

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: February 6, 2020

For the Community Development Committee meeting of February 18, 2020

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of February 26, 2020

Subject: Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail (Theodore Wirth Parkway Segment) Master Plan Amendment, Review File No. 19328-2

MPOSC District, Member: District D, Unfilled

Council District, Member: 7 – Robert Lilligren

Policy/Legal Reference: Minnesota Statutes § 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 Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail (Theodore Wirth Parkway Segment) Master Plan Amendment.
2. Require that Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, prior to initiating any new development of the regional trail corridor, send preliminary plans to the Engineering Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division.

Background

Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail is centrally located in the Regional Parks System within the Cities of Minneapolis and Golden Valley (Figures 1 and 2). The 4.0-mile existing and unplanned regional trail is part of the Minneapolis Grand Rounds 40-mile Scenic Byway loop and extends north from Theodore Wirth Regional Park on Victory Memorial Parkway to the Mississippi River along Lowry Avenue.

The Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail has a 2004-Council approved master plan that includes 2.8-miles of trail located from Broadway Avenue on Victory Memorial Parkway to the Mississippi River along Lowry Avenue. The remaining, Theodore Wirth Parkway segment, is 1.2-miles of existing, unplanned trail with trail corridor land that is located between Theodore Wirth Regional Park and Broadway Avenue (Figures 3 and 4).

Through this master plan amendment, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board is requesting to add the 1.2-mile existing Theodore Wirth Parkway segment and associated trail corridor land to the Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail master plan.

Rationale

Adding the Theodore Wirth Parkway segment to the Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* including Chapter 5, Planning Strategy 1.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment 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 regional trail is estimated at \$4,517,700 for development and \$14,000 annually for operations. No Council funding is associated with the approval of this master plan amendment at this time. Upon approval of the master plan amendment, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board may apply for or use available funding sources, subject to their applicable terms and process, to implement the eligible projects identified in the master plan amendment.

Known Support / Opposition

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board approved the Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment as part of the North Service Area Master Plan at its February 6, 2019 meeting.

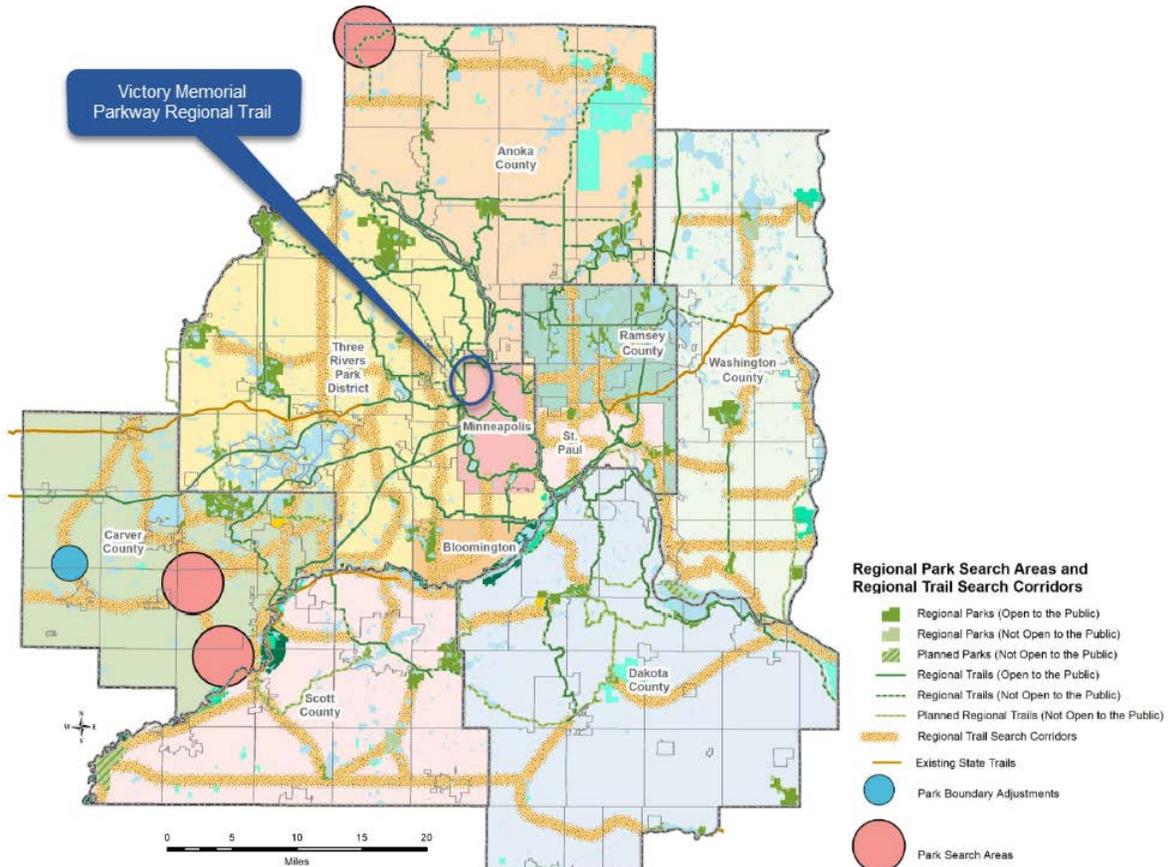
Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that master plans for destination trails address 13 items: boundaries and acquisition costs, demand forecast, development concept, conflicts, public services, operations, partner engagement, public engagement and participation, public awareness, accessibility, stewardship plan, natural resources, and the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area. The following analyzes the master plan against those requirements.

Boundaries and Acquisition Costs

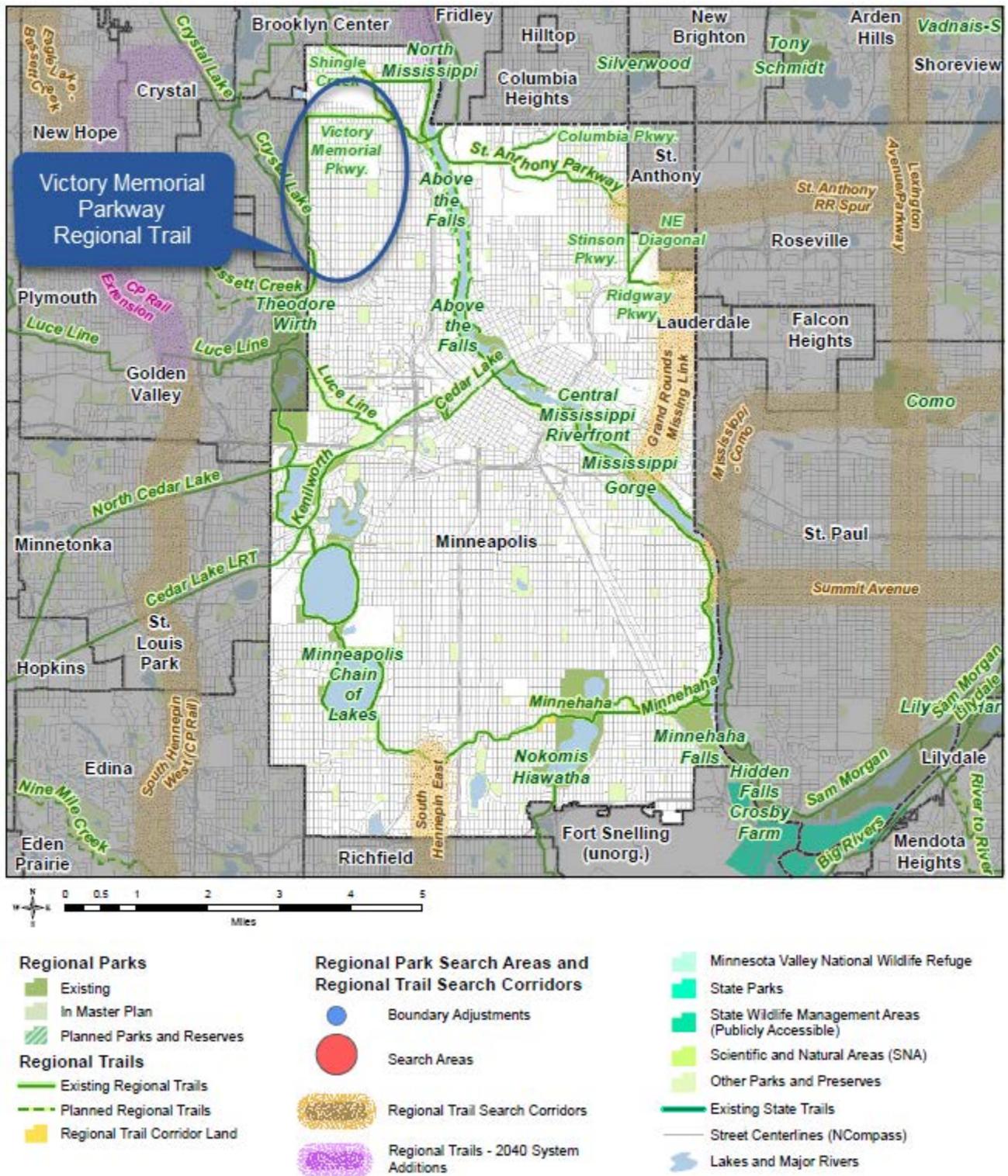
The Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail is located in the central part of the Regional Parks System (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Location of the Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail within the Regional Parks System



The Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail is located in the northeastern part of the City of Minneapolis and the western part of City of Golden Valley. The 4.0-mile existing and unplanned regional trail is part of the Minneapolis Grand Rounds 40-mile Scenic Byway loop and extends north from Theodore Wirth Regional Park on Victory Memorial Parkway to the Mississippi River along Lowry Avenue. (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Location of the Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail within the City of Minneapolis



The Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail has a 2004-Council approved master plan for 2.8-miles of trail located from Broadway Avenue on Victory Memorial Parkway to the Mississippi River along Lowry Avenue. The remaining Theodore Wirth Parkway segment, is 1.2-miles of existing, unplanned trail with 62 acres of trail corridor land that is located between Theodore Wirth Regional Park and Broadway Avenue (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Location of the Theodore Wirth Parkway Segment of the Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail



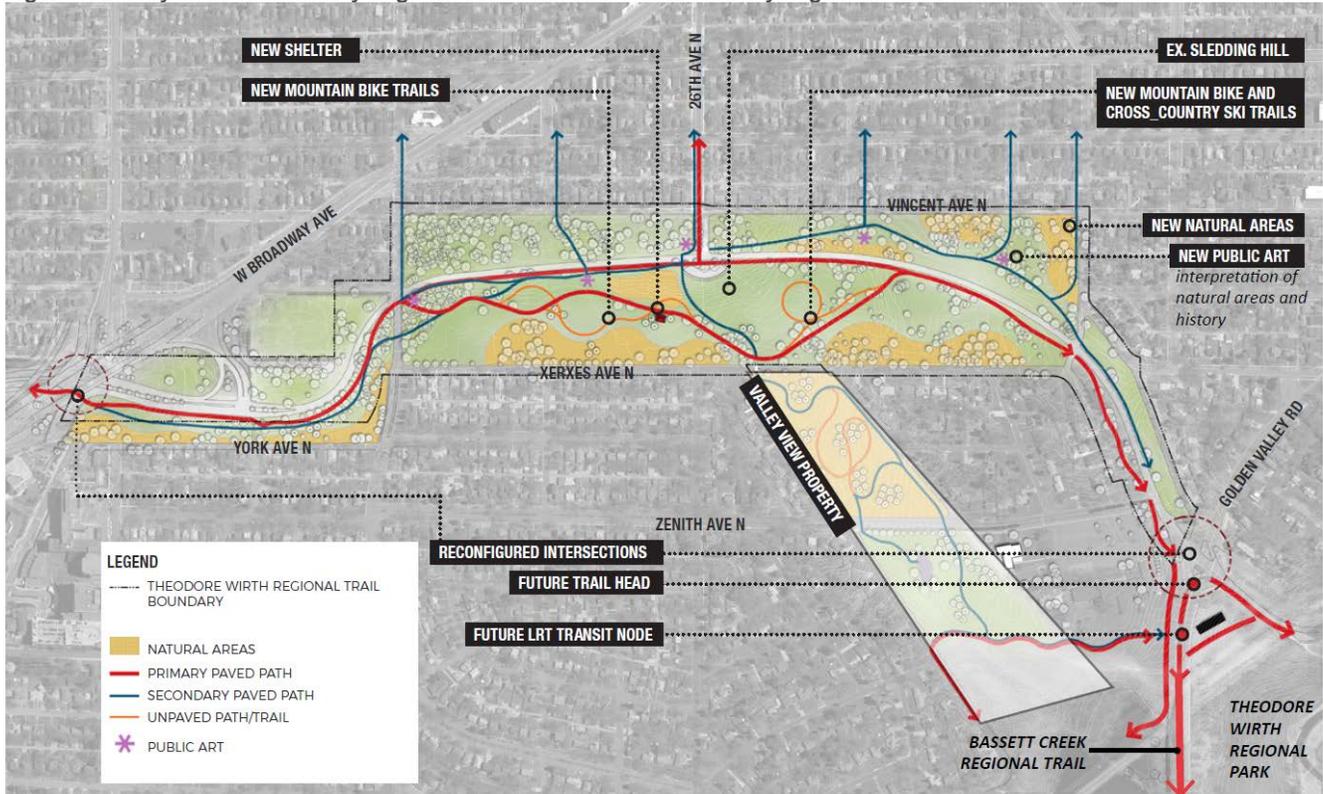
The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) is requesting a master plan amendment to add the 1.2-mile existing Theodore Wirth Parkway segment and associated trail corridor land to the Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail master plan.

The Theodore Wirth Parkway segment includes an existing regional trail with associated trail corridor land and existing and proposed park-like recreational uses, existing pedestrian and secondary bicycle trails, and an existing parkway road. The site has significant topographical change from north of 26th Avenue to the west. The landscape consists of intermixed areas of open lawns and wooded enclaves, with many of the conifer groupings that were a signature of Theodore Wirth's planting (Figure 4).

Acquisitions

No additional land acquisition is proposed by this master plan amendment.

Figure 4. Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail - Theodore Wirth Parkway Segment



Demand Forecast

The Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail was the third most visited trail in the MPRB system with 508,854 visitors in 2018 according to the Metropolitan Council’s 2018 Parks Use Estimates (Table 1). MPRB anticipates a fairly stable visitorship in the future, since the Theodore Wirth Parkway segment is an existing trail and this amendment’s development concept does not envision a significant modification of existing amenities.

Table 1: MPRB Estimated Annual Regional Trail Visits, Metropolitan Council (2018)

Regional Trail Unit	Est. Visits, 2018
Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail	1,371,364
Kenilworth Regional Trail	717,875
Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail	508,854
Cedar Lake Regional Trail	506,367
St. Anthony Parkway Regional Trail	201,052
Shingle Creek Regional Trail	154,521
Northeast Diagonal Regional Trail	149,589
Luce Line Regional Trail	143,509
Columbia Parkway Regional Trail	72,877
Ridgway Parkway Regional Trail	28,890

Development Concept

The development concept for the 1.2 miles of the Theodore Wirth Parkway segment with 62 acres of trail corridor land recognizes and affirms the deep history of the Minneapolis Grand Rounds scenic byway while improving the trails, roadways, intersections, natural resources, and other amenities (Figure 4).

Trails and Roadways

Existing and new improvements are proposed to the trails and roadways. The existing parkway, regional trail, secondary pedestrian pathway will be improved and maintained. New improvements include pedestrian linkages to the surrounding neighborhood, bike enhancements at the cross-town 26th Avenue intersection, mountain bike loops, and cross-country ski trail loops.

Intersections

The Golden Valley Road intersection and the Parkway/Lowry/Broadway interchange have been identified for improvements. The Golden Valley Road intersection with the parkway is planned to be improved with the Blue Line Extension light rail project. The free-right turns will be improved to four-way stoplight-controlled intersection with more pedestrian and bicycle accommodations. Additionally, the Parkway/Lowry/Broadway interchange has been identified for improved pedestrian, bicycle, and parkway motorist accommodations. MPRB will collaborate with the cities of Minneapolis and Robbinsdale and Hennepin County on this second project.

Natural Resources

Existing and new improvements are proposed for site-related natural resources management. The existing tree canopy and will be preserved and managed for succession and diversity. The historic conifers will be preserved and managed as well. Proposed planting additions include areas of naturalized groundcover including woodland floor, prairie, or savanna-type landscapes.

Other Amenities

Existing and new improvements are proposed for other amenities in the regional trail corridor. Existing elements will remain and be improved including the parking lot at 26th Avenue North. Proposed elements include an open-air shelter that is located at the foot of the sledding hill. The shelter will include a kitchen and fireplace and provide a location to watch sledders and picnickers.

Wayfinding

Wayfinding for the Theodore Wirth Parkway segment will utilize the Grand Rounds standard signage found throughout the MPRB system. The signage consists of four-sided wood kiosks with interpretive and mapping information and the directional signs found at most intersections. Additional signage will be added to existing wayfinding to this segment.

Conflicts

No known conflicts exist with other projects in the Theodore Wirth Parkway segment area. When the Broadway/Lowry intersection/overpass is reconsidered or redesigned, MPRB will work in coordination with the City of Minneapolis and Hennepin County.

Public Services

Theodore Wirth Parkway segment is located in a developed urban area with extensive public services. No additional public services are necessary for the implementation of the trail.

Operations

As an existing part of the well-established MPRB system, the Theodore Wirth Parkway segment is already being maintained as part of MPRB's overall budget. Annual costs for operations are \$14,000.

Partner Engagement

Partner agencies were consulted throughout the planning process and comments were incorporated into the development concept as it evolved over 18 months. Specifically, MPRB consulted with the City of Golden Valley and Metro Transit.

Public Engagement and Participation

Extensive community partner engagement took place as part of the North Service Area Master Plan, the MPRB planning effort, of which the Theodore Wirth Parkway Segment was a part. The engagement process unfolded over more than 18 months and involved a wide variety of initiatives, more than 100 direct engagement events, and personal contacts with thousands of park users and area residents. The development plan was finally vetted in a series of public Community Advisory Committee meetings in June and July of 2018, which resulted in a recommendation by the Committee to support the development concept.

The North Service Area Master Plan as a whole has equity—specifically racial equity—at its core. The overall plan includes guiding principles meant to ensure disparities are eliminated rather than reinforced, and extensive efforts were made to include under-represented communities in the planning process.

Theodore Wirth Parkway's connectivity is key for the system as a whole. It provides the north side of Minneapolis—which is home to multiple underserved population groups—with a continuous recreational amenity. The development plan proposes a group picnic and winter use shelter that could encourage more families of color to use the park for large gatherings (as noted in the Metropolitan Council's [2014 Regional Park Use Among Select Communities of Color](#)). Additionally, the master plan includes additional neighborhood connections to the park and improvements to the existing sledding hill. MPRB expects only minimal possible attraction of additional users of color, since an explicit synergy of multiple uses has not yet been identified. Specific improvements to address equity will focus on promoting the park.

Public Awareness

MPRB will make the public aware of improvements to Theodore Wirth Parkway Segment over time through e-notifications, press releases, direct communication with community engagement partners, and on-site signage. MPRB has a robust standard notification process and will apply this notification infrastructure to this regional trail segment. Furthermore, MPRB is initiating a project (funded with Parks and Trails Legacy dollars) to better connect transit riders to the regional parks. This project may include on-transit advertising and mapping, at-station information, and/or ambassadors. It is expected to roll out in 2020.

Accessibility

All new amenities of the Theodore Wirth Parkway Segment will be constructed to meet or exceed ADA guidelines, and older facilities will be gradually upgraded. MPRB has an ADA Transition Plan that identifies all existing shortcomings and has dedicated annual funding to improve accessibility throughout the system. The regional trail segment would be eligible for this funding, which is directed to projects year-by-year based on need and in coordination with other capital projects.

Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area

The Theodore Wirth Parkway Segment is not located within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area, so therefore is not required to address these requirements.

Stewardship Plan

The natural resources within the trail corridor of the Theodore Wirth Parkway segment are and will continue to be managed by MPRB's environmental management, asset management, and forestry staff. Stewardship may utilize MPRB's youth programs, like the Green Team. Additionally, MPRB's

[2019 - 2020 Draft Ecological System Plan](#) provides guidance for environmental performance in the trail corridor.

Natural Resources

Vegetation within the trail corridor of the Theodore Wirth Parkway segment will be managed as described in the “stewardship plan” section. The landscape of the trail corridor is comprised of rolling hills with forested areas and groves of specimen trees. Some small areas of grassland vegetation have been restored in the park over the years. The development concept envisions additional grassland/prairie/savanna restoration. There are, however, no water resources in this park, and therefore no wetland impacts.

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 Services – Sewer (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – The construction of any new or updating of existing paths or trails may have an impact on Metropolitan Council Interceptor 1-GV-460 which runs along the southern portion of this proposed project. The interceptor was built in 1955 and is a 36-inch concrete pipe with a cured-in-place pipe liner at an approximate depth of 6 to 17 feet. To assess the potential impacts to our interceptor system; prior to initiating this project, preliminary plans should be sent to Tim Wedin, Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager (651-602-4571) at the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services.

Metro Transit (Victoria Dan 612-349-7648) – Currently, Route 14 operates on one ramp southbound to travel via Oakdale Avenue to Wirth Parkway to Broadway Avenue. There is a bus stop located along the ramp to Broadway Avenue, which provides convenient access for residents at Xerxes Avenue & 30th Avenue (there is a sidewalk that connects the neighborhood to the bus stop and the parkway). The nearest northbound stops are further, within a quarter-mile walk on Washburn Avenue & Lowry Avenue and on Broadway & 29th Ave. Ideally, a redesign of this interchange would preserve or improve neighborhood access to transit. Further planning processes for this site should include collaboration with Metro Transit to ensure that opportunities for transit connections are explored and considered in the redesign.

Transportation Planning (Steve Elmer 651-602-1756) – The master plan should acknowledge that the existing regional trail is a Tier 1 Alignment on the Metropolitan Council’s Regional Bicycle Transportation Network. This could be highlighted on the Existing Conditions map (p. 272) and referenced in the plan text. As a Tier 1 Alignment, a project with significant renovations to the existing trail may be considered a priority for regional transportation funds.

As background information it may also be helpful to include a brief summary of the RBTN, incorporating points from this description:

The RBTN was established in the Met Council’s Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) 2015 Update. The network is designated as the official regional bikeway network for transportation with goals of:

- *establishing an integrated and seamless network of on-street bikeways and off-road trails;*
- *providing the vision for a “backbone” arterial network to accommodate daily bicycle transportation by connecting regional destinations and local bicycle networks; and*
- *encouraging cities, counties, parks agencies, and the state to plan and implement future bikeways in support of the network vision.*

The RBTN sets the region's priorities for planning and investing in bicycle transportation infrastructure. There is much overlap between the RBTN and regional parks and trails.

The full RBTN can be viewed online via this link:

<https://giswebsite.metc.state.mn.us/mcviewer/?cfg=rbtn>

Local Planning Assistance – Land Use (Michael Larsen 651-602-1407) – The master plan is consistent with the *Thrive MSP 2040* land use policy related to Natural Resources Protection. The master plan identifies improvements to natural elements and assigns costs to those improvements. The Plan is also consistent with the *Thrive MSP 2040* land use policy related to Access, Mobility and Choice. Although the trail's function is primarily recreational, it does provide uninterrupted and protected travel for bicyclists and pedestrians and a specific connection to the future LRT station at Golden Valley Road. It is also noted that the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's approach to planning for new and enhanced facilities is consistent with the Metropolitan Council's commitment to the outcome of Equity. The master plan's public engagement process and plan recommendations acknowledge the racial diversity of the service area and the particular importance of promoting access to the park and its amenities by "underserved" communities.

Additionally, the City of Minneapolis's Comprehensive Plan, *Minneapolis 2040*, recognizes this regional trail. The City's planned urban land uses remain compatible with the nature and character of the regional trail.