

Minutes

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Meeting date: December 7, 2023

Time: 4:00 PM

Location: 390 Robert Street

Members present:

Chair, Tony Yarusso,
at large

Monica Dillenburg, District A

Robert Moeller, District B

Cana Yang, District C

Tess Bouska, District D

Vacant, District E

Cecily Harris, District F

Anthony Taylor, District G

Vacant, District H

Susan Vento, Council Liaison

= present

Call to order

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Yarusso called the regular meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order.

Agenda approved

Committee members did not have any comments or changes to the agenda. **Motion carried.**

Approval of minutes

It was moved by Dillenburg, seconded by Taylor to approve the minutes of the November 2, 2023, regular meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. **Motion carried.**

Public invitation

No public comment.

Business

1. **2023-295:** Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund, Battle Creek Regional Park (McGuiness), Ramsey County

It was moved by Moeller, seconded by Harris, that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve a grant of up to \$161,728 to Ramsey County to acquire a 2.91-acre parcel located at 0 Ogden Avenue in Saint Paul for Battle Creek Regional Park.
2. Authorize the Executive Director of Community Development to execute the grant agreement and restrictive covenant on behalf of the Council.

Jessica Lee, Senior Planner, gave an overview of Business Item 2023-295. Ramsey County requested a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund (PAOF) grant on November 7, 2023, to fund the acquisition of a 2.91-acre parcel for Battle Creek Regional Park. Battle Creek Regional Park is located in the southeast portion of Ramsey County in portions of St. Paul and Maplewood and contains nearly 1900 acres. The regional park is known for its Winter Recreation Area, Waterworks Park, dog park, trails, and large playground and play areas. Ramsey County recently amended their long-range plan to add acreage to their boundary, which included the subject parcel.

Commissioner Harris requested more information about the property location on the map with

relation to the Mississippi River Bluff area. Scott Yonke, Planning and Development Director, Ramsey County Parks, shared that the map in the presentation is not current.

Council Member Vento shared her appreciation for this acquisition. Commissioner Taylor shared his excitement about Ramsey County Parks and Battle Creek Park development.

Chair Yarusso asked if the item needs to specify the grant funding source.

Chair Yarusso proposed that the item be amended to specify that the funding will come from the Parks Acquisition Opportunity Fund (PAOF).

Motion carried as amended.

2. **2023-296:** Washington County, Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail Long-Range Plan and St. Croix Valley Regional Trail Long-Range Plan Amendment

It was moved by Dillenburg, seconded by Harris, that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail Long-Range Plan.
2. Approve the St. Croix Valley Regional Trail Long-Range Plan Amendment.
3. Require Washington County, prior to initiating any construction, to send preliminary plans to the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager.
4. Request that the County send to the Council for the Council's records the Joint Powers Agreement between the County and Department of Natural Resources for use of the Brown's Creek State Trail once it has been executed.
5. Advise the County to consider implementing the recommendations for solar resources and transportation in the Advisory Comments section of the business item.

Tracey Kinney, Senior Planner, shared an overview of Business Item 296. Washington County's Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail Search Corridor and the planned St. Croix Valley Regional Trail are located centrally on the eastern boundary of the Regional Parks System and Washington County. The Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail was designated as a search corridor in 2010, as part of the development of the Metropolitan Council's 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan (Policy Plan) update. It was extended 6.8 miles during the 2020 Policy Plan Update and System's Addition process. The St. Croix Valley Regional Trail has a long-range plan approved in 2005.

The 14-mile, Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail will extend north from the planned 17.4-mile St. Croix Valley Regional Trail, for a combined total of over 31 miles. The Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail begins in downtown Afton and extends northward to the St. Croix Boom Site. The trails will provide access to and scenic views of the St. Croix River, a federally designated National Wild and Scenic Riverway, as well as the St. Croix Savannah Scientific and Natural Area, and Bayport Wildlife Management Area.

The total cost to develop the Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail Long-Range Plan and St. Croix Valley Regional Trail Long-Range Plan Amendment is approximately \$13,136,350 including \$11,700,000 for development and \$1,429,250 for acquisitions. If the preferred alignment of the Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail is deemed not feasible, then the County will pursue the 5.8-mile interim alignment segment. The total cost to develop the interim alignment is approximately \$2,018,600 including \$1,623,300 for development and \$395,300 for acquisitions.

The total cost for operations and maintenance of both trails is \$89,200 annually.

Commissioner Moeller asked if the property on the east side is in Washington County or if it is Wisconsin. Commissioners confirmed it is in Wisconsin, though the trail does not cross into Wisconsin. There is a separate, new Stillwater Lift Bridge Loop Trail that connects Minnesota and Wisconsin over two bridges. It crosses both the St. Croix Crossing Bridge and the historic Lift Bridge.



Chair Yarusso asked if there is anything in the plan that recognizes the National Wild and Scenic Riverway status of the river. Kinney responded that more planning will come as the trail is developed. Commissioner Harris asked if Met Council funding pays for interim improvements. Chair Yarusso shared that only one route can be paid for, and if the selected route is the interim it will be paid for.

Commissioner Harris asked if the proposed action #5 is common, to implement the recommendations for solar resources. Emmett Mullin shared that the Council does have staff that are focused on the promotion of solar resources.

Commissioner Taylor commented on the economic benefits and impact of longer bicycle trails connecting multiple cities, as well as the lack of access to bike shops near trails, including in the City of Afton.

Connor Schaefer, Senior Planner, Washington County, addressed development around the trail.

Commissioner Taylor asked if there has been any coordination with Saint Paul Schools, as trail usage and active transportation has been considered a priority. Washington County's planning office has engaged with several Saint Paul schools and has existing relationships to build upon.

Council Member Vento asked if there has been any engagement with the tribal nations. They were contacted with a request for engagement. Washington County staff says they will continue to cultivate these relationships.

Chair Yarusso asked about the coordination with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Chair Yarusso asked if there are any trails that are located outside of road right-of-way.

Commissioner Taylor asked for the definition of long-range regarding planning. Chair Yarusso replied that it would be until it is amended next.

Emmett Mullin commented on the increased development of regional trails in Washington County.

Motion carried.

Information

1. Regional Development Guide, Regional Parks System and Scenario Planning Analysis

Emmett Mullin, Senior Manager, Regional Parks, shared a short presentation related to Scenario Planning and Regional Parks and Trails analysis. Mullin began with the draft regional parks objectives. The three levels of goals are working regional goals, draft parks objectives, and existing parks policies. Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst, shared information about 2023 engagement work. The key parks and trails topics were acquisition, protection, and use. Kelly then shared information about the connections to regional goals. Tracey Kinney, Senior Planner, shared information about the regional growth scenarios and the connection to the key parks and trails topics of acquisition, protection, and use. Mullin then shared the connections of the topics to land use. Mullin then asked Commissioners for their feedback regarding what is important and what staff should be paying attention to.

Commissioner Dillenburg commented on the importance of communication and information for residents. She also asked for a double checkmark on slide five under "use".

Chair Yarusso commented on acquisitions and use, as well as potential impediments in policy regarding subdivision.

Commissioner Harris commented that all regional trails are paved and she would appreciate more unpaved trails for pedestrians. She also commented on the impact of trails on wildlife.

Chair Yarusso commented on the growth and use scenarios and the consideration of flexibility

in the system.

Commissioner Taylor asked if there is data available regarding growth patterns and the regional parks systems. Commissioner Harris commented on funding disparities for parks in the region. Taylor and Harris both commented on where members of Ramsey and Washington County recreate outside of their counties. Chair Yarusso commented on the funding for building new trails.

Reports

1. Chair Yarusso reported that this historical culture study will likely be at a February meeting. He also shared that the MPOSC appointment process is in progress.

2. Commission Members

Commissioner Harris shared information about the Glacier Hills Regional Trail planning process and public feedback. The proposed Glacier Hills Regional Trail would connect the cities of Marine on St. Croix and Hugo.

Commissioner Moeller asked if there have been any updates regarding virtual meeting participation.

3. Council Liaison

No report.

4. Staff

Emmett Mullin shared that staff are planning to organize virtual informational meetings regarding the Parks Policy Plan. These meetings will be short and interspersed between the Commissions regular monthly meetings. Mullin also shared that information regarding commissioner appointments is forthcoming. Mullin also shared that the Council is currently working on the legislative bonding request.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 5:56 p.m.

Certification

I hereby certify that the foregoing narrative and exhibits constitute a true and accurate record of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting of December 7, 2023.

Approved this 4th day of January 2023.

Council contact:

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