

Minutes

Special Meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Meeting Date: July 13, 2023

Time: 4:00 PM

Location: 390 Robert Steet

Members Present:

Chair, Tony Yarusso,
at large

Monica Dillenburg, District A

Robert Moeller, District B

Cana Yang, District C

Tess Bouska, District D

Vacant, District E

Cecily Harris, District F

Anthony Taylor, District G

Vacant, District H

Susan Vento, Council Liaison

= present, E = excused

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 4:00pm.

Agenda Approved

Chair Yarusso called for approval of the July 13, 2023 Agenda by consensus. Committee members did not have any comments or changes to the agenda. Agenda was approved.

Approval of Minutes

It was moved by Dillenburg, seconded by Harris to approve the minutes of the June 1, 2023 regular meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. **Motion carried.**

Public Invitation

None.

Business

1. **2023-146**, Summit Avenue Regional Trail Long Range Plan, Saint Paul (Tracey Kinney, 651-602-1029)

Kinney gave a presentation on the Summit Avenue Regional Trail long range plan as outlined in the materials provided.

Harris asked if 3,000 people engaged during the planning process seemed reasonable for a city of 300,000. Chair Yarusso commented that this percentage is probably higher than most.

Taylor stated he feels the level of engagement during this planning process was significant. He feels there was quality participation, but he believes it is always important to ask who has not been engaged in this process?

Dillenburg asked about the split between people riding on Summit Avenue for commuting and people riding for recreation. She felt that we shouldn't be using parks dollars for transportation projects.

Chair Yarusso noted that while this is not a public hearing, there have been requests from several members of the public both in support of and against the plan. After discussing our options for how to handle this unique request, he decided to allow one person from each

perspective an opportunity to speak for 5 minutes.

Tom Darling, Summit Avenue Residential Preservation Association, spoke against the regional trail. They feel the loss of trees will have an adverse effect on the natural resource base. They feel the trail will not be safer and it will destroy the majesty of Summit Avenue. He requested that the plan be rejected.

The second speaker was Andy Singer from the Saint Paul Bicycle Coalition. He spoke in favor of the new regional trail. He shared that the proposal was a simple plan, that switches the position of the current bike land and the parking. It will be constructed with the regular updates of the street. This would maintain the current street width, but accommodate the trail too, which would narrow the driving lanes and slow vehicle speeds. He discussed the difficulty of maintaining on-street bike lanes during the winter and discussed that what is being proposed for Summit Avenue will be the 'gold standard' for winter recreational bicyclists and commuters.

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

- 1) Approve the Summit Avenue Regional Trail Long-Range Plan.
- 2) Require Saint Paul, prior to initiating any construction, to send preliminary plans to the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager.

Taylor discussed this project in relation to the Public Works department. He stated that Summit Avenue needs to be repaired and it will affect the tree canopy. He stated we need to strategize and prioritize human mobility. He discussed both sides of engagement and feels it is a learning opportunity. He supports the plan.

Chair Yarusso noted the Regional Parks Policy Plan (specifically Chapter 5) is available on our website at metro council.org.

Harris discussed the importance of pedestrian pathways. Kinney stated there are sidewalks on both sides of the street. Mullin added that street crossings will be improved for both pedestrians and bicyclists.

Dillenburg asked about the number of benches along the trails and feels that if the trail is more for commuting versus recreation, we shouldn't use parks money to pay for it. It should come from transportation.

Chair Yarusso asked if there's a breakdown of biking versus walking. Kinney stated that she doesn't have those counts. She noted there is a map that shows amenities located along the trail.

St. Paul staff stated they don't have a breakdown of usership, but this trail is in the top 5 trails within the city. They also discussed amenities along the trail and future plans for the corridor.

Dillenburg shared concerns about trees being removed and the investment in this project. She feels it is more of a trail for commuters.

Chair Yarusso discussed the term "high quality" natural resources and said that that while the mature tree canopy is critical, it does not fit the definition of how we use the term "high quality" natural resources in regional policy. Kinney reinforced this response, adding that mature trees are an important natural resource but that this term is more associated with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' technical terminology for natural area quality.

St. Paul staff discussed the diversity of trees – age, health and species, that contribute to the overall tree inventory. The road is over 100 years old and needs full reconstruction. Trees will be affected by this reconstruction; however, staff have not done a detailed inventory of trees to date. There will be a block-by-block, tree-by-tree analysis once the project enters the design, engineering and implementation stage. The project will need to be flexible to avoid impacts where able.

Taylor discussed comparing a variety of street treatments, where (for example Como Avenue)



this type of surface work is done verses sewer type work. What is the difference? How do we proceed in a way that increases public confidence in terms of actual tree impacts.

Chair Yarusso pointed out that this is not a plan that would be put into place tomorrow but over several years. He noted more design and engineering will be done.

Vento discussed this project timeline is long. Public engagement will continue to be a critical facet. She encouraged folks to stay active and engaged as planning continues.

With no additional discussion, Chair Yarusso called for a vote on the motion. There were 4 in favor and two opposed. **Motion carried.**

2. **2023-144**, Lake Marion Greenway Regional Trail Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Award (Peterson), Dakota County (Jessica Lee, 651-602-1621)

Lee gave a presentation on the Lake Marion Greenway Regional Trail acquisition and grant request as outlined in the materials provided.

It was moved by Harris, seconded by Bouska, that the Metropolitan Council:

- 1) Approve a grant of up to \$120,393 to Dakota County to acquire two parcels totaling 8.8 acres, and to acquire a 0.2-acre easement on the Peterson property, all located north of 220th Street West in Section 36 in Farmington, for the Lake Marion Greenway Regional Trail.
- 2) Authorize the Community Development Director to execute the restrictive covenant on behalf of the Council.

Harris commented that paved sidewalks are not an ideal surface for walkers. She prefers a variety of other softer trail surfaces. Dillenburg noted ADA accessibility is important too. Chair Yarusso discussed the importance of getting feedback from trail designers and noted that the width available varies for different trails. Not all corridors can accommodate a dual treadway.

Chair Yarusso discussed the importance of asking implementing agencies about standards for trail width and if there could be more dual trails (paved and unpaved) in our system. He thought this was something that could be discussed at a future meeting.

Chair Yarusso called for a vote. **Motion carried.**

3. **2023-145**, Coon Lake Regional Park Long-Range Plan, Anoka County (Chee Yang, 651-602-1449)

Yang presented the Coon Lake Regional Park's long-range plan as outlined in the materials provided.

Chair Yarusso discussed the second recommendation in the staff report and asked a clarifying question about the sequence of the second action item, regarding the acquisition of three parcels, a 41-acre park inholding, that would require the City of Columbus to amend their 2040 Comprehensive Plan to change the land use from Rural Residential to Park.

Lisa Barajas, Executive Director of Community Development, responded that the Council recently issued system statement updates, which happens after updating the regional system plans. If the inholdings are acquired before the next system statements are issued in 2025, Anoka County will need to work with the City of Columbus to guide the property appropriately.

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

- 1) Approve Anoka County's Coon Lake Regional Park Long Range Plan.
- 2) Encourage Anoka County to work with the City of Columbus to change the land use from Rural Residential to Park within the City's 2040 Comprehensive Plan when the proposed future 41-acre inholding is acquired and becomes part of the regional park. This will require a comprehensive plan amendment and must be submitted to the Metropolitan Council for review and authorization.

With no further discussion, Chair Yarusso called for a vote. **Motion carried.**



Information

1. 2022 Regional Park System Annual Use Estimate (Darcie Vandegrift, 651-602-1669)

Vandegrift gave a presentation on the equity nudge and the 2022 Annual Use Estimate as outlined in the materials provided. She noted that she is available for additional questions and concerns for the Commissioners. She also shared that there is additional qualitative data available that helps us learn more about our visitors.

Chair Yarusso noted that he remains interested in winter counts.

Reports

2. Chair

Chair Yarusso discussed a small amount of ENRTF money that expired. He also noted that redistricting has been done.

3. Committee Members

Dillenburg attended a groundbreaking at Mississippi Gateway Park that was very exciting.

4. Council Liaison

None.

5. Staff

Mullin reiterated the Chair's comments regarding redistricting and noted they are currently recruiting additional members for Districts D, E, and H.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 6:06 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 Month 00, 2023.

Approved this 00 day of Month 2023.

Council Contact:

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