

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

Thursday, February 4, 2021

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

Committee Members Absent: Lolita Davis Carter

CALL TO ORDER

Secretary Dingle did a roll call for a quorum.

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, February 4, 2021.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Chair Yarusso asked for a consensus to approve the February 4, 2021 agenda. **The agenda was approved.**

With a quorum present, Chair Yarusso asked for a motion to approve the January 7, 2021 minutes. Kemery motioned, and it was seconded by Theisen to approve the January 7, 2021 minutes of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting. Secretary Dingle issued a roll call vote.

Aye – 7 (Harris, Kemery, Moeller, Peichel, Rich, Theisen, Yarusso)

Nay – 0

Abstention – 0

The January 7, 2021 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. He noted that he has not received a request to address the Commission at today's meeting.

BUINESS

2021-37, Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board – Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst

Kelly gave a presentation on the Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan, received from Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MRPB) outlined in the materials provided.

Moeller asked about migratory bird habitat concerns and referred to the memo sent from the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (ACM).

Chair Yarusso confirmed that all received the memo and asked Secretary Dingle to include a copy with the minutes (attached).

Kelly responded by outlining natural resource and habitat improvements planned and referred to MRPB staff for additional comments.

Adam Arvidsson, MRPB, provided additional information about natural resource improvements and talked about the importance of the Mississippi River Flyway. He noted that the current condition of the land within the park boundary is predominantly hardened surface and industrial. The proposed park will work to restore the natural areas for wildlife habitat and human enjoyment. He stated that this area will become a green parkway.

Moeller noted there were not comments from ACM in the public participation section of the staff report. He felt the general direction and strategy makes good sense and encouraged MPRB to include the importance of bird habitat in the Master Plan.

Chair Yarusso asked what impacts particular designs have on specific species and do we know that kind of detail. Arvidson stated that this scale of planning does not get to that level of detail design. As MPRB moves this plan into implementation, he stated that they will bring in habitat perspectives to advise on the process. Emma Pachuta, MPRB added that this plan is a vision of acquiring land that we don't have today, so the detailed design will evolve as the implementation moves forward.

Harris discussed habitat and trail studies and asked, what types of activities have impacts on birds? She felt that would be interesting to better understand. She also discussed transforming heavy industrial sites to active recreation and asked how much recreation is too much. She asked if more habitat could be conserved?

Atlas-Ingebretson asked, is there a way to think about increasing space to accommodate more people and also wildlife. She also asked how the pandemic has influenced the design, i.e., width of trails, separation space, etc. Pachuta stated these are important considerations to think about – as we work through Covid.

Atlas-Ingebretson stated we are not defining trails today, but asked if there would be an opportunity to grow the space in this area? She also asked, can we articulate the value of providing habitat for people and animals, i.e., edible forest as well as undeveloped space for migrating birds. Pachuta stated we are limited with the amount of space available in certain areas, due to the many constraints around this site. Arvidson added a lot will depend on how much land the park board will be able to acquire. He stated they will make the trails as wide as possible but will need to balance this goal with protecting natural spaces. Much of the design details will not take place for decades. The purpose of this master plan is to create the vision for the park and the needed acquisitions. He also shared that one key goal of this plan is habitat connectivity.

Moeller stated he is hearing there is a dedication to habitat and wildlife but didn't see that articulated in the business item. He would like to understand what's in the plan.

Kelly referenced the memo and stated he believes MPRB has habitat protection as a guiding principal in the master plan. He feels the master plan talks about 're-naturalizing' this area throughout master plan implementation.

Harris feels the plan should go further – she doesn't see it as a re-greening or re-naturalizing of this area.

It was motioned by Moeller to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's Above the Falls Regional Park Master Plan.
2. Require Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, prior to initiating any new development of the regional park, to send preliminary plans to the Environmental Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division.
3. Advise the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board to implement the comments in the Analysis for Natural Resources and Transit.

Chair Yarusso noted that no one seconded the motion and noted that this Commission doesn't have a lot of power to require changes, however we can approve or deny with comments.

Harris stated she is not clear about the third action and asked if the Commission can advise them to work with agencies like ACM. Kelly explained the third action, referring to comments made on page 26 and 27 of the staff report.

Theisen seconded the motion.

Theisen stated we need to be wary of characterizing this plan as having simple trade-offs between human needs versus wildlife. He feels in a busy city like Minneapolis, there are always tough trade-offs. He believes the park board has found a middle ground.

Harris discussed the Mississippi Flyway and an additional action to discuss the importance of this corridor and that the MPRB will consider this in their plans moving forward.

Moeller felt it's important to ask MPRB to consider the flyway in their development going forward.

Theisen asked, what other flyways exist and how are they managed. Harris noted that she is familiar with the Pacific Flyway that goes from Alaska southward through many urban areas.

Theisen stated if you have limited space, could you accommodate the needs of the flyway yet also meet human needs?

Mullin noted that one of the steps we take is to reach out to the DNR to invite their comments, particularly on the Mississippi River Critical Corridor Area, and the DNR did not raise concerns.

Chair Yarusso stated Atlas-Ingebretson can convey this conversation at the Community Development Committee level or if someone wants to craft an amendment at this time, they may do so to formalize a request to MPRB.

Kelly noted that in the Fall of 2019 the Commission considered the Mississippi Gorge Master Plan that had similar context to this plan. The flyway was also discussed in this document, but additional proposed actions were not called out.

With no further discussion, Chair Yarusso called for a vote. Secretary Dingle issued a roll call vote.

Aye – 7 (Kemery, Peichel, Moeller, Rich, Taylor, Theisen, Yarusso)

Nay – 0

Abstention – 1 (Harris)

The motion was approved.

2021-38, Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature Acquisition Master Plan Amendment and Boundary Adjustment, Three Rivers Park District – Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst

Kelly gave a presentation on the Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature Acquisition Master Plan Amendment and Boundary Adjustment submitted by Three Rivers Park District outlined in the materials provided.

Harris feels this is a great project. One concern she shared is that natural resource description is very vague. She feels more description of agriculture could be helpful. Chair Yarusso noted that this is an acquisition master plan rather than a development master plan.

Kelly Grissman, Three Rivers Park District spoke to the parcels to be acquired and noted it would be maintained similarly to the adjacent property. They would remove invasive species, etc. but otherwise at this point, they will leave the property as is.

Harris stated for the record, that she just wants to make sure all of these projects balance natural resources with recreation.

It was motioned by Taylor and seconded by Moeller to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve Three Rivers Park District's Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature Acquisition Master Plan Amendment.
2. Approve the boundary adjustment adding 31.2-acres to Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature in the City of Minnetrista.

With no further discussion, Chair Yarusso called for a vote. Secretary Dingle issued a roll call vote.

Aye – 8 (Harris, Kemery, Peichel, Moeller, Rich, Taylor, Theisen, Yarusso)

Nay – 0

Abstention – 0

The motion was approved.

INFORMATION

None.

REPORTS

Chair: Chair Yarusso discussed the extension to the application period for open seats and stated they've received many more applications. Interviews will happen in the next couple of weeks and hopefully new Commissioners will be seated in March. He thanked Commissioners Theisen and Davis Carter for their volunteerism to this Commission.

Chair Yarusso stated we will be looking for 3-4 Commissioners to serve on the Equity Grant Program Committee. Peichel stated he would be willing to be on that Committee. Kemery and Harris agreed to serve as well.

Commissioners: None

Staff: Mullin thanked everyone for a great discussion today.

Mullin gave an update on the 2021 Legislative Session and noted staff have been at the Capitol quite a lot advocating for funding for the Regional Park System.

Theisen thanked staff he's worked with over the years as well as the Commissioners.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed the meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Sandi Dingle
Recording Secretary

From: [Ann Laughlin](#)
To: createbalance@gmail.com; bob@moeller.us.com; cecily999@sbcglobal.net; jpeichel@gmail.com; lldaviscarter@outlook.com; nrich.m@gmail.com; rmtheisen1@comcast.net; takemery@msn.com; mposc@tonyyarusso.org
Cc: [Mullin, Emmett](#); [Atlas-Ingebretson, Lynnea](#); [Dingle, Sandi](#)
Subject: Please require changes to the Above the Falls Master Plan
Date: Thursday, February 04, 2021 2:04:26 PM

Dear MPOS Commissioners,

With regard to business item 2021-37 on your agenda today (February 4), Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (ACM) respectfully disagrees with staff's conclusion that the Above the Falls Master Plan Update meets the Regional Parks Policy Plan (RPPP) criteria.

For example, regarding the RPPP requirement that "The Natural Resource Inventory should be a basis for projects/proposals to restore degraded resources and maintain high-quality natural resource features. ... The final design and construction should allow the public to view and enjoy these natural habitats with minimal adverse impact on that habitat." ACM is concerned that the Above the Falls Master Plan fails to protect the high-quality natural resources along the Mississippi River. The Plan focuses on non-nature based recreation at the expense of birds and other wildlife and does not preserve natural areas for habitat. While the plan frequently references the word "habitat," most of the plan is designed to fill this section of the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area with so much active recreation as to diminish habitat and drive out wildlife, which is inconsistent with the goal of regional parks and RPPP criteria.

Public input prioritized the restoration and enhancement of parkland along the river, and the focus on natural and open spaces with restored habitat for ecological health. But the Plan fails to incorporate any intention or methods to actively protect migrating birds from the major threats of habitat loss, light pollution or collisions with buildings, or to include protections for the adjacent heron rookery. The MPRB's standards for "park supportive" development do not include bird safety, a glaring omission. We also note the lack of any guiding principle to protect and preserve bird and wildlife habitat in the Mississippi Flyway.

Twice a year, hundreds of bird species and millions of birds use the Mississippi Flyway on their epic journeys to and from their breeding grounds. Yet the proposed Plan fails to acknowledge the international significance of this Flyway and the Park Board's responsibility to protect birds as stewards of this vital natural resource. Instead, the proposed plan will diminish valuable natural areas and negatively impact birding habitat along the River. Plans for the park and island are said to substantially enhance riverfront migratory, nesting, and feeding habitat, yet the development concept imposes a major riverfront recreational destination that will lead to overuse through attractions including a pebble beach, park pavilion with refreshments and visitor services, water recreation outfitting, lawn, strolling paths, a regional bike path, and special programs such as movies, festivals, and other large gatherings. A walkway across the length of Hall's Island accessed by pedestrian bridges across the newly-created channel would mean that no areas of this island will be preserved as wildlife habitat. These design elements will negatively impact birding habitat along the Mississippi flyway, at a time when populations of birds and other wildlife are dramatically declining due to climate change, habitat loss, and other challenges. All those active recreational amenities will not enhance habitat, but rather cause habitat loss in areas that currently are habitat but will be converted to active recreational uses, paths and lawn.

We also oppose MPRB's intention to monetize parks via user fees, sponsors, grants or in-kind partnerships, and other ventures designed to generate enterprise revenue, since that approach undermines efforts to promote equity and access for all people and creates additional pressures for overuse and development of parkland.

For these reasons and others, we oppose the Above the Falls Master Plan and ask that you delay approval until the Plan is revised to address these problems.

Ann Laughlin
Advocacy Committee, Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

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