

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: October 1, 2020

Subject: Youth and Parks Research Findings and Recommendations

MPOSC Members: All

Policy/Legal Reference: *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, Chapter 7: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy and Strategies.

Staff Prepared/Presented: Sarah Gong, Intern CD-Research, Ellie Hohulin, Council Intern CD-Parks, and Darcie Vandegrift, Principal Researcher (651-602-1669)

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

None; information and discussion only.

Background

Research focusing on strengthening youth connection to the outdoors is an implementation of a 2018 priority in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. Chapter seven of the plan pledged to engage in “targeted studies to better understand and provide for the outdoor recreational needs and preferences” from underserved populations, including youth. Previously, no study had been conducted that informed policy about the needs, motivations, and access obstacles for youth to access the Regional Park System.

The research questions focused on how to build and strengthen connections between youth and the Regional Parks System. Questions included:

- A. What are obstacles to youth access? (*What changes can improve access for key subgroups and young people in general?*)
- B. What does a great day in the park look like? (*What activities, amenities and experiences are most important to youth and adults who bring them to the park?*)
- C. What advice/assets do youth have as they connect with the outdoors? (*How can youth themselves inform Regional Park System priorities?*)
- D. How can park agencies build connections to encourage access? (*What can implementing agency administration, park programming/outreach staff, and Council staff do to foster youth relationship to parks?*)

One strategy outlined in the policy plan was to continue and expand meetings with stakeholders to include collaborations between community-based organizations and implementing agencies. This research used this strategy through a collaboration among a multigenerational and multiracial Council research team, youth researchers, youth participants, supportive adults from youth-serving organizations and implementing agencies of the regional park system. The project generated valuable qualitative data and brought teens into parks through the research process. A toolkit with all the activities developed through the research, a youth-audience activity book, and a report will soon be available for free online and in print.

Team members Sarah Gong and Ellie Hohulin will present key findings, followed by discussion guided by three questions:

- Support – How can the research recommendations support MPOSC and Council priorities?

- Collaborate - How can the Council collaborate with park implementing agencies to connect youth with the park system?
- Strengthen - How can these findings strengthen equity efforts in the Regional Parks System?

Thrive Lens Analysis

Young people's access to the Regional Parks System is crucial to reach the goals of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. Parks offer multiple health and recreational benefits that contribute to the Region's *livability*. Young people's park use is an important component of *equity*; Twin Cities residents under age 20 experience higher rates of poverty and are more racially and ethnically diverse than older generations. Their use of Regional Parks and Trails is vital to the *stewardship* and *sustainability* of the System. The System's existence depends on an ongoing societal commitment and public support.ⁱ Today's youth will create the shared future dedication to preserve the high-quality natural resources offered by our system.

Chapter 1 of the Policy Plan notes that involvement in nature-based outdoor recreation among young adults and their children has decreased since the 1990s. Their support is needed for maintaining broad-based public support for park and trail investments. The chapter continues that "[b]y 2040, 39% of the population will be people of color, compared to 24% in 2010. The share of people of color increases among younger age groups; 53% of residents younger than age 18 will be people of color in 2040."

ⁱ Pennington-Gray, L., & Blair, S. (2010). Nature-based tourism in North America: Is Generation Y the major cause of increased participation? In P. Benckendorff, G. Moscardo, & D.

Pendergast (Eds.), *Tourism and Generation Y* (pp. 73–84). Cambridge, MA: CABI and Watson, J. E., Dudley, N., Segan, D. B., & Hockings, M. (2014). The performance and potential of protected areas. *Nature*, 515(7525), 67.