

# Business Item

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



**Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission:** January 9, 2025

**Community Development Committee Meeting:** January 21, 2025

**Metropolitan Council:** February 12, 2025

## Business Item: 2025-3 JT

Accept the Public Comment Report and Adopt the Imagine 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan Chapter

<b>District(s), Member(s):</b>	All
<b>Policy/Legal Reference:</b>	Minn. Stats. §§ 473.145 and 473.147
<b>Staff Prepared/Presented:</b>	Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst (651-602-1361) Tracey Kinney, Planning Analyst (651-602-1029) Emmett Mullin, Manager (651-602-1360) Kevin Phan, Planner (651-602-1333)
<b>Division/Department:</b>	Community Development / Regional Parks and Trails

### Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Accept the public comment report on the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan.
2. Adopt the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan Chapter.

### Background

The Council has substantially completed the development of the 2050 Regional Development Guide, Imagine 2050. The regional development guide, along with the Council’s system and policy plans, help guide the orderly growth and development of the Twin Cities metropolitan region. The policy plans include Regional Parks and Trails, Transportation, Land Use, Water Resources, and Housing.

The 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Plan is the result of numerous discussions with regional park implementing agencies, the Metropolitan Council’s Committee of the Whole, Community Development Committee, and the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, as well as extensive outreach to prioritized communities. A summary of regional development guide engagement with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission appears below (Table 1).

The 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan integrates key existing conditions and new Regional Parks and Trails System vision, mission, values, and objectives. Like other components of Imagine 2050, the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan elevates equity, natural systems, and climate resilience. The policy plan includes new policies and actions for the system plan, natural systems, and climate resilience. It also includes updated actions for planning; system protection; recreation, facilities, and programming; and finance. In addition, a workplan for implementing priority policy plan actions over the next four years is included.

A public comment period for all components of Imagine 2050, including the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, occurred from August 15 to October 7, 2024, with a public hearing occurring on September 25, 2024. During that time, more than 1,200 total comments were received from approximately 500 organizations and individuals. Specifically, the draft Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan received approximately 105 comments from five counties, six cities, and three local and federal parks agencies. At the November 7 and December 5, 2024 Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meetings, and November 18 Community Development Committee meeting, Council staff shared summaries of public comments and proposed policy plan revisions resulting from comments.

At the January 9, 2025, Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC) meeting, Council staff will share a public comment report and a summary of proposed changes (Attachment 1) to the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan and seek the Commission’s approval of proposed actions relating to these items.

Major themes of the public comment report generally align with the sections of the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan and include:

- System classification and designation
- Research and data
- Natural systems and climate resilience
- Planning and implementation
- Equity and access
- Funding and operations

Commenters expressed appreciation for opportunities to participate in the planning process and expressed support for the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan. Other commenters offered constructive feedback on the policy plan. Met Council staff revised the policy plan as a result of comments received and the document is stronger as a result.

### Rationale

Minnesota law requires the Met Council to conduct a comprehensive review of the Regional Parks Policy Plan at least every four years (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147). The policy plan was last updated in December 2020. Completion of the policy plan update, as an integrated part of *Imagine 2050*, is expected in early 2025.

### Thrive Lens Analysis

The Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan advances the Thrive MSP 2040 outcome of Livability through increasing access to nature-based outdoor recreation, which enhances the quality of life throughout the region. It also advances the Thrive outcome of Equity through strengthening equitable use of the regional parks and trails system by reducing barriers to participation across race, ethnicity, income, and ability.

### Known Support / Opposition

The public comment period provided an opportunity for input on the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan. The public comment report documents both comments indicating support and opposition to portions of the draft plan, along with revisions in response to the comments. The Public Comment Report provides a list of individual comments received during the public comment period.

*Table 1: Summary of Regional Development Guide engagement with Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission*

Date	Focus
October 6, 2022	Regional vision, values, and goals; kick-off the Regional Parks Policy Plan update process; gather input on key topics and issues to inform policy plan workgroups
March 2, 2023	Council-endorsed regional values and vision statements;





Date	Focus
	Regional Parks Policy Plan project timeline; proposal for regional park implementing agency-Council policy plan workgroups.
April 6, 2023	Small group activities focused on developing vision, mission, and values for the regional parks and trails system.
June 1, 2023	Developing shared regional goals and policy area objectives
August 3, 2023	Regional goals; regional parks and trails system vision, mission, and values; the development of a community, stakeholder and public engagement plan; launch of two more policy plan workgroups
November 2, 2023	Outcomes of policy plan workgroups; draft regional parks and trails objectives; preview remaining policy plan workgroups
January 4, 2024	Proposal for engaging MPOSC in early 2024, schedule for finalizing the Regional Development Guide, revised set of draft parks objectives
February 1, 2024	Revised set of draft parks objectives, subset of the draft objectives surrounding the Climate and Natural Systems topic, local forecasts
March 7, 2024	Revised draft regional parks and trails objectives; emerging ideas on policies and actions; background information on the existing Regional Parks Policy Plan and how components of it may change going forward
April 4, 2024	Revised regional parks and trails objectives; emerging ideas on regional parks and trails policies and actions; emerging thinking on a Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook
May 2, 2024	Overview of the draft 60% Regional Parks and Trails Plan; deeper dives into section 7 (Recreation, Facilities, and Programming) and section 8 (Finance)
June 6, 2024	Overview of the draft Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook; deeper dives into section 3 (Natural Systems) and section 4 (Climate Resilience)
July 11, 2024	Deeper dives into section 2 (System plan), section 5 (Planning), and section 6 (System protection), and associated content in the draft planning handbook
August 1, 2024	Overview of the public comment (90%) draft of the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, with a particular focus on new and different elements of the draft 2050 plan
October 3, 2024	Update on the draft Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook, with a particular focus on section 5 (Planning) and regional trail boundary adjustment criteria
November 7, 2024	Summary of public comments on the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, proposed plan modifications, and next steps
December 5, 2024	Summary of public comments on the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, proposed plan modifications, and next steps continued

## Attachment 1. Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan – Summary of Changes

This Summary of Changes provides an overview of the significant changes being proposed as part of the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, which is considered a chapter of the Regional Development Guide, Imagine 2050. This summary should be used to help navigate the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan. This update includes:

- State of the Regional Parks and Trails System
- Regional Parks and Trails Objectives that align with Imagine 2050
- New or updated policies and actions for the following sections:
  - System Plan
  - Natural Systems
  - Climate Resilience
  - Planning
  - System Protection
  - Recreation, Facilities, and Programming
  - Finance
- A new regional parks and trails sub-classification, to be nested under Special Features: Cultural Landscapes
- An updated workplan that outlines seventeen Met Council commitments for the Regional Parks and Trails System.
- The development of a Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook (Planning Handbook) that includes policy content requirements, agency-Met Council processes, and planning resources.

### Overall – 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

Location in Plan	Summary of Changes
Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Updated terminology:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “Master” plan to “long-range” plan</li> <li>○ Regional Parks System to Regional Parks <u>and Trails</u> System</li> <li>○ Natural Resources to Natural Systems</li> <li>○ “Siting” and Acquisition to “Locating” and Acquisition</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Policy Plan References:</b> Added cross references to other policy chapters of the Regional Development Guide.</li> <li>• <b>Performance Measures:</b> Added placeholders at the policy level to be developed later in 2025.</li> </ul>
Introductory Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Imagine 2050 Integration:</b> Incorporated Imagine 2050 Regional Vision, Core Values, and Goals</li> </ul>

### Section One: Overview of the Regional Parks and Trails System and Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

Location in Plan	Summary of Changes
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Regional Parks and Trails System Update:</b> Updated overview and all system facts and total number of miles and acres open to the public.</li> </ul>
Role of the Policy Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook Reference:</b> Added “Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook” section to introduce this complementary resource document.</li> </ul>



System Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>System Investment Totals:</b> Updated Table 1-1: Regional Parks and Trails System state and regional funding investments, 1974-2024 - <b>\$1.25 billion</b></li> </ul>
The State of the System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>State of the Regional Parks and Trails System:</b> Identifies four key existing conditions as a foundation for future priorities and direction.</li> </ul>
Vision, Mission, Values, Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Vision, Mission, Values and Objectives:</b> Added Regional Parks and Trails System vision, mission, values, and objectives.</li> </ul>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Research and Engagement Summary:</b> Moved to Planning Handbook</li> </ul>

## Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

Section Header	Summary of Changes
System Plan Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>New System Plan Policy and Actions:</b> Added to describe existing system plan management to better support the Regional Parks and Trails System.</li> </ul>
Overview of System Plan language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Moved Outdoor Recreation System:</b> Language transferred to Planning Handbook.</li> </ul>
Action 1: Review and update system plan, classifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Regional Park and Trail Unit Consolidation:</b> Regional park and trail unit definitions and descriptions were combined into short one-page descriptions, drawing from content in the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan’s chapters 2, 3, 4, and 7.</li> <li>• <b>Special Features:</b> “Special Recreation Feature” changed to “Special Feature”.</li> <li>• <b>Cultural Landscapes Added:</b> Cultural landscapes, a new sub-classification under Special Features was added.</li> <li>• <b>Regional Park and Trail Unit Updates:</b> Unit lists and maps were updated to reflect new changes at all four implementation statuses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Existing Regional Parks and Trails System facilities</li> <li>○ Planned Regional Parks and Trails System facilities that are not yet open to the public</li> <li>○ Regional Parks and Trails System Boundary Adjustments</li> <li>○ Regional Park Search Areas and Regional Trail Search Corridors</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>System Plan Summary Update:</b> 2050 Regional Parks and Trails System Plan Summary, including unit totals and acreage and mileage.</li> <li>• <b>Updated System Level Changes</b></li> <li>• <b>Updated Costs to Complete the System:</b> Updated estimated costs to complete the system - <b>\$3 billion</b>, as required by State Statute.</li> <li>• <b>Capital Improvement Plan:</b> Updated Capital improvement plan, as required by State Statute.</li> <li>• <b>Implementing Agency-Level Maps:</b> Maps for each implementing agency are proposed to be added to the Planning Handbook as they become available with the issuance of system statements to all metropolitan area communities later in 2025.</li> </ul>



### Section Three: Natural Systems Policy and Actions

Section Header	Summary of Changes
Natural Systems Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>New Natural Systems Policy and Actions:</b> Added policy and actions to identify and protect natural systems lands in perpetuity for the region.</li> <li>• <b>Reframed “Siting and Acquisition”:</b> Existing “Siting and Acquisition” policy and strategies reframed to sit within Natural Systems policy.</li> </ul>
Action 1: Locate and acquire land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Locating and Acquisition Action:</b> Created a Council commitment to partnering with regional park implementing agencies to locate and acquire lands with natural features, access to water, or restoration potential for conservation, recreation, and protection.</li> <li>• <b>Three Natural System Factors:</b> Added language around system addition factors of equity, geographic distribution, and natural systems.</li> <li>• <b>System Addition Process:</b> Language for process and criteria was moved to Planning Handbook.</li> </ul>
Action 2: Research natural systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Natural Systems Research:</b> Added a Council commitment to providing regional park implementing agencies with research and data to better inform restoration and protection of natural systems.</li> </ul>
Action 3: Coordinate support for natural systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Natural Systems Coordination:</b> Council commitment to coordinate support for protection, restoration, and maintenance of natural systems work across the Regional Parks and Trails System.</li> </ul>

### Section Four: Climate Resilience Policy and Actions

Section Header	Summary of Changes
Climate Resilience Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>New Climate Resiliency Policy and Actions:</b> Added policy and actions that promote resilience to climate change and outline Council commitments.</li> </ul>
Action 1: Advance climate action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Climate Coordination Efforts:</b> Added Council commitment to support regional park implementing agencies’ efforts to advance climate work through partnership and collaboration.</li> </ul>
Action 2: Research climate impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Climate Research:</b> Council commitment to partner with regional park implementing agencies to research the regional parks and trails systems impacts on climate change.</li> </ul>
Action 3: Drive Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Climate Awareness:</b> Added a Council commitment to partner with regional park implementing agencies to develop strategies and share stories that increase public awareness of the regional parks and trails system’s role in climate mitigation and adaptation.</li> </ul>
Action 4: Climate and Environmental Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Environmental Justice:</b> Council commitment to incorporate equity into the climate change conversation by gathering perspectives from historically underserved communities and shaping it into future actions.</li> </ul>

### Section Five: Planning Policy and Actions

Section Header	Summary of Changes
Planning Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minimal Policy Language Changes:</b> Policy and Action 2 (Enhanced multimodal access) language largely remain the same.</li> </ul>
Action 1: Long-Range Plan Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>“Public Awareness” Plan Requirement Integration:</b> “Public Awareness” long-range plan requirement was integrated into “Engagement, Participation, and Equity Analysis” requirement.</li> </ul>





	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Long-Range Plan Requirements Moved:</b> Details of long-range plan requirements and plan amendment processes moved to Planning Handbook.</li> <li>• <b>Planning Handbook References:</b> Added introductory language and cross references to planning handbook.</li> <li>• <b>Plan Amendment Descriptions:</b> Provided brief descriptions of Focused long-range plan requirements and Administrative process for minor long-range plan amendments.</li> </ul>
Joint Powers Agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Moved Joint Powers Agreements:</b> Moved existing Joint Powers Agreements section to Planning Handbook.</li> </ul>
Cost Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Removed Cost Sharing:</b> Existing Cost Sharing strategy removed; redundant with Finance Policy and Grant Administration Guide.</li> </ul>

### Section Six: System Protection Policy and Actions

Section Header	Summary of Changes
System Protection Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minimal Policy Changes:</b> Policy and supporting language largely remain the same.</li> </ul>
Action 1: Long-range plan requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Comprehensive Planning Clarifications:</b> Added clarification and examples on what constitutes as a “substantial departure” from a long-range plan.</li> </ul>
Action 2: Conversions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Streamlined Land Conversion Language:</b> Clarified conversion language to be more streamlined. Language mostly remains the same.</li> </ul>
Existing Reimburse. for Contamination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Moved Reimbursement for Contamination Strategy:</b> Existing strategy moved to the Grant Administration Guide.</li> </ul>
Existing Environmental Site Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Moved Existing Environmental Site Assessments Strategy:</b> Existing strategy to the Grant Administration Guide.</li> </ul>
Action 3: Telecomm. Towers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Telecommunication Towers Process:</b> Moved process and criteria in the Telecommunication towers action to the Planning Handbook.</li> </ul>
Action 4: Placement of Utilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Regional Wastewater:</b> Updated language on regional wastewater infrastructure.</li> <li>• <b>Easement Criteria Consistency:</b> Updated easement criteria to be consistent with Council practice.</li> </ul>

### Section Seven: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy and Actions

Section Header	Summary of Changes
Action 1: Increase equity in programs, activities, and places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Updated Equity Action:</b> Council commitment to developing opportunities, programs, and spaces that strive to uplift community connections to the outdoors while counteracting barriers and harm placed on underrepresented communities.</li> <li>• <b>Prioritized Equity:</b> Existing “Equitable Use” action was reorganized to be the first action</li> </ul>
Action 2: People and Natural Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>People and Natural Systems:</b> Added a Council commitment to support the conservation and restoration of natural systems alongside leisure, play, and creative opportunities in ways that connect people to each other and the outdoors.</li> <li>• <b>New Recreational Activities and Facilities Process:</b> Replaced static recreational activities list and processes associated with primary and</li> </ul>



	secondary activities with a criteria-based evaluation process. Detailed process provided in Planning Handbook.
Action 3: Cross-Sector Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cross-Sector Opportunities:</b> Council commitment to providing a wide spectrum of connections and partnerships in the outdoors through recreation, arts, programming, transit, public health, education, stewardship, and community.</li> </ul>
Action 4: Raising Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Raising Awareness:</b> New action that expands how we connect people to regional parks and trails with a focus on underrepresented communities through awareness building.</li> </ul>
Action 5: Trail system coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strengthened Coordination with Regional Bicycle Transportation Network:</b> Commitment to better coordinate the Regional Trail System with the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network.</li> </ul>
Action 6: Ineligible Activities and Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clarified Ineligible Activities:</b> Consolidated activities and facilities that are ineligible for regional funding due to being closely aligned with local recreational systems.</li> </ul>

### Section Eight: Finance Policy and Actions

Section Header	Summary of Changes
Finance Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Modified Policy Statement and Action Reorganization:</b> Content reorganized to separate four statutory requirements followed by five actions. Clarified Met Council's commitment to collaboratively support the Regional Parks and Trails System.</li> <li>• <b>Streamlined Finance Language:</b> Removed language that was redundant with Grant Administration Guide.</li> </ul>
Existing RPPP Strategy 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Removed Reimbursement Limitations Strategy:</b> Removed for no longer being legal.</li> </ul>
Action 2: Equity considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strengthened Equity Grant Program:</b> Updated equity considerations and expanded Council commitment to Equity Grant Program.</li> <li>• <b>Moved Equity Toolkit:</b> Equity toolkit language moved to Planning Handbook.</li> </ul>
Action 3: Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Increased Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Cap:</b> Increased program cap for Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund to \$2 million for Parks and Trails Legacy Fund and \$3 million for Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund.</li> </ul>
Action 4: Regional Funding Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Continued Commitment to Funding:</b> Added a Council commitment to actively analyze its regional funding budget strategy and pursue increasing regional funding commitment for the system wherever possible.</li> </ul>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Moved Content to System Plan:</b> Transferred Capital Improvement Plan and Costs to Complete the System to Section Two: System Plan.</li> </ul>





### Summary of Changes

Add the following items to the 2025-2028 workplan:

#### Accountability and Research

1. Develop a process to create a small set of performance measures at the Policy level to measure progress toward our key Regional Park and Trail System priorities.
2. Implement the 2025 Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study.
3. Explore expanding cost-effective research approaches, including forecasting tools, that provide implementing agencies with the management information at the park and trail unit level.

#### Protection and Restoration

4. Explore establishment of a Special Feature – Historical landscape sub-classification
5. Explore the establishment of a Special features – Open space/natural systems sub-classification in consultation with the Council’s Natural Systems workgroup. This effort includes renewal of the Regionally Significant Ecological Area dataset.
6. Reconvene Climate and Natural Systems Workgroup to discuss implementation steps for Climate Resilience Policy and Actions.

#### Culture

7. Develop a cultural resources inventory requirement for long-range planning in partnership with key stakeholders.
8. Continue to develop and refine the Cultural Landscape Classification, in coordination with American Indian Tribes, other cultural communities, and regional park implementing agencies.
9. Develop an inventory of and guidelines for harvestable fruits, mushrooms, and other plants in partnership with American Indian groups, regional park implementing agencies, and other partners.
10. As part of a broader Council effort, develop a training program and learning opportunities for Council and regional park implementing agency staff to explore indigenous land management practices and other related topics.

#### Trails

11. Continue to convene a trail coordination workgroup, supporting the development of a more coordinated, integrated, and connected regional trails system and Regional Bicycle Transportation Network.
12. Create regional guidelines for e-bike use on regional trails.
13. Explore system-wide wayfinding and signage minimum requirements.

#### Finance

14. Explore scoping and development of a systemwide Asset Preservation Plan, or similar.
15. Continue to pursue Pay-Go for greater flexibility to fund a wider range of activities, facilities, and programs. Pay-Go would provide an additional tool for funding the regional system.
16. Explore changing/reducing the local match requirement for the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Program, as state rules allow.
17. Continue discussion of strategic funding for the Regional Parks and Trails System, with a goal to better meet the needs of this growing system.

