

Minutes of the Meeting of the

METROPOLITAN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

Thursday, July 1, 2021

Committee Members Present: Assata Brown, Monica Dillenburg, Robert Moeller, Jeremy Peichel, Tony Yarusso, Cana Yang, and Lynnea Atlas-Ingebretson, liaison to the Council.

Committee Members Absent: Anthony Taylor, Cecily Harris, Todd Kemery

CALL TO ORDER

The Recording Secretary did a roll call for a quorum.

With a quorum being present via WebEx, Commission Chair Yarusso called the meeting of the Council's Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order at 4:03 p.m. on Thursday, July 1, 2021.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Chair Yarusso motioned to approve the July 1, 2021, Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission agenda and asked for a consensus to approve the agenda.

With a quorum present, Chair Yarusso asked for a motion to approve the June 3, 2021 minutes. Moeller motioned, and it was seconded by Peichel to approve the June 3, 2021 minutes of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting. The Recording Secretary issued a roll call vote.

Aye – 6 (Brown, Dillenburg, Moeller, Peichel, Yang, Yarusso)

Nay – 0

Abstention – 0

The June 3, 2021 minutes were approved.

PUBLIC INVITATION

Chair Yarusso noted that the posted Agenda included a public invitation and asked that anyone wishing to address the Commission should please email the Chair at mposc@tonyyarusso.org. He noted that he did not receive a request to address the Commission at today's meeting.

BUSINESS

2021-163, Vadnais-Snail Lake Regional Park Master Plan Amendment, Ramsey County – Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst

Kelly gave a presentation of the Vadnais-Snail Lake Regional Park Master Plan Amendment as outlined in the materials provided.

Peichel asked about passive recreation limitation and if fishing from the boardwalk trail was considered.

Brett Blumer, Ramsey County responded that they are committed to public engagement for each individual project to gauge interest, i.e., fishing from boardwalk trails, and then the County will work to accommodate that use.

Chair Yarusso asked about boardwalk plans and noted he received comments to reduce the amount of boardwalk proposed. Blumer stated that the development of the boardwalk will be informed by their conversations with the Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District and on-going engagement. The County's approach will be flexible, adaptive and pragmatic regarding how much boardwalk will be needed. They will need to look at both high/low water conditions and other considerations.

Chair Yarusso asked about materials and design and referred to bicycles making loud noises on certain materials. He also asked about aesthetics and how they fit

into the area. Blumer discussed materials considered including metal, plastic, concrete, wood, etc. and noted all are being looked at.

Peichel asked about resident geese issues and waterfowl 'fowling' up boardwalks. Blumer stated they are anticipating a railing system that helps prevent waterfowl from resting on boardwalks. He also discussed 'roundups' using dogs to chase geese away.

Peichel asked whether there are any anticipated changes with establishing an understanding of the high-water mark by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources hydrologists and the watershed district, and he asked about monitoring. Blumer stated they are looking at surface water and groundwater and had discussions with the watershed district on approaches to monitoring. He noted that Snail Lake doesn't have a natural outlet and relies on infiltration/evaporation.

Chair Yarusso noted the lake is very shallow and not very conducive to fishing.

A motion made by Peichel and seconded by Dillenburg to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve Ramsey County's Vadnais-Snail Lake Regional Park Master Plan Amendment.
2. Require Ramsey County, prior to initiating any development of the regional park, to send preliminary plans to the Environmental Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division.

Peichel noted that he is really grateful for Ramsey County's climate resilience and accessibility work in this area and felt it was a fantastic plan amendment.

Chair Yarusso noted that there has been some written opposition received from neighbors to the plan.

With no further discussion, Chair Yarusso called for a vote. The recording secretary issued a roll call vote.

Aye – 6 (Brown, Dillenburg, Moeller, Peichel, Yang, Yarusso)

Nay – 0

Abstention – 0

The motion was approved.

2021-162, Annual Metropolitan Regional Parks Operation and Maintenance Allocation – Abdiwahab Ali, Financial Analyst

Ali gave a presentation on the annual Metropolitan Regional Parks Operation and Maintenance allocation as outlined in the materials provided.

Peichel asked if there has been any feedback from the implementing agencies for perceived fairness or number due to use of 2019 use estimate numbers (2020 Visitor Use Estimate was not completed due to the pandemic). Ali stated no. Mullin added, no, however it's sad because anecdotal information tells us 2020 regional park and trail usage during pandemic has gone up. State Statute requires use of the most recent numbers.

Dillenburg asked the difference between lottery in lieu and general fund. Ali explained that lottery in lieu of sales tax is derived from state lottery ticket sales. General Fund dollars are state government's main operating fund and are derived from state taxes. Chair Yarusso stated in 1988 there was a constitutional amendment that stated a portion of lottery sales be used for regional parks. He added that the general fund is a direct allocation from the legislature.

A motion made by Moeller and seconded by Brown to recommend that the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission:

1. Reports to the Metropolitan Council the Regional Parks System state fiscal year (SFY) 2022 Operation and Maintenance funding requests.

2. Reports to the Metropolitan Council corrections to the SFY 2021 Operation and Maintenance funding distribution.

With no further discussion, Chair Yarusso called for a vote. The recording secretary issued a roll call vote.

Aye – 6 (Brown, Dillenburg, Moeller, Peichel, Yang, Yarusso)

Nay – 0

Abstention – 0

The motion was approved.

2021-163, Regional Parks System Equity Grant Program – Jessica Lee, Senior Parks Planner

Lee gave a presentation on the Regional Park System 2021 Equity Grant Program funding recommendations as outlined in the materials provided.

Brown asked who was on the review team and noted her concern that she did not know what many of the projects being funded were about. Lee stated that the review committee was made up of members from MPOSC, the Community Development Committee, the Council's Equity Advisory Committee, and the regional park implementing agencies.

Atlas-Ingebretson stated the work of this committee started prior to new commissioner appointments. She encouraged new commission members to participate next funding round.

Chair Yarusso explained the history behind the program.

Moeller complimented all involved in the process.

Peichel commented on his work on this review committee and stated he saw a big leap in community engagement prior to projects being proposed. He also discussed concerns about hiring BIPOC (black, indigenous, and people of color) staff getting low pay and the need to transition these temporary staff positions into full time employment. Finally, he discussed transportation and connecting individuals to park facilities across the entire system. He talked about teaming with Metro Transit with this grant program process.

Atlas-Ingebretson discussed the history of funding for this program and starting with only regional bonds, which limits the type of projects that can be funded. She expressed that there is a huge need for programming, so this recommendation is a huge win. She discussed the equity grant program being unique and gave kudos to all who participated in this work.

A motion made by Peichel and seconded by Dillenburg to recommend that the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve funding 23 projects totaling \$2,054,000 for the Regional Parks System 2021 Equity Grant Program, as shown in Table 1 of this report.
2. Authorize the Community Development Director to execute the grant agreements on behalf of the Council.

Brown stated she is having difficulty in voting for this when she doesn't know what the projects are. She would have liked a short synopsis of each project being funded. Chair Yarusso noted the full details were given to the Review Committee. He asked if staff could give a brief synopsis. Brown stated she did not need a synopsis now but, in the future, she would like this information.

Dillenburg commented how excited she felt about the recommended projects. She noted we can always reach out to an agency or Council staff to ask about projects that we're not sure of.

Moeller stated he was okay with the information presented but would like more information next year.

Atlas-Ingebretson discussed sharing with MPOSC the scoring criteria at the time the volunteers are selected and stated a little synopsis could be given at that time.

Chair Yarusso noted that some of this information was provided last fall, but new commissioners did not see it.

With no further discussion, Chair Yarusso called for a vote. The recording secretary issued a roll call vote.

Aye – 5 (Dillenburg, Moeller, Peichel, Yang, Yarusso)

Nay – 1 (Brown)

Abstention – 0

The motion was approved.

INFORMATION

Equity Nudge Discussion Topic: Reflecting on the Equity Grant Program Recommendations, how do we move forward to further support the regional park implementing agencies and communities in this important work - Amanda Lovelee, Senior Outreach Coordinator

Lovelee asked how do we move forward in the Equity Grant Program recommendations to further support the regional parks implementing agencies and communities in this important work?

Chair Yarusso noted the feedback last time from the implementing agencies felt the criteria was vague and asked if they felt it was clearer this time. Lee stated she will do follow up with the implementing agencies.

Peichel stated, from his work on the committee, the first and second criteria were well understood however the last three have room for improvement. However, overall, the agencies better understood the criteria and created better proposals.

Atlas-Ingebretson talked about helping agencies begin the development of their proposals with equity in mind. The idea of hiring more BIPOC staff is good. However, this is temporary funding, so it needs to be looked at.

Dillenburg asked what are we expecting of each other? She also asked, what can she be looking for in her district?

Chair Yarusso asked others to share how they reach out to agencies in their districts and work with community groups.

Atlas-Ingebretson discussed her approach when she hears of an issue, she contacts staff and has found it to be useful. She also has staff help coordinate meetings if needed.

Chair Yarusso discussed measuring if these projects are helpful and noted it may take years to measure.

Peichel added that because this work is about developing capacity, we should expect to see more analysis included in Master Plans when projects come before this Commission, including deepening relationships with communities. He stated we will expect to see overall increases in our equity analyses with agencies work.

Chair Yarusso stated this will be a challenge with Commissioner turnover – it will be difficult to see changes over time.

Moeller discussed community organizations have the populations we're trying to reach and better serve, such as Boys and Girls Club. He stated we may want to partner with these organizations to get more ideas of what is needed.

Atlas-Ingebretson stated we've heard from agency staff that this program has had an impact on them. She feels this program has taken a step forward, and she thanked everyone for their work.

REPORTS

Chair: Chair Yarusso discussed COVID-19 and the end of the emergency declaration, and with that the possibility of some site tours in September/October and asked Commissioners if they are comfortable with

meeting in person. Moeller and Peichel gave a thumbs up. Brown stated she is not comfortable around people she doesn't know. Chair Yarusso discussed how we conduct our meetings and asked are folks feeling safe to meet in person. He noted the importance of looking into the possibility of a hybrid option. Peichel asked if this is a decision that will be the Commissions, or will it be decided for us? Chair Yarusso stated the Regional Administrator will make the decision but that as Chair he will work with the Commission to help inform the decision.

Mullin noted that the Council doesn't have any plans to return in the short term.

Dillenburg doesn't have concerns with COVID-19 but does have concern with traffic or bad weather. She is open to meet but likes the hybrid option.

Chair Yarusso stated his general preference for meeting in-person is not even mentioned in the Open Meeting Law. This may be updated in the future.

Moeller would really like the ability to participate remotely in the case of bad weather.

Commissioners: Moeller stated the Minnesota River Valley Regional Trail is now open and thanked the Council and Committee for making this happen.

Council Liaison: None.

Staff: Mullin discussed the appropriations from the legislature and noted all in all it was good news from this Legislative Session. The Parks and Trails Legacy Program includes appropriations of \$21.712 million in fiscal year 2022 and \$22.149 million in fiscal year 2023 for the Metropolitan Regional Parks System. This represents a continuation of the 40-40-20 split of Parks & Trails Fund proceeds to the Met Council for regional parks, the DNR for state parks, and Greater Minnesota Regional Parks & Trails Commission for Greater Minnesota regional parks. The omnibus environment and natural resources bill includes \$9.99 million in each state fiscal year 2022 and 2023 for regional parks operations and maintenance. This appropriation represents an increase of \$850,000 over previous funding levels. The bill also includes two years of appropriations from the Environment & Natural Resources Trust Fund, providing \$1 million in 2021 and \$2.25 million in 2022 for regional parks land acquisition.

Mullin stated, regarding tours, he wanted to hear from Commissioners if they would be comfortable on tours. He noted the Council is working on being able to offer a hybrid meeting options for future public meetings, but currently do not have the necessary meeting infrastructure in place.

Mullin stated the Regional Park Administrative Guide is now posted on the Council's website. He stated this will be a great resource for folks. He will forward a link to Commissioners.

Chair Yarusso asked how to find it on the site. Lee stated it's on the Council's website under Parks, then Grants and Funding.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed the meeting adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

Sandi Dingle
Recording Secretary