

Minutes



Meeting Date: August 4, 2022

Time: 4:00 PM

Location: 390 Robert Steet

Members Present:

Chair, Tony Yarusso, At-large

Monica Dillenburg, District A

Robert Moeller, District B

Cana Yang, District C

Assata Brown, District D

Jeremy Peichel, District E

Cecily Harris, District F

Anthony Taylor, District G

Todd Kemery, District H

Susan Vento, Council Liaison

= present

Call to Order

Without a quorum being present, Committee Chair Yarusso called the regular meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order.

Agenda Approved

It was suggested by Dillenburg to move the information item to after items from the public in the hopes that there would be a quorum soon. Chair Yarusso noted that he would wait to ask for approval of the July 7 minutes as well.

Public Invitation

No one asked to speak.

Information

1. Equity Nudge: Friends of the Mississippi River, Youth Council with introduction from Council Member Susan Vento

CM Vento invited members from the Environmental Stewardship Institute (ESI) Youth Advisory Council to speak. She noted that she has been on the Board of Directors with the Friends of the Mississippi River for the past 11 years. She then gave some history on the Friends of the Mississippi River and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA).

Laura Manhill, Stewardship and Education Director introduced herself and stated her team is here to discuss systemic racism and other types of oppression.

Naomi Nickel introduced herself and stated that she is a student at the UofM and an associate and helps support the Youth Council and other youth programs.

Ivy Song introduced herself. She is a student from Roseville Highschool and serves as a scheduler on the Youth Council and is an assistant for the summer program.

Bella Bassat introduced herself and stated that she attends the Washington Technology Magnet School in St. Paul. Her role on the Council is the Community Outreach Coordinator.

Riya Stebleton introduced herself. She is a student at Como Park Highschool. She is an assistant for the Youth Council.

The ESI group explained their role with engaging with the natural world and inspiring advocacy

as well as educating themselves and others on environmental issues. They highlighted a few of the many issues that impact their local communities, including the Mississippi River, as outlined in the presentation provided and discussed what ESI is doing to combat those challenges. They invited Commissioners to visit their ESI Instagram page at esi.fmr for updates and also, they told the Commission about an event they are planning during the upcoming school year.

Peichel asked how people get involved with the high school fellow's program, how outreach selection works, and is there a way for the Commission to support recruiting new diverse populations into the program. The ESI group discussed the expansion of fellowship and their partnership with Right Track, an employment program through the City of St. Paul. They also work with a lot of teachers in schools because they do classroom programs and then the teachers encourage students to apply. Also, about half are recruited by active youth members.

Peichel asked if any of the program participants have gone on to serve on Commissions, Advisory Councils, or other similar activities? They noted they have only been around for 4 years but hoped that continued growth could happen.

Chair Yarusso discussed the data that the Met Council has that shows persons of color not using our parks or feeling safe in our parks. He asked if ESI had any suggestions of things we could do to address this issue. The group discussed accessibility and working with youth on projects, i.e., picking up trash in parks, or other projects and programs that get youth in parks. The misconceptions about what they were doing, as a large group of persons of color, was discussed. FMR has started a BIPOC river stewardship group where they can discuss issues and challenges openly when things happen. Also, the group discussed changing the narrative and images that we use that create generalizations and wrong assumptions. Events are great ways to get more people of color into the parks. There was discussion about how to cross-promote our events on social media.

CM Vento thanked the ESI group for their presentation. She also encouraged Commissioners to go to the FMR website and she recommended that people watch the video on the website that provides the history of the formation of MNRRA.

Approval of Minutes

Chair Yarusso noted that without a quorum present, the approval of the July 7, 2022 minutes would be postponed until our September 1, 2022 MPOSC meeting.

Business

Chair Yarusso noted again that without a quorum present, the business items could be forwarded by consensus, unless the implementing agencies preferred to wait until the September 1, 2022 MPOSC meeting. Mullin noted that there may be an issue with a quorum at that meeting as well. The Commission decided to go forward with the business items.

1. **2022-215**, Mississippi West Regional Park Master Plan Amendment and Land Conversion, Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Acquisition Master Plan Amendment, Anoka County, Tracey Kinney

Kinney gave a presentation on behalf of a request from Anoka County for a land exchange that proposes to remove land from the Mississippi West Regional Park and replace it at Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve, as outlined in the materials provided.

Peichel discussed the water connection between the two sides of 35W and asked if there will be an opportunity to do a wildlife or pedestrian underpass to help alleviate deer strikes and other conflicts and allow for animal movement. Karen Blaska, Anoka County Parks responded that there is an opportunity, and it has been discussed with the Minnesota Department of Transportation. The acquisition is a separate and initial step from the future development process.

Dillenburg asked about the round-a-bout and if there will be the pedestrian crossing. Kinney responded that it is integrated into the round-a-bout. Dillenburg stated this is a concern for her as she doesn't feel the standard round-about pedestrian crossings are the safest approach for

pedestrians. Dillenburg also discussed her concern with noise and garbage from the roadway and asked if there will be any kind of screening. Blaska stated that when they develop that area of the park, they are planning some type of vegetative screening to help alleviate some of the noise, etc. Harris noted that she is supportive of the project, even though the Commission cannot formally take action.

Chair Yarusso also stated he appreciates the land conversion because it is a land for land exchange. Chair Yarusso noted that there is a consensus among Commissioner's present on the staff's proposed actions that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Mississippi West Regional Park master plan amendment and land conversion.
 2. Approve the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve acquisition master plan amendment.
 3. Approve the removal of 3.65 acres of land within the Mississippi West Regional Park in exchange for adding 33 acres of land to Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve (Figures 3 and 4).
 4. Consent to a temporary construction easement for 1.97 acres of land within the Mississippi West Regional Park as illustrated in Figure 3.
2. **2022-213**, Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund, North Creek Greenway Regional Trail (Magellan), Dakota County (Emmett Mullin)

Mullin gave a presentation on an acquisition opportunity fund request from Dakota County for North Creek Greenway Regional Trail as outlined in the materials provided.

Harris commented on the high price and asked why the parcel is shaped as it is. Al Singer, Dakota County Parks stated that the price reflects the market rate as the land is zoned industrial. The reason for the shape is because they plan to construct a tunnel under County Road 42 and may need to bump out the trail to allow for safe access.

Harris asked if the trail will be all paved and noted that many hikers prefer non paved trails. Singer responded that their goal is to provide a variety of surfaces for the trail users and noted that there will be plenty of places along the north creek where you can get off the pavement.

Peichel asked if there will be opportunities for additional amenities along with the grating that would go with that underpass. Singer noted that there will be room for some benches, etc. and noted that they are also in negotiations with Menards, which is adjacent to the trail, for some additional width to widen the corridor.

Chair Yarusso asked for clarification on some of the costs. Singer noted that one of Magellan's conditions for selling the property is they required an eight- and one-half foot tall chain link fence. This is a pipeline company, and they have liability concerns. Additionally, Magellan wanted control of the fence and wanted it on their property, so the additional cost will provide for construction of the fence. This cost is being paid for by Dakota County, not this grant. He also noted that there were some costs associated with the sub-division of some of the property.

Chair Yarusso suggested a notation of the discrepancies before it goes to the Community Development Commission and that in the future if numbers differ from one page to the next in a staff report, that there be a note for this to the Commission explaining the circumstances.

CM Vento commended the implementing agencies for all their hard work and especially Dakota County. She feels that the Region is truly blessed.

Chair Yarusso noted that there appears to be a consensus on the staff's proposed actions that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve a grant of up to \$532,720 to Dakota County to acquire the 2.23-acre Magellan property located at 6321 150th Street West, Apple Valley, for North Creek Greenway Regional Trail.
2. Authorize the Executive Director of Community Development to execute the grant



agreement and restrictive covenant on behalf of the Council.

Information

1. 2021 Visitor Study –Research Findings – An Introduction and Proposed Sharing Approach. First of 3 presentations (Darcie Vandegrift)
Vandegrift gave a presentation on the Visitor Study as outlined in the materials provided. discussion.

Peichel asked how Wilder Research was chosen to do the survey and asked if any m-cub (Metropolitan Council Underutilized Business Program) goals associated with that selection and how did equity and purchasing apply to this? Vandegrift replied the requirement was not in place at the time this contract was done (2019) but also most people who applied were firms from out of town.

Dillenburg asked about surveying visitors who are enjoying the park and if their positive feedback might not be a good measure. Vandegrift stated that is a good point but noted that the questions were designed by the UofM. She stated that the Technical Team for the Visitor Study seeks to hear all concerns about the survey instrument because they want to continue to improve it wherever possible.

Harris noted that regarding better trail maintenance, comments from a frequent user may be very different than a non-frequent user. Vandegrift agreed and stated it is a good point.

Peichel asked about the desegregation of visitor responses and if there a “everything is fine” response means all is well or if it is just a way to sidestep the survey? Vandegrift responded there were 3 possible responses. 1. Everything is good, 2. There’s no suggestions, and 3. No response.

Chair Yarusso asked if there is any way to adjust for cultural bias of people tending to say ‘oh, it’s all fine’. Vandegrift stated this is a great point. She noted she will be doing some desegregation by different demographic characteristics. In some responses to the survey, she has looked into it, and it has not shown a pattern. She will be providing each of the ten implementing agencies with comments specific to their agency parks and trails.

Harris stated it would be interesting to know under ‘commuting’ if they are traveling to work or just traveling through to a non-workplace destination.

Dillenburg discussed a deeper dive into a response of ‘I’m doing nothing’. Vandegrift responded that the response of “doing nothing” means they are relaxing. She noted that response could benefit from additional exploration.

Chair Yarusso noted he would still like to see a count done during the winter season. He felt it would be interesting to know if the results match what we’ve been assuming through our current approach using the seasonal multipliers.

Harris was surprised that no one responded that they were doing yoga, etc. Vandegrift stated that was not an option given, so they would have had to write that in, but it could be considered in a future visitor study survey.

3. Developing the Regional Vision and Values for the Next Regional Development Guide: Inviting your input (Michael Larson)

Larson gave a presentation and is seeking input on developing the Regional Vision and Values for the next Regional Development Guide as outlined in the materials provided.

Peichel stated that, especially for economic growth, the regional park system is a key driver of livability and desirability of the metropolitan area. It is largely recognized as a resource that brings people to our region. And if people are here, the jobs will be here, and if the jobs are here, it will continue to attract more people. We cannot rest on our system as it is today. It is critical to maintain and improve these resources for their accessibility, equitability, etc., and everything about the park system maintains a happy and growing population. The work of the



Development Guide is critical for putting clarity on the importance of the Regional Parks System.

Harris wanted to reflect on the regional vision: current themes. Two things caught her attention – the affordable housing and workforce opportunities. In Washington County she hears a lot about the lack of housing for seniors including assisted living. She also discussed the region being navigable for those without personal vehicles. She noted that where she lives, they do not have uber, cabs, or buses. She cautioned that it's not just Hennepin and Ramsey Counties to think about, but also the rural areas. Next, she discussed the fabulous regional park system but noted we also have a lot of local, state, and national park lands and she felt it would be interesting to see the overlay of those on a map, and how this larger system works together.

Chair Yarusso discussed affordable housing goals and stated that one of largest growth areas is with senior apartment complexes, which is great. Yet, there are many young families in our region looking for affordable housing. He cautioned that we need to address this need as well as the senior housing need. He also agreed with Harris that transportation is a huge issue for parks.

Dillenburg stated that for her, there are two items missing from the discussion. First, we need a plan for the growth of the region, and how we want to be in 2050. There will be a lot of old people in our region! How will we be ready to serve them? Second, we need deeper education for the general public on the topics of equity and affordability. Finally, she feels there needs to be more education on what is meant by protection of natural resources. She has a general suggestion of simplifying our language in this plan.

Larson stated that they have reflected on the utility of the plan and the consistency of the language across policy realms. This is an area of growth for this effort. He also talked about words like equity or resilience and that they have a working definition that makes sense to most people.

Chair Yarusso discussed the Council's role as outlined in statute but asked what is the Council's role with school districts, with particular interest in educating young people and getting their voice in the plan? Larson stated that the Council encourages cities to coordinate with their local school districts to ensure that the planning is aligned with policy. Barajas added that the Council used to have a role with school district plans. She expressed that this is critical and challenging work with school districts, finding the right folks to engage with to look out 20 years.

CM Vento stated that she and CM Peter Lindstrom participate in a quarterly meeting with the school districts in Ramsey County with other local elected and appointed officials, and she finds that very beneficial. She also noted that Ramsey County has a formal League of Local Governments that holds monthly meetings.

Larson discussed the Council's research capabilities and stated we are very aware of disparities related to workforce development and education outcomes and noted they have not been what we've hoped for. In thinking about our income, wealth, and racial disparities in our region, correcting them would be a significant boost to the regional economy and if we don't, it's a significant risk as we become increasingly diverse.

CM Vento suggested thinking about non-profits in terms of a connection for the youth and parks and she suggested there are a lot of opportunities to connect schools with parks. She suggested an online reference for educators to be able to turn to for help.

Peichel suggested having park rangers/staff introduce themselves at schools or to boy/girl scout groups as a mechanism to engage them.

Jonathan Vlaming, Three Rivers Park District asked if there is any intention of bringing together the ten implementing agencies to help shape these values and later goals and strategies. Mullin responded that there will be opportunities for the agencies to participate early in this process and help connect the regional development guide work with the regional parks policy plan update. Vlaming agreed and felt they need to be at the table now. As just discussed, he



noted the regional park implementing agencies have strong relationships with school districts and educators.

Reports

Chair Yarusso noted that we've done a poll with Commissioners to determine whether we will have a quorum for September. We will have one but just barely so he asked Commissioners to please plan to attend if they have stated they will.

Committee Members – None.

Council Liaison – None.

Staff – Mullin stated we hope to nail down the September 1st meeting and he will confirm that there is a quorum, or it may be moved. It will be at the Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park in Washington County.

Mullin discussed a climate action plan the Council is working on for the internal workings of the Council. The regional park system is kind of nuanced in that the agencies own and operate the system, but the Council has a support and an umbrella function. He noted we have an opportunity to participate in small group discussions on the climate action plan that will include focused conversations with peer agencies and environmental thought leaders. There will be two opportunities. One at 9am on 9/28 in person and one will be a virtual event at 9am on 9/29. He will send out all the information to the Commissioners and would love their participation.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 6:50 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 August 4, 2022.

Approved this 00 day of Month 2022.

Council Contact:

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