

Business Item

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Community Development Committee: November 18, 2024

Metropolitan Council: December 11, 2024

Business Item: 2024-306

Scott County, Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail Long-Range Plan

District(s), Member(s):	District B, Robert Moeller District 4, Deb Barber
Policy/Legal Reference:	Minn. Stat. § 473.313; <i>2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan</i> : Chapter 5, Planning Policy Strategy 1, Master Plans
Staff Prepared/Presented:	Tracey Kinney, Planning Analyst (651-602-1029)
Division/Department:	Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail Long-Range Plan (future Merriam Junction Regional Trail).
2. Approve the 0.20-mile trail extension of the Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trail (future Merriam Junction Regional Trail) amending the long-range plan to provide a seamless connection to the Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail.
3. Require Scott County, prior to initiating any construction, to send preliminary plans to the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager.
4. Advise the County to consider implementing the recommendations for the Met Council's wastewater, water, and the regional bicycle transportation network in the Advisory Comments section of the business item.

Background

Scott County's Louisville Regional Trail Search Corridor and the planned Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trail are located in the southwest part of the Regional Parks and Trails System and northwest part of Scott County. The Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail was designated as a regional trail search corridor in 2010 as part of the development of the Metropolitan Council's *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. The Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trail has a 2011 Council-approved long-range plan.

The 5.28-mile Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail will be one of the first east-west regional trail corridors constructed in the southwestern metropolitan area, closing a gap in the Scott County regional trail network (Figure 1). Once completed, the trail will connect Carver County's Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail and the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge to Scott County's Spring Lake Regional Park, Mystic Lake Casino, and Cleary Lake Regional Park via the Big Woods Regional Trail.

The purpose of this long-range plan is to outline the proposed development concept, as well as the operations and maintenance needs for the trail. This plan includes the request to change the name

of the Louisville Regional Trail Search Corridor to the interim name of Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail. Scott County's near-term goal is to provide a seamless visitor experience. To do this, a 0.20-mile extension of the Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connector Regional Trail is needed. Further, a shared name of Merriam Junction Regional Trail is included in *Imagine 2050*, to be considered by the Met Council in early 2025.

Rationale

As described in the Analysis, the Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail Long-Range Plan and Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connector Regional Trail Long-Range Plan Amendment are consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* including Chapter 5, Planning Policy Strategy 1.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail Long-Range Plan and Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connector Regional Trail Long-Range Plan Amendment advance the *Thrive* outcome of Livability by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, which enhances quality of life in the region.

Funding

The total cost to develop the Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail is approximately \$10.3 million, including \$1.2 million for acquisitions and \$9 million for development. The total cost to develop the 0.20-mile extension of the Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connector Regional Trail is \$200,000; no acquisition funding is needed to develop the trail because the trail is proposed for Scott County's road right-of-way.

Anticipated annual maintenance costs for the Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail are approximately \$31,680. Anticipated annual maintenance costs for the Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connector Regional Trail extension are \$1,200.

Funding sources for the plan implementation will come from a variety of sources, including the Council, State of Minnesota, and Scott County. The future Council and State funds are subject to future Council actions.



Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that long-range plans for regional linking trails address 13 items: boundaries, acquisition costs, demand forecast, development concept, conflicts, public services, operations, partner engagement, public engagement and participation, equity analysis, public awareness, accessibility, and Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area. The following summary analyzes the long-range plan against these requirements.

Boundaries

Scott County's Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail and planned Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trail are located in the southwest part of the Regional Park System and northwest part of Scott County (Figures 1 and 2).

The Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail begins on the west end where it connects to the planned Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trail starting at the existing multi-use Merriam Junction Regional Trail crossing. The existing trail spans U.S. Highway 169 connecting to the new trail at County Road 14. The new trail then follows County Road 14 to Marschall Road where the trail meets the Big Woods Regional Trail.

With the approval of *Imagine 2050*, the Met Council's Redevelopment Guide both trails including the existing trail crossing will be named Merriam Junction Regional Trail for one clarified wayfinding experience. After both regional trails are built and their names combined, the 7.9-mile Merriam Junction Regional Trail will connect from the City of Carver, over the Minnesota River Valley, over U.S. Highway 169, and along County Road 14 to the Big Wood Regional Trail on Marschall Road.

To implement the Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail, a 0.20-mile extension of the planned Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trail is needed to provide a seamless connection between the two trails. With this trail extension, the total mileage of the Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trail will be 2.5-miles.

Acquisition Costs

To implement the Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail plan, 20 to 30 feet of easements or limited-use permits adjacent to County Road 14 right-of-way is needed. The plan identifies 38 inholdings spanning 9.67-acres, valued at a total of \$1,228,000. The Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trail will not need additional land acquisition since the trail will be located in the Scott County-owned road right-of-way.

Demand Forecast

The eastern terminus of the Louisville – Merriam Junction Regional Trail connects to the Big Woods Regional Trail, which is the most visited trail of Scott County's three regional trails (Met Council 2023 Use Study).

Once complete, the trail will serve as a major connection between Prior Lake and the Minnesota River Valley. The west end of the trail corridor will serve residents in Carver County by way of the planned Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trail that will extend to the City of Carver. This northern area of the County is already seeing development pressure and will grow faster than other areas of the County that are farther from the Metropolitan Urban Service Area boundary and County boundary.

The population in Scott County in the 2020 census was 150,928 residents. The population is forecasted to grow to 186,000 in 2030 and 212,000 in 2040 according to Met Council population forecasts. From 2020-2040 Scott County should expect an additional 60,000 residents.

The estimated 2020 population within the 3-mile primary service area is 36,656. This area is expected to continue to grow at a rate that is as fast or faster than the overall population increase projected for the County.



Development Concept

The 5.28-mile Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail is a linking trail that consists of two segments. Segment 1 is 3.03 miles (0.9 miles of existing trail and 2.13 miles of new trail) and segment 2 is 2.25 miles of new trail. The trail will be located within a 20-30-foot corridor adjacent to the County Road 14 Highway. The new trail will match the existing portion of the trail as a ten-foot-wide, off-road, non-motorized, paved, multi-use trail (Figures 3 through 6).

Primary trail uses will include biking, hiking, dog walking, and in-line skating. A parking lot and trailhead access have been identified at the existing US Fish & Wildlife Louisville Swamp Refuge Unit parking lot in Louisville Township on the west side of the trail corridor. Wayfinding, directional signage, kiosks, and rest stops have been identified and will be updated as the trail is developed. There are a number of roadway crossings along the Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail. Each crossing will be evaluated for safety and will be designed in accordance with industry best standards.

Segment 1 connects to the 0.20-mile extension of the planned Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trails starting at the existing Merriam Junction Regional Trail crossing trail segment. The existing trail runs along 145th Street to Red Rock Drive then over U.S. Highway 169 on 147th Street, and along Louisville Road before reaching County Road 14. Beginning at County Road 14, the new trail extends east along County Road 14 to Marystown Road. Segment 1 includes plans for a number of safe driveway crossings, as well as an environmentally low-impact boardwalk wetland crossing.

From Marystown Road, Segment 2 extends along County Road 14 east to Marschall Road where the trail meets the Big Woods Regional Trail. Along the way the trail includes plans for a number of safe driveway crossings and low-impact wetland boardwalks as the trail passes between Schneider Lake and Thole Lake. The wetland boardwalk crossing will include fishing locations to provide environmentally friendly ways to access the water. The Big Woods Regional Trail connection will be planned in the future and may include a safe Marschall Road trail underpass.

Conflicts

The majority of the land adjacent to the Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail corridor is private property. Concerns may arise over safe driveway crossings. Scott County will work on a case-by-case basis with landowners to review the driveway crossing and identify strategies to ensure safety. No other major conflicts have been identified on the planned or existing sections of the trail.

Public Services

The Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail is located primarily along County Road 14 with access to nearby services and parking. The existing and unbuilt sections of the trail will not need additional services, such as sewer infrastructure, to become operational.

Operations

Anticipated maintenance costs for the Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail are approximately \$31,680 and MN River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connector Regional Trail extension is \$1,200 annually.

Partner Engagement

Scott County engaged with a wide variety of partners including Louisville Township, Jackson Township, Sand Creek Township, and Spring Lake Township, City of Shakopee, City of Prior Lake, and the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (SMSC). Partner advice and support was integrated into the public engagement themes that shaped the plan. These themes are listed in the public engagement and participation section of this report.

Public Engagement and Participation

Scott County facilitated a robust public engagement process that shaped the plan. Efforts to include local landowners and residents, who will be most directly and immediately impacted by the development of the trail, as well as typically under-served groups including low-income individuals,



people with limited-English proficiency, Hispanic residents, youth and seniors, and members of the SMSC were prioritized in engagement process.

Engagement activities included holding community conversations, engaging people on-line through a project website, presentations with community-focused groups, and holding open houses with accommodating amenities including translation, accessibility, and incentives. The overall engagement themes are listed below:

- Connect the trail to parks and places
- Add safe off-road places for residents to walk and bike
- Reduce environmental impacts of trails
- Reduce potential impacts to private property in the trail corridor
- Increase trail safety along roads and at crossings
- Reduce trail costs

Equity Analysis

Scott County conducted an equity analysis as part of the long-range plan. The advice heard during the planning process shaped the long-range plan.

Project Data

Focused engagement groups, including traditionally underserved groups, were identified on both local and regional scales. Information from previous parks visitor studies highlight that over the last ten years, Scott County Parks has had gaps in service for groups including: residents of Shakopee and Belle Plaine, people of color, individuals with less than a high school education, households with annual incomes less than \$75,000, and individuals under the age of 18 (Three Rivers Park District Park Visitor Studies 2018 and 2013).

Current reasons for under-representation in park visitation include distance from home, lack of awareness, time, and transportation options. In addition, safety concerns, language barriers, weather, cultural or religious insensitivity and discrimination, and lack of desired recreation facilities. Barriers to access for these communities have included poor physical proximity to parks, feeling unwelcome or unsafe, lack of cultural accommodations, language barriers, cost, and lack of awareness.

Public Engagement and Participation

Scott County prioritized engagement events for relevant traditionally underserved groups. These efforts and engagement themes are listed below:

- Multi-lingual support with Community Design Team applications, open houses, and in-person engagement surveys (Spanish)
- Public Engagement events were prioritized based upon the diverse audiences that were being served.
 - International Walking Club Walk Around the World (140+ individuals from various backgrounds, connecting newly immigrated families and families learning English): an international community event in Shakopee supporting diverse communities of color and new English learners
 - Scott County Fair (many people attended): serving all residents of Scott County and particularly engaging with families and County youth
 - Celebrate Jordan (approximately 1,800 people attended): a community open house that showcases businesses and organizations that specifically provide opportunities and assistance for families and residents located in the Southwest portion of the County (near Belle Plaine)

English and Spanish surveys: At the Celebrate Jordan Event and Walk Around the World Event, surveys were provided about trail use and there was an opportunity for the chance to win one of two \$50 Visa gift cards.

- Opportunities for convenient engagement with the plan including online planning process information and commenting capabilities and information hosted in the Scott County SCENE (a free newspaper provided to every Scott County resident)



- Staff encouraged diverse applicants to Community Design Team by promoting applications through community organizations and township boards

Visitors value trails for the following characteristics:

- Great scenery
- Recreation
- Health and exercise
- Time with family

Evaluation Summary

Transparency: The advice received from underserved communities shaped the final outcome of the plan. As the system grows and develops, it will be able to support these communities' needs with access to recreation, health and exercise options, and free ways to connect with relatives and peers.

Accountability: As the trail moves from a planned alignment to a developed trail, Scott County has noted in the plan the need to have consistent consideration of feedback, future engagement, and communication efforts.

Public Awareness

While the trail is being implemented, informational meetings will be held to inform the public and to provide neighbors and interested parties with the opportunity to provide input on the proposed design. Scott County will notify adjacent and region-wide residents of the trail development through press releases to the media, publications such as the Scott County SCENE, park-related mailings, brochures, and newsletters. Incorporation of multi-lingual advertising methods and signage will also be considered. Other methods to promote the use of the trail will include the County's website and the addition of the regional trail within all park and trail system maps.

Accessibility

The new trail will match the existing trail in complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act and will be affordable for all residents.

Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA)

Neither the Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail nor the Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trails are located within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area. The planning, design, and implementation requirements of the MRCCA do not apply to this portion of the Regional Parks and Trails System.

Other Council Policies and Systems – Advisory Comments

Environmental Services – Wastewater Services (Kyle Colvin, 651-269-6918)

A portion of the Louisville-Merriam Junction Trail (western portion) is presumed to be located within an easement that was purchased jointly by Metropolitan Council Parks and Environmental Services (ES) in 2013. ES's interest in the easement was/is for a potential Wastewater Resource Reclamation Facility (WRRF) outfall to the Minnesota River. It is still conceivable that this easement could still be used to facilitate an outfall. However, at the time the easement was purchased (jointly), ES was in the process of offering to purchase portions of the Mid American Festival property. However, since that time, the land was formally purchased by the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, and therefore no longer represents a potential location for a future regional WRRF. Since these circumstances are subject to change, prior to initiating any project, preliminary plans should be sent to Tim Wedin, Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager (651-602-4571) at the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services to assess the potential impacts to our interceptor system.

Environmental Services – Water Resources (Maureen Hoffman, 651-602-8026)



If the County opts to operate and maintain the trail during winter months Council staff recommend that the County include no salt or smart salting techniques to limit impacts to water bodies and vegetation.

Metropolitan Transportation Services (Joe Widing, 651-602-1822)

Currently, the proposed Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail corridor is shown as a Tier 2 corridor on the Met Council's [Regional Bicycle Transportation Network](#) (RBTN). As this long-range plan is implemented, you may wish to designate the designed trail as an official alignment on the RBTN. This can be done by Council staff through a relatively simple administrative adjustment. [Steve Elmer](#) in the Council's Metropolitan Transportation Services division can assist you in making the change anytime.



Figure 1. Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail and MN River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connector Regional Trail location in the Regional Parks and Trails System

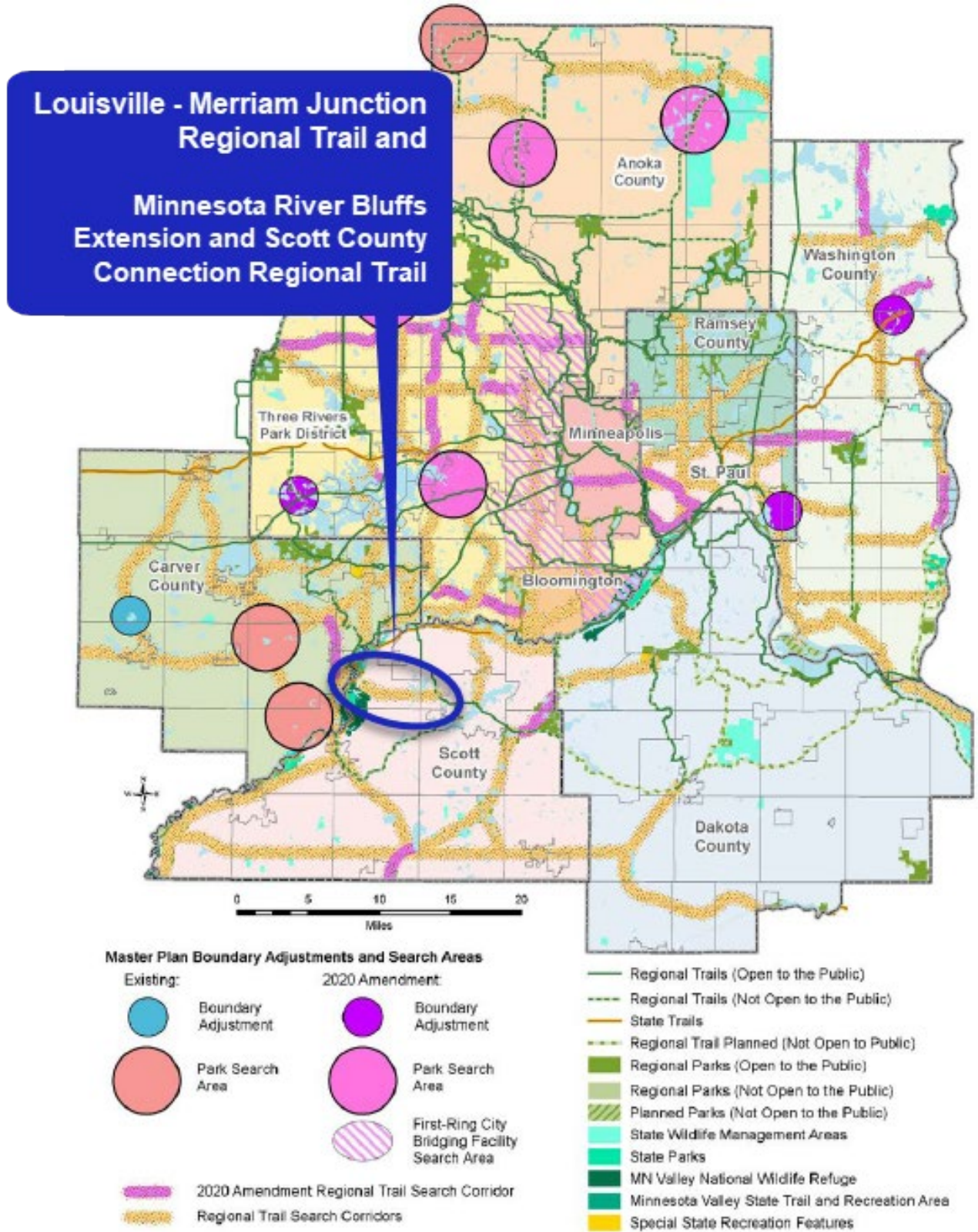


Figure 2. Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail and MN River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connector Regional Trail location in Scott County

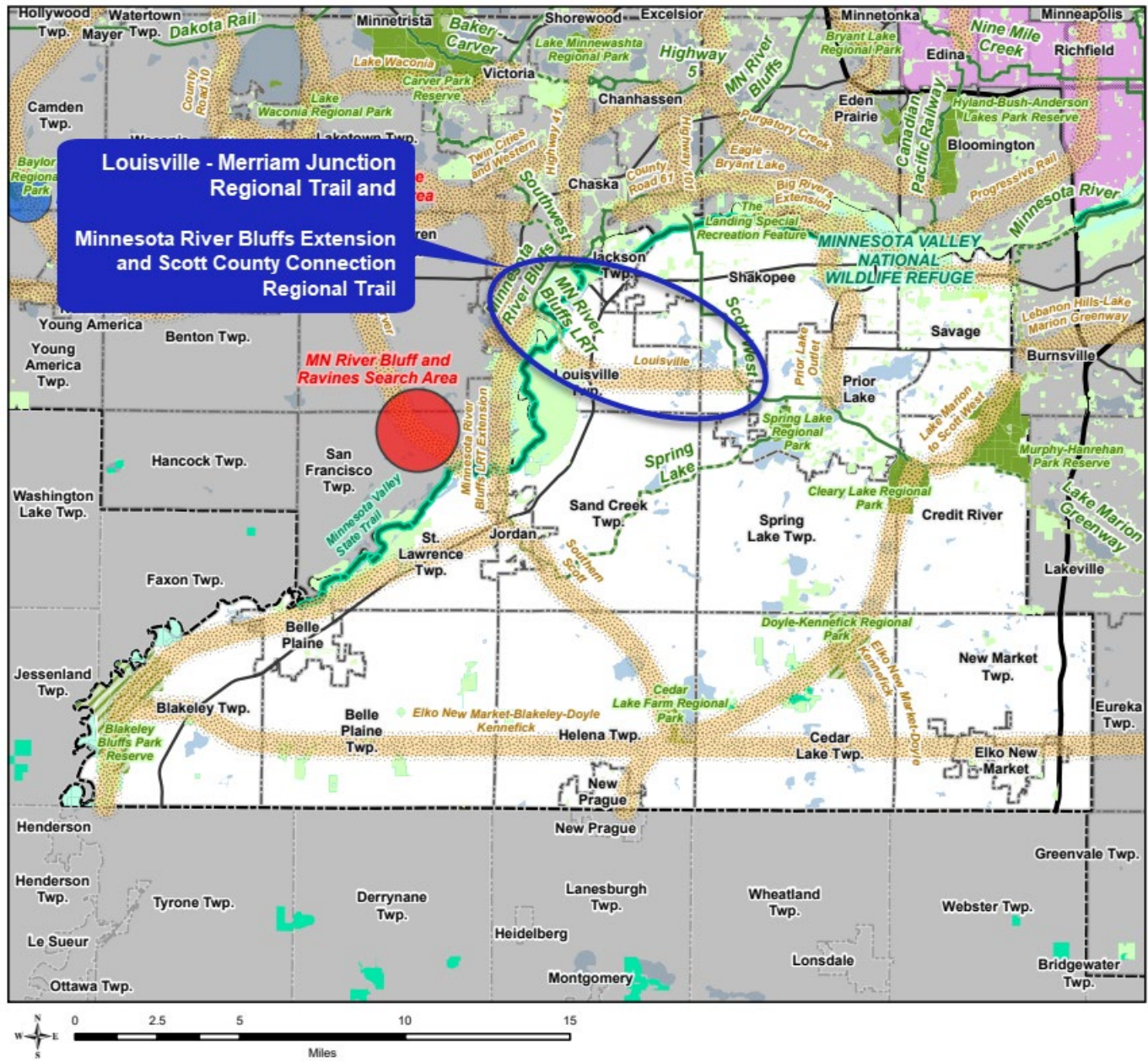
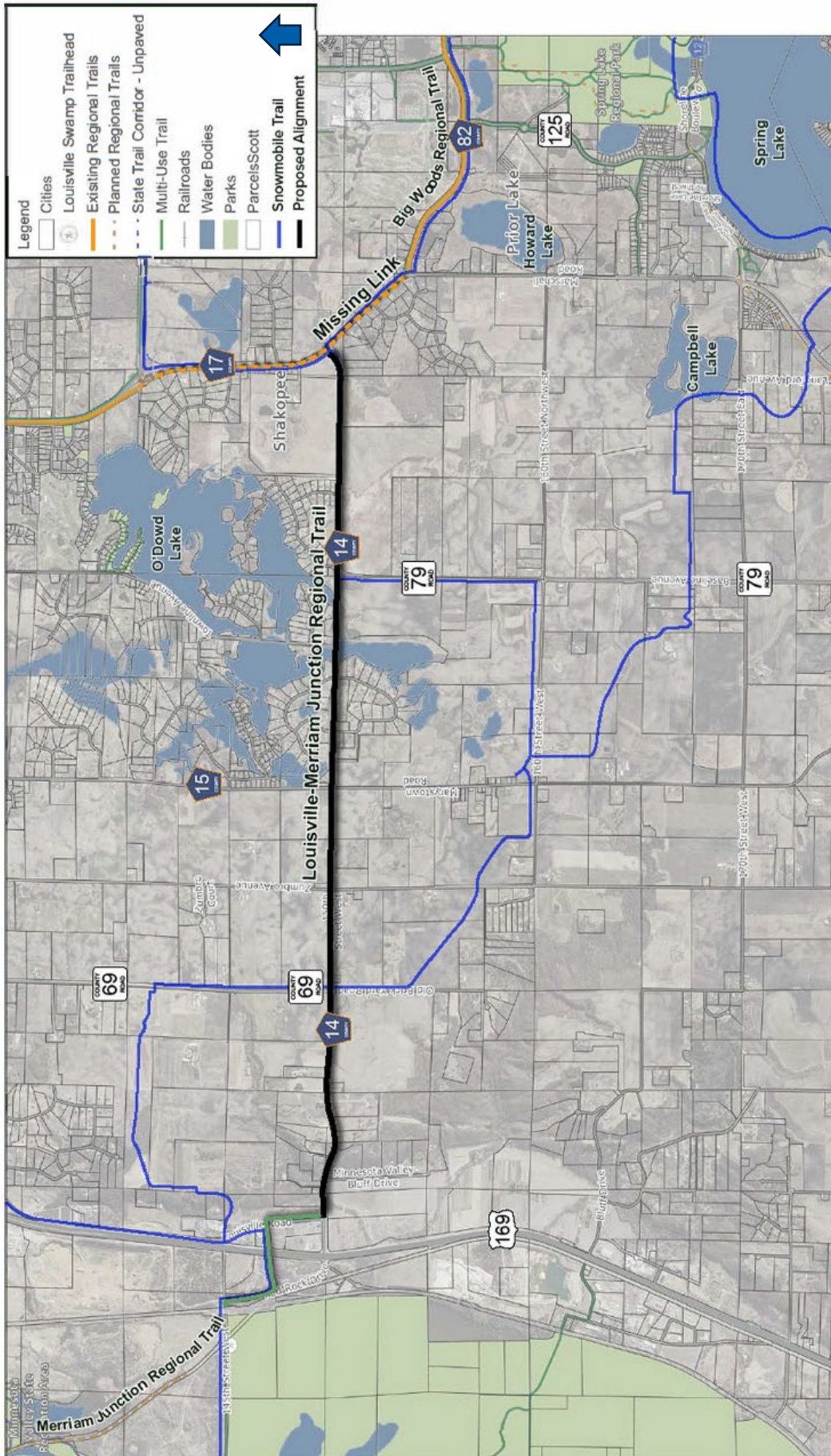


Figure 3: Louisville – Merriam Junction Regional Trail Alignment



Metropolitan Council

Figure 4: Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connector Regional Trail 0.20-mile Extension

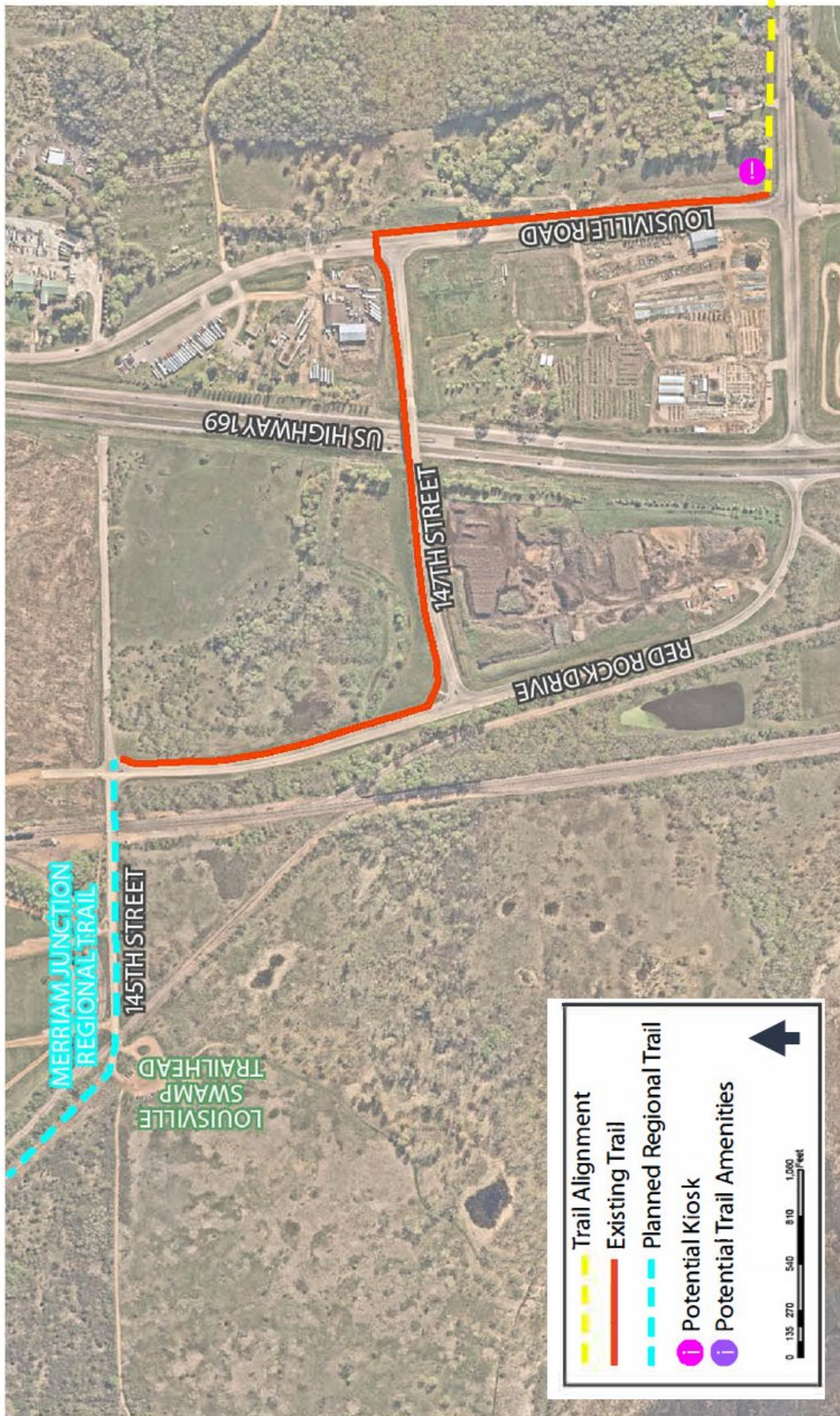


Figure 5: Louisville – Merriam Junction Regional Trail Segment 1

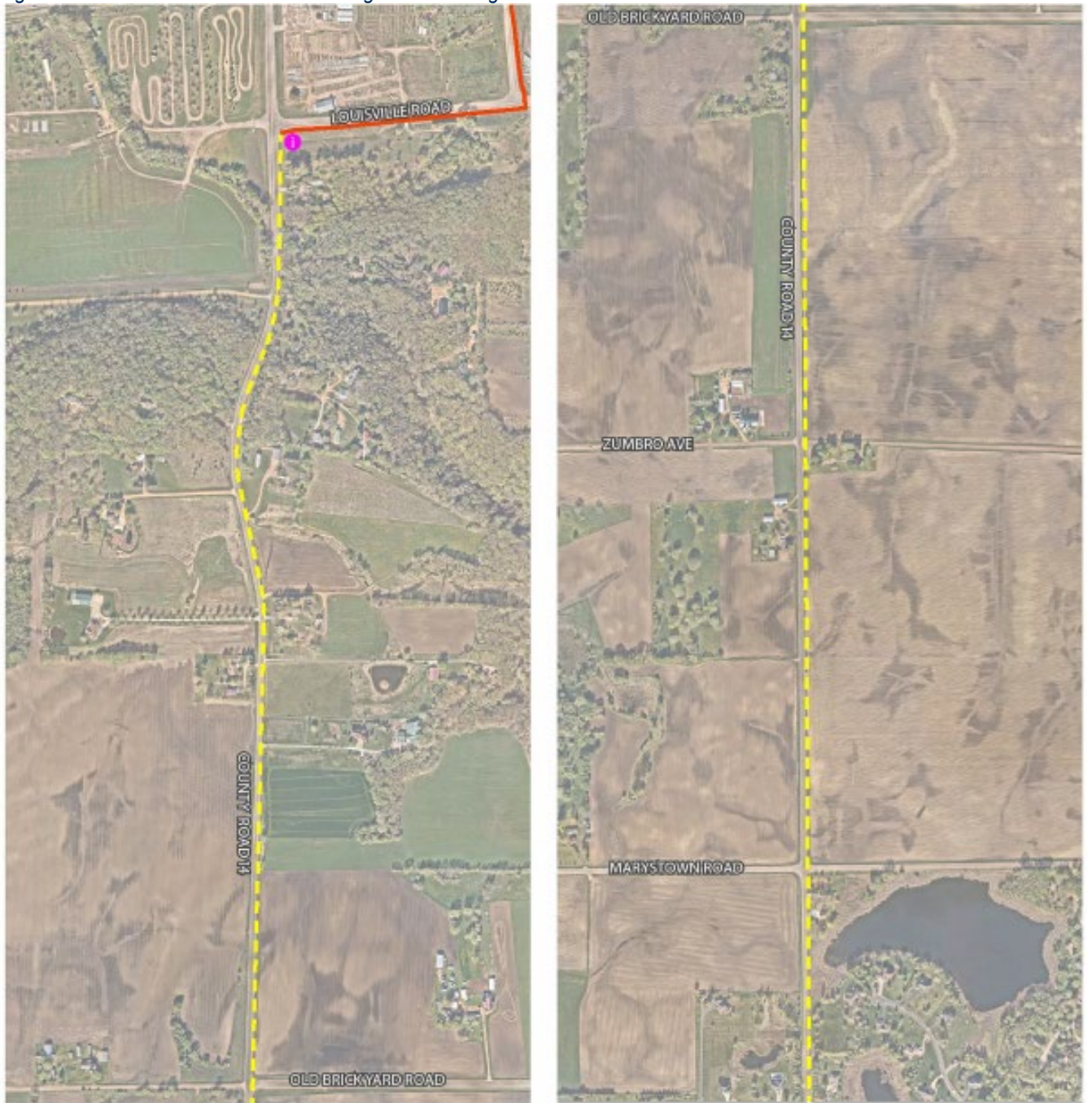
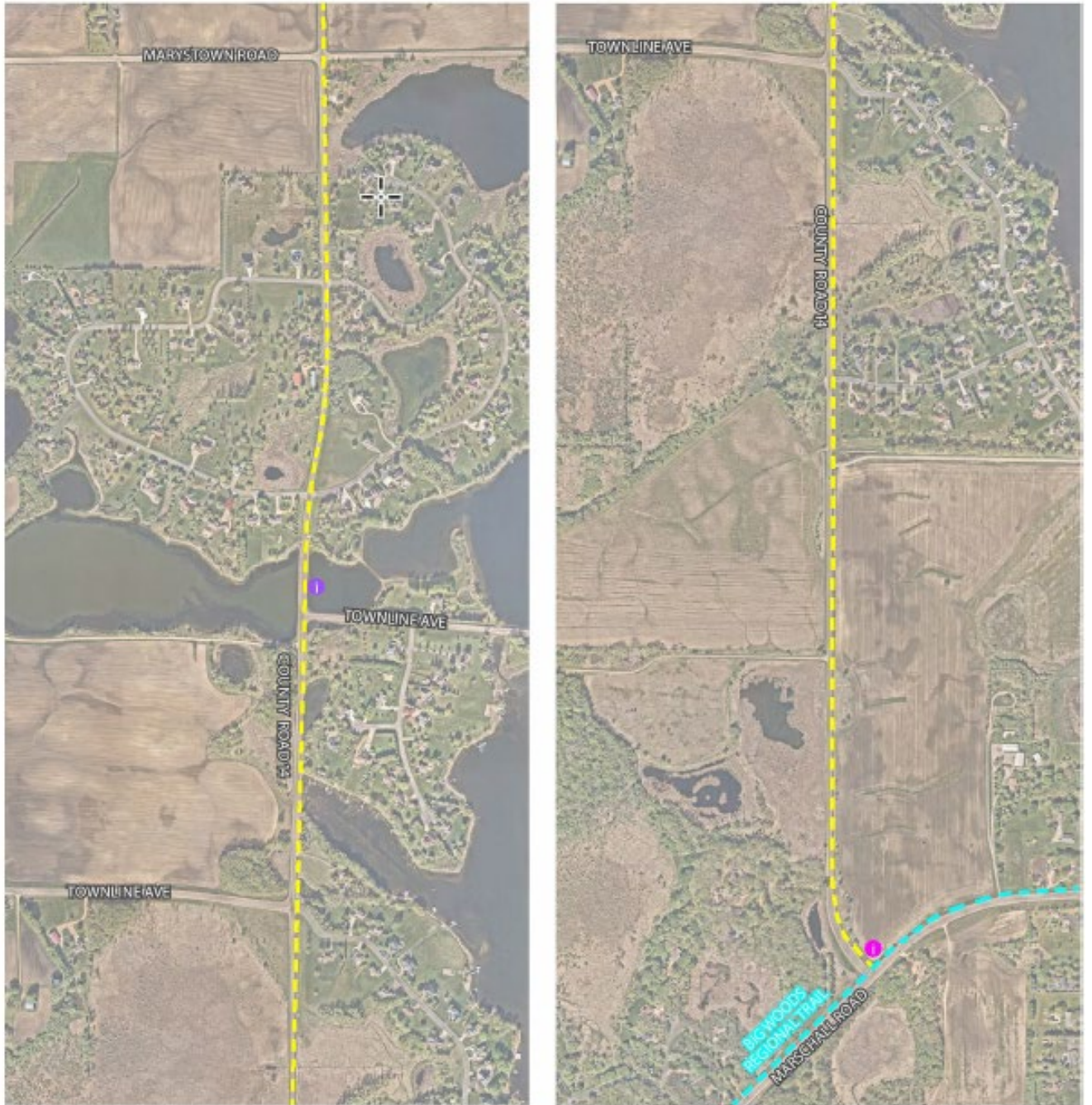


Figure 6: Louisville – Merriam Junction Regional Trail Segment 2



**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
SCOTT COUNTY, MINNESOTA**

Date: February 6, 2024

Resolution No.: 2024-42

Motion by Commissioner: Tom Wolf

Seconded by Commissioner: Jody Brennan

RESOLUTION NO. 2024-42; AUTHORIZING SUBMITTAL OF COUNTY REGIONAL TRAIL LONG RANGE PLANS TO THE METROPOLITAN COUNCIL FOR ADDITION TO THE REGIONAL PARKS POLICY PLAN

WHEREAS, The Scott County 2040 Comprehensive Plan identified the Southern Scott and Louisville Regional Trail Search Corridors; and

WHEREAS, staff conducted an extensive planning and community engagement process to identify trail routes within these search corridors; and

WHEREAS, the County Board approved the release of draft plans for the Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail Long Range Plan and the Shallow Waters Regional Trail Long Range Plan on November 21, 2023; and

WHEREAS, the plans were posted for a 30-day comment period and affected cities, townships, and the community design team were notified via email; and

WHEREAS, comments were received and the plans were updated as appropriate; and

WHEREAS, the adoption of long-range plans by the County and approval by the Metropolitan Council will allow Scott County to work to preserve and develop the trail corridors through the land development process, road construction, and other opportunities and make Scott County eligible for regional and state funding for acquisition and development of the trails; and

WHEREAS, the Scott County Parks Advisory Commission recommended that the County Board authorize submitting the plans to the Metropolitan Council.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Commissioners in and for the County of Scott, Minnesota, that the Louisville-Merriam Junction Regional Trail Long Range Plan be submitted to the Metropolitan Council for Addition to the Regional Parks Policy Plan.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Shallow Waters Regional Trail Long Range Plan be submitted to the Metropolitan Council for Addition to the Regional Parks Policy Plan.

VOTE RESULTS:

Yes: Barb Weckman Brekke, Tom Wolf, Jody Brennan, Dave Beer, Jon Ulrich

No: None

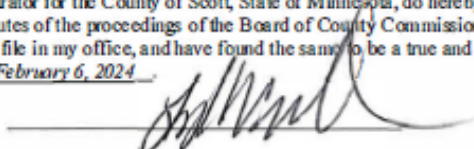
Absent:

Abstain: None

State of Minnesota)

County of Scott)

I, Lezlie A. Vermillion, duly appointed qualified County Administrator for the County of Scott, State of Minnesota, do hereby certify that I have compared the foregoing copy of a resolution with the original minutes of the proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners, Scott County, Minnesota, at their session held on February 6, 2024 now on file in my office, and have found the same to be a true and correct copy thereof. Witness my hand and official seal at Shakopee, Minnesota, on February 6, 2024.



County Administrator