

Minutes of the

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE METROPOLITAN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

Tuesday, April 22, 2014

Committee Members Present:

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

Committee Members Absent:

None.

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, April 22, 2014.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

It was moved by Theisen, seconded by Weber to approve the agenda of the April 22, 2014 special meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. Moeller asked that the Implementing Agencies (IA's) be given enough time to speak. Johnston stated that they'll be given 5 minutes. Schmidt asked that they be given more than 5 minutes if needed. Wasley agreed. Johnston asked that it be left to the discretion of the Chair and if a member felt the speaker needed more than 5 minutes they should make a motion to grant that at that time. Schmidt agreed to that. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Schmidt, seconded by Weber to approve the minutes of the April 7, 2014 special meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. **Motion carried.** Yarusso abstained due to his absence from the April 7, 2014 meeting.

PUBLIC INVITATION

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

None.

BUSINESS

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

Salk gave a presentation on policy ideas that have been put forward after a rigorous stakeholder engagement process. She noted that staff is looking for confirmation of recommendations.

Salk referenced a news article that was published at the joint MPOSC/CDC meeting on April 8, 2014 and she felt that the content of the article mischaracterized the intent and aim of what we are striving to achieve. She reiterated, so there would be no misunderstanding, that our focus is specifically related to the Thrive directions of the Regional Parks Policy Plan which is to strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all of our regions residents – such as across race, ethnicity, class, age, ability, and immigrant status. She stated this is a fairly inclusive approach as we are striving to strengthen equitable uses of our system.

Salk discussed stakeholder engagement and research done to date and also internal discussion by MPOSC as well as a joint meeting with CDC and MPOSC and a meeting with the Thrive Workgroup.

Salk discussed three policy themes including: 1) funding and investment, 2) regional parks system planning, and 3) convening and information.

Salk noted that all of the items she presented at this meeting are within the Council's legal statutory authority. She then reviewed the policy concepts listed in Attachment A of the staff report.

Hietpas asked if there was an estimated average of what the amount might be for the grant program proposed. Salk stated she doesn't have an average but gave an example of the typical levy of \$5.5 million would leave about \$1.5 million.

Wasley asked if this grant program is for acquisition. Salk stated that it would be for projects. Wasley asked where the program process is. Salk stated that's the Parks and Trails Legacy fund dollars, which are unrestricted. She noted that Met Council bonds stipulate that they must be used for capital projects.

Salk discussed the second policy concept and the use of an equity impact analysis. She stated that it would not be intended to be used as a screening tool to approve or disapprove a grant but essentially a mechanism to get agencies to specify how their project, program or other grant funded expenditure would impact on equity. Yarusso asked if it is not a screening tool, does this mean that we are not first filtering requests using this. Salk stated that it is not intended to be used as a screening tool.

Moeller clarified that if we are asked to approve a project but the equity analysis is not positive it would not affect our decision of whether to approve or disapprove the recommendation to fund. Salk noted this is correct.

Wulff stated she is trying to understand what kind of staff time for agencies this would require when it has no impact on funding and therefore asked what the point would be. Salk stated the intention is to allow agencies to speak to what impacts their projects or programs and it allows the Met Council to understand why we might be making progress towards strengthening equitable usage in terms of what projects have been done by having some sort of record of the equity impacts.

Wulff stated she is confused with this process. In the past, we've had pros and cons and feedback from the IA's and she is getting the impression that the IA's have been somewhat blindsided by this and are already doing things in regards to equity that we have no record of. Salk stated that staff was directed by the Met Council to engage with our stakeholders in a different manner than in the past. She stated that staff spoke to the IA's as well as a whole host of other people. Staff are bringing forth the ideas generated from those meetings. She stated staff is looking for what 'traction' these ideas have. In terms of timing, staff is at a clipped pace that they have no control over. She reiterated that this process has included meetings with the IA's.

Moeller commented that a quick pace is not a good reason not to do a thoughtful engagement with the IA's and is not in the best interest of the public, agencies, and/or the Met Council.

Salk discussed the third policy concept related to funding and investment.

Johnston asked if this proposal/percentage will be uniform across all agencies. Salk stated that it would be the same percentage for all agencies. That would be derived with a collaborative process.

Yarusso stated he feels this will be hard to measure and we'll need to find a way to specify what category a project falls into.

Wulff stated she feels finding an overall percentage for everyone will be challenging as there are such differences among the agencies in terms of what they've already expended and not been reimbursed for by the Council. She discussed how sometimes acquisition creates equity. Salk clarified we are talking about Parks and Trails Legacy Fund reimbursements and not CIP reimbursements.

Salk summarized the fourth policy concept.

Hietpas asked how this is being received by the IA's and how is staff looking at prioritization (differently than the IA's might) and why we may be better than the IA's in doing this. Salk responded that the Met

Council is a fiscal agent that currently has no involvement in the oversight of these funds. This would allow us to see where a majority of our funding is going.

Hietpas clarified that the equity impact analysis could not be used as a screening tool and asked how it could be used for prioritization. Salk stated that there are two different ideas. One is in the actual grant request – speaking to how it would impact equitable usage. The second is in the capital improvement and parks and trails legacy fund drafting of an entire list of what they want to do over the next two fiscal years – planning how they’re going to spend their allocation.

Hietpas asked if this would be an ‘assist to the IA’s’ or would it be a required protocol they would have to follow. Salk stated that we would work in collaboration with the agencies.

Taylor stated he is feeling like everyone is shocked by this, looking at it as if they’ve not seen it before. He feels equity is becoming part of the business plan and marketing strategy for any successful organization.

Wasley clarified that this is a directive coming from the Met Council and stated that she is also surprised that this is causing so much turmoil. She stated that in her line of work they deal with equity issues constantly.

Wulff stated that she is more surprised by the process and stated that she is used to being more collaborative with the agencies.

Youngquist stated that this is a tough issue. She noted that when they met with the IA’s and other stakeholders, ideas varied greatly. Staff decided then to meet individually with agencies so they could share openly their comments/concerns. She noted that they could not get feedback that all ten agencies could agree on, which also ran counter to what advocates and other stakeholders recommended.

Weber stated that the devil is in the details but agreed that equity needs to be addressed. He feels the question is - how far does the Met Council go.

Hietpas agreed and supports equitable use but gets bogged down in the details and doesn’t want rules to get in the way of how the agencies handle equity. She wants the IA’s to have the freedom to do what they think will most connect the populations to the parks and increase equitable use.

Johnston discussed the schedule and stated that we are talking about policy, not implementation. He stated that we need to come up with a review process that is not restrictive to IA’s but meets the Met Council’s objectives.

Yarusso asked if these policy recommendations will become the exact language. Salk stated that these policies will be the context from which the language is formed.

Schmidt shared her concern of the fourth policy concept that the variable would be too great.

Salk next discussed the first policy concept in planning and design.

Schmidt asked for examples of a ‘bridging facility’. Salk gave an example of a facility (not a current regional park) used to teach rock climbing, or paddling and then those persons could go out and use the regional parks using what they’ve learned.

Youngquist stated that at the joint meeting between CDC and MPOSC there were three different scenarios discussed and this one seemed to have the most support.

Schmidt asked what physical form would it take, i.e., a classroom. Youngquist stated it would be a park but wouldn’t have the size requirement of a regional park. Schmidt asked if it could be done at a local park. Youngquist stated that it would be owned and operated by the IA’s.

Moeller asked if it could be an existing facility or would it need to be something new. Youngquist clarified they were thinking in terms of something new.

Wulff asked why you wouldn't do 'teaching' in local parks. Youngquist stated that this was an idea of the IA's.

Taylor asked for a definition of a Special Recreation Feature. Youngquist described the four different components of the Regional Park System including: regional parks, park reserves, regional trails, and special recreation features (which do not have the size of a regional park, but offer special programming).

Hietpas stated that this brings to mind how this would be beneficial for urban areas.

Yarusso suggested that rather than a new facility, a new policy that supported funding for programs that would bridge the gap between county, local and regional parks and would help build equitable usage.

Taylor stated that he sees this as flexibility for the agencies to help them do bridging of facilities. He suggested thinking about equity – not as a mandate – but more as a way of creating opportunities.

Moeller stated that he likes the idea but is concerned with buying new facilities/land. Weber agreed.

Salk discussed the second and third policy concepts of planning and design. She noted that the Met Council is putting together a Community Engagement Plan at this time.

Salk discussed the first policy concept of convening and information.

Weber supported this as long as it is not forced upon the locals.

Salk discussed the second and third policy concepts of convening and information.

Wulff asked if there is an opportunity to use data that IA's are collecting on their own. Salk responded that not all agencies are systematically doing this.

Moeller asked what is meant by 'more consistent'. Salk stated every five years.

Weber asked what the cost of a region-wide visitor survey runs. Salk stated it is about \$250,000 dollars.

Salk discussed the fourth policy concept of convening and information.

Weber asked if this ambassador program would be targeted outreach. Salk confirmed.

Wulff asked if this would help with the misconceptions of park usage, i.e., safety in our parks.

Taylor stated that an ambassador program would help this. He asked if there is any idea of the cost involved. Salk stated no.

Yarusso stated that something like this may have multiple levels both paid persons as well as volunteers.

Weber would like this implemented by the IA's.

Salk noted that one of the outcomes of outreach was a lack of a cohesive system.

Salk discussed the fifth policy concept of convening and information.

Yarusso stated he feels the issue is that we think of parks and trails in terms of who's in charge whereas users don't care. He suggested something be done at the state level. He felt that a regional site would be good but felt it would be beneficial in areas where, for example, a trail continues beyond the region.

Salk discussed the sixth policy concept of convening and information.

Salk concluded her presentation and summarized the work staff has done and detailed staff's recommendation.

Theisen clarified that what we're being asked to adopt are policy 'concepts'. Salk stated that we could add that to the recommendation.

Moeller asked if the Thrive Workgroup was comprised of Council members only and not any outside agency staff. Salk confirmed.

Wulff referred to an email sent to MPOSC Commissioners and stated that she spoke with Councilmember Chavez and clarified that the Thrive Workgroup provided feedback on the ideas but did not order any particular action by the MPOSC.

Johnston asked if there was anyone from the audience that wished to speak.

Jonathan Vlaming, Three Rivers Park District discussed the letter sent to members that reflects concern over timing. He stated that Three Rivers strongly supports the concept of equitable service to members. He discussed steps being taken by Three Rivers and the positive outcomes they've seen. He noted that they need three basic things in the policy plan: 1) flexibility – to do what is needed, 2) funding, and 3) feasibility – need to look at: how to do things, the intended consequences and the unintended consequences.

Vlaming noted that many of the ideas in Attachment A are very good but we need to figure out how to implement them and asked the Commission to table this item for two weeks to allow the IA's an opportunity to convene and have a discussion. He felt the greatest concerns center around funding. He noted that they have done planning for many years out (for their CIP) and changing how we distribute funding would affect all of these plans. In regards to the parks and trails legacy fund, he suggested considering (instead of appropriating a certain percentage of dollars) taking 10% right off the top to fund Met Council initiatives such as additional research or the ambassador program.

Taylor noted that he needed to leave the meeting early and stated that in spirit these are guiding principles and not policy. He noted that we are not deciding on policy today. He stated that he supports Attachment A.

Mike Kimble, St. Paul Parks and Recreation stated that they are supportive of the equity initiative. The IA's worked on their own funding formulas. They would like to be able to predict long term funding streams as they also project out projects for the CIP (they have planned 10 years out). He discussed marketing being done by each agency.

Kimble shared other concerns as well as areas he liked in Attachment A. He also asked that agendas and meeting materials could be received sooner in the future so that there may be more time to analyze the contents. He welcomed an opportunity to a meeting to further discuss Attachment A.

Jennifer Ringold, Minneapolis Parks agreed with the need for equity and stated that they began in 2007 to pay close attention to this issue. They have a new department doing community outreach and research and noted they specifically focus on looking at those that are underserved. They also have a whole training series that is centered on cultural competencies. She noted that they would like to work with the Met Council staff and asked for 2-4 weeks to meet with other agencies to come to a consensus and prevent unintended consequences.

Marty Walsh, Carver County Parks stated he feels uncomfortable with the schedule and doesn't understand why we are pushing. Stefferud discussed Thrive MSP 2040 is the base document for the system policy plans and stated that the Council would like to adopt these plans this year. He noted that there is an upcoming election and the Council would like policy plans in place.

Youngquist added that in order to get policy plans adopted this year, they need to go through the public hearing process therefore we need to complete the plan by July.

Walsh discussed the variables between the different IA's. Their projects are of basic infrastructure. He feels the policies should not be one size fits all. He would welcome an opportunity to meet with other agencies and staff to put together working policies from the concepts introduced.

Scott Yonke, Ramsey County Parks stated they support the concepts regarding equity. He discussed a few concepts that he feels need to be looked at further. He feels we need more time.

Steve Sullivan, Dakota County Parks stated his board has reviewed some of these policy ideas and support improving equity. He feels these are good ideas and suggested convening IA's to provide input for policy. He discussed the possibility of 'new money' being sought. He is concerned that some assumptions have been made in connecting people to parks. He discussed the idea of bridging facility and feels it would be good. He noted the need to look at priorities as each agency is a different point of evolution. He cautioned the need to be careful if we mandate priority. He feels the Met Council can partner with IA's in marketing our parks.

Johnston made some administrative comments and stated he would recommend that we adopt staff recommendation and then discuss where to take the recommendation.

It was moved by Wasley and seconded by Hietpas 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.

Johnston asked for next steps. Salk noted that staff is busy with upcoming topics that also need to be done before June 1, 2014. Youngquist discussed next steps with meetings on 5/6, 5/20, and 6/3 and reviewed the timeline.

Johnston talked about desire from the IA's to table and asked staff about options.

Moeller stated that he has the highest regard for the work of staff. Also has the highest regard for IA's and feels he would feel much more informed if he could hear back from the IA's so he suggested modulating the schedules.

Weber agreed and stated he feels the item should be tabled.

Wulff stated she doesn't have enough information to support all thirteen items.

Hietpas stated she feels this is one of the most important things this Commission will consider and feels due to all the concerns issued she supports tabling this item.

Yarusso noted that the motion before us not to adopt policy. He felt that because it will come back to us in another form he feels comfortable with the motion on the table. He suggested we could direct staff to meet with IA's using these thirteen concepts to formulate the conversation.

Johnston stated that we could do a substitute motion and asked to hear from staff.

Salk asked that Commissioners think about how we engage other stakeholders that were a part of the outreach done in the formulation of these concepts.

Wasley suggested that there could be a friendly amendment to her motion.

Hietpas asked if this friendly amendment would request that the IA's be included in providing further input for the crafting of the policies. Wasley stated yes.

Johnston asked if the Commission felt that just including the IA's would be sufficient or if there was a need to include other stakeholders.

Wasley asked who the other stakeholders are. Salk responded there were advocacy groups, park users, DNR, National Park Service, Trust for Public Land, and also residents.

Weber stated that if we were to adopt these thirteen concepts today he didn't believe staff would go back to these stakeholders so he did not see the need to seek their input now.

Salk stated that there were certain policy recommendations put forward by certain stakeholder groups that were in stark contrast to what the IA's want. She feels that if we are only going to listen to the IA's in terms of guiding our policy then we are leaving out those people who have contrary perspectives.

Hietpas stated she doesn't feel that the IA's will be guiding policy but feels they should be included in the conversation as they are more directly affected by the policies than each of these other groups. She

feels including these groups is very important to developing these policies but so are the IA's. Salk responded that staff has met with the IA's twice to gather their input. She noted that she is not saying that an additional meeting is not warranted however to suggest that we haven't met with them is inaccurate.

Wulff asked for an example of stark contrast. Salk stated that what they heard from stakeholders was that if we take equity seriously we must focus on funding and investment. She noted that when they talked with IA's, funding did not come up once. Salk stated that is why we have some firm policy concepts relating to funding and investments.

Yarusso clarified his understanding of the next steps. There will be a meeting with the IA's that may not come back with a unanimous consensus. Salk felt she was hearing that the Commission is asking for staff to meet with the IA's and to bring back their ideas and what they are comfortable with. The Commission members collectively disagreed.

Schmidt reminded members that there is a unique partnership between the IA's and the Met Council and what they have to say is more important than individual advocacy groups as the IA's have to actually follow the policies that we come up with.

Moeller felt this is an iterative process and he supports Attachment A.

Johnston felt we could listen to the IA's over the next two weeks; however that doesn't mean that we have to develop policy according to their wants.

Theisen doesn't believe the IA's would come to complete consensus. He asked how complicated it would be to meet with the advocacy groups as well. Salk stated it was very timely to meet with them in the past.

Wasley suggested inviting them to the table.

Wulff noted that every stakeholder will have an opportunity to comment during the public hearing process. Theisen noted that it has more impact to give comment prior to the public hearing.

There was a friendly amendment by Yarusso to table this item until the May 20, 2014 MPOSC meeting to allow staff time to meet with the IA's and other stakeholders to review and finalize the 13 policy concepts outlined in Attachment A.

Johnston called for a vote. **Motion carried unanimously.**

INFORMATION

2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Discussion on Promoting Multi-Modal Access – Raintry Salk, Senior Parks Researcher, Jan Youngquist, Planning Analyst

Youngquist gave a presentation regarding promoting multi-modal access as outlined in the materials provided.

Wulff suggested adding the category of regional parks to the Metro Transit Trip Planner.

Yarusso stated it would be helpful to add park names to recognized intersections on the Trip Planner.

Moeller liked Wayfinding and discussed a website utilized by Carver/Scott Counties to determine distance between points of interest. Youngquist stated that Transportation staff is working on maps that will include trails.

Youngquist discussed collaboration with Metro Transit and local transit providers to explore feasibility of promoting regional parks at bus stops. Also looked at providing transit day pass or family passes to parks (especially to big events at parks).

Wulff noted that park and rides and regional parks are typically not located near each other as park and rides are near and/or visible to traffic where regional parks are more remote.

Yarusso discussed regional trails connecting to regional parks to park and rides.

Youngquist continued her discussion on collaboration and planning.

Jonathan Vlaming, Three Rivers Park District commented on the idea of a transit management organization (TMO), not for the regional trail system, but for a regional bicycle transportation network that is now under development and being recognized by the Met Council. He has heard that transit organizers have nixed this idea. He noted that the IA's are seeing a fundamental shift in the use of their regional trails and gave the example of Cedar Lake Regional Trail that is largely used for commuting. He suggested adding a bullet requiring regional transportation planners of the Met Council to engage regional park agency planners in regional transit planning.

Katie White, Transit stated that TMO's are public/private partnerships to support a heavily concentrated employment center, so we don't talk about them at a system level but we talk about them on a person/individual level. She does believe some 'system' is needed to promote bike traffic. She stated that there will be 'something' just not a TMO.

Wulff stated that the Transportation Policy Plan does include a map of both the regional park trail system and also a regional transportation bike trail system. She feels we are working in this direction.

Youngquist discussed next steps and timeline.

Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant Rule Changes as an Amendment to 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan – Arne Stefferud, Manager Parks and Natural Resources

Wasley asked if this item could be moved to the May 6, 2014 meeting in the interest of time. Stefferud stated that it could. He noted that it was to be presented today and acted on at our next meeting.

REPORTS

Chair: None.

Commissioners: None.

Staff: None.

ADJOURNMENT

7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandi Dingle
Recording Secretary