

Minutes of the

MEETING OF THE METROPOLITAN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

Thursday, June 6, 2019

Committee Members Present:

Rick Theisen, Tony Yarusso, Jeremy Peichel, Todd Kemery, Catherine Fleming, Cecily Harris, Bob Moeller, and Lynnea Atlas-Ingebretson, liaison to the Council

Committee Members Absent:

Anthony Taylor, Margie Andreason

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Yarusso called the meeting of the Council's Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order at 4:02 p.m. on Thursday, June 6, 2019.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Chair Yarusso asked for a motion to approve the June 6, 2019 Agenda. It was motioned by Peichel and seconded by Moeller to approve the agenda. The **agenda was approved.**

Chair Yarusso asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the May 2, 2019 meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. It was motioned by Harris and seconded by Kemery. The **minutes were approved.**

PUBLIC INVITATION

None.

BUSINESS

2019-128, Hidden Falls-Crosby Farm Regional Park Master Plan, St. Paul – Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst

Kelly gave a presentation on the Hidden Falls-Crosby Farm Regional Park Master Plan outlined in the materials provided.

Peichel clarified that 'low priority' doesn't mean that it's a low priority but more of a timing issue. Ellen Stewart, St. Paul Parks, reinforced this definition.

Kemery asked if trails through this park will connect with proposed trails or the Mississippi River Trail system. Stewart discussed that trail will connect to the Mississippi River Trail and the many state and regional trail systems that intersect this system.

Kemery asked about accessible transportation – can any of slopes/grades be redone to make the trails accessible? Stewart stated due to the bluff and steep slopes it is not an easy task.

Kemery asked if there can be transportation (public) integrated in to bringing wheelchairs down. Stewart stated that this topic is important and discussed possibly working with Metro Transit.

Moeller suggested having public transit even a couple of days a week would be good.

Fleming asked how many 'call boxes' for emergencies are in the park. Stewart stated that she is not aware of any.

Harris asked about future parkland acquisitions associated with the Ford Plant land. Stewart stated that there is an important, small parcel within the site that may be added to the park boundary in the future.

Theisen asked about the reference to the Dakota Indians and how is that being addressed. Stewart stated that they are working with tribal communities and tribal preservation officers to develop a protocol to make sure we are getting the right outreach and input to develop interpretive programming and interpretive signage.

Atlas-Ingebretson discussed the Thrive Lens worksheet on the Council's intranet and noted that there are some helpful equity questions that could deepen the Thrive Lens in the staff reports. She asked about the accountability to follow through on feedback received. Also, if there is a space for ceremonial opportunities, will there be an associated fee? Stewart discussed the steps they are taking to work with tribal nations to make sure they are making good inclusive decisions. Regarding charges, she stated that she would get back to the Council Member. She felt that for most ceremonies or events, there may need to be permitting but would not be an associated fee. Atlas-Ingebretson stated she would like follow-up.

Atlas-Ingebretson suggested a memorandum of understanding with tribal offices and the City. She also discussed other equity issues – including whether other populations were engaged.

Chair Yarusso asked if the marina is inside the park. Stewart stated it is within the park boundary.

Chair Yarusso asked what other access is available along the river. Stewart stated there is fishing, a boat launch, but no swimming. She discussed the concept of developing a bay for paddling.

Chair Yarusso asked about cost estimates and how accurate are they. Mullin stated that the cost estimate for the master plan is consistent with the estimate done for the 2018 Regional Parks Policy Plan update. Chair Yarusso responded that it would be interesting to review at a later date to see if our 'assumptions' were close.

Kemery clarified that the Watergate Marina is privately owned. Stewart confirmed that it is.

It was motioned by Theisen and seconded by Moeller to recommend the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Hidden Falls – Crosby Farm Regional Park Master Plan.
2. Require that the City of Saint Paul, prior to initiating any new development of the regional park, send preliminary plans to the Engineering Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division for review in order to assess the potential impacts to the regional interceptor system.

Atlas-Ingebretson reminded staff that she would like an update on the question of fees and accountability on other communities engaged and how does this financially fit into broader picture.

Chair Yarusso called for a vote. **The motion carried.**

2019-129, Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant for the Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail, Carver County (Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority) – Deb Jensen, Senior Parks Financial Planner

Jensen gave a presentation on a request for a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant for the Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail as outlined in the materials provided.

Moeller motioned and Kemery seconded to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve a grant of up to \$1,700,000 to Carver County to acquire the 89.81-acre Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority property located in the City of Chanhassen for the Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail.
2. Authorize the Community Development Director to execute the grant agreement and restrictive covenant on behalf of the Council.

3. Inform Carver County that an additional appraisal supporting the \$5.1 million value must be completed by March 21, 2020, and the County must close on the property within one year from the appraisal date.

Moeller commended Deb Jensen for all of her work on this matter.

Chair Yarusso clarified if the source of funding needs to be identified in the motion. Jensen stated that it is in the staff report, but it would be at the Commission's discretion to amend the motion.

Atlas-Ingebretson thanked Jensen for her work as well.

Chair Yarusso called for a vote. **The motion carried.**

Mullin pointed out that this will be Deb Jensen's last meeting as she is retiring on 7/1 and he thanked her for her work as well.

2019-130, Future Reimbursement Considerations for Carver County - Deb Jensen, Senior Parks Financial Planner

Jensen quickly explained (for the benefit of the new Commissioners) the future reimbursement consideration process and then gave a presentation on a request from Carver County for a future reimbursement for the development of Lake Waconia Regional Park as outlined in the materials provided.

It was motioned by Moeller and seconded by Peichel to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Consider reimbursing Carver County up to \$1.5 million from its share of a future Regional Parks Bonding Program for costs it incurs for development in Lake Waconia Regional Park; and
2. Inform Carver County that the Council does not under any circumstances represent or guarantee that it will reimburse the County and that expenditure of local funds never entitles a park agency to reimbursement.

Chair Yarusso called for a vote. **The motion carried.**

2019-131, Equity Grant Program Fund Distribution Plan - Emmett Mullin, Regional Parks Manager; Amanda Lovelee, Senior Outreach Coordinator; Dan Markel, Planning Analyst

Mullin began the presentation on the Fund Distribution Plan for the Regional Park System Competitive Equity Grant Program. Marckel discussed the background and Lovelee discussed the purpose as outlined in the materials provided.

Marckel discussed eligible applicants (implementing agencies) but noted that partnerships with communities/equity organizations score higher for applications.

Lovelee reviewed the available funds. Atlas-Ingebretson asked where the additional funds are coming from. Marckel stated the money is currently in the Council's six-year Capital Improvement Plan for the equity grant program.

Marckel discussed eligible uses.

Atlas-Ingebretson asked what 'broadly consistent' with a Council's approved master plan means. Marckel discussed the age of some of the master plan and noted that the earlier plans do not have a lot of consideration given to equity.

Atlas-Ingebretson felt explicitly stating this would be more powerful. Marckel discussed putting this in the application itself.

Harris clarified that agency boards must approve their requests before they are submitted to the Council or awarded. Marckel stated that before the grant contract with the agency is finalized, this must occur. Lovelee provided examples.

Moeller asked if the current funding could be used for capital projects to build awareness of the Regional Parks System. Marckel stated it's complicated. It cannot be used for programming, but staff will look into this further and clarify in the application process.

Fleming asked if money can only be used for lead-up community work? Would they have to be sure project would be built? Marckel responded that the project lead-up work would have to be the focus.

Kemery discussed a scenario of a partnership with an implementing agency. Marckel stated that this is a bit of a gray area, but more detailed guidance will be provided.

Atlas-Ingebretson asked who is the final decision maker? Marckel went over the review process and make-up of the review team. Ultimately, the Council will decide.

Peichel asked for more detail on who the two outside community members on the review team would be. Marckel explained that they envision that they would be equity 'experts.'

Harris stated that she hopes the review team meetings will be open to the public. Staff responded that the meetings will be open and posted on the Council's website.

Atlas-Ingebretson asked who decides on the plan itself? Mullin stated it will be the Council, based on recommendations from this Commission and the Community Development Committee.

Marckel discussed project and program evaluation and noted the intent is that this will be an ongoing program.

Atlas-Ingebretson suggested that the equity focus areas change over time, and they should not change until after the program evaluation.

Marckel discussed scoring categories in the selection criteria.

Harris shared comments from Washington County that she received with the Commission.

Atlas-Ingebretson discussed shifts made to equity toolkit questions she felt would limit the ability to follow-up and shared her concerns. She discussed the need to vet changes when there is a meaningful shift. She felt the language should remain the same as it fits well with this selection criteria.

Peichel discussed evaluation and language used.

Chair Yarusso asked whether unspent funds would stay with the program. Jensen stated that it was her understanding unspent funds would remain within the program.

Chair Yarusso asked about the scoring process. Lovelee stated that the review team will develop the process.

Moeller stated that this is a great first step but feels strongly about money for awareness building.

A motion was made by Moeller to recommend that the Metropolitan Council adopt the 2019 Fund Distribution Plan for the Competitive Equity Grant Program for the Regional Parks System and added to recommend that the Council create a fund for building awareness of what the equity program funded. Harris seconded the motion and asked how this would be accomplished.

Moeller discussed promotion, flyers, and other ideas to let folks know what has been done.

Atlas-Ingebretson suggested three amendments. First to require staff to give examples of communications. Second to require the reviews team to follow standard open meeting laws. And, third to make sure current language in the Equity Tool Kit, regarding verification by implementing agencies, is kept.

Theisen asked about separating Moeller's two-part motion. Moeller withdrew his motion.

Moeller motioned and it was seconded by Theisen to recommend that the Metropolitan Council adopt the 2019 Fund Distribution Plan for the Competitive Equity Grant Program for the Regional Parks System.

Chair Yarusso called for a vote. **The motion carried.**

Moeller motioned to recommend that as the equity program moves forward, additional money be provided to create awareness of the Metropolitan Council's emphasis on expanding equitable usage of our Regional Parks and Trails system, not reliant on capital projects. The motion was seconded by Theisen.

Harris shared her concern that this is vague. Chair Yarusso discussed the history and lack of awareness of projects.

Atlas-Ingebretson added that one of the biggest reasons people don't use parks is that they don't know they are there.

Chair Yarusso stated that the passage of this motion lets the Council know what our thoughts are.

Moeller motioned to amend his motion to strike 'not reliant on capital projects'. Theisen seconded the motion to amend.

Chair Yarusso called for a vote on the amendment. **The motion to amend carried.**

Chair Yarusso called for a vote on the amended motion as follows: to recommend that as the equity program moves forward, additional money be provided to create awareness of the Metropolitan Council's emphasis on expanding equitable usage of our Regional Parks and Trails system. **The motion, as amended, was approved.**

Fleming asked about communication.

Atlas-Ingebretson stated there are opportunities where the implementing agencies could do more engagement as part of a capital project, and have staff include this language in the application.

Fleming motioned to make the review team meetings open to the public. It was seconded by Kemery.

Chair Yarusso discussed possible difficulty in holding open meetings by statute if some are teleconferenced. He reviewed language already in the business item that states meetings will be noticed on the Council's website and open to the public.

Fleming withdrew her motion.

Chair Yarusso felt the discussion regarding the equity tool kit language should be through another venue.

Atlas-Ingebretson felt it currently aligns with criteria and changing that language would shift this and it would no longer align. She wanted this commission to be aware of the changes.

Chair Yarusso felt there needs to be more follow-up to learn more before taking action at this time.

Harris noted that this is a pilot and it could be modified later. Chair Yarusso agreed but stated that the toolkit is a separate document.

Kemery felt it would be helpful to look at language and compare to new language.

Chair Yarusso asked the Commission if they would like staff to bring this back for a future discussion.

Theisen stated he would like more information/background before taking a vote. He felt this should be brought back at another meeting.

Starling discussed the language and noted it has been changed back to the original language.

Atlas-Ingebretson suggested this group re-visit.

Fleming asked that the Commission be notified when staff make changes to the equity toolkit language.

Atlas-Ingebretson suggested being able to put changes up on the screen so that they could be reviewed as a group during the meeting. She felt this may be helpful when Commissioners make additional motions not contained in the staff reports.

REPORTS

Chair: Chair Yarusso gave a legislative update and stated the operations and maintenance funding was approved. He noted there was not a bonding bill but there may be a special session in August.

Commissioners: Harris noted that she toured Lake Elmo Regional Park with the Chair Slawik. She stated she will be touring Big Marine Park Reserve next week.

Peichel stated that he toured Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park on the Hennepin County side.

Staff: Mullin noted that there will be a celebration for Deb Jensen's retirement on Thursday, 6/27/19 at 4:30pm at the Como Park Pavilion in the Spring Café.

Mullin discussed the summer tour schedule. He noted that the 9/5 meeting/tour will be at Keller Golf Course and the 10/3 meeting/tour will be in Scott County at Cleary Regional Park.

Mullin stated he is also working with Washington County to possibly do a Spring tour in 2020.

Lovelee discussed an exciting partnership between the regional park system and the Metro Transit system. She discussed a project called the Nature Connector, where two buses will be wrapped in a mural to showcase how you can take Metro Transit to your regional park system. There will be an event to reveal the buses on Wednesday, June 19 at Minnehaha Park at 10am. She noted that an email with more information will be sent.

Jensen stated that she is having a personal retirement party on July 20 at 3pm, Kordiak Park in Columbia Heights. She will send out an email invite.

ADJOURNMENT

With business completed, the meeting adjourned at 7:04 p.m.

Sandi Dingle
Recording Secretary