PLANNING COMMISSION SYNOPSIS

Thursday, September 10, 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
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Bennett, Goodrum
STAFF PRESENT: Farnham, Heyman, O'Day

ITEM 1 6:03 p.m.	**APPLICANT:**	City of Bloomington
	REQUEST:	Study Discussion on Minnesota River Valley Master Plan Update

SPEAKING FOR THE APPLICANT:

Julie Farnham, Senior Planner
Liz Heyman, Planner

PUBLIC HEARING DISCUSSION:

Farnham noted when the draft was reviewed last spring, the City Council asked staff to give more detail before any decisions are made. She reiterated that the top priorities include:

- Top Priorities
  - Complete ongoing activities
    - State Trail
    - Old Cedar Avenue bridge construction
  - System-wide plans
    - Master Trail Plan
    - Sign plan
    - Comprehensive maintenance plan
    - Resource Protection Plan
  - Process and management related activities
    - Park Asset inventory
    - Update memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife
    - Institute intentional communication strategies with the website, newsletter, new technologies on an ongoing basis

Comments:
Nordstrom asked if there has been major agreement on the tasks with other partners. Farnham noted that staff has met with other partners recently. For the most part, the partners agreed the system-wide plan is more of a strategic plan. There is also agreement that the Natural Resource Protection Plan should proceed first.

Nordstrom asked about the Comprehensive Maintenance Plan, specifically about the budget and overall tasks. Farnham said that The Maintenance Plan will be split into two pieces, a natural/cultural based plan and a facility based plan that will include the sign and trail plans.

Nordstrom asked about the specifics of the State Trail. Farnham stated the State Trail is a MN DNR project. The City will primarily look at connections to the State Trail as part of our Master Trail Plan. The Sign Plan will identify and coordinate consistent signage for those connections to the trail.

Willette said the access point from the Pond House has limited signage. Farnham noted that in the trail and sign plans, there will be discussion about connections and improvements on the Pond Dakota site.

- Project Timeline
  - The system-wide plans are intertwined and laid out in the project timeline
  - The timeline reflects the shortest estimated timeline to complete all priority projects
  - Timeline assumes:
    - Beginning in 2016 after the Strategic Plan is approved. However, the Asset Inventory could begin this fall.
    - A minimum of 2 ½ years to complete all projects
    - Longer time will be needed if staff needed for other priorities

Comments:
Willette asked if there will be any new facilities. Farnham noted the new facilities, if any, will be identified in the Sign Plan and Trail Plan.

Nordstrom asked about the DNR's organization. He asked about challenges in communication and organization. Farnham noted that communication is a big challenge.

Farnham stated that staff has the information needed to create the cultural resources plan but have not compiled everything together. Staff will not be conducting any historical research or surveying. With the Natural Resource Plan, a consultant is needed with specific expertise in order to verify sensitive resources and best practices.

Fischer asked if the sign and trail plans need to be created before construction of the State Trail. Heyman stated the sign and trail plans would identify connections to the State Trail. Signage will only be created for city facilities but our intent is to coordinate with other agencies.

Nordstrom asked if staff will be analyzing primary uses of the trail. Farnham said that those detailed discussions will start with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife in the Memorandum of Understanding. City staff will coordinate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife to identify different types of users in the trail plan. Part of the Asset Inventory plan will be to evaluate ADA accessibility of the existing trails.

- Costs/Budget
  - Consultant fee for work with the Park Asset Inventory is $20,000 for 2015-2016
  - Cultural and Resources Plan - $20,000
  - Sign Plan - $30,000
  - Trail Plan - $45,000
  - Total: $95,000 and 0.25-0.32 full time employee/year

Comments:
Nordstrom said that staff time is a concern. Workload may increase and staff time is short. Farnham noted that the costs and staff time is an estimate. Staff believes the work can be done with existing staff. However, timing may be affected if priorities change.

- Next Steps
  - The draft plan needs to be finalized
  - PARC has reviewed the plan last night
  - The Plan will go to City Council on September 21, 2015
  - Staff anticipates the final plan will be ready for review by the Planning Commission in December for a public hearing and adoption.
  - Then staff will begin the implementation tasks starting in 2016.

Comments: Nordstrom asked about support from the general public.
Farnham said the master plan has become a way of venting about the State Trail even though they are separate projects. The people who show up to the open house are usually people who are not happy with the State Trail. So, it's been challenging to get much input on the overall plan recommendations.

Fischer said that the master plan is more of a bigger picture.

Willette noted that many people who attend the open houses do not want a paved trail.
Farnham said that the general public agrees that the Minnesota River Valley is an important asset. Fischer said that the Minnesota River Valley is an asset and helps us compete with other cities.

Farnham posed the following questions to the Planning Commission members:

Question: Should all proposed projects be undertaken? If not, what projects should be removed from consideration and/or delayed?

Nordstrom said that it might take longer to do the beginning tasks.
Fischer said it is beneficial to be prepared on the front end and find out what the DNR's plan is.
Willette asked how the agencies are communicating and cooperating. Farnham said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife are more open and flexible to new opportunities and challenges.
Farnham said U.S. Fish and Wildlife recognize this is an opportunity. The main frustration is that the DNR's timeframe for the State Trail has not been made clear

Question: Do you agree with project sequencing/priority and duration? If not, what changes should be made?

Batterson said the media promotion and natural resource plan will take a year to flesh out. It is important to get those things done.
Farnham said the Natural Resource Plan may take longer and may go beyond the estimated timeline.
Heyman said the Natural Resource Plan includes a fair amount of public outreach because of the number of involved partners. The purpose is to wrap them in the process and leverage their knowledge.

Question: Do you support the proposed timeline or should it be extended to reduce annual resource commitment?

Spiess stated she doesn't think this plan should be put off. The plan will naturally get people attracted. This is something Bloomington has to invest time and money in.

Fischer said this plan ties in with the investments of the South Loop and will attract people to the high-intensity South Loop District as well as the natural resources of the Minnesota River Valley.
Nordstrom said that the timeframe isn't easily predictable. Any project that has a design, construction, or engineering component will deal with short timelines. Short windows can be a concern especially with the winter season.
Fischer said that once time and money is put toward the plan, the natural tendency will be to move forward.
Farnham said that the system plans will identify specific projects that will be put into the City Improvement Plan.
Willette noted that the DNR is subject to the state legislature and could potentially stall the process.
Farnham said that even if the State Trail is delayed, moving forward on the City's plans can happen.

Question: Do you support committing funds to hire consultants: 2015 - $20,000; 2016- $20,000; 2017 - $75,000?

Willette asked if we should have more money allocated toward the beginning stages.
Farnham said the only task proposed in 2016 will be to hire the consultant for the Natural Resource Plan. The $75,000 proposed in 2017 will be allocated between the Sign Plan and Trail Plan.
Fischer said it makes sense to pay someone who knows what they're doing.
Spiess said this is the case where special expertise is needed.
Nordstrom noted it's most likely cheaper to hire someone who has the specific experience and knowledge.
Batterson suggested spending the money and getting it done.

Question: Do you support committing the proposed staff resources to these projects? Average .25-.32 FTE/a year

Batterson and Spiess said it makes sense to have staff spend time on this plan.
Nordstrom recommended that it may be beneficial to have someone to keep track of the timeline and communication flow.
Batterson asked about the 0.25-0.32 FTE/year. Farnham said it is a rough estimate. This will be divided between several individuals – depending on that expertise. For example, Mark in the Park and Recreation Department has expertise in cultural and natural resources. The Maintenance Department will be the main point of contact for creating the Maintenance Plan. Trail and signage will be staffed by the Planning Division and Public Works. It will be important to maintain communication between departments.

The meeting adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

Prepared By: EO **Reviewed By:** JF, LH

Approved By Planning Commission:
10/8/15