

Minutes

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Meeting date: September 5, 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, E = excused

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 4:00 p.m.

Agenda approved

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

Approval of minutes

It was moved by Harris, seconded by Dillenburg to approve the minutes of the August 1, 2024, regular meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. **Motion carried.**

Public invitation

None.

Business

1. **2024-222**, Rice Creek West Regional Trail Long-Range Plan, Anoka County (Colin Kelly)

Kelly gave a presentation of the Rice Creek West Regional Trail Long Range Plan as submitted by Anoka County, as outlined in the materials provided.

Harris asked about the proposed action #2, noting that the action was not an even exchange of land for land. The proposal included exchanging land for a facility improvement. Kelly explained that the land for facility exchange does provide an exchange worth four times the value of the land proposed to be removed. Karen Blaska, Anoka County Parks further explained that the neighbor, who is regularly dealing with issues of trash being dumped on the property under consideration is hoping to purchase the property and better secure the area.

Moeller complemented staff for this plan and the equity analysis that was done.

Yakes asked how much use this trail sees. Kelly responded the trail gets over 300,000 visits per year. Yakes asked about the number of visits and allocation of dollars to the trail. Mullin discussed the aspects of the regional trail that make it “regionally significant”. He noted that the Council staff does not conduct a “return on investment” assessment after a unit is established, but it does conduct a rigorous systems additions process prior to designation. He discussed different uses our trails have. Chair Yarusso noted that we do have data on visits.

He discussed the equity grant program and believes that this topic of return on investment evaluation would be a great area to look into.

Dillenburg asked clarifying questions about when the 0.1 acre will be removed from the park boundary. Blaska noted the timing for this is out 7-10 years, but it could happen sooner.

Chair Yarusso discussed how the land for facility exchange is tracked. Blaska noted it could be that the facility improvement could be transferred to a different segment of the trail at the time the land is removed, to ensure accountability.

Chair Yarusso asked about limited use permits with the railroad. Blaska state the limited use agreement is the “tool” the railroad uses, as they don’t like to grant easements.

Chair Yarusso asked about better maintenance of the water trail. Blaska explained that they work with the City of Fridley and their “water team” do do the highly specialized work of maintaining the waterway and removing things like downed trees.

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

1. Approve Anoka County’s Rice Creek West Regional Trail Long-Range Plan.
2. Approve the removal of a 0.1-acre, non-contiguous parcel of land within Rice Creek West Regional Trail corridor in exchange for a trail reconstruction project of greater value that will meet or exceed Americans with Disabilities Act standards within the regional trail corridor.
3. Require Anoka County, prior to initiating any construction, to send preliminary plans to the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager.
4. Advise Anoka County to coordinate planning and work with Metro Transit and the Minnesota Department of Transportation to improve crossing safety at the 69th Street intersection before committing to a tunnel at this location.
5. Advise Anoka County to consider implementing the recommendations for solar and transportation in the Advisory Comments section of the business item.

Motion carried.

2. **2024-223**, Como Regional Park Long-Range Plan, Saint Paul (Kevin Phan)

Phan gave a presentation on the Como Regional Park Long-Range Plan, submitted by the City of St. Paul, as outlined in the materials provided.

Chair Yarusso asked about ‘enterprise facilities, special recreation features and athletic fields. Mullin noted that athletic fields don’t receive regional funding and discussed enterprise facilities, i.e., water parks, golf courses, etc., and noted that they are not eligible to receive regional funding. He noted that the while the summer use of the golf course is not eligible for regional funding, investment in winter uses is allowed, i.e., cross-county skiing. Further clarification of what parts of the park are not eligible for funding was discussed. It was noted that some amenities have been approved on a case-by-case basis, i.e., disc golf, etc. Chair Yarusso noted this is something that could be discussed further in the update of the Regional Parks Policy Plan.

Duerr asked about copper wire theft and wondered whether there are strategies to ensure the lighting is adequate. Staff are experimenting with different solutions and also looking into solar, however that technology is not quite there yet.

Vento commented on the history of the land and noted it is just fascinating and hopes that the plan reflects this. She also noted the work of the Saint Paul Parks Foundation founder, Peggy Lynch, recently passed away. Vento wanted to reinforce the efforts of these volunteer organizations.

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

1. Approve the Como Regional Park Long-Range Plan.



2. Advise the City of Saint Paul to consider implementing the recommendations for solar resources and population forecasts in the Advisory Comments section of the business item.
3. Require the City of Saint Paul, prior to initiating any new development of the regional park, to send preliminary plans to the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager.

Motion carried.

Information

1. Draft Fishing Pier Grant Program: Notice of Fund Availability Information Item (Jessica Lee)

Lee gave a presentation on a draft Fishing Pier Grant Program: Notice of Fund Availability as outlined in the materials provided.

Duerr stated she was concerned with drawing for winners and the legislator's reaction. She noted criteria/eligibility should be met.

Dillenburg shared concern with all the work that goes into applications and then it's just chosen by a drawing.

Lee noted that staff have talked about this approach with the park agencies and how best to select awards. The group discussed eligibility and the amount of work it takes to complete the applications and review them. Because the use of the grant money is time sensitive, and the amount of funding available, this approach seems to work.

Chair Yarusso suggested that in the future, we come up with a policy on how to handle this type of award process.

Vento suggested touching base with Judd Schetnan, the Council's Government Affairs Director, to make sure this would be accepted by legislators.

Duerr stated she would feel more comfortable with first come, first serve.

Moeller stated this is a refreshing change on how to get something done. One concern is the 'shovel ready' requirement. Lee noted that they need to get projects done in a short timeframe because funding will expire.

Chair Yarusso asked about the DNR approvals. Blaska stated there are minimal 'hoops' to jump through with this funding, concerning DNR permitting.

Yakes asked about the equity focus and how this is done. Chair Yarusso discussed prioritized communities and the need to elevate them, as well as ensure accessibility.

Duerr felt that the actual costs need to be communicated to legislators.

Reports

1. Chair – no report.
2. Committee Members

Harris discussed the need for legislatively reauthorizing the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund and noted that CM Gail Cederberg is on the Environmental Initiative Board helping support this. She stated she's been talking with Conservation MN.
3. Council Liaison – Vento stated that the Draft 2050 Plan is out there and they're seeking input.
4. Staff – Mullin stated he will send a link to the 2050 Plan.

Mullin commented on staff working with the Art + Policy Project, working with visual and engagement artists and using buses to promote art and the Council's work. He pointed out the postcards with pictures of the artwork provided on the table for members.

Mullin discussed several upcoming events in our parks and stated he will send commissioners a list.

Mullin noted that the next MPOSC meeting will be held at Baker Park Reserve beginning at 3pm with a tour, followed by a meeting.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 5:55 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 September 5, 2024.

Approved this 3rd day of October 2024.

Council contact:

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