

Minutes of the Meeting of the METROPOLITAN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

Thursday, May 6, 2021

Committee Members Present: Assata Brown, Monica Dillenburg, Cecily Harris, Robert Moeller, Jeremy Peichel, Anthony Taylor, Tony Yarusso, Cana Young, and Lynnea Atlas-Ingebretson, liaison to the Council.

Committee Members Absent: Todd Kemery

CALL TO ORDER

The Recording Secretary did a roll call for a quorum.

With a quorum being present via WebEx, Commission Chair Yarusso called the meeting of the Council's Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order at 4:06 p.m. on Thursday, May 6, 2021.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Chair Yarusso motioned to amend the agenda, allowing for an informal icebreaker and asked for a consensus to approve the May 6, 2021 agenda. It was seconded by Moeller to approve the amended Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting agenda with the above-mentioned addition. The Recording Secretary issued a roll call vote.

Aye – 8 (Brown, Dillenburg, Harris, Moeller, Peichel, Taylor, Yang, Yarusso)

Nay – 0

Abstention – 0

The agenda was approved.

With a quorum present, Chair Yarusso asked for a motion to approve the April 1, 2021 minutes. Commissioner Harris discovered an error regarding her attendance at the Washington County Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park Ribbon Cutting. This event has not occurred yet and is scheduled for June 8th. Peichel motioned, and it was seconded by Moeller to approve the April 1, 2021 minutes of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting with the above-mentioned correction. The Recording Secretary issued a roll call vote.

Aye – 8 (Brown, Dillenburg, Harris, Moeller, Peichel, Taylor, Yang, Yarusso)

Nay – 0

Abstention – 0

The April 1, 2021 minutes were approved.

PUBLIC INVITATION

Chair Yarusso noted that the posted Agenda and asked that anyone wishing to address the Commission should please email the Chair at mposc@tonyyarusso.org. He noted that he did not receive a request to address the Commission at today's meeting.

[Click here to view the May 6, 2021 Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting video](#)

BUSINESS

The Commission was asked the following question **“How have the events of the last month impacted your thinking about equity and the Regional Parks System?”**

Chair Yarusso solicited Commissioners to share their thoughts. He reflected that parks and trails over the past months have become places of rest and reflection as well as places of protest.

Atlas-Ingebretson called this an opportunity for “equity nudges” and should be added to regular meetings to share thoughts, our impact, and as a reminder of our collective equity goals. The tensions of the Chauvin trial and the death of Daunte Wright magnified the importance of our parks for healing, prayer, and trauma. Parks are very important, and we should promote them as spaces for respite and relief.

Yarusso commented on the importance of the park implementing agencies, acting as hosts with conscious intent to provide activities and uses of the parks for common venues for free speech events, protest/awareness, demonstrations, and to protect the ancestral rights of people to use these spaces.

Moeller remarked on the importance of this discussion and reminded Commissioners that Black Lives Matter and how it relates to our work. He stated with the increase in the population of black and brown people in Minnesota, we need to anticipate changes in interests and activities.

Peichel commented on the Equity Grant Program proposals he recently reviewed, and how implementing agencies are approaching the topic of equity with human centered engagement, defining space, as a place to bring people together. We may need to look at our system’s authorizing legislation, to make it more flexible to meet changing needs.

Dillenburg shared her experience living with the unrest in Brooklyn Center, regarding the death of Daunte Wright. The shock of school and day care closures. Fortunately, she and her family found calm at a Three Rivers Park District park, to take a break and process current events.

Atlas-Ingebretson thanked the Commissioners for sharing.

2021-103, Square Lake Special Recreation Feature Master Plan, Washington County

Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst, presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission at its meeting on May 6, 2021.

Connor Schaefer, Washington County Parks Planner and Sandy Breuer, Washington County Park Director, were in attendance and responded to questions.

Peichel asked whether the 30-minute travel shed was limited to Washington County. Kelly responded that it was not; that it went into adjacent counties as well as western Wisconsin.

Chair Yarusso asked for more information on the adaptive management approach mentioned in relation to natural resources. Kelly referenced the Natural Resources section of the staff report in the Analysis section, noting that the management approach is an incremental process of testing techniques, observing effectiveness, and adjusting techniques as needed.

Moeller asked for clarification on the criteria for a special recreation feature. Kelly responded that special recreation features typically require a unique programming or management effort and are usually smaller in size than regional parks. Square Lake has some of the clearest waters in the Twin Cities metropolitan area and draws visitors from across the region.

Chair Yarusso asked about the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources’ (MN DNR) efforts to stock the lake with trout. Schaefer responded that the master plan focuses on Square Lake’s land base and access to the lake, recognizing management of the lake and any trout stocking is the responsibility of the MN DNR. Schaefer added that MN DNR suspended stocking trout until further notice.

Council Member Atlas-Ingebretson asked whether race was considered in the equity analysis. Kelly responded that it was and mentioned that the disparities referenced in the staff report compare Washington

County park and trail visitors to the overall County population. When Washington County park and trail visitors are compared with the overall metropolitan area population, race and ethnicity are also considered disparities. Schaefer added that Council Research staff also conducted an analysis of Square Lake visitation using location-based cell phone data (a.k.a., Streetlight). A presentation of these findings is available in the master plan's appendices.

Harris noted that Square Lake visitation is surprisingly diverse for the fairly rural location of the special recreation feature, having personally visited the park on numerous occasions.

Dillenburg expressed the concern around the lack of public transit access and options to Square Lake, and suggested Washington County consider providing some form of a transportation stipend or coupon for disadvantaged communities. She noted that transportation is often a major barrier to people visiting regional parks.

Taylor asked multiple questions. First, he asked for clarification on a proposed trail connection between Pine Point Regional Park and Square Lake. Kelly responded that, as a result of last year's system additions process, there is a regional trail search corridor connecting the two regional park system units. A master plan has not yet been developed. Next, Taylor asked about the potential for programming at Square Lake. Schaefer noted that stand-up paddleboard programs are currently very popular and said the County is interested in expanding programming options at the special recreation feature. In addition, Taylor asked about potential outreach efforts to underserved populations and referenced the east side of St. Paul. He suggested Square Lake could be an excellent entry point for new users to the regional park system. Schaefer noted the County is interested in expanding its marketing efforts and that this is an area they will be looking into.

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

1. Approve Washington County's Square Lake Special Recreation Feature Master Plan.

With no further discussion, Chair Yarusso called for a vote. The recording secretary issued a roll call vote.

Aye – 8 ((Brown, Dillenburg, Harris, Moeller, Peichel, Taylor, Yang, Yarusso)

Nay – 0

Abstention –

The motion was approved.

INFORMATION

Regional Parks System Historical-Cultural Study – Introduction

Tracey Kinney, Planner, Sarah Gong, Intern, Amana Lovelee, Senior Outreach Coordinator, Jessica Lee, Senior Planner, presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission at its meeting on May 6, 2021.

Peichel expressed his appreciation for the presentation, initiating creative interpretive programs; art, podcasts, stories, history, that connect decisions of past with the consequences of today and potential for future.

Yarusso expressed his concern regarding a desire to avoid the making the mistakes of the past in our regional system, putting us on a better path for the future. Land acknowledgment is a complicated process and must be done in ways that recognize that indigenous groups exist today and preserve the past while connecting to the future.

Moeller thanked staff for bringing this to the Commission's attention and shared a story of purchases of land belonging to indigenous families which are now public venues, for example Fort Snelling State Park.

Dillenburg expressed her delight at the idea of incorporating art and history. We cannot delete or re-write history, but we can acquire more information from the past to help create a better future.

Atlas-Ingebretson suggested promoting awareness regarding land acknowledgment and rights to the land. While we must incorporate history into our system understanding, don't talk about this topic solely in an historical context but in a current day context. And get to action and the "so what". Include the topics of truth and reconciliation, especially around sacred sites. We will need to be truthful and transparent in how we acknowledge the past.

Taylor strongly encouraged attention to interpretive spaces, telling history with connections through current time using programming and outreach.

REPORTS

Chair: Chair Yarusso asked Commissioner Peichel to report on the Equity Grant Program proposed revisions and next steps.

Commissioners: Peichel announced his appointment to the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) to a 4-year term. Finally, an opportunity to exercise his degree in conservation.

Moeller suggested resuming Regional Park tours at future MPOSC meetings, with the intention of selecting parks that are designed to welcome diversity and inclusion.

Staff: Mullin reported only eleven days remaining of the Legislative session. He provided updates on the following relevant Regional Parks System legislation:

- Parks & Trails Legacy funding is currently under consideration with the Governor's recommendation of dividing funds 40% - DNR, 40% Metropolitan Council, and 20% to Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails Commission.
- The Environment and Natural Resources Conference Committee is working through funding several Regional Parks System Programs, including Operations & Maintenance funding, and two LCCMR bills: acquisition funding of \$2.5M 2021, and \$1M in 2020 funds.
- While this is not formally a bonding year, the agencies have a bill under consideration for \$7.5M.

Mullin provided an update on some future MPOSC business:

Finally, a future Bdote, Sacred Sites tour is being organized for September 17, 8:30-2:30. It will begin at Fort Snelling State Park. He encourages all commissioners to sign up to attend. The park agencies are also invited to join.

The June 3rd MPOSC agenda will include the Equity Grant Program Recommendations, and a Three Rivers Park District acquisition.

Council Liaison: Atlas-Ingebretson stated information on the State Outdoor Task Force is available.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed the meeting adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

Michele Wenner
Recording Secretary