



METROPOLITAN
C O U N C I L

Parks Recommendations: 2023 Met Council Young Leaders Collaboration

Information Item

Metropolitan Parks and Open Spaces Commission

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November 2, 2023



Parks Policy Recommendations from Young Leaders Collaboration (Spring 2023)



Today's conversation

1. Young Leader's Collab background
2. Recommendations: Natural systems
3. Recommendations: Parks access and safety
4. Recommendation: Nurturing the people-park connection through policy
5. Discussion

Young Leaders Collaboration process



Overview of Met Council Imagine 2050 Young Leader's Collaboration Process



Youth

- Leaders age 14-24 from 5 organizations
- Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey and Scott Counties
- Rural, suburban, and urban communities

Activities

- Studied Council authorities, selected priority topics, conducted independent research
- 20 hours of workshops winter/spring 2023
- Presented to Council Members May 2023
- All had interest in parks; specific focus of Environmental Stewardship Institute

Parks-specific themes



Park and trail advice generated through:

- Specific focus by Environmental Stewardship Institute (ESI-Friends of the Mississippi River).
- ESI interview research with young people
- Widespread interest in nature, outdoors by four other organizations across the region
- Young people's reflections on 2021 Visitor Study data, life stories, study of Council authorities

Recommendations and Themes



1. Natural System Protection and Conservation
2. Parks Accessibility and Safety
3. Recreation Activities
4. Regional parks need support from other Council systems, areas

ESI young leaders at YLC Expo

(L-R) Lydia DeGross, Brandon Luna Sanchez, Sara, Grace MacDonal, and An Lee

Natural System Protection and Conservation



Balancing Development and Open Space

Quotes about Land Use

Land Use Goals

- Efficient land use to protect open space
- Create community garden space through comprehensive plans.
- Preserve native habitat

"In my neighborhood there has been a lot of development, and some of this development will be at the **wetland area**, and we are currently lacking wetland in Minnesota."

"Cities should stop cutting down trees. They made roads and they're still cutting down trees. The trees I saw every day, I came home, and they were gone. They started construction for new roads and cut the trees. Lower down the construction because we need trees."

"Spaces for community gardens and habitat conservation should be important elements of comprehensive plans from local governments."

"Water and noise pollution in parks should be prevented through land use policy."

"It upsets me because there used to be a lot of **open land where kids used to be able to play for free**"

Litter and pollution are natural systems concern, visitation barriers

Concerns about Litter and Pollution

Litter and Pollution Goals

- Complaints about litter in the visitor study decrease between 2021 and 2025.
- Our parks and trails receive funding to maintain them free of litter or pollution.
- Our parks are biodiverse, clean, and well-kept.

"Something that keeps me from visiting parks is the **littering in parks.**"

"Animals and plants are healthy in our region, free of effects of pollution and litter."

"Parks have litter and water pollution. There's algae, dead fish, and it smells bad **due to fertilizer contamination.**"

"These are issues for Como Park and Como Lake with litter, plastic pollution and water quality. This creates a barrier to people accessing parks because they do not want to be exposed to garbage or illness due to unhealthy water and air."

Park Accessibility and Safety



Better Transportation to Parks Improves Access

Transportation Goals

- Our parks are accessible for the youth – Transportation infrastructure.
- Our region is safe, walkable, and accessible.

Quotes on Transportation

“**Transportation infrastructure does not adequately serve parks.** In our interviews, we found that people who bike or walk feel that the roads aren’t safe. Cars don’t know what to do when there’s a biker around. There are dangerous roads and intersections for cyclists and pedestrians to reach regional parks. A stoplight at busy intersections would help.”

“There is very little public transit to parks. The Met Council does not adequately **coordinate transportation planning, public transit, and regional parks planning.**”

“If the park is far away and people have to bike/walk **and don't have a safe way** to do it most will choose to not go. Having designated sidewalks and bike lanes are important as well as drivers being aware of these sidewalks and bike lanes to make it safer for everyone.”

"If there is public transportation like busses, it makes it much **easier to get to parks**, especially cause for a long time I didn't have a car"

Nurturing people to parks connection



Why Parks are Important to Young People

" I think that parks are places for communities to gather and connect, it's also interesting because there can be different cultural barriers in a terms of accessing parks and feeling sense of belonging in the community. "

Parks and trails create vitally needed community connection.

" Parks are a huge part of my life, they are a place where I go to relax and rec and overall helps my mental health"

Parks and trails are a place to hang out and just be in nature. They are important to mental health.

"I think there should be a big effort to educate people on Indigenous land. Not only that there was people but their culture as well and how we can protect them better."

Environmental education nutures young people's passion and care for parks.

Desirable Activities for Young People in Parks

" I grew up having picnics in the regional parks by me, and then when I learned to bike I would bike to regional parks. Parks, I can't live without because pretty much my whole life I have had at least one park that I regularly go to."

Social connection and gathering spaces

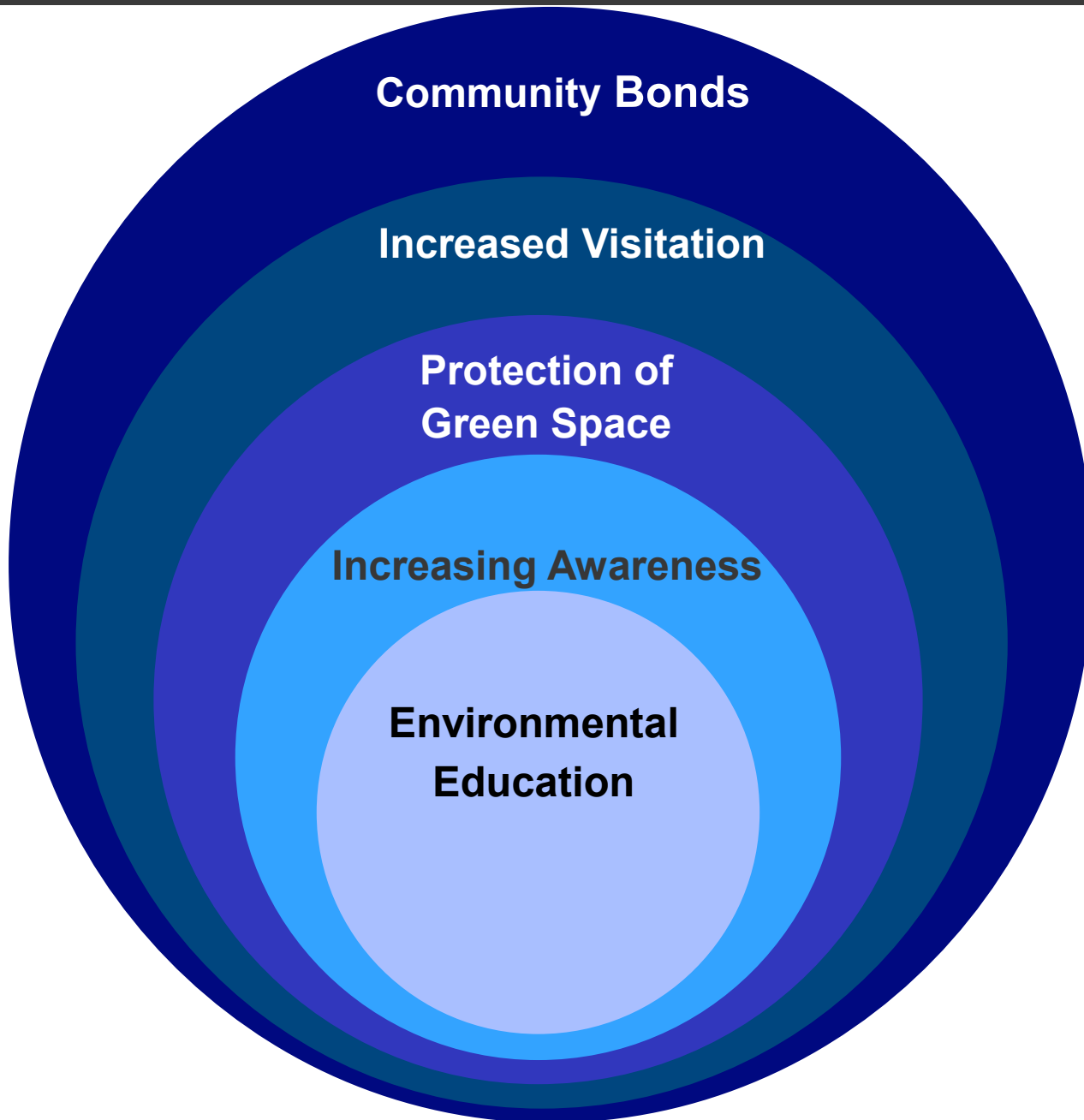
"In winter, park staff encourage younger kids to interact with the nature they are in. It's free. They provide hot cocoa. For the ages missing, in nature, all you need is proper covering up. The reason that people say there's nothing to do is that they're not teaching them how to interact during the winter."

Winter visits

"Sometimes it gets super loud in parks, I wished they had a quiet area where people can relax and read books in a calm environment."

Doing nothing

Environmental Education Nurtures Positive Outcomes



Community Bonds

“There aren’t enough spaces to connect and be together.”

Increased Visitation

Education activities will bring young people to parks.

Protection

Informed park advocates have interest in natural systems.

Increasing Awareness

New knowledge helps young people gain understanding of the environment.

Environmental Education

- Service opportunities
- Park programs
- Citizen Science

Discussion Questions

- How can the Regional Parks Policy Plan support these recommendations?
- How can other Council policies coordinate to support these recommendations?
- How can our region plan for more connected, welcoming connections to nature for our residents?





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