

Minutes

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Meeting date: July 1, 2025

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
- ☒ Wendy Wulff, Council Liaison
- ☐ = present, E = excused

Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgment

The Metropolitan Council acknowledges that the land we currently call Minnesota and specifically the seven-county region is the ancestral homeland of the Dakota Oyate who are present and active contributors to our thriving region. As part of the Metropolitan Council's commitment to address the unresolved legacy of genocide, dispossession, and settler colonialism and the fact that government institutions, including the Metropolitan Council, benefitted economically, politically, and institutionally after the forceable removal of the Dakota Oyate, the Metropolitan Council is dedicated to instilling Land, Water, and People Commitments in regional policy. These commitments support the Dakota Oyate, the eleven federally recognized Tribes in Minnesota, Ho-Chunk Nation, and the American Indian Communities representing over 150 diverse Tribal Nations that call the seven-county region home.

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 4:05pm.

Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgment

The Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgment was recognized by Chair Yarusso.

Agenda approved

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

Approval of minutes

It was moved by Yakes, seconded by Harris to approve the minutes of the June 5, 2025, regular meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. **Motion carried.**

Public invitation

None.

Business

1. **2025-161:** Annual Metropolitan Regional Parks Operations & Maintenance Allocation (Nicole Clapp, 651-602-1723)

Clapp introduced Rachel Neuville, who will be conducting the Operations and Maintenance review process next year. She then gave a presentation on the Annual Metropolitan Parks

Operation & Maintenance (O&M) allocation as outlined in the materials provided.

Chair Yarusso asked about the permanent increase to the lottery in lieu money. Clapp noted that the Legislature appropriates the total dollar amount based on estimated tax revenues. Sometimes the allocation needs to be adjusted.

Wulff asked if a slide could be added before this goes to CDC and the full Council to show the total amount allocated to the Operations and Maintenance funding historically, including what percentage of the total expenses provided for reimbursement, as it is not keeping up with rising operating costs.

Chair Yarusso asked if expenses are going up with inflation. Clapp stated that this year's total reported O&M expenses are over \$143 million, which is about \$10 million more than last year. The big change was the retiring of federally provided COVID relief funds, so the agencies are seeing a larger number of expenses that are not covered by other grant dollars and noted that the system is expanding.

Taylor asked about Three Rivers Park District's allocation. Clapp discussed the changes in visitation and noted that St. Paul's numbers went down. She also noted that Minneapolis always has the highest visitation amounts.

It was moved by Moeller, seconded by Duerr, that the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission reports to the Metropolitan Council the Regional Parks and Trails System state fiscal year (SFY) 2026 Operations and Maintenance Funding requests.

Motion carried.

2. **2025-162:** Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve, Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Award (Riesgraf), Scott County (Jessica Lee, 651-602-1621)

Lee gave a presentation on the Park Acquisition Opportunity Award for Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve for Scott County as outlined in the materials provided.

Harris stated she is troubled with high price of land for a park that is not open and asked if there is a long-range plan for the Park Reserve. She expressed concern about the administrative boundary covering land that is not owned. Patti Freeman, Scott County explained that the administrative boundary is an expression of the vision for the park reserve and said she is working closely with landowners on a willing seller basis.

Moeller noted he has been to this property and feels that once it is open it will truly be one of the Regional Parks and Trails Systems top amenities.

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

1. Approve a grant of up to \$1,462,502 from the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund to Scott County to acquire approximately 123 acres located at 17525 263rd St. W. in Belle Plain, MN, for the Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve.
2. Authorize the Executive Director of Community Development to execute the grant agreement and restrictive covenant on behalf of the Council.

Motion carried.

3. **2025-163:** Lake Rebecca Park Reserve, Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Award (Van Horn), Three Rivers Park District (Kevin Phan, 651-602-1333)

Phan gave a presentation for a park acquisition opportunity fund award for Lake Rebecca Park Reserve for Three Rivers Park District (3RPD) as outlined in the materials provided.

Chair Yarusso asked about stewardship costs. Phan discussed the cost to move the home, demolition, and restoration work. Jonathan Vlaming, 3RPD, noted that this acquisition was an experiment in reselling and moving the home on the site rather than deconstruction or demolition. Final costs may likely be lower than estimated and may reduce the total cost requested.



Moeller expressed his delight in seeing the attempts to move and reuse the home and commended 3RPD for their efforts.

It was moved by Yakes, seconded by Taylor, that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve a grant of up to \$350,636 from the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund to Three Rivers Park District to acquire approximately 5 acres located at 9045 Rebecca Park Trail in Greenfield, MN, for the Lake Rebecca Park Reserve.
2. Authorize the Executive Director of Community Development to execute the grant agreement and restrictive covenant on behalf of the Council.

Motion carried.

Information

1. 2024 Regional Parks and Trails System Annual Use Estimate (Ismael Ramirez, 651-602-1831)

Ramirez gave a presentation of the Regional Parks and Trails System Annual Use Estimates as outlined in the materials provided.

Taylor asked if there would be an opportunity in future years to do some counts during the winter. Ramirez stated the methodology does not conduct counts outside of the summertime but instead uses seasonal multipliers that are determined by the visitor study. He said the methodology is nationally peer reviewed and has stood the test of time. He will give the winter counts topic his attention and discuss it with his managers. Harris agreed that winter counts would be helpful.

Chair Yarusso asked who pays for staff to do counts. Ramirez stated the agencies pay for the staff counters and the Council pays for staff who collect and analyze the agency counts.

Wulff stated it may be worthwhile to look at cell phone data in comparison to these surveys.

Chair Yarusso asked whether it would be possible to do the study one year during the summer months and the next year during the winter months.

Mullin stated that staff will explore options of seasonal measurement; however, cell phone data is no longer an option to use due to provider privacy changes.

Chair Yarusso would like feedback from agencies on this topic. Ramirez said he would explore this topic with the agencies.

Harris suggested trained volunteers.

Bouska talked about asking winter park users to 'check in' to help gather some data voluntarily.

Yakes discussed the process and feels there must be a smarter way, i.e., cameras, automatic counters, etc. to do the counts.

Chair Yarusso discussed the cost of this type of technology and noted it would be needed to be done the same universally to be valid.

Lisa Barajas, Executive Director Community Development, noted that one of the main reasons for doing our counts is to ensure our distribution of funding is fair and accurate. She stated the Council is always open to exploring new methodology. Staff are always looking at ways to improve how the counts are done on an ongoing basis.

2. Imagine 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan Performance Measurement Update (Colin Kelly, 651-602-1361 and Kevin Phan, 651-602-1333)

Kelly and Phan gave an update on the Imagine 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Performance Measurement slate as outline in the materials provided.

Harris asked about the Imagine 2050 lens analysis as well as the health benefits we don't see.

She also discussed connections to parks and what is meant by multi-modal. Phan stated that multi-modal includes multiple ways of using the trail including walking and biking.

Chair Yarusso discussed climate resiliency and the possibility of taking on a mapping project that shows tree canopy coverage and how are regional parks and trails contributing to the fight of climate change. Regarding the equity grant program, he asked, are they doing what we'd hoped. He discussed amenity mapping, like showing bathrooms such as changes to gender neutral, including baby changing stations, and the like. He also suggested noting if there is drinking water.

Wulff noted anywhere it says 'dollars spent' is an empty comment.

Taylor asked about the proposed measure of 'average age of long-range plans', and what is their value? Mullin stated that the key factor is whether the vision for the park or trail is still valid in the plan or whether the vision has changed. He said it is complicated. Taylor asked whether as a measure it is useful? Mullin stated that updating a plan, while an expensive process, helps ensure that the plans reflect the needs/desires of the current population.

Taylor asked about transit measures to parks. Chair Yarusso wants to track both public transit but also other modes of transportation.

Taylor asked what measures would help us convey the value of the system? What measures would help us advocate for supporting the system financially. Taylor talked about using measures effectively at the Legislature to ask for more funding.

Chair Yarusso noted this was a new area for the Commission. Once we see what comes of it, we can look at ways to use the measurement reports.

Wulff doesn't feel transit measures are very useful currently. She also noted Minneapolis doesn't allow buses on Parkways, which poses some difficulties. She noted park users aren't a reliable enough 'travel base' to be economically feasible, as well as the distribution of our regional park and trail units, and how many will not have transit services due to that.

Taylor asked where folks can use transit to the regional system. He'd like to better understand how many people do this annually.

Reports

1. Chair

Chair Yarusso shared there have been some conversations on where data is shared on the Secretary of States Office.

2. Committee Members

None.

3. Council Liaison

None.

4. Staff

Nicole Clapp gave a brief update on the 2025 Legislature Outcomes including operations and maintenance funding and Parks and Trails Legacy. Also, she shared news about a community tree planting grant program and other initiatives.

Mullin introduced Thony Thou, the new Parks Ambassador Manager.

Mullin noted that the Regional Trail tour was cancelled due to weather and stated they are looking to reschedule possibly in September.

Mullin stated staff are looking to do a tour for a future MPOSC Meeting at Baylor Park. More information to follow.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

Certification

I hereby certify that the foregoing narrative and exhibits constitute a true and accurate record of the Special Parks and Open Space Commission meeting of July 1, 2025.

Approved this 7th day of August 2025.

Council contact:

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