

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: March 5, 2020

Subject: Regional Parks System Additions Project: Process Update

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, Chapter 3: System Plan, Chapter 4: Siting and Acquisition Policy, and Chapter 7: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy

Staff Prepared/Presented: Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst (651-602-1361)

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

None; information and discussion only.

Background

Minnesota State Statute 473.147, subd. 1 states that the Metropolitan Council (Council) shall plan for the Regional Parks System. The updated *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (RPPP) commits the Council to convene a region-wide discussion about system additions in 2019, which began in October at the regular Council-Regional Parks Implementing Agency (Implementing Agency) partner meeting. Council staff is in the process of engaging Implementing Agencies and the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission on this effort.

Council staff provided a brief update on the system additions project to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission via a December 2019 information item. In the coming months, the Council will consider Implementing Agency proposals to add regional recreational resources to the Regional Parks System based on criteria set forth in chapters 4 and 7 of the RPPP. The results of the system additions process will be added to the RPPP during the next amendment that is scheduled for the second half of 2020 as part of the Community Development Committee's 2020 work plan.

Thrive MSP 2040 (Thrive) and the RPPP offer framing language for systems additions criteria to ensure a larger regional context and individual resource or unit requirements are considered. While the focus in Thrive is on the overarching vision for the region, Thrive provides direction for the RPPP and the Regional Parks System. Thrive specifies that the Council will collaborate with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, Implementing Agencies, and state partners to:

- Expand the Regional Parks System to conserve, maintain, and connect high-quality natural resources identified as being of high quality or having regional importance, as identified in the RPPP.
- Provide a comprehensive regional park and trail system that preserves high-quality natural resources, increases climate resiliency, fosters healthy outcomes, connects communities, and enhances quality of life in the region.
- Promote expanded multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, and the transit network, where appropriate.
- Strengthen equitable use of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability.

Resource or unit-level criteria includes drawing visitors from across the region, providing for geographic balance, and other detailed requirements for each of the Regional Parks System units: Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Regional Trails, and Special Recreation Features.

During the February 26, 2020 Council-Implementing Agency partner meeting, to foster a shared understanding of system addition criteria, Council staff highlighted key elements of the *Policy Plan* that relate to system additions including:

- Chapter 4, Strategy 1: Priorities
- Chapter 4, Strategy 2: Geographic balance
- Chapter 4, Strategy 4: New regional trails
- Chapter 4, Strategy 5: Special Recreation Features
- Chapter 7, Strategy 1: Balance conservation and recreation
- Chapter 7, Strategy 2: Range of recreation activities
- Chapter 7, Strategy 3: Equitable use

Council staff also sought the advice of Implementing Agency partners on specific areas of criteria based on what they expressed in previous meetings as well as topics that align with key Council initiatives. These areas include bridging facilities, geographic balance and recreation opportunities, increasing recreation access to underserved communities, natural resource quality, and climate resilience. The input gathered from agency partners will help inform the development of an application for system addition proposals as well as the evaluation of those proposals.

During this information item, Council staff will share an updated project timeline (Figure 1) and seek the Commission's advice on both their desired level of involvement and the system additions proposal evaluation process.

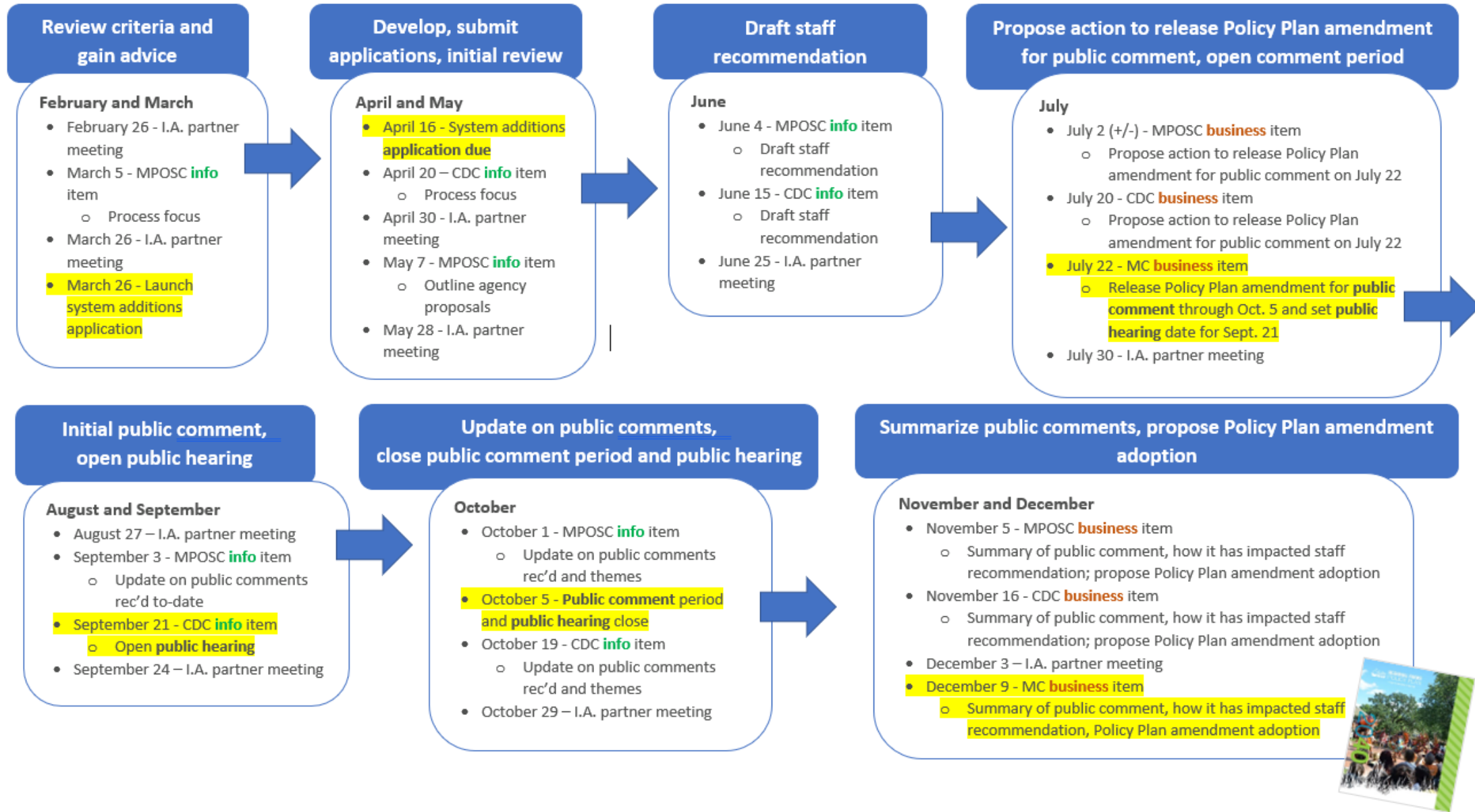
Thrive Lens Analysis

The System Additions project will advance Stewardship, Equity, and Livability. Stewardship advances the Metropolitan Council's mission of orderly and economical development by responsibly managing the region's natural and financial resources, and making strategic investments in our region's future. Regional Park System additions that protect natural resources, adapt to changing conditions, and serve future residents advance this outcome.

Equity connects all residents to opportunity and creates viable housing, transportation, and recreation options for people of all races, ethnicities, incomes, and abilities so that all communities share the opportunities and challenges of growth and change. System additions that thoughtfully consider the specific context of geography and demographics have the potential to powerfully and positively impact a variety of underrepresented groups. Bridging facilities are an area of particular interest in advancing the Equity outcome.

Livability focuses on quality of life and experiences in our region, and how places and infrastructure create and enhance the quality of life that makes the Twin Cities metro area a great place to live. System additions that create more opportunities for residents to recreate in the regional park system improve residents' quality of life.

Figure 1: Regional Park System Additions Project Timeline¹



¹ Specific dates may be adjusted as the work progresses