Park, Arts, and Recreation Commission

April 9, 2014

DRAFT minutes - Excerpt

MN River Valley Master Plan Presentation Item #3B

Quale presented to the Commission the MN River Valley Master Plan project. Quale noted that he was looking for input on the vision, goals, principles, opportunities, public engagement approach and schedule. He stated and elaborated on the goals of the master plan which are to enhance access, improve utilization, increase awareness and protect and preserve the area.

Quale stated that there were many potential areas where we could consider enhancing access for trailheads. He noted that the locations must be considerate of neighbors and will have further discussion in the future. Quale also mentioned there would be need for compromise regarding access because trailheads can widely vary in size, shape and amenities.

Quale noted that there are many opportunities for utilization in the MN River Valley, but again the City would need to be sure that new facilities would not cause negative impacts on the sensitive natural areas. Ideas for utilization include but are not limited to trail connections, interpretive signage, mountain biking challenge course, marina, picnic shelters, rest rooms, drinking fountains, horseshoes pits and many more. Quale said that the City will count on the public to provide input as to potential uses of the MN river valley which will be submitted to the City Council, who will make the ultimate decisions regarding utilization.

In regards to protecting and preserving the MN River Valley, Quale mentioned that a Hennepin County natural resources inventory had been completed in 2007 and that it will be highly utilized when compiling the master plan. Quale stated that the plan will identify areas that should be protected and will develop best practices for natural resources maintenance practices. Quale stated that at this point in the planning process he is using the rule of thumb that at least 80 percent of the river valley lands should remain in a natural condition and no more than 20 percent of the land may be developed. He noted that this is in line with the Metropolitan Council's policy for park reserves but made sure to note that this could change.

Quale laid out the schedule for the master plan noting its anticipated completion date in December 2014. He stated there would be many opportunities for the public to provide input through focus groups, community open houses and online surveys. Quale then opened up the floor to the Commissioners for comments and questions.

Lee asked if the master plan was being done to augment the possible state trail or if it was being done to replace the project if it were to fall through. Quale noted that the City is trying to be proactive and improve access and utilization, whether or not the state trail is approved. He also mentioned that the 2008 Bloomington Parks and Recreation Master Plan was not very specific as to future plans for the MN River Valley, and it's important to create a plan for the future utilization of the MN River Valley.

Lee then asked if the City were to increase its access points if this would change the route of the State trail. Quale said that any connections to the state trail would be the responsibility of the property owner (City or U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service). He noted that some of the funding for the Long Meadow Bridge reconstruction does include connections.

Visitor John Crampton stated his support for the MN State Trail and the master plan for the MN River Valley. He noted the success of the Root River Trail and how it has enhanced the area. He also mentioned that the trail will bring people from other communities to see what the City has to offer, as well as provide as service to the residents.

Stan Danielson mentioned the Old Cedar Ave. Bridge and the construction to be done at the trailhead in that area. He noted that they will be putting in a new parking lot and possibly new bathroom facilities. He requested that the bathroom facilities be ADA-compliant, so they are wheelchair accessible.

Quale thanked the visitors for coming regarding the presentation and encouraged them to sign up for the Esubscribe on the City website to make sure they don't miss anything involving this project in the future. Esubscribe will notify its users of upcoming meetings and any further developments with the project.

CITY OF
BLOOMINGTON
MINNESOTA

PLANNING COMMISSION SYNOPSIS

Thursday, April 9, 2015

CALL TO ORDER	Chairperson Nordstrom called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Bloomington Civic Plaza.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Nordstrom, Willette, Spiess, Batterson, Fischer, Bennett, Goodrum
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:
STAFF PRESENT: Markegard, Fields, Farnham, Heyman, Quale, Hiller

Chairperson Nordstrom led the attendees in the reciting of *The Pledge of Allegiance*.

ITEM 2	**CASE:**	N/A
6:43 p.m.	**APPLICANT:**	City of Bloomington
(Study Item)	**LOCATION:**	Minnesota River Valley
	REQUEST:	Discuss Minnesota River Valley Master Plan Update

SPEAKING FOR THE APPLICANT:

Julie Farnham, Senior Planner

PUBLIC HEARING DISCUSSION:

Farnham provided a presentation summarizing progress on the Minnesota River Valley Master Plan. The update was divided into four topics: recent input, top priorities, feedback and next steps. Farnham explained that back in November, general recommendations were presented around the four goals of the plan which included: enhanced access, improve utilization, increase awareness and understanding, and to protect and preserve natural and cultural resources. After receiving input on these goals, staff put together some site specific recommendations and conducted valley tours with Council members last January. Since then staff has refined the plan and recommendations. Staff performed an exercise to help prioritize specific recommendations. Through that exercise, it was determined more study is needed before very detailed recommendations and priorities can be made particularly given very limited funding.

Farnham described the top priorities groups: 1) complete ongoing activities, 2) system-wide plans, 3) process and management related activities, and 4) site specific improvements. Farnham identified the top priorities in the ongoing activities group as: park asset inventory, Old Cedar Avenue Bridge Reconstruction, and the Minnesota Valley State Trail. The system-wide plan priorities are identified as: master trail plan, master sign plan, comprehensive maintenance plan, and natural resource protection plan. The process and management related priorities are identified as: update Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), pursue Metropolitan Regional Parks System designation, strengthen partnerships with interest groups, and leverage existing communication tools. The site specific improvement priorities are identified as Trailheads and Access. More specific recommendations about trailhead improvements will be provided once the park asset inventory is complete.

Farnham stated there are three types of costs: capital improvements, maintenance, and operating and programming costs. Funding for these costs can be divided into existing sources and new sources. Existing sources are identified as: general fund, storm utility fund, strategic priorities fund, park dedication funds, grants, and partnerships. New sources may include: Metropolitan Regional Park System (Park Reserve) funds which include LCCMR and Legacy Funds.

COMMENTS AND INPUT OF THE COMMISSION:

Staff asked for input and comments from the commission regarding four questions:
Do you agree with the top priorities? Should additional funding be budgeted to complete any priority tasks? Should additional staff time be dedicated to complete any priority tasks? Given limited funding, what should be done within the next five years?

Bennett asked staff to comment on any requirements that may come along with being a part of the Metropolitan Regional Park System (Park Reserve). Farnham stated one of the key requirements to be part of the Metropolitan Regional Park System is that 80 percent must remain natural and undeveloped (parking lots and trails would be considered developed). Farnham noted that an analysis of the existing lands would need to be completed to verify this requirement can be met. Bennett asked staff to comment on whether the funds that may become available to the City as being a part of the Metropolitan Regional Park System (Park Reserve) would be significant enough to make the process worthwhile. Quale (Parks and Recreation Manager) introduced himself and stated the City currently receives approximately $300,000 a year from the Met Council and the State of Minnesota (Legacy funds) and bonding dollars every two years of approximately $250,000 – $430,000. He noted that a 50 percent increase could be realized which would have a tremendous impact on the ability of the City to maintain and develop the park land.

Goodrum asked for clarification from Quale regarding park lands within Bloomington and the relationship with other entities. Quale stated the Hyland/Bush/Anderson Parks reserve is jointly operated by the City and Three Rivers Park District.

Nordstrom stated given the City of Bloomington is not the only player in the Minnesota River Valley (DNR, U.S. Fish & Wildlife), is the vision for the Valley similar for the various players. Quale explained the City's Master Plan is reliant upon the DNR Trail decisions as the trail will cross City and U.S. Fish and Wildlife owned land. Until the State Trail alignment is finalized, we cannot make final plans for connective trails.

Nordstrom asked if there are any real significant barriers out there or are the visions of the various entities close enough together where a mutual solution can be agreed upon. Farnham explained the City owned land would be the only portion of the Valley eligible for Metropolitan Regional Park System (Park Reserve) funding. Quale added the 80/20 provision would be a provision the U.S. Fish & Wildlife would see as a benefit consistent with their vision to ensure preservation.

Spiess stated she appreciates the staff time and effort being put into this update. She stated the Minnesota River Valley and the Highland Park Reserve are two jewels of our City. They are the kinds of things, along with what is going on within the South Loop District and the infrastructure improvements going on all over the City that make Bloomington special and attract families who want to live and work in Bloomington. Spiess added she has been using these trails and frequently talks with users of the trails and it is something that should not be neglected. She supports continued dedication of time and resources to this project and that anything we can do to enhance the area is good for the community.

Goodrum asked staff to comment on any private property within Bloomington located in the Valley. Quale stated there are a few parcels south of the Dwan Golf Course that are included in the Master Plan, but the City is not actively seeking those parcels now, but are interested in acquiring/purchasing them in the future. Goodrum asked Quale to comment on if the City were to become part of the Metropolitan Regional Park System (Park Reserve) would be under more pressure to become more aggressive in obtaining the private parcels. Quale stated he did not believe so. Goodrum asked Quale if all of this would come under one budget or if there would be shared funding sources. Quale stated there would be multiple funding sources, with the largest being the General Fund. He added, historically, the Valley has received very little funding, but that more funding will be needed in the future for maintenance and to accommodate increased use of the area. Quale added that usage of the Valley in the Old Cedar Avenue Bridge area may be a good indicator of what may happen in the rest of the Valley.

Fischer stated he believes this is an important asset for the City and is currently being neglected. He added many cities do not have an asset such as this and it is time for Bloomington to capitalize on its assets just as Minneapolis has done and is known as the City of Lakes.

Willette asked staff to comment on why parking is counted as developed land when computing the 80/20 calculations. Quale explained the standards are set by the Met Council and parking areas would count as developed area. Quale noted that in some locations old, unused parking lots could be removed and converted to natural areas (Mounds Spring Park). Willette stated he believes that since public transportation to these areas is not provided, the parking areas should not be counted as a developed area. Nordstrom asked if parking provided outside of the Valley would be counted as developed land. Quale stated no.

Goodrum commented that staff is doing a wonderful job on this and he likes where we are going. He added the natural resources within the City is what makes Bloomington special and he would love to see access and awareness continue to grow and make Bloomington even more special for the future.

Farnham explained this item will be reviewed by Council on May 11 and any comments you may have can be directed to her email or to contact her via her work phone. She added there will also be time to comment after the May 11 Council date.

Farnham reviewed the project schedule stating there will be a public open house where staff will be seeking input in June and official input again in August during final review and approval process.

Quale stated there is controversy regarding the State Trail. He explained the State Trail plan is to have two trails, one natural surfaced trail and an improved ADA compliant trail. He stated the mountain bike community are clearly opposed to having any type of paved trail in the Valley. Quale explained that until the DNR finishes their concept plans and brings them forward for public input, it is premature for the City to weigh in on the trail design. He added the City does support the concept of a DNR State trail and staff are monitoring progress on DNR's plans. He stated giving additional users access to the trails and the trail being ADA compliant has a lot of validity.

The meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Prepared By: MH **Reviewed By:** GM, MC, JF

Approved By Planning Commission: _____

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