

# Minutes

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



**Meeting date:** December 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

Without a quorum being present, Committee Chair Yarusso called the regular meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order at 4:10 p.m.

## Agenda approved

Because there was not a quorum, Chair Yarusso stated he'd prefer to start with the information item followed by the approval of minutes and then the business item. He noted that one Commission Member was on his way. Committee members agreed. The Agenda was approved.

## Public invitation

None.

## Information

1. *Imagine 2050* Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan: Public Comments Summary and Next Steps (Colin Kelly, Tracey Kinney, Emmett Mullin, and Kevin Phan)

Kelly, Kinney, Mullin and Phan gave an update on the *Imagine 2050* Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, as outlined in the materials provided.

Chair Yarusso asked what triggers a 'system departure' and if this creates the need for a Comprehensive Plan change. Kelly explained a few examples of what triggers the need for a Comprehensive Plan Amendment, including when road is upgraded to a higher volume capacity, which can create a substantial departure from the Comprehensive Plan and an impact on the park unit. Lisa Barajas, Executive Director of Community Development, added that roadway expansions that occur within a park unit can have a significant impact on the park visitor experience. She provided an example of a roadway that was proposed to go through Carver Park Reserve. Ultimately, it was deemed a substantial departure from the Comprehensive Plan and an impact on the park reserve. She noted that impacts to recreational values and/or natural resource values can constitute a substantial departure.

Dillenburg asked how we deal with air pollution. Barajas discussed the environmental review process that would be done as part of a development proposal.

Chair Yarusso asked what triggers this type of review. Barajas explained that the Met Council is required to support the environmental review process and as such looks at all proposed major developments and environmental impacts.

Moeller, who was tuned into the meeting remotely, encouraged Wayfinding consistency on regional trails. Kelly spoke to areas of the plan that call out the importance of system-wide wayfinding.

Chair Yarusso suggested adding a section to the Parks and Trails Planning Handbook that talks about how the handbook is approved, as well as what handbook additions or changes should go through the Council process and what changes don't require such review.

Chair Yarusso asked, what is 'tool' exactly. Mullin talked about the Local Planning Handbook that has planning tools and webinars to help with planning and education. Chair Yarusso discussed the equity analysis toolkit. Mullin stated that the Research Department put this together and stated it is a mapping tool that park planners can use to better understand demographic information in a given area.

Chair Yarusso noted that the public comments were linked to the MPOSC agenda on the Council's website and if Commissioners have further questions/comments about this area, they should forward them to staff.

Taylor asked if we have reached out to organizations that we've partnered with over the planning process to get comments. Mullin stated that staff have made a concerted effort to do this. He noted that the Council's outreach efforts during the Imagine 2050 process sought to meet people where they are, wanting commentors to feel welcome, comfortable, and able to comment on what is important to them.

Chair Yarusso asked about visual accessibility of the plan. Barajas discussed how this document will look once finalized online. She stated Communications is working on a web experience as well as hard copies of the actual policy plans and handbook.

Yakes discussed the idea of creating a high-level summary of the plan, and he asked about using Artificial Intelligence as a way to help summarize it. Mullin agreed that this could be a useful tool when summarizing the document for laypeople.

Taylor thought that most people will be most interested in how the regional system's facilities are activities are evolving and innovating. He also expressed appreciation for opening up the system to new users.

Chair Yarusso asked, what is the 'active transportation network?' Mullin said that this work intersects with our Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, and he discussed how the active transportation network intersects and overlaps with the regional trails system. There is a strong link to federal transportation funding for trail systems.

Chair Yarusso discussed tying park planning around communities, i.e. trails and development patterns around parks. Mullin discussed themes, i.e., transportation system works with trail system and being more intentional in mitigating impacts of development. He discussed the distribution of our system.

Chair Yarusso discussed how cities integrate this regional planning into their local municipal planning, with the goal of creating better things like wayfinding and connection to local parks and trails. Barajas discussed how this concept resonates with her experience with local planning and land use policy.

Taylor discussed active transportation and trail use for commuting and seeing these as critical systems to coordinate and support.

Chair Yarusso discussed how the topic of more funding was one of the big themes in the public comments. He called out the differences that exist between our agencies, for example, the size of their systems, funding levels, etc. Mullin discussed ways to better fund early acquisitions for agencies that may not be able to develop the land into a park or trail for a while, and how this will continue to be part of our work plan going forward.



## Approval of minutes

With a quorum now present, it was moved by Yakes, seconded by Duerr to approve the minutes of November 7, 2024, regular meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission.  
**Motion carried.**

## Business

1. **2024-343:** Phalen-Keller Regional Park, Long-Range Plan Amendment, Saint Paul (Tracey Kinney)

Kinney gave a presentation on the Phalen-Keller Regional Park long range plan amendment from St. Paul, as outlined in the materials provided.

Duerr referenced recent budget shortfalls reported in the news of late for St. Paul and asked about how this is impacting their parks budget? Brett Hussong, St. Paul Landscape Designer discussed that the funding for this daylighting project is coming from the Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage funding, which will not be impacted by the current city budget shortfall.

Vento stated she loves this project and commended the city on the work they're doing.

Chair Yarusso asked whether the timing of this plan amendment would work with an approved grant. Hussong said the process and grant request are on track and will be awarded and completed shortly after this amendment request.

Chair Yarusso asked about the logistics of the grant. Gabby Menomin, Wakan Tipi, discussed the timeline and the possibility of an extension if needed.

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

1. Approve the Phalen-Keller Regional Park Long-Range Plan Amendment.
2. Require Saint Paul, prior to initiating any construction, to send preliminary plans to the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager.

**Motion carried.**

## Reports

1. Chair – none.
2. Committee Members

Taylor discussed working with Ramsey County Parks to do programming at Battle Creek for cross-country skiing as well as for the Winter Carnival, offering snowboard lessons at Battle Creek.

3. Council Liaison – none.
4. Staff

Mullin discussed the expiration for appointments to Districts E, F, G, and H. He noted commissioners will need to reapply and he hopes appointments will be made in mid-January. He encouraged current Commission members to re-apply as soon as they are able.

Mullin stated the next MPOSC Meeting will be held on January 9, 2025, due to the holidays. Also, at that time, he reminded MPOSC members that the legislative session will have begun.

Mullin thanked all Commission members for their work on the Regional Parks Policy Plan. It has been a long and successful process.

## 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 Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting of December 5, 2024.

Approved this 9 day of January 2025.

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