

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the METROPOLITAN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

Thursday, June 11, 2020

Committee Members Present: Cecily Harris, Rick Theisen, Tony Yarusso, Anthony Taylor, Todd Kemery, Jeremy Peichel, Nate Rich, Lolita Davis Carter, Bob Moeller and Lynnea Atlas-Ingebretson, liaison to the Council.

Committee Members Absent: None.

CALL TO ORDER

With a quorum being present via WebEx, 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, June 11, 2020.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Chair Yarusso asked for a consensus to approve the June 11, 2020 agenda. Chair Yarusso noted that he wished to add comments prior to the information item. **The agenda was approved.**

Chair Yarusso asked for a motion to approve the May 7, 2020 minutes of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. It was motioned by Kemery and seconded by Theisen to approve the May 7, 2020 minutes. Recording Secretary Dingle took a roll call vote.

Aye: 9 - Carter, Harris, Kemery, Moeller, Peichel, Rich, Taylor, Theisen, Yarusso
Nay: 0
Absent: 0

The minutes were approved.

PUBLIC INVITATION

Chair Yarusso noted that the posted Agenda asked that anyone wishing to address the Commission should please email the Chair at mposc@tonyyarusso.org. Chair Yarusso noted that he did not receive any emails.

COMMENTS

Chair Yarusso commented on the death of George Floyd and resulting actions in the region. He wanted to express his sympathies to his family and highlighted the importance of equity work that this commission is doing. Additionally, he discussed the equity work of our implementing agencies and the importance of this work moving forward. He suggested that if Commissioners have specific questions about what the agencies are doing regarding their equity efforts, to reach out to them directly.

BUSINESS

None.

INFORMATION

Regional Parks System Additions. Implementing Agency Proposals (Part I of II) – Emmett Mullin, Parks Unit Manager, Colin Kelly, Parks Planning Analyst

Mullin thanked Commissioners and implementing agencies for work and participation in this process. Today's meeting will cover the first 12 of 28 proposals today from 5 agencies. He briefly reviewed the process and gave an overview of system addition proposals to be discussed.

Kelly noted today's focus will be on 5 agency proposals that include boundary adjustments, regional trail search corridors, and recognition of regional status. The first implementing agency to present is Washington County.

Connor Schaefer, Washington County, gave a brief presentation on each of the 5 proposals from Washington County outlined in the materials provided. He began with the Pine Point Regional Park Boundary Adjustment.

Chair Yarusso asked for questions/comments. Hearing none, he commented on his appreciation for the work done on the first proposal.

Schaefer continued with a brief description on the second proposal – Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail Search Corridor Boundary Adjustment.

Moeller asked what is expected of the Commission today. Mullin explained the process again as laid out in the materials provided. Today's meeting is informational only and an opportunity for Commissioners to ask questions about the proposals, provide insights, and give comments on whether the proposal should be "designated" as part of the Regional Parks and Trails System. A draft recommendation will be brought back to MPOSC at their July meeting, to provide Commissioners with the opportunity to provide additional direction and input. Also, he noted that the recommendations will be brought to the Community Development Committee at their July meeting.

Moeller asked at what point will the commission take action. Mullin explained that this is deliberate process to designate new units to the Regional Parks System. The public comment period will be launched at the end of August and will run for 60 days. At the end of the public process, if the unit is approved, the next step will be for the implementing agencies to develop a master plan. This is an additional opportunity for the Commissioners to review and approve the future direction of the unit.

Taylor stated he likes this addition -- the Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail Search Corridor Boundary Adjustment -- as it fills a gap, especially for cyclists. He asked what standards will be used to develop the trail. Schaefer responded that the trail will be built to a regional standard. Taylor asked about trail design to help bikers and walkers share a trail, especially around the Bayport area. Schaefer stated that this topic will be taken up during the master planning process, as safety is a key consideration.

Harris commented that she likes the first proposal and is familiar with it. Regarding the second proposal, she finds on Highway 95 that a separation is needed. She feels Washington County is underserved for Regional and State Trails so she is very supportive of this proposal.

Moeller stated he is also very supportive of the second proposal.

Lolita asked, in the chat, what is the strategy for restoration and conservation of the natural resources to promote biodiversity without sacrificing recreational opportunities. Schaefer stated that establishing the direction on conservation and recreation will happen during the master planning process. He stated that they are looking for ways to provide important educational and recreation opportunities.

Atlas-Ingebretson asked what the plans are for advertising and promoting these proposals. Schaefer stated that program and proposals piece is very important and largely will be addressed during the master planning process. He also discussed that Washington County is interested in doing more programming around their regional trails. He is excited about how to develop this programming and awareness going forward.

Schaefer discussed the third proposal as outlined in the materials provided – Central Greenway Regional Trail Search Corridor Boundary Adjustment.

Peichel liked that this proposal would connect with Chisago County to the north, as this will be an area of population growth. He stated he likes all three proposals.

Kemery asked about the Washington County's bicycle and pedestrian plan and asked how this is connected with their proposals. Schaefer stated they are doing their best to incorporate motorized with non-motorized transportation and recreation in the County. He discussed forward thinking as the County develops their planning out to 2040.

Kemery asked about the timeline for implementation and how many total miles it will include. Schaefer stated it is currently 11.7 miles to Big Marine and will be extending 18.5 miles to the Chisago County line.

Schaefer stated that if this designation is approved, the next step will be to develop a master plan. An implementation timeline for this proposal is difficult to predict because it is often done with road improvements.

Kemery asked - has funding and the timeline changed due to impacts from COVID-19? Schaefer stated no because this timeline is further out.

Harris commented that some people may not want to ride a 30-mile segment – they may be interested in shorter rides, so making it accessible and safe is really important.

Schaefer reviewed the fourth proposal outlined in the materials provided – Lake Elmo Park Reserve to Phalen-Keller Regional Park Regional Trail Search Corridor.

Chair Yarusso commented on the benefits of this regional trail, bringing new visitors to the park reserve.

Peichel asked about the alignment of the trail corridor, and whether some portions will be too narrow. He asked how much flexibility is in the search corridor definition. Kelly responded that in no way is it 'set' to the proposed alignment. The alignment will ultimately be established in the master planning process. He stated that search corridors are drawn in broad brush strokes. Mullin added when you identify a search corridor you define a beginning and an end, and much of the rest is to be determined.

Schaefer continued with the fifth proposal as outlined in materials provided – Pine Point Regional Park to Square Lake Special Recreation Feature Regional Trail Search Corridor.

Chair Yarusso asked what the relationship is with the DNR when regional trails overlap with state trails. Schaefer stated that they will work with the DNR on alignment and ownership of trails. The hope is that the regional trail will compliment state trail alignment.

Harris stated that these are two popular parks so different and yet so complimentary. She liked the idea of a safe recreational way to connect them.

Taylor discussed programming and asked if it could possibly start during the master planning process. He feels this proposal is well laid out and stated that he believes programs and awareness could be developed sooner rather than later.

Kelly next introduced Karen Blaska, Anoka County to review their two proposals.

Blaska gave a brief presentation on the first proposal – Coon Lake County Park, Recognition of Regional Status as outlined in the materials provided.

Chair Yarusso noted that Martin Island Linwood park is rustic and asked why not add facilities here? Blaska stated that this has been discussed and the surrounding communities seek to retain the rustic nature of Martin Island Linwood.

Davis-Carter asked how this proposal can help to balance conservation and restoration of natural resources with recreational opportunities. Blaska discussed development versus conservation and why they are choosing to leave Martin Island Linwood more rustic. This creates balance across their system.

Peichel struggles to see Coon Lake's regional significance and how others in the region would benefit. He feels like the benefit is local. Blaska stated they are looking to fill a service gap, particularly with large lakes and the opportunities they provide.

Peichel asked how the gap is not filled if continuing as a County Park. Blaska said they consider it regionally significant because of the lake. She noted there is documentation that this is drawing a wide audience because of the boat launch that supports regional visitation. Mullin added this proposal includes one of the largest lakes in Anoka County, with high quality swimming and a great way to draw more people in the regional system.

Chair Yarusso discussed data that is lacking for what draws folks in. He felt that data would be helpful. Mullin responded that staff do have a research project using location-based cell phone data that could provide data of where people are coming from, in the future. He noted that no personal data is being collected.

Kemery asked about accessibility and paving unpaved trails. He also asked about accessibility of bathrooms. Blaska discussed the master planning process and stated they are looking at paving trails and other accessibility improvements. She believes the bathroom is accessible but will confirm.

Blaska reviewed the second proposal – Rum River North and South County Parks – Recognition of Regional Status, Combine with the existing Rum River Regional Park.

Peichel stated he feels this is a fantastic proposal. He asked about making the Rum River a regional Blue Water Trail.

Chair Yarusso noted that the Rum River is currently a State Water Trail. He was not sure if it was on the Blue Water designation. He stated it makes a lot of sense.

Harris echoed Peichel's comments and Moeller approved as well.

Chair Yarusso discussed the policy questions surrounding this proposal. In the bigger picture – do our existing policies allow for a park such as this? Does it make sense? What criteria should be involved in putting all these units together, just because they're along a single river. He would like to flush out this idea in the future.

Peichel thinks of the Rum River proposal as a river park where the land just happens to connect to it. He appreciated Chair Yarusso's comments.

Harris stated she thinks of the river as a linear trail and discussed the potential for bridging facilities.

Chair Yarusso asked is Regional Park the right category? Should it be a Special Recreation Feature?

Taylor agreed with the idea of a Special Recreation Feature and thinks there are opportunities for programming along the river.

Mullin stated these are great comments. He is not sure how staff would proceed but this gives them lots to think about. He asked whether looking at changes to the policy plan is something the Commission would like to consider.

Chair Yarusso stated it depends on Anoka's timing but suggested getting thoughts from the Community Development Committee would be helpful. Mullin stated he would do that.

Kelly next introduced Adam Arvidson, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) to discuss their proposal.

Arvidson gave a brief overview of MPRB's proposal – Midtown Greenway Recognition of Regional Status as outlined in the materials provided.

Theisen asked about the consultant survey and what was specifically addressed. Arvidson responded enhancing public safety along the trail corridor.

Davis-Carter asked what is the key focus of climate resilience efforts? Arvidson discussed reducing dependence on automobiles – this corridor receives heavy bicycle transportation use.

Davis-Carter asked with current city events, how can this project still be the key connector to transit and other trails within the region's multimodal transportation system as stated in the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority letters of support. Arvidson discussed the proximity to neighborhoods most impacted by the past week's demonstrations and the importance of gathering and public spaces.

Harris asked, as it is already built, will the Met Council need to review the existing trail and develop a joint powers agreement. Mullin stated a joint powers agreement would be needed, as outlined in the Regional Parks Policy Plan. A master plan would need to be adopted and staff would work with Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board on this.

Arvidson stated regarding the master plan, existing documents could not simply be submitted. Work would need to be done on existing documentation before submittal. He discussed other areas within the MPRB where they use joint powers agreements, where they operate a unit but don't own.

Chair Yarusso discussed data showing this trail gets a ton of use and asked how much is local versus regional.

Atlas-Ingebretson commented that she believes the city has information/data regarding usage. She feels this project makes a ton of sense and is a major draw for the community from all over.

Chair Yarusso discussed transportation dollars that could be used in exchange for reducing greenhouse gases.

Kelly introduced Scott Yonke from Ramsey County to review their proposal – Battle Creek Regional Park Boundary Adjustment.

Yonke gave a brief outline of the proposal for a boundary adjustment as outlined in the materials provided.

Atlas-Ingebretson felt this regional park is a tremendous natural resource.

Chair Yarusso stated he was confused by the shaded spaces on the map in the presentation. Yonke stated that these are the bluff areas in need of long-term conservation. He discussed the long-term connections that will be made with this proposal and noted the overall master plan is being amended. They are looking at how to make critical connections to programming and recreational connections.

Harris stated she had trouble understanding this proposal and asked why the system addition was not just the suburban pond open space proposal, and then submit an independent proposal for the other parcels under consideration, rather than making this all into one regional park. Yonke stated this idea as considered but there is a desire to link up all the pieces of this park and integrate them. He believes that this proposal will become a new, innovative transformation to the 21st century park approach.

Kelly introduced Marty Walsh, Carver County's park director, to discuss their three proposals.

Walsh discussed the first proposal – Highway 5 Regional Trail Search Corridor as outlined in the materials provided.

Chair Yarusso commented that it makes sense to talk about trails connecting to Lake Waconia Regional Park.

Walsh discussed the second proposal – County Road 11 Regional Trail Search Corridor as outlined in the materials provided.

Harris stated she likes all three Carver County Regional Trail Search Corridors.

Atlas-Ingebretson asked - how can this proposed trail reach out to new immigrant communities. Walsh stated they are reaching out specifically to minority populations and they will do more of this work during the master planning process.

Kemery asked will this trail go over Hwy 212. Walsh stated yes there's an existing bridge structure that would be enhanced.

Davis-Carter asked - what is the strategy to strengthen youth access and equitable usage. Walsh stated the strategy relates to connections to the school district which is located along the corridor. He stated a corridor study is underway. Much has been virtual and online surveys that have been done.

Walsh discussed the third proposal – County Road 40 Regional Trail Search Corridor as outlined in the materials provided.

Moeller stated he feels this will be a very nice addition to this area.

Kemery asked – does any of County Road 40 connect to the Minnesota Valley State Trail system? Walsh stated there is potential for a longer- term connection at Belle Plaine to this State Trail.

Chair Yarusso discussed combining this to County Road 11 proposal and stated that this would make another nice connection.

Chair Yarusso noted that 20+ years is the longest timeframe we've seen thus far. He asked if there is concern that major changes would be needed as time passes. Walsh stated that he is not worried about this and feels growth will then be planned in collaboration with other trail plans. He feels the opportunity would be lost if it's not done this way.

Mullin added this trail was included in Carver County's 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

Davis-Carter wondered as immigrant communities thrive and grow is there a desire for a living, breathing document? Walsh stated as the master plan is developed, much more public engagement will be done.

Kelly thanked everyone for their time and participation and stated Part II will be presented at the June 18, 2020 meeting.

REPORTS

Chair: Chair Yarusso reminded Commission Members that the next meeting will be June 18, 2020 at 4pm (virtually).

Commissioners: Taylor shared that what is happening as a result of George Floyd's death is important. There are direct connections to the regional parks and trails system. He discussed the importance of having parks and green spaces and their impact on people's lives are critical. He encouraged commission members to stay committed to the work that we are doing together.

Staff: Mullin noted that the July MPOSC Meeting has been changed to July 9, 2020 to give staff more time to prepare recommendations.

Atlas-Ingebretson shared what has been happening at the Met Council. She has been inundated with calls. She has received numerous complaints over the years from persons of color not feeling accepted or welcome on regional parks and trails. She recognized the importance of leadership to address this by the Met Council and this Commission. She's hearing people are feeling intimidated. She stated we

have very important work to do. She discussed a club she participates in when she shares concerns with who is in charge, she is asked – where is the proof. She applauds those taking decisive action and is would like to help support those who want to reach out. She talked about the Commission’s role in the Parks and Trails Legacy funds and connecting all persons to our parks. She asked Commissioners to think – are we going to be proud of ourselves in the end.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed the meeting adjourned at 6:44 p.m.

Sandi Dingle
Recording Secretary