

Minutes of the Meeting of the METROPOLITAN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

Thursday, December 3, 2020

Committee Members Present: Cecily Harris, Anthony Taylor, Todd Kemery, Tony Yarusso, Jeremy Peichel, Rick Theisen, Lolita Davis Carter, Bob Moeller, Nate Rich, and Lynnea Atlas-Ingebretson, liaison to the Council.

Committee Members Absent: none.

CALL TO ORDER

Secretary Dingle did a roll call for a quorum.

With a quorum being present via WebEx, Committee Chair Yarusso called the meeting of the Council's Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order at 4:01 p.m. on Thursday, December 3, 2020.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Chair Yarusso asked for a consensus to approve the December 3, 2020 agenda. **The agenda was approved.**

With a quorum present, Chair Yarusso asked for a motion to approve the November 5, 2020 minutes. Peichel motioned and it was seconded by Harris to approve the November 5, 2020 minutes of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting. Secretary Dingle issued a roll call vote.

Aye – 6 (Carter, Harris, Peichel, Taylor, Theisen, Yarusso)

Nay – 0

Abstention – 1 (Rich)

The November 5, 2020 minutes were approved.

PUBLIC INVITATION

Chair Yarusso noted that the posted Agenda asked that anyone wishing to address the Commission should please email the Chair at mposc@tonyyarusso.org. He noted that he received one request to address the Commission (see text read by Chair Yarusso below).

From Holly Jenkins, Wilderness in the City.

RE: Comment for MPOSC re Information Item: Parks and Trails Legacy Fund FY2022/2023 Biennium Projects Overview

It is concerning that the public is not allowed to actively participate in MPOSC meetings, and today in particular, which includes a controversial agenda item about spending of monies from the Legacy Amendment.

Today you will hear one perspective of projects being proposed for Parks and Trails Legacy spending, however you will not be asked for your recommendation because instead the final project list will be worked out between staff and the agencies.

The project list is vague and without adequate detail. Similar to previous years there remains a concerning lack of transparency with regard to how the Metropolitan Regional Parks System uses its portion of Legacy dollars—and as more people learn how these dollars are actually being spent there is growing opposition to the manner in which this portion of Legacy dollars is being used.

Much of this opposition stems from three areas:

- the process by which the Legacy funds are distributed among the IAs which conflicts with the guidelines provided by the 25-year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan,

- the lack of a credible and unbiased project approval process,
- the ongoing imbalance of spending, in particular the negligence to natural resources stewardship.

It is for these reasons we express our opposition to the proposed projects being recommended by the regional park implementing agencies.

This topic is far too intricate to share in the allowed brief written comment limited to 250 words. As such, I encourage you to learn more by visiting *The Legacy of Nature* page on our website, wildernessinthecity.org.

BUSINESS

2020-326, Accept the Public Comment Report and Adopt the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Amendment - Tracey Kinney, Senior Planner and Emmett Mullin, Manager

Mullin reviewed the agenda for the adoption of the Public Comment Report and adoption of the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan (RPPP) Amendment as outlined in the materials and presentation provided. Next, he discussed the public comment process and lessons learned. He also discussed significant changes being proposed in the plan, beginning with 26 system additions and expansions listed in the presentation including 4 boundary adjustments, 5 search areas, and 17 regional trail search corridors.

Kinney discussed policy refinements for the RPPP amendment listed in the materials provided. She then reviewed the next steps and recommended action.

Taylor asked whether we have expanded the definition of bridging facilities and is it in the amendment? Kinney stated yes, it is.

Taylor suggested using language like 'progressive nature-based experiences' as a more effective way to communicate the purpose of these facilities. He asked whether the new language is trying to convey this. Mullin responded, yes and that he appreciated Taylor's language of 'progressive nature-based experiences'. He also liked the broader notion of an entry level experience that brings new visitors into our broader system. Moeller agreed and stated he likes the input.

Taylor discussed developing associated programming that is progressive.

Atlas-Ingebretson commented that progression is key. Entry activity is where we have the most disparities. She also asked, what is nature-based. Entry is often without activity. She asked, is this something to identify? She discussed comments received regarding equity and engagement and asked, how do we do more programming?

Taylor agreed and stated engagement is a long-term relationship but added equity is not just engagement. He discussed decisions made and who is on our boards and commissions and making sure there is equity at all levels.

Peichel discussed, as a point of order, balance of what is appropriate for RPPP and what is appropriate under our Legislative mandates. Chair Yarusso stated we have discussed the range of activities but have not discussed proposing a legislative language change. Mullin stated that this topic would be good to discuss more as a Commission and he would follow up with Commissioner Peichel offline.

It was motioned by Peichel and seconded by Moeller to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Accept the Public Comment Summary Report on the draft amendment to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*; and
2. Adopt the revised final *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Amendment*.

With no further discussion, Chair Yarusso called for a vote. Secretary Dingle issued a roll call vote.

Aye – 9 (Carter, Harris, Kemery, Peichel, Moeller, Rich, Taylor, Theisen, Yarusso)

Nay – 0

Abstention – 0

The motion was approved.

2020-327, Pine Point Regional Park, Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Program (Branson), Washington County - Jessica Lee, Senior Planner

Lee gave a presentation on a request from Washington County for a park acquisition opportunity fund grant for Pine Point Regional Park as outlined in the materials provided.

Peichel asked about the funding ratio of Legacy funds to Council funds and whether this is typical? Lee stated that staff ensures the proper 3-2 ratio on state to Council funds, and how this will be balanced out over the State Fiscal Year.

Chair Yarusso elaborated regarding the Council's commitment to levy bonds. He suggested having this topic as a discussion with this Commission when things are 'back to normal'.

It was motioned by Harris and seconded by Theisen to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve a grant of up to \$590,805 to Washington County to acquire the 48.52-acre Branson property located at 120th Street North in Stillwater Township for Pine Point Regional Park, contingent on Council approval of the amendment to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (Business Item 2020-326), *Accept the Public Comment Report and Adopt the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan Amendment*.
2. Authorize the Community Development Director to execute the grant agreement and restrictive covenant on behalf of the Council.

Harris noted that she is excited about this acquisition because it serves multiple purposes, recreational and natural resource conservation.

Taylor asked about a local trail and connections to Brown's Creek, with the idea of exploring whether it should be part of the regional trail system.

Harris asked if this was a part of an existing search corridor. Chair Yarusso responded that it is located close to Washington County's Central Greenway Regional Trail.

With no further discussion, Chair Yarusso called for a vote. Secretary Dingle issued a roll call vote.

Aye – 9 (Carter, Harris, Kemery, Peichel, Moeller, Rich, Taylor, Theisen, Yarusso)

Nay – 0

Abstention – 0

The motion was approved.

2020-328, Sam Morgan Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment, Saint Paul - Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst

Kelly gave a presentation on the Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Corridor Master Plan Amendment as outlined in the materials provided.

Atlas-Ingebretson shared that the literal Dakota translation of the name of this game is the Creator's Game. Chair Yarusso asked whether this game played across more than one tribal group? Atlas-Ingebretson stated it was.

Moeller likes the inclusion of more variety to attract more people to this regional trail.

Harris is very supportive and shared that her ancestors settled in this area.

Taylor commended the City of St. Paul on this project and other new trails.

It was motioned by Taylor and seconded by Davis Carter to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the City of Saint Paul's Samuel Morgan Regional Trail Corridor Master Plan Amendment, including the supplemental information provided in the submittal memorandum dated October 26, 2020.
2. Require the City of Saint Paul, prior to initiating any new development of the regional trail corridor, to send preliminary plans to the Environmental Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division.

Chair Yarusso discussed some of the activities and how they fit into a nature- based system. He felt there is a 'fuzzy' line with some of the uses. He hopes we can figure better ways of identifying what is regional and what is not – particularly when discussing trail amenities.

Taylor shared that as we are developing community engagement approaches that and open dialogue with more diverse groups of people, you will find an interest in non-traditional regional park uses. He gave the example that if you ask a group of young African American males what they'd like to see, they will say basketball courts. He recognizes that this is a stereotype and feels there is an obligation, as we expand engagement, to follow through with what we're hearing. He also seeks deeper discussions with these groups on how they want to participate in the regional system.

Chair Yarusso stated this topic speaks to the purpose of bridging facilities and how we seek the experiences to progress to a wider range of opportunities, to get more people into our parks.

Peichel feels this is another example of spectrum of recreational activities problem – and again asked how these non-traditional activities fit with our statutory language. He feels we need to establish a clearer understanding here.

Atlas-Ingebretson appreciated Peichel's concerns and questions. One of the great things about Minnesota is we have a strong balance of elected officials and citizen based appointed bodies to make sure there's a balance between politics and policy. She added the Commission has a partnership with the implementing agencies and noted the Council is able to provide guidance on this topic.

With no further discussion, Chair Yarusso called for a vote. Secretary Dingle issued a roll call vote.

Aye – 9 (Carter, Harris, Kemery, Peichel, Moeller, Rich, Taylor, Theisen, Yarusso)

Nay – 0

Abstention – 0

The motion was approved.

INFORMATION

2021 Competitive Equity Grant Program Priorities - Jessica Lee, Senior Planner and Amanda Lovelee, Outreach Coordinator

Lee presented the program priorities of the 2021 Competitive Equity Grant Program priorities as outlined in the materials provided.

Chair Yarusso asked about the money available for the program and whether there would be any concerns around the impacts from the pandemic? Lee stated that funding is available in the Council's budget. Chair Yarusso asked will this program be on a 2-year cycle? Lee responded yes.

Chair Yarusso asked about the potential for conflict of interest with having regional park implementing agencies serving on the review committee. Lee responded that she has had success in the past with similar approaches on other grant programs she has operated, and noted that members will recuse themselves for scoring their own projects.

Harris stated that it seems to be a very large review team and suggested that it might be more efficient to have a smaller team, particularly as the grant program continues into future years. She also asked about whether the evaluation of the applications will consider matching funds, in-kind contributions, etc. Lee responded that yes, they would consider these types of contributions during the review process. Regarding

the size of the committee, we intentionally set it up larger with the idea that this approach will ensure we have adequate participation on the committee.

Moeller stated he didn't see where the Council could apply for funding, particularly around the idea of collective efforts to build awareness. He asked, are we allowing the Met Council to apply? Nicole Clapp, responded that we need to adhere to legacy funding guidelines which precludes the Met Council from applying. Moeller encouraged the Met Council to move forward with expanding awareness building through their partnership with the agencies.

Kemery asked about American with Disability Act (ADA) transition plans – aren't agencies required to have these? Lee responded that these plans are required. Agencies with older plans are able to apply for small grants to help them update their plans (over 10 years old).

Atlas-Ingebretson discussed last year's grant proposals, and how there were a number of ADA requests – that included work that either already needed to be done or didn't have enough engagement. She asked whether there a way to focus the agencies on innovative and new ADA approaches?

Chair Yarusso discussed feedback and changes given to staff to address these types of concerns. Lee responded that the scoring criteria has been simplified. She also stated that we would share the guidance from the Commission and Council with the agencies.

Davis Carter asked for clarification on the scoring criteria. Lee explained there needs to be an application submitted for each project (no limit). Each agency can receive up to \$200,000.00

Atlas-Ingebretson recommended staff provide a companion document with lessons learned last year to provide clear guidance. Lee stated they could do that.

Parks and Trails Legacy Project Equity Highlights – Part 1: 5 agencies. 5 minutes to present 2 slides each. 5 minutes for questions - Jessica Lee, Senior Plan

Lee gave a presentation on the Regional Park System FY2022/2023 Parks and Trails Legacy Fund project overview and equity highlights as outlined in the materials provided (Part I) and noted we will hear from 5 agencies today. Presentations began as follows:

St. Paul: Paul Sawyer discussed their projects outlined in the presentation provided. He focused on Lake Phalen Regional Park, particularly the East Shore Trailhead.

Anoka County: Karen Blaska reviewed their projects outlined in the presentation where they are focusing their funding on taking caring of their existing facilities. She provided equity highlights on the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Regional Park.

Three Rivers Park District: Jonathan Vlaming discussed their one project at the Mississippi Gateway Regional Park, as outlined in the materials provided. Their focus will be on a complete reconstruction of this park.

Scott County: Alysa Delgado discussed three projects outlined in the materials provided and highlighted Spring Lake Regional Park lakefront development.

Kemery asked Scott County to consider some picnic tables that would be accessible for wheelchairs. He offered his assistance if needed.

Washington County: Sandy Breuer discussed three projects outlined in the materials provided. They focused on the Point Douglas Regional Trail and visitor service building improvements.

Kemery asked for consideration for accessibility for autistic children as well as children with physical disabilities in the play area. He offered his assistance if needed.

Lee thanked all of the implementing agency staff for their reports.

REPORTS

Chair: Chair Yarusso noted that the Chair position and 4 MPOSC Districts are up for appointment in 2021 and encouraged commissioners to reapply or help network for new Commissioners.

Commissioners: Harris shared some high complements and praise for Todd Kemery for his advice regarding accessibility with the Square Lake Special Recreation Feature planning effort.

Staff: Mullin reiterated that Districts A, B, C, and D will be up for reappointment and also the Chair's position (at large). He stated they hope to conduct interviews in January.

Mullin stated they are preparing for the 2021 Legislative session that will begin in January.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed the meeting adjourned at 6:39 p.m.

Sandi Dingle
Recording Secretary