

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: October 1, 2020

For the Community Development Committee meeting of October 19, 2020

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of October 28, 2020

Subject: Grand Round North Regional Trail Master Plan, Saint Paul, Review File No. 50220-1
MPOSC District, Member: District G, Anthony Taylor
Council District, Member: District 13, Chai Lee; District 14, Kris Fredson
Policy/Legal Reference: Minnesota Statutes § 473.313; *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*: Chapter 5, Planning Strategy 1
Staff Prepared/Presented: Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst (651-602-1361)
Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the City of Saint Paul's Grand Round North Regional Trail Master Plan.
2. Require the City of Saint Paul, prior to initiating any new development of the regional trail corridor, to send preliminary plans to the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division Assistant Manager.
3. Encourage the City of Saint Paul to implement the advisory comments in the "Consistency with Other Council Policies and Systems" section regarding stormwater, natural resources and solar.

Background

The Saint Paul Grand Round was first envisioned by renowned landscape architect Horace Cleveland in 1872. Cleveland was hired by both Minneapolis and Saint Paul to outline a plan for their respective park systems. In Saint Paul, Cleveland envisioned a system of parks and parkways linking the Mississippi river to Lake Como and Phalen Park.

In the early 20th century, Saint Paul's Park Board president Joseph Wheelock prioritized completion of the parkway system. Though significant right-of-way acquisition occurred during his tenure, political will, funding and momentum lagged to complete the parkway system in the late 20th century. The vision of a connected Grand Round was reignited in 2000 when a local non-profit, the Saint Paul Neighborhood Energy Consortium, initiated a master plan. While the 2000 master plan suggested the trail location and alternate routes, the 2015 Saint Paul Bicycle Plan refined the route and served as the basis for the 2017 Grand Round Design and Implementation Plan. The Design and Implementation Plan includes guidelines on identity and branding, green infrastructure (such as landscaping and water resources), placemaking and wayfinding.

Following this recent planning work and the construction of the Samuel Morgan Regional Trail – comprising the southern half of the route – the first phase of construction of the northern half of the Grand Round was completed at the end of 2016. The Grand Round North Regional Trail will realize Cleveland's concept by linking a consistent path for pedestrians and recreation use when fully developed.

The approximately 13-mile long Grand Round North Regional Trail is located near the center of the Regional Park System, generally in the northern part of the City of Saint Paul (see Figure 1). The regional trail includes the full length of, and will subsume, three Regional Trail Search Corridors including Como-Phalen (Wheelock Parkway), Johnson Parkway, and Mississippi Como (see Figure 2).

Full implementation of the Grand Round North Regional Trail Master Plan will continue the vision of a connected system of parkways, bicycle and pedestrian facilities that enhance the urban forest and improve transportation choices within Saint Paul, and will complete the Saint Paul Grand Round, an approximately 26-mile recreational greenway (see Figure 3).

Rationale

The Grand Round North Regional Trail Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, particularly Planning Strategy 1, and other Council policies.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Grand Round North Regional Trail Master Plan advances the Thrive outcome of Livability by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, which enhances quality of life in the region.

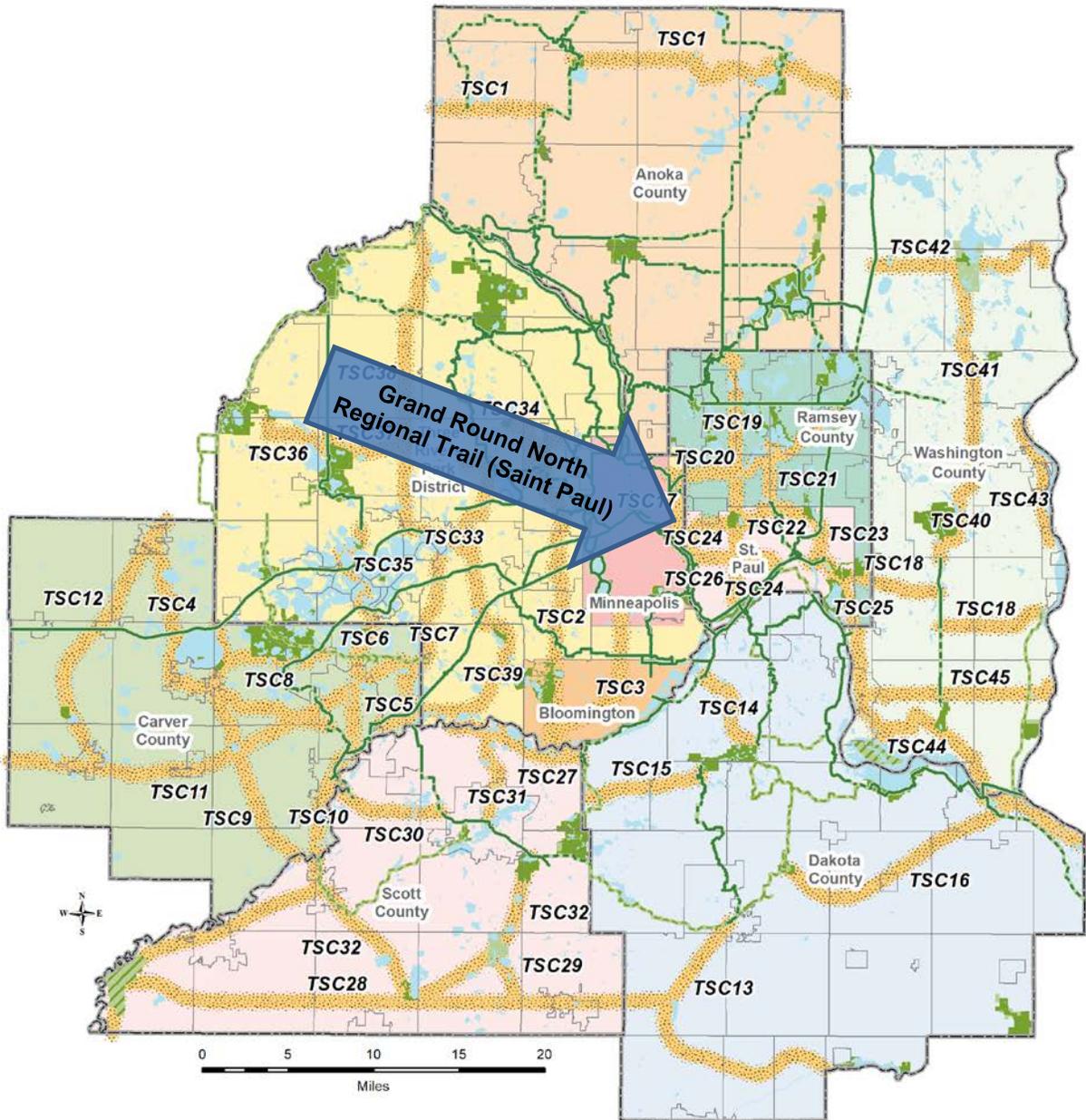
Funding

All segments of the Grand Round North Regional Trail are contained within existing public right-of-way and parkland. No acquisitions will be necessary to develop the trail. The total cost to develop the regional trail over the eight segments outlined in the master plan is estimated at approximately \$11,058,000. Annual operations and maintenance costs are estimated at \$205,000.

Known Support / Opposition

The Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Commission adopted the Grand Round North Regional Trail Master Plan on February 13, 2020. The Saint Paul City Council adopted the master plan on March 17, 2020. There is no known opposition to the Master Plan.

Figure 1: Regional Trails Search Corridor Map (2018) and Grand Round North Regional Trail location



Numbers Correspond to List in Table 3-9

- | | |
|--|--|
|  Regional Trail Search Corridors |  County Boundaries |
|  Regional Parks (Open to the Public) |  City and Township Boundaries |
|  Regional Parks (Not Open to the Public) |  Lakes and Rivers |
|  Planned Parks (Not Open to the Public) | |
|  Regional Trails (Open to the Public) | |
|  Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public) | |
|  Planned Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public) | |

Figure 2: Grand Round North Regional Trail in context of existing Regional Parks, Regional Trails, and Regional Trail Search Corridors

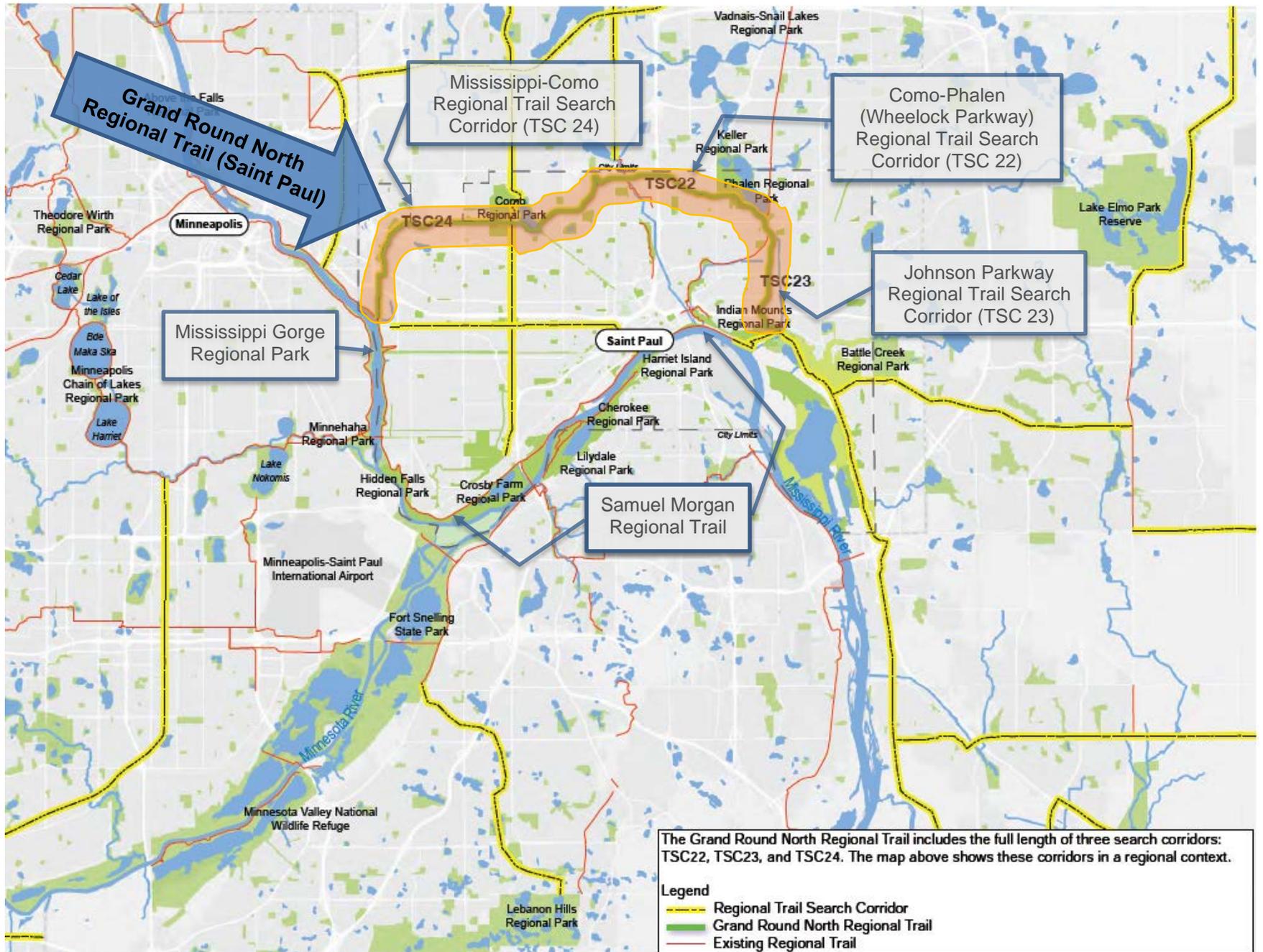
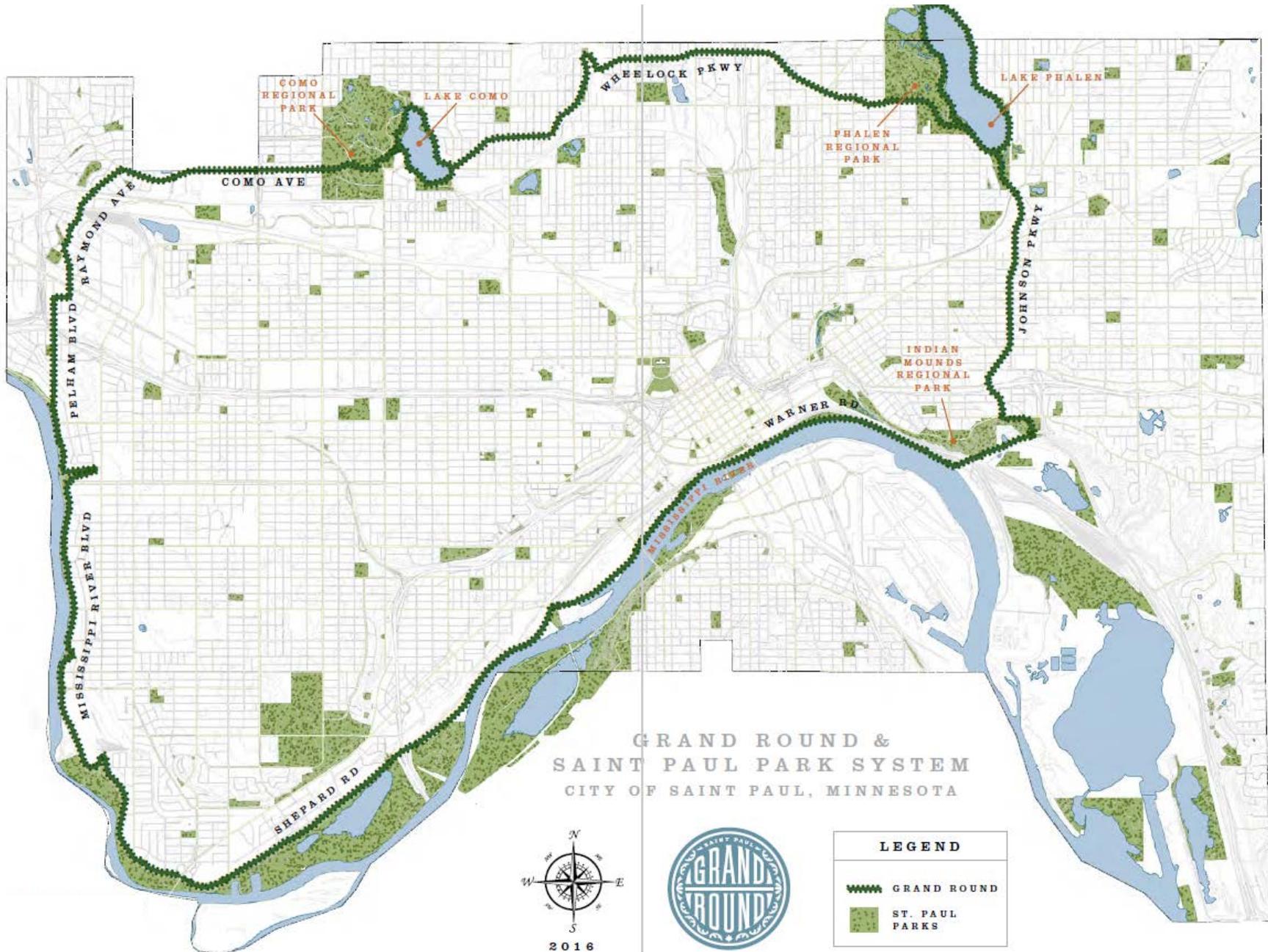


Figure 3: Grand Round and Saint Paul Park System



Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that master plans for linking regional trails address 12 items: boundaries and acquisition costs, demand forecast, development concept, conflicts, public services, operations, partner engagement, public engagement and participation, equity analysis, public awareness, accessibility, and Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area. The following analyzes the master plan against those requirements.

Boundaries and Acquisition Costs

All segments of the Grand Round North Regional Trail are contained within existing public right-of-way and parkland. No acquisitions will be necessary to develop the trail.

Demand Forecast

The Metropolitan Council's 2019 Annual Use Estimate¹ provides the most recent regional park and trail usage estimates. Table 1 shows the estimated annual visitation to the regional parks and trails that are connected by the Grand Round North Regional Trail. The estimates also show usage of approximately 39,000 annual users per mile on the nine-mile Sam Morgan and 13-mile Bruce Vento Regional Trails in Saint Paul. Assuming a similar level of usage on the 13-mile Grand Round North Regional Trail, approximately 506,000 users could be expected annually if the trail were completely built today.

Table 1: Estimated Annual Visits to Regional Parks and Trails Connected to the Grand Round North Regional Trail

| Regional Park, Trail or Special Recreation Feature Name | Total Estimated Annual Visits (2019) |
|--|---|
| Bruce Vento Regional Trail | 210,334 |
| Samuel Morgan Regional Trail | 555,300 |
| Indian Mounds Regional Park | 383,602 |
| Como Regional Park, Zoo and Conservatory Special Recreation Feature | 3,782,517 |
| Phalen Regional Park | 1,278,529 |
| Mississippi Gorge Regional Park | 1,344,194 |

Additionally, Saint Paul's population is expected to grow to 344,100 by 2040, a 20.7% increase from its 2010 population. A 2016 visitor study conducted by the Metropolitan Council found 80% of users of regional trails throughout the metropolitan region came from within five miles of the trail. Consequently,

¹ The annual use estimate data are accurate only at the agency level. The Metropolitan Council (Council) does not publish the park and trail level estimates because they are not statistically valid. The data are useful for identifying the proportional use of parks and trails by agency or for looking at trends for an agency across time. These numbers are available in the official appendix published on the Council website. They are acceptably accurate for identifying the proportion of park vs. trail visits in the system overall. The estimates for individual park or trail units are not representative due to unacceptably large margins of error at the park or trail unit level. The park and trail estimates are presented at the request of stakeholders, but are not published by the Council as research.

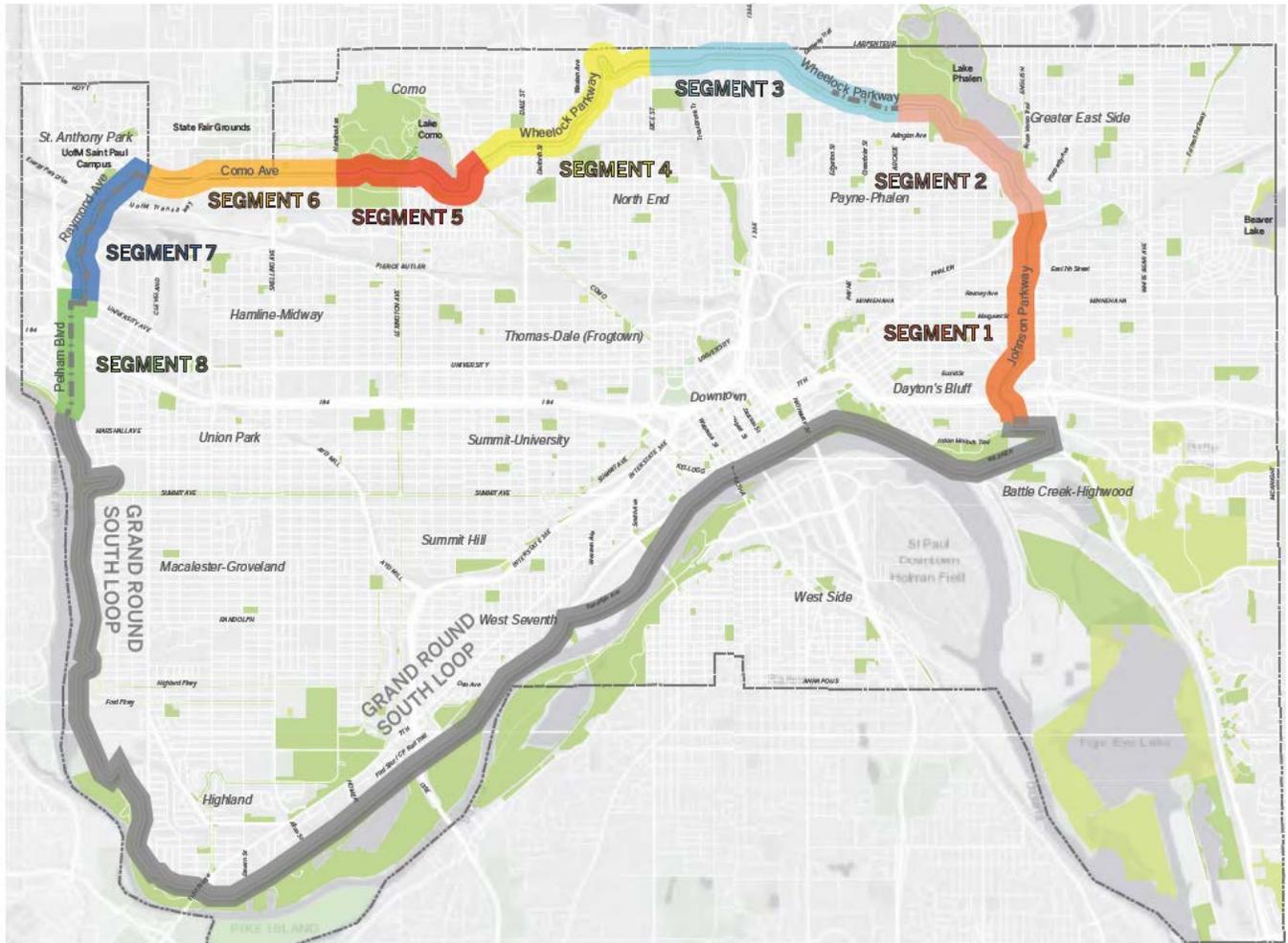
population growth in Saint Paul is expected to increase usage of the Grand Round North Regional Trail further.

Development Concept

The Grand Round North regional Trail forms the northern half of Cleveland's vision of parkways encircling the city. The proposed trail is approximately 13 miles long and follows Saint Paul roadways including Pelham Boulevard, Myrtle Avenue, Raymond Avenue, Como Avenue, Wheelock Parkway, and Johnson Parkway, except where the trail passes through regional parks. The standard design is a ten-foot bike trail where it is parallel to a minimum five-foot sidewalk for pedestrians. The trail is generally 12 feet wide where no adjacent pedestrian facility exists. Standard grade separation is a six-inch curb. All segments and facilities of the Grand Round North Regional Trail will be constructed to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Approximately one-third of the regional trail has been constructed since the adoption of the 2017 Grand Round Design and Implementation Plan. Figure 4 outlines the eight segments of the regional trail. The regional trail will not be considered fully realized until all trails within the Grand Round are off-street. Where on-street trails currently exist (segments 7, 8, and a portion of segment 3), they are considered an interim condition. Separated trails will be constructed as street improvements are made.

Figure 4: Grand Round North Regional Trail Segments



The master plan summarizes existing and future development over the regional trail's eight segments, which is detailed in the Grand Round Design and Implementation Plan. Relevant sections of the Design and Implementation Plan are appended to the master plan and the full plan is available on the City of Saint Paul's Grand Round project website : <https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/parks-recreation/design-construction/current-projects/saint-paul-grand-round>.

Table 2: Grand Round North Segments and Construction Status

| Segment Number | Name | Description | Length (% of total) | Planned Completion | Trail Development Status |
|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| 1 | Johnson Parkway | Burns to Phalen Blvd. | 10,200 ft. or ~1.9 miles (15.0%) | 2021 | Construction will start in 2020 and be complete in 2021. |
| 2 | Phalen Regional Park | Phalen Blvd. to Arcade | 7,850 ft. or ~1.5 miles (11.6%) | Future | Pending regional park master plan update and reconstruction of Wheelock Pkwy. between Arcade and East Lakeshore Dr. |
| 3 | Wheelock Parkway | Arcade to Rice | 11,000 ft. or ~2.1 miles (16.2%) | 2022 | Edgerton to Rice is complete. Edgerton to Arcade will be complete in 2022. |
| 4 | Wheelock Parkway | Rice to Victoria/Como | 11,200 ft. or ~2.1 miles (16.5%) | 2020 | Section between Western and Rice will be completed in 2020. Remainder of segment is complete. |
| 5 | Como Regional Park | Como to Hamline Ave. | 7,500 ft. or ~1.4 miles (11.0%) | Future | Pending transportation study and regional park master plan update. |
| 6 | Como Avenue | Hamline Ave. to Raymond Ave. | 8,500 ft. or ~1.6 miles (12.5%) | 2021 | Construction will start in 2020 and be complete in 2021. |
| 7 | Raymond Avenue | Como to University | 6,200 ft. or ~1.2 miles (9.1%) | Future | Construction will be completed in the future as funding allows. |
| 8 | Pelham Boulevard | University to Mississippi River Blvd. | 5,500 ft or ~1.0 mile (8.1%) | Future | Off-road trail construction will be completed in the future as funding allows. |

Conflicts

The Grand Round North Regional Trail will predominately run through residential areas within the City of Saint Paul. Because the trail is entirely within City right-of-way, the City would require that any development project require inter-departmental review including the Planning and Economic

Development, Public Works, and Parks and Recreation departments, to ensure future trail development does not conflict with regional trail use.

Future road construction scheduled in the City's Capital Improvement Plan and Residential Street Reconstruction Program will require coordination between City departments including Public Works and Parks and Recreation. Where portions of the Grand Round North Regional Trail travel through regional parks, careful consideration will be given to development of the park and the trail to not adversely impact either facility.

There are no known private developments or street expansions that conflict with the proposed regional trail.

Public Services

No significant public services or facilities such as roads and sewers are needed to accommodate the Grand Round North Regional Trail. Such non-recreational public services and facilities already exist along the entire regional trail corridor. From a recreation standpoint, the regional trail is designed to provide ample user amenities. These services include wayfinding, water, seating and lighting.

Operations

The standard rules and regulations for all Saint Paul parks will be enforced on the regional trail. Signage along the length of the trail will display rules and regulations. The City of Saint Paul's operating budget will fund maintenance and operations for the parkway portion of the Grand Round North Regional Trail. Annual maintenance will include snow removal and ice treatment, trash removal, mowing and weed control, and tree maintenance. Such operations and maintenance is estimated to cost approximately \$205,000 annually or \$15,800 per mile.

Partner Engagement

Many partners were engaged during the development of the Design and Implementation Plan, including the Capitol Region Watershed District, Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District, Ramsey County staff, and Saint Paul Police. Public Art Saint Paul assisted with Pop-Up Meetings and had members on the advisory committee for the project.

Agencies such as the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Ramsey County, and Metro Transit are consulted as each segment is engineered and constructed.

Advocacy non-profits such as the Saint Paul Bicycle Coalition have voiced their support of continued Grand Round North Regional Trail development. The City will partner with organizations such as Move Minnesota (formerly Transit for Livable Communities and Saint Paul Smart Trips), the Saint Paul Bicycle Coalition, and the Saint Paul Transportation committee to promote trail use.

Public Engagement and Participation

Community outreach and engagement, particularly to the multiple ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic communities throughout Saint Paul, is critical to the design and implementation of the Grand Round. The methods of engagement focused on informing and consulting the community and involving them at interactive workshops and pop-up meetings.

The City of Saint Paul and the design team reached out and engaged the public using many different tools and approaches. Engagement events were held near the proposed trail in places where people were already congregating, including workshops at community events and popular destinations, which likely enabled more people to learn about the plan and offer input. There were over 40 public meetings held in 2015, including:

- Pop-up events along the Grand Round route

- Listening sessions with community organizations
- Engagement events held in coordination with larger community events
- Presentations at District Council meetings
- A four-day design workshop (June 2015)
- Online engagement including an online survey
- Open House meetings (July 2015)
- Community Advisory Committee meetings made up of citizen representatives

To promote effective communications, the project team developed welcoming, user-friendly, jargon-free project materials. The materials were oriented to residents who may not be familiar with city planning processes and projects.

Several key themes emerged through the engagement effort:

- Support for the plan was prevalent.
- Users of the Grand Round route include both pedestrians and bicyclists. The needs of each user group must be considered.
- Participants expressed a preference for facilities separated from motor vehicles.
- Safety was a key concern for many participants.
- Amenities such as restrooms, water fountains and benches are desired.
- Consistent walk/bike facilities throughout the route are strongly desired. Where possible the same kind of facility should be provided for long stretches of the route.
- Several intersections and/or roadways were identified as challenging for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Connections and better wayfinding to existing trails are desired.

Comments requesting trail amenities were the most prevalent with nearly one third of comments recommending additional water foundations, restrooms, and benches. More than a quarter of the responses focused on infrastructure recommendations, such as better crossing treatments and improved bicycle facilities with the most attention focused on facilities separated from motor vehicles.

Safety was also a key concern for many participants, as well as improving connections to existing trails and adding wayfinding options such as maps, mile markers, and technology-based route-finding tools.

Equity Analysis

The Grand Round Design and Implementation plan project team made proactive efforts in 2015 to expand opportunities for members of underrepresented communities to contribute meaningfully to the planning process. Engagement efforts have continued as segments have been implemented, most recently with Como Avenue Trail and Johnson Parkway Trail in 2018.

Members of the Project Team held a pop-up workshop at the Spring Fling at McDonough Homes on Timberlake Road in 2015. This engagement session focused on segment 3 of the project and the location was chosen in part to reach local residents who live in public housing, are low-income, or are communities of color. Hundreds of people attended the family-friendly Spring Fling with many parents attending with their children. During conversations with local residents, the Project Team gathered feedback that has impacted the trail's design, including a clear preference for facilities separated from motor vehicles.

The Project Team also held a pop-up workshop at the Commonwealth Terrace Cooperative on Fifield Avenue in 2015. This engagement session focused on segment 6 of the project and the location was chosen in part to reach students enrolled at the University of Minnesota, and to reach families with

parents who are enrolled at the University. Many residents at the Cooperative speak languages other than English and hundreds of people attended the family-friendly event. During conversations with local residents, the Project Team gathered feedback that has impacted the trail's design, including a clear preference for facilities separated from motor vehicles as many people felt uncomfortable biking on-road with their small children. Snelling Avenue was also mentioned several times as being difficult to cross and uncomfortable to travel on.

To reach local residents where they are located, pop-up workshops were also held in several other locations along the future Grand Round North Regional Trail including the Dayton's Bluff neighborhood, Payne-Phalen, Como, and St. Anthony Park. Feedback provided in these locations also underscored the preference for facilities separated from motor vehicles, the importance of wayfinding, and overall support for the plan.

Public Awareness

The Grand Round North Regional Trail will be a signature facility in the Saint Paul park system. A strong branding effort will assist in promoting and identifying the trail. This branding will appear on signage and manhole covers along the trail. Local signage will also direct users to the trail from adjacent neighborhoods.

The City also maintains a webpage with public information on the project (<https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/parks-recreation/design-construction/current-projects/saint-paul-grand-round>) and will promote the trail through social media. The Public Works Department has many communications tools at its disposal, including several social media accounts, press releases, and communications from elected officials. The City also has a strong relationship with many neighborhood organizations and district councils, which assist the City with outreach and communications.

Accessibility

All segments and facilities of the Grand Round North Regional Trail will be constructed to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The steepest section of Wheelock Parkway – north of Arlington Avenue West and west of Rice Street – has been designed and partially constructed with construction activities scheduled to be completed in 2020.

The Grand Round Regional Trail will also be financially accessible as there will be no fee for trail use.

The regional trail will be connected to transit at several locations along the alignment including the Green Line LRT and Metro Transit bus routes 63 and 67 at University Avenue, Route 87 along Raymond Avenue, Route 3 along Como Avenue, the A Line Bus rapid Transit at Snelling Avenue, Route 83 at Lexington Parkway, Route 65 at Dale Street, routes 61 and 68 at Jackson Street, Route 71 at Westminster Street, Route 64 on Maryland Avenue, route 74 on 7th Street East, Route 63 on 3rd Street, and Route 70 on Burns Avenue.

The regional trail is also near the planned Gold Line station at Etna Street.

Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area

A small portion of the west side of the proposed regional trail sits within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA). The City of Saint Paul acknowledges the regulations with MRCCA and will comply as required.

Of the six Critical Area districts, only one intersects with the trail: the Critical Area – River Neighborhood (CA-RN) district, which applies at the end of Pelham Boulevard where it meets Mississippi River Boulevard. The district is defined as developed residential lands and existing parkland that is visible from the river or that abut riparian parkland.

Trail construction within the CA-RN district would use the existing road right of way and shoulders. Height and setback requirements would not apply as the trail is a compatible use.

The eastern end of the proposed regional trail, where Johnson Parkway terminates at Burns Avenue, is the boundary for MRCCA.

Consistency with Other Council Policies and Systems

Community Development – Forecasts (Todd Graham, 651-602-1322) – The regional trail master plan is informed by the Metropolitan Council’s socioeconomic forecast and by estimated usage of existing and connected trails. This appears complete.

Community Development – Housing (Ashleigh Johnson, 651-602-1106) - I have reviewed Saint Paul’s Grand Round North Master Plan and it is consistent with the Council’s 2040 Housing Policy Plan.

The plan doesn’t require the acquisition of private residential land that could affect single or multi-family housing, however, within a half-mile there are number of affordable housing developments, serving various household income levels at or below 80% of Area Median Income. Many of these developments directly abut the trail. The Master Plan quoted residents and staff of nearby McDonough Homes, a nearby affordable housing development, stating that many “complained of difficult, unsafe and confusing access to nearby trails and other amenities”.

In addition to McDonough Homes, there are *at least* 16 affordable housing developments within 0.5 miles of Grand Round North: Gabriel Flats, East Side Apartments, Westminster Place, Kendrick Apartments, Salvation Army Booth Brown House, Elders Lodge, Hazelwood Terrace, Sanctuary at Vandalia, Carleton Lofts, Catholic Charities Midway Residence Project, Union Flats, 2700 University, Weyerhauser Project, 808 Berry Place, Como by the Lake and Greenbrier Project.

This regional trail would directly affect various populations living in these developments—many residents have families with children, are seniors, live with disabilities and/or need supportive services at their residence. Providing/improving access to recreational (and other) amenities such as Grand Round North contributes to residents’ overall quality of life. The engagement process detailed in the plan did a great job discussing how these groups were engaged.

Community Development – Local Planning Assistance (Patrick Boylan, 651-602-1438) – The Grand Round North Regional Trail Master Plan (Master Plan) is consistent with draft 2040 Comprehensive Plan documents in Council files. The City’s Comprehensive Plan identifies the Grand Round and the appropriate regional trail search corridors consistent with the content found in the Master Plan. The 2040 Comprehensive Plan recognizes all of the segments in the Master Plan as regional trail and City’s planned urban land uses remain compatible with the nature and character of the regional trail.

The Master Plan includes three Regional Trail Search Corridors (Como-Phalen, Johnson Parkway, and Mississippi Como) within the City of St. Paul and identifies eight segments and supportive planning, design, and community outreach information.

Thrive MSP 2040 has designated the City as Urban Center and the Master Plan is consistent with *Thrive* policy of Access, Mobility, and Transportation Choice. Within *Thrive*, Cities are directed to develop local policies, plans, and practices that improve pedestrian and bicycle circulation, including access to regional transit services, regional trails, and regional bicycle corridors. The Master Plan provides details on connections and physical improvements to existing facilities including ADA

accommodations. *Thrive* further directs communities to adopt development standards that improve the user experience, circulation, and access for bicyclists and pedestrians. The Master Plan identifies places for wayfinding and plaza and road crossing infrastructure improvements to enhance the pedestrian and cyclist experience.

It is also noted that the Master Plan's approach to planning for this facility is consistent with the Metropolitan Council's commitment to the outcome of Equity. The Master Plan's outreach and public engagement process identified specific efforts to engage in underrepresented communities along the segments. The Master Plan 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.

Community Development – Stormwater, Natural Resources and Solar (Cameran Bailey, 651-602-1496) – Complete for review with minor technical comments. Regarding stormwater and natural resources: Multiple portions of the regional trail master plan state that "Storm water issues will also be addressed, such as providing treatment within the boulevard area between the roadway and bike trail." Council staff recommend an intentional integration of landscaping vegetation, grading, and stormwater management. Staff recommend the master plan prioritize the maximal use of native plants, herbs, and pollinators in boulevards, public rights-of-way, plazas, and rest areas.

Council staff also recommend the prioritization of intentional grading and stormwater best management practices (BMP's) to increase areas where stormwater BMP's also serve vegetation irrigation needs, minimize the need for pumped irrigation to serve vegetation, and increase stormwater infiltration. These sort of intentional design principles can also support other municipal, state, and watershed goals of improved water quality, improved health of wildlife and habitat corridors, increased urban ecosystem diversity and resilience, and supporting the primary stated goals of the regional trail master plan: "the trail will be an important way to connect old neighbors to new neighbors and provide residents access to nature" and "the GRNRT will become an important recreational amenity to economically-stressed communities in addition to providing a safe, alternate transportation option." These principles bring more nature, and better sustain the health of nature, on the regional trail itself.

Regarding solar: "Lighting will be improved within this area to include the typical Saint Paul Lantern Style lights." There are no statutory requirements, nor Council policies, regarding planning for the protection and development of access to direct sunlight for solar energy systems in Regional Parks and Trails. However, the Council commends the consideration of stand-alone, solar photovoltaic and battery storage, lighting installations for new and existing segments of the regional trail where new lighting is being considering for construction. The installation of these systems is becoming more common in the Upper Midwest Region. They provide the opportunity to reduce short and long-term construction, operation, and maintenance costs, avoid greenhouse gas emissions, serve as a form of public education, and increase the operational resilience of Regional Parks and Trails. Please, feel free to follow up for any further technical assistance.

Environmental Services – Sewers (Roger Janzig, 651-602-1119) – The City of St. Paul has submitted the Draft Master Plan for the Grand Round North Regional Trail. The construction of any new or updating of existing trails may have an impact on multiple Metropolitan Council interceptors in multiple locations. To assess the potential impacts to the region's interceptor system; prior to initiating this project, contact Tim Wedin, Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager (651-602-4571) at the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services.

Environmental Services – Water Resources (Joe Mulcahy, 612-913-8864) – The plan appears to be complete and accurate, and the proposed project appears to have no water resource impacts.