

Minutes of the

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE METROPOLITAN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

Tuesday, May 20, 2014

Committee Members Present:

Dean Johnston, Rick Theisen, Tony Yarusso, William Weber, Carrie Wasley, Barbara Schmidt, Robert Moeller, Sarah Hietpas, Anthony Taylor, Wendy Wulff, Council Liaison

Committee Members Absent:

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Johnston called the special meeting of the Council's Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order at 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 20, 2014.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Chair Johnston noted that Gary Vaneyll, Council Member and also member of the Thrive 2040 MSP Workgroup asked to address the Commission. With this addition to the agenda, it was moved by Yarusso, seconded by Moeller to approve the agenda of the May 20, 2014 special meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Schmidt, seconded by Theisen to approve the minutes of the May 6, 2014 meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. **Motion carried.**

PUBLIC INVITATION

Invitation to interested person(s) to address the Commission on matters not on the agenda.

None.

BUSINESS

Council Member Gary Vaneyll, accompanied by members of the Thrive 2040 MSP Workgroup, addressed the Commission regarding equity. He indicated he was concerned that MOPSC might have some misconceptions or misunderstanding about how seriously and strongly most Council Members and in particular, the Thrive Work Group, feel about the issue of equity. He stated that the Council wants all of the system policy plans to address equity.

The Commissioners each shared their concerns that this was misinformation and that they were very much 'on board' with equity. Their discussions have centered more on how to achieve, how to fund, and how to measure and quantify equity.

2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Discussion and Confirmation: Revisiting Recommendations for Strengthening Equitable Usage of the Regional Parks System - Raintry Salk, Senior Parks Researcher and Jan Youngquist, Planning Analyst

Salk stated that this has not been an easy discussion and shared the following quote: "If it's easy, it probably isn't equity."

Salk gave a presentation and discussed the directive put forward from Thrive. She reviewed the process to date of stakeholder engagement and research done as well as internal discussions that have taken place.

Salk discussed the additional meeting held on May 9, 2014 between staff, the 10 implementing agencies and representatives from several stakeholder groups. She discussed the objectives of that meeting and the inherent tension heard between flexibility and accountability.

Salk spoke to the actual policy concept themes beginning with Planning and Design.

The Commission spoke at length regarding bridging facilities being included under the definition of Special Recreation Features as they were concerned with the idea of purchasing land/facilities to offer programming that would bring more people into our regional park system. They agreed with the concept of 'bridging' however thought more funding should be provided for programming.

Salk noted that this is a concept that people felt allowed flexibility that the IA's spoke to wanting. She noted that the agencies were in favor of allowing funding for bridging facilities. Youngquist added that the discussion was bouncing between capital and programming with legacy funding, there is an opportunity to get into funding with connecting people to outdoors and this discussion is coming.

Salk noted that we are talking about planning and design and dealing with capital. She further clarified that this is not about existing parks or special recreation features but about new system additions.

Salk next reviewed policy concepts related to Convening and Information. She noted these were widely accepted.

Theisen asked, regarding quarterly meetings, what 'best practices' means or constitutes. Salk stated that it is an opportunity for everyone to learn from one another – what's working, what's not, etc. It is enhanced organizational learning to be captured and disseminated.

Wasley asked if MPOSC members could attend quarterly meetings to be an observer. Staff agreed to keep them informed of meeting dates/times.

Webber stated he is concerned about 'lack' of changes to the policy concepts after the May 9 meeting. Theisen responded he was not surprised due to the inherent tension between desired flexibility and accountability. Taylor felt it had a great outcome and discussed the IA's and other stakeholder's commitment to future engagement.

Salk next discussed Funding and Investment policy themes and noted that there was the most tension dealing with these policy concepts.

Wulff discussed the four pillars of the 25 year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan: 1) Connect people and the outdoors; 2) Acquire land and create opportunities; 3) Take care of what we have; and 4) Coordinate among providers.

Moeller asked why there weren't any changes to this section. Salk responded that there were divergent views. Moeller felt that based on input – there's no language that would work better.

Salk discussed policy that we should have been doing regarding ranking projects in CIP and making recommendations to the Council. She noted that we have not been doing this. She recommended language amending this policy:

- Add Parks and Trails Legacy Fund
- Priorities: Equity Lens as defined by the Met Council

Wasley suggested striking 'against' and use 'in light of' instead to make the language more 'friendly'.

Theisen clarified that only 3% has been used (of Legacy Funding) to connect people to the outdoors. Stefferud responded and discussed the review done and where that percentage came from.

Moeller stated we need to have goals and need to set aside funding to make them happen. If not us, he asked, who will be setting goals.

Wasley noted that 3% only focuses on programs. She stated we're also comparing two different kinds of budgets.

Salk responded that it is our fiscal responsibility to carry out the Legacy Plan. Money shouldn't replace existing funds; we have a CIP in place. We don't have money set aside for connecting people to outdoors – we can ask IA's to use money for programming.

Wasley stated she feels like we've given this very little energy. We do not approve programming. Salk stated currently we don't bring forward any Legacy dollars for approval – now the Commission would be.

Taylor stated that this is where we can make equity happen. He discussed how community stakeholders are now engaged.

Yarusso spoke to Moeller's concerns and discussed the Communications Sub-committee and also the Benchmark Sub-committee of the Parks and Trails Legacy group.

Wulff stated that she is still trying to understand Legacy dollars comparing Regional vs. State Parks.

Salk concluded her presentation and noted their intent to create win/win outcomes. She reviewed important caveats and discussed staff's recommendation.

Schmidt asked if the IA's would be invited to speak. Johnston noted that they have been given the opportunity to provide input and asked if Schmidt had specific questions. Johnston noted that many of the community stakeholders had left early and comments would not be a balanced representation.

Schmidt stated that she sees the IA's as partners and felt the Commission should hear from them. Johnston reiterated that we have heard from them and stated there would need to be a motion from the Commission to allow this. Wulff noted that they will have an opportunity to comment in the Public Hearing process.

Wasley asked clarified the next steps. Salk stated that the draft plan will come back to the Commission on July 1. Youngquist noted that the Commission would be asked to set the public hearing date at the August 5 meeting. Stefferud noted that there will be a 55 day comment period on the document.

Johnston clarified that he is not discouraging anyone from submitting written comments. He recommended not taking any more input other than from the Commission tonight.

Yarusso asked if there are summary notes from the May 9 meeting. Salk stated that Attachment B contains notes summarized by the facilitator.

Schmidt stated she would still like to hear from the IA's. Johnston asked for a motion.

Weber motioned to continue the meeting without taking input from the audience. It was seconded by Taylor. **The motion carried.** Schmidt abstained from the vote.

Theisen made the motion and it was seconded by Moeller to recommend that the Metropolitan Council incorporate the set of policy concepts in Attachment A into the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* which aims to enhance equitable usage of the regional parks and trail by all our region's residents, such as across race, ethnicity, class, age, ability and immigrant status.

Wulff asked about the prioritization of grant funding for the CIP and PTLF grant funds, using equity as defined by the Metropolitan Council as a lens. Salk stated this was to ensure equity be brought forward. Youngquist noted that this was a direct quote from Thrive. She stated other outcomes were not drawn out.

Wulff asked how this will play out if an agency is already doing equity – do we not look at gaps? Salk stated staff is still determining what it will look like.

Taylor stated that he reads this as the Council's top priority. He noted however that priorities change.

Youngquist stated that equity is not mutually exclusive – there are other Council priorities that will be looked at as well.

Yarusso asked what the language will look like since equity is within the Council's priorities. Salk stated that it's not a priority, it's an outcome. She noted the language has not been completed yet.

Wasley stated if equity is an outcome, it needs to be measurable and asked how this will be done. Salk stated that the Council is working on a set of indicators to measure outcomes. Taylor noted that in order to make that happen, funds need to be set aside.

Wulff discussed the bonding bill and earmarking dollars for parks, etc. She doesn't know how it will play out and stated that she is hesitant to jump into a special grant program.

Theisen clarified that if you're setting aside money – would it be a one year commitment or more. Salk stated that the proposal is for using Council bonds so the duration is unending, however the amounts may vary.

Yarusso asked what the amount of Metro Council bonds not needed to match State funds potentially could be used to finance this set aside grant program. Stefferud replied that about \$7 million could be available over a 2 year period based on the need to match current and projected State funding for this year and next year.

Yarusso asked, if less than \$7 million was granted from this set aside grant program in that 2 year period, could those funds be rolled into the next two year cycle? Stefferud replied that bonds are issued when grants are awarded. Consequently there would be no funds to roll over.

Taylor asked would the Metro Council use all or part of the \$7 million for equity grants? Stefferud replied that the Metro Council would set an amount for the set aside grant program for equity grants and grant all of the funds.

Wulff stated she was not sure the Council would want to commit all the money. She noted we don't know what type of requests would be out there.

Stefferud noted that the Council could issue \$13 million a year in bonds however there would be property tax implications.

Yarusso clarified that the policy language would give the Council the flexibility to set the amount.

Johnston called for a vote. **Motion carried.** Schmidt abstained from the vote.

BREAK – The Commission suspended the meeting at 6:35 p.m. for a 25 min. break.

Meeting resumed at 7:00 p.m.

Proposed System Addition Discussion for 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan - Raintry Salk, Senior Parks Researcher and Jan Youngquist, Planning Analyst

Youngquist gave a presentation on the proposed system additions for the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan. She noted that the additions proposed by Three Rivers Park District would be discussed at the June Meeting.

Weber clarified that both of the proposed trails are within the right of way (ROW) and will be asphalt. He stated he understands linking trails but questioned the Council's role in funding bike paths along highways and county roads that are not particularly scenic. He asked if they should be funded elsewhere. Schmidt agreed but noted there is a difference with IA's and who builds what. She discussed some cases where counties or highway departments put in trails along roads.

Youngquist discussed the distinction between destination and linking trails. She noted this is a way of providing access to Regional Park System from inner-ring cities where they're not going to get a regional park.

Weber discussed the City of Minneapolis bike trails and asked if the Met Council funded these. Youngquist stated they were federally funded.

Weber stated he is concerned with so much planned/proposed/completed on the west side of the cities and so little on the east side.

Wulff noted that there is a Regional Bikeway Map being developed.

Weber asked how do you decide who should fund these trails. Wulff stated it depends on what type of traffic they serve.

Weber feels Highway 41 trail is more utilitarian and stated there is nothing scenic about it. He felt it should be funded from a different source. Moeller stated that this trail will do a lot to link to the Lake Minnewashta Regional Park and he supports it.

Wulff stated she understand where Weber is coming from however noted the trail serves well linking regional facilities.

Moeller made the motion and it was seconded by Theisen to recommend that the Metropolitan Council add the proposed County Road 41 Regional Trail Search Corridor to the Regional Parks System as part of the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan.

Johnston called for a vote. **The motion carried.**

INFORMATION

None.

REPORTS

Chair: Chair Johnston offered that meetings may go better/faster if some of the questions Commissioners had are directed to staff prior to the meeting. He noted that staff's contact information is included on the staff report.

Commissioners: Yarusso noted that there is an item in the Cash Spending Bill that may provide funding for a trail over Hwy 35W and Hwy 96.

Staff: Stefferud noted that the next meeting of the MPOSC will be on June 3, 2014 at 4pm and is expected to be a long meeting. He noted that dinner will be provided.

Stefferdud gave a Legislative update. Schmidt asked if he could provide a memorandum summarizing his update.

ADJOURNMENT

7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandi Dingle
Recording Secretary

Attachment A

Policies Aimed to Strengthen Equitable Usage of the Regional Parks System

The policy ideas which seek to strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents, such as across race, ethnicity, class, age, ability and immigrant status fall into three broad categories: 1) funding and investment, 2) regional parks system planning and 3) convening and information.

Funding and Investment

- Create a set-aside grant program with Met Council park bonds for capital projects that specifically aim to address strengthening equitable usage of the regional parks system
 - The amount available for the program would vary from year to year
 - Based on the amount remaining after our obligated matches are met (e.g. State bond match, Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant matches)
 - Staying within our \$7 million annual bonding limit and \$40 million overall cap
- Require agencies to identify the direct impact their funding requests would have on strengthening equitable use
 - Through the use of an equity impact analysis
 - Would not to be used as a screening tool, but as a means to get agencies to think about equity in their capital projects, programming, and other Council grant funded expenditures
 - Would apply to capital improvement program (CIP) and Parks and Trails Legacy Fund (PTLF) grant programs
- Require a certain percentage of each agencies' share of their Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations be used to "connect people to the outdoors" (one of the four pillars of the 25 year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan)
 - The types of funding expenditures considered to "connect people to the outdoors" include programming, events, staff, training, among others
 - Since inception, only 3% of metro funding has been spent to "connect people to the outdoors", while 62% has gone toward acquisition and development and 33% has gone to "taking care of what we have"
 - By contrast, the DNR allocated 17% of their PTLF appropriations to "connect people to the outdoors"
- Begin Met Council staff involvement in the prioritization of grant funding for the CIP and PTLF grant funds, using equity as defined by the Metropolitan Council as a lens
 - In drafting the list of how those dollars are spent, the agencies are currently the sole responsible parties for reviewing and prioritizing their respective list

Regional Parks System Planning

- Revise the description of a Special Recreation Feature to allow a "bridging facility"
 - Could allow for a pilot project to test the waters on accommodating changing recreational preferences
 - Would allow for experimentation to try new things that attract diverse users
 - Would still need to serve a regional audience, but would not require the size commitment of a regional park (100-500 acres) or a park reserve (1,000+ acres)
- Allow and encourage the following design elements to be included in a regional park or trail master plan:
 - Amenities suited for the aging population and those with limited mobility
 - Siting amenities close to parking lots or points of access, such as picnic areas or short, looped trails
 - Providing benches at appropriate intervals

- Picnic areas suitable for emerging recreational patterns of use
 - Picnic areas that accommodate mid-sized groups of 15-25
 - Does not need to be a formal picnic shelter—could be a number of picnic tables that can be grouped together
 - Would not require an advance reservation
 - Does not replace picnic areas that require reservations—both options would be offered
- Large open ball fields that could accommodate a variety of pick-up games
- Clustering of amenities that would allow for multi-generational groups
 - Provide amenities for all ages in a centralized area
 - Such as picnic areas near playgrounds and open ball fields
- In developing a regional park or trail master plan, require regional park implementing agencies to conduct community engagement that seeks to mitigate existing racial, ethnic, cultural or linguistic barriers and includes diverse races, ethnicities, classes, ages, abilities and immigrant statuses
 - The language from the Community Engagement Plan (CEP) may want to be used here instead for consistency across Metropolitan Council plans. The current CEP draft states the following: “Engagement efforts should work to mitigate existing racial, ethnic, cultural or linguistic barriers **and include diverse races, cultures, genders, sexual orientations, and socio-economic and disability statuses**”

Convening and Information

Several ideas were brought forward through stakeholder engagement that may not translate into specific policies as part of the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, but are based in the Thrive principle of collaboration. These activities will require the Metropolitan Council to provide additional funds or resources.

- Provide community engagement assistance to regional park implementing agencies to engage diverse races, ethnicities, classes, ages, abilities and immigrant statuses in developing a regional park or trail master plan
 - Several regional park implementing agencies have indicated they would need assistance to engage these audiences, at least initially
- Provide regional-level research related to changing recreational preferences and demographics
 - Expand prior efforts to include garnering information related to social class, educational status, age cohorts, disability status, etc.
- Conduct region-wide visitor survey on a more consistent basis
 - Currently only conducted once every decade
 - Systematic data collection for all regional park and trail units is costly
- Create a Met Council funded regional parks system ambassador program
 - Intent would be to build awareness of the regional parks system
 - Bringing parks to the people and people to the parks
 - Focus on enhancing participation among non-park users
- Develop an integrated web application with an activity/park finder feature
 - Currently do not have a regionally focused, centralized site that provides regional parks and trail details
 - Links provided to park implementing websites currently, which also include their other system components (e.g., golf courses, city parks, county parks, sports complexes, etc.)
- Conduct quarterly “best practices” meetings with regional park implementing agencies, **partners, community-based organizations, and advocacy groups***

- Coupled with an integrated, multimedia platform to facilitate continuous learning, institutional memory and enhanced dialog

* Italicized and highlighted language added May 12.