

Minutes of the

REGULAR MEETING OF THE METROPOLITAN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

Tuesday, June 6, 2017

Committee Members Present:

Tony Yarusso, Mike Kopp, Rick Theisen, Todd Kemery, Margie Anderson, Anthony Taylor, Wendy Wulff, Sarah Hietpas, Bob Moeller

Committee Members Absent:

None.

Implementing Agency Attendees:

Boe Carlson, Three Rivers Park District; John Vondelinde, Anoka County Parks; Adam Arvidson, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board; Jon Oyanagi, Ramsey County Parks; Mike Hahm, St. Paul Parks and Recreation; Paul Sawyer, St. Paul Parks and Recreation; Patty Freeman, Scott County Parks; Randy Quale, Bloomington Parks; Steve Sullivan, Dakota County Parks; Connor Schaefer, Washington County Parks

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Yarusso called the regular meeting of the Council's Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order at 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, June 6, 2017.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Chair Yarusso noted that today's meeting will be a less formal meeting of the Commission, which includes the participation of the implementing agencies at the table in order to encourage constructive, forward-looking dialogue. It was moved by Yarusso, seconded by Theisen to approve the agenda. Motion carried.

In keeping was a less formal meeting, Chair Yarusso noted that the minutes of the May 2, 2017 minutes would be approved at the July meeting.

INFORMATION

Chair Yarusso stated that the purpose of this meeting is to allow for informal dialogue among MPOSC Commissioners, Regional Park Implementing Agency leadership, and Metropolitan Council, and Council staff. The goal is to strengthen our working relationship to better serve all residents of the region.

Chair Yarusso began with introductions around the table.

Mullin instructed the group on a 'speed dating' ice breaker to help the group get to know one another by answering some simple questions regarding our Regional Parks System.

Once the ice breaker was complete, Chair Yarusso opened the discussion.

Connor Schaefer, Washington County Parks talked about staff changes over the past year and stated the Met Council was a big help through their transition. He felt that partnerships are key to Washington County's success. He discussed the project at Cottage Grove Ravine and the master plan process, which was very challenging. He noted that the Met Council, among other partners, was a big help.

Kemery discussed the Big Island project he is involved in with the City of Orono (Veterans Retreat). He stated that they are looking for input on how to make it 'a place to go'. He noted that he sits on an advisory committee to help achieve this. He stated that the work Caver County has done on the Coney Island/Lake Waconia Regional Park project could be useful in this effort.

Steve Sullivan, Dakota County Parks discussed three grand openings they have had over the past three weeks for the expansion of the greenway system. They include the Spring Lake Park – Mississippi River Trail; the Minnesota River Trail segment in Burnsville; and the connection of Lake Byllesby Regional Trail and Cannon Falls Regional Trail.

Chair Yarusso remarked on the importance of community engagement, and how the agencies have really increased their capacity to work effectively with stakeholder groups.

Adam Arvidson, Minneapolis Park and Recreation stated that working with stakeholders is essential to their park planning efforts. He highlighted the Chain of Lakes planning process, and renaming Lake Calhoun to Bde Maka Ska. The engagement process helped his organization understand different perspectives that resulted in this change.

Anthony Taylor discussed the importance of "how" we conduct community engagement, that is process is critical to empowering the implementing agencies and communities to engage and promote equity.

Chair Yarusso discussed the upcoming Regional Parks Policy (RPPP) update and how we should talk with each other as well as discuss what steps we should take.

Jon Oyanagi, Ramsey County Parks suggested tapping into what we are learning from the comprehensive planning process at the local level and the county level. He is interested in streamlining efforts to being efficient with stakeholder time.

Mullin shared that staff is just beginning to review comprehensive plans, to ensure that the Regional Parks System is given due consideration. Youngquist loves the idea but noted that staff are currently working to initiate the Parks Policy Planning Process and has some concerns about sequencing and timeframes.

Wulff asked where are points of contention among the group?

Patty Freeman, Scott County Parks reflected that issues had arisen during the past Regional Park Policy Plan update process. She is looking forward to a productive RPPP update.

Youngquist discussed parts of the RPPP and the last round of comprehensive planning (comprehensive plans in 2008 and RPPP in 2010) and noted that it doesn't line up for this round unfortunately. She discussed the System Statements that have already been sent out, but stated that this is a good goal for the next major policy plan update.

Youngquist stated that the effort to strengthen some of the criteria in the policy plan would be a good place to put emphasis for this next update.

Arvidson suggested a discussion on what is allowed in regional parks. He feels expanding the criteria will increase overall use from a wider range of users. He gave an example of state parks. He noted there is also more desire for more active uses and more synergy of uses.

Oyanagi discussed cultural games/activities and added with our racial equity goals, we may find new ways to address disparities.

Chair Yarusso discussed Regional Park System uses outside of the current criteria that have been 'grandfathered' in.

Steve Sullivan discussed the need to protect some of the best natural places in the metro area. He feels we need to look at what is being managed and what is not and also look for new funding sources. We need to be more strategic in protection of natural resources. He asked whether we are all managing at a level we should/could.

Chair Yarusso stated we need to look at the definition of regional open space.

Kopp discussed shooting ranges. He felt that private ranges are prohibitive and there are limits for indoor ranges. He noted that they are also very costly.

Youngquist discussed the definition of Special Recreation Features in the RPPP.

John Vondelinde discussed their success with accessing funding from the Outdoor Heritage Council. He noted that there is critical habitat in regional parks and we need additional funding avenues to pursue.

Boe Carlson, Three Rivers Park District discussed concerns about diminishing funding going forward. He stated they've been more successful with the Conservation Partners program. He felt we need to talk about what funds are most appropriate for the Regional Parks System and how we are going to be successful pursuing it.

Chair Yarusso discussed state statute that requires the State Legislature to fund operations and maintenance at 40% of total system operational expenses, yet they have historically funded Metropolitan Regional Parks at levels far below what is needed.

Margie Anderson discussed strategically thinking about how we could more effectively use technology as a way to promote the Regional Parks System. Exploring the use of social media could be a big boost.

Chair Yarusso discussed doing this on a regional basis.

Mike Hahm noted a lot has changed in the past ten years. The 'standards' that once served us well may no longer be adequate. For example, community engagement looks different now... Yet our operations and maintenance funding have not changed to grow with our responsibilities.

Moeller felt that master plan presentations go very well at MPOSC. Regarding policy conversations, he feels that at times the Met Council and implementing agencies have a mutual understanding, yet during other times there seems to be a lack of clarity around what agencies and/or Council staff believe to be the right course of action. Carlson encouraged Commissioners to reach out to the agencies to learn about their priorities and/or concerns. Mullin agreed and encouraged the Commissioners to also reach out to Council staff when they have questions.

Hietpas discussed a need for better communication and public engagement. She stated that some of the current master plans for our system are very old, and there is a disconnect whether this plan should be updated or if it is still "right" for the park. She gave examples of times when citizens come forward not wanting a project, but because it is a part of a master plan, we go ahead with it.

Sullivan suggested making sure that policy allows some flexibility to be nimble.

Freeman discussed quarterly meetings that haven't always happened. She felt it would be a good opportunity to have regular communication. Mullin stated he is interested in looking at this again and resuming these meetings but in a less prescriptive format.

Vondelinde felt it's a great opportunity to get together and added we need more informal meetings to collaborate on how we work better together. Oyanagi agreed.

Freeman discussed connectivity with trails and the desire to focus on this topic in the next RPPP.

Chair Yarusso stated that he felt this discussion has been useful and productive and felt we should do it again.

Arvidson asked if this is helping MPOSC members? He felt there needs to be a narrower focus at future discussions among MPOSC, agency leaders, and Council staff.

Taylor discussed the many times we've been caught between what the community wants and what policy is. He feels there can be a disconnect between the Met Council and the implementing agencies. He feels it is critical to build good relationships among Commissioners, staff and the implementing agencies.

Hietpas agreed. She has struggled during MPOSC meetings with upholding the master plan policies when she hears voices in the community saying that they don't want something. She has found it discouraging and confusing.

Mullin acknowledged the challenges and stated he is committed to providing more space for dialogue and opportunities for better communication.

Theisen noted that agencies are all different. He stated that communication is essential and feels it is a key role for him as a Commissioner to do well. He feels it would be useful to have future dialogue meetings but with a narrower focus. He suggested holding them three times a year.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Sandi Dingle
Recording Secretary