

**Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission
Meeting Minutes for August 27, 2014
Sartell City Hall**

Approved 9/24/14

Members Present: Rita Albrecht; Bill Bruins; Mike Hulett; Al Liefkort; Marc Mattice; Keith Nelson; Bryan Pike; Anita Rasmussen; Tom Ryan; Tom Schmitz; Barry Wendorf; LuAnn Wilcox

Members Absent: Rick Anderson

1. The meeting was called to order by Chair Al Liefkort

2. Motion by Hulett, second by Bruins: Approve the minutes of July 23, 2014 as written. **Carried.**

3. Approval of the Agenda

Motion by Wilcox, second by Ryan: Approve the agenda as written. **Carried.**

4. Acknowledge Members of the Public in Attendance

Jeff and Kathy Schoenbauer, Schoenbauer Consulting LLC
Joe Czapiewski, JFC Strategic Services (serving the commission as System Plan Coordinator)
Laura Preus, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

These were invited guests appearing on the agenda.

5. Unfinished Business

5.1 - District Planning Meeting Update

Joe reported on the second meeting of District Planning Committees (DPCs) held in Districts 4, 6, and 3. The committees discussed the evaluation criteria adopted by the commission in the *Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan* and the process for project prioritization, as influenced by trends in population, use, and history.

In an exercise to differentiate districts, define a district identity, and establish a baseline direction for District Master Plans, DPC members were asked to rank the relative importance of the three Parks and Trails Legacy Plan classifications: Regional Trail; Regional Park; Special Feature Regional Park. Then, members weighted the criteria in each classification to design district-specific priorities. (The abridged criteria are: high quality experience; preserves a natural setting or enhances connectivity; serves a population center or tourist destination; fills a regional gap.)

Commissioners who had participated in the exercise remarked that it helped committee members develop a district-wide perspective, putting parochial interests within the larger context and reaching consensus by aggregate. Noting that the DNR liaisons have been helpful in identifying trends and challenges, it will also be necessary to interface with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and local public works departments to integrate transportation systems and partner with them (i.e. share costs, save money) on projects wherever feasible (e.g. road shoulder connector trails). As individual projects are further scrutinized, the merits of a given acquisition or development may be eclipsed by logistical and/or economic realities, necessitating collaborative partnerships and strategic prioritization.

5.2 - Project Proposals Evaluation Team (ETeam) appointments

The commission evaluated ten applications for service on the ETeam and deliberated at length. Due consideration was given to professional background, geographical distribution, and demographic representation.

Motion by Nelson, second by Ryan: Appoint Bob Bierscheid, Dennis Fink, Wayne Sames, George Watson, and Kurt Wayne to the ETeam, with Martin Dibben as alternate in the event that a member becomes unable to fulfill their duties. **Motion carried.**

5.3 - Demonstration of GoMN System / Writing the System Plan

Al initiated a discussion regarding the work of the commission in 2015 by reiterating the statute mandating a *Statewide System Plan for Regional Parks and Trails*, and the importance of "defining how and who will staff this organization." He noted that the City of Bemidji has been providing good financial management, and Douglas County Public Works has allowed in-kind resources on behalf of commission work, but as the work volume and complexity increases, they cannot continue to provide these ancillary services. Stating that "It becomes really critical that we morph this organization into something that has an office space somewhere where we can conduct business," he determined that work on the system plan must begin immediately, and that the GoMN system, in concert with the work of the consultants is the starting point.

Al demonstrated the GoMN software system which inventories federal, state, regional, county, and municipal recreational amenities in layers that can be viewed individually or in aggregate to aid in analysis and planning. It can be accessed and referred to by the ETeam, the DPCs, the commission, and the legislature to evaluate proposed projects and determine priorities. The "Regionally Significant Parks" in the inventory will include all Legacy projects funded to date, and Al acknowledged Bill's work on entering those into GoMN.

Al proposed that the contract with Schoenbauer Consulting be extended to assist with writing the *Statewide System Plan for Parks and Trails in Minnesota*. Jeff offered an outline of the scope of services that would include: shaping the ETeam work effort in coordination with the System Plan Coordinator to flow into the system plan; facilitating work sessions with the commission and DPCs to do the groundwork of the system plan; working with Houston Engineering to integrate and arrange system data; preparing the system plan and editing final drafts; providing legislative testimony and attending hearings as needed; writing the fiscal plan by district. He estimated the cost of this work at \$60,000 to \$85,000.

Jeff suggested that another concern the commission should address is performance measurement methodology. Referring to metropolitan interests, he said "They're going to use performance measures they developed, based on visitation, and if that is the paradigm by which funding is judged, then Greater Minnesota doesn't have a chance" [in competing for legislative appropriations]. "The commission must shape the storyline ..." to articulate the long term vision for the system plan, demonstrate economic and tourism impacts, and quantify the benefits to quality of life in Minnesota. Such analysis is deeper, broader, and more nuanced than visitation data alone.

Al said that the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails *Coalition* has engaged the firm of Flaherty and Hood to coordinate lobbying efforts on its behalf, and that the commission will benefit from their efforts. "Our work will focus on the system plan draft, which will be refined

next spring and summer into something bullet proof and ensure that the commission continues and functions as the third leg of the stool" [along with the Metropolitan Council and DNR.]

Motion by Nelson, second by Mattice: Extend the current contract with Schoenbauer Consulting for up to \$65,000 with the scope of services as outlined. If additional work or time is needed they would be required to submit another proposal at that time.

Discussion included questions and concerns regarding the current commission budget as well as what the administrative infrastructure will cost. Al said there is approximately \$138,000 left from the first appropriation (for capacity building) and \$75,000 left from the supplemental appropriation (for the System Plan Coordinator and GoMN) and he was advised that up to 7% is typical for administrative overhead. The commission needs the FY2016 appropriation bill to allow up to 7% for office space and to hire an Executive Director and office staff, and to address the 4% now going to the DNR for grants administration. "To clearly define how we will handle state money, how we will write and monitor grants, is a difficult task that lies before us between now and the end of the year" Keith added that "we need to be there long before the legislative session" by actively engaging with legislators, seeking bill sponsors, and having contingency plans in place. **He asked that the commission add appointing a legislative subcommittee to the September meeting agenda.**

Motion carried.

5.4 - 2015 Legislation/Budget

This topic was covered in earlier discussion.

5.5 - Rural Development Commission (RDC) Liaison

Members discussed the need for consistent messages about applying for designation of regional significance. At this point, exceptions can be made to allow entities other than a city, county, or township (such as the RDC, CEDA, North Country Trail Association) to apply for designation in tier 1 and get partner(s) later to apply for funding in tier 2.

6. New Business

6.1 - DNR System Plan for State Parks and State Trails

Laura Preus presented an update on the DNR draft system plan that will guide investments in the next five to ten years and beyond. She pointed out that general fund support for parks has been flat for over a decade while operating expenses continue to increase, necessitating difficult budgetary decisions and strategic investments. Meanwhile, there are 2,400 miles of legislatively authorized trails, of which 1,200 have been developed. As more miles of trails are added to the system, more demands are placed on maintenance and operations while funding remains flat. Visitors expect a high quality experience and the DNR struggles to meet expectations with diminished resources.

Laura and the commissioners engaged in a dialogue about partnering opportunities, particularly within the "Partner-led Core Trails" classification. The commission asked for clarity about the Grant-In-Aid trail system and requested more collaboration regarding interconnectivity. Members also asked for information on which of the authorized trails the DNR will be developing and which specific segments or connections might be appropriately developed in partnership with the commission. Commissioners agreed that motorized trails

are integral to the system plan and although development dollars are available from other sources (i.e. license fees), there may be circumstances where Legacy funds can be directed to maintenance under the strategic directive to "take care of what we have" in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*.

7. Consent Agenda

Rita asked the commission to reconsider the motion passed at the July meeting to compensate the City of Bemidji for fiscal agency administration at 5% of the annual budget. The city's finance director estimated the fully burdened cost at 9%. **AI will discuss this with the finance director and return to the commission for discussion.**

Motion by Albrecht, second by Rasmussen: Approve the consent agenda as follows:

- JFC Strategic Services: \$9,104.00
- Houston Engineering: \$9,887.25
- Commissioners Expenses, Clerical Services: \$2,505.08
- DPC Members Expenses: \$2,283.89
- Fiscal Agent Administrative Fee: \$4,305.00

TOTAL: \$28, 085.22

Motion carried.

8. Items from members

8.1 - Recommend that members whose terms expire January 15, 2015 submit a letter to the Governor after the election in November to apply for re-appointment if they want to continue serving on the commission

8.2 - August 28: Tom R. reporting on commission business at the meeting of the coalition. He was asked to cover the ETeam, the Statewide System Plan, GoMN, and to inquire about their lobbying efforts and "plans to preserve the 40-40-20 split." **He will report back to the commission at the September meeting.**

8.3 - Next meeting agenda: report from ETeam; findings of DPC meetings in Districts 1, 2, 5. A list of applications for regional designation with park or trail name and lead applicant will be provided for review and discussion.

The next regular Commission meeting is scheduled for September 24, 2014.

Motion to adjourn was made by Mattice, second by Hulett. **Motion carried.**

*All motions are carried unanimously unless otherwise noted. Motions which are not unanimous are recorded in the Vote Tally Journal.