



# **Regional Parks Policy Plan**

Adopted June 29, 2005

Amended June 28, 2006

 **Metropolitan Council**

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**T**he mission of the Metropolitan Council is to develop, in cooperation with local communities, a comprehensive regional planning framework, focusing on transportation, wastewater, parks and aviation systems that guide the efficient growth of the metropolitan area. The Council operates transit and wastewater services and administers housing and other grant programs.

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# Outdoor Recreation for Future Generations: A Renowned Parks System

Thanks to the vision and commitment of previous generations, the seven-county Twin Cities area enjoys a regional parks and open space system with few rivals across the globe.

More than 100 years ago, visionaries like Horace Cleveland and Charles Loring helped establish an outstanding network of drives, parks and boulevards around the lakes and rivers of Minneapolis and St. Paul. In response to state legislation, the Metropolitan Council in 1974 designated about 31,000 acres of existing parks owned by counties, cities and special park districts as “regional recreation open space.” Those parks had about five million visits in 1975.

Between 1974 and 2004, the Council – with both regional and state funds – invested \$367 million to help local park agencies develop these parks as well as acquire and develop new parks and trails for the growing metropolitan population. Today, the system includes:

- ✓ 52,000 acres
- ✓ 47 regional parks and park reserves
- ✓ Six special recreation features, such as the zoo and conservatory at Como Park
- ✓ 22 regional trails (170 miles currently open to the public)
- ✓ 30.5 million visitors annually (2003 estimate)

Between 1970 and 2000, the population of the seven-county area grew from 1.87 million to 2.64 million. The Council projects that by 2030 nearly one million more people will live in the region. Now is the time to identify and preserve the last best natural resources and outdoor recreational opportunities in the region for future generations.

## Preserving our Future

As it works to preserve and expand the regional parks system, the Council will be guided by five major policies:

1. Identify and protect, forever, lands with high-quality natural resources that are desirable for regional parks system activities.
2. Provide adequate and equitable funding to acquire, develop and rehabilitate regional parks and trails.
3. Provide a regional system of recreation opportunities for all residents while maintaining the integrity of the natural resource base.
4. Promote master planning and integrated resource planning across jurisdictions.
5. Protect the public investment in the regional parks system.

### Expanding the System

To meet the needs of the region in 2030, the Council proposes a variety of changes to the current regional parks system. Among them:

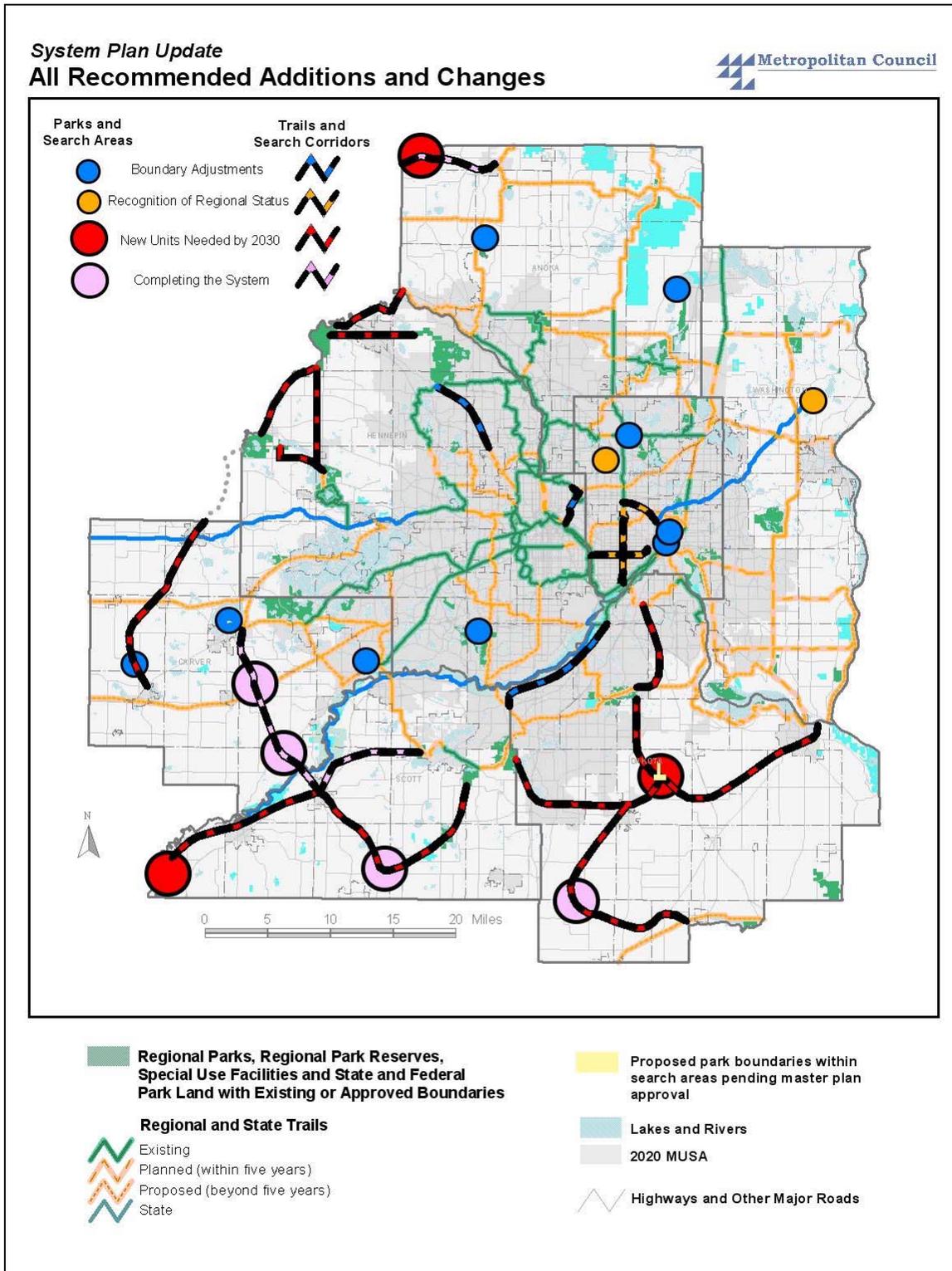
- ✓ **Designate two existing county parks and three trails as "regional."**
  - In Washington County, Pine Point Park
  - In Ramsey County, Tony Schmidt Park
  - In Ramsey County/St. Paul, three regional trails – Trout Brook, Summit Avenue and Lexington Parkway
  
- ✓ **Acquire and develop three new parks. Search areas include:**
  - Northwestern Anoka County
  - Empire Township in Dakota County. An acquisition master plan was approved for this 460-acre regional park on March 9, 2005.
  - Blakeley Township in Scott County
  
- ✓ **Acquire and develop seven new trails. Search areas include:**
  - The Crow River, in Carver County and Three Rivers Park District
  - Both a north/south and an east/west trail traversing Dakota County
  - An east/west trail traversing Scott County
  - In Three Rivers Park District, a trail connecting parts of Baker Park Reserve; a trail connecting Baker and Crow-Hassan Park Reserves; and a trail connecting Crow-Hassan and Elm Creek Park Reserves
  
- ✓ **Acquire land within the current boundaries of 30 existing parks and four trails.**
  
- ✓ **Acquire natural-resource lands adjacent to six existing parks and six existing trails.**

### The Last Best Places

To meet the needs of the region beyond 2030, the Council proposes to acquire four new regional parks or reserves and three new trails. These parks would not be developed until after 2030, but the opportunity to acquire them will likely be lost if the lands aren't identified and purchased before 2030. The goal is to secure the last best places, complete the acquisition of the regional park system, and secure opportunities for future generations, just as our predecessors did for us. Search areas include:

- ✓ **Parks – Miller Lake area and Minnesota River Bluff and Ravines in Carver County; southwestern Dakota County; and Cedar Lake area in Scott County.**
  
- ✓ **Trails – northwestern Anoka County; central to south Carver County; and Minnesota River to Spring Lake in Scott County.**

Figure 1: All Recommended Additions and Changes



## Financing Our Legacy to the Future

### Estimated Cost to Rehabilitate, Develop and Expand Regional Parks and Trails (2005 dollars)

<b>System Component</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Acquisition: 25-year total (\$ millions)</b>	<b>Rehab and Dev. 25-year total (\$ millions)</b>	<b>Annual Cost* (\$ millions)</b>	<b>Percent of Costs</b>
Rehabilitate and develop existing parks/trails	52,000	0.0	187.6	7.5	43
Acquire land in current park boundaries	5,100	125.1	18.4	5.74	33
Acquire land adjacent to existing parks	1,546	10.8	5.6	0.66	4
Convert local parks/trails to regional status	547	0.0	2.0	0.08	<1
New units needed by 2030, including the Empire Wetlands Park in Dakota County approved on March 9, 2005	8,000	45.3	28.9	2.97	17
Completing the system (units needed beyond 2030)	2,523	12.0	0.0	0.48	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69,716</b>	<b>193.2</b>	<b>242.5</b>	<b>17.43</b>	<b>100</b>

- ✓ For the owner of a \$200,000 home in the seven-county metropolitan area, the average annual cost of the regional parks system, including the proposed additions, would be \$6.75 per year over the next 30 years. The estimate assumes that the Council issues a maximum of \$7 million annually of bonds as a 40 percent match to \$10.5 million in state, federal and other funds. The funding would be used to acquire land, rehabilitate aging parks and trails, and develop new park and trail facilities.

The estimates are in 2005 dollars. They do not include any assumption concerning the effect of inflation on costs over the next 25 years, or assume any private sector donations. Consequently, these are conservative estimates. It is understood that additional funds from the public and private sectors will be needed to finance actual costs over this time period. Estimates will be considered again and refined every four years when this policy plan must undergo a comprehensive review required in Minnesota Statute 473.147.

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## Acknowledgements

This plan was developed with the help and contributions of residents of the region, numerous organizations, the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (see roster below) and the 10 regional park implementing agencies (see list below).

### **Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission**

Glen Skovholt, Chair

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Richard Jabs	District C	Emily Barbeau	District G
Michael Rainville	District D	Barbara Schmidt	District H

### **Regional Park Implementing Agencies**

1. Anoka County
2. Carver County
3. City of Bloomington
4. City of St. Paul
5. Dakota County
6. Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
7. Ramsey County
8. Scott County
9. Three Rivers Park District
10. Washington County

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## Chapter One: Accommodating Regional Growth

During the 1990s, the Twin Cities metropolitan area gained more population – 353,000 – than any previous decade in its history. By the year 2030, the region is expected to grow by nearly 1 million people – the equivalent of two Denvers plunked down within the boundaries of the seven-county metropolitan area.

Such robust growth is a sign of the region’s economic health and vitality. With this growth will come new jobs, greater ethnic diversity, expanded economic opportunities and increased tax revenues. But accommodating growth is not always easy, as the increasing public concern about traffic congestion attests.

The purpose of the Metropolitan Council’s *2030 Regional Development Framework*, adopted in January 2004, is to provide a plan for how the Council and its regional partners can address such challenges. The Council’s *Framework* and the accompanying metropolitan system plans – including this *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan* – are intended to help ensure the coordinated, orderly and economical development of the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area – consisting of Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington counties (Minn. Stat. 473.851).

The *Framework*’s strategies are organized around four policies:

**Policy 1: Work with local communities to accommodate growth in a flexible, connected and efficient manner:** Supporting land-use patterns that efficiently connect housing, jobs, retail centers and civic uses. Encouraging growth and reinvestment in centers with convenient access to transportation corridors. Ensuring an adequate supply of developable land for future growth.

**Policy 2: Plan and invest in multi-modal transportation choices, based on the full range of costs and benefits, to slow the growth of congestion and serve the region’s economic needs:** Improving the highway system, removing bottlenecks and adding capacity. Making more efficient use of the highway system by encouraging flexible work hours, telecommuting, ridesharing and other traffic management efforts. Expanding the bus system and developing a network of transitways, based on a thorough cost-benefit analysis.

**Policy 3: Encourage expanded choices in housing location and types, and improved access to jobs and opportunities:** Allowing market forces to respond to changing market needs, including increased demand for townhomes and condominiums as baby-boomers grow older. Preserving the existing housing stock to help maintain a full range of housing choices and ensure existing local and regional infrastructure is fully utilized. Supporting the production of lifecycle and affordable housing with better links to jobs, services and amenities.

**Policy 4: Work with local and regional partners to reclaim, conserve, protect and enhance the region's vital natural resources:** Encouraging the integration of natural-resource conservation into all land-planning decisions. Seeking to protect important natural resources and adding areas to the regional parks system. Working to protect the region’s water resources.

This and other Framework goals and policies help set the parameters for local planning carried out at the municipal and, in some cases, county levels. Communities will soon begin preparing updates to their local comprehensive plans that are due to the Council for review by 2008. A significant opportunity resides in the Regional Parks and Open Space System. The metropolitan area has made a substantial investment in conserving its green spaces through its regional parks, park reserves and trails. Since its creation in 1974, nearly \$400 million has been invested in acquiring and improving parkland for the system. Regional parks, encompassing 52,000 acres, draw more than 30 million visitors a year. Federal, state, and local governments own and manage parks, natural areas, and wildlife refuges that provide additional habitat

## Chapter One: Accommodating Regional Growth

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and recreational activities. Local communities have invested millions in community and neighborhood parks and recreation areas.

Protecting remaining natural resource lands in the metropolitan area builds on these past investments and offers an excellent opportunity for further investment in the regional park and open space system as the region grows by one million more people in the next 30 years.

The Metropolitan Council and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources have charted highly important natural resources in the seven-county area as part of a region-wide natural resource inventory and assessment (NRI/A). The NRI/A – a geographic database and series of maps – records valuable information about land and water resources that perform significant ecological functions, contain important habitat for animals that are sensitive to habitat fragmentation and destruction, and provide opportunities for people to experience nature and the region's historical landscapes

The NRI/A builds on existing information, such as Minnesota County Biological Survey data, to provide a comprehensive look at natural resources. The NRI/A is an information tool that the Metropolitan Council and local governments can use to accommodate growth while protecting the environment through implementing effective land protection and restoration tools. This is especially valuable as a resource to help communities develop their 2008 comprehensive plan updates.

The NRI/A revealed that roughly 100,000 (between 75,000 and 120,000) acres of regionally significant natural lands remain unprotected in the metro area, compared to 280,000 acres of total natural lands and 1,900,000 acres of land overall. Identification of these remaining natural lands using the NRI/A provides a great opportunity to prioritize and coordinate conservation action.

With these and other efforts to build on, the future offers a host of opportunities for regional and local partners and the private and public sectors to collaborate and work in partnership to protect our valuable natural resources.

MINN. Statute 473.147 limits the Council's regional park system planning and capital improvement funding to lands acquired and managed by counties, cities and special park districts, which together with State facilities will reasonably meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the Metropolitan Area. Since the Regional Park System is by statute directed to provide lands for outdoor recreation, and must complement what the State provides, not all of the regionally important natural resource lands can be part of the Regional Park System. The land that is not proposed for the Regional Park System is not needed to reasonably meet outdoor recreation needs and other conservation strategies should be employed. Conserving lands that are not part of the Regional Park System can be accomplished via acquisition in fee title or conservation easements by other entities for State scientific and natural areas, State wildlife management areas, State aquatic management areas, State Parks, State Trails, and local conservation areas. Other land can be protected and remain in private ownership through conservation easements and environmentally sensitive design.

## Regional Growth Forecasts

During the last three decades, the Twin Cities metropolitan area grew by nearly 800,000 people. By the year 2030, the Metropolitan Council forecasts that the region will add another 966,000 people and 471,000 households.

**Table 1: Metropolitan Area Growth, 1970-2030**

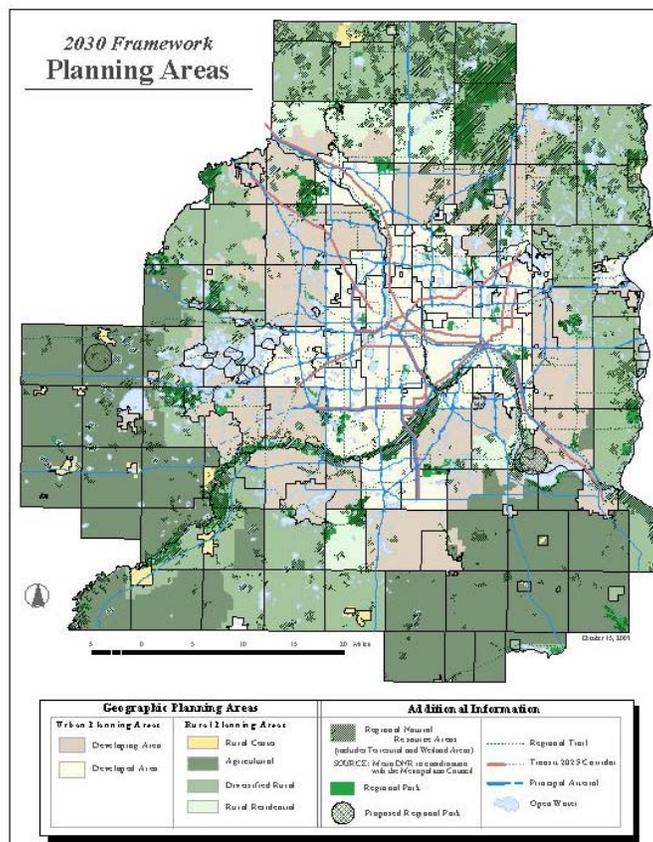
	1970	2000	2030	1970–2000 Increase	2000–2030 Projected Increase
Households	573,634	1,021,454	1,492,000	448,000	471,000
Population	1,874,612	2,642,056	3,608,000	767,000	966,000
Jobs	779,000	1,563,245	2,126,000	784,000	563,000

The metropolitan system plans seek to carefully integrate regional land-use, transportation, housing and natural resource policies – to achieve regional goals in each area and avoid working at cross-purposes. The forecasts are used in the planning and capital improvement program processes to assess regional needs, land-use patterns and infrastructure investments that will be needed to serve growth in a timely, efficient and cost-effective manner.

## Recreation Open Space, Land Use and Framework Planning Areas

The *Framework* sets out different strategies for communities based on the types of growth that are expected (see “2030 Framework Planning Areas” map, Figure 1).

**Figure 1: 2030 Framework Planning Areas**



## Chapter One: Accommodating Regional Growth

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The *Framework* identifies an urban area and a rural area, each of which occupies approximately half of the region. Also depicted on the regional growth map are Regional Natural Resource Areas, including terrestrial and wetland areas. These regional natural resource areas, identified through an inventory and assessment of the region's natural resources, can help local governments plan development that respects the integrity of natural areas and incorporates environmental features into development projects. Conserving and restoring natural resources of regional or local importance contributes to a healthy natural environment and enhances our quality of life. Connecting regional and local features by natural-resource corridors helps sustain wildlife and plant habitat and shapes how development looks on the ground.

The urban area is divided into two specific geographic planning areas: the Developing Communities and the Developed Communities. The rural area is divided into four specific geographic planning areas: Rural Centers/Rural Growth Centers, the Diversified Rural Communities, the Rural Residential Areas and the Agricultural Areas. Approximately 91 percent to 95 percent of new growth is forecast to be located in the urban area – in land-use patterns that make efficient use of regional infrastructure – with the rest, 5 percent to 8 percent, in the rural area, particularly in small towns designated as Rural Growth Centers.

One of the primary differences among these planning areas is the density at which they develop. The Council has established benchmarks indicating the overall densities for planned development patterns in each of the geographic planning areas. The Council negotiates a share of the regional forecasts with each community based on its geographic planning area designation(s), development trends, expected densities, available land, local interests and Council policies.

The cumulative results of the community-negotiated distribution of the forecasts among planning areas becomes the basis for determining the required land supply and for the Council's plans for investments in regional systems such as highways and wastewater service. Decisions relating to transportation, sewers, housing, natural resources and other land uses cannot be made in isolation from one another. Regional parks, transportation and sewers help shape growth patterns; housing location and types affect mobility options and travel patterns.

Unplanned growth can put a strain on natural areas – both regionally significant natural areas and locally designated natural areas, groundwater quality and other resources. The *Framework* and the metropolitan system plans seek to carefully integrate growth, transportation, housing and natural resource policies – to achieve regional goals in each area and avoid working at cross-purposes.

The Developed Communities are the cities where more than 85 percent of the land is developed, infrastructure is well established and efforts must go toward keeping it in good repair. These communities have the greatest opportunities to adapt or replace obsolete buildings, improve community amenities, and remodel or replace infrastructure, restore natural areas to increase their economic competitiveness and enhance their quality of life.

Developing Communities are the cities where the most substantial amount of new growth – about 60 percent of new households and 40 percent of new jobs – will occur. The amount of infill and rehabilitation and the way in which new areas are developed directly influence when and how much additional land in Developing Communities will need urban services – services that will call for substantial new regional and local investments.

The flexibility to stage growth locally also offers Developing Communities the opportunity to incorporate natural resources into their local plans. They can build on the regional Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment and updates as new information becomes available, by identifying additional locally important resources. Then staging plans can incorporate these regional and local resources, developing local infrastructure (wastewater systems, roads, parkways, parks and open space, and airports) in a way that conserves natural resources and avoids or protects sensitive natural areas.

## Chapter One: Accommodating Regional Growth

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Roughly half of the 3,000 square miles in the seven-county Twin Cities area are rural or agricultural. That includes cultivated farmland, nurseries, tree farms, orchards and vineyards, scattered individual home sites or clusters of houses, hobby farms, small towns, gravel mines, woodlands and many of the region's remaining important natural resources. About 5 percent to 8 percent of new growth is forecast for the rural and agricultural area.

The regional parks and open space system represents a major, well-established conservation effort for land and water resources. The area's growing population will need additional large-scale park and open space lands in the future. The region needs to identify natural areas that could be added to the regional parks system and plan for their acquisition before the opportunity is lost.

In addition, as local communities update their comprehensive plans they can identify locally important natural areas for protection. Together, the region, the regional park implementing agencies, local communities, nonprofit organizations and the private sector can preserve natural areas through acquisition, conservation easements, and conservation-sensitive development practices and conservation strategies.

### Comprehensive Planning Process

The *2030 Regional Development Framework* was prepared under the authority of state statutes, which direct the Council to:

*...prepare and adopt...a comprehensive development guide for the metropolitan area. It shall consist of a compilation of policy statements, goals, standards, programs, and maps prescribing guides for the orderly and economical development, public and private, of the metropolitan area. The comprehensive development guide shall recognize and encompass physical, social, or economic needs of the metropolitan area and those future developments which will have an impact on the entire area including but not limited to such matters as land use, parks and open space land needs, the necessity for and location of airports, highways, transit facilities, public hospitals, libraries, schools, and other public buildings.... (Minn. Stat. 473.145)*

The *Development Framework* is the initial "chapter" and the unifying theme of the Council's Metropolitan Development Guide. The *Framework* is the umbrella statement of regional policies, goals and strategies that will inform the Council's metropolitan system plans for transportation, airports, wastewater service and regional parks, as well as other comprehensive development guide chapter policies adopted by the Council.

Under state law, each city and township in the seven-country metropolitan area is required at least every 10 years to review and, if necessary, amend its local comprehensive plan to ensure that the local plan – and local fiscal devices and official controls – are consistent with the Council's metropolitan system plans (Minn. Stat. 473.864). The next round of updated local plans will be due in 2008.

Following the adoption of this *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan* and the issuance of system statements as required under the Metropolitan Land Planning Act (MLPA), local communities then have three years to update their local comprehensive plan. These plans are reviewed by the Council for conformance with metropolitan system plans, consistency with Council policies and compatibility with adjacent and affected governmental units.

**Conformance:** A local comprehensive plan generally will conform to the metropolitan system plans if the local plan:

1. Accurately incorporates and integrates the components of the metropolitan system plans as required by Minn. Stat. 473.851 to 473.871.
2. Integrates public facilities plan components described in Minn. Stat. 473.859, subd. 3:

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- Integrates development policies and compatible land uses to accommodate forecasted growth at appropriate densities and to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the regional system.

**Consistency:** A local comprehensive plan generally will be consistent with Council policies and statutory requirements if the local plan:

1. Addresses community role strategies contained in the *Framework*, including conservation strategies to protect regional important natural resource areas and wildlife corridors.
2. Addresses the linkage of local land uses to local and regional park and open space systems.
3. Includes an implementation plan that describes public programs, fiscal devices and other specific actions for sequencing and staging to implement the comprehensive plan and ensure conformance with regional system plans, described in Minn. Stat. 473.859, subd. 4.
4. Addresses official controls:
  - Includes a capital improvement program (sewers, parks, transportation, water supply and open space) that accommodates planned growth and development.

**Compatibility:** A local comprehensive plan is compatible with adjacent and affected governmental units, based on comments or concerns, or lack thereof, from these entities. In order to be determined compatible, a community must adequately document that it has addressed the concern(s) of all adjacent and affected governmental units.

## **Chapter Two: Policies and Strategies**

### **Introduction**

In 1974, the Metropolitan Council designated about 31,000 acres of existing parks owned by counties, cities and special park districts as “regional recreation open space.” Those parks had about 5 million visits in 1975. By 2004, the metropolitan regional parks system open for public use encompassed approximately 50,000 acres of parkland and included 35 regional parks, 11 park reserves, 6 special recreation features and 22 regional trails. These park/trail units are owned and operated by 10 implementing agencies – Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Ramsey, Scott and Washington counties, the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board and Three Rivers Park District, plus the cities of Bloomington and St. Paul.

In addition to units open to the public, land is being acquired for a park reserve on the south shore of Big Marine Lake and for a regional park on Grey Cloud Island in Washington County. Land is also being acquired for a regional park in the northwest corner of Cedar Lake Township in Scott County. The total acreage of parks open to the public and land yet to be acquired within those parks, plus “planned” from the 2001 park policy plan, is 57,700 acres.

Within the regional parks system, many unique natural features are being preserved for future generations. They include:

- Oak savannas, prairies, lakes and wetlands of the “Anoka Sand Plain.” Much of Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve in Anoka County is composed of these features.
- Maple-basswood forests and associated wetlands of the “Des Moines Ground Moraine,” which are protected in Carver Park Reserve in Carver County.

An estimated 30.5 million visits were made to the regional parks system in 2003. Visitation increased 1.5 percent, or about 445,000 visits, over the 2002 estimate. Annual use has increased 28 percent since 1995, when visits were estimated at 23.9 million. Forty percent of the increase is attributed to the addition of new parks and trails.

Much of the regional parks system is working well and does not require any significant changes. The policies and strategies included in this plan are focused on existing conditions that can be improved, on new challenges and on warding off potential problems. Policies that restate conditions and requirements covered by legislation are used to clarify and reinforce legislative intent. If necessary, legislation that requires interpretation and management to make it useful is picked up in the Management Procedures of the plan.

This chapter of the policy plan is divided into five major sections:

- A. Siting and Acquisition
- B. Finance
- C. Recreation Activities and Facilities
- D. Planning
- E. System Protection

### Section A: Siting and Acquisition

**Policy 1: Identify lands with high-quality natural resources that are desirable for regional parks system activities and to put these lands in a protected status so they will be available for recreational uses and conservation purposes in perpetuity.**

This plan defines the type, mixture and quality of natural resource attributes desired for the regional parks system, and, in cooperation with the regional implementing agencies, identifies lands that meet the criteria.

#### **Strategy 1(a): Siting criteria for units of the regional parks system**

**Future Metropolitan Council designation of lands for the regional parks system should primarily stress lands with important natural resource features, lands that include or provide access to water bodies and lands with natural resource features that enhance outdoor recreation. Geographic balance or proportionate distribution tied to population distribution patterns can be given weight when natural resource features can be provided through restoration.**

#### **Discussion**

The legislative charge to the Council is to prepare a policy plan that "...shall identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to provide a system of regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal facilities, which together with state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area and shall establish priorities for acquisition and development". (Minn. Stat. 473.147, subd. 1)

Regional recreation open space is defined as "...land and water areas, or interests therein, and facilities determined by the Metropolitan Council to be of regional importance in providing for a balanced system of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area including but not limited to park reserves, major linear parks and trails, large recreation parks, and conservatories, zoos, and other special use facilities". (Minn. Stat. 473.121, subd. 14)

Water is a major attraction in almost every unit of the regional parks system and is an amenity along many of the regional trails. Since most surface water is public, with the bed of those water bodies owned by the state, it is appropriate to provide access to these water bodies through the regional parks system.

Major considerations that vie for contention in deciding which lands should be acquired for the regional parks system are (1) acquiring lands that have natural qualities most desirable for the outdoor recreational activities; (2) acquiring lands to assure that regional park facilities are evenly distributed around the metropolitan area or distributed in proportion to the existing and forecasted urban development; or (3) acquiring lands that protect an important natural resource feature. Examples of important natural resource features include lands that link other natural resource areas or water bodies together, which in turn provide a larger natural habitat opportunity; lands that help protect or could be used to improve water quality; or other lands that serve as habitat for protected or endangered species.

Although these considerations vie for contention, the legislative directive is clear that the land should be of "regional importance." Regional importance is not directly defined in the law. But the legislative directive requires that the regional parklands plus state facilities should reasonably meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area. Consequently, lands of "regional importance" would be comparable in size, draw users from rather large geographic areas and contain natural resources

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similar to the state parks and trails in the metropolitan region. Conversely, lands that only serve a municipality or neighborhood would not be of “regional importance.”

Past acquisition activity has tended to favor lands with high-quality natural resources over even geographic distribution. This has produced a regional parks system that contains a certain amount of geographic imbalance that favors the west and southwest portions of the metropolitan area over the other sectors. This is due to both the natural qualities of the land and to the aggressive early land acquisition program practiced in the western part of the metropolitan area.

This imbalance in the regional parks system is considerably ameliorated by the presence of state parks in the St. Croix Valley and at Fort Snelling. The geographic imbalance is also mitigated by the existence of a high-quality highway system with most of the regional facilities within a half-hour or less driving time from the urbanized area. National standards for regional parks assume a one-hour driving time as acceptable. Yet another mechanism for redressing any imbalance is to use development in a creative manner. The rehabilitation of urban areas that include natural resource features (for example, Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park and Cedar Lake Regional Trail) have provided opportunities to create regional park sites or regional trails that also address the geographic balance issue.

### **Strategy 1(b): Land acquisition funding priorities for regional parks and park reserves**

**The priority rating for acquiring park and park reserve lands identified in Metropolitan Council approved master plans is as follows:**

- 1. Lands available for purchase now that would be lost to the regional parks system if timely action is not taken and which meet criteria 2 or 3 below.**
- 2. Lands essential to protect the natural resources that define a park or park reserve and make it usable to the public as planned.**
- 3. Lands that are essential for the park or park reserve to reach its full regional natural resource based outdoor recreation service potential as defined in the Council's regional parks system plan and the park unit's master plan.**

**Matching non-state and non-Metropolitan Council funds to acquire land and the donation of land or sale at a discounted price is encouraged. Capital improvement program requests for funding that leverage non-state and non-Metropolitan Council funds, including the value of any donation, will be given higher priority for funding than similar projects that do not leverage non-state and non-Metropolitan Council funds.**

### **Discussion**

Most master plans provide for a range of recreational activities and developments that require lands in addition to those strictly needed to protect and enjoy the prime natural resource base. The full intent of the master plan will not be realized until these additional lands have been acquired for the system.

All privately owned parcels within an approved master plan boundary are “inholdings” until they are acquired. Some parcels have homes on them and are called “residential inholdings”. The acquisition of inholding parcels – especially those containing homes or those likely to be developed for residential or other urban uses – should be protected by first-right options to purchase, official mapping, life estates or other means. It is imperative that efforts are made to acquire these parcels because every time the land is sold to another private party, the land continues to remain unavailable for regional parks system purposes. If once-vacant land is developed for housing or other uses, it becomes unreasonably expensive to acquire and is essentially lost for regional parks system purposes.

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The Metropolitan Council with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission will work with regional park implementing agencies on systematic reviews of inholding parcels that have undergone development to determine their consistency with this strategy's requirement that the land is essential to protect the natural resources that define the park and make it usable to the public as planned, or the land is essential for the park or park reserve to reach its full regional natural resource based outdoor recreation service potential as defined in this policy plan and the park unit's master plan. The results of that review may conclude that some parcels, or a portion of a parcel no longer meet the requirements of this strategy and should be removed from the park's boundary via a master plan amendment. For example, small parcels with homes on the edge of parks have either been removed from the park boundary or subdivided with the undeveloped land acquired for the park and the home removed from the park boundary.

Because of the strong public attraction to water resources, acquisition of any additional public water frontage within the regional parks system should be given a very high priority. Acquisition of water frontage should also be given a high priority because its high demand and rapidly escalating value will only make it more costly in the future. It is more affordable if it is undeveloped or hasn't been redeveloped with expensive homes, which then makes it even more expensive to convert back to public use.

### **Strategy 1(c): Siting criteria and land acquisition funding priorities for regional trails**

**To qualify for regional trail status, an existing or proposed trail must meet the following criteria:**

- 1. The trail should not duplicate an existing trail. The trail may include a portion of an existing county or local trail if the trail serves one of the following functions:**
  - (A) Destination Regional Trail. Be a destination itself, providing a high-quality recreation experience that traverses significant natural resource areas where the trail treadway will have no adverse impact on the natural resource base;**
  - (B) Linking Regional Trail. Link two or more units of the regional recreation open space system.**
- 2. The trail must serve a regional audience based on visitor origin and service-area research on regional trails.**

**New Linking Regional Trails should be located within the developing or developed area of the region. For Linking Regional Trails, any two trails running parallel to each other and not separated by natural or human-built barriers should be at least 1.5 miles apart so as not to overlap the localized service area of those trails. For Destination Regional Trails, there should be no spacing minimums or maximums; instead, the decision to locate the trail should be based on the availability of existing high-quality natural resources or the opportunity for natural resources restoration, enhancement and protection. Areas within the urban and urbanizing portion of the metropolitan area that are not within 3 miles of a regional trail should be identified as search sites for new regional trails.**

**Destination Regional Trails should be located to reasonably maximize the amount of high-quality natural resources within the trail corridor boundaries. Whenever possible, Linking Regional Trails should be located to reasonably maximize inclusion of high-quality natural resources and connections to local trails, areas of lifecycle and affordable housing, and areas of infill and redevelopment.**

**The funding priority rating for individual parcels of land within a trail corridor is as follows:**

- 1. Lands essential to protect the trail corridor and make it usable to the public as planned.**
- 2. Lands considered essential for the trail corridor to reach its full regional service potential as defined in the Council's system plan.**

**Matching non-state and non-Metropolitan Council funds to acquire land and the donation of land or sale at a discounted price is encouraged. Capital improvement program requests for funding that leverage non-state and non-Metropolitan Council funds, including the value of any donation, will be given higher priority for funding than similar projects that do not leverage non-state and non-Metropolitan Council funds.**

### **Discussion**

The *Minnesota Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)*<sup>1</sup> noted that trail recreation is becoming increasingly important, and the interest and demand for more trails are being felt at all levels of government. Some of the reasons given for this increased interest in trail recreation are that it is a healthful form of exercise for people of all age groups, is suitable for all levels of physical conditioning, can be carried out by families, groups or individuals, and is often available close to home. Another important criterion, not in the report, is that there is little need for a heavy financial outlay to acquire any special equipment or supplies, and usually there are no admission charges.

Demographic forecasts further accentuate the growing importance of trail recreation. The 45-65 age group is expected to grow significantly during the 2000-2010 period. Although many of these people would not or could not participate in more vigorous contact sports, the vast majority of them could walk, hike or ride a bicycle along a trail. Promotion of exercising and keeping fit well into advanced age will also stimulate trail development.

There are local trails in the metropolitan area, and a number of well-developed trails and walkways are located within the confines of larger regional parks and park reserves. In 2000, there were 17 regional trails developed or in some stage of acquisition/construction in each of the seven counties and the two central cities.

The visitor origin data from the 1998-99 regional trail survey indicate that regional trails in the metropolitan area are used most by people who live nearby or can reach the trail in a short drive or bicycle time.

The main criterion used to define regional parks and park reserves – the presence of high-quality natural resources – is also relevant to the location of a regional trail. Attractive settings contribute strongly to the quality of trail recreational experience. Since trails are linear elements, areas along rivers and streams or chains of lakes are excellent candidates for incorporation into the regional trail system.

Natural features adjacent to the trail treadway serve ecological and environmental educational purposes too. Restoration and management practices emphasizing native species can maintain and enhance the aesthetic, habitat and other resource values of these areas.

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<sup>1</sup> The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan is prepared by the Minn. Dept. of Natural Resources every five years. The most recent version (2003-2008) can be found at [http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/scorp\\_final1202.pdf](http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/scorp_final1202.pdf)

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Trail corridors planned and operated mainly to provide bicycle transportation functions such as trips to work, shopping, etc., are not emphasized as a part of this policy plan. The emphasis is on recreational trail activities. Where bicycling can safely be accommodated with pedestrian traffic, it will be allowed. The selection, development and operation of bicycle transportation arteries are covered as a component of the Council's transportation plan. However, some regional trails also function as bicycle transportation corridors and have been funded in part with federal transportation funds. In addition, the commuting trips taken on regional trails also have a recreation component inherent within the trip. The commuter on a regional trail typically enjoys a more scenic travel experience compared to the experience offered on road-based bicycle transportation lanes. Increased commuting opportunities by locating new regional trails benefit the region through reduced congestion and the health benefits associated with physical activity. Consequently, new regional trails that are projected to serve both recreation and commuting uses are desirable as part of the regional trail system. Examples of existing regional trails that provide these multiple benefits include the Southwest LRT Regional Trails, Cedar Lake Regional Trail, the Mississippi River Regional Trail, the Big Rivers Regional Trail and the Bruce Vento Regional Trail.

Since user surveys indicate that recreation trails draw heavily from nearby areas, an important criterion is to concentrate on the acquisition of more trail corridors in the metropolitan urban service area, where more than 90 percent of the population resides. In this urbanized area, attention should be given to both high-quality natural resources, and in the fully built-up areas, to major human-built or developed resources as well. The interesting human-built developed resources include historical and architectural buildings and sites, education facilities, cultural facilities, and major public and private buildings. Utilizing the surface rights of underground utility corridors such as large sewers for trail purposes protects the utility for access/maintenance and provides a linear corridor for the trail.

The regional trail system in the metropolitan area might be likened to the highway system, with regional and local components. The regional component consists of trails in the regional trail system, along with state-administered trails. This system is complemented by shorter, local trails, which may eventually feed into units of the regional trail system. The opportunities for interesting trail recreation experiences are substantially enhanced where local trails intersect with or are reached by elements of the regional system. Therefore, another criterion for designation of regional trails is the existing or likely possibility of intersecting with the local trail system.

When determining the boundaries of regional trail corridors, regional park implementing agencies should consider Natural Resource Inventory lands adjacent to the trail treadway to enhance the natural resource values of the trail. This is especially appropriate when the trail treadway is primarily an abandoned railbed, in a power line corridor or along a highway. These pockets of natural areas not only enhance the recreational experience of the trail user but also enhance the values of the primary land near the entire trail. Retaining these areas in their natural condition is the best use of the land, especially if it would be difficult to develop them anyway. An example would be including wetlands adjacent to the trail within the trail boundary. The wildlife habitat, water-quality values plus the aesthetic values of the wetlands enhance the trail user's experience and encourages best land-use practices since the wetland could not be developed economically compared to "dry" land.

Some of the inner-ring suburbs within the metropolitan area are not close to parks within the regional parks system. Additionally, these suburbs do not have large tracts of land that would be available for future development of parks for the system. To help achieve equitable distribution of regional parks system facilities, regional trail development should be pursued in these suburbs when the need has been identified.

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If parcels are needed to link trails to each other in a network and they are likely to be developed for residential or other urban uses, acquisition of them should be protected by first-right options to purchase, official mapping, life estates or other means.

### Strategy 1(d): Special recreation facilities

**Special recreation facilities proposed for inclusion in the regional parks system must meet the following criteria for eligibility consideration:**

- 1. Are unique and complement or enhance the services already offered by the regional system.**
- 2. Are capable of functioning within the existing management structure of the regional parks system.**
- 3. Do not duplicate or compete with recreation facilities adequately provided by the private sector.**
- 4. Do not drain funds from other facilities in the system either because they have an existing or committed financial base or because a prior agreement for a public subsidy has been reached that is in the public's interest.**
- 5. Demonstrate the existence or potential for drawing a sizable number of people from throughout the metropolitan area.**
- 6. Are approved through the master plan process.**

### Discussion

Regional parks system legislation indicates that the system should contain parks, park reserves and trails, and zoos, conservatories and “other special-use facilities.” The term “other special-use facilities” is not defined in legislation. Discussion in previous Council policy plans suggests that “other special-use facilities,” also referred to in the plan as special recreation features (SRF), are those facilities that have the following characteristics:

1. Contribute to the inventory of available and needed recreation opportunities.
2. Are distinctive developments and/or unique natural landscapes not commonly found in the parks, park reserves and trails.
3. Require special programming or management.

As of 2004, there are six special recreation facilities. They are: (1) Como Zoo, (2) Como Conservatory, (3) Noerenberg Gardens, (4) Square Lake, (5) Gale Woods and (6) Silverwood. The Como facilities are found within Como Regional Park. The Noerenberg Gardens facility was given to Three Rivers Park District with the understanding that it was a unique and regional-level attraction. Square Lake provides beach and boat access to the clearest lake in the metropolitan area. The land encompassing Gale Woods was originally proposed as a regional park in earlier versions of the *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan*. Silverwood is a former Salvation Army camp on Silver Lake that was acquired in 2001. It is programmed for environmental education to serve urban populations.

### Section B: Finance

**Policy 2: Provide adequate and equitable funding for the acquisition, rehabilitation and development of regional parks system units and facilities in a manner that provides the greatest possible benefits to the citizens of the region.**

#### **Strategy 2(a): Management process (CIP)**

**Council-administered funds for acquisition and development go only to projects included and ranked by priority in an adopted capital improvement program (CIP). Funding will be consistent with the established CIP priorities. Projects are eligible for inclusion in a CIP only if they are included in a master plan that has been found to be consistent with the policy plan.**

#### **Strategy 2(b): Who is eligible to receive regional parks system funds**

**Any funds provided by or through the Metropolitan Council for regional parks system acquisition, development and operations/maintenance will be granted only to the following regional park implementing agencies for projects consistent with Council-authorized master plans, capital improvement programs or state law:**

- 1. Anoka County Parks and Recreation**
- 2. City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation**
- 3. Carver County Parks**
- 4. Dakota County Parks**
- 5. Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board**
- 6. Ramsey County Parks and Recreation**
- 7. City of St. Paul, Division of Parks and Recreation**
- 8. Scott County**
- 9. Three Rivers Park District**
- 10. Washington County Parks and Recreation**

#### **Strategy 2(c): System-wide investment priorities**

**Whenever possible, a balance should be struck between investing in acquisition and investing in development. If a decision on fund allocations must be made, the following priorities should be followed:**

- 1. Acquire those lands essential to protect the natural resource that defines a park, park reserve or trail and to make it usable to the public as planned.**
- 2. Develop new or rehabilitated facilities or increase the capacity of existing facilities in places where there is a documented existing or projected high level of use and where the natural resource base will be protected.**

#### **Discussion**

If the metropolitan area, over the long run, is to have a fully usable regional parks system, it is necessary to make investments in both the acquisition of land and in the development of facilities that are used to deliver recreational services. Long-term focus exclusively on either acquisition or development makes little sense. If the region focuses all of its money and attention on acquiring thousands of acres of land and

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makes only minimal improvements, we will not have a usable system. Likewise, if only minimal land acquisitions are made and vast amounts of money are spent on improving this land, the end result may be an overdeveloped landscape that offers little opportunity for the individual outdoor recreational activities the regional system intends to provide.

Investment in development also has some strong reasons for pursuing that course of action. One of the most important development and investment policies expressed in the Council's *Regional Development Framework* is to maintain existing facilities in good operating condition and to give priority to investing in new or improved facilities intended to serve the existing population. This very important priority is recognized in this plan by assigning the number-two priority to the development of facilities that will carry out the *Framework* position.

### **Strategy 2(d): Development and rehabilitation funding eligibility criteria**

**Development in regional parks system units should be based on the principle of providing and maintaining quality public park areas and facilities primarily for citizens of the metropolitan area. The individual master plan process will balance the need to provide facilities in the park with the impacts of those facilities and their use on the natural resources in the park. The following funding eligibility criteria (not in any priority order) are applicable for development and rehabilitation of regional park reserves, parks, trails and special facilities:**

- 1. Projects that provide new facilities, rehabilitate facilities or increase capacity where there is documented existing or projected high use, and where there will be no adverse effect on the natural resource base.**
- 2. Projects continuing a phased high-priority project or one of relatively high-priority that is timed with other public improvement projects to achieve significant economies in cost of construction.**
- 3. A project providing a specific facility that meets a documented need, is currently not available or is significantly under-represented in the system where there will be no adverse effect on the natural resource base.**
- 4. Regional trails that connect to other trails or regional facilities or extend existing trails.**
- 5. Natural resource restoration, invasive species control and other types of resource restoration and protection projects.**
- 6. Matching non-State and non-Metropolitan Council funds to develop/rehabilitate recreation facilities or restore natural resource areas is encouraged.**
- 7. Projects that provide essential facility improvements and natural resource enhancements to allow for the initial public use of a regional park once there is adequate demand and acquisition base to support the development.**

### **Discussion**

Early efforts of the regional parks system program focused on acquiring desirable tracts of land and on incorporating into the regional system those existing park facilities that possessed qualities that made them valuable to the region. Since the lands in question were being used or were intended to be used for some form of recreation, it was recognized that eventually the new lands would require development and

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the facilities in the older parks would eventually have to be redeveloped through replacement or reconstruction.

Implementing agencies have the responsibility to identify development and rehabilitation needs for their units in the regional parks system. The individual master-plan process will balance the need to provide facilities in the park with the impacts of those facilities on the natural resources in the park. Each regional park implementing agency ranks its proposed development and rehabilitation projects for possible inclusion in the capital improvement program of the Council. All of the proposed development and rehabilitation projects may be desirable, but some, due to their location, their existing use or intended use, tend to be more valuable from a regional standpoint than others.

It is imperative that adding recreational facilities to regional parks system units does not adversely affect the natural resource base that justifies the park or trail's regional designation. Park implementing agencies need to balance the carrying capacity of the recreational facilities against the carrying capacity of the park or trail corridor so that recreational uses do not adversely affect the natural resources.

With regard to regional trails, implementing agencies are encouraged to connect existing trails to other trails or regional facilities or extend existing trails. Implementing agencies are encouraged to negotiate with local communities and landowners to provide fencing or vegetative screening to meet safety and local community concerns. Fencing and screening may be grant-eligible development costs. The Metropolitan Council and Commission will consider such costs when reviewing trail development master plans and trail development funding requests. Excessive screening or fencing beyond a reasonable minimum should be cost-shared with the adjacent landowner since the additional cost provides no benefit to the trail-using public.

### **Strategy 2(e): Funding emergency capital improvement requests**

**The Metropolitan Council may consider requests to finance capital improvement projects for regional parks system land acquisition and development that are not financed in the currently adopted regional parks system capital improvement program as "emergency requests" under the following criteria:**

- 1. The project must be consistent with a Council-approved park or trail master plan.**
- 2. The regional park implementing agency can demonstrate that the opportunity for funding the project would be lost if action is not taken now compared to deferring it to a future biennium. For example, the opportunity to acquire land may be lost if funds were not provided at that time versus waiting for funding in a future capital improvement program.**
- 3. The delivery of outdoor recreation services would be severely affected if action is not taken now.**

**If all criteria can be met, the Council may finance the emergency request in one of the following ways:**

- A. The Council may reallocate grant funds of the requesting regional park implementing agency.**
- B. The Council may use any interest earnings on park grant funds on park projects consistent with state law.**
- C. If land acquisition financing or additional matching TEA-21 grants would be disbursed to another state if not obligated in Minnesota, the Council may use unmatched Council bonds from the previous biennial capital improvement program to finance up to 40 percent of eligible project costs.**

**If the Council approves funding for the emergency request by following the criteria stated above, it may amend the regional parks system capital improvement program without holding a public hearing in order to expedite the decision-making process for the funds.**

### **Discussion**

The Metropolitan Council authorizes grant funds for land acquisition and development capital improvements based on its adopted regional parks system capital improvement program (CIP). Occasionally, regional park implementing agencies request the Metropolitan Council to finance land acquisition or development projects that were not part of the adopted CIP. These projects were not budgeted in the CIP because there was no need for funding them at the time the CIP was prepared. For example, land may come up for sale in a park after the CIP was adopted. Or a disaster, such as a fire or flood, may call for funding to replace structures at a cost beyond that covered by insurance.

When an existing grant is reallocated to another project, one of two outcomes is possible:

1. A portion of a project that was originally planned may be deferred. The regional park implementing agency recognizes that it is more cost-effective to defer some work and do other work with the funds available. For example, acquiring land that would otherwise be lost to development or be much more expensive to acquire in the future would be a better use of grant funds.
2. The regional park implementing agency may have been able to complete the originally planned project for less money and thus wants to maximize the benefit of the entire grant by doing more capital improvements consistent with a Council-approved park or trail master plan. For example, estimates for the original project may be much higher than actual costs. The regional park implementing agency may be able to do more work with the existing funds for that park and utilize the current contractor on site with a change order in the work to be accomplished.

In both cases, the “emergency project” needs to be consistent with a Metropolitan Council-approved master plan for the park/trail unit involved. Due to the timing needed for funds in these cases, criteria are appropriate to allow the Council to amend its capital improvement program without an additional public hearing.

### **Strategy 2(f): Reimbursement**

**Reimbursement will be considered for early acquisition of land currently designated as regional recreation open space by the Metropolitan Council in the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* if the acquisition is in full agreement with a Council-approved master plan as required under MN Statutes 473.313 and the regional park implementing agency received Council approval prior to undertaking the acquisition.**

**If land is acquired or protected under an option to purchase by a regional park implementing agency, or an entity under contract with that agency while the Metropolitan Council considers adding the land to the *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan* via a public hearing process, the Council will consider reimbursing the park agency for the costs to acquire or protect the land via an option to purchase under the following conditions:**

1. **The Council is informed in writing of the land acquisition or option to purchase before it occurs.**
2. **The Council makes a preliminary finding via staff analysis that the proposed regional park unit is consistent with Strategy 1 (a): Siting Criteria for units of the**

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Regional Park System, and the size/service area requirements for the applicable regional park system unit are met.

3. The Council conducts a public hearing to designate the acquired land as regional recreation open space based on a draft acquisition master plan containing the acquired land or land held under an option to purchase. The hearing is conducted under the requirements of MN Statutes 473.147.
4. That based on the findings/conclusions of the public hearing, the Council designates the land as regional recreation open space and approves an acquisition master plan that contains the acquired land or land held under an option to purchase.

If these conditions are met as required by MN Statutes 473.147, and 473.313 the Council will consider reimbursing the park agency via a grant as permitted under MN Statutes 473.315 for the following costs:

- a) Appraisal costs incurred by the acquiring park agency or entity under contract with the agency
- b) Surveying costs incurred by the acquiring park agency or entity under contract with the agency
- c) Legal fees incurred by the acquiring park agency or entity under contract with the agency
- d) Fees for service provided by an entity under contract by the park agency to negotiate and purchase the land or obtain an option to purchase
- e) Principal payments made towards the purchase price including principal payments on a contract for deed or bond, or payments made on an option to purchase
- f) 180% of township or city taxes due on the parcel at the time of closing as required by MN Statute 473.341

Since the acquisition of the land will primarily benefit the acquiring agency; to comply with MN Statute 16A.695 requirements on the expenditure of State bonds; to minimize the total costs of acquisition; and to be consistent with reimbursements made on other projects the following costs are not grant eligible:

- a) Acquisition costs incurred to acquire a local park, which is later, designated a regional park.
- b) Interest incurred by the acquiring agency or entity under contract with the agency on bonds it issued to buy the land, or interest incurred on a contract for deed payment.
- c) Projected investment revenue lost by the acquiring agency or entity under contract with the agency based on what it might have earned on funds it spent to acquire the land or to buy an option to purchase the land.
- d) Interest on inter-agency or intra-agency loans used to finance the acquisition payment(s) or option to purchase.

Reimbursement will be considered for a development or rehabilitation project reimbursement project—not how the park agency will spend the reimbursement grant. However, agencies should state how they would spend the reimbursement grant so that State funds as well as Council bonds can be used when possible. This would eliminate any need for amendments to the Council’s Unified Capital Budget since the CIP would accurately reflect how the funds were being spent and informs the public and elected officials on how the funds will be spent.

If an agency chooses to spend reimbursement grant funds on a phase 1 project, the subsequent phase 2 or continuing phased project request should not be ranked with other phase 2 or continuing phased projects but be ranked along with other unphased projects in the parks CIP. Additional phases should be outlined in the first phase request and the Council concur that this is one project versus several projects that could stand on their own.

Since Council bonds are limited to financing only 40% of the total biennial CIP, the following steps will be taken when considering reimbursement requests in a biennial CIP:

Park agencies should submit their CIP funding requests with the understanding that there’s a guideline that reimbursement grants not exceed 40% of an agency’s biennial CIP allocation.

If the total requests for reimbursement grants exceeds 40% of the total biennial CIP, agencies should submit to the Metropolitan Council how they intend to spend the reimbursement grant in order to ascertain whether or not State bonds can also be used to finance the reimbursement grant in addition to Council bonds. If the amount of reimbursements requiring Council bond funding exceeds the amount of Council bonds available for that biennial CIP, then park agencies are asked to reduce their CIP requests for reimbursements for that biennium and request funds to finance new project(s).

If the adjusted requests for reimbursements that require Council bonds still exceed the amount of available Council bonds for that biennium, then the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission will rank reimbursement requests according to the ranking criteria in place at that time.

The Metropolitan Council will use best efforts to implement this reimbursement policy as described above. However, the Council does not, under any circumstances, represent or guarantee that reimbursement will be granted, and expenditure of local funds never entitles a park agency to reimbursement.

### Discussion

On December 6, 2005 the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC) recommended that the 2006-2011 regional parks capital improvement program be adopted as part of the Council’s 2006-2011 Unified Capital Improvement Program. However, the MPOSC felt more discussion/review was needed regarding the revised park grant reimbursement policy. Specifically, how the policy is interpreted and applied in ranking funding requests for reimbursement grants and how the expenditure of those grants affects the ranking of other funding requests in future park capital improvement programs needs to be resolved. Therefore, the Commission requested that the Council postpone action to adopt the proposed revised park grant reimbursement policy.

On December 14, 2005 the Metropolitan Council:

1. Received the Hearing Report on the 2006-2011 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program.
2. Postponed action on the proposed revised park grant reimbursement policy until March 22, 2006; and

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3. Directed the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to review the proposed revised park grant reimbursement policy and to submit its findings and recommendations to the Community Development Committee no later than February 28, 2006.

Based on the comments submitted by the park agencies and the discussion from the January 6, January 23 and February 7, 2006 meetings, the MPOSC came to consensus on the following changes to the reimbursement policy:

1. Park agencies would not have to submit a compelling reason to the Metropolitan Council as to why they are spending their own funds in advance of CIP funding as a condition for reimbursement consideration. The premise for this change is that as long as a project is consistent with a Council approved master plan and the Council acts to consider reimbursing the park agency for the project prior to starting the project, the Council should not require a park agency to have a compelling reason to finance a project with its own funds instead of waiting for a Metropolitan Council regional park CIP grant to finance a project. Furthermore, the revised policy does not guarantee payment of the reimbursement by the Council.
2. Rank reimbursement projects in the CIP based on how the funds were initially spent—not on how they will be spent. However, agencies should be asked how they would spend the reimbursement grant so that State funds as well as Council bonds can be used when possible. This also would eliminate any need for amendments to the Council’s Unified Capital Budget since the CIP would accurately reflect how the funds were being spent. It also lets the public and elected officials know how the funds will be spent.
3. If an agency chooses to spend reimbursement grant funds on a phase 1 project, the subsequent phase 2 or continuing phased project request should not be ranked with other phase 2 or continuing phased projects but be ranked along with other unphased projects in the next biennial regional parks CIP. Additional phases should be outlined in the first phase request and the Council concur that this is one project versus several projects that could stand on their own.
4. Since Council bonds are limited to financing only 40% of the total biennial CIP, the following steps should be taken when considering reimbursement requests in a biennial CIP:
  - A. Park agencies should submit their CIP funding requests with the understanding that there’s a guideline that reimbursement grants not exceed 40% of an agency’s biennial CIP allocation.
  - B. If the total requests for reimbursement grants exceed 40% of the total biennial CIP, agencies should submit to the Metropolitan Council how they intend to spend the reimbursement grant in order to ascertain whether or not State bonds can also be used to finance the reimbursement grant in addition to Council bonds. If the amount of reimbursements requiring Council bond funding exceeds the amount of Council bonds available for that biennial CIP, then park agencies are asked to reduce their CIP requests for reimbursements for that biennium and request funds to finance new project(s).
  - C. If the adjusted requests for reimbursements that require Council bonds still exceed the amount of available Council bonds for that biennium, then the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission will rank reimbursement requests according to the ranking criteria in place at that time.

### Strategy 2(g): Funding joint-use corridors

**Regional parks system funds should only be used to acquire or develop a corridor identified for future transit use in a Council-approved transit implementation plan when there is a guarantee that the trail facility will be operational for its useful design life as negotiated by the transit provider and the regional park implementing agency.**

**In cases where light-rail transit, busways or other uses and trail recreation are to be permanent partners in the use of the corridor, regional parks system funds will be used only for that part of acquisition and development attributable to trail use.**

### Discussion

Occasionally, existing linear space previously used for railroad or road transportation becomes available for new uses. This is particularly true of railroad rights-of-way that are no longer required for service. The most likely new uses for these corridors at the present time are recreational trails, light-rail transit and busways.

The availability of these corridors potentially offers excellent opportunities for the regional trail system to expeditiously acquire links that would otherwise have to be assembled on a parcel-by-parcel basis. All surplus corridors put on the market should be evaluated for their suitability as additions to the regional trail system.

If the available corridor traverses an area with high-quality natural resources or it constitutes part of a link in a more extensive regional trail system, there is interest in acquiring the trail for use as part of the regional trail system. In some cases, available corridors do not provide any linkages or offer any potentially interesting trail recreation experience. In these cases, the regional parks system has little interest in acquisition or use of the corridor.

However, where either the linkage or natural resources criterion or both are met, two potential problem situations occur. First is a situation where the surplus corridor is wide enough to accommodate both the permanent use as a light-rail/busway transit right-of-way and permanent use for trail recreational purposes. Such areas are of substantial interest to the regional parks system. It is hoped that differences between the transportation use and the recreation use can be resolved so that both types of activity can become permanent, valuable additions to the metropolitan area. Planning, development and management arrangements, however, will have to be worked out among the various interests involved.

The trail use of rights-of-way owned by regional rail authorities is allowed as an interim use under agreements between the regional rail authority/transit provider and regional park implementing agencies. Signs on these trails inform the public of that fact and that trail use may be displaced or shared with transit uses in the future. In recognition of these conditions, an additional classification of regional trails is depicted—"interim trail use subject to shared use or displacement with transit use of this right-of-way." See Figure 3, "Regional Parks System as of January 2005," for the locations of these trails.

A more difficult situation occurs when the corridor right-of-way, on a permanent basis, can accommodate either light-rail/busway transit or trail recreation, but not both of them. Since light-rail/busway transit is in the early planning and implementation stages, it may well be a period of years or even decades before light-rail transit is actually constructed in a particular corridor. It is fairly common to suggest that, in the interim, the corridor be used for recreational trail purposes. The possibility always exists that the eventual conversion of the corridor to light-rail/busway transit will not occur and, presumably, the corridor will be available for permanent recreational uses.

However, it is also possible that light-rail/busway transit will eventually claim the facility after a period of several years. If the facility has been used as a recreational trail, it's entirely possible that the trail will become popular and be viewed as a permanent part of the regional trail system. The regional parks system will experience a substantial dislocation and deprivation if one of its links is suddenly removed from the system. Public opposition over conversion from recreation to transportation use is also very likely. If the regional trail system and the transit system are to take this risk, it must be done with the clear-cut understanding that trail recreation may only be a temporary use. No significant long-term recreation investment will be made in the facility unless it will be in operation for its useful design life. As defined by the Federal Highway Administration, the useful design life of a trail is 10 years or more. Bridges have a useful design life of 50 years.

A document entitled "Minnesota Abandoned Railroad Corridor Preservation Process" describes how railroad rights-of-way can be preserved for a variety of public uses. If regional railroad authorities decide to divest themselves of rights-of-way, this procedure should be used to determine future public uses of the right-of-way, including regional trails if the rights-of-way can generally meet regional trail criteria.

### **Strategy 2(h): Financing land acquisition for the regional parks system**

**The Metropolitan Council and Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission -- in consultation with regional park implementing agencies, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association and nonprofit organizations devoted to acquiring and protecting land for natural resource-based recreation and environmental education – will evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of creating a park/trail land acquisition reserve fund financed with state revenues and matched with funds from other public sources. These entities will also evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of establishing a park/trail land-acquisition fund endowment composed of private donations managed by a private nonprofit organization, and will look at other alternative funding sources and mechanisms. The endowment could provide private-sector funds as match to public-sector funds to acquire parks and trails and/or provide upfront financing to acquire land until public sector funds are appropriated.**

### **Discussion**

Although deciding what lands should be purchased for the regional parks system has been carefully determined through individual park and trail master plans and prioritized for regional funding, the ability to acquire the land is dependent on having enough funds available when landowners are ready to sell. Since the landowner decides when the land is available for purchase, regional park agencies have had to estimate how much money to budget to buy the land. In several instances, regional park agencies have not had sufficient regional acquisition grant funds to meet the demand for funds. In those cases, park agencies have had to use their own funds to acquire the land and then seek reimbursement with regional grants in the future.

These reimbursement grants are financed with Metropolitan Council bonds because state bonds cannot be used to reimburse a local government for land that has already been purchased. In other cases, if the regional park implementing agency did not have sufficient funds, the land was sold on the private market and homes or other structures were built or rebuilt on the land. It then became unreasonably expensive to acquire and was lost for park or trail purposes.

In order to have sufficient funds on hand when needed to acquire regional parks system land, two options were initially considered:

1. The state could establish a park/trail acquisition reserve fund financed with state revenue, which could be matched with a portion of Metropolitan Council bonds. The legislature would have to decide to dedicate a portion of the state revenue for this purpose by statute or through amending

the Constitution. The Metropolitan Council would have to decide how much of its regional park bonding capacity it would want to devote as potential match to the state funds. The Council could use a portion of its bonding capacity that is not needed to match state funds for regional park and trail development and rehabilitation projects.

2. With the help of a nonprofit organization, an endowment could be created using private donations with the goal of financing 50 percent of land acquisition costs for regional parks and trails. The remaining 50 percent would be funded with public funds – possibly from the reserve fund mentioned in option 1. In some instances, the private funds might have to be used to acquire the land and hold it until sufficient public funds are appropriated to finance at least half the initial acquisition cost.

Additional options to generate revenue for land acquisition should also be examined. Implementing these options can provide funds when needed to acquire land for the regional parks system as well as other recreation providers. For example, a statewide fund could be used for acquiring conservation easements to protect habitat. Other examples include fee title acquisition for state parks and trails and regional parks and trails in Greater Minnesota, park/trail acquisition grants to local governments statewide, and acquisition funds for metropolitan regional parks and trail land. The Natural Resource Task Force has recommended that the Metropolitan Council increase collaborative implementation efforts for open space and recreation planning by increasing partnerships to finance protection through conservation easements. Other innovative partnerships with private enterprises or interested nonprofit groups may help the region leverage its financial base. There is a variety of agencies and organizations that can purchase and manage these lands; there is a need to coordinate efforts to identify the most appropriate owners/managers for each important site.

The Natural Resource Task Force recommended that the Metropolitan Council increase collaborative implementation efforts for open space and recreation planning by increasing partnerships to finance protection through conservation easements. Other innovative partnerships with private enterprises or interested non-profit groups may help the Region leverage its financial base. There are a variety of agencies and organizations that can purchase and manage these lands; there is a need to coordinate efforts to identify the most appropriate owners/ managers for each important site.

### **Strategy 2(i): The financial base**

**The Council will seek continued state funding for acquisition, development and rehabilitation of all elements in the regional parks system. The Council will also pursue other sources of funding where appropriate. Continued State supplemental support to finance 40 percent of operation and maintenance costs of the regional system will also be sought.**

### **Discussion**

The regional parks system has been funded through a combination of state and local funding sources over the last 30 years. Funding for operations and maintenance of the regional system has been provided primarily by implementing agencies through local taxes available to them and, to a lesser extent, user fees. Since 1985, the state has provided some supplemental funding to implementing agencies to help fund their O&M costs. Minn. Stat. 473.351, subd. 3, states that:

Each regional park implementing agency must receive no less than 40 percent of its actual operation and maintenance expenses to be incurred in the current calendar year budget as submitted to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. If the available operation and maintenance money is less than the total amount determined by the formula including the preceding, the implementing agencies will share the available money in proportion to the amounts they would otherwise be entitled to under the formula.

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Any changes in the formula used to distribute state funds for operations and maintenance will require legislative action.

### Section C: Recreation Activities and Facilities

**Policy 3: Provide a regional system of recreation opportunities for all residents, while maintaining the integrity of the natural resource base within the regional parks system.**

#### **Strategy 3(a): Appropriate regional parks system activities**

**Minn. Stat. 473.147 requires the Metropolitan Council to prepare a policy plan that "...shall identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to provide a system of regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal facilities, which together with state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area and shall establish priorities for acquisition and development."**

**Minn. Stat. 473.121, subd. 14 defines regional recreation open space as "...land and water areas, or interests therein, and facilities determined by the Metropolitan Council to be of regional importance in providing for a balanced system of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area, including but not limited to park reserves, major linear parks and trails, large recreation parks, and conservatories, zoos, and other special use facilities."**

**Based on the legislative directive and definition of "regional recreation open space," recreational activities to be accommodated by the regional parks system should meet the following criteria:**

- 1. Be strongly tied to high-quality natural resources and to the distribution of these resources around the area.**
- 2. Require a land supply and acquisition effort generally found at the regional level.**
- 3. Be reasonably, feasibly and safely accommodated without detriment to existing uses as determined through master plans for facility improvements to accommodate the use, or through regional park implementing agency policy board decisions on park/trail use management issues.**
- 4. Be protective of the environment/ecology of the site and not negatively impact its natural resources.**

#### **Discussion**

Recreation encompasses a diverse range of activities and pursuits. Some of these activities can be carried out on an individual basis, while others involve participation of large numbers of people. Certain activities require very little investment on the part of the participant; others call for a fairly substantial personal outlay of funds. A number of activities can and do take place on lands and in facilities usually provided at public expense. Others, however, are provided on a for-profit basis and require admission and user charges.

The Council, early in its regional recreation and open space planning effort, defined the outdoor recreational activities selected as prime candidates for accommodation by the system as picnicking, camping, swimming, conservation, nature interpretation, fishing, boating and trail uses such as ski-touring, hiking/walking, bicycling, equestrian and in some cases, snowmobiling. This list does not include unique activities such as those offered by the Como Park Zoo and Conservatory, because these two facilities are, by law, to be included in the regional parks system.

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The regional activities selected require large tracts of land or land endowed with unique natural resources, or both. The land needs are easier to meet at the regional level than at the municipal level, and the associated activities are more likely to be developed or provided at a regional level than by cities and towns.

When the regional system was being created in the 1970s, several preexisting parks were included. Several of these parks had activities not currently considered appropriate for inclusion in the regional system. Many of these activities continue to operate quite legitimately, but they are not eligible for regional funding for improvement or expansion.

Land is acquired at the regional level for inclusion in the system with the intent that it may eventually be developed in a way that provides for the recreational activities listed above. Adherence to this basic list of activities has served the regional system well over the years and has helped to fend off efforts to acquire and develop regional parks system lands for other ventures. The criteria for selecting regional activities to be accommodated by the system are given in the strategy preceding this issue discussion.

### Potential New Uses of Trails

The following are examples of new trail uses and the factors that regional park implementing agencies should consider in determining whether to accommodate them in trail development master plans.

1. **In-line skating:** This activity requires a wider trail treadway (wider than eight feet) if pedestrian, bicycling and in-line skaters are on the same treadway and going in two directions. In-line skating also requires a smoother/harder treadway surface than bicycling and pedestrian uses. In-line skating also is more popular on flat-terrain trails such as abandoned railroads than on hilly terrain trails going cross-country. Finally, in-line skating seems to be more popular on looped in-park trails than long distance park-to-park trails. However, skaters will go out and back on linear trails at a distance that meets their physical conditioning. Based on these factors, in-line skating could be added as a primary use on a regional trail if:
  - a. The trail treadway was or could reasonably be made sufficiently wide, smooth and flat enough to safely accommodate skaters, pedestrians and bicyclists.
  - b. No other or a few in-line skating opportunities were being provided nearby on regional trails (in-park or inter-park) or could not be provided on nonregional trails (in-park or inter-park).
2. **Mountain biking:** This activity may be appropriate on terrain/soil that can withstand use without excessive erosion, which would damage the environment the trail user came to enjoy. Challenging, hilly terrain is attractive to mountain bicyclists, but the trail treadway must be designed to minimize soil erosion. In some cases, mountain biking on turf trails may be permitted during drier times of the year because the underlying soil and slopes may not be able to withstand mountain bike use when it is seasonally wet. Mixing mountain biking and pedestrian users on the same trail treadway should be carefully evaluated during the trail design process. Trail user rules may be needed to provide a safe and enjoyable experience for both user types. Finally, most mountain bike trail terrain is best provided in closed loop trails within regional parks or park reserves versus cross-country trails between parks. Based on these factors, mountain biking (off-road, nonpaved trails) could be added as a primary use on a regional trail if:
  - a. During drier seasonal time periods, mountain-bike use can be accommodated if the trail treadway surface and design permits it without causing excessive erosion.

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- b. The trail treadway can safely accommodate either bicyclists alone or a mix of pedestrians and bicyclists through appropriate trail design and/or trail user rules.
3. **Night trail use:** This activity allows for increased trail use for those who work during the weekdays, and increases trail uses during the off-peak spring and fall seasons as well as winter cross-country skiing and walking. Trail lighting projects are encouraged where appropriate, especially on trails with high demand. An important component when considering lighted trails is the impact on adjacent land uses.

Mixing motorized and nonmotorized trail uses such as snowmobiling and hiking requires appropriate trail design, possibly speed controls and signage to safely accommodate both use types. Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to use public participation processes to develop solutions to multi-use trail conflicts.

Other trail uses, such as motorized wheelchairs or three-wheel bicycles, should be reasonably accommodated to serve persons with mobility impairments wherever possible.

There has been a demand for organized amateur athletic facilities that serve several municipalities or organized league play within a municipality. Municipal recreation departments and/or school districts provide these athletic field complexes. The Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission (MASC) is responsible for elevating the social and economic benefits of sports to enrich the lives of all Minnesotans. Grants for such facilities go through the MASC, not the Metropolitan Council. Such athletic field complexes do not require a high-quality natural-resource land base to exist. They are easier to develop on formerly disturbed lands. As such, athletic field complexes are inappropriate for development on regional parks system lands.

Recreation activities arise and the need exists to examine the appropriateness of accommodating these activities on regional parks system lands. For example, activities that have gained popularity in the last 10 years include field archery, ski-joring, paint ball, BMX biking, skate parks, dog exercise areas and dressage. These activities may preclude the use of an area for other uses. However, this does not mean that these facilities are unacceptable within regional parks system lands in all cases. To accommodate new recreation activities on regional parks system lands, the regional park implementing agency must first assess how well the proposed activity meets the standards set forth in the preceding strategy and then incorporate any physical changes to the regional parks system landscape through a master plan revision process that includes significant public input.

In some instances, there may be no need for any physical change to the park or trail unit, but a change in visitor or park management rules or policies. An example of a management issue versus a park-development issue is permitting off-leash dog use on a trail or a part of a park outside of a defined off-leash dog exercise area. Another management issue example is permitting a limited controlled hunt as a means of maintaining the health of a park's deer herd within the constraints of the habitat supporting the herd. In both cases, there are no physical changes to the park/trail unit requiring capital improvements but rather a change in how the park/trail unit is used or managed. Such park/trail management issues should be resolved by the regional park implementing agency's policy board after appropriate public input and consideration on how these management changes affect the park's environment, park users and adjacent property.

Some new recreation open space uses may well be compatible with the long-range basic mission of the regional park and open space program. In some instances, new uses may enhance the viability of the regional system and expand the range of opportunities available in the parks, park reserves and trails.

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Other recreation open space uses may substantially reduce the ability of the regional facilities to carry out their planned roles or diminish the quality of the recreational experience.

Off-road vehicle use is an important concern for the regional parks system. Off-road vehicles (ORVs) are defined as all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), off-road motorcycles (ORMs) and 4-wheel drive vehicles being used off designated roads. For the purpose of this policy plan, snowmobiles are not considered to be ORVs. Snowmobiles have been permitted on regional trails and in some regional parks when local ordinances and the regional park implementing agency have authorized such use. Local units of government in the rural areas of the region also work with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and snowmobile clubs to provide rights of way for snowmobile trails which link to other trails outside the seven county Metropolitan Area.

It is believed that the number of ORVs will continue to increase and that there will eventually be significant demand for ORV recreation facilities within the metropolitan area. ORV use has been shown to have negative impacts on the experiences of nonmotorized recreationists when these activities occur in the same area. ORV use can also result in environmental damage such as soil erosion, inappropriate use in wetland areas and stream crossings, noise and air pollution. ORV use, as defined above, has been determined to be inappropriate in regional parks, park reserves and regional trails because of their adverse impact on existing recreational activities and the natural environment.

The Metropolitan Council acknowledges that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has statutory authority under Minn. Stat. 84.03 to provide for regulated use of off-road vehicles through its management of several legislatively dedicated accounts that contain license receipts and a portion of Minnesota gas tax revenues from the use of these vehicles. Siting and managing an off-road vehicle use area in the seven county Metropolitan Region that doesn't adversely affect nearby land uses and natural resources will require cooperation between the affected local unit of government and the DNR. Regional park implementing agencies may participate in siting an off-road vehicle use area, but the lead responsibility for siting and funding the area will be provided by the DNR under the authority its granted in statute.

The initial decision on whether a new activity can and should be accommodated is up to the regional park implementing agency responsible for the park, park reserve and trail. The Council will become involved if the regional park implementing agency decides it would like to accommodate a new activity but finds that a master plan amendment is necessary before it can act.

### **Strategy 3(b): Role of urban and rural areas in delivery of recreational services**

**The development of facilities that attract large numbers of users, which require larger capacity roads and connection to a municipal sewage treatment system, should be confined to parks and park reserves located in the urban and urbanizing area of the region unless the demands for heavily used services cannot be adequately met at regional parks system units in those areas. In this latter case, the master plan should justify development of park system units in the rural area designed to attract large numbers of users and indicate how support services and facilities such as roads and sewers will be provided.**

**When feasible, transit system elements should be developed to provide access to regional parks system units. Transit planners should prepare specific transit system elements, which are sensitive to parks, park users, park development plans and local agencies' rules and regulations.**

### Discussion

The metropolitan urban area is the land already urbanized or planned to accommodate urban development in the next 20 years. This area is to receive a full complement of regional and local services. These are services commonly found only in built-up areas, such as central sewers, transit, parks and playgrounds, a dense road network, and full-time fire and police protection. The people and the businesses in the urban area that will receive these services are also the ones who will pay for their development and delivery.

The rural area is the area that is to be retained for agriculture, natural resource conservation and related recreation and other low-density types of uses. Its residents can do without urban services and normally will not receive them. They are not expected to pay for the facilities that will deliver services to people in the urban area. The rural area contains 50 percent of the total land acreage in the metropolitan area and, of necessity, must contain some facilities intended primarily to deliver services to people living within the urban area. Several regional parks, park reserves and trails are located in the rural area.

This is because the presence of a high-quality natural resource base has long been a major criterion for the definition of lands to go into the regional park and park reserve system. The distribution of high-quality natural resources bears little or no resemblance to the designated urban and rural areas. Also, in order to build up a large recreational land reserve to be used for future populations, it has been necessary to acquire land in the rural area.

The *Regional Development Framework* accepts the presence of regional parks, park reserves and trails in the rural area. In doing so, it takes the position that these components should primarily serve the demands of residents of the urban area; they should not interfere with agricultural activities nor natural resource conservation and hunting, and should be planned in a way that discourages urban-density developments from occurring around their peripheries.

Much of the regionally generated demand for recreational facilities, especially those that attract large numbers of users, can be adequately accommodated at properties located in the urban area (including the freestanding growth centers). Some activities, such as nature study, camping and water recreation, because of their resource demand, will likely be accommodated at parks or park reserves located in the rural area. Intense developments at parks and park reserves in the rural area should be the exception rather than the rule and should be considered on a property-by-property basis. Developments intended to enhance the protection and preservation of natural resources, whether in the rural area or the urban area, are acceptable and in keeping with the basic concept behind designation of areas with strong conservation roles as park reserves.

### Strategy 3(c): Uses of the system by special populations

**The regional park implementing agencies should act to remove or reduce the deterrents to use of the regional system by special populations – that is, safety problems, costs, transportation barriers and inadequate dissemination of information. If needed, new facilities and/or programs (including marketing programs) should be designed to increase visitation to the regional parks system by special populations. Capital improvement funding requests should include how the needs of special populations will be met.**

**Metro Transit and other transit providers are urged to work with the regional park implementing agencies to better define the transportation barriers for special populations and design programs to increase the level of access to the regional parks system.**

### Discussion

The regional parks system has been designed and developed to provide services for all of the residents of the metropolitan area, with facilities and services geared to meet the demands and abilities of the general population. A 1989 study entitled *Recreational Interests and Needs of Special Need Groups*, which surveyed regional park use by special populations, indicated that some 30 percent of the metropolitan area's population are members of special population groups. Special population groups identified in the study were people with physical and mental disabilities, low incomes, as well as racial-ethnic minorities, single parents and elderly people. Findings from that study were reconfirmed in the 1998-99 Regional Parks Visitor Study. The 1998-99 study found that teens, young adults, racial-ethnic minorities and the elderly underuse the regional system.

The 1998-99 study identified three deterrents to more widespread use of the system by these groups.

1. **Safety to the user.** The safety concern deals with both perceptions of personal safety (worry about assaults, robbery, etc.) and the safety of the facilities used. The concern over facilities deals with such problems as broken steps, steep pathways, missing railings, obstructions in the right-of-way, etc.
2. **Costs involved in using the elements of the regional system.** Reference here is to a wide range of charges, including admission fees, parking fees and concession costs.
3. **Overall lack of information about the regional system and the diverse opportunities it offers for special population groups.** Information and publicity about the offerings of the regional system are not very prominent even among the population as a whole. This relatively low profile means that people with special needs who are also often operating under various handicaps simply don't know about all the opportunities available to them in the regional system.

The 1998-99 survey findings about transportation as a barrier to use of the regional system by special populations are somewhat ambiguous. The report recommended focusing on safety, costs and lack of information rather than on transportation as a way to make the system more accessible to special populations. However, the report also indicated that transportation problems were significant barriers to greater use for the people surveyed. For example, transportation was given as the second most important problem and on a par with fear as a deterrent to greater use by those who indicated they were interested in using the regional system. The number one problem for this group was work or family responsibilities.

Also, the survey did not directly cover people under 18, who would have less access to an automobile than older people. Nor did it specifically deal with the costs of traveling by public transit, if it is available, to parks/park reserves at some distance from the place of residence. These findings suggest that transportation should be added to the list of major deterrents for special populations.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1990. This act has resulted in very specific requirements for development and rehabilitation projects in the regional parks system. All new projects and updated master plans for the system now include extensive ADA review. Consequently, barriers to persons with disabilities have been reduced since the original 1989 study. Additionally, implementing agencies are encouraged to provide physically challenged participants with similar park/trail experiences through adaptive programs.

The Council further defined potential barriers to participation for racial-ethnic minorities in the second half of 2004. Members of these special populations were part of focus group meetings that helped identify barriers to participation as well as facility and setting preferences. Findings from those meetings will provide the basis for creating responsive management actions, information dissemination, new facilities and other services designed to increase regional park use by these special populations.

### Strategy 3(d): Relationship to bicycle transportation plan

**Safe, high-quality, continuous, barrier-free bicycle and pedestrian systems shall be developed, maintained and improved to function as integral parts of the region's transportation and recreation systems.**

#### Discussion

Regional trails may serve a transportation function as well as a recreation function – especially for bicycle commuting. Where bicycling can safely be accommodated with pedestrian traffic, it will be allowed. The selection, development and operation of bicycle transportation arteries is covered as a component of the Council's *Transportation Policy Plan* rather than the *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan*.

The Metropolitan Council's *Transportation Policy Plan*, adopted in December 2004, contains a policy and related strategies that address these issues. That policy has been included in this plan, since it is an important consideration when planning for the regional parks system. For the purposes of this plan, the policy has been updated to recognize recreational use of trails.

The regional trails system will provide primarily the following categories of bicycle facilities:

- Off-road facilities, which are paths within the roadway rights-of-way but are separated from the roadway surface. They may also be used for hiking/in-line skating as well as bicycling.
- Independent trails, such as trails using abandoned railroad corridors or utility easements that exist in their own independent rights-of-way.

These facilities are intended to primarily serve the following types of bicyclists:

**Group B** Bicyclists, who are casual or new adult and teenage riders who prefer comfortable access, preferably by a direct route, on low speed or low traffic volume streets where having the right-of-way as a moving vehicle is not critical. Group B bicyclists are most comfortable on designated bikeways, off-road facilities and independent trails.

**Group C** Bicyclists, who are pre-teen riders whose roadway use is usually accompanied with a parent. They need access to local schools, libraries, recreation facilities, shopping or other residential areas. They need separation of bicycles and motor vehicles through off-road facilities or independent trails or access to streets with low vehicle speeds and volumes.

In addition to Group B and C bicyclists, the regional trail system may occasionally serve Group A bicyclists. **Group A** bicyclists are experienced riders, including regular bicycle commuters, messengers and racers/trainers who can operate under most traffic conditions. They want direct access to destinations at maximum speed with minimum delays. Group A bicyclists primarily rely on the road system for routes and value having the right-of-way like other vehicles, but occasionally enjoy independent trails if they are relatively continuous and not overly crowded.

For regional trails, the majority of trail miles should be off-road. However, in some instances it may be necessary for a short stretch of trail to be adjacent to or on-road to bypass natural or man-made barriers or private property. These portions of trails should be designed to safely accommodate Group C bicyclists.

Regional parks system funds and federal TEA-21 grants may be used to finance parts of the regional trail system where the system serves a transportation as well as a recreation function. Transportation funds for highway and bridge construction/reconstruction should be used to provide on-road and off-road facilities, including striped bike lanes that exist within the extent of the actual road surface, and bicycle/pedestrian bridge lanes to provide safe routes over rivers, freeways or railroad tracks to provide continuity to the

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regional trail system. The appropriate sources of funding for local trails are through the local tax base and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Local Trails Grant Program.

It is desirable to have a comprehensive network of trails that serves both recreation and transportation needs. This network links state, regional, county and local trails, and integrates the trail system with other transportation modes such as the bus and light-rail transit systems. Regional trails are primarily recreation trails, though some of the urban regional trails also have important commuter functions. County and local trails serve as recreation and transportation routes for the immediate local population. They may also serve as “feeder” trails into the larger regional system of trails. To help integrate the network, the Council is responsible for reviewing the comprehensive plans of all cities and townships within the metropolitan area. This review includes an assessment of local trails and their relationship to the regional trail and transit systems. As discussed in the Planning Policies section of this document, enhanced dialogue between recreation providers at all levels will be promoted by the Council and should result in a well-designed comprehensive system of trails throughout the metropolitan area.

The Metropolitan Council is responsible for regional transportation planning, including bicycle transportation facilities. Since regional trails also serve nonmotorized commuters, it is important that the regional trail system and the regional transportation system strive to work in unison when developing trail and transportation plans. Regional trail projects that would serve transportation needs qualify for additional funding with TEA-21 grants and are given priority for funding in the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program.

### Section D: Planning

**Policy 4: Promote master planning and help provide integrated resource planning across jurisdictions.**

#### Strategy 4(a): Master plans

**The basic unit of Council control is at the master-plan level for the allocation of regional acquisition and development funding. As a condition to request development funding in the first biennium of the regional parks capital improvement program (CIP), regional park implementing agencies must assess and report to the Metropolitan Council whether sufficient information on the cost of the facility has been provided in the master plan or subsequent amendments and that the facility’s construction can begin if funds are provided. Alternatively, the regional park implementing agency may choose to request capital improvement funds to finance the final design/engineering of the facility in the first biennium of the CIP and a separate grant for the facility’s construction in the second biennium of the CIP. The amount of the construction grant will be based on the results of the final design/engineering phase.**

**If a master plan amendment is needed prior to funding construction of a facility, the regional park implementing agency must provide the general public and agencies that have an effect on the particular park or trail an opportunity to participate in the process. The opportunity for public input must also be provided in the final design/engineering phase of any project.**

#### Discussion

Minn. Stat. 473.313 requires a master plan to be developed by each regional park implementing agency in consultation with all affected municipalities. While the statute requires only one master plan per regional park implementing agency, the Council requires individual master plans for each regional park, park reserve, trail and special recreation feature. Master plans prepared by the implementing agencies are

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critical in defining the specifics of acquisition, development and operation of regional facilities. The plans include the regional park implementing agency's and Council's estimates of use and costs. The master plan process allows other units of government and citizens to know what is planned for a park and how it affects them. Collectively, these master plans form the implementing agencies' part of the regional system plan. For a regional park implementing agency to receive a Council grant for acquisition or development, the proposed project must be consistent with a Council-approved master plan.

Master plans will be reviewed and approved by the Council for consistency with this and other Council policy plans. Inconsistent plans will be returned with comments to the regional park implementing agency, which must revise and resubmit the plan to be eligible for Council funding.

Minn. Stat. 473.313 provides for the state mandate on master plans; however, it does not provide guidance on timeliness of revisions/updates. A plan is revised/updated when the regional park implementing agency submits a plan amendment to the Metropolitan Council to change its original proposal for acquisition and/or development, or when it has developed significant additional detail. The Metropolitan Council may approve or reject the plan amendment.

With regard to financing the construction of recreation and visitor support facilities proposed in a master plan, it is important that there is sufficient detail about the facility in the master plan and that the regional park implementing agency is ready to construct the facility when funds become available. As a condition for requesting regional parks system development funds in the first biennium of the regional parks capital improvement program (CIP), the Council will require implementing agencies to assess and report to the Council whether sufficient information on the cost of the facility has been provided in the master plan and that the project's construction can begin if funds are provided. Alternatively, the regional park implementing agency may choose to request capital improvement funds to finance the final design/engineering of the facility in the first biennium of the CIP and a separate grant for the facility's construction in the second biennium of the CIP. In either case, the regional park implementing agency must provide an opportunity for the general public and agencies that have an effect on the particular park or trail to participate in the process to amend a master plan or the final design/engineering phase of a facility prior to funding its construction.

The outcome of this assessment, which may result in an amended master plan or separate financing of final design/engineering of a facility, will provide adequate information to determine the proposed facility's consistency with the Council's policy plan and help justify the priority and timing of funding in the regional parks capital improvement program.

### **Master Plan Content Requirements and Funding Process**

Each master plan must include information for each of the items listed below:

1. **Boundaries and Acquisition Costs:** A list of parcels to be acquired and the estimated total cost and schedule for their acquisition; information on natural resources (see natural resources item 11 below), site suitability, special assessments and other conditions that affect acquisition of the site or location of the boundaries.
2. **Stewardship Plan:** A program for managing park property, including activities, expenses and anticipated revenue prior to developing the property for recreation purposes. Planned nonrecreation uses and disposition of revenue from such use should be detailed.
3. **Demand Forecast:** The recreational demand to be met by the site as identified by the Council, the regional park implementing agency or other sources.

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4. **Development Concept:** A plan for recreational development and natural resource management, including schedule and cost estimates for each project and the approximate capacity of each facility. Conflicts between recreational and natural-resource management needs in developing the park/trail unit should be addressed and resolved. Amendments to an acquisition-phase master plan should be made prior to funding recreation and visitor support facilities if there is insufficient detail on the scale and cost of the facility. Alternatively, the final design/engineering phase of a proposed facility should be funded first, with construction funding provided in a separate capital improvement grant.
5. **Conflicts:** Identification of conflicts with other existing or proposed projects or land uses affecting the park/trail unit, including steps necessary for their resolution.
6. **Public Services:** A description of any nonrecreational public services and facilities, such as roads or sewers, needed to accommodate the proposed recreational use, including the timing of these services and the arrangements necessary to provide them.
7. **Operations:** Rules, regulations or ordinances affecting the site, including estimated operations and maintenance costs and sources of revenue to operate and maintain recreation facilities and to manage natural resources in the park/trail unit. The operations plan should also indicate how energy to operate and maintain the park unit is being managed and conserved. The plan should also state how solid waste from park users is recycled and disposed of consistent with applicable laws.
8. **Citizen Participation:** A process to involve affected municipalities and the general public in the master planning. The process must include, but not be limited to, timely notice to the affected municipality and an opportunity to be heard. The master plan should include a summary of comment received with emphasis on issues raised.
9. **Public Awareness:** Plans for making the public aware of services available when the regional park is open, including cooperative measures with the Council's regionwide awareness program.
10. **Special Needs:** A plan that identifies special populations to be served by the facility and addresses accessibility, affordability and other measures designed to ensure that the facility can be used by members of special population groups.
11. **Natural Resources:** As part of the master plan, there should be a natural-resource management component that includes:
  - a. **Natural Resources Inventory (NRI)** as a part of the master plan process. An NRI should include a land cover inventory that is consistent with the Minnesota Land Cover Classification system developed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Metro Geographic Information System – a consortium of government entities in the region that create, manage and share digital geographic data. It is the same format used in the Metro Greenways program. Using the same NRI format will assure compatibility with other natural resource inventories that have been completed or will be done in the metropolitan region. The natural resource inventory should include native plant communities mapped in the Minnesota County Biological Survey and listed (rare, endangered, and threatened) species documented in the Natural Heritage Information System
  - b. The Natural Resource Inventory should be a basis for projects/proposals to restore degraded resources and maintain high-quality natural resource features, including the estimated capital costs of natural resource restoration projects. Implementing agencies should consult with natural resource professionals in the design and final construction of park facilities, especially trails, that are adjacent to or cross over natural resource areas. The final design and construction should allow the public to view and enjoy these natural habitats with minimal adverse impact on that habitat.

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- c. Information on how surface water and groundwater resources in the unit, including wetlands, will be protected. This should include standards and requirements that are consistent with the Council's model ordinance for stormwater management. The master plan should include provisions to, first, avoid wetland impacts; second, minimize impacts; and, finally, mitigate impacts when no other options are available.
- d. Information on how vegetation will be managed. Vegetation management is important for maintaining water quality, preserving plants, and providing bird and wildlife habitat. It involves protection of old growth trees and rare and endangered plant species, control of exotic species, forest management practices, vegetative buffers on water bodies, and consideration of hard surfaces, including shortly mowed turf. The DNR's "Guidelines for Managing and Restoring Natural Plant Communities along Trails and Waterways" is a good reference. State Critical Area guidelines/standards on vegetation management and resource protection should be addressed in master plans of parks and trails within the Mississippi River Critical Area/Mississippi National River and Recreation Area.

Each regional park implementing agency is responsible for preparing a master plan for each regional system unit assigned to it by this policy plan. The regional park implementing agency shall present the master plan and planned amendments to affected local units of government, as well as local, state and federal recreation providers with facilities within the primary service area of the park or trail, and address their concerns prior to submitting the plan to the Metropolitan Council. (The primary service area of a park or trail is the area in which 75 percent of the unit's visitors come from.) The master plan submitted to the Council shall include a summary of comments received that identifies issues raised.

### **Strategy 4(b): Governance of regional trails**

**Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to enter into joint-powers agreements with local governments regarding the acquisition and operations/maintenance of regional trails. The joint-powers agreements should address these topics:**

- 1. Who has control over the trail right-of-way and how that control is exercised.**
- 2. Who will operate and maintain the trail and how operations and maintenance will be accomplished.**
- 3. The trail must be available to all users (not restricted by residence) with only controls on the type of use and timing/season of the permitted use(s).**

**The duration of the joint-powers agreements should last the expected life of the trail and should be included in the trail master plans submitted to the Metropolitan Council as an assurance that any funds provided by the Council for the trail would be spent consistent with the Council-approved trail master plan.**

### **Discussion**

Unlike regional parks, where the regional park implementing agency usually deals with one or two local governments and the regional park implementing agency acquires and owns the park, regional trails affect several local governments and may not be "owned" by the regional park implementing agency. Instead, the regional park implementing agency may only lease the trail land and manage it with a local government through a joint-powers agreement.

Although no two joint-powers agreements need to be identical, the regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to negotiate arrangements that deal with the primary issue of how trail land ownership is controlled, how the trail is going to be managed and that the trail will be open to all people (not restricted

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by residence). The trail should be treated as truly a regional facility, since regional and state funds are or will be used to finance its acquisition, development and operations/maintenance.

By including these joint-powers agreements in trail master plans, the Metropolitan Council can be assured that any funds it provides or passes on for the trail's acquisition, development or operations/maintenance will be consistent with Council-approved trail master plans.

### **Strategy 4(c): Cost sharing for projects that exceed regional need**

**Projects that are consistent with a master plan but exceed regional need as determined by the Council may proceed on a cost-sharing basis. Agencies must obtain Council approval in advance of undertaking cost-shared developments.**

#### **Discussion**

It is possible that a regional park implementing agency may wish to make improvements that substantially differ in type, size, scale or cost from those in the approved master plan and the adopted CIP in order to meet expanded local recreational demands or satisfy above-average quality standards. Two conditions must be satisfied before such activity can be approved. First, the responsible regional park implementing agency must request an amendment to the master plan to reflect the new proposal and the Council must review and, if in accord, accept the amendment for the process to proceed further.

If a new master plan is adopted, there must also be a funding proposal under which regional funds will be used only for the regional service facilities, not for those intended to serve local needs. In all fairness to other users of regional funds, it is also necessary to limit the amount of regional funds to a level adequate to cover average improvements that will deliver adequate services and not to pay for excessively ornate or elaborate facilities.

A master plan amendment followed by final Council approval for regional park implementing agency action is required even if all of the improvement funds come from regional park implementing agency sources or are raised through cost-sharing arrangements with other governments or the private sector. This is necessary because the improvements are to be put on regional system lands that are committed to specific long-term planned uses. These lands must be protected from the intrusion of activities and developments that are incompatible with the planned uses of the park, park reserves and trails, irrespective of who pays the development bill.

The regional park implementing agency may be required to pay the full amount or the extra portion of the project cost when a regional park implementing agency wants to develop a facility sooner than the Council has determined that it is needed to meet regional demand, or at a scale greater than regional demand warrants, or at a higher cost than the Council finds necessary to serve the regional interest.

1. Projects funded by cost sharing must meet the same requirements of master planning and Council approval as any other regional recreation system projects.
2. Costs incurred by the regional park implementing agency as the local share is not reimbursable.
3. The Council will not consider the availability of local funds in establishing the ranking of projects by priorities in the CIP.
4. Where funds are available from private sources or sources other than the regional park implementing agency to share in project costs, the Council will work directly with the affected regional park implementing agency.

### Section E: System protection

**Policy 5: Protect public investment in acquisition and development by assuring that every element in the system is able to fully carry out its designated role as long as a need for it can be demonstrated.**

The integrity of the regional parks system can be threatened by actions taken within units of the system or by activities outside but in close proximity to a system unit. The Council has in place several existing mechanisms to protect the system.

- **Master Plan:** The master plan defines acceptable activities within a system unit; the implementing agencies must receive Council approval before proceeding with any activities inconsistent with the existing approved master plan.
- **Restrictive Covenant:** Implementing agencies are required to place restrictive covenants on lands purchased with regional funds to ensure that all land in the system remains in regional recreation open space use unless a change is agreed to by the Council.
- **Land Planning Act:** Proposed plans of local governments that have a substantial effect on or represent a substantial departure from the regional parks system plan will be subject to a required modification by the Council to ensure that the system is protected.
- **Metropolitan Significance:** Proposed development projects that have a substantial effect on or represent a substantial departure from the regional parks system plan may also be required to undergo a review for metropolitan significance, with up to a year's delay in proceeding if found to adversely affect the system.

The following standards contained in the metropolitan significance rules and in the plan amendment guidelines are currently used to determine an effect on or a substantial departure from the regional parks system:

Impacts on the use of regional parks system facilities include, but are not limited to, traffic, safety, noise, visual obstructions (for example, to scenic overlooks), impaired use of the facilities or interference with the operation or maintenance of the facilities. Impacts on natural resources include, but are not limited to, the impact on the level, flow or quality of a facility's water resources (lakes, streams, wetlands, groundwater) and impact on a facility's wildlife populations or habitats (migration routes, breeding sites, plant communities).

A proposed project is considered to have an impact on the system if it may preclude or substantially limit the future acquisition of land in an area identified in the system plan of the Council's *Recreation Open Space Policy Plan*.

#### Strategy 5(a): Land uses

**The Metropolitan Council may require plan modifications to local comprehensive plans, updates or amendments that will more likely than not have adverse and substantial impacts on the current or future intended uses of the regional parks system lands or facilities, or are likely to have adverse and substantial impacts on lands that are officially recommended for acquisition in an adopted policy plan.**

### Discussion

There is a strong case for intervention in situations where potentially adverse land uses are proposed after a site for a regional parks system facility has been adopted by the Council in the system plan element of this policy plan. Local governments will be notified of any changes to the regional recreation open space system plan following Council adoption of the changes and will be given nine months following notification to bring local plans and ordinances into conformance with the Council's plan. The Council will review local comprehensive plan amendments and environmental documents to ensure that regional parks system sites are protected from land uses or projects that represent substantial departures from the Council's adopted policy plan or are likely to have a substantial impact on the regional parks system.

Substantial departures from or impacts on the Council's adopted regional recreation open space system plan may include, but are not limited to, plans that don't acknowledge the presence of the regional parks system unit; projects that create safety issues for park system users; projects that impair the use and enjoyment of the park system unit due to excessive noise, air pollution or water pollution; and projects that interfere with the operation and maintenance of the park system unit.

Where appropriate, the Council will initiate or accept for initiation a metropolitan significance review with regard to specific projects if a metropolitan significance review is necessary to help protect the regional parks system. A project that is consistent with a Metropolitan Council-approved local comprehensive plan is exempt from Metropolitan Significance reviews for metropolitan system effects.

In accordance with the Council's *2030 Regional Development Framework* principles, increasing population densities in urban areas is preferable to scattered developments throughout the rural and agricultural areas of the metropolitan region. Increasing population densities adjacent to urban regional parks system units is not a detriment to those units if the urban development is designed in ways that are sensitive to areas that enjoy scenic views and the natural features of the regional parks system unit, and do not interfere with the operation and maintenance of the unit. The Metropolitan Council will work cooperatively with local governments to help ensure urban development and land uses in areas adjacent to regional parks system units occur in ways that preserve the integrity of the regional parks system.

### Strategy 5(b): Conversion of regional parks system lands to other uses

**Lands in the regional parks system will only be converted to other uses if approved by the Metropolitan Council through an equally valuable land or facility exchange as defined below.**

**"Equally valuable land" is defined in this context as land that is contiguous to the regional parks system unit containing the land proposed to be exchanged (that is, only add and take away land in the same park/trail unit) and/or, the land has comparable or better natural resource characteristics and could provide comparable or better recreation opportunities as what is being exchanged. In exceptional circumstances, the Metropolitan Council may accept as equally valuable land the addition of land to another unit of the regional parks system where that replacement land has comparable or better natural resource characteristics and comparable or better recreation opportunities than the land being converted and all other provisions of this policy can be met.**

**"Equally valuable facility" is defined as an exchange of land for facilities when recreational benefits and/or natural resource benefits are increased as a result of the exchange. For example, some land in a regional trail corridor may be exchanged to widen a highway if a highway department constructs a trail overpass or underpass of the widened road at no cost to the regional park implementing agency.**

Regional parks system lands are protected through restrictive covenants when land is acquired. These covenants ensure that the land is used only for regional parks system purposes and cannot be broken or amended unless the Metropolitan Council approves. The only restrictive covenant amendments approved by the Council in which no land was exchanged were for small strips of land needed for public highway improvements. The land was needed to make roads safer and there was no alternative. In addition, such projects improved access to the adjacent regional parks system unit. The Metropolitan Council will consider land exchanges for other uses if the criteria listed below have been met so as not to harm the regional parks system.

The following criteria will be used to determine whether regional parks system land may be exchanged for other parkland. For those changes that represent a potential system impact, the Council will use a process comparable to the 90-day review period for plan amendments with a potential impact on the regional system. For conversions such as small exchanges of land to provide right-of-way for access, an expedited review comparable to the 10-day waiver will be used.

Issues with respect to the existing park system unit:

1. How well can the park system unit continue to meet Council site and site attribute standards established for the particular type of park system unit (regional park, park reserve, trail or special recreation feature)?
2. Can the park system unit continue to function as the Council intended? How will use of the park system unit be affected?
3. Will environmental features (wildlife habitat, water quality) be adversely affected? Can they be protected with the new use?
4. Can any loss of site or function be made up through acquisition of a site with comparable characteristics adjacent to or in the immediate area of the current location? Is there a need to replace a site or function for comparable uses in a comparable location? Would the system benefit from a different park system unit in a different location? Does the park system unit benefit from a facility in exchange for land?
5. Will all costs of relocation be covered by nonregional recreation funds?
6. Are there mitigating measures that may be preferable to land exchange, particularly with respect to minor conversions? Is the need for the conversion, as in the instance of transportation improvements, generated by the recreational park system unit?

Issues with respect to the alternative use:

1. What are the land area needs of the proposed project?
2. What are the specific site requirements for the proposed project and how unique are they to the area proposed for conversion?
3. What is the duration of the proposed project?
4. Is the proposed project consistent with Council policies?
5. Is the proposed project of greater benefit to the region than continuance of the regional parks system unit?

### Discussion

Lands in the regional parks system are subject to use-conversion proposals for a number of reasons. Some very limited conversions may be accommodated and still not affect the ability of the remaining area to offer the facilities and services planned. Such facilities as a well-designed transit waiting station or a properly located and operated yard waste compost site could be of positive value to the regional system and can be worked out between the proposing parties, the implementing agencies and the Council in accordance with the system management guidelines.

However, most conversions are likely to detract from the ability to provide the type and quality of outdoor recreation experiences promised in the master plan. Some of the undesirable conversion impacts will be very obvious and direct, such as unsightly landscapes, barriers to movement, loud noises, night light or obnoxious odors. Other conversion impacts are more indirect, such as those that affect water quality and plant and animal life. In addition to adversely affecting the regional parks system's ability to deliver service, removal of lands for nonrecreation open space uses also sets a bad precedent.

The Council has long indicated it considers lands intended for outdoor recreation activities to be in their highest and best permanent use. The Council requires restrictive covenants to be put on all lands acquired with regional funds. The covenants are to ensure that nondiscriminatory regional parks system use is continued in the future.

### Strategy 5(c): Soil contamination cleanup funding conditions

**The Metropolitan Council will not consider funding soil contamination cleanup or capping abandoned wells that have contaminated their ground water aquifer on regional park land unless the following conditions are met:**

- 1. The land is already under regional park implementing agency ownership or control via a joint powers agreement or lease, and was acquired or was under the park implementing agency's control before phase-one environmental audits were required.**
- 2. The land is essential to make the regional park or trail function as intended according to a Council-approved master plan and no reasonable alternative exists to relocate the park or trail facilities elsewhere.**
- 3. The park or trail is essential in contributing to strengthening neighborhood vitality consistent with the *Regional Development Framework*.**
- 4. The cost of cleanup is not eligible to receive federal or state soil contamination cleanup funds or abandoned well-capping funds from any other program or funding has been denied.**
- 5. The regional park implementing agency has an agreement with the party that will remediate/clean up the contamination or cap an abandoned well that absolves the regional park implementing agency from any future liability of pollution caused by the contaminated soil or contaminated groundwater.**

### Strategy 5(d): Assessment of potentially contaminated lands

**Regional park implementing agencies must conduct phase 1 environmental audits on land that is suspected to be contaminated or land suspected to have abandoned wells as part of the master planning process. The phase 1 environmental audit will determine the likelihood of soil contamination or abandoned wells, including the likelihood of contaminated groundwater aquifers. The findings of the audit should be submitted to the Metropolitan Council in the master plan.**

The cost of the phase 1 environmental audit may be borne by the party selling the land and/or the regional park implementing agency, as agreed to by both entities. It is in the interest of the party selling the land to finance the cost of the environmental audit to justify the market sale value of the land. Likewise, the regional park implementing agency's interests are also served in financing the cost of the environmental audit since the audit will help determine the value of the land, determine whether the land should or should not be proposed to be part of a regional park or trail, and determine how recreation facility development could or could not be accommodated on the land. The cost of the phase 1 environmental audit is part of the master planning process and is therefore not grant eligible.

The Council shall make a determination as to whether the contaminated land, including lands with abandoned wells, should be part of the proposed park or trail. The Council's decision will include consideration of the costs and benefits of cleanup or well capping and will be based on the following factors:

1. What is the likelihood of contamination and how severe is it? What is the likelihood that abandoned well(s) are part of the property and, if so, they are likely to have contaminated their groundwater aquifer?
2. Is the land essential to make the regional park or trail function as intended according to a Council-approved master plan and is there no reasonable alternative to relocate the park or trail facilities elsewhere?
3. Have responsible parties been identified who contaminated the site and will they or can they clean it up? If not, what is the likelihood the site can be cleaned up with federal or state cleanup funds? In the case of abandoned wells, have responsible parties been identified to cap the well(s)? If not, what is the likelihood that the well(s) can be capped with federal or state well-capping funds if they have contaminated their groundwater aquifer?
4. What is the estimated cost to clean up the contamination or cap the abandoned well(s) versus the recreational, economic and social benefits the park or trail would provide, especially if it contributes to strengthening neighborhood vitality consistent with the *Regional Development Framework*?

Answers to these questions will help the Council determine if the land should be added to the regional park or trail system, and whether the problem can be resolved by establishing alternative boundaries or alternative recreation-facility development plans that would avoid disturbing contaminated soils.

If the Council concludes that the land should be added to the regional parks system, this does not imply that the Council will use park funds to clean up the site or cap abandoned wells. Park funds will only be used for contaminated soil cleanup or capping abandoned wells if conditions have been met.

### Strategy 5(e): Telecommunication towers in regional parks or reserves

Antennae towers for telecommunication services and the Metropolitan Emergency Radio System are generally prohibited on lands within the Metropolitan Council-approved master plan boundaries of regional parks system land already acquired and land proposed to be acquired unless the following conditions can be met:

**Condition 1.** The communication system is not able to function without placement of the tower on regional parks system land. Before locating any tower on park system land,

however, all other alternatives must be considered for placement within the grid in order to avoid placing any tower on regional parks system land. The communication service provider must satisfy this criterion in requesting Metropolitan Council and regional park implementing agency approval to place a tower on regional parks system land. The only exception to this condition is that a tower for the Metropolitan Emergency Radio System may be placed on regional parks system land even if it could be placed on private land instead, but the tower placement must meet conditions 2a and 2b below.

Condition 2. If condition 1 has been met– that is, there is no feasible alternative to placing the tower on park land – the tower’s impact on the regional parks system land must be minimized through the following ways:

- A. The tower must be screened from view of park/trail users as much as possible through tower placement and design features agreed to by the regional park implementing agency.
- B. The tower must be located on land already affected by park/trail development and accessible through the existing park road system. Land in park reserves or regional parks conserved for habitat restoration and interpretation must be avoided.
- C. Co-location of antennas on one tower is preferred over constructing several towers if co-location has less visual and other environmental impacts on regional parks system land. The only exception to this condition is if co-location would result in frequency interference between antennas.

Payments for placing telecommunication towers in regional parks or reserves should be dedicated to the park agency, which owns the park or reserve for operations and maintenance of its regional parks system units.

The strategy stated above will be implemented through one of two ways:

1. Regional park implementing agencies can submit a park/trail master plan amendment to the Commission and Metropolitan Council for review/approval that would propose a tower placement. The park/trail master plan amendment should state how the conditions listed above have been met. The Commission and Council will then review the master plan amendment for consistency with the conditions of this policy and either approve, modify or reject the master plan amendment.

If the land for the tower’s location has a restrictive covenant on it (required for land acquired with Metropolitan Council acquisition grants), the regional park implementing agency shall amend the covenant to recognize the temporary use of the tower with any conditions required for the tower’s lease and submit the amended covenant to the Metropolitan Council as part of the master plan amendment. The Council will consider the master plan amendment and the restrictive covenant amendment concurrently and either approve or disapprove them. The communication service provider shall pay the cost of amending the covenant.

2. If a regional park implementing agency believes that a tower should not be placed on their regional park land because the tower could not meet the conditions of this policy, the regional park implementing agency has the authority to deny the application.

Tower placement on regional parks system land shall be considered a temporary nonrecreation use. Any lease revenues for the tower easement must be used by the regional park implementing agency to further the acquisition, redevelopment, development or operations/maintenance of that regional park implementing agency’s

**portion of the regional parks system. The regional park implementing agency must report the annual lease revenues to the Metropolitan Council and how the revenues were spent if they exceed \$2,500 per year. Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to charge "at cost" fees for public safety radio equipment on towers located on regional park land.**

### **Discussion**

The growth in cellular telephone, personal communication system (PCS) telephone business and implementation of the Metropolitan Emergency Radio System has resulted in requests that regional parks system land be leased for antennae towers or that towers be located near regional parks system lands.

The following standards contained in the metropolitan significance rules and in the plan amendment guidelines are currently used to determine an effect on or a substantial departure from the regional parks system:

- Impacts on the use of regional parks system facilities include, but are not limited to, traffic, safety, noise, visual obstructions (for example, to scenic overlooks), impaired use of the facilities or interference with the operation or maintenance of the facilities. Impacts on natural resources include, but are not limited to, the impact on the level, flow or quality of a facility's water resources (lakes, streams, wetlands, groundwater) and the impact on a facility's wildlife populations or habitats (migration routes, breeding sites, plant communities). When applying this standard, the Council will evaluate visual obstructions created by telecommunication towers that are not screened from park visitor view.
- A proposed project is considered to have an impact on the system if it may preclude or substantially limit the future acquisition of land in an area identified in the system plan of the Council's *Recreation Open Space Policy Plan*.
- With increasing expansion of telecommunication markets and the implementation of the Metropolitan Emergency Radio System network, there may be situations in which regional parks system land will be proposed for antennae tower placement. Each of these radio frequency communication systems relies on a grid placement of towers. Co-location of antennae on fewer towers is not always possible, however, because the size of a particular grid varies from one system to another. In addition, co-location of antennas on one tower may not be possible if it causes frequency interference between the antennas.

Federal laws allow local governments to regulate the placement of towers as long as there is no ban preventing reasonable market access for that communication system. As a partner in the planning and financing of the regional parks system, the Metropolitan Council has a policy position on telecommunication towers.

### **Strategy 5 (f): Regional wastewater conveyance facilities on regional park land and other utilities on regional park land**

#### ***Regional Wastewater Conveyance Facilities:***

**To provide sanitary sewer services to regional parks system facilities and/or to implement the regional wastewater system plan, the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division will work cooperatively with regional park implementing agencies to locate regional wastewater conveyance facilities on regional parks system lands in a manner which minimizes the impact on existing and planned park system facilities and natural resources.**

For wastewater conveyance facilities located in existing park system units, the Metropolitan Council, with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, shall have the option to purchase an easement (property right) or to accept a permit (license). For new regional parks system units, the Metropolitan Council reserves the option to include an easement for a future regional wastewater conveyance corridor as a condition of a Council grant used to acquire land for the new park system unit provided the conveyance is consistent with the approved new park unit's master plan. If the Council requires an easement for a future regional wastewater conveyance corridor as a condition of its park acquisition grant, the Council will waive the Sewer Availability Charge for that park unit.

### *Other Utilities:*

In order to distribute electricity, natural gas, oil and drinking water, it may be necessary to place underground conduits/pipes or aboveground transmission poles/towers on regional parks system lands. Such utilities may be needed to serve visitors at that park system unit, and to serve other land. Regional park agencies should collaborate with the utility provider to determine where these utilities should be placed that minimizes impacts on the park system unit's natural resources and on its existing and future recreation and visitor support facilities while providing reasonable access to the utility line for repair and maintenance.

Park agencies may either sell or grant an easement (property right), or sell or grant a permit (license) to the utility provider that spells out where the utility may be located, conditions for access to the utility, how impacts to the park for placement, repair or relocation of the utility will be mitigated and any time limit on the easement or permit. The utility provider may have to pay for the easement or permit based on the benefit the utility provides to the park system unit.

## **Chapter Three: System Plan**

### **Introduction**

Regional parks system legislation directs the Metropolitan Council to take the leading role in providing for a regional parks system that will complement the recreational open space opportunities provided in the area by the federal, state and local units of government. Consequently, the regional parks system, which is the focus of this plan, is just one part of a total park, recreation and open space system in the metropolitan region.

Minn. Statute 473.147 limits the Council's regional park system planning and capital improvement funding to lands acquired and managed by counties, cities and special park districts, which together with State facilities will reasonably meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the Metropolitan Area. Since the Regional Park System is by statute directed to provide lands for outdoor recreation, and must complement what the State provides, not all of the regionally important natural resource lands can be part of the Regional Park System. The land that is not proposed for the Regional Park System is not needed to reasonably meet outdoor recreation needs and other conservation strategies should be employed. Conserving lands that are not part of the Regional Park System can be accomplished via acquisition in fee title or conservation easements by other entities for State scientific and natural areas, State wildlife management areas, State aquatic management areas, State Parks, State Trails, and local conservation areas. Other land can be protected and remain in private ownership through conservation easements and environmentally sensitive design.

The regional system fills a niche that emphasizes high-quality natural resources, major special features, activities that tend to require large areas of land or water, and park lands that often extend into several political jurisdictions. The regional system plays an essential role in the recreational features of the area, but the facilities and opportunities provided by the other levels of government are equally important in meeting the demands of the population. The regional parks system alone cannot, and was never intended to, provide all of the metropolitan area's recreational open space facilities and services.

The recreational open space provided by the federal and state government in the area generally serve the same recreational demands as the regional system and, consequently, the federal and state facilities are accorded special status by the Council. Federal and state agencies are encouraged to transmit master plans for recreational open space units within the area to the Council for its review.

To the extent these plans indicate that facilities will fulfill regional recreation open space objectives and are consistent with this policy plan, the Council recognizes these areas as providing experiences equivalent to those offered by the regional system. The Council will then provide these lands protection under the metropolitan significance review regulations and the Metropolitan Land Planning Act when applicable. This special status, however, does not mean that any regional funds will be granted to federal or state agencies for capital improvements or for operation and maintenance of their facilities.

Local recreational open space facilities provide for a very large number and variety of recreational activities that occur in the metropolitan area. Local facilities generally provide opportunities for activities that don't usually require large areas like those offered by the regional system. The local units of government provide facilities relatively close to where people live and are able to respond to the differing needs of small groups, like neighborhoods or communities. The local facilities tend to be population-based, while the regional system is primarily resource-based. While the local recreational open space

areas are not covered in this plan, the facilities and services they offer are taken into consideration when master plans of the regional system are prepared and reviewed.

Public recreational open space facilities do not meet all the demands for such recreation required by the area's residents. Private operations also make substantial contributions to the development of facilities and the provision of services. The most prominent facilities provided by the private sector are golf courses, riding facilities, marinas, day camps and downhill ski areas. There are also multiple recreational open space areas owned and operated by corporations, employees' associations, benevolent associations and nonprofit social agencies.

These private facilities reduce the burden on the public sector, provide additional opportunities and help to preserve thousands of acres of land in open space. They are complementary to the public sector.

### **Regional System Components**

Not all recreation facilities warrant regional status. Table 2 provides a classification system for local and regional facilities. The regional parks system with its primary focus on high-quality natural resources and on providing facilities that require substantial areas of land and/or water are subdivided into four major components. These four components are regional parks, park reserves, regional trails and special recreation features.

#### **Regional Parks**

Areas selected for regional parks should contain a diversity of nature-based resources, either naturally occurring or human-built. The recreational quality of a regional park is measured by the presence or absence of outstanding resources and the ability to provide adequately for a wide range of natural resource-related recreational opportunities. Access to water bodies suitable for recreation – such as swimming, boating and fishing – is particularly important and most of the regional parks are focused on lakes, rivers or streams.

A regional park should be large enough to accommodate a variety of activities, preserve a pleasant natural aspect, and buffer activity areas from each other and from surrounding areas. This is interpreted as 200 to 500 acres of land. Occasionally, because of the quality of the resource, an exception may be made and a regional park may be as small as 100 acres. Experience has shown this to be the minimum size acceptable for the range and type of activities expected to be accommodated.

The implementation potential is also important in selecting a candidate for regional park status. Implementation potential is measured by the reasonable availability of the site, by the opportunity to acquire and protect key resources, by the support of the host community and other local groups and by the interest of the regional park implementing agency that will own and operate the park.

#### **Park Reserves**

Park reserves, like regional parks, are expected to provide for a diversity of outdoor recreational activities. The major feature that distinguishes the park reserve from a regional park is that the reserve is also intended to provide, protect and manage representative areas of the original major landscape types in the metropolitan area to permit appreciation and enjoyment of the natural resources that influenced the region's development.

The park reserves are substantially larger than the parks because they are to contain a diversity of natural resources with adequate space for protection and management of natural resources and for the pursuit of compatible outdoor activities. Experience has shown that an optimum size exceeds 2,000 acres, while the

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minimum is about 1,000 acres. To establish and maintain an uncompromised sense of nature and protect high quality natural resources, at least 80 percent of each park reserve should be managed as wild lands that protect the ecological functions of the native landscape. This would permit up to 20 percent of a park reserve to be developed for compatible recreational activities.

The eight regional landscape types that have been used in selecting areas for park reserves are (1) sand plains, (2) St. Croix ground moraine, (3) Des Moines ground moraine, (4) terminal moraine, (5) lightly glaciated area, (6) Mississippi River Valley, (7) Minnesota River Valley and (8) St. Croix River Valley.

For park reserves, as for regional parks, the concept of implementation potential is also an important factor in the designation of new candidate areas. The implementation potential criteria mentioned earlier, under “Regional Parks,” are also applicable to the park reserves.

### Trails

Trail corridors are intended to provide for recreational travel along linear pathways throughout the metropolitan area. They are selected to follow natural or linear features that traverse areas of scenic appeal and/or historical, architectural and developmental interest while assuring that the trail treadway will have no adverse effect on the natural resource base. The regional trails are selected to pass through, or provide access to, elements in the regional parks system. The parks and park reserves perform the important function of providing places for parking, comfort facilities, safe water supplies, etc. Trails also are selected for their ability to intersect with local trail networks, with the regional trails functioning much like regional highways that interconnect with more local arterials and collector streets.

Experience has indicated that people tend to prefer trails that are relatively close to where they live. In the metropolitan area, a 1998-99 Council survey on users of regional trails found a strong local-use pattern. More than 75 percent of trail visitors surveyed lived within 3 miles of the trails they used. However, trail users are traveling from one city or county to another. It is this inter-jurisdictional trail length that makes these trails regionally significant.

### Special Recreation Features

The special recreation features, which are called for in state legislation, are defined as regional parks system opportunities not generally found in the parks, the park reserves or the trail corridors. Special recreational features often require a unique managing or programming effort on the part of the regional park implementing agency.

As of 2004, there were six special recreation features in the system: the Como Park Zoo and Marjorie McNeely Conservatory at Como Park, both managed as a part of Como Park; Square Lake in Washington County; the Noerenberg gardens on the northwest side of Lake Minnetonka; Gales Woods on the shore of Whaletail Lake in Minnetrista; and Silverwood, on the shore of Silver Lake in the City of St. Anthony. Before the Council designates a new special recreation feature, it is essential that a comprehensive feasibility study be performed, including an assessment of need, financing, resource suitability and management. This is to make sure any new, special recreation feature is complementary to the rest of the regional parks system and will not be a financial burden to the system.

**Table 2: Classification System for Local and Regional Facilities**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Site Attributes</b>	<b>Site Location</b>
<b>Local Facilities</b>					
Mini-Park	Specialized facilities that serve a concentrated or limited population or specific group such as tots or senior citizens; may be in locations such as apartment complexes, townhouse developments or commercial centers.	Less than ¼ mile radius	< 1 acre		
Neighborhood Park/Playground	Area for intense recreational activities such as field games, court games, crafts, apparatus area, skating, neighborhood centers.	¼ to ½ mile radius to serve a population of 4,000 – 5,000 (one neighborhood)	< 25 acres	Physiography suited for intense development.	Proximity to elementary schools.
Community Playfield	Area for intense recreational facilities such as athletic fields and swimming pools; could include neighborhood use.	3 – 5 neighborhoods or one community	25 – 50 acres	Physiography suited for intense development.	Proximity to secondary schools and other public facilities.
Community Park	Area of natural or ornamental quality for outdoor recreation such as walking, viewing, sitting, picnicking; could have some field and court games.	3 – 5 neighborhoods or one community	25 – 100 acres	Affords natural features with varied physiographic interest.	Proximity to community facilities and resources.
County Park	Area of natural or ornamental quality for outdoor recreation such as walking, viewing, sitting, picnicking; could have some field and court games.	County	25 – 100 acres	Affords natural features with varied physiographic interest.	Proximity to community facilities and resources and/or where resource occurs.
Conservancy Lands	Area of natural quality such as watercourses and wetlands that are preserved for environmental or aesthetic benefits to the community and/or because of the negative environmental or economic effects of development in them.	Municipality, township, county	Variable, based on extent of resources	Natural resources that merit preservation and that would be negatively affected by development.	Where resource occurs.

**Table 2: Classification System for Local and Regional Facilities (Continued)**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Site Attributes</b>	<b>Site Location</b>
<b>Local Facilities (continued)</b>					
Local linear parks, trails, corridors and parkways.	Area developed for on or more varying modes of recreational travel such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, canoeing and driving.	A neighborhood or several neighborhoods in a city or township.	Contained within one city or township. Width and length minimums vary by locality.	On or off-road trails that may or may not traverse scenic areas while assuring the trail treadway has no adverse effect on the natural resource base.	Where needed to link neighborhoods to components of the local or regional recreation system and/or community facilities such as schools, libraries, commercial areas and to link to adjacent municipalities.
County linear parks, trails, corridors and parkways.	Area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, canoeing and driving.	Several cities and/or townships in a county.	Traverses one or more municipality. Width and length minimums vary by county.	On or off-road trails that may or may not traverse scenic areas while assuring the trail treadway has no adverse effect on the natural resource base.	Often found adjacent to major roadways within the county. Other locations were needed to link cities to components of the local or regional recreation system and/or community facilities such as schools, libraries, commercial areas and to link to adjacent counties.

**Table 2: Classification System for Local and Regional Facilities (Continued)**

Component	Use	Service Area	Size	Site Attributes	Site Location
<b>Regional Facilities</b>					
Regional Park	Area of natural or ornamental quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation such as picnicking, boating, fishing, swimming, camping and trail uses.	3 – 5 communities	200 – 500 acres (100 acre minimum)	Complete natural setting contiguous to water bodies or watercourses where possible.	Where natural resource occurs – particularly water.
Regional Park Reserve	Area of natural quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation such as viewing and studying nature, wildlife habitat, conservation, swimming, picnicking, hiking, boating, camping and trail uses.	County, multi-county area.	1000 + acres; sufficient area to encompass the resource envisioned for preservation.	Diversity of unique resources, such as topography, lakes, streams, marshes, flora, fauna.	Where resource occurs.
Regional destination trail	Area developed for one or more varying modes of non-motorized recreational travel such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and canoeing.	The entire metropolitan region.	Sufficient corridor width to protect natural resources and can safely accommodate trail use. Sufficient length to be a destination itself, or to serve as a link between regional parks system units.	When feasible, off-road trails that utilize human-made and/or natural linear resources such as utility corridors, railroad and highway rights of way, stream / river valleys, or at the edges of forest or prairie. On-road trails are acceptable when off-road trails are not feasible.	Preferably adjacent to high quality natural areas. The trail treadway should be placed where it has no adverse impact on the natural resource base.
Regional linking trail	Area developed for one or more varying modes of non-motorized recreational travel such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and canoeing.	The entire metropolitan region.	Sufficient corridor width to protect natural resources and can safely accommodate trail use. Sufficient length to link regional parks system units.	When feasible, off-road trails that utilize human-made and/or natural linear resources such as utility corridors, railroad and highway rights of way, stream / river valleys, or at the edges of forest or prairie. On-road trails are acceptable when off-road trails are not feasible.	Linkages between components of the regional parks system. When feasible, linking trails should attempt to connect to population, economic and social centers along its route. The trail treadway should be placed where it has no adverse impact on the natural resource base.

**Table 2: Classification System for Local and Regional Facilities (Continued)**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Site Attributes</b>	<b>Site Location</b>
<b>Local or Regional</b>					
Special Features	Area that preserves, maintains and provides specialized or single-purpose recreational activities such as golf course, nature center, marina, zoo, conservatory, arboretum, display gardens, arena, gun club, downhill ski area, and sites of historic or archeological significance.	Local – (municipalities, townships) Regional – (metropolitan area).	Specific standard applicable to desired feature.	Appropriate to particular special feature.	Where most advantageous for the special feature and the overall park system.

### **Regional System Size and Composition as of January 2005**

The Regional parks system as of January 2005 (open for public use and planned for future acquisition and development) is composed of 42 regional parks, 12 park reserves, 58 trails, and 6 special recreation features. The total land area in the regional parks, park reserves, freestanding special recreation features and those trails with complete master plans is about 58,000 acres, with about 52,000 acres acquired by the regional implementing agencies as of January 2005. Approximately 6,000 acres remain to be acquired as of January 2005.

The total area contained in the trails without master plans or with incomplete master plans is not known. However, much of the land for these trails will be on existing public rights-of-way or acquired in cooperation with municipal governments using their parkland dedication authority. Parkland dedication authority allows the municipality to obtain land at no cost as part of the municipality's approval for residential development.

Master plans, the prerequisite for a site to qualify for regional acquisition and development funds, have been approved for 40 parks, 12 park reserves, six freestanding special recreation features and 19 trails as of January 2005.



**Table 3: Parks, Reserves and Special Recreation Features Currently in the System**

Regional Parks	Park Agency	Status
Anoka Co. Riverfront RP	Anoka Co.	Open
Bunker Hills RP	Anoka Co.	Open
Lake George RP	Anoka Co.	Open
Martin-Island-Linwood Lakes RP	Anoka Co.	Open
Mississippi West RP	Anoka Co.	Planned
Rum River RP	Anoka Co.	Open
Coon Rapids Dam RP	Anoka Co./Three Rivers	Open
Baylor RP	Carver Co.	Open
Lake Minnewashta RP	Carver Co.	Open
Lake Waconia RP	Carver Co.	Open
Lake Byllesby RP	Dakota Co.	Open
Lebanon Hills RP	Dakota Co.	Open
Empire Wetlands RP (plan approved March 9, 2005)	Dakota Co.	Planned
Above the Falls RP	Mpls. Park & Rec. Bd.	Planned
Central Miss. Riverfront RP	Mpls. Park & Rec. Bd.	Open
Minnehaha RP	Mpls. Park & Rec. Bd.	Open
Mpls. Chain-of-Lakes RP	Mpls. Park & Rec. Bd.	Open
Nokomis-Hiawatha RP	Mpls. Park & Rec. Bd.	Open
Theodore Wirth RP	Mpls. Park & Rec. Bd.	Open
Mississippi Gorge RP	Mpls. Park & Rec. Bd./St. Paul	Open
North Mississippi RP	Mpls. Park & Rec. Bd./Three Rivers	Open
Bald Eagle-Otter Lake RP	Ramsey Co.	Open
Long Lake RP	Ramsey Co.	Open
Snail Lake (Grass-Vadnais-Snail) RP	Ramsey Co.	Open
Battle Creek & Indian Mounds RP	Ramsey Co./St. Paul	Open
Doyle-Kennefick RP	Scott Co.	Planned
Spring Lake RP	Scott Co.	Planned
Como RP	St. Paul	Open
Harriet Island-Lilydale & Cherokee Heights RP	St. Paul	Open
Hidden Falls-Crosby Farm RP	St. Paul	Open
Phalen-Keller RP	St. Paul/Ramsey Co.	Open
Bryant Lake RP	Three Rivers	Open
Clifton E. French RP	Three Rivers	Open
Eagle Lake RP	Three Rivers	Open
Fish Lake RP	Three Rivers	Open
Lake Minnetonka Islands	Three Rivers	Partially Open
Lake Minnetonka RP	Three Rivers	Open
Lake Sarah RP	Three Rivers	Planned
Cleary Lake RP	Three Rivers/Scott Co.	Open
Cottage Grove Ravine RP	Washington Co.	Open
St. Croix Bluffs RP	Washington Co.	Open

**Table 3: Parks, Reserves and Special Recreation Features Currently in the System (Continued)**

Park Reserves	Park Agency	Status
Rice Creek Chain-of-Lakes PR	Anoka Co.	Open
Miesville Ravine PR	Dakota Co.	Open
Spring Lake PR	Dakota Co.	Open
Baker PR	Three Rivers	Open
Carver PR	Three Rivers	Open
Crow-Hassan PR	Three Rivers	Open
Elm Creek PR	Three Rivers	Open
Lake Rebecca PR	Three Rivers	Open
Hyland-Bush-Anderson L. PR	Three Rivers/Bloomington	Open
Murphy-Hanrehan PR	Three Rivers/Scott Co.	Open
Lake Elmo PR	Washington Co.	Open
Big Marine PR	Washington Co.	Partially Open
Grey Cloud Island PR	Washington Co.	Planned
<b>Special Recreation Features (SRF)</b>		
Como Conservatory	St. Paul	Open
Como Zoo	St. Paul	Open
Gales Woods	Three Rivers	Open
Noerenberg Gardens SRF	Three Rivers	Open
Square Lake SRF	Washington Co.	Open
Silverwood	Three Rivers	Partially Open

Note: System recognition is dependent on an approved master plan. Park units without approved master plans are not recognized as part of the system.

### System Analysis Background

Minn. Stat.473.147, subd. 1, states that:

The Metropolitan Council, after consultation with the [Metropolitan] Parks and Open Space Commission...and after appropriate public hearings, shall prepare and adopt a long-range system policy plan for regional recreation open space as part of the Council's Metropolitan Development Guide...The policy plan shall identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to provide a system of regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal facilities, which together with state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area and shall establish priorities for acquisition and development. The policy plan shall estimate the cost of the recommended acquisitions and development, including an analysis of what portion of the funding is proposed to come from the state, metropolitan council levies, and cities, counties and towns in the metropolitan area respectively. In preparing or amending the policy plan the Council shall consult with and make maximum use of the expertise of the Commission. The policy plan shall include a five-year capital improvement program, which shall be revised periodically, and shall establish criteria and priorities for the allocation of funds for such acquisition and development.

Subd. 2 of the law states:

...At least every four years the Council shall engage in a comprehensive review of the policy plan...capital improvement programs...which have been adopted by the Council.

In response to this law, the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission has completed a system analysis that reviewed and recommended changes to the *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan* regarding criteria and policies for the allocation of funds for the acquisition and development of regional recreation open space (the CIP). The system analysis is intended to assist the Commission in “generally identifying the areas which should be acquired ...to provide a system of regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal facilities, which together with state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area.”

The proposed system changes look to the future – to 2030 and beyond to comply with the law and to use available forecasted data regarding the growth of the region. Also included in this chapter are the estimated costs to acquire and develop the recommended acquisitions from 2005 to 2030 in the context of what has been accomplished from 1974 to 2004.

As noted above, a comprehensive review of the *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan* occurs every four years. Consequently, the plan will change to respond to conditions as they change over time. What is adopted in 2005 will be considered again and change based on new information in 2009.

This chapter summarizes the proposed modifications for inclusion in the system plan portion of the 2005 *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan*. The modifications have been organized into four categories:

- A. Master Plan Boundary Adjustments
- B. Recognition of Regional Status
- C. New Units Based on 2030 Needs Analysis
- D. Saving the Last Best Places – Completing the Acquisition of the Regional Parks System

### Process for Determining System Changes

The process involved two classic planning approaches. The traditional rational-comprehensive model incorporated park visitation, population and natural resources data to identify needs based on objective measures (Figure 4). A transactive model was used with the 10 regional park implementing agencies to also identify potential changes in the system, and for review of the results of the rational-comprehensive model (Figure 5).

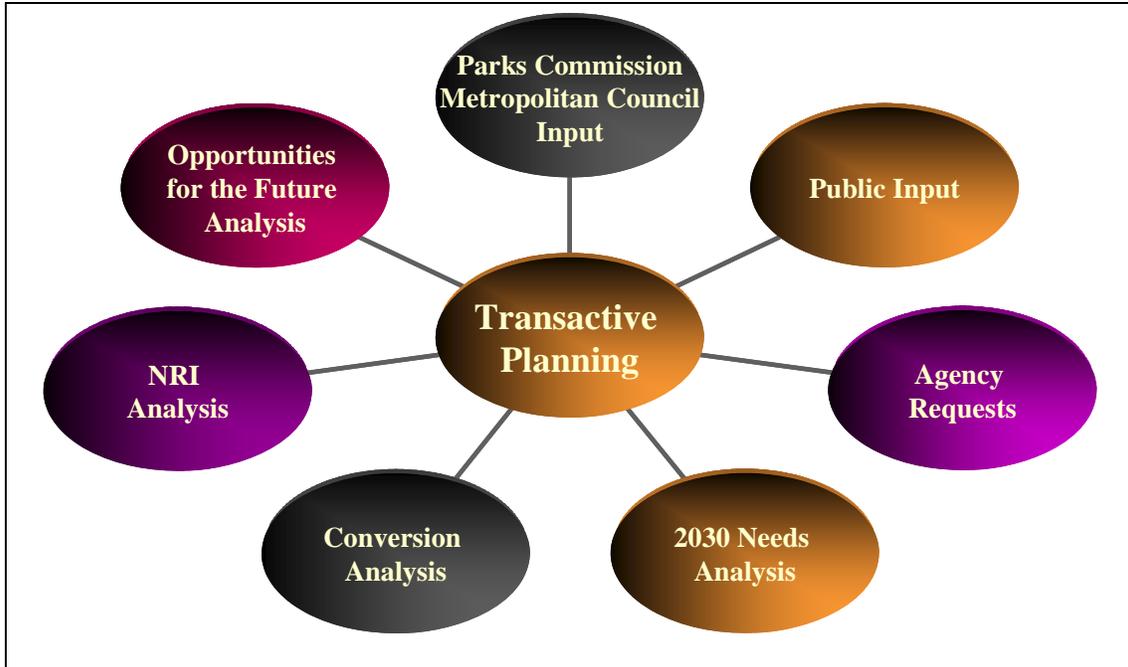
Both models yielded very similar results. Much of “Category A: Master Plan Boundary Adjustments” was a direct result of requests from the implementing agencies. In addition to the agency input, there was a wide range of recreation needs and natural resource based analyses used to determine proposed system changes in the other categories (for technical reference please refer to the *2005 Analysis of the Regional Parks System* document). Four primary analysis themes emerged:

1. **Conversion analysis**, based on identification of existing nonregional facilities to determine if they meet the legal and policy requirements for designation as “regional recreation open space.” Recommendations stemming from this analysis are listed under “Category B: Recognition of Regional Status.”
2. **Recreation needs analysis**, based on service areas of parks and expected population growth. Recommendations stemming from this analysis are listed under “Category C: New Units Based On 2030 Needs Analysis.”
3. **Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) analysis**, based on identification of regionally important natural resource lands that are adjacent to existing regional parks system units and large areas with regional recreation potential that could qualify as regional park units. Recommendations stemming from this analysis are folded into each of the four categories.
4. **Opportunities for the future analysis**, based on identification of remaining large undeveloped areas that contained regionally important natural resources and regional recreation potential, but which did not meet the requirements of the 2030 needs analysis due to existing service area coverage and/or low expected population growth through 2030. Recommendations stemming from this analysis are listed under “Category D: Saving The Last Best Places – Completing the Acquisition of the Regional Parks System.”

Figure 4: Rational-Comprehensive Model



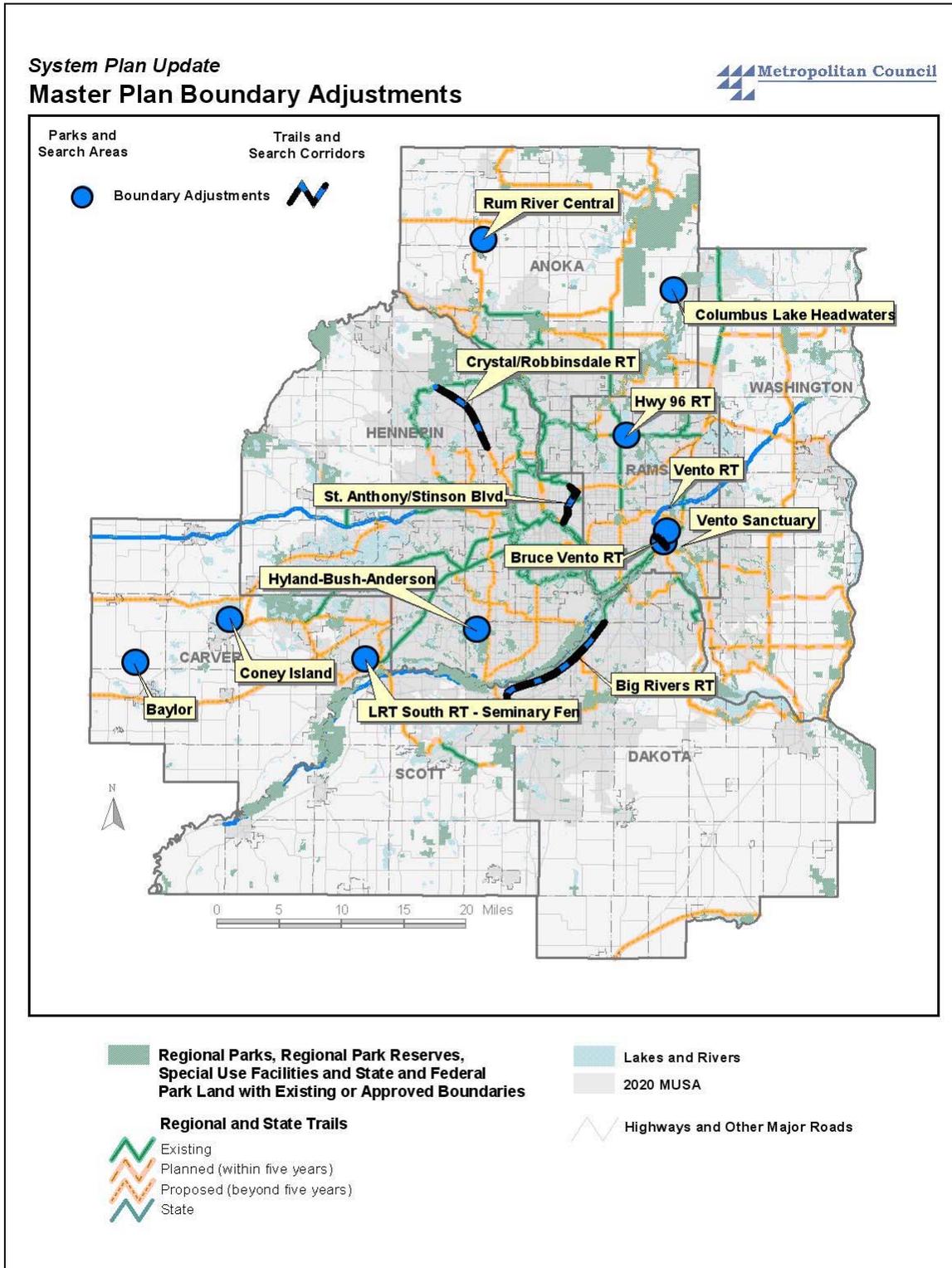
Figure 5: Transactive Planning Model



### **Proposed Modifications: Category A –Master Plan Boundary Adjustments**

The system plan recommends six regional park boundary adjustments and seven regional trail boundary adjustments. The primary purpose of park boundary adjustments is to protect regionally significant natural resource areas that have significant recreation potential and that are adjacent to the park. The primary purpose of the trail boundary adjustments is to extend the trails to help complete the trail system or to connect to other regional parks system facilities. Figure 6 shows the location of the suggested adjustments. Table 4 provides details for each adjustment.

Figure 6: Recommended Master Plan Boundary Adjustments



**Table 4: Summary of Category A: Master Plan Boundary Adjustments**

Agency	Site Name	Type	Con- version acres	Probable acres	Maximum Acres	Probable cost	Maximum cost	Trail length	Notes
Carver	Baylor RP (additional lakeshore)	Park		100	100	\$310,000	\$310,000		Preserves lakeshore adjacent to park
Carver	Lake Waconia RP (add Coney Island)	Park		30	30	\$500,000	\$1,000,000		Coney Island has an important great blue heron nesting colony and maple-basswood forest. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has concerns with activities that would displace great blue herons or significantly damage or remove areas of maple-basswood forest. Local and regional interests in interpreting and preserving the history of the island along with allowing compatible recreational opportunities needs further study. The DNR, Carver County, and City of Waconia are encouraged to participate in preparing a master plan for the island, which would identify areas for preservation, interpretation and other compatible recreational activities.
St Paul	Battle Creek RP (add Vento Sanctuary)	Park	27	-	-	\$-	\$-		Desirable addition of public land to park. The DNR holds a conservation easement on 17 of the 27 acres and would need to be a party in the decision to add this land to the regional park.
Bloomington	Hyland Bush Anderson RPR (add Bloomington holdings)	Reserve	87	-	-	\$-	\$-		Adds publicly owned land to park

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Agency	Site Name	Type	Con- version acres	Probable acres	Maximum Acres	Probable cost	Maximum cost	Trail length	Notes
Dakota	Big Rivers RT (extend to Scott Co.)	Trail	-	-	-	\$-	\$-	9	Trail system extension needed. Proposed boundary adjustments are subject to the outcome of a pending Dakota County Parks System Plan due to be completed in late 2005/early 2006.
Dakota	Mississippi River RT (extend to Goodhue Co.)	Trail	-	-	-	\$-	\$-	9	Trail system extension needed. Proposed boundary adjustments are subject to the outcome of a pending Dakota County Parks System Plan due to be completed in late 2005/early 2006. DNR also needs to be involved in planning any trail in the Gores Wildlife Management Area.
MPRB	St Anthony Pkwy (complete Grand Round)	Trail	-	-	-	\$-	\$-	5	Trail system extension needed
Ramsey	Hwy 96 RT (add Snail Lake Marsh)	Trail	47	-	-	\$-	\$-	1	Adds area for trail facilities and interpretation
St Paul	Bruce Vento RT (add trail access)	Trail	5	-	-	\$-	\$-	1	Adds trail access facilities and ties trailhead to other regional trails
Three Rivers	Crystal/Robbinsdale (CR 81) RT (extend trail)	Trail	-	-	-	\$-	\$-	2	Trail system extension needed
Anoka	Rice Creek RPR (Columbus Lake Headwaters)	Reserve	-	-	900	\$-	\$6,030,000		Has significant recreation benefits
Anoka	Rum River Central RP	Park	-	-	150	\$-	\$1,470,000		Helps protect river bank
Carver	LRT South RT (Seminary Fen - partial addition)	Trail	-	-	200	\$-	\$2,000,000		Cost may be reduced - DNR/Chanhassen/Carver partnership
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>			<b>166</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>1,380</b>	<b>\$810,000</b>	<b>\$10,810,000</b>	<b>27</b>	

**Proposed Modifications: Category B - Recognition of Regional Status**

This category proposes the recognition of two county parks as regional parks and three county/city trails as regional trails. The two parks are Tony Schmidt Park in Ramsey County and Pine Point Park in Washington County. Both meet the size and characteristic criteria for regional status, and there is documented regional use of both parks.

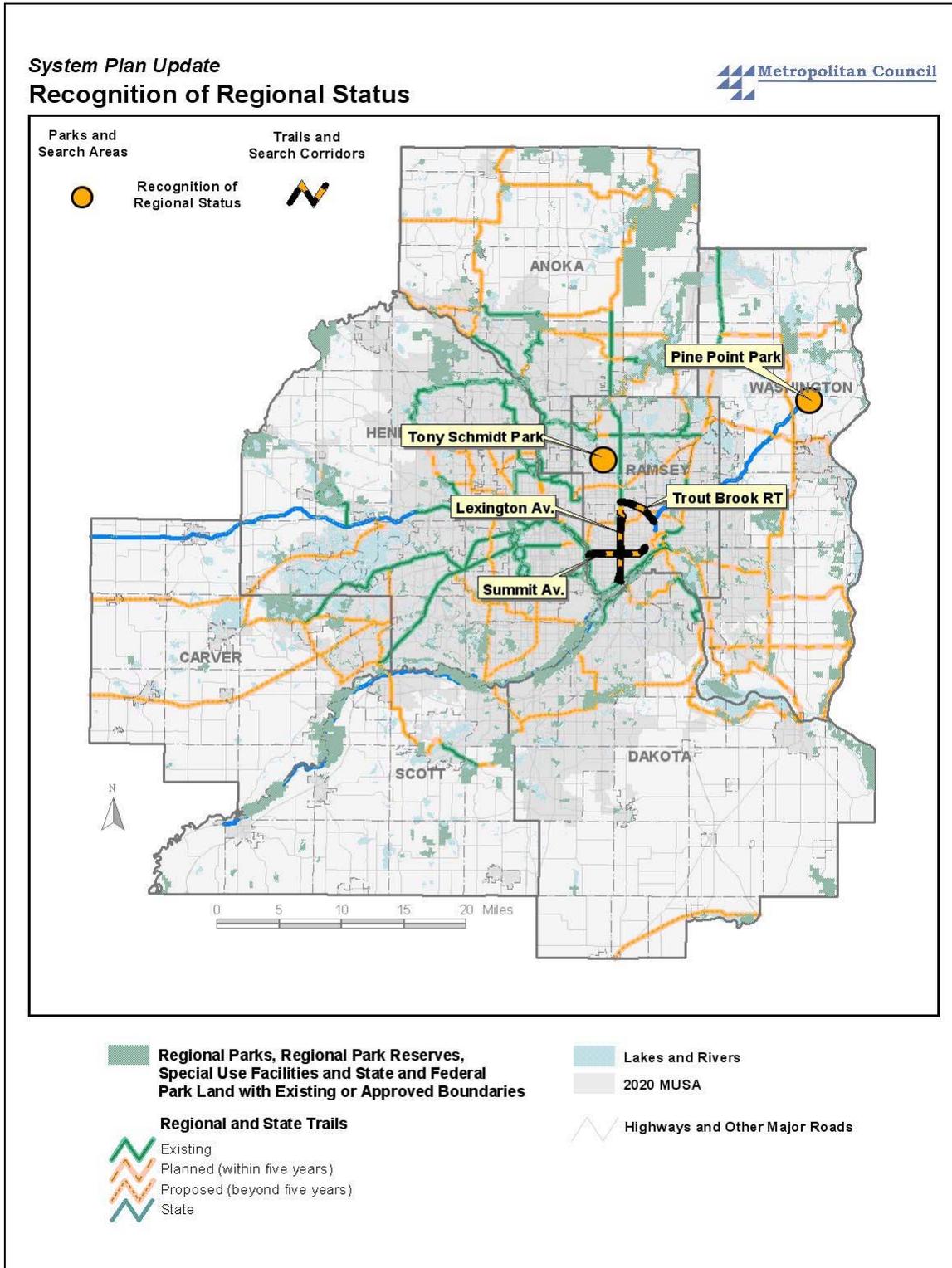
The three trails are Lexington Parkway, Summit Avenue Parkway and the Trout Brook trail. Lexington Parkway and Trout Brook are managed by both the City of St. Paul and Ramsey County. Summit Avenue is managed by the City of St. Paul. These trails meet the criteria for “linking trails” based on their location in the developed area of the region and spacing of 1.5 miles – excluding where they link to another trail. These trails, along with others proposed in this document, would meet the “regional recreation open space” definition by providing for a balanced system of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area.

**Table 5: Summary of Category B: Recognition of Regional Status**

Agency	Site Name	Type	Con- version acres	Trail length	Notes
Washing- ton	Pine Point Park	Park	296		Based on annual visits and non-local visitor data, plus acreage and natural resources, it is comparable to other regional parks.
Ramsey	Tony Schmidt Park	Park	211		Based on annual visits and non-local visitor data, plus acreage and natural resources, it is comparable to other regional parks.
Ramsey/ St. Paul	Lexington Pkwy	Trail	-	10	Urban trail dependent on Lexington rehab in St. Paul. Provides needed trail system connection.
Ramsey/ St. Paul	Trout Brook RT	Trail	40	2	Needed trail system connection. Some natural resource features protected. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) holds a conservation easement on a portion of the site. If conservation easement land is involved in the regional trail designation, the DNR will need to be involved in planning the trail treadway to insure no adverse impact on the conservation easement.
St Paul	Summit Ave RT	Trail	-	5	Provides trail system connection and would be a destination trail due to historic nature of street.
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>			<b>547</b>	<b>17</b>	

Note: These parks and trails are regional in use and function, but are not currently recognized as part of the regional system. Since they are all under public ownership, there are no acquisition costs associated with adding them to the regional system.

Figure 7: Recognition of Regional Status



### **Proposed Modifications: Category C - New Units Based on 2030 Needs Analysis**

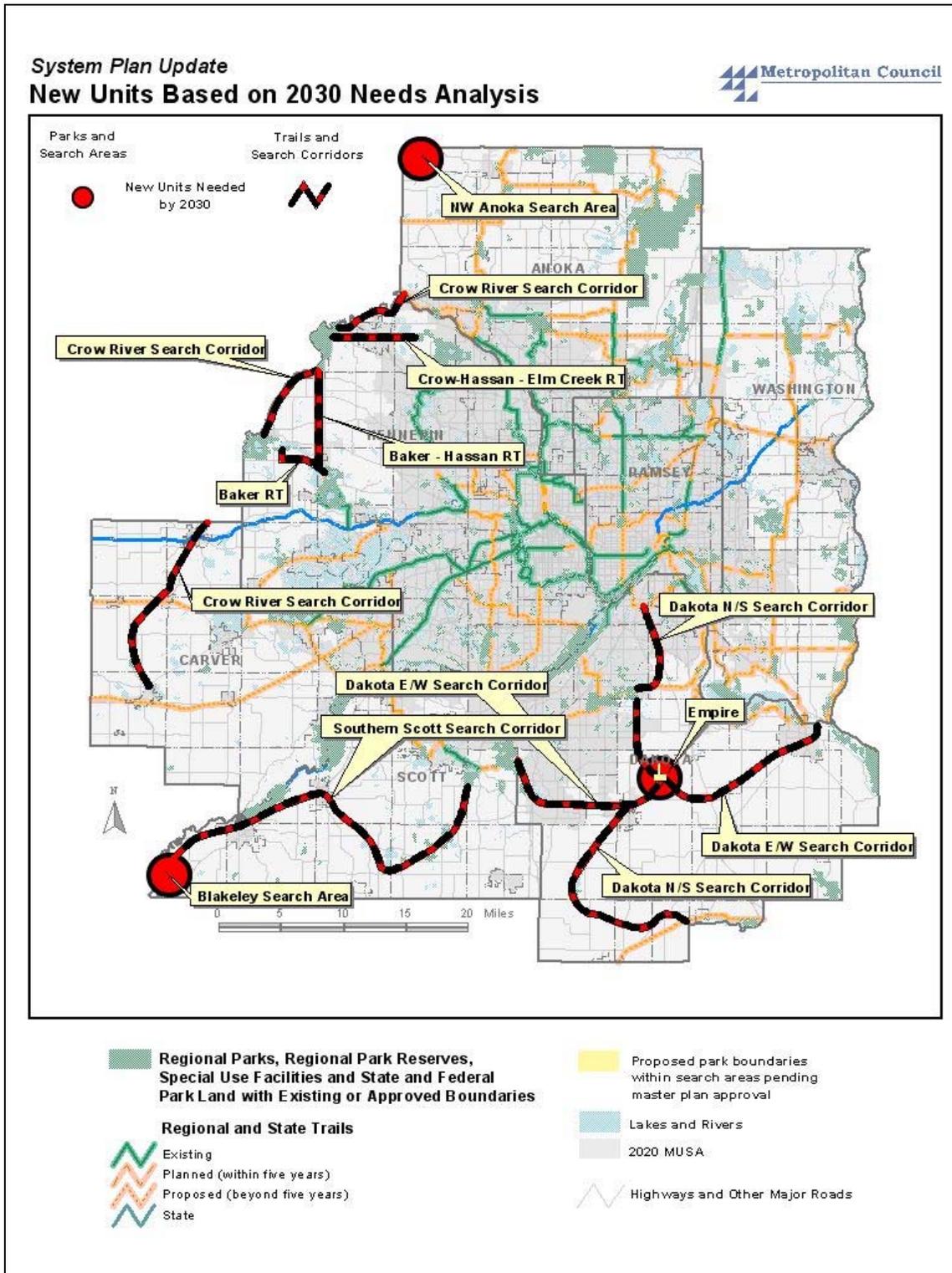
Are new parks and trails needed to meet the needs of the region's growing population out to the year 2030? If so, where are these needs located? The needs analysis portion of this study used a variety of analysis approaches to answer these questions. Those approaches are detailed in the *2005 Analysis of the Regional Parks System* report. The needs analysis identified three park search areas, three destination trail search areas and four specific connector regional trails.

New regional parks or park reserves will be needed in the Empire Township area of Dakota County, the Blakeley Township area of Scott County and the St. Francis area of Anoka County. The Empire Township search area was originally identified as a need in the 2001 system analysis. Dakota County has gone through a rigorous site evaluation process to work toward meeting that need and has submitted a master plan for the proposed regional park in Empire Township. On March 9, 2005, the Metropolitan Council approved an acquisition master plan for this 460-acre regional park. The other two search areas were not identified in the 2001 system analysis, but since that analysis was completed, new Census data and new growth forecasts have become available and the need for new units in the Blakeley and St. Francis areas has become apparent.

The three destination trails are needed to complete coverage of the region by the regional trail system. Each trail search area is located in an area that is currently not within any service area of an existing or planned regional trail. In addition to this need for service, each destination trail search area offers an excellent opportunity to tie the trail to a parkway-like corridor along major rivers within the region. Development of these three trails as destination trails adjacent to rivers would enhance their recreation quality and regional draw, and would provide significant environmental benefits to the river resource as well through sound management by regional park implementing agencies.

The four connector trails are needed to tie regional park units together and to complete trail loops within the regional system.

Figure 8: Map of Recommended System Additions Based on 2030 Needs Analysis



**Chapter Three: System Plan**

**Table 6: Summary of Category C: New Units Based on 2030 Needs Analysis**

Agency	Site Name	Type	Con- version acres	Probable acres	Maximum Acres	Probable cost	Maximum cost	Trail length	Notes
Dakota	Empire RP	Park	-	460	460	\$6,500,000	\$6,500,000		Strong need identified in 2000 Policy Plan. The Metropolitan Council approved a 460-acre acquisition master plan for this park on March 9, 2005. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is acquiring land adjacent to the park for a wildlife management area and possibly an aquatic management area along the Vermillion River—a State designated trout stream. Cooperative planning efforts for the regional park, and state wildlife management area/aquatic management area will be done.
Scott	Blakeley Search Area	Reserve	-	1,500	3,200	\$5,400,000	\$11,520,000		Strong need by 2030
Anoka	NW Anoka Search Area	Reserve	-	1,000	2,500	\$3,600,000	\$10,625,000		Very high quality natural resource area unique in Anoka County
Dakota	Dakota East/West RT Search Corridor	Trail	-	600	600	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	25	Strong need by 2030. This trail is subject to the outcome of the pending Dakota County Parks System Plan due to be completed in late 2005/early 2006.
Carver/3 Rivers	Crow River RT Search Corridor	Trail	-	640	640	\$6,160,000	\$6,160,000	25	Strong need by 2030
Scott	Southern Scott RT Search Corridor	Trail	-	600	600	\$5,500,000	\$5,500,000	25	Strong need by 2030
Dakota	Dakota North/South RT Search Corridor	Trail	-	-	-	\$-	\$-	25	Trail system need to tie parks together. This trail is subject to the outcome of the pending Dakota County Parks System Plan due to be completed in late 2005/early 2006.

**Chapter Three: System Plan**

Agency	Site Name	Type	Con- version acres	Probable acres	Maximum Acres	Probable cost	Maximum cost	Trail length	Notes
Three Rivers	Baker RT	Trail	-	-	-	\$-	\$-	6	Strong need by 2030, trail system need to tie parks together
Three Rivers	Baker to Crow-Hassan (CR 19) RT	Trail	-	-	-	\$-	\$-	8	Strong need by 2030, trail system need to tie parks together
Three Rivers	Crow-Hassan to Elm Creek RT	Trail	-	-	-	\$-	\$-	9	Strong need by 2030, trail system need to tie parks together
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>				<b>4,800</b>	<b>8,000</b>	<b>\$30,660,000</b>	<b>\$45,305,000</b>	<b>123</b>	

### **Proposed Modifications: Category D – Saving the Last Best Places – Completing the Acquisition of the Regional Parks System**

When are the acquisition goals for the regional parks system complete? The system can not grow indefinitely as there is a finite land base. There are very few remaining large tracts of undeveloped land that contain regionally important natural resources that have high quality recreation resource amenities. Nor does the system need to grow indefinitely, as the social carrying capacity – the point where crowding diminishes the recreation experience – of the system is very large. Research also shows that the public adapts successfully to increased use. Nearly all of the developed area of the region is within a 20-minute drive of at least five regional parks or reserves.

The area of concern, then, lies in the rural or agricultural portions of the region, where growth is expected to be light through 2030, but at some point may experience significant development. Analysis of the NRI data and potential recreation-resource amenities identified the last best places – the opportunities for the future. These opportunities will likely be lost if action is not taken in the near term. The acquisition goals for the system would be complete if the proposed units in Categories C & D were added to the system. The last best places in the region would be protected for generations to come.

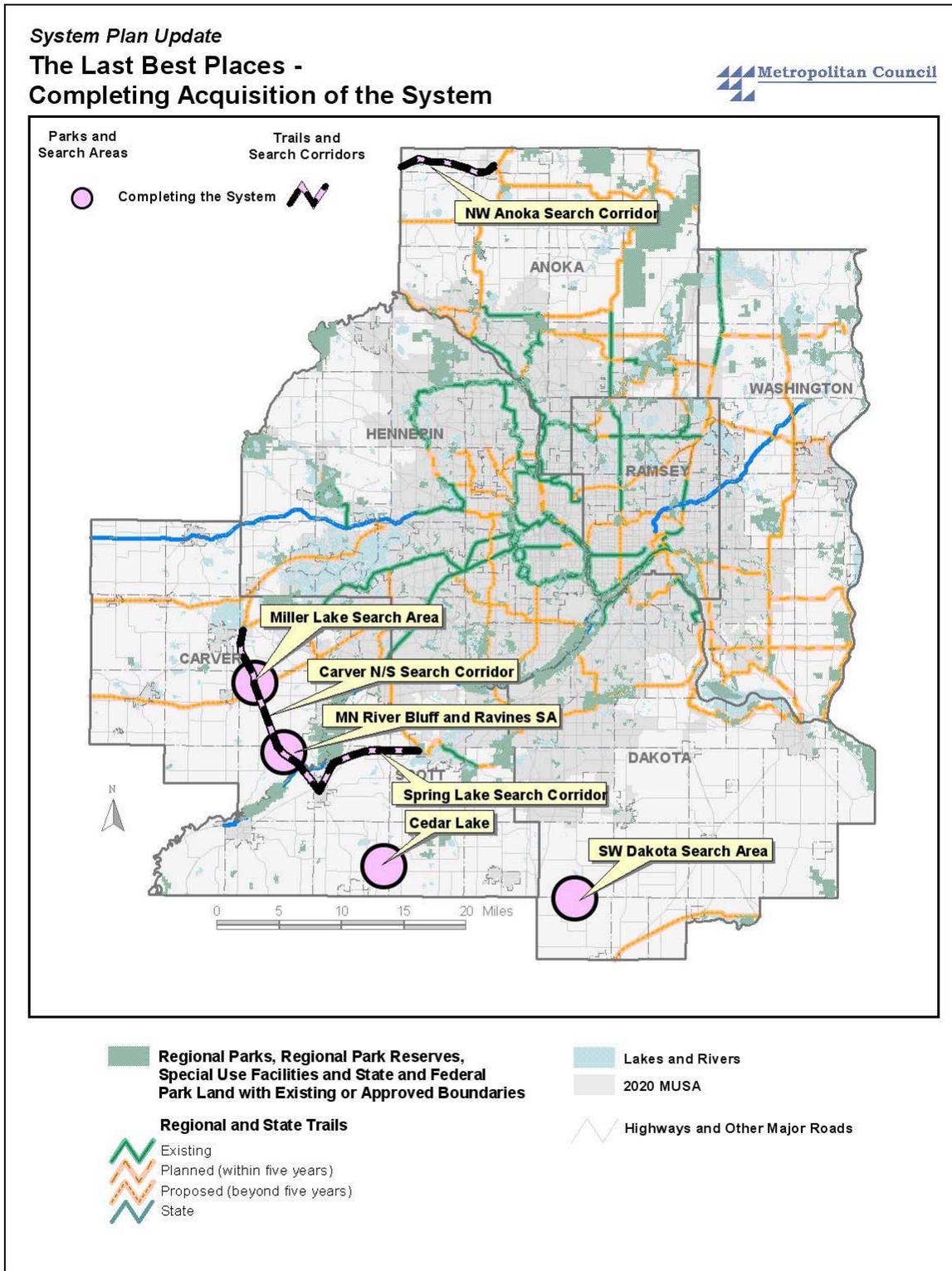
This idea of completion is related only to acquisition. The overall system itself will never be “complete” in that there will always be a need for refurbishing existing facilities and developing new types of facilities to meet recreation demands and trends that change over time. Acquisition completion is also dependent on public expectations for available regional park land and the current legislative definition of the system and its limitation to the seven-county metropolitan area. If the definition of the regional parks system were to be expanded at some future point to include the collar counties surrounding the seven-county metropolitan area, the system would again likely be incomplete and a vigorous review of the system opportunities and needs that includes the collar counties would be needed.

There are significant potential benefits for acknowledging a plan to complete acquisition of lands for the regional parks system. Completion is a powerful concept. It sets a goal that is readily understood by the public. It would attract media attention to the program, garner public support for the acquisition effort, help develop potential partnerships with the private and nonprofit sectors, and is likely to be favorably received. Over the long term, costs to complete acquisition of the system would be significantly reduced if they were addressed sooner than later. It also promotes the development of a much needed long-range acquisition and financing plan.

The impact on local community comprehensive plans for these additions is thought to be minimal, as three of the four proposed park search areas are already identified in county plans and have undergone significant public and local community involvement. The fourth area (in southeastern Dakota County) will incorporate local input as Dakota County Parks works through its 2025 vision process in the 2005 calendar year. Nonetheless, since the four park search areas are not based on official forecasts and their related need, the Council should not require local comprehensive plans to recognize the proposed additions beyond acknowledgement that the communities will work with the regional park implementing agencies to determine the feasibility of new parks in those areas.

In addition, the need for the additions in this category is less than the need for those additions with documented need by 2030. Consequently, the Council urges the regional park implementing agencies to focus their acquisition efforts first on those sites with documented need and then on those sites which would complete the system.

Figure 9: Map of the Last Best Places – Completing the Acquisition of the Regional Parks System



**Chapter Three: System Plan**

**Table 7: Summary of Category D – Saving the Last Best Places – Completing the Acquisition of the Regional Parks System**

Agency	Site Name	Type	Con- version acres	Probable Acres	Maximum Acres	Probable Cost	Maximum Cost	Trail Length	Notes
Carver	Minnesota Bluffs and Ravines Search Area	Park	-	500	1,500	\$2,550,000	\$7,650,000		Significant amounts of regionally important natural resource lands, excellent recreation potential. Already in Carver County Park Plan.
Carver	Miller Lake Search Area	Park	-	200	400	\$1,060,000	\$2,120,000		Very nice lake and setting, already in Carver County Park Plan.
Dakota	SW Dakota Search Area	Park	-	400	400	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000		Significant amounts of regionally important natural resource lands; one of the few big lakes in southern Dakota County. This park is subject to the outcome of the pending Dakota County Parks System Plan due to be completed in late 2005/early 2006.
Scott	Cedar Lake Search Area	Park	173	-	50	\$-	\$270,000		Most of park already in County ownership, additional 50 acres protects more lakeshore.
Anoka	NW Anoka RT Search Corridor	Trail	-	-	-	\$-	\$-	8	Needed for trail system purposes if NW Anoka Park Reserve is approved. Anoka County should continue to work with Sherburne County on a trail alignment that runs south of the proposed park reserve in the northwestern corner of Anoka County towards the Mississippi River through the City of Elk River.
Carver	Carver County North/South RT Search Corridor	Trail	-	-	-	\$-	\$-	9	Needed for trail system purposes if Miller Lake Regional Park & Minnesota Bluffs Regional Park are approved.
Scott	Spring Lake RT Search Corridor	Trail	-	-	-	\$-	\$-	6	Needed for trail system connection to Carver County if Miller Lake Regional Park & Minnesota Bluffs Regional Park are approved.
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>			<b>173</b>	<b>1,100</b>	<b>2,350</b>	<b>\$5,610,000</b>	<b>\$12,040,000</b>	<b>23</b>	

## Chapter Four: Finance

### Estimated Acquisition Costs for the Proposed Additions to the System

State law requires that the *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan* estimate the cost of the recommended acquisitions and development of the park system, including an analysis of what portion of the funding is proposed to come from the state and Metropolitan Council levies, and other local government units (Minn. Stat.473.147, Subd. 1). No acquisition and development costs are proposed to be funded with city, county or township taxes. The following analysis is an estimate proposed to be funded with state appropriations, Metropolitan Council bonds, and federal Transportation Enhancement grants. Public costs may be further reduced through private donations of land or cash to leverage public funds.

The estimated acquisition costs for the proposed changes range from \$39 million to \$68 million (Table 8). Acquisition costs were calculated based on an estimated cost per acre for each proposed modification. Per-acre land values were derived from a sample of similar parcels in the immediate area around the acquisition being examined. The land values are from the county assessor's office. Since assessor-identified land values have historically been lower than market value, the price per acre was not based on the average value of the sample, but instead was based on the 75 percent quartile land value (that is, 75 percent of the parcels in the sample had lower values per acre). The acquisition cost range in some of the proposed modifications reflects the range of acreage to be acquired – not a change in the value per acre.

The acquisition costs listed in Table 8 are only for the proposed system changes. In addition to those acquisition costs, another \$146 million is estimated to be needed to complete the acquisition of in-holdings (privately owned land) within approved master plan boundaries of open and planned park system units (Table 9). The estimate was derived from park master plan data and consultation with park implementing agencies. There is no maximum or minimum range because an exact amount of land is not known. However, some acreage may not be acquired if its public benefit is not supported by the cost of acquisition. For example, parcels at the edges of park units that were developed with a home or business and would be very expensive to acquire relative to their public recreational benefit have been deleted from park boundaries. The most recent example was deletion of 15 acres from the proposed boundary of Doyle-Kennefick Regional Park that was at the edge of the park and contained two large homes. Furthermore, it is possible that some of the in-holdings may not be available for acquisition until after the 2030 window. Consequently, the total area of in-holdings expected to be acquired by 2030 is 5,100 acres at an estimated costs of \$125 million.

Some land may be donated or partially donated through sale at below market value. Finally, private sector donations may be used to reduce the amount of State and Metropolitan Council funds needed to acquire land.

The total amount of land proposed for acquisition including up to 5,100 acres of in-holdings ranges from 6,951 to 17,716 acres. The estimated cost to acquire this land is between \$39 million to \$193 million in 2005 dollars (Table 10). (No inflationary factor is projected in this estimate since the timing of the acquisition can't be predicted.)

To put this proposal in context, since the inception of the regional parks system in 1974, about 21,000 acres has been acquired with \$142 million of state and Metropolitan Council funds. The value of that \$142 million today is \$268 million, based on adjustments from the Consumer Price Index at the time the funds were appropriated (Table 11).

**Table 8: Estimated Acquisition Costs of Proposed Changes to the Regional Parks System (2005 dollars)**

Category	Acres Added	Estimated NRI Acres	Minimum Cost	Maximum Cost
A) Master plan boundary adjustments	296 to 1,546	Up to 1,350	\$810,000	\$10,810,000
B) Recognition of regional status of existing park land (no future acquisition cost)	547	N/A	\$0	\$0
C) New units based on 2030 needs analysis	4,835 to 8,000	2,400 to 4,200	\$32,160,000	\$45,305,000
D) New units needed beyond 2030 analysis (completing the system)	1,273 to 2,523	600 to 1,250	\$5,610,000	\$12,040,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,951 to 12,069</b>	<b>3,000 to 6,800</b>	<b>\$38,580,000</b>	<b>\$68,155,000</b>

**Table 9: Estimated Acquisition Costs for Regional Parks System In-Holdings (2005 dollars)**

Regional Park Agency	Acres of In-Holdings	Cost	Cost Source
Anoka County	561	\$2,787,772	MC estimates
City of Bloomington	17	\$8,191,178	Agency
Carver County	29	\$4,200,000	MC and Agency estimates
Dakota County	686	\$8,551,834	MC estimates
Three Rivers (including Cleary Lake RP & Murphy-Hanrehan PR in Scott Co.)	874	\$22,495,000	Agency
Scott (Scott Co. Trail & Doyle-Kennefick)	825	\$11,856,667	Agency via master plan data
Minneapolis Park & Rec. Board	85	\$38,835,000	Agency via master plan data
Ramsey County	107	\$6,081,338	Agency
City of St. Paul	0	\$0	Agency
Washington County	2,788	\$43,490,000	Agency
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,972</b>	<b>\$146,488,789</b>	

Note: Not all in-holding acres will be available for purchase before 2030. For estimating acquisition costs out to 2030, it is assumed that up to 5,100 acres will be available at an estimated cost of \$125 million.

**Table 10: Range of Total Estimated Acquisition Costs for the Regional Parks System Plan, 2005-2030 (2005 dollars)**

Category	Minimum Acreage	Maximum Acreage	2005 Estimated Minimum Cost	2005 Estimated Maximum Cost
In-holdings within currently approved parks/trails. <b>Note:</b> Some acreage may not be acquired if its public benefit is not supported by the cost of acquisition. Some land may be donated or partially donated by sale at below market value.	0	5,100	\$0	\$125,099,267
A) Master plan boundary adjustments.	296	1,546	\$810,000	\$10,810,000
B) Recognition of regional status.	547	547	Already acquired	Already acquired
C) New units based on 2030 needs analysis including the 460-acre Empire Wetlands Regional Park in Dakota County approved on March 9, 2005.	4,835	8,000	\$32,160,000	\$45,305,000
D) New units needed beyond 2030 analysis (completing the system).	1,273	2,523	\$5,610,000	\$12,040,000
Total proposed for acquisition (excludes 547 acres of existing parks in Category B).	6,404	17,169		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,951</b>	<b>17,716</b>	<b>\$38,580,000</b>	<b>\$193,254,267</b>

### Rehabilitation and Development Costs

When the Metropolitan Council adopted its first *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan* in 1974, it designated 31,000 acres of existing park land as “regional recreation open space.” About \$142 million has been granted from 1974 to 2004 to acquire an additional 21,000 acres. State- and Metropolitan Council-financed grants to rehabilitate and develop recreation facilities on these lands (52,000 acres) during this time period total \$225 million. The annual average cost for rehabilitation and development was \$144 per acre.

The estimated cost to rehabilitate and develop the existing 52,000 acre park system and the proposed additional lands (6,951 to 17,716 acres) ranges from \$208 million to \$242 million.

### Total Annual Costs

The estimated total costs for acquisition plus rehabilitation and development ranges from \$247 million to \$436 million from 2005 to 2030 (Table 12). The annual average cost is \$9.9 million to \$17.4 million. To put the estimated annual costs into context, the average annual appropriation of state and Metropolitan Council funds to acquire 21,000 acres plus rehabilitate and develop facilities on that land and portions of 31,000 acres of existing regional parks from 1974 to 2004 was \$12.2 million. After adjusting for inflation during that time period, the \$12.2 million would be worth \$23 million in 2004 (Table 11).

The estimates are in 2005 dollars. They do not include any assumption concerning the effect of inflation on costs over the next 25 years, or assume any private sector donations. Consequently, these are conservative estimates. It is understood that additional funds from the public and private sectors will be needed to finance actual costs over this time period. Estimates will be considered again and refined every four years when this policy plan must undergo a comprehensive review required in Minnesota Statute 473.147.

Most of the expenditures would be on acquiring lands within existing parks along with rehabilitation and development of existing parks and trails (76 percent). About 4 percent would be spent on acquiring natural resource lands adjacent to existing parks, less than 1 percent for rehabilitation and development of

## Chapter Four: Finance

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nonregional parks and trails that are converted to regional status, 17 percent for acquiring and developing new parks and trails to meet forecasted growth to 2030 and up to 3 percent for acquiring and possibly developing parks and trails that would be needed after 2030 (Table 13).

Decisions on financing such costs will be made annually based on negotiated land purchases and specific rehabilitation and development projects. All projects are refined to fit the budgeted appropriation and other fiscal constraints.

Metropolitan Council bonds are proposed to finance up to 40 percent of the proposed capital costs with the remaining 60 percent financed with state funds. Grants from the federal government, other publicly funded grants and donations from the private sector will also be sought.

**Table 11: 1974-2004 State- and Metropolitan Council-Funded Regional Parks System Capital Improvement Appropriations**

Item	Acquisition	Rehabilitation & Development	Total
1974-2004 appropriations (actual dollars)	\$142,061,150	\$225,089,184	\$367,150,334
Percent of total appropriations	38.7%	61.3%	
Adjusted for inflation (2004 dollars)	\$268,008,523	\$424,646,849	\$692,655,372
Average annual amount appropriated, 1974-2004 (actual dollars)	\$4,735,372	\$7,502,973	\$12,238,344
Average annual amount appropriated, 1974-2004, adjusted for inflation (2004 dollars)	\$8,933,617	\$14,154,894	\$23,088,512

**Table 12: Combined Estimated Acquisition and Development Costs for the Regional Parks System, 2005-2030 (2005 dollars)**

Category	Acres		Estimated Acquisition Cost		Estimated Development Cost <sup>2</sup>		Total Estimated Acquisition and Development Cost	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
Existing system	0	0	\$-	\$-	\$187,574,320	\$187,574,320	\$187,574,320	\$187,574,320
In-holdings <sup>1</sup>	0	5,100	\$-	\$125,099,267	\$-	\$18,396,712	\$-	\$143,495,979
A) Boundary adjustments	296	1,546	\$810,000	\$10,810,000	\$1,067,731	\$5,576,729	\$1,877,731	\$16,386,729
B) Conversions	547	547	\$-	\$-	\$1,973,138	\$1,973,138	\$1,973,138	\$1,973,138
C) New units to 2030	4,835	8,000	\$32,160,000	\$45,305,000	\$17,440,805	\$28,857,588	\$49,600,805	\$74,162,588
D) Completing the system	1,273	2,523	\$5,610,000	\$12,040,000	\$-	\$-	\$5,610,000	\$12,040,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,951</b>	<b>17,716</b>	<b>\$38,580,000</b>	<b>\$193,254,267</b>	<b>\$208,055,993</b>	<b>\$242,378,486</b>	<b>\$246,635,993</b>	<b>\$435,632,753</b>

Notes:

High per-acre costs of in-holdings is due to the fact that most of the land is riverfront or lakefront and in or near densely populated areas. Some parcels may not be acquired if the public benefit is not worth the cost of acquisition. Some land may be donated or partially donated by selling the land to the park agency below market value.

Estimated rehabilitation and development costs are based on the assumption that the cost per acre in the next 25 years will be the same annual average as actual costs in the past 30 years (\$144 per acre).

**Table 13: Estimated Annual Average Costs Over 25 Years (2005 dollars)**

Category	Total Estimated Acquisition and Development Cost		Estimated Annual Cost 2005 to 2030		Percent of Annual Costs by Category	
	Maximum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
Existing system	\$187,574,320	\$187,574,320	\$7,502,973	\$7,502,973	76%	43%
In-holdings <sup>1</sup>	\$-	\$143,495,979	\$-	\$5,739,839	0%	33%
A) Boundary adjustments	\$1,877,731	\$16,386,729	\$75,109	\$655,469	1%	4%
B) Conversions	\$1,973,138	\$1,973,138	\$78,926	\$78,926	1%	0%
C) New units to 2030	\$49,600,805	\$74,162,588	\$1,984,032	\$2,966,504	20%	17%
D) Completing the system	\$5,610,000	\$12,040,000	\$224,400	\$481,600	2%	3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$246,635,993</b>	<b>\$435,632,753</b>	<b>\$9,865,440</b>	<b>\$17,425,310</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Regional parks system operations and maintenance funding**

In 1985, Minn. Stat. 473.351 was enacted, calling for state appropriations to finance 40 percent of the costs to operate and maintain the Metropolitan Regional Parks System. State appropriations for park system operations and maintenance are distributed to regional park implementing agencies according to the following formula:

- 40 percent based on each agency's proportion of total regional system visits;
- 40 percent based on each agency's proportion of total regional system operation and maintenance expenditures in the previous calendar year; and,
- 20 percent based on each agency's proportion of total regional system acreage, with park reserve resource management lands divided by four.

From 1985 to 2004, state appropriations have financed between 5.4 percent and 17.7 percent of operations and maintenance costs per year, as shown in the following table. Property taxes in each park implementing agency's jurisdiction and park user revenues finance the remainder of operations and maintenance costs.

**Table 14: Regional Park Operations and Maintenance (O & M)  
Grant Appropriations, 1985 to 2004**

<b>Calendar Year/ (State Fiscal Year)</b>	<b>O &amp; M State Appropriation</b>	<b>Park Agency's O &amp; M Actual Costs (1985-2003) and Budgeted Costs 2004/(2005)</b>	<b>Percent of O &amp; M Costs Covered by State Appropriation</b>
1985/(1986)	\$2,000,000	\$19,091,548	10.5%
1986/(1987)	\$2,000,000	\$22,656,187	8.8%
1987/(1988)	\$2,000,000	\$24,595,929	8.1%
1988/(1989)	\$2,000,000	\$26,461,148	7.6%
1989/(1990)	\$2,000,000	\$29,294,759	6.8%
1990/(1991)	\$2,817,000	\$31,107,785	9.1%
1991/(1992)	\$2,759,000	\$32,076,220	8.6%
1992/(1993)	\$2,356,000	\$33,453,546	7.0%
1993/(1994)	\$2,238,000	\$35,646,465	6.3%
1994/(1995)	\$2,238,000	\$37,928,496	5.9%
1995/(1996)	\$2,238,000	\$40,158,254	5.6%
1996/(1997)	\$2,238,000	\$41,322,602	5.4%
1997/(1998)	\$3,000,000	\$44,338,618	6.8%
1998/(1999)	\$3,000,000	\$49,242,255	6.1%
1999/(2000)	\$4,500,000	\$50,748,152	8.9%
2000/(2001)	\$9,695,105	\$54,801,219	17.7%
2001/(2002)	\$7,865,716	\$59,526,381	13.2%
2002/(2003)	\$8,009,857	\$63,587,498	12.6%
2003/(2004)	\$7,452,000	\$66,825,266	11.2%
2004/(2005)	\$7,353,000	\$71,494,008	10.3%
<b>TOTALS/AVERAGE/ PERCENT</b>	<b>\$77,759,678</b>	<b>\$834,356,336</b>	<b>9.29%</b>

### Capital Improvement Program

State legislation requires that a five-year capital improvement program (CIP) be included as an integral part of an adopted *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan*. The initiative for preparation of the CIP has been assigned to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, with final review and adoption by the Council.

The CIP is revised every other year, while the policy plan is considered for major revision every four years. To provide policy plan users with a CIP that is always up to date, the current CIP is a separate document.

The CIP is a prioritized list of **proposed** capital expenditures for land acquisition, rehabilitation and development that is dependent upon future state appropriations, which in turn would leverage a 40 percent match of Council bonds. The CIP describes each project, the rationale for its priority and projected revenue sources to finance the project.

## **Chapter Five: Management Procedures**

### **Amending the Policy Plan**

The Metropolitan Council will amend the *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan* only if a substantial revision is proposed. A substantial revision is defined by the Council as (1) a proposed revision that is intended to or could have the effect of changing the direction or intent of adopted Council policy; (2) addition or deletion of a policy; or (3) addition or deletion of a system element.

An amendment request initiated by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission should include documentation to substantiate that it constitutes a substantial revision as defined here. A Council decision to amend the plan on its own initiative or that of the Commission will be preceded by a finding that a substantial revision is proposed. When the Council decides to amend the policy plan, Minn. Stat. 473.147 will be followed.

### **Updating the Policy Plan**

Minnesota law requires the Council to conduct a comprehensive review of the *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan* at least every four years. However, over a four-year period, changes occur in population, acquisition, development and system use. Updating the data and factual information to keep the policy current with new trends and conditions is not a substantial revision to the policy plan, and will be accomplished through the ordinary process of consideration and approval by the appropriate Council committee and the full Council. The Commission and the implementing agencies will receive formal notice of any proposed updating 30 days prior to final action by the appropriate Council committee.

### **System Plan**

The Metropolitan Council has the responsibility to prepare a system plan for the regional parks system. The system planning process begins with the Council identifying “generally the areas which should be acquired,” as required by the 1974 Metropolitan Parks Act. The policy plan includes the system plan.

The Council reviews the system plan every four years as part of the policy plan revision process and may add or delete planned elements to the system. Additions or deletions to the system proposed outside the regular plan review process are substantial revisions to the policy plan. Identification of specific boundaries and detailed planning for individual units of the system are addressed in master plans for each unit. The master plans are prepared by the regional park implementing agencies.

By statute, any municipality, park district or county located wholly or partially within the metropolitan area could function as a regional park implementing agency and receive Council grants. The Council believes that larger governmental entities are more likely to have the expertise and resources to carry out park development and operation on a regional scale. Therefore, the Council will confine grants to the present 10 implementing agencies.

Implementing agencies will be limited to Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Ramsey, Scott and Washington counties; the Three Rivers Park District; the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board; the City of St. Paul and the City of Bloomington (for its portion of the Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve only). Figure 10 shows the regional parks system process. Implementing agencies prepare a master plan for each regional parks system component within their respective jurisdiction consistent with the Council’s policy plan. These master plans are reviewed by the Council for consistency with the system plan and, when approved by the Council, constitute an element of the system plan.

Figure 10: Regional Parks System Process

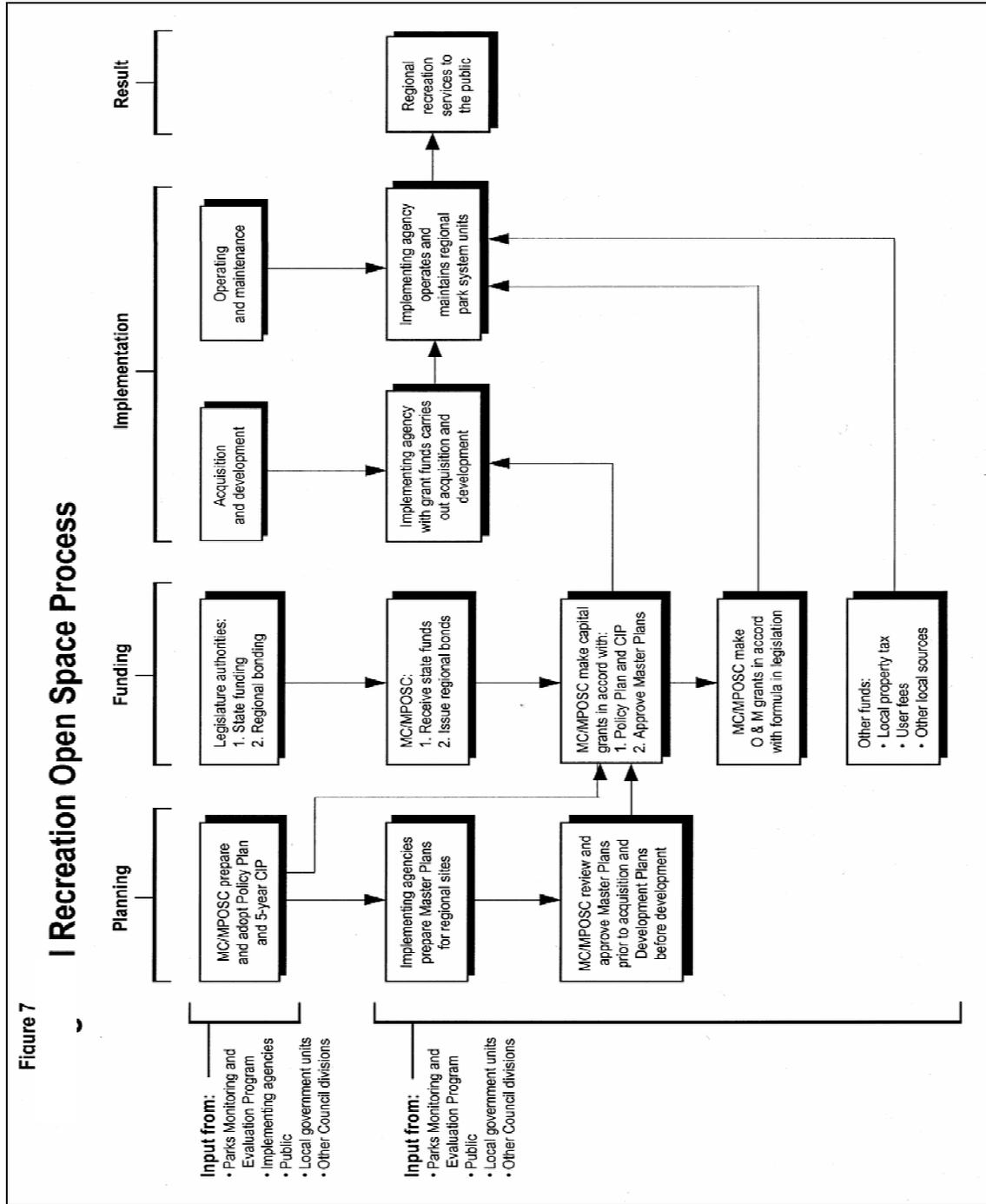


Figure 10:

## **Capital Improvement Program**

One important use of master plan information is preparing the capital improvement program (CIP) for the regional system. The CIP has two roles: it ranks projects across the system based on priorities in the policy plan and it provides the basis for requesting legislative funding for the biennium. The CIP is completely revised every two years to correspond with the legislative biennium.

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.

## **Backup Acquisition**

Master plans are the basis for granting funds for acquisition of regional parks system lands. The 1974 Metropolitan Parks Act, Minn. Stat. 473.301-473.341, provides the procedure by which land is acquired in the regional system. In general, the implementing agencies buy land with Council funds. Occasionally, a regional park implementing agency has been unwilling to proceed with acquisition. The law provides a backup procedure for acquisition that involves the Council's offer of a grant to a second regional park implementing agency if the first regional park implementing agency does not initiate acquisition within 60 days of being offered the grant or has not acquired the land within 12 months. The second regional park implementing agency must initiate acquisition within 30 days of being offered the grant or complete acquisition within six months. If acquisition does not proceed under these conditions, the Council may direct the Commission to acquire the land. The Council has no power of eminent domain and can only acquire land from a willing seller.

The Metropolitan Council may approve funds for acquisition without an approved master plan when the responsible regional park implementing agency has failed to prepare an adequate master plan for Council review. If the regional park implementing agency offered the grant fails to proceed, the Council will follow the acquisition procedure outlined in Minn. Stat. 473.333. Before acquiring land under this procedure, the Council will, with assistance of the Commission, prepare and adopt a plan for the site that meets the information requirements of a master plan. This plan will be prepared with appropriate public and local government participation.

## **Negotiated Purchase**

Acquisition of land is costly and limited public funds must be used wisely. It is sometimes necessary to acquire land through condemnation, which can be a long and costly process. Implementing agencies must make negotiated purchases based on appraisals by qualified appraisers wherever possible to minimize the need for condemnation.

## **Stewardship**

Use of Council grant funds is limited to the costs of acquisition and/or development of the regional parks system unit consistent with the Council-approved master plan. Grants for acquisition pay for the cost of real estate, relocation assistance, special assessments existing at the time land was designated for the regional system, land stewardship and legal fees and appraisals. Land stewardship is defined as boundary fencing or marking; stabilizing or rehabilitating natural resources to aid in the reestablishment of threatened natural resources or to prevent non-natural deterioration thereof; preventing the deterioration of existing structures; removal of unneeded structures, dangerous land forms or attractive nuisances;

maintaining or closing existing roads; and developing the unit to support minimal recreational use, including access roads, parking lots, signage and restrooms until capital improvement funds are available to develop the regional parks system unit.

## **Special Assessments**

Special assessments may be levied against parkland after its designation for the regional system. Such assessments are legitimate and grant-eligible when they are for benefits conferred on the park that are consistent with the approved master plan. To encourage prompt payment of such assessments by the regional park implementing agency, regional funds will not be used for special-assessment late-payment penalties and interest charges resulting from late payments unless the regional park implementing agency has requested funds from the Council to pay the special assessments and did not receive them.

Under the provisions of Minn. Stat. 473.334:

...the governing body [charging the assessment] shall not consider any use of the property other than as regional recreation open space property at the time that the special assessment is determined. The Metropolitan Council shall not be bound by the determination of the governing body of the city but may pay a lesser amount, as agreed upon by the Metropolitan Council and the governing body of the city, as they determine is the measure of benefit to the land for the improvement.

This statute does not pertain to assessments on Bald Eagle-Otter Lake Regional Park land located in White Bear Township. Special assessments on that park are governed by Minn. Stat. 435.19. Once a final decision has been made on a challenged assessment, regional funds may be used for the assessment and for any penalties and interest incurred during the time of challenging the assessment, as well as for the regional park implementing agency's legal costs in challenging the assessment if agreed to previously by the Council.

## **Payment in Lieu of Local Property Taxes**

Under the provisions of Minn. Stat. 473.341, 180 percent of the property taxes due to the city or township are paid when land is acquired for the regional parks system. This provides a financial cushion to the loss of that tax base to the city or township. The payment in lieu of taxes is an eligible land acquisition grant expenditure.

The Metropolitan Council will make acquisition grants to implementing agencies to include land costs, relocation assistance, land stewardship, special assessments and fees for appraisal and legal services and payment in lieu of taxes under the conditions stated above.

## **Revenue from Nonrecreational Uses**

Lands acquired with regional funds are to be used for regional parks system purposes. On occasion, usually during, but not limited to, a period prior to development, land may be used in various other ways. The Council has defined the following nonrecreation uses as consistent with regional parks system purposes:

1. Sale of buildings, equipment or materials acquired with land;
2. Rent or lease of buildings to protect structures or secure services for the park; and
3. Rent or lease of land for park benefits.

All uses of this kind must be consistent with the approved master plan. Revenue that implementing agencies receive from such uses may be used in regional park lands for land stewardship or for the capital costs of providing recreation opportunities; otherwise, they will be returned to the Council. Any other use requires prior Council consent.

Revenue from recreation uses in regional parks system units consistent with the master plan shall be used for park purposes as determined by the regional park implementing agency. Revenues generated by nonrecreational uses in regional park lands, consistent with an approved master plan, shall be used in regional park lands either for stewardship or for the capital costs of providing regional recreation opportunities, unless the Council consents to another use. Implementing agencies shall make an annual report of such revenues when their revenues exceed an amount determined by the Council. Unused nonrecreational revenues will be returned to the Council by the end of the year succeeding the one in which they are earned.

## **Enterprise Activities**

Regional parks, park reserves and special features may contain enterprise-fund recreation facilities that are compatible with the natural-resource base of the unit and do not conflict with the primary recreation uses of the park unit. Enterprise-fund recreation facilities include any facility that is expected to generate sufficient revenues to pay its own costs, such as golf courses and downhill ski areas. These facilities are not eligible for regional parks system funds from the Metropolitan Council for the following reasons:

1. Enterprise-fund facilities are expected to generate sufficient revenues to pay their own costs. Such enterprise-fund recreation facilities should raise money for their development and operation in the same way as their private sector counterparts.
2. The Minnesota Amateur Sport Commission provides funds for amateur sport facilities. Consequently, no regional parks system funds should be used to develop amateur athletic facilities since they have their own sources of public and private funding.

## **Equal Access**

Development financed with regional funds and subsequent park operation must be carried out in a manner consistent with this policy plan, whether the land was acquired with regional funds or not. Development grant contract agreements require the regional park implementing agency to operate and maintain the facility so as to provide access to all persons in the region as described in the approved master plan.

## **Design Plans**

When master plans are first approved, it is often true that large or complex recreation facilities are only conceptually described. When development of a particular recreation facility within a regional system component is imminent and when funds allocated in the CIP are available, the regional park implementing agency may request a grant. Upon Council approval, the regional park implementing agency may use an agreed-upon portion of the allocated amount to prepare construction documents through what is generally defined as the design development phase of the project. If preferred, the regional park implementing agency may proceed with design in advance of a grant and request reimbursement. The remainder of the grant will be used to construct the project after the Commission has reviewed the nature, scope and cost of the project for consistency with the approved master plan and the regional CIP.

The Metropolitan Council will make development grants to implementing agencies as follows:

- Development grants will be made for improvements such as recreational buildings, utilities, roads, parking and landscaping in regional parks, park reserves, trail corridors and special-use areas.
- Development grants may be made for natural resource rehabilitation within peak reserves and conservation zones of regional parks.
- The costs of preparing and executing construction documents for development are grant-eligible, including consultations with natural resource professionals to insure the development does not adversely affect the park system unit's natural resource features.
- The Council may approve development grants prior to the preparation of construction documents for a project. Construction of such a project will not proceed until the Commission has been made fully aware of the nature, scope and estimated complete cost as determined in the design development phase of the process.
- Regional park implementing agencywide improvements are grant-eligible expenses. When such eligible regional park implementing agency-wide facilities are also used for other than regional park purposes, the regional funding will be on a negotiated, pro-rated basis.

## **Closing Grants and Conditions for Returning Grant Funds to the Metropolitan Council**

Financial transactions of regional parks system grants are reported quarterly over a year's time and audited. A final report is completed and given a final audit when the project is completed. Under the terms of the agreements, grant agreements are to be "closed" once all grant-eligible work has been completed and paid for with grant funds. Any unexpended grant funds held by the regional park implementing agency must be returned to the Council when the grant is closed. It is in the interest of the Council and the implementing agencies to close out completed projects in a timely manner and free up unexpended funds for other projects. To ensure that completed grants are closed, unexpended grant funds

shall be returned to the Metropolitan Council when grant agreements are closed or under the following procedure:

1. There has been no financial activity reported for the grant over an 18-month period.
2. The Metropolitan Council will notify the regional park implementing agency of the lack of activity on the grant and give the regional park implementing agency six months to complete any grant-eligible work or to close the grant immediately and refund any unexpended grant funds.
3. If the regional park implementing agency needs more than six months to complete the work, it must request an extension and explain the need for the extension. Extensions will be given under the authorization of the Metropolitan Park and Open Space Commission.

### **Executing Minor Amendments to Grant Agreements**

To maximize the efficiency of the work of the Commission and the Metropolitan Council, the Council has authorized its regional administrator to execute minor amendments to regional parks system grant agreements if such amendments meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. The amendment is consistent with the *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan*.
2. The amendment does not change the intent of the grant agreement in any essential respect.
3. The amendment extends the duration of the grant agreement.
4. The amendment clarifies the Council's intent in entering the agreement.
5. The amendment does not change the total amount of the grant.
6. The amendment reflects changes officially adopted by the Council in the *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan*.
7. The amendment is required under terms of the contract the Council has with the state agency that transmits state funds for the grant agreements.
8. The amendment reflects changes officially adopted by the Council in Council policies or procedures (for example, changes in affirmative action plans or grant management procedures).
9. The amendment executes restrictive covenants on land acquired with regional parks system funds or releases restrictive covenants to permit another land use compatible with the park (for example, widening a county road that also provides access to the adjacent park).

