Met Council

Parks and Trails

Discover Phase Findings

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Today

- ‣ Discover Phase Reporting
- ‣ Recommendations
- ‣ Next Steps

Objectives

How do you remove the barriers which prevent use of the parks and trails to create an equitable regional parks and trails system?

How do you bring unity to a system that while not designed to be "separate," spans multiple cities and jurisdictions?

How do we create a sustainable marketing communications platform from which we can effectively tell a unified story?

Research Objectives

Through a mix of qualitative and quantitative research, we will aim to understand the following:

‣ Does a unified approach increase equitable use of the system?

‣ How do we work together to ensure that the system is serving the needs of our communities today and in the future?

‣ What are the barriers to use that the public are experiencing? What are the opportunities to not only improve the public's perception of, but increase the use of, the parks and trails system?

Research Methodology

CONSTITUENT INTERVIEWS

We conducted video interviews with 16 key stakeholders representing all agencies to better understand current opinions and perceptions of the Regional Parks and Trails efforts, identify opportunities for future messaging, and highlight areas for improvement.

ONLINE SURVEYS

We expanded our outreach with an online survey soliciting opinions and perceptions of Regional Parks and Trails from internal and external contacts. The goal was a total of 30 - 40 survey completes, and 78 surveys were completed.

An additional online survey targeting park users was fielded to understand current awareness of Regional Parks, park usage and any barriers. A total of 77 surveys were completed.

RESEARCH NOTE:

For this project we spoke to individuals already engaged with the Council and parks to assess current perceptions and areas of improvement.

Constituent
Feedback

What is the role of Regional Parks and Trails?

PARKS AND TRAILS ARE AN IMPORTANT," VALUABLE RESOURCE FOR THE REGION "

You are creating and sustaining a culture of outdoor recreation by making nature more accessible to all, improving quality of life, and creating nature based amenities and activities while protecting the environment.

You are also seen as providing a cohesive vision for the future of the system while unifying the efforts across the metro.

"We underestimate the role that our regional park system plays in providing really healthy ways for you to learn and gain confidence."

"Provide **high quality parks and trails** for the region while **protecting natural resources.**"

"To provide an overall **cohesive vision** for regional parks and trails in the metro area."

"As a **connector** of the parks and trails opportunities throughout the metro area."

What value does the Regional Parks System provide to the region or your agency?

OPPORTUNITY FOR COLLABORATION

The current perceived value of Met Council varied by agency but most saw an opportunity for shared resources and collaboration. Many attached the value to gaining additional funding for specific needs in their parks.

"I think it's difficult because the **Met Council doesn't run parks.**"

"We really appreciate our coordination with Metropolitan " Council, and that has not always been the case. Now it's " a really strong benefit to us working with other agencies." "

"Right now we're really **10 individual agencies.**"

"There might be opportunities to **share resources**, or bring together resources to create a better opportunity or bigger opportunity."

"We're able to **collaborate on legislative issues** because we're part of a regional system."

What areas do you think the Regional Parks System can improve on?

GREATER AWARENESS OVERALL

Awareness of the parks and amenities were top of mind for many along with helping to improve equity across the system. Help with consistent signage and wayfaring also was cited.

How Met Council communicates with the agencies was an area for improvement and many noted you could help be a facilitator of cross agency conversations.

The desire for greater autonomy in decision making was cited by many agencies wanting to determine for themselves the best way to use funds and resources in their parks.

"I think it would be great for all the regional planners to come together at least once a year. I think Met Council would be a great coordinator in that effort."

"I think there could be an opportunity there for **improvement in communication** across the agencies. Sometimes it almost will come as a baked idea - Here, we want you to do this in your park - as opposed to sometimes a collective."

"That more people knew about them and really knew the benefits."

"Recognizing the differences between the systems and **allowing flexibility in the policies** so that we can each operate in the way that's best for us."

"**Increasing equity** in our regional park system."

What is the public's perception of the Regional Parks System?

PEOPLE ENJOY PARKS, BUT LACK AN AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING "

On a scale of one to ten, the average ranking of the public's awareness and understanding of a regional park was four. Many constituents said residents don't distinguish between a regional, city or county park or understand the differences.

"Our community does not know the difference. People want to connect to their parks and to them **a park is a park.**"

"For people to see the value in what we do, we need to get then out to the parks."

"As park employees, if we're not clear what it is, I think the public isn't going to be clear."

What are the Regional Parks System biggest opportunities?

REDUCING BARRIERS. "
INCREASING EQUITY. "

Most constituents cited ways the Met Council could help reduce the barriers to accessing regional parks and helping to increase park usage overall as the biggest opportunity.

Being the regional advocate for parks and helping to connect people with them.

"Having a bus route in the summer that would go to regional parks…or even park and ride kind of parking lots."

"As an advocate for people exploring their landscapes and their regions, I think it would be beneficial for us to **connect the regional parks more together.**"

"I think this is particularly important from an equity standpoint, if you're a North Minneapolis urban dweller, perhaps a person of color and you're getting accustomed to Wirth Park and those kinds of activities and uses that you didn't grow up doing, what's the next step?"

"I think the regional trail system is a huge opportunity."

"A big untapped future goal is maintaining them and adding services within some of the county parks."

What barriers are preventing parks and trails usage by residents?

MANY POTENTIAL BARRIERS

Our resident survey did not identify a primary barrier to park use but many of the assumed barriers were mentioned. Fees and transportation were mentioned more than others overall.

A future study targeting residents with a goal of achieving a diverse population and income mix may help to further validate assumptions and identify solutions.

"**Language barrier.** All of our parks and park signage are almost primarily in English."

"**Funding.** For operations, for maintenance."

"**Transportation** connecting the parks."

"Until we start providing some of those **connections**, they will never grow."

"It's all about access - transportation and **fees**."

"People think they don't have **time** for regional parks to be in their regular lives."

"I think the barrier is being outside of one's comfort zone and outside of one's community, and wondering what they're going to face."

What is missing from communications?
How should we be communicating with visitors?

BETTER COMMUNICATION CHANNELS FOR VISITORS "

There was a lot of discussion around how the Regional Parks and Trails team could better communicate with residents and be a go-to information resource.

There is a great opportunity and need for unique park digital channels and a unified resource for connecting/ finding parks.

"I don't know how much **social media** presence they have, but that seems to be a huge asset."

"Sometimes things get really map focused. **The focus needs to be a little bit more on either types of activities or types of landscapes.**"

"We don't have the internal resources, but **videos that break ' down the barriers** and show people what our parks look like." "

"I would love to see the Met Council do some type of promotions targeting the metropolitan multicultural media, just about park use. Because it works."

How do you think the Met Council and the parks might amplify one another's opportunities?

ONE SHARED MISSION.

There was agreement from all that the Regional Parks and Trails should be the connector for all helping to drive collaboration amongst the agencies. There is a great desire for tools to cross promote parks and amenities.

"There needs to be this way of being able to figure out how to amplify and support what the implementing agencies are doing **without requiring a huge conformity project**"

"Continue to have **collaboration**, because we do have a lot of common interests."

Met Council should be the connecter. **Create the tools** that allows local agencies to easily recommend other parks within the system.

"**Amplifying one another's mission** and wanting people in the outdoors."

Once someone puts their foot in the door, then I think the Regional Park System and the Met Council maybe needs to have some tools where we can say:

"You liked your local park, there's a world of other opportunities out there."

Should we create and market a Regional Parks and Trails brand?

One idea we were investigating was the potential benefit of a unified brand for regional parks and trails. The assumption was if we were able to differentiate the regional offerings it would drive usage.

What clearly came out is users aren't deciding to go to a type of park, but seeking a place that allows them to enjoy an activity they want to experience. And with little awareness of Regional Parks and Trails to begin with, it would be a significant effort to change behaviors. Building a brand takes time and funding. In this case there is little benefit to a unique Regional Parks and Trails brand.

There is great benefit however in making residents aware of the availability and opportunity of activities they are seeking within the region, and connecting them to new areas they have not experienced.

What constituents said about a Regional Parks and Trials Brand

"I think it would be really hard for one agency to be able to communicate across all in a way that would resonate with everyone." "

"It might be helpful in terms of just **knowing it's more than** **what's in your backyard.**" "

"**A unified regional message about connecting with nature** and about, just the value of connecting with nature, I think is great." "

"I think that there's the **potential that it would actually make things worse.** I think it would be confusing."

"Does it matter whose park it is, or do we just want people to be in nature?"

"Is there value in a unified message or messaging around regional parks when **we're all operating so differently**?"

Summary and Recommendations

There are clear, shared objectives across the region

INCREASE PARK USAGE AMONG A MORE DIVERSE AUDIENCE

GET PEOPLE TO EXPERIENCE A PARK.

Met Council's work should amplify these efforts for all.

Awareness and Usage of Regional Parks and Trails

"I'm going to the park."

A majority of people don't distinguish between the types " of parks and trails they are using. For them it's about the " activity, and that's how they decide they are going to the " park, and which park they are going to. "

"I'M GOING FOR A WALK."

"I'M GOING BIKING."
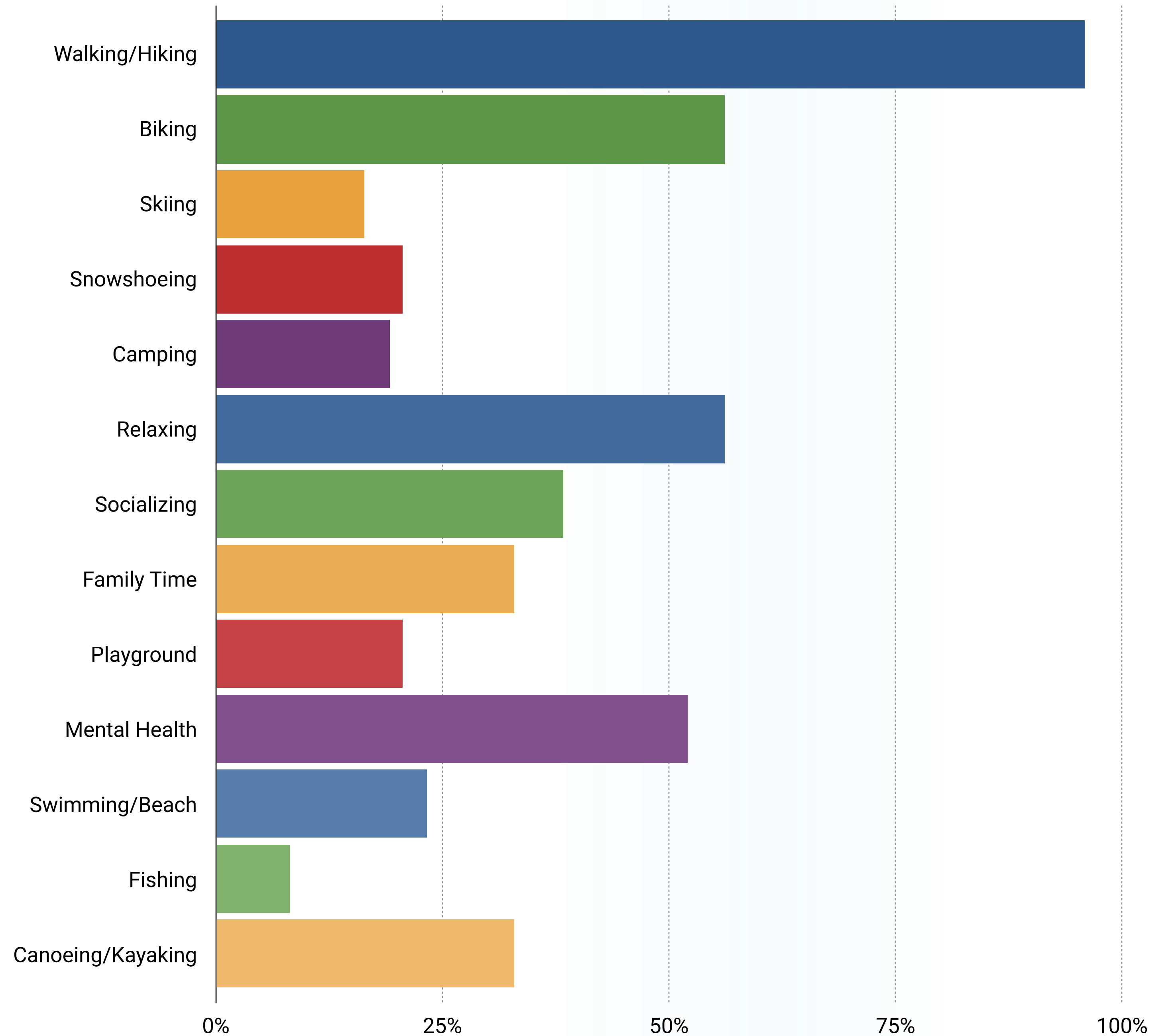
"I WANT TO SNOWSHOE."

"LET'S GO TO THE PLAYGROUND." "

Why I go to the park.

We asked residents to choose the activities that bring them to parks

What would make you consider visiting a regional park in the future?

Recreation also drive future usage and consideration with a majority of individuals mentioning a specific activity that would bring them to a park. This includes accessing and using trails for hiking and biking which was the most mentioned activity.

But people are unaware

Awareness of individual parks and understanding of their " amenities was noted as the biggest area of opportunity " for the regional parks and trails system. "

Opportunities for the Future

The role for Met Council Regional Parks and Trails

Be the connector for the region.

‣ Connecting Residents to parks and activities

‣ Connecting agencies for shared planning

Providing thought leadership and insights to reduce barriers and drive use

Use interests to drive use across the region

Park users are making choices based on activity and recreation and we should ensure they know every location they can have that experience to give them the reason to try a new destination.

This also allows us to bring more diverse audiences to parks they may not of considered. Their first experience may be at their local park, but we connect them with other parks that offer the same activities.

Support the region with marketing efforts that drive new use

‣ Coordination of region-wide, annual campaigns and/or events aimed at growing use and exposing users to new parks in the system.

‣ Helping to create materials that allow people to easily connect with other parks, and represent people they relate with.
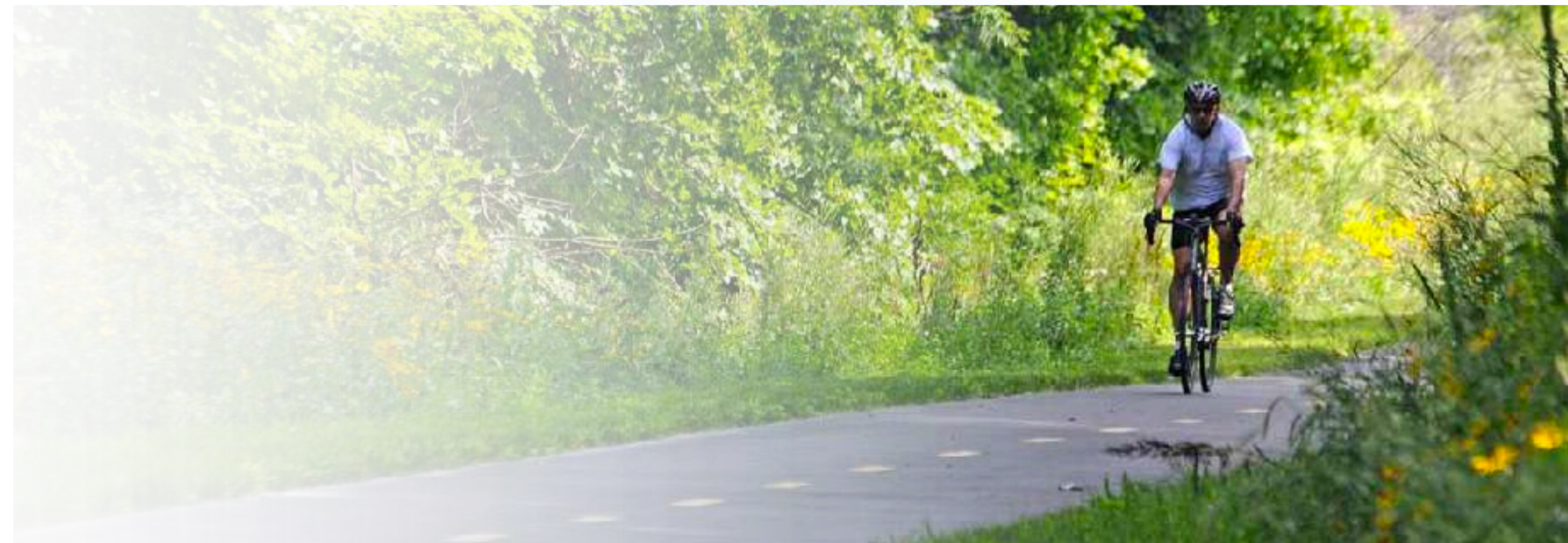
Engaging visitors to drive growth

Our best marketers are park users themselves. There is great opportunity for engagement through digital channels that hasn't been realized.

We can also use digital platforms to better educate and connect people to other areas of interest.

Improved digital presence and capabilities to:

‣ Market and connect with users (Unique Social Media)

‣ Educate (Website)

‣ Guide and engage (App)

Discussion

Thank You.

.   **Commissioner Discussion Questions**
1. What did you hear?
2. What is the connection between marketing, communications, and equity?
3. What more do you want to know?
4. What opportunities do you see for partnership?
5. How can we – the Metropolitan Council – help move this conversation forward?

METROPOLITAN
C O U N C I L