

Minutes

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Meeting date: September 4, 2025

Time: 4:00 PM

Location: Streetcar Museum, Como Reg'l Park

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.

Paul Sawyer, Saint Paul Parks, welcomed everyone to the Streetcar Museum at Como Regional Park.

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 4:03pm.

Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgment

The Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgment was noted 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 Dillenburg, seconded by Yates to approve the minutes of the August 7, 2025, Special meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. **Motion carried.**

Public invitation

None.

Business item

2025-220, Release the Draft Amendment to the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, Modernizing Mapping, for Public Comment and Set Public Hearing Date (Tracey Kinney, 651-602-1029 and Kevin Phan, 651-602-1333)

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

1. Amend Section 2, System Plan, of the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan to designate the Regional Parks and Trails Geographic Information System (GIS) dataset as the Met Council's primary reference for regional park and trail boundaries, and to align the boundaries described in the System Plan with those delineated in the GIS dataset.
2. Require Park Implementing Agencies to reflect the updated boundaries in the Regional Parks and Trails Dataset and their park and trail long-range plans. If any outstanding, substantial inconsistencies exist between Agency plans and the Council's System Plan, then Agencies should submit an amendment request to the Council by December 31, 2026.
3. Authorize Council Parks Staff to administratively review these long-standing, regional park and trail long-range plan amendment requests that resulted from the adoption of the GIS dataset boundaries.

Tracey Kinney and Kevin Phan presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission.

Chair Yarusso asked if the Policy Plan itself is being amended. Kinney responded that the amendment is formally announcing that the GIS dataset will be the primary reference for the Council's System Plan and regional park and trail boundaries. There are no proposed Policy Plan language changes.

Commissioner Harris asked who will be responsible for going through all the park and trail long-range plans to identify inconsistencies in the GIS data? Kinney responded that Implementing Agency and Council Parks Staff have worked together over the past 4 years to iteratively review the GIS data alongside the regional park and trail long-range plans. The bulk of the review has been completed. Additionally, Council staff have created a process to update the data in partnership with the park agencies on an annual basis. Commissioner Harris expressed support for the Policy Plan Amendment.

Commissioner Moeller asked if there is an impact on the agencies by moving over to the GIS data? Are agencies supportive? Kinney responded that the agencies are supportive of the project. This process has involved heavy collaboration between the Council and agencies over the last 4-5 years.

Council Member Wulff asked whether the public hearing will be included as the first action of this business item. Also, she wondered whether there will be an associated redline document with the proposed changes to the policy plan. Kinney responded that the public hearing will be on the first action of the business item to declare that the GIS dataset are the boundaries for the system plan. Another benefit of this proposal is that it offers a path forward for correcting the long-standing minor errors with park and trail boundaries. There will be no redline document as part of this amendment. Council Member Wulff expressed support for the proposal.

Chair Yarusso thanked staff for their responsiveness to the Commission's suggestions and liked the modifications made to the amendment process. He also likes requiring agency board support for any significant change to the park and trail boundaries.

Motion carried.

Information Item

An Update on the Revised Slate of Outcomes Measures for the Regional Parks and Trails System (Colin Kelly, 651-602-1361 and Kevin Phan, 651-602-1333)

Members and Staff discussed the information presented.

Wulff asked how to iteratively improve this set of outcomes measures? Phan explained that Council staff are committed to improving outcome measures over time in partnership with the park agencies, around things like access, water quality, and equity.

Yarusso inquired about connecting the proposed outcomes with different goals in Imagine 2050.

Wulff commented that the travel shed measure is complicated. Do residents of the region even know whether a park or trail is local or regional.

Kelly replied that understanding travel sheds, especially travel time can help us understand how well we are serving residents. This information can help deepen understanding during processes like system additions, to understand important factors such as equity and geographic distribution of parks and trails.

Harris asked how staff was defining the average travel shed for visitors?

Phan responded that this information could help evaluate equitable access.

Mullin commented that when exploring the system additions process, ideas such as the park or trails proximity to population centers, travel time and mileage can be important.

Yarusso asked if travel shed data is available from the Council's Metropolitan Transportation Services Division?

Phan responded yes.

Wulff questioned whether there were better measures to understand the progress toward the Imagine 2050 goals.

Kelly expressed that there are several measures that would be useful to understanding progress, including measures around clean water, access to water, and others. Equity and geographic balance are also important considerations.

Yates asked for information on the cross-policy measures, such as expanding measures around water quality, visitation, and the importance of access to water in the system.

Commissioners discussed the challenges of developing meaningful measures. Taylor asked if we are trying too hard to develop too many measures. He wants measures that are meaningful.

Kelly explained that the measures around clean water, access, restoration, and water quality are useful measures, and they help us be thoughtful about investments and help us be accountable.

Harris inquired about the Council's use estimates as a data source for the measures.

Mullin explained that the once every five-year Regional Parks Visitor Study has important demographic information that will help us understand whether we are making progress toward our goals.

Commissioners and staff continued discussing the development of meaningful measures, asking about accountability. Accountable to who? The public? To the Council?

Staff explained that there remains a strong commitment to data development in this process.

Yates asked if regional parks reflect the diversity of the surrounding area and how programming helps improve access.

Yarusso asked how to measure? People involved? Demographics by region? Does current

direction reflect public concerns?

Commissioners continued to discuss the difficulty to measure for park agencies with or without staff, and accountability. Taylor added that the programming varies so much across the system.

Duerr commented on the process of developing measures. There are still so many unanswered questions. She wants to better understand perspectives of the park agencies.

Mullin commented on next steps, including recognizing that this current proposal is a good start in this important process.

Yarusso expressed support for continuing to work on measures, including the natural systems ones around increasing tree canopy and natural restoration. This is a balancing act.

Moeller encouraged the Commissioners to continue their work to understand important measures in the coming years.

Reports

1. Chair

None.

2. Committee Members – Dillenburg reminded the group that Three Rivers Park District was hosting the grand opening of the Mississippi Gateway Regional Park on Saturday at 9 am.

Moeller announced his retirement from MPOSC after this meeting. He mentioned his decades of serving the regional parks and trails system and provided a few examples of the group's accomplishments including reducing entrance costs, the creation of the equity grant program, and working on increasing awareness of the system.

Mullin thanked Moeller, commenting that "increasing awareness" will be his legacy.

3. Council Liaison

None.

4. Staff – Mullin mentioned several upcoming events including Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's Monarch Festival at Nokomis Regional Park, the upcoming Kenilworth Tunnel and Cedar Lake Regional Trail tour next Friday September 12 from 2-5 pm, and the Tuj Lub Court grand opening event at Keller Regional Park on Saturday, September 20 from 10-1.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 5:45p.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 September 4, 2025.

Approved this 2nd day of October 2025.

Council contact:

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