

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

390 North Robert Street, St. Paul, MN 55101
Phone (651) 602-1000 TDD (651) 291-0904

DATE: December 26, 2012

TO: Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

FROM: Jan Youngquist, AICP; Planning Analyst (651-602-1029)

SUBJECT: (2013-xxx) Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Master Plan
Amendment, Anoka County
Metropolitan Parks & Open Space Commission District F: Daniel Schlaferman

INTRODUCTION

Anoka County has submitted an amendment to the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Master Plan for Metropolitan Council review and approval. The master plan amendment proposes to adjust the boundary of the park reserve by adding a 1.3 acre parcel of land near the park reserve entry along Main Avenue in Centerville and by removing three inholding parcels totaling 120 acres in Columbus.

The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (Chapter 2 – Planning Strategy 1), describes the role of the master plan in the regional parks system. The policy requires that any project proposed for funding in the Metropolitan Regional Parks Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) be consistent with a Metropolitan Council approved regional park master plan.

This staff report contains a review of the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Master Plan Amendment based on its consistency with the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and recommends approval of the master plan amendment.

AUTHORITY TO REVIEW

Minnesota Statute 473.313, Subdivision 1 requires Regional Park Implementing Agencies to, "...prepare, after consultation with all affected municipalities, and submit to the Metropolitan Council, and from time to time revise and resubmit to the council, a master plan and annual budget for the acquisition and development of regional recreation open space located within the district or county, consistent with the council's policy plan." (i.e., the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*)

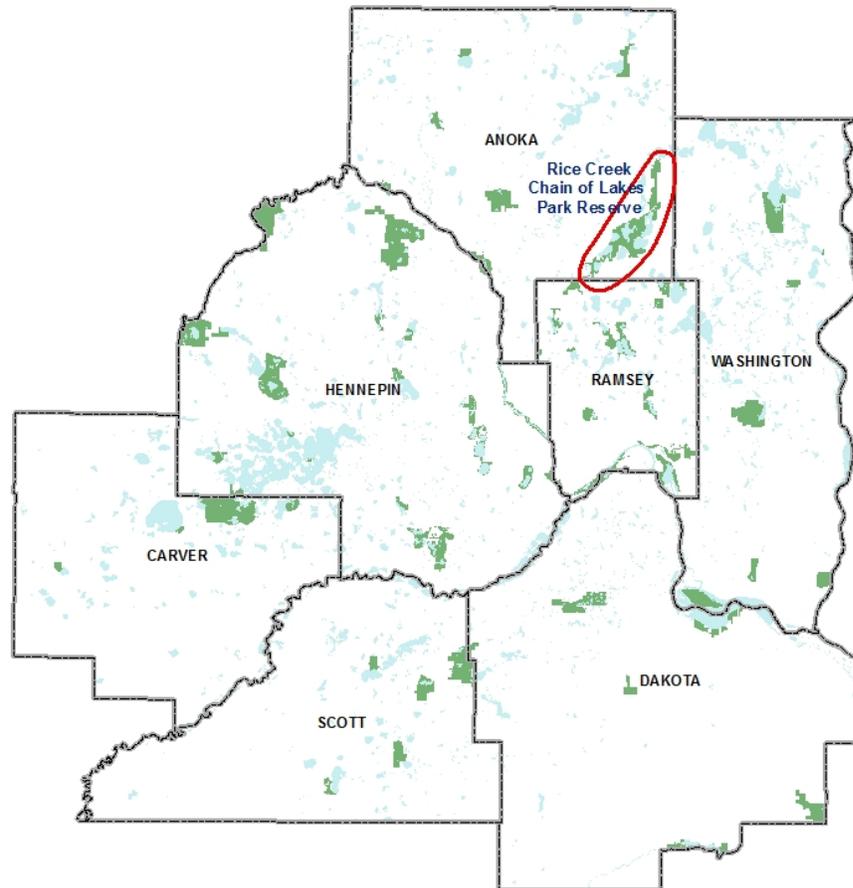
Minnesota Statute 473.313, Subdivision 2 authorizes the Metropolitan Council to review, with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, master plans for the regional park system. Plans are reviewed for their consistency with the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. If a master plan is not consistent with Council policy, the Council should return the plan to the implementing agency with its comments for revision and resubmittal.

BACKGROUND

Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve is located in the cities of Columbus, Lino Lakes and Centerville in eastern Anoka County. The park reserve boundary includes 5,500 acres

containing significant native wildlife habitat, water resources and archeological sites. Figure 1 illustrates the park reserve's location in a regional context.

Figure 1: Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve in Regional Context



The Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Master Plan was originally developed in 1975 and revised in 1999. The master plan was amended in 2003 to increase the size of the park reserve boundary. In June 2012, the Metropolitan Council approved a master plan amendment adding 87 acres to provide access to the portion of the park reserve located north of Interstate 35W.

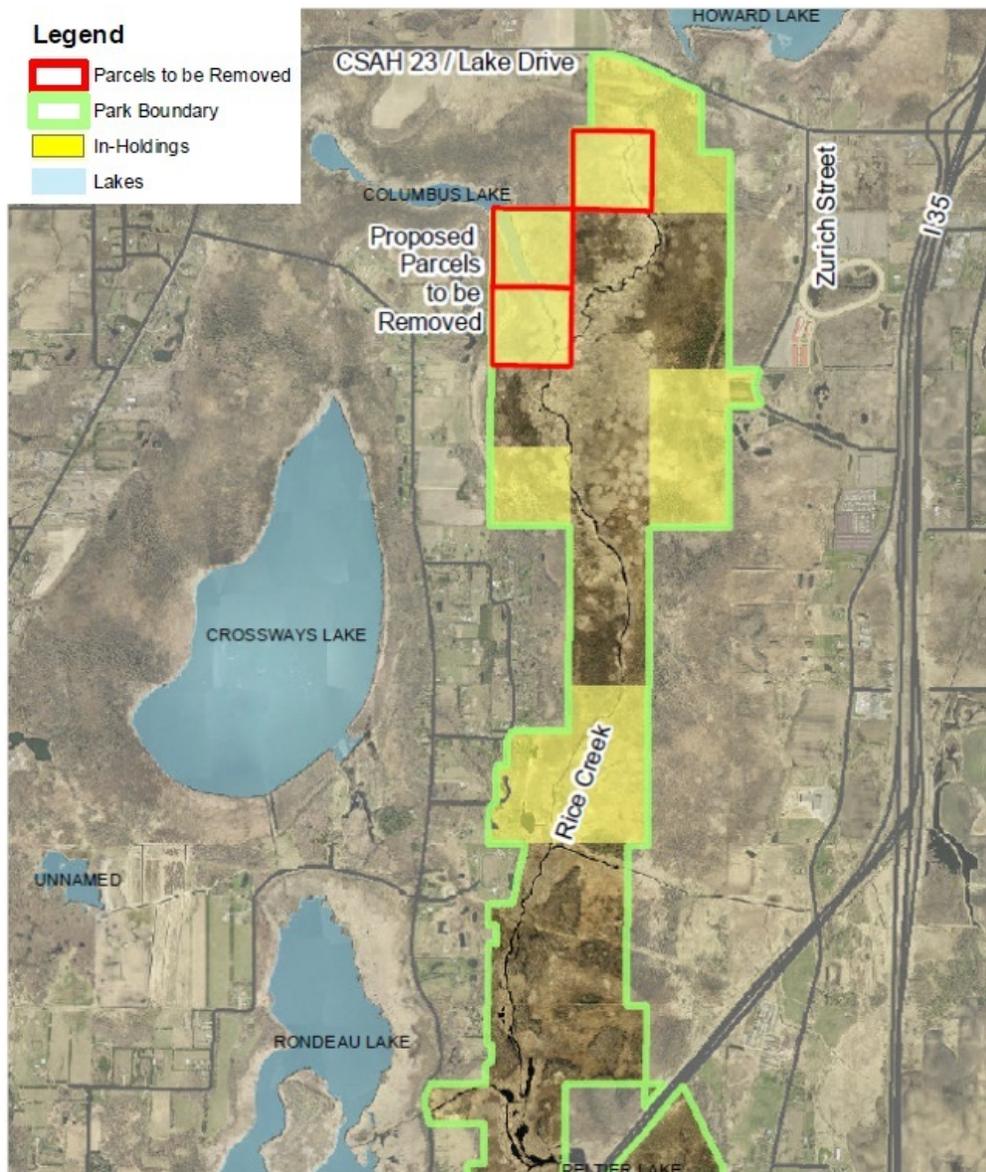
After the master plan amendment was approved in June 2012, Anoka County was approached by a property owner wanting to sell a 1.3 acre parcel in Centerville. The parcel has an existing structure on it that was used as an auto body repair shop. The County is interested in purchasing the property for use as a maintenance facility. A Native American burial mound is also located on the property. The County is proposing to provide an interpretive node near the mound. This area will also serve as a rest stop for the Central Anoka County Regional Trail, which is adjacent to the site. Figure 2 depicts the location of this parcel in relationship to the park reserve boundary.

Figure 2: Proposed Addition of 1.3 Acres to Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Boundary



Anoka County is also proposing to remove three parcels that are within the master plan boundary of the park reserve, but are privately owned inholdings. These parcels are located at the northern end of the park reserve in Columbus. The County has an opportunity to purchase seven parcels, totaling 263 acres around Columbus Lake in the Rice Creek headwaters. Three of these seven parcels are inholdings with the master plan boundary of the park reserve. In August 2012, the County secured \$940,000 in Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Legacy funds, received \$60,000 from the Trust for Public Land and will use \$257,000 in County funds to acquire the parcels. Land purchased with Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Legacy funds is required to be open for hunting and fishing and a Notice of Funding Restrictions must be recorded on the acquired parcels for that purpose. Since hunting is not an activity provided within the regional parks system, the County is proposing to remove the three inholding parcels from the boundary of Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve. The seven parcels will become part of the Columbus Lake Conservation Area, which will be operated similarly to a State wildlife management area. The land removed from the park reserve boundary will be publicly owned and will remain in an undeveloped natural state. The parcels to be removed from the park reserve boundary are outlined in red on Figure 3.

Figure 3: Proposed Removal of 120 Acres from Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Boundary



MASTER PLAN ANALYSIS

1. Boundaries and Acquisition Costs

The 1.3 acre parcel proposed to be added to Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve is located on the southwest corner of Mound Trail and Main Street in Centerville (Parcel ID# 15-31-22-43-0003). The parcel is adjacent to the park reserve as well as to the Central Anoka County Regional Trail, with a residential neighborhood located to the west and south of the property. The site will provide easy access to parks and trails in the area and has enough space for the storage of maintenance equipment. The site also includes 200 feet of shoreline along Peltier Lake. The estimated cost for acquisition of this property is \$343,000. If this master plan amendment is approved by the Metropolitan Council,

acquisition is likely to occur in Spring 2013. The parcel proposed to be added to the park reserve boundary is shown in yellow on Figure 4.

Figure 4: Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Proposed Acquisition



In addition, Anoka County is proposing to remove 120 acres from the boundary at the northern portion of the park reserve. This land will become part of the Columbus Lake Conservation Area. Since these parcels are currently privately owned, there is no net loss of existing regional parkland by removing them from the park reserve boundary. Anoka County will be acquiring the 120 acres plus an additional 143 acres, for a total of 263 acres for the conservation area, thus increasing the publicly owned and protected land. Figure 5 shows the parcels being removed from the park reserve boundary with a red cross-hatch and the Columbus Conservation Area outlined in blue.

Figure 5: Columbus Lake Conservation Area

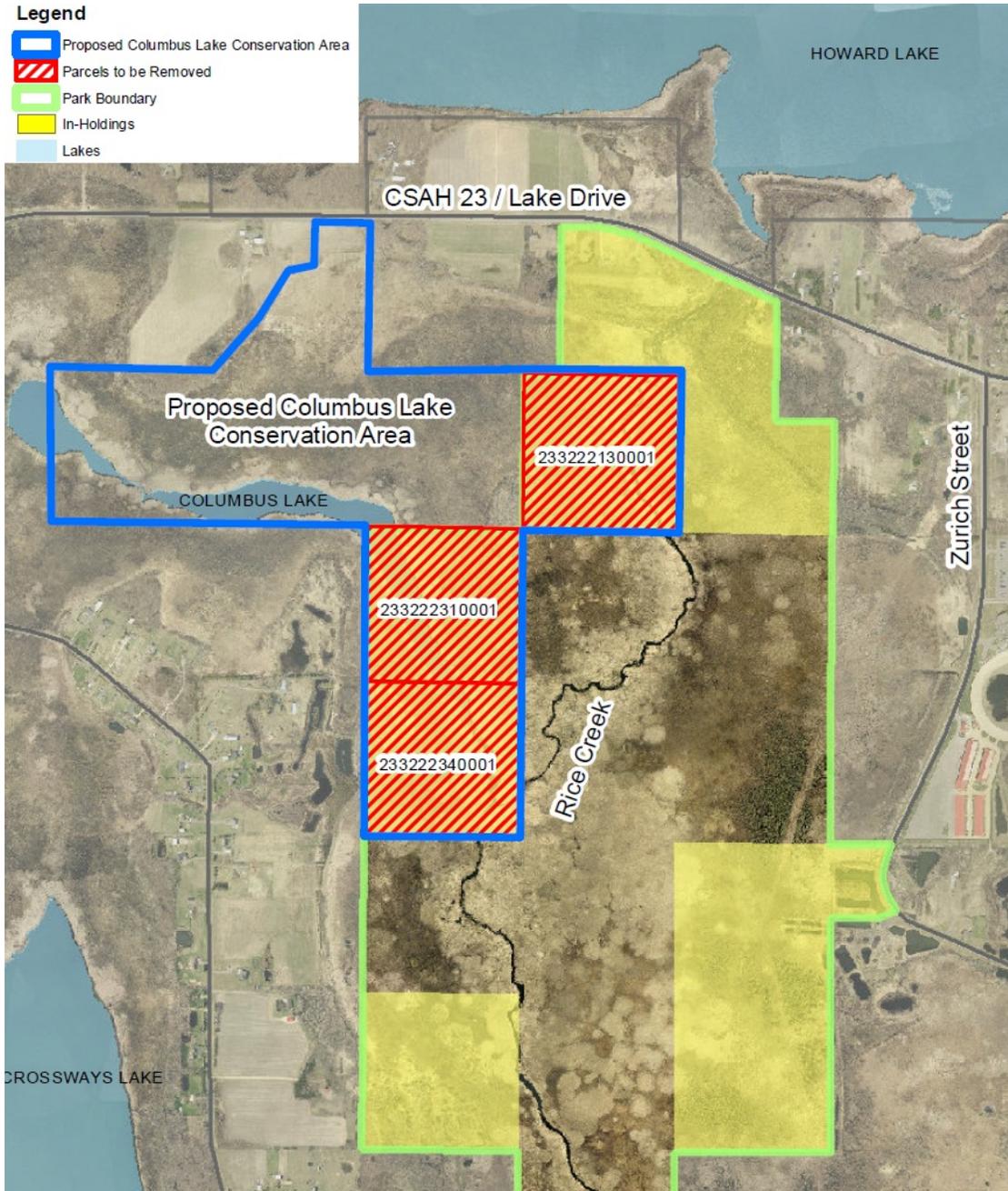
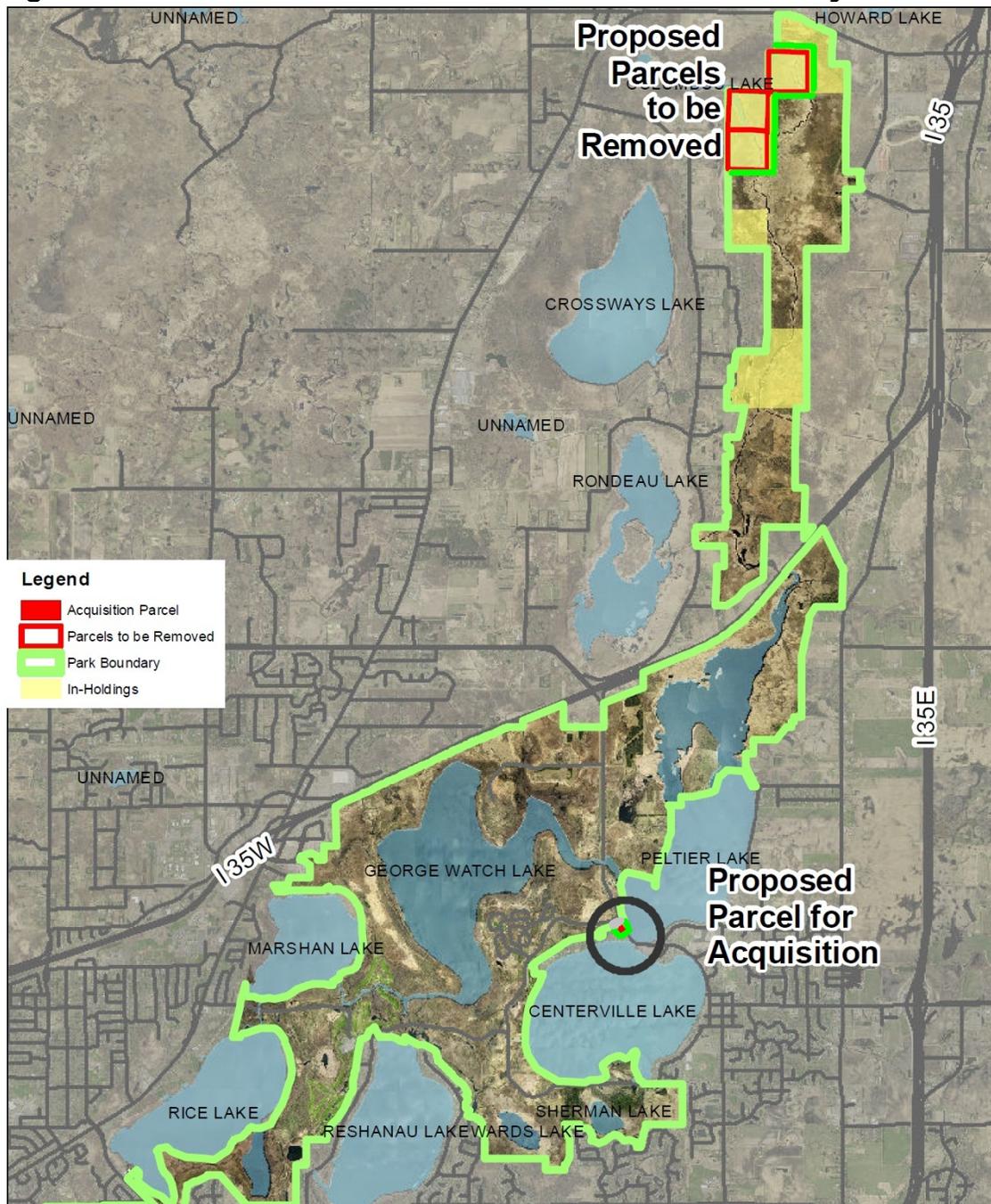


Figure 6 depicts the 1.3 acre addition to the park reserve as well as the 120 acres being removed in relation to the entire park reserve. The proposed boundary of Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve after the master plan amendment is outlined in green on Figure 6.

Figure 6: Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Boundary After Amendment



2. Stewardship Plan

Anoka County will continue to manage the park reserve within the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* guidelines of 80 percent of a park reserve being managed as natural lands with up to 20 percent of a park reserve developed for compatible recreational activities. The Native American burial mound on the site being added to the park reserve boundary will be protected and the structure on the site will be reused to serve the function of maintenance and operations for regional parks and trails in the area. The land being removed from the park reserve boundary will be protected and managed as part of the Columbus Lake Conservation Area.

3. Demand Forecast

The population of Anoka County has grown steadily and is predicted to grow an additional 20 to 25 percent in the next 20 years. The City of Centerville is predicted to grow 70 percent and Lino Lakes is expected to grow 36 percent during that time period. Visits to Anoka County's regional parks and trails are currently at 3.2 million per year, of which 400,000 visits are to Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve. The projected population growth will increase the recreational demand and use of regional parks and trails in the area. Anoka County currently lacks a centralized maintenance facility in the eastern portion of the County. Acquisition of the 1.3 acre parcel for a maintenance facility will support regional parks and trails in the area. The 120 acres being removed from the park reserve boundary will be open to the public as part of the Columbus Lake Conservation Area, outside of the regional parks system.

4. Development Concept

Development of the 1.3 acre site being added to the park reserve will include renovation of the existing building for parks maintenance use. The facility will allow for storage of park vehicles and equipment, minor equipment repair and light carpentry work, and office space for up to 5 maintenance staff. The building will be connected to the City of Centerville's sanitary and water services, and upgrades will be made to the existing lighting system, HVAC system, restrooms and office area. Site renovations will include painting, security lighting, fencing, paving and expanding the existing driveway and parking lot.

A small node will be developed on the site that will provide interpretive information regarding the Native American burial mound and archeological richness of the area as well as information about the park reserve and its amenities. This area will also serve as a rest stop along the Central Anoka County Regional Trail, which is adjacent to the site. An 8 to 10 foot trail will connect the regional trail to the interpretive node. Other trail amenities such as seating, trash containers and a bike rack will be installed.

Anoka County had discussions with the City of Centerville regarding the master plan amendment and acquisition of the 1.3 acre property. As part of the City's consent to the acquisition, Anoka County has agreed to provide an easement on the site for a City-owned "Welcome to Centerville" monument entrance sign. The County anticipates that the sign will be located in the southeast corner of the property and will occupy an area of up to 200 square feet.

Figure 7 depicts the development concept for the 1.3 acre site being added to the park reserve.

Figure 7: Development Concept



The estimated development costs are anticipated to be \$345,000, as shown in Figure 8. The estimated costs for the sign/site furnishings are for the interpretive node near the burial mound. The City of Centerville will be responsible for the costs of their entrance sign.

Figure 8: Estimated Development Costs

Development Concept Item	Cost Estimate
Building Renovations	\$150,000
City Sanitary/Water Connection	\$30,000
Paving	\$25,000
Lighting	\$10,000
Fencing	\$20,000
Interpretive Node/Rest Stop	\$30,000
Natural Resource Restoration/Landscaping	\$10,000
Signs/Site Furnishing	\$10,000
Fees/Contingencies	\$60,000
TOTAL	\$345,000

5. Conflicts

Anoka County does not anticipate any conflicts from the boundary amendment. The use of the structure on the 1.3 acre property being added to the park reserve will be similar to its existing use. The County will provide some screening or a vegetated buffer between the facility and the residential neighborhood to the west if requested by the homeowners. Safety between pedestrians and vehicular traffic will be ensured through the use of signs and crosswalk striping.

6. Public Services

The master plan amendment proposes to eventually abandon the existing septic system and well at the 1.3 acre site and connect to the City of Centerville's sanitary and water services. No other non-recreational related public services will be required or changed.

7. Operations

Anoka County operates and maintains Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve. The annual estimated costs of operations and maintenance for the new parcel is \$5,000. This will be financed with a variety of revenue sources including the Anoka County General Fund which includes revenues from picnic shelter and room rentals, program fees, and park entrance fees, plus the State appropriations passed through the Metropolitan Council to each of the 10 regional park implementing agencies.

8. Citizen Participation

Opportunities for citizen participation in review of the master plan amendment were provided through the following processes:

- The master plan was reviewed and approved by the City of Centerville.
- A community open house was held on November 27, 2012 to obtain comments on the draft plan amendment. A public notice of the open house was published in the local weekly newspaper and was posted on Anoka County's website. In addition, invitations were sent to the neighbors near the site on Mound Trail.
- Public meetings were conducted by the Anoka County Parks Commission and Anoka County Board of Commissioners. The County Board approved the master plan amendment at its meeting on December 18, 2012.

The County received a few comments in favor of the master plan amendment; none were against it. One written comment requested a fence around the proposed maintenance facility property, which was already included in the development plans for the site.

9. Public Awareness

Anoka County Parks and Recreation Department promotes public awareness of its regional parks and trails through maps, publications, brochures and its website.

10. Accessibility

Facilities and amenities proposed in the master plan will be developed in accordance with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements. Park and trail use is open to all citizens. There is no fee for non-vehicular entry to the park reserve, although there is a nominal fee for vehicles at the main park entrance. Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve is located near public transportation routes. Additionally, the Anoka County "Traveler" transit system provides rides to specific locations for a minimal fee and is available to those in need.

11. Natural Resources

The Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS) land cover of the 1.3 acre parcel to be added to the park reserve is grasses and mixed trees, with 10 percent impervious cover and some cultivated herbaceous vegetation near the adjacent homes. The size of the parcel does not allow for in-depth natural resource restoration. Natural resource related work will be limited to surface mowing and herbicide application to control non-native species. The portion of the property that is located across Main Street along Peltier Lake is categorized as seasonally flooded cattail marsh. The master plan amendment will not affect the existing natural resources management plan in place for the park reserve, which includes:

- Protecting, restoring and enhancing native plant and animal habitats throughout the park, lakes and along the Rice Creek corridor
- Protecting and improving water and soil resources
- Increasing public awareness regarding the natural resources of the area
- Utilizing sustainable practices in park development, operations and maintenance

REVIEW BY OTHER COUNCIL DIVISIONS:

Environmental Services – Sewers (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) The Metropolitan Disposal System has adequate capacity for this project.

Community Development – Environment and Surface Water Management (Jim Larsen 651-602-1159) The master plan indicates the site has a structure on it that served as an auto body repair shop. While we have no reason to believe that there has been any improper handling, storage, or disposal of chemicals on this property by the current or previous owners, we would suggest that the County at least perform a Phase I cursory investigation of the site for any potential chemical releases that might have occurred in the past. The remainder of the master plan amendment document adequately addresses future water, sanitary sewer service, and surface water management for the site.

County response: A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment will be conducted as part of the standard due diligence process prior to purchasing the property.

Transportation Planning (Ann Braden 651-602-1705) – No comments.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. The Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Master Plan Amendment is consistent with the requirements of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies.
2. The estimated costs to implement the master plan amendment are \$688,000, which includes \$343,000 in estimated acquisition costs, and \$345,000 in estimated development costs for the 1.3 acre addition to the park reserve boundary.
3. The 120 acres of inholdings being removed from the park reserve boundary will be acquired by Anoka County for the Columbia Lake Conservation Area using Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council funds, which require that the land be open to the public for hunting and fishing. The Columbus Lake Conservation Area will be adjacent to Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve, which does not allow hunting. In order to ensure that visitors understand the different uses allowed on the properties, the County should provide perimeter signage between the conservation area and Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve indicating that hunting is not allowed in the park reserve.
4. A portion of the 1.3 acre parcel being added to the park reserve will include an easement to the City of Centerville for a monument entrance sign. Regional parks system funds should not be used for the acquisition of this portion of the site. If the County seeks regional parks funding for acquisition of the property, the grant amount should be based on a pro-rated purchase price that excludes the easement area.
5. Approval of this master plan does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. Future funding based on this master plan would be granted through the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and Land Acquisition Opportunity Fund. Council action is required to approve the CIP and to approve specific grants to Anoka County.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Metropolitan Council

1. Approve the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Master Plan Amendment.
2. Require that Anoka County provide perimeter signage between the Columbus Lake Conservation Area and Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve informing visitors that hunting is not allowed within the park reserve.
3. Advise Anoka County that if it seeks regional parks system funding for acquisition of the 1.3 acre addition to the park reserve, regional parks funding may not be used for the easement area granted to the City of Centerville for its monument entrance sign.