

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: July 9, 2013

For the Community Development Committee meeting of July 15, 2013

Subject: Hardwood Creek Regional Trail Master Plan, Washington County

District(s), Member(s): MPOSC District F, Daniel Shlaferman

Policy/Legal Reference: MN Statute 473.313

Staff Prepared/Presented: Jan Youngquist, AICP, Planning Analyst (651-602-1029)

Division/Department: Community Development, Regional Parks and Natural Resources

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail Master Plan.
2. Require that prior to development of new trail segments, Washington County should send development plans to Metropolitan Council Environmental Services (MCES) for review and comment to ensure the integrity of the regional interceptor system, specifically MCES Interceptor 7029.

Background

Washington County has submitted a master plan for the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail, which will travel primarily along an abandoned railroad corridor from the border with Ramsey County to the border with Chisago County. The Hardwood Creek Regional Trail will connect to several local and regional trails along its route and will provide an opportunity to connect to Bald Eagle-Otter Lakes Regional Park in Ramsey County. Approximately 10 miles of the 12 mile regional trail exist; this master plan identifies an alignment for the remaining two miles at the southern portion of the corridor.

Rationale

The Hardwood Creek Regional Trail Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies.

Funding

The estimated costs to implement the master plan are approximately \$1,088,500 which includes \$184,500 for easement acquisition and \$904,000 for development. Funding based on this master plan and the future reimbursement for construction may be awarded through the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund. Council action is required to approve specific grants to Washington County.

Known Support / Opposition

The Washington County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution approving the master plan. There is no known opposition to the master plan.

Analysis

The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that destination regional trail master plans address the eleven items listed below.

1. Boundaries and Acquisition The Hardwood Creek Regional Trail will travel through the cities of Hugo and Forest Lake along its 12 mile route. Ten miles of the trail are existing; the master plan identifies the alignment for the remaining two miles. The alignment of the regional trail is shown on **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Hardwood Creek Regional Trail



The regional trail will generally follow an abandoned railroad corridor from the border of Ramsey County to the border of Chisago County and will make the following connections along its route:

- Sunrise Prairie Trail in Chisago County
- Glacial Hills Regional Trail which connects to the Central Anoka County Regional Trail
- Proposed Bruce Vento Regional Trail in Ramsey County
- Bald Eagle-Otter Lakes Regional Park in Ramsey County
- Several local trails in Forest Lake and Hugo

The planned alignment of the Hardwood Creek Regional is shown in **Figures 2-3**, starting from the northern terminus at the Sunrise Prairie Trail and heading south to the border of Washington and Ramsey Counties at Bald Eagle- Otter Lakes Regional Park.

Figure 2: North Half of Hardwood Creek Regional Trail



Figure 3: South Half of Hardwood Creek Regional Trail



The existing portion of the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail begins at the junction with the Sunrise Prairie Trail, then heads ten miles south where it currently ends at 145th Street in Hugo (Section 10 on **Figure 3**). From there, the proposed regional trail follows the abandoned rail corridor south to 140th Street. Washington County Regional Rail Authority plans to acquire the abandoned railroad corridor between 145th and 140th Streets.

The railroad is currently active south of 140th Street. There is limited space between the railroad tracks and Highway 61 from 140th Street to Falcon Court, which precludes the development of the regional trail. The railroad corridor is anticipated to remain in use for an undetermined amount of time (10 to 20 years) and there are no planned changes to the alignment of Highway 61 to facilitate the development of a trail in this section. Therefore, the master plan identifies an interim trail route between 140th Street and Falcon Court, which is shown as the orange line in Sections 11-12 on **Figure 3**. The interim route will provide a near-term means to complete the trail connection. The preferred long-term alignment for the regional trail is within the railroad corridor—if and when the active rail line is abandoned and made available for acquisition by the Washington County Regional Railroad Authority.

The regional trail will follow the railroad corridor from Falcon Court south to 120th Street. There is adequate space between Highway 61 and the active railroad tracks in this section to develop the trail and still maintain the 25 foot desired setback from the railroad tracks. Washington County will need to acquire an easement of approximately 4,100 linear feet to develop a trail in this section. The estimated acquisition cost for the easement is \$184,500.

2. Demand Forecast: The master plan references the Metropolitan Council's *2008 Regional Parks and Trails Survey*, which found that biking and walking/hiking are the most popular activities at regional parks and trails. Bicycling will be the predominant use of the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail, although with the trail's proximity to Hugo and Forest Lake, it will likely also attract walkers and joggers. Snowmobiles and horses are allowed to use the regional trail corridor, but are not allowed on the paved trail surface, with the exception of bridges.

The Hardwood Creek Regional Trail had an estimated 365,000 visits in 2011. Housing and business development is anticipated to occur along the corridor over time and Washington County's population is projected to increase by 42.5 percent between 2010 and 2030. The new connections that the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail will make with local and regional trails and with Bald Eagle-Otter Lakes Regional Park, coupled with the projected increase in development and population in the area, will increase the anticipated trail visits over time.

3. Development Concept: The regional trail will be 10 feet wide with an asphalt surface and 3-foot wide shoulders on both sides of the trail.

There will be five trailheads that will serve the regional trail, including:

- Lakeside Park Trailhead—a local city park that has parking, restrooms, picnic shelters and access to businesses
- Northland Mall Trailhead—trailhead facilities associated with the development of a new Municipal Center, including parking and restrooms
- Washington County Transit Center and Trailhead—parking, restrooms, vending, access to mass transit
- 145th Street Trailhead—parking, restrooms
- Bald Eagle-Otter Lakes Regional Park Trailhead—related to making a connection from this trail to the existing developed area within the park in Ramsey County-includes parking, restrooms and other park-related features

In addition to the trailheads, site amenities along the trail will include select bench locations that focus on points of interest. Wayfinding and signage will also be provided along the trail corridor.

Along rural portions of the trail corridor, a natural landscape character will be maintained. Within developed portions of the trail corridor, landscaping enhancements will focus on key

points of entrance; screening of adjacent properties; and accenting amenities, such as adding trees around a bench to provide shade and frame views.

The estimated development costs for segments of the trail are shown below:

Existing Trail Improvements (North of 145th Street)

Item	Estimated Cost
Site amenities—benches, signage, kiosks	\$20,000
Planting/landscaping enhancements along trail	\$25,000
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$45,000</i>
Design/engineering/contingency	\$12,000
Total	\$57,000

Development Estimates (145th Street to 140th Street)

Item	Estimated Cost
Trail development—site work, paving	\$114,000
Planting—screening of properties, etc.	\$10,000
Site amenities—benches, signage, kiosks	\$6,000
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$130,000</i>
Design/engineering/contingency	\$33,000
Total	\$163,000

Development Estimates (Falcon Court to 120th Street)

Item	Estimated Cost
Trail development—site work, paving	\$176,000
Planting—screening of properties, etc.	\$15,000
Site amenities—benches, signage, kiosks	\$10,000
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$201,000</i>
Design/engineering/contingency	\$51,000
Total	\$252,000

Development Estimates (140th Street to Falcon Court—long term segment once railroad corridor has been abandoned)

Item	Estimated Cost
Trail development—site work, paving	\$315,000
Planting—screening of properties, etc.	\$20,000
Site amenities—benches, signage, kiosks	\$10,000
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$345,000</i>
Design/engineering/contingency	\$87,000
Total	\$432,000

Therefore, the total estimated costs to development the long-term preferred alignment of the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail are \$904,000.

4. Conflicts: The former railroad corridor has existed for decades and land ownership boundaries are well-defined. Adjacent land uses do not conflict with the regional trail. Minor issues occur, such as adjacent private property owners encroaching on the public right-of-

way. Washington County Parks will work with the Washington County Regional Railroad Authority and local community to address any issues.

With regard to the southern portion of the trail where the use of the corridor will be shared between the trail and the railroad, the County will develop the trail to ensure that trail safety is maintained and there are no impacts to the operation of railroad facilities. These issues will be clarified under a written agreement between the County and the railroad authority.

5. Public Services: The master plan states that no additional public services such as roads or sewers will be needed to accommodate the regional trail.

6. Operations: Washington County will be responsible for maintaining the regional trail corridor. Use of the trail corridor is controlled by Washington County Ordinance 174, which addresses the regulation of:

- Public use
- Parkland operations
- Use of motorized vehicles
- Protection of property, structures and natural resources
 - General conduct
- Recreational activity
- Parking

Kiosks and signs will inform the public about the trail rules and regulations. The Washington County Sheriff's Department will respond to emergencies and criminal complaints.

Washington County's pavement preservation program will help maximize the public investment in the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail corridor. This program includes crack sealing every 2-3 years (\$500-\$1,000 per mile, depending on the condition); seal coating every 5-7 years (\$1,000 per mile); and repaving once every 25 years (\$150,000 per mile). Annual investments will vary from year to year, with a large investment every 25 years for repaving. Washington County estimates that the average annual operations and maintenance costs are \$50,000 to \$75,000 over the 25 year lifecycle of the trail.

Seasonal monitoring and inspections of the regional trail will occur to identify maintenance issues. Routine maintenance includes sweeping to remove loose sand and debris from the trail surface.

7. Citizen Participation: Washington County formed a technical advisory committee to provide oversight and technical input to the planning process. The technical advisory committee included representatives from Washington, Anoka, Ramsey and Chisago Counties; the Cities of Hugo and Forest Lake; the Minnesota Department of Transportation; the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources; as well as the Rice Creek and Comfort Lake/Forest Lake Watershed Districts. Opportunities for public comment were provided as part of the following schedule:

December 2012	Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
January 2013	Public Open House
February 2013	Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
March 2013	Public Open House
March 2013	Washington County Parks and Open Space Commission
April 2013	City of Hugo Park Commission
April 2013	City of Forest Lake Park Commission
May 2013	Washington County Board of Commissioners Public Hearing

The Washington County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution approving the regional trail master plan.

8. Public Awareness: Washington County promotes awareness of its regional parks and trails through the following means:

- Brochures and maps
- Website
- Displays at the County Fair
- Articles in the County Commissioner newspaper
- News releases in local newspapers
- Social media

9. Accessibility: The regional trail will be designed to meet or exceed the Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines. Washington County does not charge a fee to use the trail, making it affordable.

10. Stewardship Plan: The Natural Resources section of Washington County's *2030 Comprehensive Plan* includes baseline goals and policies for managing natural resources along the trail corridor. Stewardship of the trail corridor will focus on four priorities:

- Minimizing erosion potential during construction
- Buffering adjacent ecological systems
- Enhancing the quality of natural resources within the corridor
- Enhancing the natural scenic qualities of the corridor through the use of native plantings in select locations

11. Natural Resources: Since the regional trail follows a railroad corridor, the land cover along the trail has been altered from its original native condition. Most of the corridor is characterized by non-native grasses and trees, such as Smooth Brome and Siberian Elm. The hydrology is managed through naturally vegetated stormwater swales and an interconnected culvert system in certain locations.

Review by Other Council Divisions

Environmental Services – Sewers (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) The additional two mile extension of the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail may have potential impacts on Metropolitan Council Interceptor 7029 in multiple locations. To assess the potential impacts to our interceptor system, prior to initiating this project, preliminary plans should be sent to Scott Dentz, Interceptor Engineering Manager (651-602-4503) at the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services for review and comment.

Community Development – Environment and Surface Water Management (Jim Larsen 651-602-1159) – No comments.

Transportation Planning (Mary Karlsson 651-602-1819) – The regional trail is not anticipated to affect transportation planning for the Rush Line Corridor. The dedicated transit options for Rush Line are proposed to extend to White Bear Lake only, which is south of this regional trail corridor.

Conclusions

1. The Hardwood Creek Regional Trail Extension Master Plan 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 are approximately \$1,088,500 which includes \$184,500 for easement acquisition and \$904,000 for development.
3. The regional trail route may have a potential impact on MCES Interceptor 7029 in multiple locations. In order to maintain the integrity of the regional sewer system, preliminary development plans for the regional trail should be submitted to Scott Dentz, Interceptor Engineering Manager (651-602-4503) at Metropolitan Council Environmental Services for review and comment.
4. Approval of this master plan does not commit the Metropolitan 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 Washington County.