



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

Date: 5/23/2024

Minutes prepared by Liz Hansen

Location: Western Service Center

## Attendance

### Members Present

- Jerry Rich
- Amy Hunting
- James Guttman
- Tony Nelson
- Kelly Kausel
- Dennis Peine
- Lori Hansen
- Jill Smith
- Barry Graham

### Dakota County staff members attending:

- Kurt Chatfield, Planning Manager
- Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator
- Niki Geisler, Parks Director
- Lil Leatham, Principal Planner

### Member(s) Absent:

- Mike Cahn
- Brady Folkestad

## Meeting Called to Order

- Time: 7:00 p.m.
- By Chair, Commissioner Amy Hunting

## 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 Graham moved, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, approving the agenda. Voice vote: Ayes – 9 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved**

## Approval of Minutes (from March 28, 2024)

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 Hansen moved, seconded by Commissioner Rich, approving the previous meeting's minutes. Voice vote: Ayes – 9 – Nays – 0 Abstain – 0 – Unanimously Approved**

Chair Hunting emphasized using Robert's Rules of Order during the meeting to maintain decorum. The planning commission members were instructed to raise their hands and wait to be called on to facilitate an organized meeting.

## Dakota County 2050 Vision for Parks and Natural Resources - Information (Lil Leatham – Planning Office, Niki Geisler – Parks Department)

The Planning Commission received an update on the project's purpose and process. They reviewed the 2030 vision and goals and provided direction for 2050 updates. They also identified priority areas for future discussion on great, connected, and protected places and consistent funding.

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

Commissioners discussed whether the park system should remain solely nature-based or be adapted to accommodate new desires and needs. A comment was made that nature-based activities could be interpreted more broadly to include healthy and enjoyable activities that people do outside. A question was asked about whether Dakota County residents were leaving Dakota County to visit parks outside of the County. *Staff responded that the export rate to parks outside of Dakota County is significantly lower than in 2008 when the last Park System Plan was prepared. This is likely because Dakota County has invested in providing popular activities and facilities such as greenways since 2008.*

A Commissioner inquired about whether recent mild winters may be one reason that park visitation has increased. *Staff responded that mild weather may result in increased visitation, but the absence of snow also results in a drop off of cross-country skiing at locations such as Lebanon Hills Regional Park.*

Commissioners discussed visitation trends and noted the differences in visitation between gender, income, age, and racial representation at Dakota County Parks. Several comments were made about how the availability of free time and access to public transit may influence visitation. It was noted that most of Dakota County parks are not accessible by transit and that many parks are located in rural areas. A comment was made that Dakota County should explore expanding transit services to parks and consider providing activities that may appeal to residents who are not currently visiting. Older or vulnerable residents may also need facilities such as shelters or drop-off locations protected from the elements.

Several Commissioners pointed out that when looking at what the park system can provide, it is also important to look at the attributes of each individual park. Some parks may be better suited to providing recreational activities whereas other parks that have high quality natural resources or offer a natural setting may not be appropriate for some recreational uses. There was a general discussion about the importance of protecting natural resources and the need to look at parks in the system individually. Several comments were made about how the recent improvements at Thompson County Park appear to be serving different demographic groups, although since Thompson is not a regional park, those numbers are probably not in the Metropolitan Council's regional park visitation data.

Planning Commissioners discussed whether new units could be added to the Park System to serve northern Dakota County residents better. A comment was made that Marcott Lakes could be looked at as a regional park candidate. A planning Commissioner also mentioned the benefits of locating parks integrated with housing so that parks are more accessible and central to people's lives.

Within a broader discussion of looking at new park search areas, planning Commissioners discussed the reuse of landfills. Several Commissioners commented on the potential for reuse of landfills as parks, and a comment was made that if a landfill is proposed for repurposing as a park, that the landfill should be regulated and managed in a way so that it can be repurposed in the future.

A comment was made that Dakota County may want to consider celebrating and interpreting its farming heritage either within existing parks or possibly in a new park.

A Planning Commissioner commented that the map that shows greenways should show that the ring route trail adjacent to Cliff Road has been completed. Planning Commissioners discussed the status of the Lebanon Hills Regional Park Connector Trail. *Staff responded that the map would be changed to show that a segment of the ring route along Cliff Road had been completed. The proposed connector trail within the park remains in the adopted master plan but has yet to be programmed.*

Planning Commissioners discussed ADA accessibility along greenways. *Staff responded that the Veterans Memorial Greenway is being constructed as an ADA-accessible trail, and that the vast majority of the County's greenway system meets ADA accessibility standards.*

Planning Commissioners discussed the status of natural resource restoration for the park system. A comment was made that the restoration process is a multi-year process that then requires a commitment to management. *Staff responded that the park vision will include language to better describe the multi-year process of restoration and long-term management.*

Planning Commissioners discussed the use of the Metropolitan Council term “bridging facility” and whether Dakota County will consider providing bridging facilities. *Staff provided an explanation of the term and the overall purpose of bridging facilities to introduce people to parks that perhaps would not otherwise use parks. Whether Dakota County should consider using bridging facilities would be a good topic for further discussion.*

A Commissioner suggested that Dakota County’s overall facilities are well-balanced. *Staff responded that this is a topic that can be explored in the upcoming public engagement process, with the intention of aligning with Dakota County residents and working in coordination with other park providers.*

Planning Commissioners suggested upcoming community celebrations and festivals that would be good opportunities to gather public input such as South St. Paul Kaposia Days and Hastings for Rivertown Days.

Planning Commissioners discussed several suggestions aimed at improving communication within the community. One suggestion was to create a centralized location (e.g., web page) to serve as a centralized source of information for residents seeking information or providing comments. Greenway trailheads would be a good location to post information about the park visioning process. Libraries should have information about current and proposed plans too. Social media platforms should be used, but not everybody has access to social media.

Planning Commissioners requested an update on the consultant hiring status. *Staff reported that a contract has been signed with a consultant and that the next step is to begin working on a public engagement strategy.*

A question was raised about whether Dakota County would consider establishing a park district as a means to accelerate investment in the park system similar to Three Rivers or Minneapolis. *County staff responded that the County Board has not been interested in creating a park district in the past. The County Board has a budget workshop scheduled to discuss county-wide funding issues in the near future and this topic may or may not be brought up at that meeting.*

Maryann Passe, the Director of Wilderness in the City, was in the audience and spoke during the presentation. She commented on the importance of natural resource restoration projects. She questioned whether the data on recent natural resource restoration acres included acres that were disturbed by adding recreational facilities. *Staff responded that the overall numbers are the result of area-wide restoration activities. Staff will check whether site-specific areas that have been restored in coordination with recreational facilities are included in the overall restoration numbers and, if needed will clarify the reporting language for accuracy.*

## **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:

- Discussed 2050 Vision for Parks and Natural Resources – Great Places (April), and Protected Places (May)
- Provided direction on Parks and Greenways 2025 Capital Improvement Program
- Authorized contract with Landbridge Ecological for natural resource management in Lebanon Hills Regional Park

- Authorized contract with TLALLI for the Dakota County 2050 Vision for Parks and Natural Resources
- Accepted donation of greenway easement from Smead Manufacturing in Hastings
- Received update on scope and approach for the History Interpretation Loop Trail Pilot Project

## Upcoming Public Meetings – Community Outreach

County Highway 91 Construction Open House	June 4 <sup>th</sup> , 4:30pm-6:30pm Douglas Town Hall, 12409 240 <sup>th</sup> Street E, Hampton
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## Topics for next meeting (Thursday, June 27, 2024)

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

- Solid Waste Management Plan – 2nd round of public engagement and draft policies

## Planning Commissioner Announcements/Updates:

Commissioner Nelson gave an update regarding the current state of the Vermillion River Watershed, focusing on the efforts to reintroduce fish to the creek.

## Adjournment

Chair Hunting asked for a motion to adjourn.

**MOTION: Commissioner Smith moved, seconded by Commissioner Graham, to adjourn the meeting at 8:56 p.m. Voice Vote: Ayes – 9 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved.**

## Next Meeting: Thursday, June 27, 2024, at 7:00 p.m., Dakota County Western Service Center, Apple Valley

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator