

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: April 9, 2020

For the Community Development Committee meeting of April 20, 2020

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of May 13, 2020

Subject: Pine Point Regional Park Master Plan, Washington County, Review File No. 50222-1

MPOSC District, Member: District F, Cecily Harris

Council District, Member: 12 – Francisco J. Gonzalez

Policy/Legal Reference: Minn. Stat. § 473.313; *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, Chapter 5, Planning Strategy 1

Staff Prepared/Presented: Tracey Kinney, Senior Planner, 651-602-1029

Division/Department: Community Development/ Regional Planning

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve Pine Point Regional Park Master Plan without the boundary adjustment and proposed acquisitions.
2. Advise Washington County that the proposed boundary adjustment and 169.82-acres of acquisitions are contingent on its inclusion in the 2020 Policy Plan Amendment and will be reviewed and considered through the Systems Additions process.

Background

Pine Point Regional Park is located in the northeastern part of the Regional Parks System and in the northern part of Washington County (Figures 1 and 2). The existing 287-acre park serves as a major trailhead to the Gateway State Trail connecting Stillwater Township to the City of Saint Paul.

Washington County is requesting Council consideration of a new master plan. The master plan features natural resource management, trail improvements, and user experience areas referred to in the masterplan as nodes. Additionally, the master plan includes a proposed boundary adjustment with future acquisitions that are contingent on its inclusion in the 2020 System Additions *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* Amendment.

Rationale

The Pine Point Regional Park Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* including Chapter 5, Planning Strategy 1.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Pine Point Regional Park Master Plan advances the Thrive outcome of livability by enhancing the quality of life in the region through increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation.

Funding

The total cost to implement the master plan is estimated at \$9,400,000 including \$5,600,000 for development and \$3,700,000 for the proposed acquisitions. Proposed additions to this park are contingent on review through the System Additions Process and subsequent *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* Amendment.

No Council funding is associated with the approval of this master plan at this time. Upon approval of the master plan and subject to further system additions approval, the County may apply for or use available funding sources, subject to their applicable terms and processes, to implement the eligible projects identified in the master plan.

Known Support / Opposition

The Washington County Board approved and adopted (resolution 2020-02-01) the Pine Point Regional Park Master Plan at its February 25, 2020 meeting. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Washington Conversation District indicated their support the master plan.

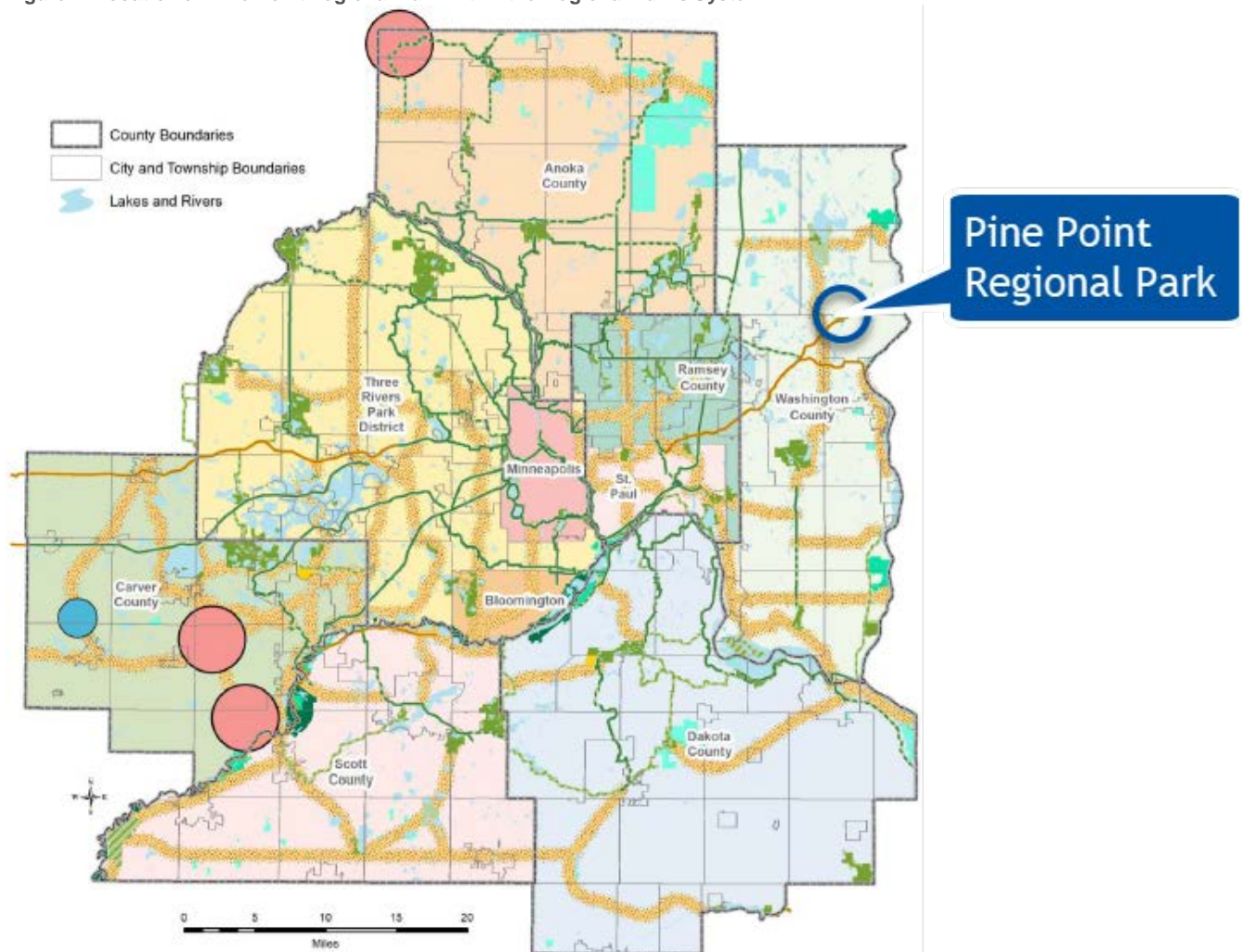
Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the 2040 *Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that master plans for regional parks address 13 items: boundaries and acquisition costs, stewardship plan, demand forecast, development concept, conflicts, public services, operations, partner engagement, public engagement and participation, equity analysis, public awareness, accessibility, and natural resources. The report that follows analyzes the master plan against those requirements.

Boundaries and Acquisition Costs

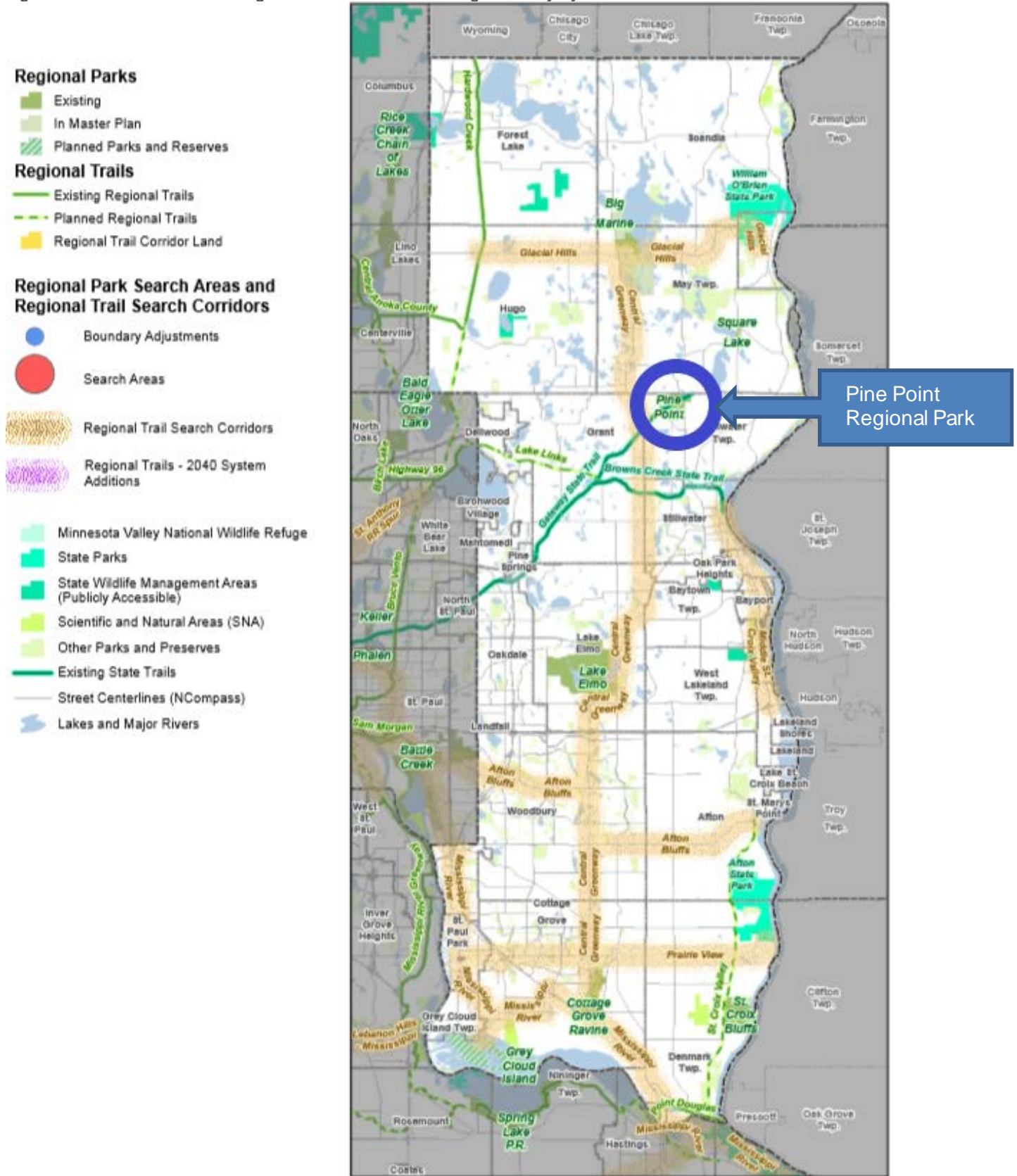
Pine Point Regional Park is located in the northwestern part of the Regional Parks System and in the northern part of Washington County (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1: Location of Pine Point Regional Park within the Regional Parks System



The existing 287-acre park serves as a major trailhead to the Gateway State Trail connecting Stillwater Township to the City of Saint Paul.

Figure 2: Location of Pine Point Regional Park within the Washington County System



The master plan includes a proposed boundary adjustment with future acquisitions that are contingent on its inclusion in the 2020 System Additions *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Amendment* (Figure 3).

The master plan is a long-term vision of the park that will be implemented over the next fifteen years in three 5-year planning phases.

Acquisitions

The master plan proposes to add 169.82 acres to the park’s current 287 acres, expanding the park boundary to 457 acres. The proposed additions include 6 privately-owned parcels and one parcel already owned by Washington County (Table 1). These proposed acquisitions and subsequent boundary adjustment are contingent on Council review and potential inclusion in the 2020 System Additions *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Amendment*.

The projected timing and sequencing of acquiring the proposed property adjacent to the park will ultimately be determined by funding and the ability to work with willing sellers as opportunities present themselves.

Table 1. Proposed Acquisition Parcels and Costs

Parcel ID	Acres	2019 Tax Assessed Value
05.030.20.11.0002	48.52	\$737,900.00
06.030.20.12.0001	29.95	\$839,600.00
06.030.20.12.0002	0.52	\$248,400.00
06.030.20.13.0003	24.54	\$1,381,000.00
06.030.20.41.0001	44.03	\$504,600.00
05.030.20.32.0008	2.18	\$27,500.00
05.030.20.31.0006	20.08	\$0 (County-owned)
Total	169.82	\$3,739,000.00

Figure 3. Pine Point Regional Park – Development Concept



Stewardship

The 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan requires a program for managing park property, including activities, expenses, and anticipated revenue prior to developing the property for recreation purposes.

Washington County budgets annually for operating the park system. The budget includes maintenance of recreation facilities and management of natural resources within the parks. Revenue for these expenditures originates from three primary sources:

- Vehicle passes and campground reservations
- County levy
- Operations and maintenance grants consisting of State general funds and lottery in-lieu sales tax funds that are disbursed through the Metropolitan Council.

Demand Forecast

The Pine Point Regional Park was the sixth most visited park in the Washington County Parks System with 125,697 visitors in 2018 according to the Council's 2018 Parks Use Estimates (Table 2).

Table 2: Estimated Annual Regional Visits, Metropolitan Council (2018)

Regional Trail Unit	Est. Visits, 2018
Lake Elmo Park Reserve	620,965
Hardwood Creek Regional Park	261,397
Big Marine Park Reserve	227,036
Square Lake Special Recreation Feature	167,388
St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park	130,077
Pine Point Regional Park	125,697
Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park	122,379

Development Concept

The master plan for Pine Point Regional Park includes improved park access, trails, user experience areas (nodes), and wayfinding.

Access Improvements

The master plan identifies main park entrances and entry area improvements:

- Norell Avenue Crossing: Norell Avenue bisects the west side of the park making it difficult for visitors to cross the street. Washington County will work with the DNR to identify potential crossing improvements that are similar to other at-grade Gateway State Trail crossings.
- Main Entrance & Gateway State Trail Trailhead: The existing trailhead building and wayfinding signage will be improved to strengthen the connection between the park, Gateway State Trail, and local trail system.
- Gateway State Trail & Interchange Nodes: New access points (interchange nodes) to Pine Point Regional Park from the Gateway State Trail have been added that include wayfinding signage to mark entries into the park.

Trails

The existing 7.9 miles of existing unpaved trails in the park have been updated to reflect new user experience routes.

- Blue Trail: The Blue Trail is a 4.3-mile unpaved, multi-use trail, that includes a boardwalk for improved access and views of Louise Lake.
- Yellow Trail: The Yellow Trail is a 4.3-mile unpaved, multi-use trail, that includes a boardwalk for improved access and views of Loon Lake and is reserved for cross-country skiers in the winter.
- Bike Access and Proposed Single Track Mountain Bike Areas: The existing mountain biking area in the northeast corner of Pine Point Regional Park will be expanded both on the east and west sides of the park.

Experience Routes and Areas

Proposed experience routes and areas include environmental, historical and cultural, recreational and accessibility improvements.

- Ecological Trail Route & Natural Resource Nodes: The proposed Ecological Trail Route allows visitors to sample Pine Point Regional Park’s diverse ecological plant communities. Natural Resource Nodes may include signage, wildlife blinds, photography hotspots and seating for scenic overlooks.
- Discovery Trail Route & Discovery Nodes: The Discovery Trail Route is an interpretive path showcasing the park’s interesting historical and cultural features. Discovery Nodes may highlight: the Outing Lodge, poor Farm historic cemetery and pine plantations, an agricultural site, the Gateway State Trail trailhead, and a restored prairie.
- Recreation Nodes and Zones: Recreation Nodes and Zones highlight potential locations for additional or enhanced recreational opportunities and include features geared toward families and groups and/or water-based amenities. These areas may include non-motorized boat launch (canoe, kayak, etc.) and pier, campfire area, potential rustic campsites, family recreation zones (nature/adventure play, picnic benches, picnic shelter & restrooms, sledding hill, campfire area, star gazing mound), and other low-impact recreational improvement.
- ADA Accessible Loop: A fully ADA accessible one-mile trail loop will begin from the main trailhead and lead visitors to many of the park’s main features including views of the park’s major target plant communities, access to the family recreation zones, picnic and play facilities, Outing Lodge, and Gateway State Trail.

Wayfinding

A uniform signage theme will continue to be implemented throughout the park for orienting visitors to facility locations and trail circulation and understanding the rules and regulations for park use. Wayfinding and interpretation elements include kiosks, directional signs, interpretation, and policy signage.

Conflicts

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires the identification of conflicts with other existing or proposed projects or land uses affecting the trail unit, including steps necessary for their resolution.

Anticipated conflicts include trail use by equestrian riders and bicyclists, at-grade pedestrian crossing at Norrell Avenue, balancing recreational and natural resource management needs, and wayfinding clarity.

Equestrian riders and bicyclist trail use: Trail use conflicts between equestrian riders and bicyclists were addressed in the master plan by amending existing trails to separate the uses, adding clearly defined bicycle use areas, and adding clear signage.

Norell Avenue At-Grade Crossing: Washington County will work with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to identify potential crossing improvements similar to other pedestrian crossings used on Gateway State Trail.

Recreational and natural resource management needs: The master plan relocated trails to the periphery of identified significant ecological areas.

Wayfinding signage: The master plan recommends updating wayfinding signage to clearly show the regional park and the Gateway State Trail and include guidelines for different recreational uses. Washington County will collaborate with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources on the proposed improvements.

Public Services

No new public services are being proposed as part of the master plan.

Operations

Washington County Parks Division has an annual operations and maintenance budget of approximately \$4,000,000 to operate and maintain the County's park and trail system. Pine Point Regional Park is managed by public safety, operations, and maintenance staff operating primarily out of the Washington County Public Works North Shop. Washington County has existing waste, recycling, and organics receptacles that are standard across the park and trail system. This system will be expanded to accommodate new and expanded uses in the park.

Partner Engagement

To gain input from affected agency partners, Washington County collaborated with representatives from related agencies, local government, and associated recreation providers. Two committees provided guidance throughout the master planning process, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Community Advisory Committee (CAC).

The TAC met four times and included representatives from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Carnelian-Marine-St. Croix Watershed District, Stillwater Township, Metropolitan Council, and the Washington County Conservation District.

The CAC met four times and included representatives from the Gateway Trail Association, Stillwater Area Scholastic Cycling Advocates Bike Club, Pollinator Friendly Alliance, Washington County Parks and Open Space Commission, equestrian park users, Metropolitan Council Parks and Open Space Commission, and Outing Lodge at Pine Point.

Common themes that emerged from the partner engagement include:

- Enhance the park's natural features and plant communities; and maintain its natural and rustic feel.
- Highlight views and access to the surrounding lakes.
- Potential for increased programming and amenities around environmental education and cultural interpretation.
- Resolve trail use conflicts between equestrians and bikers.
- Address equity in access, such as providing ADA trail opportunities, enhanced community connections, and improved wayfinding/ safety signage.

Public Engagement and Participation

Strategic efforts were made to engage the general public, park users, local community of May Township and Stillwater Township, underrepresented stakeholders, and organizations. A variety of different strategies were used to target specific user groups and gain input from the general public.

- Project website: This platform was viewed 1,167 times for project and engagement information including the online survey and interactive map.

- Online Survey: The online survey was available from May through July 2019 and received 630 responses.
 - Of survey respondents, nearly as many visitors arrive via the Gateway State Trail (almost 41%) as by vehicle (almost 45%).
 - The most popular recreational activities at Pine Point Regional Park are use of the Gateway State Trail (69%), hiking (45%), horseback riding (32%), cross-country skiing (28%), and dog walking (25%).
 - Survey respondents indicated the most desired amenities to be added and/or improved upon in the park are equestrian trails (27%), hiking/skiing/snowshoeing trails (25%), mountain biking trails (19%), canoe/kayaking access (17%), and educational signage (17%).
- Online Interactive Map: An interactive mapping exercise was available on the project website from May through November 2019 and received 43 responses.
- Direct Connect: Washington County sent out direct email invites to group leaders to share survey and event information with their networks.
- In-Person Engagement Activities:
 - Open House 1: The first open house that took place on July 23, 2019, at the Washington County Public Works Building consulted the public on the early concept development. Over 60 attendees were asked what types of future improvements they would like to see considered as part of the master plan, and 106 written responses of feedback were received.
 - Open House 2: The second open house took place on November 14th, 2019, at the Washington County Public Works Building and consulted the public on the final plan recommendations and on prioritization of key issues, such as trail alignments and wayfinding. Over 80 community members attended the open house and 59 comments were documented.
 - County Fair Tabling: On August 1-2, 2019, fair goers were consulted on the kinds of activities and amenities they would like to see in Pine Point Regional Park. 241 responses were received.
 - Park Pop-Up Table: On July 14, 2019, a pop-up table in the park consulted the public about the master plan. Thirteen responses were gathered during the day.
 - Urban Roots: On October 8, 2019, Urban Roots, an organization whose mission is to cultivate and empower youth from the East Side of Saint Paul through nature, healthy food, and community, was engaged through a partnership between Metropolitan Council and Washington County. Around 25 youth collaborated on amenities that would improve their experience at a nature-based park.
 - Individual Conversations with Key Stakeholders: Residents who live directly adjacent to Pine Point Regional Park were involved in the identification of potential parcels for acquisition.

The major themes and findings from the engagement process included:

- Most popular uses: Gateway State Trail, hiking, horseback riding, biking and skiing
- Top liked activities to add: multi-use/equestrian trails, wayfinding, canoe & kayak launch, adventure play, mountain biking, and camping
- Opportunities to enhance connectivity to Gateway State Trail

- Current users like that the park is rustic, natural, and quiet
- There is a demand for family-based recreation (picnic, play, etc.) and educational programming
- Additional low-impact infrastructure (trails, lights, restrooms, wayfinding, etc.)
- Improve and expand trails for all users – including separation of equestrian and mountain bike uses, where possible
- Prioritize improving wayfinding and signage
- Balance ecological needs and recreational use

Recreational elements that received public and key stakeholder support included new equestrian and biking trails, picnic and play facilities, a non-motorized boat launch, potential future campsite development, and user experience areas for natural resource, discovery, and recreation development.

Additionally, public input supported increased educational programming in the park. To incorporate this input, the master plan includes adding natural resource user experience areas (nodes) that establishes interpretive signage and educational programming.

Equity Analysis

Washington County conducted an equity analysis as part of this master plan that consisted of an examination of the public engagement process and outcomes for stakeholders by race, ethnicity, national origin, income, ability, age, and other pertinent characteristics.

Washington County focused on engaging existing and potential park users within a 30-minute travel shed. According to the Council's [2016 Regional Parks System Visitor Study](#), disparities in Washington County park and trail visitation included: age, household income, educational attainment, and physical or mental ability. Washington County conducted an engagement process that collaborated with local business and non-profit leaders on a Community Advisory Committee, collaborated with Urban Roots, a non-profit youth-serving organization, and held engagement events with the public at the park itself.

Washington County's collaboration with Urban Roots is an example that highlights how stakeholders participated in master plan. County staff collaborated with the Metropolitan Council to host 25 middle schoolers and high schoolers from Urban Roots. The age and race/ethnicity of the youth participants represent demographics that are underserved in Washington County and the metropolitan area Regional Parks System.

Youth participants toured the park, discussed their experience, and provided ideas on how the park could be improved. The youth recommended having places to gather with friends and family away from the parking lot. As a result of this input, the master plan proposes the addition of family recreation zones. They also discussed having observational points along the trail with viewing blinds, interpretative signage, and seating along the trails. These spaces would provide an opportunity for park users to take photos with friends, relax, learn about natural and the historical features of the park. This input is directly reflected in the design concept through the proposed development of natural resource, discovery, and recreation area (nodes). At the end of the master plan process, Washington County will be sharing this master plan with Urban Roots staff and youth to demonstrate how their input was used.

Through the public engagement process, Washington County was able to create relationships and build trust with community stakeholders. Washington County will continue to pursue partnerships in developing programming at Pine Point Regional Park. Recent programs held have already revealed considerable public enthusiasm for events located in the park, and the master plan strives to provide enhanced infrastructure and circulation that support such programs. Offering new or different programming is a strategy Washington County is employing to bring in demographic groups currently underrepresented in the regional park system.

Public Awareness

Washington County uses a variety of outreach and marketing strategies to promote its park system, including, but not limited to, web postings, social media, direct mailings, brochures, flyers, and press releases. Promotional materials will include how one can get to Pine Point Regional Park by foot, bike, transit, and car. Washington County collaborates with many partner organizations to promote and publicize programs, facilities, and initiatives held within its parks.

Accessibility

The Pine Point Regional Park master plan includes numerous American with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements and strengthens connections to the Gateway State Trail as a transportation option since transit does not service Pine Point Regional Park.

- **ADA Improvements:** The master plan proposes the addition of an ADA Trail Loop, which will provide a level, easily accessible trail alignment that allows users of all ages and abilities to experience the park. The new loop will connect to and support the existing Gateway State Trail that bisects the park and is ADA accessible.
- **Gateway State Trail:** Proposed wayfinding and additional connections between the park and the Gateway State Trail, strengthening sustainable alternatives to motorized transportation.

Natural Resources

Pine Point Regional Park is comprised of unique natural resources such as lakes, wetlands, degraded oak savanna remnants, prairie restorations, and grass dominated fields, mixed coniferous/deciduous forest and pine plantations for which it was named (Figure 4). Lake Louise and Lake Loon are identified in the Carnelian-Marine-St. Croix Watershed District 2010 Watershed Management Plan as impaired water bodies, due to excess nutrients. Today, plant diversity is limited because aggressive native and non-native species proliferate on these old field sites. Since 2005, efforts have been made to restore prairie, and clear invasive shrubs from an oak savanna remnant.

This master plan provides a framework for managing Pine Point Regional Park's natural resources, ensuring these assets are protected. Proposed natural resource management strategies include:

- Implementing an adaptive management plan to restore and enhance native plant communities in the park.
- Focusing restorations and improvements in priority areas for future target plant communities (Figure 5).
- Preparing for the impacts of climate change by actively managing Pine Plantations.
- Implementing practices that protect and conserve the parks water resources.

Wetlands

No wetland impacts are anticipated. The master plan improves wetland quality through habitat restoration

Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area

The Pine Point Regional Park is not located within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area; therefore, the master plan does not address these requirements.

Figure 4. Minnesota Land Cover Classification System of Pine Point Regional Park

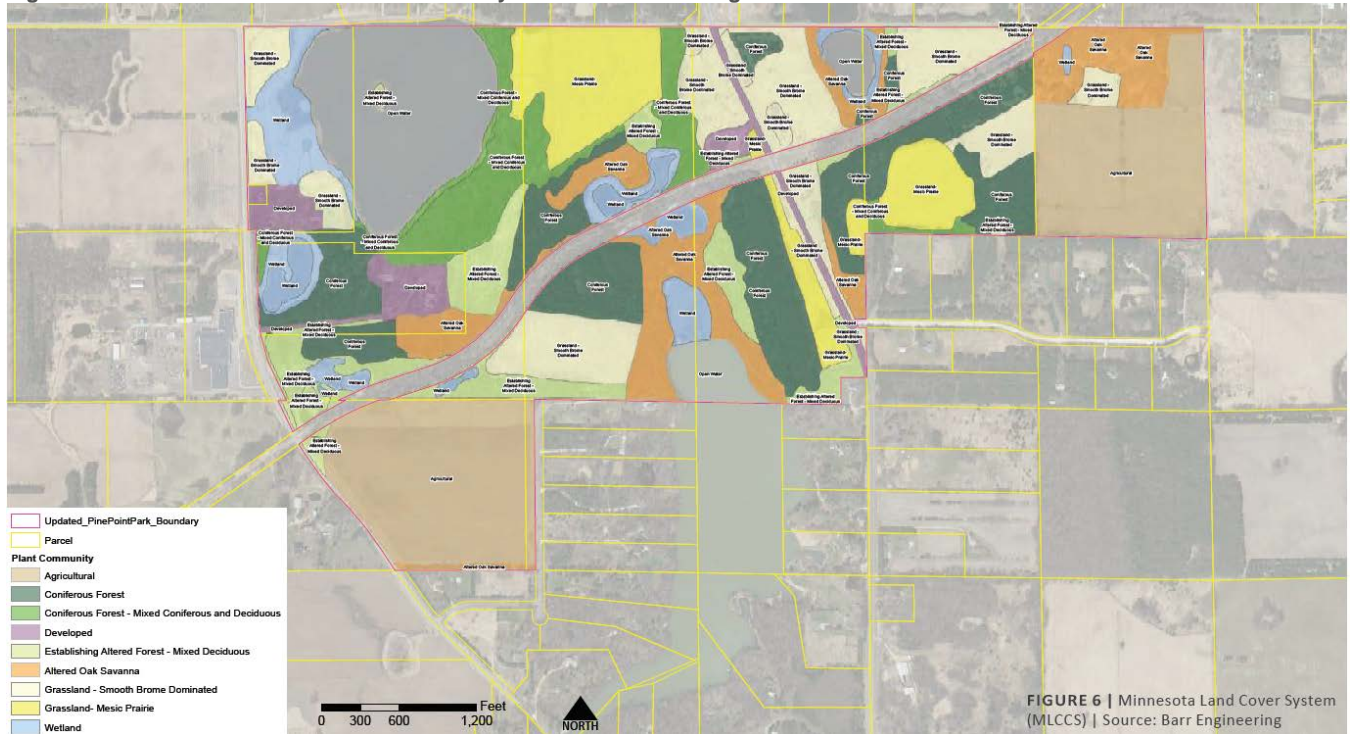
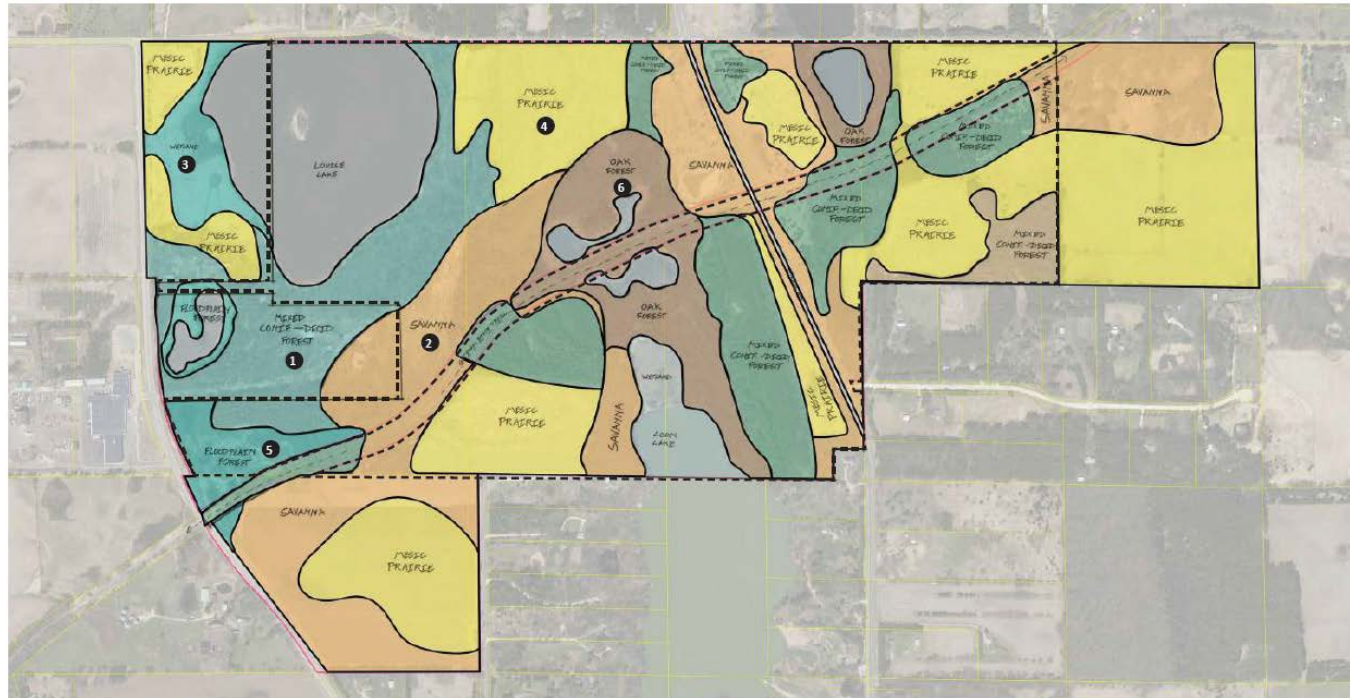


FIGURE 6 | Minnesota Land Cover System (MLCCS) | Source: Barr Engineering

Figure 5. Target plant communities of Pine Point Regional Park



1 Mixed Coniferous - 2 Savanna 3 Wetland 4 Mesic Prairie 5 Floodplain Forest 6 Oak Forest

Review by Other Council Divisions

Community Development – Housing (Hilary Lovelace 651-602-1555) – No additional comments.

Environmental Services – Sewer (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – There are no MCES facilities in the vicinity of this Regional Park; therefore, there is no impact.

Environmental Services – Surface Water (Joe Mulcahy 651.602.1104) – No additional comments.

Metro Transit (Stephen Baisen 612-349-7361) – Metro Transit Route 294 offers the nearest peak period express service 5.5 miles south of Pine Point Regional Park in downtown Stillwater. Route 294 provides peak-only express service between downtown Stillwater and downtown St. Paul with two reverse commute trips to Stillwater in the AM peak and one reverse commute trip to downtown St. Paul in the PM peak.

Given the current transit investments in the corridor now, the proposed master plan will likely have a marginal effect on the existing transit network, if at all, and this master plan should not expect an extension of the existing transit service. Other potential transit options include Transit Link.

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

Local Planning Assistance – Land Use (Jake Reilly 651-602-1822) – The Washington County Parks Pine Point Regional Park Master Plan is complete and consistent with Council Land Use Policy and *Thrive MSP 2040*.