

Originator Parks and Recreation	Item <b>Minnesota River Valley Master Plan Update - Strategic Initiatives</b>
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Date 9/9/2015
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Description
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## BACKGROUND

In April and May, staff presented the recommended priorities proposed in the draft *Minnesota Valley Strategic Plan* (f/k/a *Minnesota Valley Master Plan*) to the Park, Arts and Recreation Commission, Planning Commission and City Council. The draft Minnesota Valley Strategic Plan (MVSP) identified several priority activities, including preparation of four more detailed system wide plans addressing natural and cultural resources, trails, signs, and maintenance.

At those meetings, Commission and Councilmembers requested additional details specific to the system plans and other proposed priorities in order to compare and assign priority to the list of projects. Over the summer, staff prepared detailed outlines of the proposed priority projects, including estimates of staff time and consultant assistance needed to complete each project. Cost estimates were also made for anticipated consultant assistance. Staff also prepared a timeline to illustrate the expected duration of each project and “critical path” sequencing. It became clear that some tasks provided valuable foundational information and should be completed before other projects began, while other projects could occur simultaneously and/or independently.

The MnDNR’s Minnesota Valley State Trail project was also considered in the timeline. While the process and timing to complete this project is beyond the City’s control, staff concluded that certain priority projects – particularly the proposed master trail plan – should not commence until plans for the State Trail were solidified. Based on information obtained from MnDNR staff, final plans and required environmental documentation should be completed by the end of 2016, with trail construction to commence in 2017.

## OVERVIEW OF UPDATE

Descriptions of the scope of work required to complete a project were prepared for most of the proposed priority projects identified in the draft MVSP. These outlines identify tasks and the associated staff and consultant time needed to complete the projects. A timeline was prepared to describe project sequencing and duration. The outlines and timeline are enclosed. Following is an overview of the information provided in the project outlines and timeline.

**Tasks** – Items requiring consultant assistance are called out. All other items are assumed to be tasks that existing staff can complete.

**Staff time** – An attempt was made to translate staff time into FTE equivalents and/or percent of work load. The staff time estimates assume that described tasks will be completed by existing staff. Staff also believes that many of the tasks can be absorbed into current workloads, particularly given the proposed project timing and duration, which allows flexibility to fit these projects in as time permits and coordinate with other staff assignments and priorities.

It is also assumed that the inter-departmental staff team convened to prepare the MVSP will continue to work together to coordinate and complete the priority projects. The MVSP has been meeting monthly or bi-monthly for much of the past two years. While staff from Planning and Parks and Recreation co-managed and led the project, tasks were shared among other team members depending on skills and expertise needed. The project team led the public engagement effort related to the MVSP (open houses, preparation of website materials, stakeholder engagement, etc.). This role is proposed to continue as needed for the proposed priority projects (e.g., preparation of system plans).

**Consultant time** – Estimates for consultant services were based on similar projects and discussions with potential providers. Funding for consultant services could come from allocations from the General Fund and/or strategic Priorities funding. It is noted that funding for consultant assistance with the Minnesota River Valley portion of the Park Asset Inventory is currently earmarked in the 2015 Parks and Recreation Division General Fund budget.

**Timeline** - The timeline assumes work on priority projects will commence in 2016, after the MVSP is approved; which is assumed to occur by end of this year. However, one priority project – the Park Asset Inventory – is proposed to begin this fall. The timeline indicates that all priority projects could be completed over the next 2 ½ years if consistent resource allocation is provided.

## REQUESTED INPUT

The purpose of this review is to get input and direction regarding the priorities proposed in the MVSP.

**Project Priorities and Timing** - The project sequence illustrated in the timeline reflects staff's recommended priority for completing the priority projects. A summary of the sequencing (priority), duration, and timing is provided below.

Sequence/ Priority	Project	Duration	Timing
1	Park Asset Inventory (MN Valley)	7 months	Oct 2015-May 2016
2	Resource Protection Plan (natural and cultural resources run concurrent)	11 months	Jan 2016-Nov 2016
3	Update MOU w/FWS	12 months	Jan 2016-Dec 2016
4	Maintenance Plan (re: natural & cultural resources)	6 months	Jan 2017 - June 2017
5	Master Sign Plan	12 months	Jan 2017 – Dec 2017
5	Master Trail Plan	12 months	Jan 2017 – Dec 2017
6	Maintenance Plan (re: signs and trails)	6 months	Jan 2018 – June 2018

Other priorities discussed during the spring meetings were: enhancing communication (website, newsletter) and pursuing Metropolitan Regional Park Reserve designation. With regard to communication, this is really a continuation of current efforts to provide information to the public about City projects, events, and news. The recommendation is to make this effort more intentional, by assigning a staff person to serve as the liaison with the City's Communications staff to ensure timely posting of information on the website, compile and prepare information for the newsletter, and identify opportunities to engage other outlets (e.g., social media, Bloomington Today stories, etc.).

The task of pursuing regional park preserve designation was also discussed as an opportunity to explore. Over the summer staff reached out to Metropolitan Council Regional Parks staff to begin this discussion. However, the feasibility of designation – in the foreseeable future - is unclear given the 2040 Metropolitan Regional Parks and Open Space System Plan was just adopted and does not identify the Minnesota River Valley for designation. Staff believes there is benefit to continue to explore this, but doing so is not intended to supplant any of the other priority tasks. In fact, the information provided by the proposed system plans can be used to prepare (and thus streamline) the extensive application that must be submitted to formally initiate consideration of regional park designation by the Met Council.

### Key questions:

1. Do you concur that all the projects identified should be undertaken? If not, what projects should be removed from consideration?
2. Do you agree with the project sequencing/priority and duration recommended by staff? If not, what changes should be made?

3. Do you support completing the projects in the anticipated 2 ½ year timeframe, or should the timeline be extended to reduce the annual resource commitment?

**Resources/Budget** - The detailed project descriptions estimate staff time and consultant time/fees needed to complete the proposed projects. As noted above, it is anticipated that staff time needed to complete the projects could be absorbed into current staff workloads without significant impacts to other assignments. A rough estimate of staff hours needed to complete all the projects over the 2 ½ year period totals approximately 1,250-1,600 hours; the equivalent of about 0.25-0.32 FTE per year. This time would be shared between several staff and departments.

A rough estimate of consultant fees needed to complete all these projects is about \$95,000, not including the \$20,000 already available (2015 budget) to complete the Park Asset Inventory of the City’s MN River valley properties. Based on the proposed timeline, estimated annual expenditures on consultant fees are summarized below:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Consultant Fees</b>
2015	Park Asset Inventory	\$20,000 (available)
2016	Natural & Cultural Resources Plan	\$20,000
2017	Sign Plan	\$30,000
	Trail Plan	\$45,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$95,000</b>

Key Questions:

1. Do you support committing \$95,000-\$100,000 to hire consultants to assist with these projects? If not, what projects/tasks should be removed from consideration? Note – the 2016 proposed budget does not currently include funding for these projects.
2. Do you support committing the proposed staff resources to complete these projects? If not, what projects/task should be removed from consideration?

**PUBLIC INPUT UPDATE**

Throughout the planning process, City staff has sought input from other governmental agencies, property owners, and stakeholders. Early public input on the MVSP was received through an online survey (summer 2014), a community open house (summer 2014), stakeholder meetings (summer 2014), and through email and written correspondence. Public input over the past year has included:

- **Community Open House** –held on June 17 in the Council Chambers. About 125 people attended. In addition to City staff, staff from the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge was on hand. MnDNR staff was invited, but did not attend. Also in attendance were Mayor Winstead and Representative Ann Lenczewski. The open house provided an opportunity for public input on the draft recommendations in the MVSP. A comment box and survey were available for attendees to provide written comments on the plan. By far, the focus of most questions and comments was the MnDNR State Trail project; specifically the proposal to provide a paved surface trail.
- **Stakeholder Meetings** – In June staff met with key stakeholders to obtain input on the draft recommendations in the MVSP. Stakeholders included other government agencies (e.g., Three Rivers Park District, Dakota County, FWS, MnDNR, and State legislators), and special interest groups (e.g., Friends of the MRV, the Izaak Walton League, and MORC). Stakeholders expressed support for preparation of the proposed more detailed system plans. There was general agreement that the Resource Protection Plan should be completed first.
- **Other Public Engagement** – The project webpage was updated to make available the draft MVSP document (revised per study session input) and provides current information on project schedule and opportunities for public input.

- **Online Survey** – An online survey was available on the website from May 20 to June 30, 2015. Approximately 86 respondents. Similar to comments received at the open house, the majority of survey responses focused on the State Trail project and proposed paved surface.

Summaries of comments received are available on the project web page at [www.blm.mn/mnrivervalley](http://www.blm.mn/mnrivervalley), see ‘Documents Library’. Other documents related to the MVSP, including the May 2015 draft MVSP document are also available on the project web page.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

This update information is scheduled to be reviewed with PARC (September 9), Planning Commission (September 10 - study), and City Council (September 21 – study). Once staff received input and direction on the plan priorities, the draft MVSP will be revised and scheduled for final, formal review and approval as follows:

- **Finalize MVSP document** – Staff anticipates revising and preparing a formatted version of the MVSP by the end of November.
- **Final Review** – It is anticipated that the final MVMP will be ready for final review by the Commissions and City Council in November and December.

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#### Requested Action

No formal action is required. Staff seeks input on the proposed implementation priorities in the draft MVSP.

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#### Attachments:

Priority Project Outlines and Timeline