

2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Update on Strengthening Equitable Usage of the Regional Parks System

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Thrive MSP 2040: Equity

“Equity connects all residents to opportunity and creates viable housing, transportation and recreation options for people of all races, ethnicities, incomes and abilities so that all communities share the opportunities and challenges of growth and change.”

Thrive MSP 2040, cont.

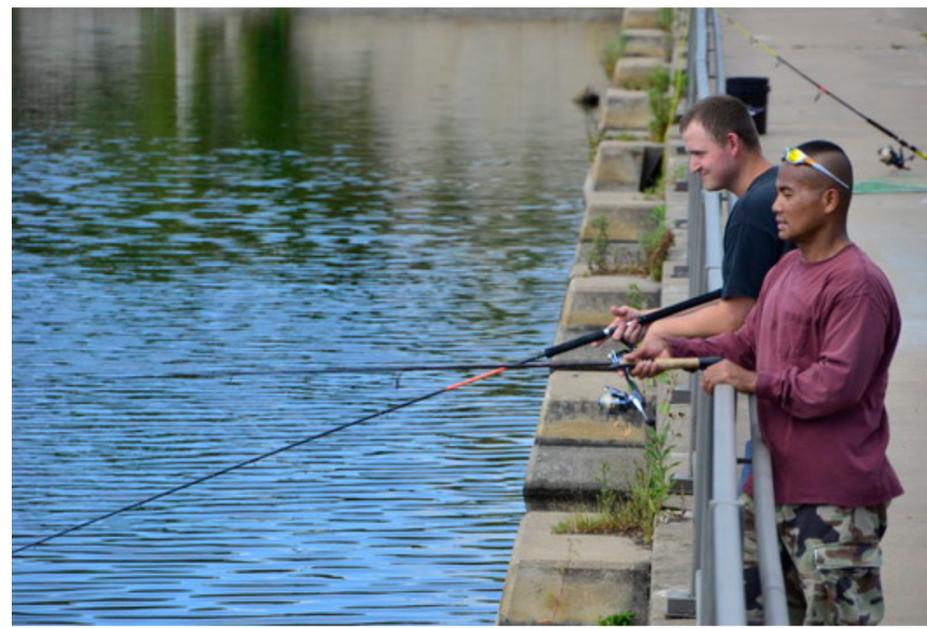
“The Metropolitan Council will use equity as a lens to evaluate its operations, planning, and investments, and explore its authority to use its resources and roles to mitigate the place-based dimension of racial, ethnic and income-based disparities.”

Thrive Direction for Regional Parks Policy Plan

- **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



Lake Elmo Park Reserve—
Washington County



Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park—
Anoka County & Three Rivers Park District

Stakeholder Engagement & Research

– Stakeholder meeting

- Park implementing agencies, DNR, NPS, & advocacy groups (n=13)

– Regional Park poll

- On-site; Park visitors (n=75)

– Focus group research

- Select communities of color (n=263)

– Community Conversation

- Select communities of color (n=17)

– Focused meetings

- Park implementing agency staff (n=30)
- Advocacy groups working on park equity issues (n=5)
- Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee Chair



Internal Discussions

- **MPOSC**
 - **March 11**
 - Brainstorm session focused on equitable usage
- **Joint CDC and MPOSC**
 - **April 7**
 - Discussed 19 stakeholder-driven policy concepts
 - Feedback received suggested 13 should be brought forward for continued discussion
- **Thrive Work Group**
 - **April 15 & May 20**
 - Discussed 13 of the original 19 stakeholder-driven policy concepts (Attachment A)
 - Strong support

Internal Discussions, cont.

- **MPOSC**

- **April 22**

- Sought recommendation of the 13 equity-related policy concepts (Attachment A)
 - Directed staff to conduct one more stakeholder meeting with regional park implementing agencies and other interested stakeholders

- **Stakeholder Meeting**

- **May 9**

- Outside facilitators
 - 28 people participated
 - 13 representatives from the ten regional park implementing agencies
 - 15 representatives from external partners, community based organizations and advocacy groups

Stakeholder Meeting Objectives

- 1) **Create shared understanding of differing stakeholder viewpoints about both the *potential contributions and any unintended consequences* of the proposed equity-related policy concepts**
 - Each participant asked to speak to their most important potential contribution and unintended consequence
 - Facilitator turned unintended consequences into desired consequences

(Attachment B)
- 2) Identify priorities among the contributions and unintended consequences for consideration
- 3) Clarify next steps in decision-making

Inherent Tension

Flexibility	Accountability
Too focused	Too narrow
Too rigid	“lip service”
Too prescriptive	Focus on outcomes/measures
We are doing a lot of this already	Expand scope
Spending different pots of money to do these things	Where are the people of color?; White space; Not welcoming
Can't use a 'one size fits all' approach	Need to hold institutions accountable

Equity-Related Policy Concept Themes

- **Planning and design**
- **Convening and information**
- **Funding and investments**

Planning and Design

Planning and Design: #1

- **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)

Planning and Design: #2

- **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
 - Picnic areas suitable for emerging recreational patterns of use
 - Picnic areas that accommodate mid-sized groups of 15-25
 - 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

Planning and Design: #3

- 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***”

Planning and Design Summary

- 1. Revise the description of a Special Recreation Feature to allow a “bridging facility”**
- 2. Allow and encourage the following design elements to be included in a regional park or trail master plan:**
 - Amenities suited for aging and limited mobility individuals
 - Picnic areas suitable for 15-25 people
 - Large open, informal ball fields
 - Clustering of amenities
- 3. Require focused community engagement among agencies in the development of regional park or trail master plans**
 - Mitigate existing racial, ethnic, cultural or linguistic barriers and includes diverse races, ethnicities, classes, ages, abilities and immigrant statuses

Convening and Information

Convene/Information Summary

- 1. Provide community engagement assistance to regional park implementing agencies in developing a regional park or trail master plan**
- 2. Provide regional-level research related to changing recreational preferences and demographics**
- 3. Conduct region-wide visitor survey on a more consistent basis**
- 4. Create a MC funded regional park system ambassador program**
- 5. Invest in the development of an integrated web application with an activity/park finder feature**
- 6. Conduct quarterly “best practices” meetings with agencies, partners, community based organizations and advocacy groups***

* New language added May 12

Funding and Investment

Funding and Investment: #1

- **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

Funding and Investment: #2

- **Require agencies to identify the direct impact their funding request would have on strengthening equitable use**
 - Through the use of an equity impact analysis
 - Would not be used as a screening tool
 - Consider equity in 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

Funding and Investment: #3

- **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)**
 - Expenditures include programming, events, staff, training, web-based applications, among others
 - Since inception, only 3% of metro Legacy funding has been spent to “connect people to the outdoors”
 - 62% has gone toward acquisition and development
 - 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”

Funding and Investment: #4

- **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**
 - Agencies currently are the sole responsible parties for reviewing and prioritizing their respective list

2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan

Page 5-104:

- “The Commission, working with the implementing agencies, initiates the biennial process of revising the CIP. **The Commission reviews requests from the implementing agencies against Council priorities and recommends a ranked list of projects to the Council for action.** The revision of the CIP is considered to be a substantial revision to the policy plan and will follow the Council’s administrative procedures on amending a policy plan.”
- *Amend existing policy*
 - Add Parks and Trails Legacy Fund
 - Priorities: Equity lens as defined by the Metropolitan Council

Funding and Investments: Summary

1. 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
2. Require agencies to identify the direct impact their funding request would have on strengthening equitable use
3. 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)
4. 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

Conclusion

- Staff spent over six months conducting research and stakeholder engagement to address Thrive MSP 2040 charge 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”
- 13 stakeholder driven equity-related policy concepts
- MPOSC voted to approve the 13 equity-related policy concepts on May 20

Important Caveats

- Speak to what agencies are already doing
 - *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* narrative
- Collaborate with external stakeholders and regional park implementing agencies in the implementation of equity-related policies