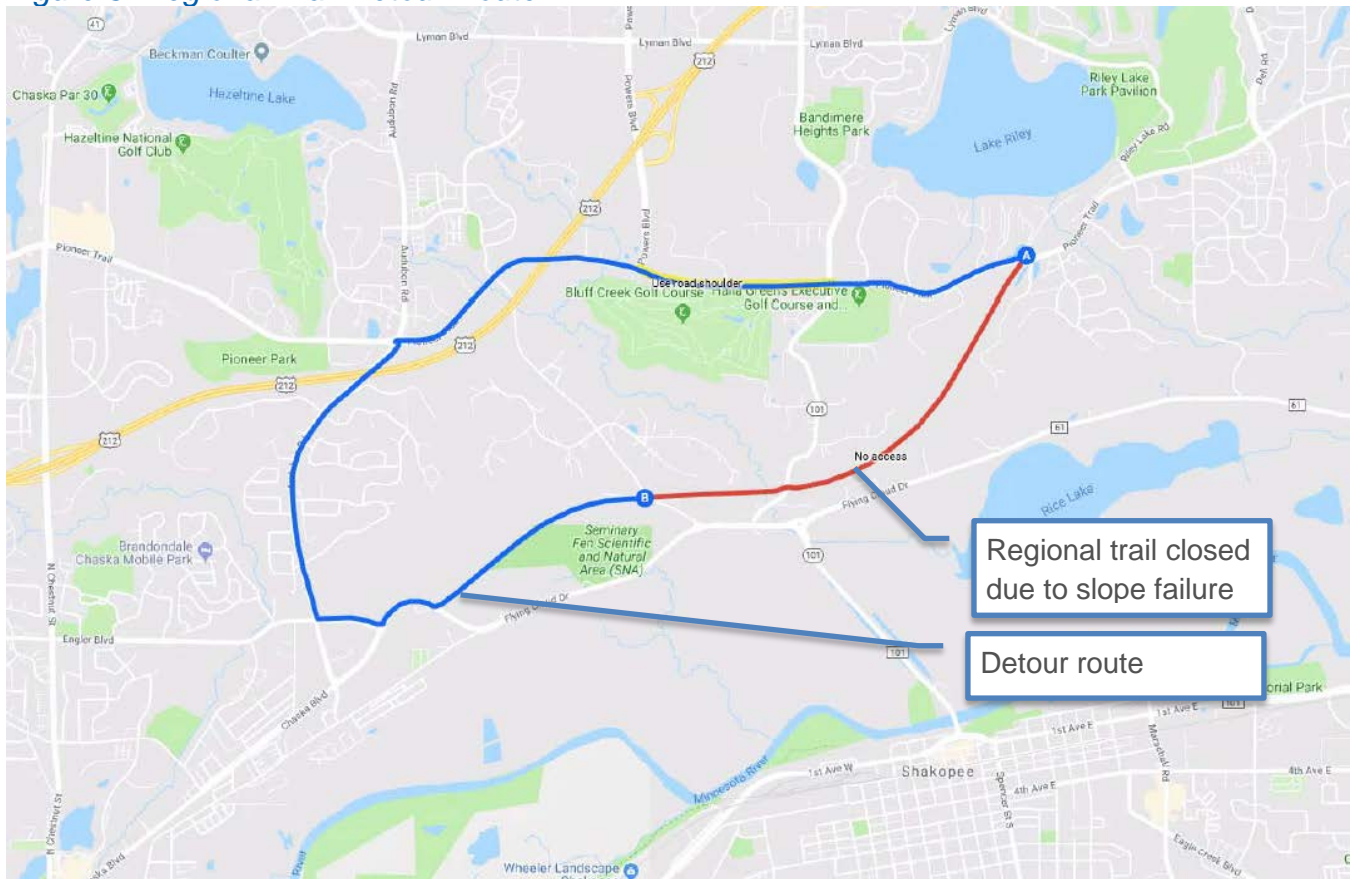
Figure 2: Proposed Acquisition Location



Currently, Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority leases the land to and permits the management of the Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail segment to Three Rivers Park District, and the Southwest Regional Trail segment to Carver County.

A portion of Three Rivers Park District's Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail segment (shown in red) has been closed since 2014 due to a slope failure, rerouting trail users on an approximately six-mile detour (shown in blue) over other less desirable routes (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Regional Trail Detour Route



Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority has notified Carver County that it intends to dispose of this rail property. Additionally, Carver County is currently developing an agreement with Three Rivers Park District for the eventual transition of management to the County.

Carver County is requesting to transfer the following two regional trail segments to the Carver County Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail Master Plan:

- 0.75-mile portion of the Southwest Regional Trail (shown in yellow) from County Road 61 in the City of Chaska to Bluff Creek Drive in the City of Chanhassen
- 2.25 miles of Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail (shown in green) from Bluff Creek Drive in the City of Chanhassen and extending to the eastern county line near Pioneer Trail in Eden Prairie.

At a future date, Carver County intends to propose an amendment to separate the Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail and Southwest Regional Trail into two distinct regional trail master plans.

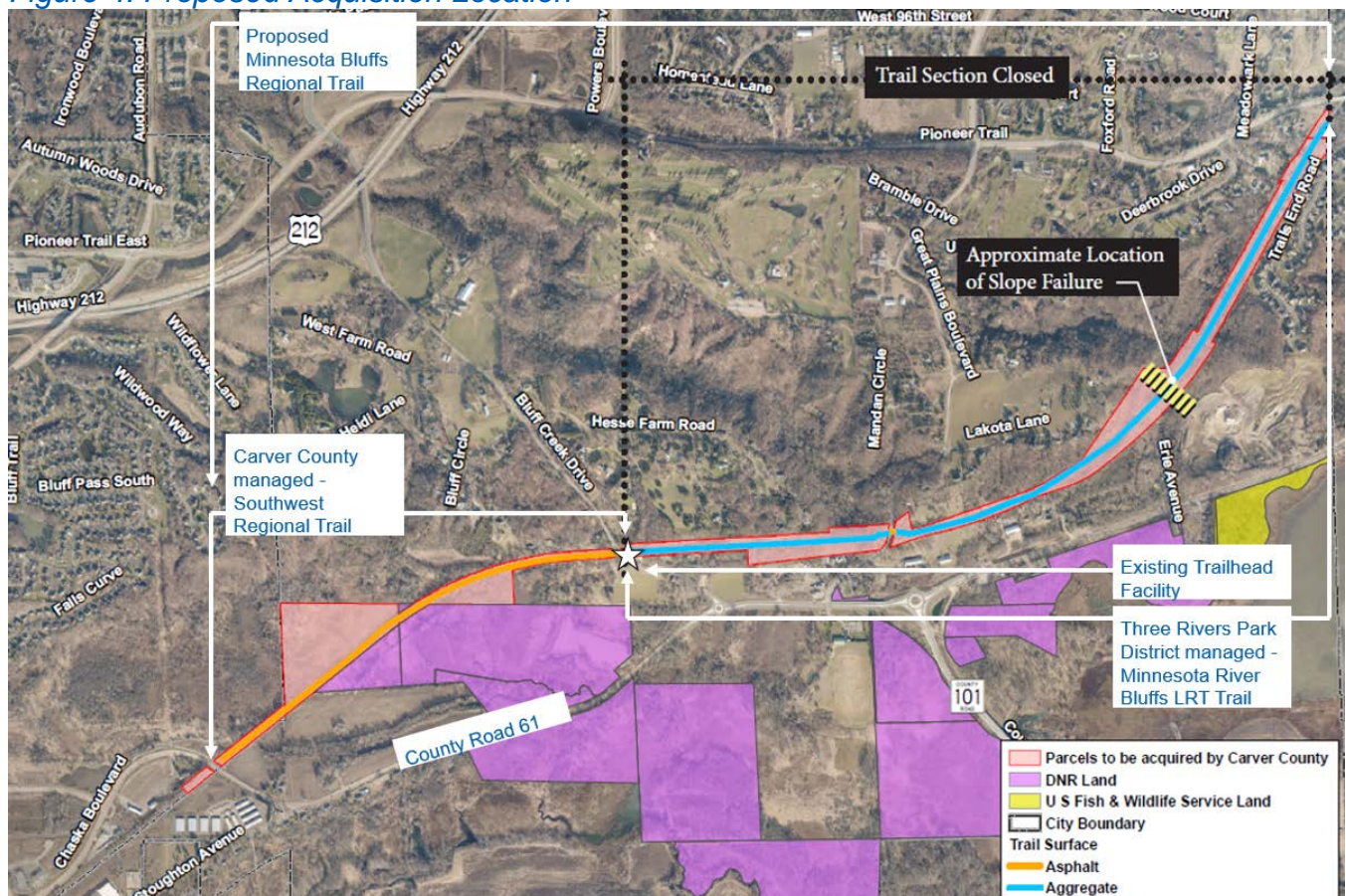
Acquisition Needs:

Carver County undertook an initial appraisal process to determine preliminary costs for the acquisition of the corridor from the Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority. The preliminary draft appraisal value for the following four parcels is \$5,480,000:

- 259990600
- 259990500
- 259990700
- 309990310

The following map identifies the property boundaries of the trail corridor currently owned by the Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority and anticipated to be purchased by Carver County Parks. The map also identifies the section of the trail currently closed due to the slope failure (*Figure 4*).

Figure 4: Proposed Acquisition Location



Stewardship Plan

The 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan requires that a master plan describe how park property will be managed prior to developing the property for recreation purposes. The existing three-mile regional trail corridor includes a stewardship plan for each of the two regional trail segments.

The Southwest Regional Trail segment from Bluff Creek Drive to County Road 61 is open and managed by Carver County. This section of trail transitions down the Minnesota River Valley bluff and is adjacent the Seminary Fen Scientific and Natural Area managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

A slope failure partially closed the Minnesota River Bluffs LRT trail segment managed by Three Rivers Park District, from Bluff Creek Drive extending to the eastern county line near Pioneer Trail. Restoration of the land affected by the slope failure is expected to take place prior to Carver County taking ownership of the land.

Carver County will pursue a development master plan for the trail which will explore opportunities to improve natural resource stewardship and storm water management, while minimizing disruption to natural systems, and improving drainage of the land adjacent to the slope failure.

Demand Forecast

From 2000 to 2017 Carver County's population increased by 30 percent according to the U.S. Census and is forecasted by the Metropolitan Council to continue to rise by fifty percent by 2040 (Table 1).

Table 1: Carver County Population and Growth Forecasts

Forecast Year	Population	Households	Employment
2010	91,042	32,891	31,836
2020	108,520	40,940	42,190
2030	135,960	52,190	48,100
2040	161,240	62,590	53,840

From 2000 to 2010, the percent of people with racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds grew in Carver County including the following population segments:

- African American population grew from 0.59% to 1.23%
- Latinx population grew from 2.55% to 3.86%
- Asian population grew from 1.56% to 2.72%

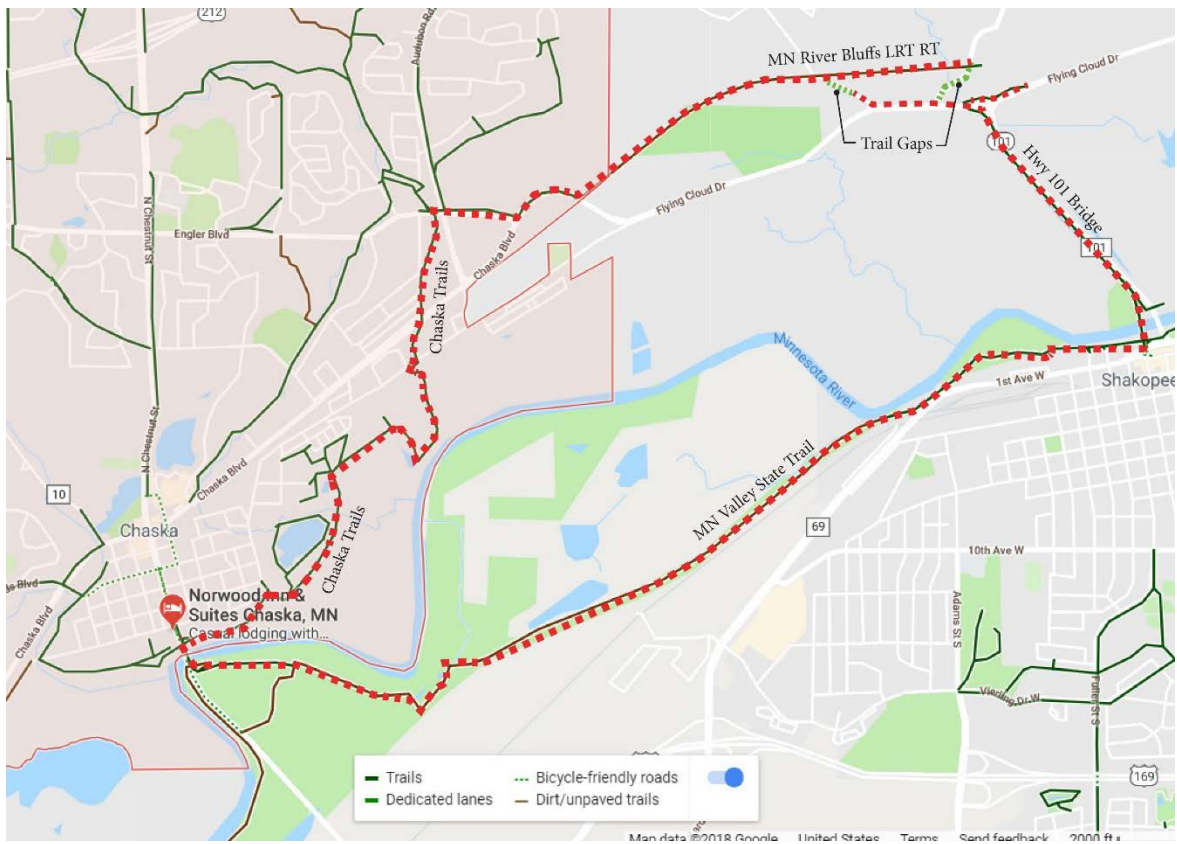
High-demand facilities, such as trails for walking, biking and hiking, are sought-out recreational activities that attract users to the Regional Parks System and contribute to overall health. The proposed Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail, once reconstructed, will provide vital connections to numerous communities and populations along the trail corridor.

Current demographics indicate that approximately 4,800 residents live within the 0.75-mile core service area of this segment of the Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail, with an additional 85,300 residents living in the extended service corridor between the 0.75 and 3.0-mile distance from the trail.

The Southwest Regional Trail had 76,100 visits in 2016 and the Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail located south of Chaska had 42,400 visits according to the Metropolitan Council's 2017 Annual Use Estimate. The Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail was not surveyed as part of the Annual Use Estimate.

With the reconstruction of the proposed Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail segment, trail use is anticipated to increase, providing access to Highway 101 bridge to cross the Minnesota River while linking to Minnesota Valley State Trail and Scott County (*Figure 5*).

Figure 5: Trail Loop



Development Concept

Carver County will develop the proposed Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail segment in accordance to a future development master plan upon approval by the Council. Future trail improvements will have either the existing aggregate trail surface or a paved bituminous trail surface, both of which are considered accessible if kept level and maintained properly. The current existing trail segments include:

- The Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail segment that aligns with the abandoned railroad corridor and is constructed of aggregate.
- The Southwest Regional Trail segment that aligns with the abandoned railroad corridor is a ten-foot wide, bituminous surface with separation from the roadway.

Wayfinding

The Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail currently has a trailhead facility with wayfinding information located at the intersection of Bluff Creek Drive and the trail. Additional wayfinding measures are anticipated to be incorporated at key trail access locations and key intersections along the trails.

Conflicts

There are no known conflicts regarding the existing trail. The area surrounding the trail corridor is mainly natural and undeveloped lands due to the steep slopes. This area includes both privately owned land, public lands, a golf course and commercial property.

Public Services

The proposed Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail segment is a self-contained recreational feature that does not need additional services to function at a base level, after the repair of the slope failure.

Utilities

Municipal sewer and water services are not currently available to the property, nor is it envisioned that the property will need these services.

Policing

Upon acquisition of the Southwest Regional Trail and Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail segments from the Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority, Carver County Sheriff's Office will provide patrolling for all County parks and trails.

911 First Responder system currently handles calls made from the trail.

Operations

Carver County Parks is charged with the management and operation of the County's parks and trails system, including the trail defined by this master plan. The Carver County Board of Commissioners establishes policies and ordinances for the park and trail system. The County Board sets a budget for operations and maintenance work as well as capital improvements for the Parks Department.

Carver County will provide operations and maintenance funding for the trail corridor supported by the County General Fund and Operations and Maintenance funding provided through the Council's state funded program.

Public Engagement and Participation

Carver County conducted a public awareness process that engaged the public and adjacent government entities for this acquisition amendment along with a future master plan amendment for the Southwest Regional Trail.

Public Engagement

Carver County hosted two engagement events with language interpreters to build awareness about the current trail closure, upcoming land acquisitions, and anticipated reconstruction while promoting the individual trails and their connectivity to the regional system.

- The first engagement took place at Lake Susan Park in Chanhassen over two hours on Sunday, August 19th. The target audience included the Liga Latina Baseball League during a regularly scheduled game and weekend park users visiting the lake, trails, playground, tennis courts, basketball court, and ballfield. The baseball team hosted a special event to attract more interest.
- The second engagement was a pop-up event that took place at Fireman's Park in Chaska over two hours on Sunday, August 19th. It sought to engage the diverse array of weekend park users who use the beach, playground, curling club, restaurant and pub, lawn area, trails and boardwalk, and those just taking in the scenic setting. There was a log rolling event to attract more interest and participation.

Partner Coordination

Carver County is working with adjacent government entities including: Three Rivers Park District, Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority, the City of Chanhassen and City of Chaska. They support Carver County's efforts to complete this master plan to enable the ultimate acquisition of the Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority property.

Public Awareness

Public awareness of the proposed Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail acquisition segment is a joint effort between Carver County and Three Rivers Park District.

Three Rivers Park District is promoting the trail detour due to the slope failure on their website and has provided additional signage in the area to direct trail users.

After the acquisition occurs, Carver County's website will be updated to inform the public of Carver County's role in the management of the property and operations of the trail.

Carver County continues to work to improve public awareness of its park and trail facilities, programs, and services with various methods including:

- Printed Materials: Carver County has developed and distributes on a regular basis brochures and maps, including trail and park maps and picnic, camping, and other brochures. Park and trail fliers are also distributed to County departments, libraries, community agencies, and other contacts throughout the community.
- Electronic Communication: Carver County has a web page to inform citizens about the County's functions and services (e.g., Park Commission meetings, the master planning process, trails, park facilities, and programs). In addition, the public.

Accessibility

The Regional Parks Policy Plan requires that all park and trail improvements are fully accessible to people with limited mobility. The proposed Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail will be maintained properly to be accessible according to the Americans with Disability Act from a variety of locations.

The segment of the trail covered by this master plan amendment is accessible by the roadway crossing at County Road 61, Bluff Creek Drive, TH 101, and at Dell Road near the east boundary of the trail between Hennepin County and Carver County.

There are numerous locations to access the Southwest Regional Trail and Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail either directly along the regional trails or via the local linking trail systems associated with numerous surrounding communities, including but not limited to the following:

- Trailhead parking lot at Engler Blvd and Audubon Road (east of Brandondale Mobile Home Park)
- Trailhead at the intersection of Bluff Creek Drive and the Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail
- Firemen's Park in Chaska
- Riley Lake Park in Eden Prairie
- Miller Park in Eden Prairie
- Edenvale Park in Eden Prairie
- Shady Oak Beach in Hopkins
- Trailhead at the Depot Coffee House in Hopkins
- Carver County Courthouse
- Chaska Athletic Park
- Chaska Lions Park
- Shakopee Huber Park

Natural Resources

The proposed Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail segment transitions down the Minnesota River Valley bluff through woodlands, scenic vistas and the Seminary Fen Scientific and Natural Area managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. A natural resource inventory will be included in the future development master plan.

Review by Other Council Divisions

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

Community Development - Forecasts (Todd Graham 651-602-1322) – No additional comments.

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

Metro Transit (Steve Mahowald 612-349-7775) – As Carver County moves forward with this project, consideration should be given to pedestrian safety including the separation of paths between pedestrian and bike users.

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

Local Planning Assistance – Land Use (Angela Torres 651-602-1566) – No additional comments.