

Information Item

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Meeting Date: April 3, 2025

Topic

Grounded and Growing, A Living History of Our Region's Parks and Trails

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, Chapter 9

Staff Prepared/Presented: Jessica Lee, Planning Analyst (651-602-1621); Krysten Ryba-Tures, Research Manager (651-602-1821); Raven McKnight, Data Visualization Specialist (612-747-4733)

Division/Department: Community Development

Proposed Action

Information item; no action is proposed at this time.

Background

Grounded and Growing: A Living History of Our Region's Parks and Trails (formerly referred to as the Regional Parks System Historical-Cultural Study) first began in 2021. Since then, Met Council staff has worked with Regional Park Implementing Agency staff, consultants, and residents of the region to develop this project. The project's initial goal was to establish a baseline understanding of the formation of the Regional Parks and Trails System. More importantly, the project highlights the impacts of past inequitable practices and how they gave rise to current-day disparities in visitation and experiences within our system. Grounded and Growing strives to find ways to acknowledge this past in order to build a more empathetic, inclusive, and equitable system moving forward.

The Council hired two consultants: 1) Historical consultants, Hess, Roise and Company and 2) engagement experts Zan Associates. Hess Roise led the initial historical research component of the project, while Zan led an integrated engagement approach for the project, with the idea of present-day experiences guiding the scope of historical research. They delivered a series of summaries, multimedia, and other resources which were then turned over to community development research's Strategy and Product Design team in 2024 to create digital products on the Council's platforms.

Grounded and Growing project launch

This project is an invitation for Met Council, Regional Parks Agencies, residents and visitors to develop a shared understanding of where we've been, where we are today, and the future we can build together.

We caution visitors to the website that this is not a comprehensive or complete accounting of how we arrived at this moment. Rather, Grounded and Growing calls us to reflect on the journey of our system (even before it was one) and asks us to consider what future paths we will chart. While growth and change are certainties over the next 30 years, disparities are not predestined—they are decided. As we continue to explore the information in Grounded and Growing—and enhance the depth and breadth of its offerings through partnership and continued engagement—we commit

to strengthen equitable use of the regional parks and trails system anew. We hope to spark and support meaningful conversations that encourage the deliberate actions needed to address the varied experiences with the project's five themes:

1. Access
2. Feeling safe
3. History of our lands
4. Sense of belonging
5. Outdoor experience

Project components

The Grounded and Growing project, available at <https://metro council.org/parkslivinghistory>,* consists of the following tools and resources:

- Interactive dashboards
 - Historical information
 - Visitation trends and population characteristics
- Interactive mapping platform
 - Ongoing story collection of outdoor experiences
- Videos, documents, and images describing experiences of residents and visitors

The project offers flexibility to use the information in tailored ways, and multiple avenues for continuous development and improvement, which we are excited to explore with our current partners as well as new ones.

**The project's webpage will be publicly available on Wednesday, April 2, 2025.*

Rationale

The Regional Parks Policy Plan committed the Metropolitan Council to conduct a cultural-historical study that describes and documents the impacts that inequitable policies have had on the development of the Regional Parks System (Chapter 9, Table 9-1, 2020-2023 Workplan for the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*).

Thrive Lens Analysis

Grounded and Growing seeks to advance the *Thrive MSP 2040* outcome of equity by informing the Council and Implementing Agencies about how some of the harmful policies and practices of the past helped create the Regional Parks and Trails System of today. The development of the project website allows us to better understand past and current day inequities, share lesser-known stories, and build a more equitable and empathetic regional parks and trails system moving into the future.

