

**Minutes of the
MEETING OF THE
METROPOLITAN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION**

Tuesday, August 6, 2013

Committee Members Present: Dean Johnston, Carrie Wasley, Daniel Shlaferman, Tony Yarusso, Emily Piper, Barbara Schmidt, Wendy Wulff, Council Liaison

Committee Members Absent: Seyon Nyanwleh, Bob Moeller

CALL TO ORDER

After a tour of Como Regional Park, Committee Chair Johnston called the meeting of the Council's Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order at 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, August 6, 2013.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

With a slight change to the order of the Agenda, it was moved by Yarusso, seconded by Piper to approve the agenda. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Piper, seconded by Shlaferman to approve the minutes of the July 9, 2013 meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. **Motion carried.**

PUBLIC INVITATION: Invitation to interested person to address the Commission on matters not on the agenda.

None.

BUSINESS

Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment, Ramsey County - Jan Youngquist, Planning Analyst

Youngquist gave a presentation describing the amendment submitted by Ramsey County for the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan to expand the trail corridor. She reviewed the background and analysis done, as well as the implementation costs including \$615,000 in eligible acquisition costs. She also discussed estimated development costs of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail amendment.

Wulff asked what the distance between the two trails was as she is concerned that it will be too close to an existing regional trail. Greg Mack, Ramsey County stated that the trails are 1.5 miles apart. Youngquist added that the Regional Parks Policy Plan calls for 1.5 mile distance between trails, so it falls within the parameters in the policy plan.

Wasley commented that she toured the area just last week and is quite pleased with the development of the area and the trail.

Yarusso motioned and it was seconded by Wasley to recommend that the Metropolitan Council approve the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment.

Chair Johnston called for a vote and the motion carried.

INFORMATION

Information Item: Status and Anticipated Demand for Regional Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grants – Raintry Salk, Senior Parks Researcher

Salk, in a follow up to the July MPOSC meeting, held a meeting with 9 of the 10 Implementing Agencies to discuss their recommendations for the anticipated demand for acquisition dollars. She reviewed their four recommendations outlined in the materials provided.

Salk discussed the account fund balances and revised anticipated acquisitions. She reviewed an example of recommendation #2 (in the handouts) and discussed caveats employed in the scenarios she gave.

Salk next discussed agency preferences for the reimbursement scenario for land acquisition opportunity grants where 60% would be held in reserve for reimbursement. Four of the agencies preferred this scenario. Two of the agencies preferred the scenario where 40% would be held in reserve for reimbursement. Three agencies were fine with either scenario and one agency did not respond.

Next, Salk reviewed recommendations 3 and 4 (listed in the handout).

Yarusso asked if agencies that chose the 60% scenario could make the 40% scenario work. Salk responded that some agencies noted that there would be hardships created.

Wasley stated that this is a good problem to have and it needs to go back to the Metropolitan Council.

Johnston asked if staff is looking for a recommendation. Stefferud stated that staff is looking for direction on a recommendation that would be brought back to the next meeting.

Wulff asked what the levy impact for additional bonding would be. Stefferud responded he would need to do more analysis and stated this is not a short term solution. Long term would require a change in the law and if it becomes a problem, we can show the need for a change in the law.

Wulff stated she felt a much bigger budget discussion is needed.

Piper asked how long changing the rules would take. Salk stated 4-5 months.

Piper asked about putting money in the Parks and Trails Fund. Salk stated that the Parks and Trails Fund has more flexibility and there are 3-4 potentially affected by the cap.

Yarusso asked if we have the ability to write a sunset date for policy issues. Stefferud stated he could prepare a sunset provision but he would need to research that.

Yarusso asked about increasing the bonding vs. getting it from other sources. Stefferud stated that the Council issues short term bonds every year. No more than \$40 million can be issued at any point in time. The Council has been issuing \$7 million per year of short term bonds to comply with this legal limitation. He noted that the \$1.5 million proposed is within that \$40 million limit. He stated we are talking about adding money to accounts so agencies can do acquisitions as efficiently as possible.

Yarusso asked what the downside of increasing the bonding limit would be. Wulff responded that the Council has a strategy and would like to see what a change would look like.

Yarusso asked if staff could provide a short summary explaining levies and how they work.

Wasley clarified that increasing the \$40 million bonding limit is a separate issue than adding the \$1.5 million. Stefferud said yes, in the long term staff would need more analysis before asking for an increase in the \$40 million bonding limit.

Johnston asked if asking for the \$1.5 million is a concern, if it's within the \$40 million limit. Stefferud noted that Alan Morris is on vacation this week or he would have been at this meeting. He gave a brief synopsis of impacts if this were done one time.

Wasley suggested focusing on the immediate issue and a short term solution.

Piper asked if agencies will not be able to do certain projects with this short term solution. She is concerned with the cap and what it will inhibit agencies from doing.

Salk stated if we do nothing, there will be nothing there – the money will run out. She stated that 'something' is better than nothing. Agencies came to a meeting acknowledging this. Piper felt the brunt of the burden would be felt by more developed agencies.

Yarusso stated that he heard from his agency that they are fine with this change.

Johnston asked to hear from the implementing agencies.

Mark Themig, Three Rivers Park District – for Scott County noted that there was a time when the acquisition opportunity fund didn't exist. He felt that the implementing agencies could work with a \$1.7 million cap. He feels the solution is temporary and feels it's important to look at increasing the \$40 million bonding limit.

Greg Mack, Ramsey County complimented staff for bringing together this discussion. He talked about the 60/40 split and stated that he voted for the 40% scenario but felt 60% would work if you used "up to 60%" and felt this would work for other agencies as well.

Jonathan Vlaming, Three Rivers Park District agreed with his colleagues. He suggested that all agencies work with the Met Council and show anticipated acquisition costs, etc. He agreed that we need a short term fix. He also suggested the need to get rid of dual funding sources. He'd like to see all funding sources combined. He also suggested talking with the LCCMR to see if they can provide additional short term funding.

Vlaming stated we need to fix the length of time on reimbursements. He is against the short term fix suggested. He felt that if it is done, CFO's of park agencies need to meet with finance staff at the Met Council.

Vlaming suggested the need to re-look at first come, first serve to receive a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant and change it so that each grant request gets something.

Steve Sullivan, Dakota County thanked staff and the committee for their work and support. He explained how this affects Dakota County and Federal Grants for the benefit of greenways – deliverables for those grants and asked for land control by date certain. He noted the County has committed in their 5 year CIP the 25% match required under current policy of the Met Council.

Sullivan stated that Dakota County is ripe for acquisition as they have more inholdings. Also, they have made an increased effort to market to inholding landowners. He discussed reasons to acquire land now. They have also made commitments to land owners. He wants to be able to maintain those commitments. He stated that they are in support of the 60% scenario and agrees that there is a long term issue here. He stated he is also concerned with the \$1.7 million cap as he feels it will not be sustainable over time. He feels we should also be looking at capital needs within the system.

Yarusso encouraged staff to work with the Council to look at increasing bonding.

Schmidt noted that the Acquisition Opportunity Fund was developed by the MPOSC.

Information Item: Overview of the Great River Passage Master Plan – Don Ganje, City of St. Paul

Ganje gave an overview of the Great River Passage Master Plan for information purposes. He discussed the following three principals – wanted to make the river corridor:

- More natural
- More urban
- More connected (citywide access to individual parks)

More information can be found at www.greatriverpassage.org Ganje will email a video to Commission members.

Information Item: Distributing State Fiscal Year 2014 Appropriations for Metropolitan Regional Parks System Operations and Maintenance - Arne Stefferud, Manager Regional Parks and Natural Resources

Stefferud reviewed a memo regarding the distribution of State Fiscal Year 2014 appropriations for Metro Regional Parks System Operations and Maintenance.

He reviewed appropriations from 1985 to 2013 and noted that this is reported to the Legislature. He noted that although the state is supposed to cover 40% of the costs, this historically has never happened.

REPORTS

Chair: Johnston reported that he attended the Committee of the Whole Meeting regarding policy issues and it went well.

Commissioners: Yarusso reported that he attended the Vadnais Lake Trail grand opening.

Staff: Stefferud reported that the appointment of MPOSC members will be soon. He noted that an email will be sent out. He reviewed the process and noted that as a courtesy, staff would like to know if members plan to re-apply. It was further discussed that members must fill out an application if they do intend to reapply.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 6:12 p.m.

Sandi Dingle
Recording Secretary