

# Minutes

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



**Meeting Date:** December 1, 2022

**Time:** 4:00 PM

**Location:** 390 Robert Steet

## Members Present:

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chair, Tony Yarusso, At-large | <input type="checkbox"/> Vacant, District D                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Anthony Taylor, District G   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Monica Dillenburg, District A | <input type="checkbox"/> Jeremy Peichel, District E           | <input type="checkbox"/> Todd Kemery, District H                 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Robert Moeller, District B    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cecily Harris, District F | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Susan Vento, Council Liaison |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cana Yang, District C         |   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> = Present                    |

## 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 4:03 p.m.

## Agenda Approved

Chair Yarusso stated that the order of the agenda needed to be reversed to accommodate a presenter that was running late. Committee members did not have any comments or further changes to the agenda. **The agenda was approved with the order change.**

## Approval of Minutes

It was moved by Dillenburg, seconded by Harris to approve the minutes of the November 3, 2022, regular meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. **Motion carried.** Chair Yarusso abstained.

## Public Invitation

None.

## Business

None.

## Information

### **Parks and Trails Legacy Fund FY2024/2025 Biennium Projects Overview and Equity Highlights, Part 1 of 2** (Jessica Lee, 651-602-1621, with implementing agency partners)

Lee provided background on the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund and introduced the five agencies making a presentation on their Legacy projects.

Washington County – Connor Schaffer reviewed three projects outlined in the presentation provided. There were no questions.

Dakota County – Niki Geisler reviewed their request for three projects outlined in the presentation provided.

Moeller asked if Dakota County is the primary manager of the bison herd at the park reserve or is it

the tribal partners. Geisler stated that Dakota County has hired a bison expert. Moeller asked about education for visitors. Geisler stated that there is a plan for a number of educational programs for kids and adults.

Taylor asked about what coordination is done with the tribes and how is Dakota County working to deepen relationships with the tribal community? Geisler discussed a number of interpretive projects that Dakota County is working on with the tribes at Spring Lake that focus on indigenous ways. She also mentioned a cultural study Dakota County is doing at Miesville Ravine Park Reserve with tribal partners.

Vento stated that she loves to learn about this work and has enjoyed visits to Spring Lake and suggested a Commission summer tour and meeting at this park.

Carver County – Marty Walsh reviewed four projects that they are planning as outlined in the presentation provided.

Harris asked what is done with the old playground equipment that is replaced and wondered if it can be repurposed. Walsh stated he's not sure but a lot of the equipment their replacing is obsolete and worn out.

Taylor asked about whether Carver County is trying to “ladder” opportunities to encourage children and families playing at the playground to move to other more nature based activities. Walsh spoke about their programming work and discussed a partnership they have with Phyllis Wheatley Community Center in North Minneapolis and their mission to bring inner city youth out to rural areas.

Bloomington – Lee reviewed their two proposed projects as there was no representation from Bloomington to speak.

There were no questions.

Scott County – Alyssa Misfeldt reviewed their three projects outlined in the materials provided.

Chair Yarusso asked about costs for completing the Merriam Junction Regional Trail. Patty Freeman, Scott County said the total project cost for constructing the trail including acquisition is estimated at \$23 million. Scott County will be implementing this over several years and are seeking other sources of funding.

Moeller asked about the railroad bridge over the river and its status. Freeman stated the railroad bridge has been taken down, so the main crossing will be a brand new bridge.

Moeller asked about plans for flooding on the trails along the Minnesota River. Freeman discussed the importance of constructing durable concrete bridges that will withstand flooding. Trails will be along raised railroad beds.

Lee stated that the remaining agencies will review their projects at the January MPOSC meeting.

**Equity Nudge: The Transformation of Indian Mounds Regional Park, City of Saint Paul**  
(Tracey Kinney, 651-602-1029, Ellen Stewart, Saint Paul, and Franky Jackson, Lower Phalen Creek Project)

Kinney introduced Ellen Stewart, St. Paul and Franky Jackson, Lower Phalen Creek Project.

Stewart introduced herself.

Jackson introduced himself and gave an overview as described in the materials provided.

Stewart summarized how the Cultural Landscape project came to be. Originally, the City was going to invest its Parks and Trails Legacy Funds into constructing a splashpad. Some members of the community raised concerns about impacts to the historic mounds. This gave rise to the Cultural Landscape study. Stewart reviewed the study's findings and messaging plan, and discussed challenges listed in the materials. Longer term plans include development of a mound management plan that would include natural resource rehabilitation, limiting roads, and further



protecting the mounds.

Jackson discussed the shift in thinking that occurred during this project and discussed co-management with tribal partners versus creating an MOU or MOA's.

Stewart discussed how much the city has learned through the engagement process and discussed the development of new approaches to acknowledge mistakes and move forward with different approaches.

Stewart discussed next steps outlined in the presentation and discussed upcoming conversations planned.

Jackson discussed work with Dakota Tribal partners as well as his work with the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council. There is a need to repatriate remains that are currently being stored at Hamline University and the History Center. They seek reinternment at the site.

Vento expressed appreciation and the need to teach visitors about these mounds and how to be respectful. She recognized the work and patience of the tribes on this project.

Jackson noted that even Dakota people are challenged in how they visit this landscape.

Vento asked about the area between the pavilion and the care center. Stewart stated the vision is to phase it out.

Vento asked about the street that runs through there. Stewart stated the plan is to take it out.

Vento asked, about the site and how it will be used going forward? Jackson discussed that this is an active, on-going conversation, and the importance of creating a vision for the future together. Further, he shared the principle that the City and Tribes are operating under: if an amenity is slated for removal at the park, it first needs to be relocated within this same service area.

Harris asked about co-management versus 'land-back'. Jackson clarified that 'land-back' may not mean land title but creating a shared management plan of the mound sites with tribal partners.

Harris asked, what will trigger other cultural land scope studies for the Met Council? Mullin discussed the Met Council's desire to become more cognizant of the region's sacred spaces.

Chair Yarusso discussed the requirement to reach out to the state archeological office when dealing with sacred sites and noted this is an area of much needed learning and growth.

Stewart discussed what they have learned because this site is a sacred space. There is a need to be diligent about working with tribal members. She discussed gaps that do exist.

Taylor shared the story about when the city brought the splash pad proposal first to MPOSC and asked, how do we as a regional system move from a mindset that is recreationally focused to one that thinks about our parks and trails in an historic and sacred way. How are we working with implementing agencies and are we getting any resistance. Stewart responded they've not had resistance but there remains a lot for the agencies to learn.

Jackson stated that education is something we need to be promoting. He discussed ongoing engagement and conversations to discuss myths and truths about Indian Mounds Regional Park.

Taylor asked about St. Paul's youth programming. Jackson stated they're hoping their Lower Phalen Project organization can be the hub for that work.

Harris asked whether we need to create a new classification for this type of park. She asked, how do we identify it or do we need a category for sacred space in the Regional Parks System.

Chair Yarusso discussed special recreation features as a possible option. He wondered about the fit for cultural and historic sites and asked, should we be having a conversation about historical/cultural designations within our Regional Park System.

Jackson discussed that there is a debate amongst tribal members, and at this site there was a decision to use the term cemetery because it's direct correlation with state burial law.

Vento gave kudos to the Dayton administration that initiated development of stronger relationships



with tribal nations and the need for tribal consultation. This work continues with the Walz/Flannigan administration.

Moeller stated 5 years ago we began discussing equity and inclusion and feels that we have come a long way. He suggested we look at sensitive tribal lands in future Commission discussions.

Taylor discussed a shift going forward in how we think about sacred spaces and how we define them.

Chair Yarusso discussed Grand Portage State Park and how the State does not own it but instead leases it from the Grand Portage Tribal Band. He finds this a great example of co-management and spoke of the shared work to heal the landscape and relationships.

Jackson called out the parallel challenges at Indian Mounds and discussed how parts of this landscape have been closed to allow the land to heal.

Chair Yarusso discussed the respect of these sacred spaces.

Dillenburg shared about her Mexican heritage and spoke to the protection of sacred spaces. Right now our educational system in the United States is not very good with indigenous history. We have work to do. Jackson feels there is an opportunity for the Met Council to be leaders for change in the Regional System. There has been an absence of tribal voices at the table. This is changing and needs to continue to change.

Chair Yarusso read Commissioner Peichel's comments that he emailed.

Jackson stated there is lots of work that needs to be done but engaging with tribal partners is a step in the right direction and he's excited to see how far we've come in two years.

## Reports

### Chair

Chair Yarusso noted there are several terms expiring and encouraged networking for the open districts.

### Committee Members

Taylor called out the importance of the Equity Grant Program that funded numerous new positions to promote equity and programing. He stated the agencies are doing a great job with this work, connecting to community.

Harris discussed Washington County's continued work on a regional trail from Afton to Stillwater and noted there is still time to comment on this trail plan.

### Council Liaison

None.

### Staff

Mullin stated the Legislative session is gearing up. He mentioned the Regional Development Guide and Parks Policy Plan work that is on-going. He shared three emerging themes: Equity, Natural Systems, and Climate. Vento added a fourth talked about the importance of Public Health, Safety and Wellness.

Mullin discussed upcoming Commission agenda items.

## Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 6:10 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 December 1, 2022.

Approved this 5th day of January 2023.

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**Council Contact:**

Sandi Dingle, Recording Secretary

[Sandi.Dingle@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:Sandi.Dingle@metc.state.mn.us)

651-602-1312

