

Minutes of the

METROPOLITAN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

Thursday, November 7, 2019

Committee Members Present: Margie Andreason, Cecily Harris, Todd Kemery, Rick Theisen, Tony Yarusso

Committee Members Absent: Jeremy Peichel, Anthony Taylor, Bob Moeller, and Lynnea Atlas-Ingebretson, liaison to the Council.

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Yarusso called the meeting of the Council's Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order at 4:04 p.m. on Thursday, November 7, 2019.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Chair Yarusso asked for a motion to approve the November 7, 2019 agenda. It was motioned by Theisen and seconded by Harris to approve the agenda. Chair Yarusso motioned to amend the order of the agenda, moving the second information item, Parks Ambassador Update, to follow "Public Invitation". It was seconded by Harris. **The amended agenda was approved.**

Chair Yarusso asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the October 3, 2019 meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. It was motioned by Harris and seconded by Kemery. Andreason asked for the language at the bottom of page 2 to be softened. Her intent was to say that it is important for folks to be heard or they will continue to speak out. **The minutes with this amendment were approved.**

PUBLIC INVITATION

None.

INFORMATION

Parks Ambassador Update – Amanda Lovelee, Parks Ambassador and Ellie Hohulin, Intern

Lovelee began by highlighting a number of Ambassador Program efforts, including helping support the development of the first-ever Regional Parks System Equity Grant Program and the Art Shanty Project, coming this winter as outlined in the presentation materials provided.

Hohulin discussed increasing awareness of our regional trails and her efforts to develop a regional ride guide. She discussed outreach events done throughout the summer and supporting the regular convenings of the regional park outreach staff.

Harris asked when the dates of the Art Shanty will be. Hohulin stated they will be the last two weekends in January and the first two weekends in February.

Harris asked about observing Imagine Deliver conversations with agency staff. Lovelee stated that yes, that can be arranged.

Kemery asked about the equity awareness regional trail ride and if it is weekly. Hohulin stated it's a guide they're developing in partnership with the regional park agencies. Organized rides could be a consideration for a future effort. Kemery stated that he would be very interested in participating.

Yarusso discussed digitizing the mapping game.

Andreason asked about the Art Shanty Project how staff would capture participant questions and concerns in addition to the visitor's 'love letters' to their favorite park or trail.

BUSINESS

2019-316, Mississippi Gorge Regional Park Master Plan, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board – Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst

Kelly gave a presentation on the Mississippi Gorge Regional Park (MGRP) Master Plan submitted by Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board as outlined in the materials provided.

Kemery asked if moving forward on plan implementation is contingent on moving the dam or leaving it. Kelly stated the master plan includes both scenarios.

Kemery asked what the timeline for changes to the dam. Tyler Pederson, MPRB, stated that the timeline is under consideration by the US Army Corps of Engineers, but that no planned changes would happen in the near term.

Kemery asked why the Corps is considering removing the dam? Pederson stated that the commercial use of the lock and dam system in Minneapolis is slowing down.

Harris asked for clarification about the formal naming of the park. Pederson noted there is the Central Mississippi Riverfront and the Above the Falls Regional Park. He also noted the formal naming of MGRP stems from a CAC recommendation. It will be promoted on signage throughout the park.

Harris asked how many more parks along the Mississippi River share the name (Mississippi Gorge). Pederson stated that this section is the only gorge along the river.

Andreason asked about the public engagement and equity conversations. Pederson shared that providing access to the river in this area of Minneapolis was a significant theme that emerged.

Chair Yarusso discussed the barrier study done a few years ago, for example, the fear or not understanding concept of public land. He asked if anything has been done to address these issues. Pederson discussed specific targeted activities geared to draw people in who haven't historically been part of park master plan discussions. He also discussed the recommendation to use multi-lingual signage in the plan.

Kemery asked if there would be fees involved in the new park. Pederson stated there is no fee to access the park but there can be fees for programs, parking, and other special uses.

Kemery discussed financial barriers. Pederson noted that there are programs to help with fees for those in need.

Harris motioned, and it was seconded by Theisen to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Mississippi Gorge Regional Park Master Plan.
2. Require that the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, prior to initiating any new development of the regional park, send preliminary plans to the Engineering Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Divisions for review in order to assess the potential impacts to the regional interceptor system.

Chair Yarusso asked what the potential risks involved in losing the dams, i.e., land lost. Pederson didn't think land would be lost if the dam was removed, but there will be a detailed study to come.

Chair Yarusso called for a vote. **Motion carried.**

2019-317, Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant for St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park (Rowe), Washington County – Jessica Lee, Senior Parks Planner

Lee gave a presentation on a request from Washington County for a park acquisition opportunity fund grant for St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park as outlined in the materials provided. She noted that after this acquisition, there will only be 20 acres remaining to be acquired to complete the master plan.

Theisen motioned and it was seconded by Harris to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve a grant of up to \$2,228,599.65 to Washington County to acquire the 102-acre Rowe property located on St. Croix Trail south of 90th Street, Denmark Township, for St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park.
2. Authorize the Community Development Director to execute the grant agreement and restrictive covenant on behalf of the Council.

Chair Yarusso made a motion to amend the motion with the language contained in the handout he passed out to read as follows:

Subject to the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources approving the purchase price, the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approves a grant of up to \$2,228,599.65 to Washington County to Acquire the 102-acre Rowe property located on St. Croix Trail south of 90th Street, Denmark Township, for St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park.
2. Authorizes the Community Development Director to execute the grant agreement and restrictive covenant on behalf of the Council.

Andreason seconded the amended motion and asked why the change. Chair Yarusso explained that this acquisition is contingent on LCCMR approval. In the event that they do not approve the acquisition, the Metropolitan Council would not be responsible for financing it.

Mullin noted that Council staff is working closely with LCCMR on this request. He added that this is an amazing parcel.

Harris stated she visited the site and felt it is spectacular and is very supportive.

Chair Yarusso called for a vote on the amendment to the motion. **The motion carried.**

Kemery asked about the easement and if the public can access the shoreline. Sandy Breuer, Washington County Parks stated yes.

Chair Yarusso called for a vote of the original motion, as amended. **The motion carried.**

2019-318, Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant for Nine Miles Creek Regional Trail (Wanner), Three Rivers Park District – Jessica Lee, Senior Parks Planner

Lee gave a presentation on a request from Three Rivers Park District for a park acquisition opportunity fund grant for Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail as outlined in the materials provided.

Theisen motioned and it was seconded by Andreason to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve a grant of up to \$71,250.00 to Three Rivers Park District for the 2,305 square-foot easement located at 7125 Ohms Lane in the City of Edina for Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail.
2. Authorize the Community Development Director to execute the grant agreement and restrictive covenant on behalf of the Council.
3. Consider reimbursing Three Rivers Park District for up to \$23,750 from its share of a future Regional Parks Bonding Program for costs associated with their local match.
4. Inform Three Rivers Park District that the Council does not under any circumstances represent or guarantee that the Council will grant future reimbursement and that expenditure of local funds never entitles a park agency to reimbursement.

Chair Yarusso called for a vote. **The motion carried.**

INFORMATION

Regional Parks System Competitive Equity Grant Program Pilot – First Round Funding Recommendations – Jessica Lee, Senior Parks Planner

Chair Yarusso explained that this information item is to inform the Commission about the outcomes of the Equity Grant Program. It is the Review Committee that will make the actual recommendation to the Council.

Lee went over the work of the Review Committee and the three projects recommended for funding outlined in the materials provided. Chair Yarusso gave further insights on the work of the Review Committee, as he was one of the members.

Kemery encouraged agencies to continue to submit applications and hopefully we can encourage the Council to increase the amount of available funds for this program.

Mullin added that the Council is budgeting for more funding in the future. He noted that the Review Committee provided feedback on all projects that were not funded.

Harris suggested having agencies provide feedback on the Fund Distribution Plan.

Mullin noted that this new program will develop a 2020 Fund Distribution Plan, which staff will bring back to this commission for feedback prior to the next funding round.

Andreason discussed grant amount limits. She noted she liked the recommended outcomes and wondered whether these projects would have been implemented if not for this funding?

Chair Yarusso suggested that in the future we ask applicants what would happen if a project is not funded or is only partially funded.

Theisen cautioned that we want to keep the application simple, so we don't disincentivize participation.

Andreason asked whether the Review Committee looked at the full range of grant requests as a whole or whether they just reviewed the top scoring ones? Chair Yarusso stated the committee reviewed the top scoring ones first, but then discussed the full range. In the end, the committee recommended the ones that received the highest scores. He felt that reviewing the full package of recommendations would be important for future grant rounds.

Mullin asked Commissioners to think about the process going forward as staff will be looking for advice for the next round of funding.

REPORTS

Chair: Chair Yarusso stated that Washington County has a Master Plan for Pine Point Regional Park and there will be an open house next Thursday. There will also be an opportunity to view/comment online after the open house.

Chair Yarusso announced the resignation of Catherine Fleming due to a job change.

Commissioners: None.

Staff: Mullin noted that Margie Andreason will also be leaving the Commission but will serve until her seat is filled.

Mullin discussed the System Addition Meeting held at the Nordic Center on Halloween at Lake Elmo Park Reserve. There will be more information on this process at the December meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed the meeting adjourned at 5:36 p.m.

Sandi Dingle
Recording Secretary