

Business Item

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Meeting Date: August 1, 2024

Business Item: 2024-192 JT

2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, Release for Public Comment

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: Minn. Stats. §§ 473.145 and 473.147

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Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Parks

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council release the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Plan for public review and comment.

Background

This item is part of the Imagine 2050 plan and will be brought forward as part of the consolidated action with the same business item for the governing body of the Metropolitan Council. Each of the committees will review and take action on specific components of Imagine 2050.

The Metropolitan Council is nearing an important milestone in its work on the 2050 Regional Development Guide, Imagine 2050. On August 14, 2024, the Council intends to release a draft of Imagine 2050 for public comment (Table 1). Like the current Regional Development Guide, Thrive MSP 2040, Imagine 2050 will help guide the orderly growth and development of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Imagine 2050 will include each of the Council's system and policy plans, including regional parks and trails, transportation, water resources, and housing.

Table 1: Schedule for finalizing Imagine 2050

Date/Timing	Milestone
August 14, 2024	Metropolitan Council authorizes release for public comment
August 15, 2024	Public comment draft posted
September 25, 2024	Public hearing
October 7, 2024	Public comment period closes
Varies	Final public comment reports prepared
February 12, 2025	Metropolitan Council adoption

At the August 1, 2024, Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC) meeting, Met Council staff will provide an overview of the public comment (90%) draft of the 2050 Regional

Parks and Trails Policy Plan, with a particular focus on new and different elements of the draft 2050 plan as compared to the existing 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan (Attachment 1 shows a summary of changes).

The draft 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan is the result of numerous discussions with regional park implementing agencies, the Metropolitan Council’s Committee of the Whole, Community Development Committee, and MPOSC, as well as extensive outreach to prioritized communities. Engagement with MPOSC on the 2050 Regional Development Guide began in August 2022, with a focus on regional values, vision, and goals, and has continued since.

As part of the planned integration of the policy plan into Imagine 2050, Met Council staff have reviewed draft content to ensure it is fundamentally oriented to objectives, policies, and actions. Content that is contextual, procedural, or includes more detailed requirements is proposed to be moved into the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook. Council staff shared an overview of the draft planning handbook with MPOSC at the June meeting. Staff will return to MPOSC with an update on the draft planning handbook this fall.

Following the public comment period, scheduled to end on October 7, 2024, Council staff will prepare public comment reports and refine draft policy plan content as appropriate. The Regional Development Guide is proposed for adoption on February 12, 2025.

As noted, MPOSC engagement on the 2050 Regional Development Guide began in August 2022, with focused discussions on updating the Regional Parks Policy Plan beginning in October 2022. Council staff sought the advice of MPOSC and shared the advice of regional park implementing agencies, other Council committees, and other stakeholders in each of these engagements. A summary of the engagement appears in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Regional Development Guide engagement with Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Date	Focus
October 6, 2022	Regional vision, values, and goals; kick-off the Regional Parks Policy Plan update process; gather input on key topics and issues to inform policy plan workgroups
March 2, 2023	Council-endorsed regional values and vision statements; Regional Parks Policy Plan project timeline; proposal for regional park implementing agency-Council policy plan workgroups.
April 6, 2023	Small group activities focused on developing vision, mission, and values for the regional parks and trails system.
June 1, 2023	Developing shared regional goals and policy area objectives
August 3, 2023	Regional goals; regional parks and trails system vision, mission, and values; the development of a community, stakeholder and public engagement plan; launch of two more policy plan workgroups
November 2, 2023	Outcomes of policy plan workgroups; draft regional parks and trails objectives; preview remaining policy plan workgroups
January 4, 2024	Proposal for engaging MPOSC in early 2024, schedule for finalizing the Regional Development Guide, revised set of draft parks objectives
February 1, 2024	Revised set of draft parks objectives, subset of the draft objectives surrounding the Climate and Natural Systems topic, local forecasts
March 7, 2024	Revised draft regional parks and trails objectives; emerging ideas on policies and actions; background information on the existing Regional Parks Policy Plan and how components of it may



	change going forward
April 4, 2024	Revised regional parks and trails objectives; emerging ideas on regional parks and trails policies and actions; emerging thinking on a Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook
May 2, 2024	Overview of the draft 60% Regional Parks and Trails Plan; deeper dives into section 7 (Recreation, Facilities, and Programming) and section 8 (Finance)
June 6, 2024	Overview of the draft Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook; deeper dives into section 3(Natural Systems) and section 4 (Climate Resilience)
July 11, 2024	Deeper dives into section 2 (System plan), section 5 (Planning), and section 6 (System protection), and associated content in the draft planning handbook

Minnesota law requires the Council to conduct a comprehensive review of the Regional Parks Policy Plan at least every four years (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147). Completion of the policy plan update, as an integrated part of *Imagine 2050*, is expected in early 2025.



Attachment 1. Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan – Summary of Changes

This Summary of Changes provides an overview of the significant revisions proposed as part of the *2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan*, which is considered a chapter of the Regional Development Guide, *Imagine 2050*. This summary should be used to help navigate the draft Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan. This update includes:

- Regional Parks and Trails System state of the Regional Parks and Trails System
- Regional Parks and Trails vision, mission, values, and objectives
- New or updated policies and actions:
 - System Plan
 - Natural Systems
 - Climate Resilience
 - Planning
 - System Protection
 - Recreation, Facilities, and Programming
 - Finance
- A new regional parks and trails sub-classification of Special features: Cultural landscapes.
- The development of a Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook (Planning Handbook) that includes process and criteria content. The Handbook will be the focus of a Fall Metropolitan Parks and Open Space presentation.

Below is a more detailed walkthrough of the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan changes organized by section.

Section 1: Overview of the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

Location in Draft Plan	Summary of Changes
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated: Overview of the Regional Parks and Trails System, including all system facts and totals
System Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated: Table 1-1: Regional Parks and Trails System state and regional funding investments, 1974-2024 - \$1.25 billion
State of the System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added: The state of the Regional Parks and Trails System
Vision, Mission, Values, Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added: Regional Parks and Trails System vision, mission, values, and objectives.
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moved: Regional Parks and Trails System research and engagement summary to Planning Handbook

Section 2: System Plan Policy and Actions

Location in Draft Plan	Summary of Changes
Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added: New policy and actions to describe existing system plan management to better support the Regional Parks and Trails System.
Overview of System Plan language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moved: Minnesota Outdoor Recreation System to Planning Handbook



<p>Action 1: Review and update system plan, classifications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidated: Regional park and trail unit definitions and descriptions into shorter descriptions, drawing from content in the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan’s chapters 2, 3, 4, and 7. • Added: Cultural landscapes sub-classification • Updated: Four “implementation status” categories that make up the system plan, including all the associated lists and maps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Existing Regional Parks System facilities ○ Planned Regional Parks System facilities that are not yet open to the public ○ Regional Parks System boundary adjustments ○ Regional Park search areas and Regional Trail search corridors • Updated: 2050 Regional Parks and Trails System Plan Summary • Updated: System level changes • Updated: Estimated costs to complete the system - \$3 billion, as required by State Statute • Updated: Capital improvement plan, as required by State Statute.
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Section Three: Natural Systems Policy and Actions

Location in Draft Plan	Summary of Changes
Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added: New policy and actions to identify and protect natural systems lands in perpetuity for the region. • Updated and reframed: Existing “Siting and Acquisition” policy and strategies within Natural Systems policy.
Action 1: Locate and acquire land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modified: Council commitment to partnering with regional park implementing agencies to locate and acquire lands with natural features, access to water, or restoration potential for conservation, recreation, and protection • Added: Narrative around system addition factors of equity, geographic distribution, and natural system.
Action 2: Research natural systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added: Council commitment to providing regional park implementing agencies with research and data to better inform restoration and protection of natural systems.
Action 3: Coordinate support for natural systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added: Council commitment to coordinate support for protection, restoration, and maintenance of natural systems work across the Regional Parks and Trails System.

Section Four: Climate Resilience Policy and Actions

Location in Draft Plan	Summary of Changes
Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added: New policy and actions that promote resilience to climate change and outline Council commitments.



Action 1: Advance climate action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added: Council commitment to support regional park implementing agencies' efforts to advance climate work through partnership and collaboration.
Action 2: Research climate impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added: Council commitment to partner with regional park implementing agencies to research the regional parks and trails systems impacts on climate change
Action 3: Drive awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added: Council commitment to partner with regional park implementing agencies to develop strategies and share stories that increase public awareness of the regional parks and trails system's role in climate mitigation and adaptation.
Action 4: Climate and Environmental Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added: Council commitment to incorporate equity into the climate change conversation by gathering perspectives from historically underserved communities and shaping it into future actions.

Section Five: Planning Policy and Actions

Location in Draft Plan	Summary of Changes
Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy and Action 2 (Enhanced multimodal access) language largely remain the same
Action 1: Long-range plan requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moved: Details of long-range plan requirements and amendment processes to Planning Handbook. Updated: Brief descriptions of Focused long-range plan requirements and Administrative process for minor long-range plan amendments
Joint Powers Agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moved: Existing Joint Powers Agreements strategy to Planning Handbook
Cost Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removed: Existing Cost Sharing strategy.

Section Six: System Protection Policy and Actions

Location in Draft Plan	Summary of Changes
Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy and supporting language largely remain the same
Action 2: Conversions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conversion language streamlined and clarified but largely remains the same Moved: Existing Reimbursement for contamination strategy to Grant Administration Guide Moved: Existing Environmental site assessments strategy to the Grant Administration Guide.
Action 3: Telecomm. Towers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process for Telecommunication towers largely remains the same.
Action 4: Placement of Utilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated: Language on regional wastewater infrastructure Added: Easement criteria to be consistent with Council practice.

Section Seven: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy and Actions



Location in Draft Plan	Summary of Changes
Action 1: Increase equity in programs, activities, and places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added: Council commitment to developing opportunities, programs, and spaces that strive to uplift community connections to the outdoors while counteracting barriers and harm placed on underrepresented communities
Action 2: Build relationships between people and natural systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added: Council commitment to support the conservation and restoration of natural systems alongside leisure, play, and creative opportunities in ways that connect people to each other and the outdoors Removed: “Traditional” activities list Moved: Portions of existing Recreation, Activities, and Facilities policy to Planning Handbook <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process for adding new activities Definition for off-road vehicles and enterprise facility guidance
Action 3: Establish and broaden cross sector opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added: Council commitment to providing a wide spectrum of connections and partnerships in the outdoors through recreation, arts, programming, transit, public health, education, stewardship, and community
Action 4: Raise Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added: Action that expands how we connect people to regional parks and trails with a focus on underrepresented communities through awareness building
Action 5: Trail system coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened: Commitment to better coordinate the Regional Trail System with the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network.

Section 8: Finance Policy and Actions

Location in Draft Plan	Summary of Changes
Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated: Policy statement Updated and reordered: Content including four statutory requirements followed by five actions. Removed: Language that was redundant with Grant Administration Guide.
Existing RPPP Strategy 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removed: Reimbursement limitations strategy; no longer legal
Action 2: Equity considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated: Equity considerations and expanded Council commitment to Equity Grant Program Moved: Equity toolkit language to Planning Handbook
Action 3: Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased: Program cap for Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund to \$2 million for Parks and Trails Legacy Fund and \$3 million for Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund



Action 4: Regional funding commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added: Council commitment to actively analyze its regional funding budget strategy and pursue increasing regional funding commitment for the system wherever possible
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Section Nine: 2025-2028 Workplan

Summary of Changes

Added the following 12 items to the 2025-2028 workplan:

1. Develop process to create a small set of indicators at the Objective level to measure progress toward our key Regional Park and Trail System priorities.
2. Explore establishment of a Special feature – Historical landscape sub-classification
3. Explore establishment of a Special feature – Open space/natural systems sub-classification
4. Convene regional park implementing agencies to develop cultural resources inventory requirement for long-range planning. Continue to engage American Indian Tribes and communities for advice and direction.
5. Continue to convene a trail coordination workgroup, supporting the development of a more coordinated, integrated, and connected regional trails system and Regional Bicycle Transportation Network.
6. Create regional guidelines for e-bike use on regional trails.
7. Explore system-wide wayfinding and signage minimum requirements.
8. Explore establishment of system-wide Asset Preservation Plan.
9. Continue to pursue Pay-Go for greater flexibility to fund a wider range of activities and programs.
10. Explore changing/reducing the local match requirement for the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Program, as state rules allow.
11. Continue discussion of strategic funding for the Regional Parks and Trails System.
12. Implement the 2025 Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study.

