

Minutes

Special Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Meeting date: July 11, 2024

Time: 4:00 PM

Location: 390 Robert Street

Members present:

Chair, Tony Yarusso,
at large

Monica Dillenburg, District A

Robert Moeller, District B

Tess Bouska, District C

David Yakes, District D

Chris Suerig, District E

Cecily Harris, District F

Anthony Taylor, District G

Amanda Duerr, 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 at 4:02pm.

Agenda approved

Committee members did not have any comments or changes to the agenda. Agenda approved.

Approval of minutes

It was moved by Suerig, seconded by Yakes to approve the minutes of the June 6, 2024, regular meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. **Motion carried.**

Public invitation

None.

Business

1. **2024-168:** Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Long-Range Plan, Dakota County (Tracey Kinney)

Kinney gave a presentation on the Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Long-Range Plan for Dakota County as outlined in the materials provided.

Yakes asked about engagement that was done with the communities listed and if they were in-person. Lil Leatham, principal planner at Dakota County, contracted with Upper Sioux to do a survey for sacred and sensitive areas and included a map of areas to avoid. She noted the park is lightly developed and they can protect areas of higher sensitivity, while maintaining recreational quality.

Yakes asked about the development and acquisition costs under consideration. Leatham confirmed that he was tracking the costs correctly.

Vento commented that Dakota County does a great job with parks and trails. She recommended that park agencies and the Council engage in emergency preparedness conversations, as it relates to caring for our elderly and others in need when emergencies occur. She encouraged staff to think about emergency phones, connectivity, and what else might be needed. She also suggested looking at weather preparedness.

Taylor discussed accessibility for all users and talked about all-terrain wheelchairs. He asked

if the County has plans to acquire some. Specifically, Taylor mentioned the cost concerns of all-terrain wheelchairs. Leatham discussed accessibility challenges at this park, especially at the boat launch and fishing piers. Dakota County is working on improvements to ease access, as well as accessible bathrooms, picnic shelters, and parking lots.

Nicki Giesler, Dakota County Park Director, shared the work they are doing with the DNR. She reported that Dakota County recently purchased two all-terrain wheelchairs. They will be initially used at Lebanon Hills. They will be rolled out soon and will also be available at other parks in the future. Yakes asked about how Dakota County plans to advertise these wheelchairs? Giesler shared that they coordinate an outreach and check-out program through their website.

Moeller reinforced Vento's comments on safety preparedness, and he noted that park agencies should have AED defibrillators and Narcan available at our parks. Giesler responded they have some at the parks and are getting more AED's. Additionally, they are working on making Narcan available, but the challenge is that it can only be administered by emergency professionals. They are working on qualifying Rangers with the ability to carry Narcan.

Chair Yarusso asked, regarding tribal consultation, and shared support for protecting sensitive and sacred sites. Leatham explained that when sites are sensitive, they're concerned about disturbances from the public.

Chair Yarusso asked about the possibility of marking sensitive areas. Leatham noted that these recommendations are going to be included in the more detailed landscape plans.

Chair Yarusso asked about how Dakota County will be accountable for protecting these sites. Giesler stated that they've hired their first indigenous consultant and liaison to help navigate these areas.

Chair Yarusso asked about the 22-acre inholdings being removed from the long-range plan and what is being lost. Leatham explained this parcel was not needed for recreational opportunities or water conservation/protection of steep slopes.

Chair Yarusso discussed lands in Goodhue County that are within the park boundaries and asked if they are owned by Dakota County. Leatham stated there is interest in protecting lands along the river with steep slopes. If there are willing sellers, they would like to purchase these areas for conservation and watershed benefits.

The motion was moved by Duerr, seconded by Yakes, that Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Long-Range Plan.
2. Approve the boundary adjustment removing 22-acres of private inholdings and adding 77-acres of Dakota County-owned parkland within the Miesville Ravine Park Reserve boundary.
3. Advise the County to consider implementing the recommendations for solar resources and the Minnesota DNR in the Advisory Comments section of the business item.

Chair Yarusso called for a vote. **Motion carried.**

Information

1. 2023 Regional Park System Annual Use Estimate (Darcie Vandegrift and Ismael Ramirez)

Vandegrift introduced Ismael Ramirez, who will take her place going forward, as she will be moving into a new position within the Metropolitan Council. They gave a presentation on the 2023 Regional Park System Annual Use Estimate as outlined in the materials and presentation which noted that the visitation was moderately flat and without increases in visitation.

Ramirez further discussed the Annual Use Estimates for the 2023 Regional Park System and



discussed the upcoming 2025 Visitor Survey process going forward.

Vento asked about the numbers of K-12 school groups visiting and the programs provided. Vandegrift discussed the Council's research program and data collection with the once-every-five-year Visitor Survey versus the annual use estimates. Vento felt it would be interesting data to have in a future study.

Yakes asked about thoughts on using artificial intelligence to help with visitor counts. Vandegrift discussed a past research effort using 'street light data', with anonymized cell phone data. However, there were challenges that emerged with privacy setting changes that prevent using this system as an effective way to count parks and trails visits today. She feels the question needs to be asked periodically as technology is advanced.

Dillenburg discussed measuring in different seasons and talked about finding another way to measure the use of our parks and trails. For example, it would be interesting to learn how people find out about parks.

Vandegrift discussed anomalies and sharing what they see with the implementing agencies. She also discussed questions asked in the Visitor Study that include questions on how people found out about the park.

Chair Yarusso discussed the equity grant money given to implementing agencies and stated it would be great to study the effectiveness of these investments.

Taylor stated he felt that winter use is increasing and some of this may be because of climate change.

Chair Yarusso suggested staff could put together a list of what the Commission is interested in learning more about and measuring.

Taylor appreciated the presentation and showing the process and felt it was very helpful, especially to new members.

Mullin asked to take a moment, before some members had to leave, to poll commissioners to see if it would be acceptable to move the January 2, 2025 meeting to January 9th. Commission members agreed.

2. Draft 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Information Item (Tracey Kinney, Kevin Phan and Emmett Mullin)

Mullin, Phan and Kinney gave an update on the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan as outlined in the materials provided.

Chair Yarusso asked about a cultural resources inventory as part of the planning requirements. Do agencies use a common language around how agencies define it? Mullin discussed that this is one of the reasons staff and agencies recommended that cultural resources inventory be an item for future discussion. It was recommended to be placed in the workplan section of the plan. Further, he said that there are federal laws around the protection of cultural resources preservation, and that this is not our area of focus. Mullin stated that implementing agencies do a good job with natural resource inventory and protection. This area is a natural extension of this work, expanding to cultural resource protection and interpretation.

Moeller asked about training with staff and implementing agencies to come to consensus. Chair Yarusso stated it could benefit this commission to get some training as well. Mullin discussed resources we do have, including the Tribal State Relations Training, offered by the State of Minnesota. Commissioners expressed support for MPOSC training.

Moeller suggested language that states we support building knowledge and expertise in this area.

Dillenburg discussed sharing knowledge with the public and creating awareness. Specifically,



Dillenburg also asked about parks agency efforts to teach parks and trails etiquette, educating visitors on how best to visit and protect cultural sites.

Chair Yarusso discussed having something on our website that talks about the planning requirements and the planning process, educating the public on how this all works.

Chair Yarusso discussed the Special Feature classification and stated it makes him realize how many of our park classifications overlap, for example, park reserves with special recreation features.

Dillenburg asked if long-range plan amendments included additional costs. Mullin stated that is a great question. Chair Yarusso discussed that the Commission has set past cost thresholds for proposed Administrative plan amendment changes.

Chair Yarusso asked about older long-range plans, and whether the overall cost to update these plans is considered with need to update and amend them. What would trigger a full plan update? Chair Yarusso inquired about further conversation regarding this process. Moeller agreed.

Reports

1. Chair – Chair Yarusso noted that Glacial Hills regional trail planning effort is continuing their engagement work in Washington County.

2. Committee Members

Moeller reported that Victoria got a \$250K grant from the Bavaria Road Trail from Minnesota DNR for a one-mile trail connection that supports the Highway 5 Regional Trail, making many key connections and opening greater access to Eastern Carver County.

Moeller discussed meeting start time and suggested changing so we are not competing with rush-hour traffic. Chair Yarusso stated we could poll members.

Duerr attended the 'Party in the Park' with Commissioner Harris and stated it was a great event.

Dillenburg asked if the Summit Avenue issue will need to be discussed again. Chair Yarusso stated we don't have any official action coming to us regarding this plan.

3. Council Liaison - none

4. Staff – Mullin thanked everyone for agreeing to meet the week after July 4, and noted it makes for a quick turnaround for our next meeting on August 1, 2024.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 6:15 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 Special meeting of July 11, 2024.

Approved this 1st day of August 2024.

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