

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: October 1, 2013

For the Community Development Committee meeting of October 7, 2013

Subject: Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail Master Plan, Dakota County

District(s), Member(s): MPOSC District H, Barbara Schmidt

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 Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail Master Plan.
2. Require that prior to initiating development of the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail, preliminary plans should be sent to Scott Dentz, Interceptor Engineering Manager (651-602-4503) at Metropolitan Council Environmental Services for review in order to assess the potential impacts to the regional interceptor system.

Background

The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* identifies a regional trail search corridor that generally lies between the Minnesota River and Lebanon Hills Regional Park. Dakota County has completed an extensive planning process to determine the trail alignment and has submitted a master plan for the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail, which will travel from The Village at Mendota Heights, through Mendota Heights, Inver Grove Heights and Eagan, to Lebanon Hills Regional Park. The regional trail will provide connections to local parks, office and retail hubs and schools along its 8.5 mile route.

Rationale

The Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway 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 \$12,727,992, which includes \$1,359,000 for land acquisition and \$11,368,992 for development.

Approval of this master plan makes the acquisition and development costs eligible for regional parks funding, but does not commit the Council to any funding. Future funding based on this master plan may be awarded through the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund. Council action is required to approve the CIP and to approve specific grants to Dakota County.

Known Support / Opposition

The Dakota County Board passed a resolution approving and adopting the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail Master Plan. The master plan also includes resolutions of support from the Cities of Eagan, Inver Grove Heights and Mendota Heights. There is no known opposition to the master plan.

MASTER PLAN REVIEW ANALYSIS

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

1. Boundaries and Acquisition Costs

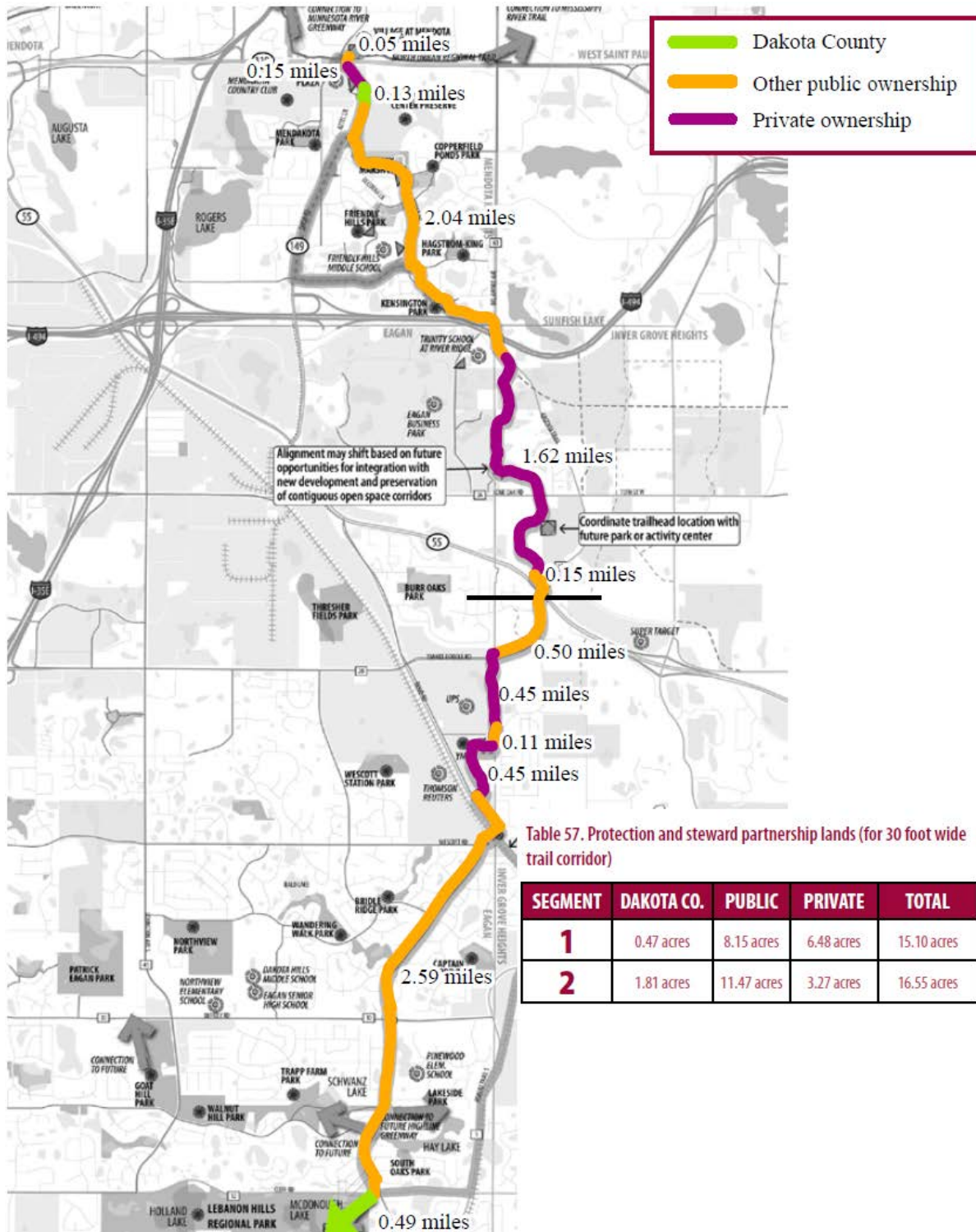
The Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail will travel 8.5 miles through Mendota Heights, Inver Grove Heights and Eagan. The general route of the regional trail is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail Alignment



The route for the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail consists of existing trails as well as planned trail segments. The master plan envisions a 100 to 300 foot wide greenway, although the regional trail corridor will be 30 foot wide. Along its length, the regional trail corridor consists of approximately 31.65 acres. Sixty percent of the acreage is publicly owned, either by Dakota County or another public agency. Forty percent of the acreage for the regional trail corridor is privately owned. Figure 2 depicts the trail route and the property ownership.

Figure 2: Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail Property Ownership



Strategies for protection of land for the regional trail include:

- Park dedication
- Direct purchase with the resale of land not required for the trail corridor
- Permanent easements
- Use agreements
- Land donation
- Bargain sale
- Life estate
- Negotiations with cities and developers

Dakota County estimates that the acquisition costs for the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail are \$1,359,000.

2. Demand Forecast

Dakota County estimates that if open today, the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail could expect approximately 270,000 annual visits. The master plan cites Metropolitan Council studies, which indicate that 50 percent of regional trail users live within three-quarters of a mile from the trail (the core service area) and 75% percent of users live within 3 miles of the trail (the primary service area). The core service area of the trail includes the communities of Mendota Heights, Inver Grove Heights, Eagan and Sunfish Lake. The primary service area includes the core service area and also extends into Apple Valley, Rosemount, Mendota, Lilydale, West St. Paul, Saint Paul and South St. Paul. The majority of trail users are anticipated to come from these service areas.

3. Development Concept

The primary recreation feature of the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail will be a continuous destination trail. The greenway corridor will vary in width from 100 feet to more than 300 feet; however, the development concept described in the master plan focuses on the 30 foot wide regional trail corridor to be constructed and operated by Dakota County.

The regional trail will be a bituminous trail designed in accordance with applicable American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) guidelines, Minnesota Department of Transportation bicycle design guidelines and Dakota County trail standards. The trail will be 10 to 12 feet wide with a 3 foot grass clear zone on each side. Anticipated uses include walking, jogging, inline-skating and bicycling. The trail will be maintained for winter use and lighted, where appropriate.

Access to the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail will be provided at trailheads for local and regional access, as well as at neighborhood gateways. Access points will typically be located at recreation destinations, activity centers and trail intersections.

Trailheads will occur every 3 to 5 miles and will include the following amenities:

- Water
- Motor vehicle parking
- Secure bicycle parking
- Picnic areas or facilities
- Wayfinding and traffic control
- Local or regional trail connections
- Restrooms
- Interpretation
- Benches
- Food, where there are opportunities
- Shelter and shade

Neighborhood gateways will be located at convenient intervals between trailheads. Where possible, facilities will be shared with other uses and will ideally be located where there is a recreation destination or activity center. Neighborhood gateways will include:

- Benches
- Secure bicycle parking
- Wayfinding and traffic control
- Local or regional trail connections
- Water
- Interpretation

For planning purposes, the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail corridor has been divided into two segments.

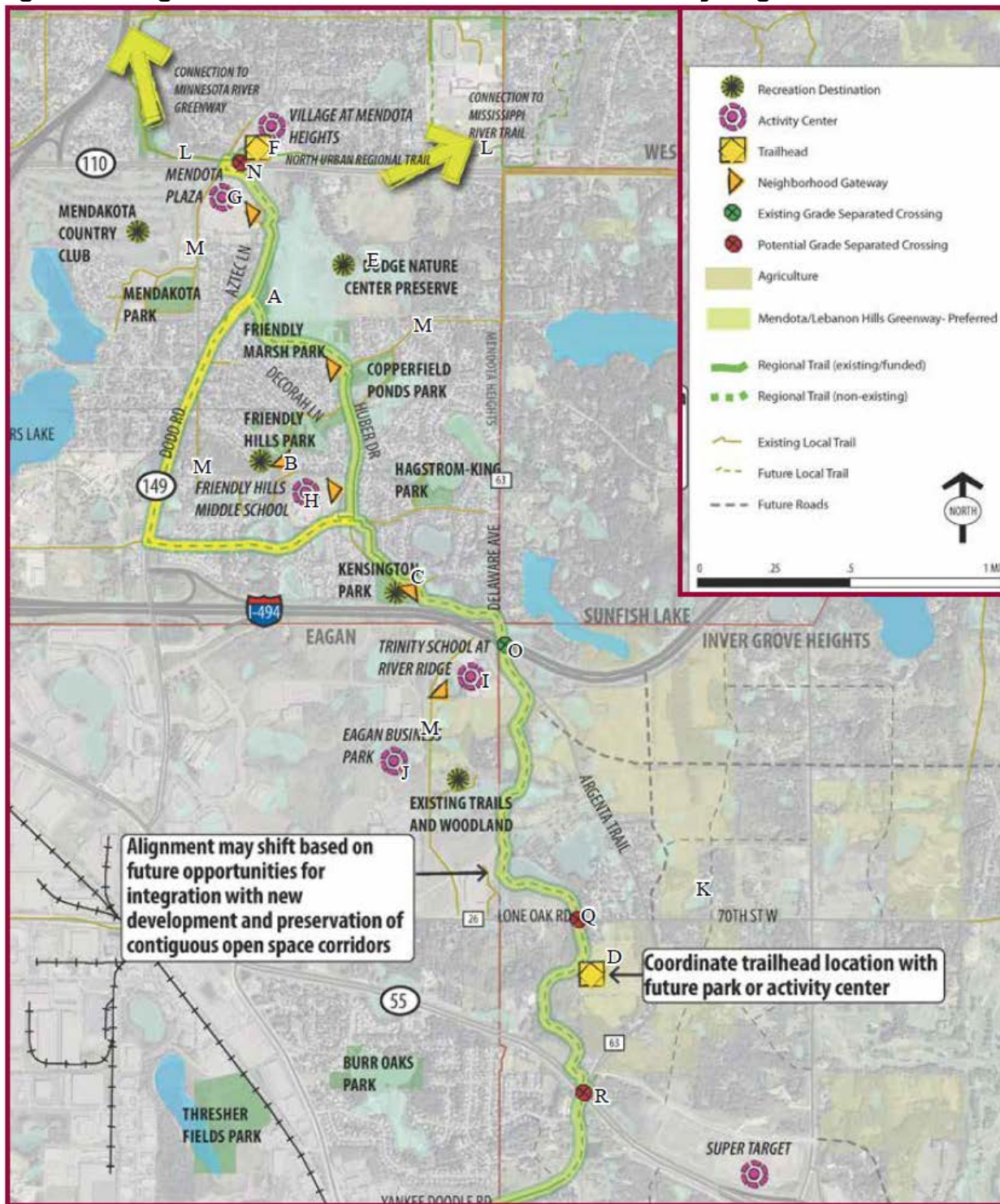
Segment 1 is 4 miles in length and travels between The Village at Mendota Heights, an activity center with restaurants, retail and employment, and Highway 55 in Inver Grove Heights.

Segment 1, as depicted in *Figure 3*, will include trailheads at The Village at Mendota Heights and at a future park to be coordinated with the City of Inver Grove Heights. The regional trail will also have six neighborhood gateways. Segment 1 will provide connections to four existing local parks, Dodge Nature Center, the North Urban Regional Trail, local trails, and two schools. Four grade separated crossings will be needed for this trail segment.

The master plan identifies a preferred route for the trail through Friendly Marsh Park in Mendota Heights, which will require a boardwalk to be constructed. Future studies will be conducted to determine the feasibility of the boardwalk. An alternate alignment is suggested along Dodd Road and Mendota Heights Road if the boardwalk is determined to not be feasible for cost or environmental reasons.

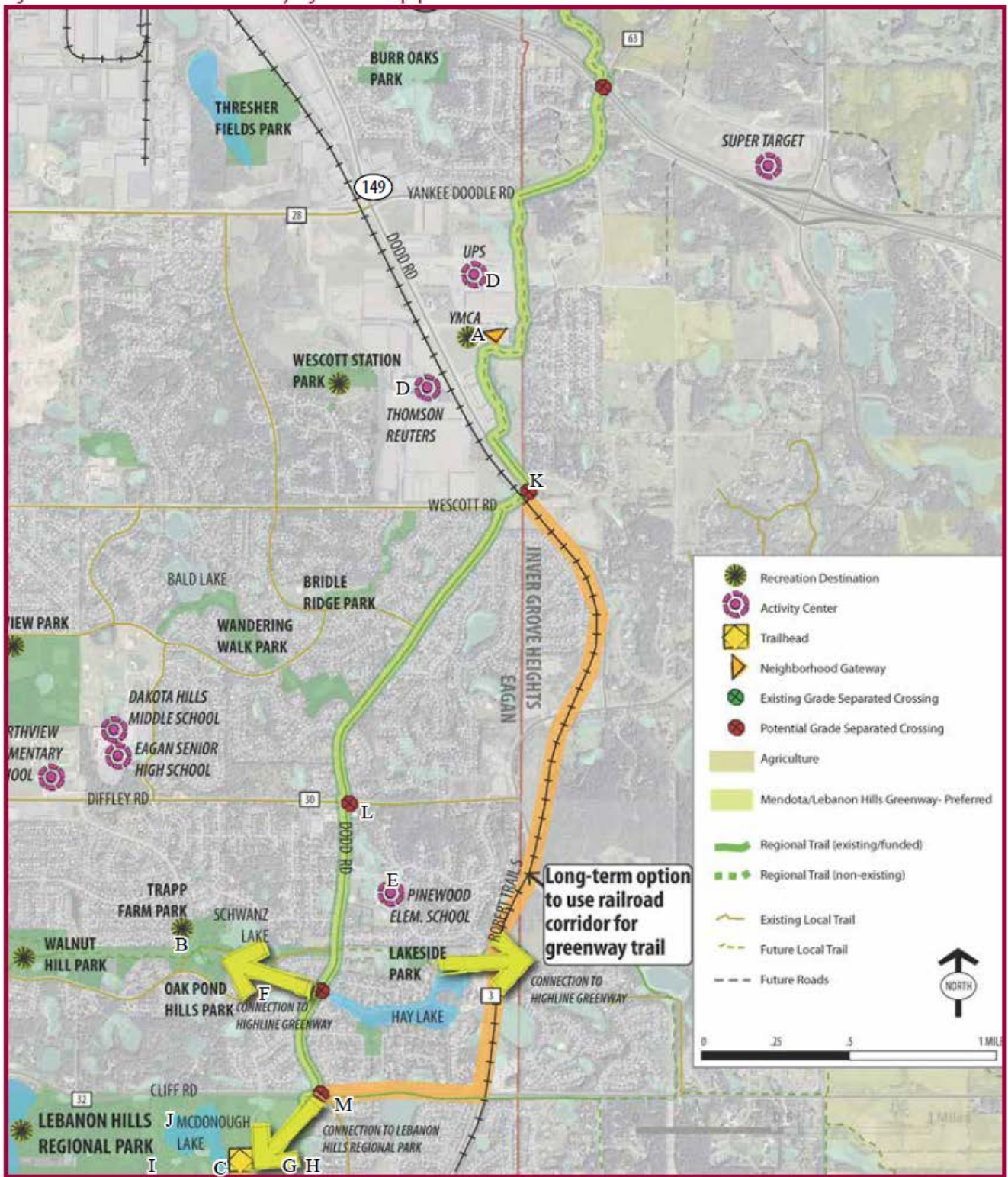
Between I-494 and Highway 55, the regional trail travels through the Northwest Area of Inver Grove Heights, which is an area guided for significant future growth. The City's Northwest Area zoning ordinance requires preservation of at least 20 percent of the net developable area as open space, much of which must be in contiguous corridors at least 100-feet wide. This provides an opportunity to integrate the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail into future development. A trailhead will also be coordinated with the City of Inver Grove Heights within this area.

Figure 3: Segment 1—Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail



Segment 2 is 4.5 miles in length and travels between Highway 55 and Lebanon Hills Regional Park, as shown in *Figure 4*. Segment 2 will include a trailhead at Lebanon Hills Regional Park and a neighborhood gateway at the YMCA in Eagan. Three grade separated crossings will be needed for this trail segment.

Figure 4: Segment 2, Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail



The master plan also identifies a long term option for the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail along a railroad corridor, if the corridor becomes available. This alignment is shown in orange on *Figure 4*. The master plan does not include acquisition and development costs for this option and it is not considered as part of the regional trail alignment at this time.

The estimated development costs for the regional trail are \$11,368,992, as shown in *Figure 5*. These costs include trail construction, wayfinding signage, landscaping, lighting, site furnishings, trailhead and neighborhood gateway amenities, and grade separated crossings. This estimate also includes a contingency of 10 percent as well as estimated design and engineering fees of 18 percent. Grade separated crossings, which are a critical component of the County's greenway system, total approximately \$5.7 million. It may be feasible to coordinate these crossings with local and Minnesota Department of Transportation roadway projects.

Figure 5: Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail Proposed Development Costs

Segment	Proposed Development Cost
1	\$6,802,696
2	\$4,566,296
TOTAL	\$11,368,992

4. Conflicts

The surrounding land uses are generally compatible with the regional trail corridor. Minor conflicts may arise from private encroachment or residents' sensitivity to trail recreation or maintenance uses. Dakota County will work with individual landowners to resolve these issues on a case-by-case basis.

5. Public Services

No significant new public services will be needed to accommodate the regional trail. Proposed trailheads and neighborhood gateways are served by the existing road network. If utilities are not available, options such as solar-powered lighting, self-composting toilets or wells will be considered. Accommodations for later installation of continuous trail lighting will be considered at initial trail construction.

6. Operations

Dakota County will be responsible for the operations of the 30 foot regional trail corridor and will enter into a joint powers agreement with partner agencies where there are opportunities for operational partnerships. Once the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail is complete, an additional 0.5 FTE year-round park keeper position and a .5 seasonal FTE will be needed to operate and maintain the trail.

Regular maintenance for the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail will include:

- Sign maintenance
- Trash collection
- Sweeping and blowing
- Trail and bridge repair
- Mowing
- Tree trimming

The master plan also includes a pavement management schedule for long term maintenance of the regional trail.

Public use of the Dakota County parks system is controlled by County Ordinance 107. Visitors are informed of the park and trail rules via kiosks and signs that include information regarding hours of operation, permitted and prohibited activities, fees and directions. The County's Parks, Lakes and Trails Officers patrol the parks and trails, educate visitors and

enforce ordinances. Local law enforcement and public safety agencies will be responsible for emergency and criminal complaints along the greenway corridor.

Dakota County estimates that annual operations and maintenance costs for the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail will be \$97,875.

7. Citizen Participation

Dakota County led a yearlong planning process with advice from a technical advisory group (TAG). The TAG included representatives from:

- Cities of Eagan, Inver Grove Heights and Mendota Heights
- Dakota County Historical Society
- Dakota County Parks and Open Space Department and the Office of Planning

The responsibilities of the TAG included providing guidance and technical assistance, identifying partnerships opportunities and discussing concurrent projects. Four TAG meetings were held between September 2012 and April 2013. Meetings with key stakeholders were held to discuss specific issues.

An open house was held in January 2013 to gather input on the trail alignment and a second open house was held in May 2013 to review the draft master plan. The draft master plan was posted on a project website as well as on the County's website, which allowed opportunities for public feedback. All project stakeholders also were provided a copy of the master plan for review.

Input on the draft master plan was generally supportive, but concerns were raised regarding the feasibility of a boardwalk through Friendly Marsh Park in Mendota Heights and the increased use and trail width as local trails become regional trails. The master plan discusses the need for a future feasibility study for a boardwalk through Friendly Marsh Park. If the boardwalk is determined unfeasible, an alternate alignment will be used.

The Dakota County Board adopted the master plan on August 20, 2013. The master plan also includes resolutions of support from the Cities of Eagan, Inver Grove Heights and Mendota Heights.

8. Public Awareness

Dakota County promotes awareness of its regional parks and trails through the County website, direct mail, press releases, brochures, on-site promotion, signage and paid advertising. Dakota County also collaborates with cities, businesses, the Metropolitan Council and others to promote its facilities, programs and services.

9. Accessibility

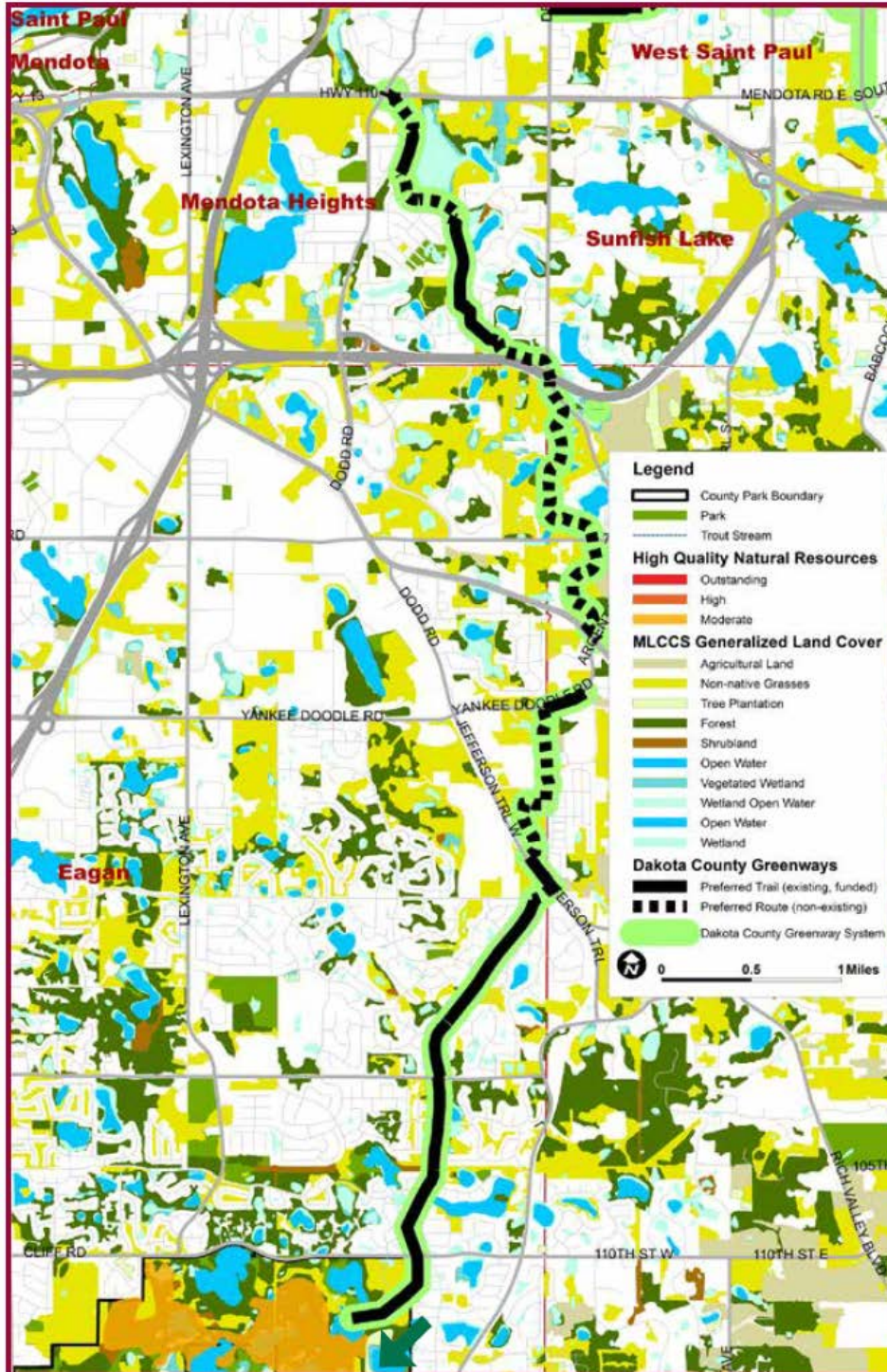
The master plan states that Dakota County is committed to offering universal accessibility at all trail facilities. The primary paved trail and all access points described in the master plan are located and planned for accessibility for all visitors.

10. Natural Resources

The existing natural resources along the planned greenway and regional trail corridor consist of large patches of woodlands and wetlands which are mostly within local parks and residential areas. Lebanon Hills Regional Park is located at the south end of the corridor and is comprised of regionally significant natural resource areas.

According to the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS), a majority of the land cover along the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail route is developed lands, non-native grasses or forest cover. Lebanon Hills Regional Park is a diverse preserve of prairie, shrubland, woodland and wetlands. *Figure 6* shows the existing land cover along the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail corridor.

Figure 6: Existing Land Cover, Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail



Water resources along the greenway corridor include scattered wetlands and small bodies of open water. Many of the water bodies are surrounded by forest cover or non-native grasses; some are directly adjacent to developed landscapes.

11. Stewardship Plan

Restoration and protection efforts will be focused near trailheads, which will provide the greatest opportunity for users to see the results of stewardship and provide a high-quality user experience. Stewardship activities are proposed to be pursued in cooperation with adjacent landowners, both public and private. Since the regional trail corridor will be 30 feet wide within a greenway corridor of 100-300 feet, the stewardship plan relies heavily on partnerships.

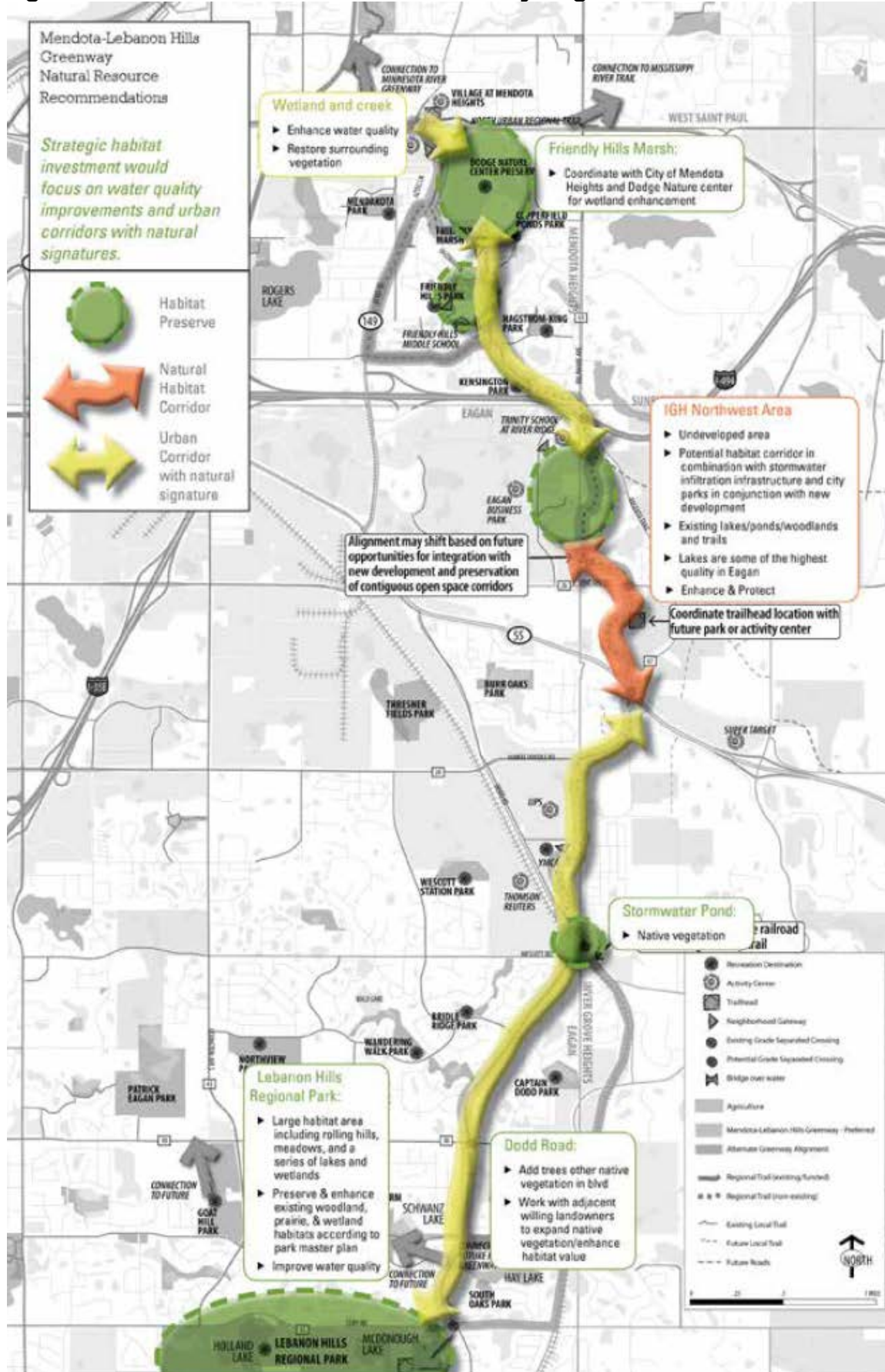
The master plan identifies and prioritizes key habitat investment areas for natural resource management, which are targeted to areas associated with high quality ecological resources and greenway use patterns. Since most of the area along the greenway corridor is developed at suburban densities, it will be difficult to establish a continuous ecological habitat corridor. Therefore, improvements at key areas and capitalizing on opportunities to preserve and enhance the ecological function along with the development in the Northwest Area of Inver Grove Heights will be the focus of the stewardship plan. The habitat investment areas are depicted in *Figure 7*.

Vegetation management activities will include the removal of invasive species, wetland buffer protection, and the establishment or reestablishment of disturbed areas. The master plan includes specific actions for individual sites along the regional trail route.

Surface water management practices at trailheads will include:

- Developing rain gardens alongside trailhead parking lots
- Creating planted depressed parking lot islands to capture stormwater
- Allowing stormwater to run onto surrounding grass for small parking lots surrounded by green space
- Planting trees to capture and evaporate rainwater on their leaves and to create pores in the soil with their roots to allow water to soak in
- Planting prairie plants around parking lots where their deep roots facilitate stormwater infiltration

Figure 7: Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail Habitat Investment Areas



Review by Other Council Divisions

Environmental Services – Sewers (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – This project extends 8.5 miles through the communities of Mendota Heights, Inver Grove Heights, and Eagan. The construction of any new or updating of existing trails may have an impact on Metropolitan Council interceptors. To assess the potential impacts to our interceptor system, prior to initiating any proposed 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 (Russ Owen 651-602-1724) – No comments.

Metro Transit (Stephan Baisden 612-349-7361) – Since the Greenway will connect to existing regional transit stations (Eagan Transit Center and Blackhawk Park & Ride) and annual visitation is expected to increase based on Met Council estimates, Minnesota Valley Transit Authority may witness a marginal increase in ridership on their routes.

Conclusions

1. The Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail 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 \$12,727,992, which includes \$1,359,000 for land acquisition and \$11,368,992 for development.
3. The regional trail route may have a potential impact on MCES facilities. 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. The master plan identifies a long term option for a trail segment along a railroad corridor in Inver Grove Heights and Eagan, if the corridor becomes available in the future. If the railroad corridor does become available, Dakota County may submit a master plan amendment for Metropolitan Council consideration.
5. Approval of this master plan does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. Future development funding based on this master plan would be done 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 Dakota County.