



Meeting Minutes: Dakota County Planning Commission Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes-Final

Date: 12/14/2023

Minutes prepared by Liz Hansen

Location: Western Service Center

Attendance

Members Present

- Jerry Rich
- Amy Hunting
- James Guttman
- Nate Reitz
- Tony Nelson
- Kelly Kausel
- Mike Cahn
- Dennis Peine
- Barry Graham
- Brady Folkestad
- Lori Hansen

Dakota County staff members attending:

- Kurt Chatfield, Planning Manager
- Georg Fischer, Physical Development Director
- Niki Geisler, Parks Director
- Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator
- Lil Leatham, Principal Planner
- Tom Lewanski, Parks Natural Resource Manager

Member(s) Absent:

- Jill Smith

Meeting Called to Order

- Time: 7:00 p.m.
- By Planning Commission Chair, Amy Hunting
- Commissioner Reitz joined the meeting at 7:01 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

- The Planning Commission opened the meeting by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comments

- Comments/Notes: No audience member wished to address an item not on the agenda.

Approval of Agenda

Chair Hunting asked if there were any changes to the agenda.

The Planning Commission advised no changes, additions, or deletions.

MOTION: Commissioner Folkestad moved, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, approving the agenda. Voice vote: Ayes – 10 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved

Approval of Minutes (from November 16, 2023)

Chair Hunting asked if there were any changes to the previous meeting's minutes.

The Planning Commission advised no changes, additions, or deletions.

MOTION: Commissioner Rich moved, seconded by Commissioner Graham, approving the previous meeting's minutes. Voice vote: Ayes – 10 – Nays – 0 Abstain – 0 – Approved

Item VI. Park System Plan Kick-Off – Information/Discussion (Lil Leatham, Principal Planner, and Tom Lewanski, Park Natural Resources Manager)

Niki Geisler, Parks Director; Lil Leatham, Principal Planner; and Tom Lewanski, Parks Natural Resources Manager, presented this topic and responded to questions.

The Planning Commission received an update on the kickoff of the Park System Plan. Staff provided an overview of the previous plan and shared comments and direction from the Physical Development Committee about their expectations and the scope of the new plan. Planning Commissioners provided comments on the plan's scope and suggested how to conduct the upcoming public engagement process.

Questions and comments by the Commissioners, along with responses from staff (*italics*):

Planning Commissioners commented about the rapid growth of park visits since 2008 and that the growth indicates that Dakota County is providing popular park facilities. Several other questions were raised about who is being served by the park system and who is not being served. Planning Commissioners suggested that staff attempt to gather data about who is visiting Dakota County parks and what facilities/programs have a truly regional draw. A comment was made that it is important to keep the mission of Dakota County's natural resource-based park system in mind to balance natural resource protection and stewardship with a desire for increased visitation.

Planning Commissioners discussed how increased use of the park system strains County staff and operating budgets. A comment was made that attracting staff for front-line service positions is increasingly difficult and that this problem also challenges many businesses. Dakota County may need to find innovative solutions to staffing challenges. One thing that may be helpful for the Dakota County Board is for staff to identify what service levels are possible with a range of staffing levels to provide options for policymakers.

Planning Commissioners suggested ways to provide services with limited resources to park visitors, such as working with businesses to sponsor concerts, partnerships with schools such as Dakota County Technical College, and inviting food vendors to sell food and beverages at trailheads and visitor centers to appeal to more visitors. In addition, it may be possible to generate revenue from some of these partnerships.

Planning Commissioners discussed the future of the park system and how Dakota County could improve on what exists today. Several comments were made about prioritizing attracting first-time visitors and offering signature facilities such as the bison reintroduction at Spring Lake Park Reserve. One suggestion was to build on the popularity of the county's greenway system by completing it and offering trail loops from greenways to increase popular appeal.

Several comments were made about getting the most out of Dakota County's current park investment. One possibility would be to offer a "passport" program for residents that encourages people to visit some of the less busy parks in southern Dakota County. Several comments were made about the need to market the Dakota County Park system to inform residents about existing park opportunities.

The topic of ADA accessibility was raised. A comment was made about the need to acknowledge the large number of people living with disabilities and provide facilities and equipment to meet their needs. A suggestion was made to work with senior facilities and nursing homes to make parks available to these groups. There may be opportunities to create partnerships with these facilities.

Planning Commissioners asked questions about potentially merging the Land Conservation Plan with the Natural Resources Park System Plan. *Staff described the overlap in these plans and how land protection, restoration, and natural resources management are common to both plans. Staff intend to recommend merging these plans as part of the larger Park System Plan update.*

Planning Commissioners discussed the possibility of adding new parks to the system. Chub Lake was mentioned as a new park possibility. *Staff responded that Chub Lake was evaluated at the time of the last park plan update and that it has the potential to be a new regional park. It could be looked at again.*

A question was raised about whether it would be possible to locate a new park in the north where more of Dakota County's population resides. *Staff responded that locating a large regional park in the north would be difficult because most of the land has been developed. One possibility would be to look at combining Thompson County Park with Kaposia City Park to create a regional park. Another option would be to work with smaller natural areas that may work as a nature center or in partnership with an existing nature center.*

The Planning Commission concluded its comments with a suggestion that the Park System Plan be developed in coordination with the plans for cities and state parks. Dakota County should coordinate and partner with these agencies, and the Park System Plan can help define the County's role.

Planning Manager Update and County Board Actions

Comments/Notes: Kurt Chatfield, Planning Manager, provided the Planning Commission with an update on the following County Board Actions:

- PDC considered 2024 Planning Commission Work Plan
- Opportunity for a combined meeting of Planning Commission and County Board in February
- PDC considered designating 105th Street as the preferred alignment for the Veterans Memorial Greenway
- Received an update on the proposed Park System Plan update

Upcoming Public Meetings – Community Outreach

Vermillion River Watershed Plan Public Meeting	January 16 th , 5-7pm Lakeville Water Treatment Facility
Vermillion River Watershed Plan Public Meeting	January 24 th , 5-7pm Pleasant Hill Library, Hastings

Topics for next meeting (Thursday, January 25, 2024)

Kurt Chatfield, Planning Manager, provided an overview of next month’s meeting topics:

- Election of Planning Commission Officers for 2024
- Establishment of meeting dates for 2024
- Review of work plan for 2024
- Miesville Ravine Park Reserve – Long-Range Plan
- Miesville Ravine Park Reserve – Natural Resources Management Plan

Planning Commissioner Announcements/Updates:

A commissioner asked for an update on the decriminalization of park violations. Staff responded that this topic was on the County’s legislative priority list, but Dakota County’s new approach is to work with other regional park implementing agencies on a combined legislative request.

A commissioner asked for an update on whether the Board had adopted the park regulations (Ordinance No. 107) that the Planning Commission worked on. *Staff responded that the County Board approved the ordinance, which has been in effect as of October 15, 2023.*

Adjournment

Chair Hunting asked for a motion to adjourn.

MOTION: Commissioner Folkestad moved, seconded by Commissioner Hansen, to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 p.m. Voice Vote: Ayes – 11 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved.

Next Regular Meeting: Thursday, January 25, 2024, at 7:00 p.m., Dakota County Western Service Center, Apple Valley

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator