

DAKOTA COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

Dakota County Western Service Center – Room L139  
14955 Galaxie Avenue  
Apple Valley, MN 55124  
Thursday, June 26, 2025  
7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Agenda

- I. Call to Order
- II. Pledge of Allegiance
- III. Public Comments:  
Anyone wishing to address the Planning Commission on an item not on the agenda may address the Planning Commission at this time (comments are limited to 5 minutes).
- IV. Approval of the Agenda
- V. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes of Meeting Held on March 27, 2025
- VI. Release Draft Mississippi River Greenway Natural Resources Management Plan - Action  
(Tom Lewanski – Parks)
- VII. Adoption of 2050 Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas Plan - Action  
(Lil Leatham – Planning)
- VIII. Planning Manager Update and County Board Actions
  - Provided direction on CSAH 54 and Mississippi River Greenway design process
  - Provided direction on the Vance Grannis Trust property (potential nature center) at Marcott Lakes
  - Authorized agreement with Canadian Pacific Kansas City Railroad for Veterans Memorial Greenway bridge
- IX. Upcoming Public Meetings – Community Outreach

Burnsville Library Renovation Open House	June 25, 4pm – 7pm Burnsville Library
Hwy 50 and I-35 interchange CP 50-33 Public open house #3	Wed June 18, 2025, 4:30–6:30 p.m. - Central Pavilion at Antlers Park; 20141 Ipava Ave., Lakeville <a href="#">County Road 50/County Road 5 Interchange at Interstate 35, Lakeville   Dakota County</a>
Hwy 42 and US 52 Interchange Open House	Mon, August 25, 4pm-6pm Rosemount Public Works Building, 14041 Biscane Avenue
- X. Topics for Next Meeting (Thursday, July 24, 2025 – 7 p.m., Western Service Center, L139)
  - None at this time
- XI. Planning Commissioner Announcements/UpdatesAdjourn



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

Date: 3/27/2025

Minutes prepared by Liz Hansen

Location: Western Service Center

## Attendance

### Members Present

- Jerry Rich
- Amy Hunting
- James Guttman
- Tony Nelson
- Dennis Peine
- Jill Smith
- Lori Hansen
- Paul Nasvik
- Barry Graham
- Ibrahim Abdinasir
- John Wallace

### Member(s) Absent:

- Kelly Kausel
- Steve Shurts

### Dakota County staff members attending:

- Kurt Chatfield, Planning Manager
- Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator
- Niki Geisler, Parks Director
- Lil Leatham, Principal Planner
- Georg Fischer, Physical Development Director
- Bruce Chamberlain, Lead Consultant, Tlal-li

## Meeting Called to Order

- Time: 7:00 p.m.
- By Chair, Jim Guttman

## 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 Guttmann asked if there were any changes to the agenda.

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

**MOTION: Commissioner Hunting moved, seconded by Commissioner Smith, approving the agenda. Voice vote: Ayes – 11 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved**

## Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (from January 23, 2025)

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

The Planning Commission discussed the changes noted below.

- Pg. 1—Members Present: Lori Hansen should only be listed once. The list should contain 13 members.
- Pgs. 3, 4, & 7—Approval of the Agenda, Establishment of 2025 Meeting Dates, and Adjournment: Each vote should reflect 13 ayes, not 14.
- Pg. 3—Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (from December 19, 2024): The vote recorded should reflect 12 ayes and one abstain.

**MOTION: Commissioner Hansen moved, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, approving the previous meeting's minutes. Voice vote: Ayes – 11 – Nays – 0 Abstain – 0 – Unanimously Approved**

## Release Draft 2050 Vision for Park, Greenway, and Natural Systems - Action (Lil Leatham – Planning, Niki Geisler - Parks)

The Planning Commission received an update on the 2050 Vision for Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems. Lil Leatham, project manager; Niki Geisler, Parks Director; and Bruce Chamberlain, Lead Consultant, Tlal-li, presented this topic and responded to questions.

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

A Commissioner complimented staff on the preparation of the plan and expressed urgency to protect lands and secure funding for land restoration. There was a discussion about whether the recent cuts to federal programs and grants will impact the implementation of the County's plan. A concern was raised about having stable and reliable funding sources. Planning Commissioners also discussed how some cities and counties have developed additional funding sources, such as by creating a park district with taxation authority. *Staff responded that the loss of near-term federal funding will impact near-term implementation but that the plan is a long-range vision*

*and that there will likely be surplus and deficit cycles over the life of the plan. Staff also pointed out that the funding sources used to protect and restore lands come from a combination of federal, state, metro, county, municipal, and private sources and that the majority of funds are not from federal programs. Dakota County may wish to explore the benefits of creating a separate park district as an additional revenue source.*

Planning Commissioners emphasized the importance of having a strong vision and strategies to implement the vision. Commissioners requested that staff periodically update the Planning Commission about the County's five-year capital improvement program and its alignment with the goals and strategies in the plan. A Commissioner noted that the five-year capital improvement program is able to be adjusted by the County Board based on the fiscal circumstances at that time. *Staff agreed to this request.*

A Commissioner requested that an executive summary be prepared for the plan. *Staff responded that an executive summary is being prepared and is nearly complete.*

A question was raised about how the plan responds to the growth projected to occur in Dakota County over the next 20 years. *Staff responded that the region's growth forecasts were used to develop the plan. Many of the County's future greenways are located in rural areas that will transition to urban areas. Staff met with cities over the last several months and discussed areas that are being planned for growth. City staff were supportive of the County's plans for new greenways and parks to meet the needs of the growing population.*

A comment was made that the goals and strategies in the plan could do a better job of emphasizing the need to collaborate with cities. *Staff responded that Goals 8 and 11 are intended to address the need for collaboration but staff will look more closely at the language to see if it can be strengthened.*

A comment was made that Inver Grove Heights is experiencing significant growth. Do the cities understand that it is the County's role to provide regional parks and not city parks? *Staff responded that in their meetings with cities, they clarified that the County's role is to meet regional park needs.*

The Planning Commission discussed the purpose of the plan and the County's role to provide regional parks. A comment was made that the city of Lakeville appreciates the County's expertise in natural management. Commissioners discussed that the plan is a long-term vision and that adjustments will be needed during implementation according to funding opportunities and circumstances.

The Planning Commission discussed the use of the term "underrepresented," used throughout the plan to describe which demographic groups are visiting or not visiting the County Park system. Some Commissioners requested that a different term be considered and that "underrepresented" is thought by some to be a biased term. Perhaps a definition is needed within the plan to communicate the results of the demographic analysis more clearly. *Staff responded that the National Park and Recreation Association uses this term and that it is an industry-standard. Staff will explore whether there are alternate terms that can be used to describe the under/over-representation of demographic groups at County parks and greenways and that a definition can be added to the plan for clarity.*

The Planning Commission held a discussion about how well the County Park System is meeting the needs of all County residents and whether all demographic groups were engaged in this process. A comment was made that it is important for the County to make sure that all of its residents are accommodated somewhere in the park System. *Staff responded that there have been many outreach events to engage demographic groups that have not traditionally used large natural area regional parks. Staff provided an overview of some of the specific groups and events where outreach occurred over the last six months.*



Planning Commissioners discussed recreational trends and how they are changing. A comment was made that many retirees are interested in rock climbing and mountain biking. We have an opportunity to meet these desires using the County's natural resource based park system and to be a leader in the region.

It was noted that the gray font used for the plain text was difficult to read. Several other technical comments and suggested corrections were made. *Staff responded that the font can be changed to make the document more readable, and the corrections will be made.*

The Planning Commission inquired about the next steps in the process. *Staff provided an overview of the upcoming County Board approval steps and the public engagement process. Staff also mentioned that they are developing a staffing plan to address some of the challenges associated with using seasonal employees to do year-round regularly occurring tasks.*

**MOTION: Commissioner Rich moved, seconded by Commissioner Graham, recommending the Physical Development Committee of the Whole release the 2050 Vision Plan for Dakota County Park, Greenway, and Natural Systems document for public review. Voice vote: Ayes – 11 – Nays – 0 Abstain – 0 – Approved**

## 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:

- Reviewed the Lebanon Hills Regional Park Sustainable Trails Plan
- Authorized joint powers agreements with multiple cities for greenway construction
- Authorized contract to prepare Mississippi River Greenway Long-Range Plan

## Upcoming Public Meetings – Community Outreach

CSAH 26 reconstruction Open House	Tuesday, April 1, 4:30pm-6:30pm Veterans Memorial Community Center (Room 1) Inver Grove Heights
Draft Mississippi River Greenway Natural Resources Management Plan Open House	TBD – June/July  (pending release for public review)

## Topics for next meeting (Thursday, April 24, 2025)

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

- Mississippi River Greenway Natural Resource Management Plan

## Planning Commissioner Announcements/Updates:

A Commissioner announced a vacancy on the Met Council following a recent resignation.

A Commissioner asked if Dakota County is submitting a letter of intent with 3M regarding the PFAS settlement. *Staff responded that, yes, Dakota County intends to submit a letter of intent for up to \$5 million in Spring Lake Reserve Park funding for restoration and recreation projects.*

What are our expectations regarding bonding? *Staff responded that there are four bonding requests: Thompson County Park, a natural resources request, the new recycling zone, and I35/50.*

A Commissioner announced that Trout Unlimited received an award for a Miesville Ravine restoration plan.

The Planning Commission Chair announced that the Dakota County Board of Adjustment met earlier in the evening.

A Commissioner acknowledged staff members Lil Leatham and Kurt Chatfield for their milestone years of service, which they were recognized for at the Board meeting on February 18.

## Adjournment

Chair Guttmann asked for a motion to adjourn.

**MOTION: Commissioner Smith moved, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, to adjourn the meeting at 8:43 p.m. Voice Vote: Ayes – 11 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved.**

**Next Meeting: Thursday, April 24, 2025, at 7:00 p.m., Dakota County Western Service Center, Apple Valley**

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator

# DAKOTA COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

**DATE: JUNE 26, 2025**

**AGENDA ITEM:** Draft Natural Resource Management Plan for Mississippi River Greenway (*Request for Action*)

**PREPARED BY: TOM LEWANSKI**

## PURPOSE

Provide Planning Commission:

1. *Review the plan document for the Mississippi River Greenway.*
2. *Recommend whether it should be opened for Public Review.*

## BACKGROUND

The County has developed a final draft of a Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP) to guide the natural resource management of the Mississippi River Greenway and surrounding public and private lands. The NRMP establishes specific, near-term (five years) implementation steps and a long-term vision (20+ years). It also includes a prioritized list of restoration/management projects and cost estimates for the Greenway Corridor, for which the County and/or Cities can readily apply for grant funding and/or seek partnership with other landowners to assist in project implementation.

A meeting with stakeholders occurred in October 2024, which was attended by each city adjacent to the greenway and other stakeholders. The cities were given a packet that contained information on their natural areas next to the Greenway, and also information about the current conditions of their areas and a summary of management recommendations. Response from all stakeholders was very positive, and they all seemed interested in implementing at least some of the proposed projects from the plan, especially if there were cost-share or grant funds available.

## ATTACHMENTS

- Mississippi River Greenway Draft Natural Resource Management Plan
  - <https://www.co.dakota.mn.us/parks/About/ResourcePlans/Documents/MississippiRiverGreenwayNRMPDraft.pdf>
- Presentation of the Draft Mississippi River Greenway Draft Natural Resource Management Plan\_5-13-2025.pdf

## QUESTIONS

The following questions are intended to help assist in review of the packet materials.

1. *What do you think of this draft plan? Is it complete? Are there any major revisions that need to be done to it? Are there any gaps that have not been addressed?*
2. *Asking the Planning Commission to recommend to the Board of Commissioners that the draft plan be released for public review? Public review would consist of posting the draft plan online, on County and partnering City's websites.*
3. *Is there support for implementing aspects of this plan? If so, can you share your thoughts regarding that?*

# DAKOTA COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

**DATE: 6/26/2025**

**AGENDA ITEM:** Recommendation to Adopt the 2050 Vision Plan for Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems

**PREPARED BY: LIL LEATHAM**

## PURPOSE

Provide Planning Commission:

1. Review the public comments received on the Draft 2050 Vision Plan for Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems (2050 Vision Plan) and resulting plan changes.
2. Consider recommending that the 2050 Vision Plan be forwarded to the Physical Development Committee for adoption by the County Board.

## BACKGROUND

At the March 27, 2025, meeting, the Planning Commission reviewed the Draft 2050 Vision Plan. On April 22, 2025, the Dakota County Board approved releasing the plan for public review. During the review period, the public was able to provide feedback through online review and comment, an online questionnaire, an in-person open house, and at pop-up input opportunities at county parks and community events. Participants were asked if they support the updated vision, which goals are their highest priorities and had the opportunity to provide open-ended comments. Online participants were asked additional questions about draft plan strategies. Plan changes are summarized in Attachment A and highlighted in yellow in the plan document. A more robust summary of comments is in the 2050 Vision Plan Document, *Appendix B, Community Engagement, pages 162-169*. Full comments and meeting summaries are in *Appendix B, Community Engagement, pages 318-356*.

## ATTACHMENTS

- A. *2050 Vision Plan for Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems Plan Public Review Comment Summary and Plan Response*
- B. *2050 Vision Plan for Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems Executive Summary*
- C. *2050 Vision Plan for Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems Plan*  
<https://www.co.dakota.mn.us/parks/About/VisionPlan/Documents/2050VisionPlanJune.pdf>
- D. *2050 Vision Plan for Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems Appendices link*  
<https://www.co.dakota.mn.us/parks/About/VisionPlan/Documents/2050VisionPlanAppendicesJune.pdf>

## QUESTIONS

The following questions are intended to help assist in review of the packet materials.

1. *Is the 2050 Vision Plan complete?*
2. *Does the Planning Commission agree with the proposed plan changes outlined?*
3. *Are there any other changes that should be made to the plans prior to adoption?*

## Dakota County 2050 Vision Plan for Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems

### Summary: Public Review Period Comments and Draft Plan Changes

Community engagement activities for the Public Review phase of the 2050 Vision Plan for Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems plan update were held April 22 – May 20, 2025. The purpose was to offer Dakota County residents, park visitors, stakeholder representatives, partners, and staff the opportunity to review the plan, to suggest changes, and provide feedback priority goals and strategies.

For the most part, feedback was supportive of the plan vision, goals and strategies. For those who provided feedback, the five most important goals are:

- Protect, improve, and manage the natural resources of Dakota County.
- Nurture the reciprocal relationship between people and nature.
- Expand environmental stewardship through outdoor programs, learning, and volunteerism.
- Locate new park units close to people or to protect natural areas and recreational assets.
- Provide safe and positive core services, amenities, and experiences.

Participation in the final round of engagement was not as robust the first round. While certainly helpful, the results are likely not representative of the breadth of interests held by County residents. Survey responses and input received was weighted toward interests already engaged in the county and city park systems rather than non-park users.

Below is a summary of comments and plan changes. Changes responding to comments are noted in the table below and are highlighted in yellow in the plan document. A more robust summary of comments is in the 2050 Vision Plan Document, *Appendix B, Community Engagement, pages 162-169*. Full comments and meeting summaries are in *Appendix B, Community Engagement, pages 318-356*.

Comment	Plan Changes
<b>Dakota County Disability Advisory Council</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall support for the plan vision, goals and strategies (strategies related to goals B and C were discussed at the meeting)</li> <li>• Request that parks have more representation from the disability community on future project committees.</li> <li>• Access should be integrated into everything (e.g. infrastructure, park locations, visitor services, communications, operations).</li> <li>• Appreciation that the plan aims to go beyond ADA – that is the floor, not the ceiling.</li> </ul>	<b>No changes</b> General comments.
Goal B Strategy 9 should be clarified – what kind of advisory committees?	<b>Page 29</b> Strategy #8 clarified to include advisory committees at the regional, county, parks, or project level.
Goal B, Strategies 4 and 7 could be combined to reduce the overall number. Suggestion <i>Establish accessibility goals to reduce barriers to park services through supportive, accessible, affordable services.</i>	<b>Page 29</b> Strategies combined into new strategy #4.

Numbering of the goals implies importance/priority. They should be lettered.	<b>Pages 27, 28-42</b> Goal numbers replaced with letters. Minor reordering of goals to group similar goals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Parks Department needs to acknowledge what will be done to improve access in the future as well as communicate about when ADA is not possible because the impact to natural resources is too great (example, redwood forests in CA).</li> <li>Create a page on the County website to list of all the accessible facilities/spaces in one location. Include information on what to expect in each location and virtual tours.</li> <li>Include a comment box on the website to report maintenance needs/safety issues – make reporting easy and the process clear.</li> <li>An overall park accessibility assessment is needed and tracking when issues have been addressed.</li> </ul>	<b>Page 63</b> Edited existing language to clarify that the website information should be centralized.  Added: - Include information on what parks will do to improve access in the future. - Consider virtual park tours to help visitors understand what to expect in each location. - Include information about when ADA is not possible and why. - Include a process for reporting maintenance and safety needs. - Develop a public facing tracking to communicate progress being made to improve access.
<b>General Public</b>	
At engagement events and in the on-line questionnaire participants were asked “What is the most important thing Dakota County could do to improve Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems?” Themes included <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be good stewards of the land</li> <li>Keep parks natural</li> <li>Focus on comfort facilities and amenities</li> <li>Build for all ages</li> <li>Expand and maintain trails and greenways</li> <li>Take care of what we have</li> </ul>	<b>Page 30</b> Most of the themes heard were like themes heard in the first round of engagement and addressed. A strategy was added to goal C to address taking care existing facilities and lands.
Suggestions included many specific ideas to support the goals and strategies.	<b>No change</b> Specific suggestions will be considered as tactics in the operational plan updates.
Comment: provide recreation in all seasons	<b>Page 31</b> Goal D, strategy 4 revised to reflect year round recreation.
Please pursue any rails to trails possibilities in the county and provide separate walking and bicycle paths where possible.	<b>Page 49</b> Section about converting rail corridors to trails added.
<b>Oheyaawahe Task Force/City of Mendota Heights</b>	
Oheyaawahe isn’t a park, avoid classification, or refer to as open space.	<b>Pages 7-10</b> <i>Locally Managed Land</i> text edited to clarify purpose and include more

	nature-based recreation locations and to remove the park description.
<b>Physical Development Committee</b>	
Develop staffing model with less dependence of seasonal staff is very specific. Generalize.	<p><b>Page 41</b> Goal N Strategy 1 revised.</p> <p><b>Page 73, Next Steps</b> <i>Develop staffing model with less dependence on temporary staff for year round operations</i> edited to <i>Develop a staffing model that addresses the shift from seasonal to year-round services.</i></p>
Interest in Dakota County supporting local trail connections and loops to greenways by assisting cities political and technical support.	<p><b>Page 35</b> Goal H, strategy 9 revised</p> <p><b>Page 73, Next Steps</b> Language added regarding establishing the level of support for local trail loops connecting to greenways and nature-based recreation in city parks adjacent to greenways in the update for the 2010 Greenway Guidebook.</p>
<b>Indigenous Engagement Workshop</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerns about mound management and funding</li> <li>Issue that places are sacred but unfamiliar to many Dakota/Indigenous people.</li> <li>Need a forward-thinking plan for and with Dakota/Indigenous community members.</li> <li>Encourage cross-generational knowledge sharing.</li> <li>Concern about how state and tribal teachings will be address, how artifacts will be cared for.</li> <li>Priority to have elders involved in processes.</li> <li>Create an Indigenous Committee in Dakota County.</li> <li>What is the 100-year plan?</li> </ul>	<p><b>No changes.</b></p> <p>Goal G strategies address partnership with Dakota/Indigenous community, reconnecting Native people with park lands, naming, and public awareness. Goal B, strategy #8 addresses advisory committees.</p>
<b>Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization</b>	
<p>Add the types of rare species for the restoration bullet point? How about the naming the invasive species that were eradicated?</p> <p>Within <i>Protected Places</i>, consider mentioning partnerships with VRWJPO and Trout Unlimited for trout stream protection/enhancement projects.</p>	<p><b>Page 4</b> Example species added.</p> <p>Partnerships added.</p>
The VRWJPO also operates a Watershed Wetland Bank Easement program (similar to BWSR easements). Please include under <i>Locally Managed Land</i> .	<p><b>Page 7</b> Added VRWJPO wetland bank easement program.</p>

Valley Lake Park in Lakeville provides fishing opportunities, trail surrounding the lake (ADA accessible), two pollinator gardens (one with nature-based play equipment), a rain garden, an additional conservation area, etc. Please include.	<b>Pages 9-10</b> Edited section listing nature-based parks to be a more complete representation of nature-based recreation locations.
Can you add watersheds to the partnerships on pages 32, 39, and 74?	<b>Pages 32, 39, 74</b> Added.
Goal J, would it be possible to state the names of the watershed organization (VRWJPO) in item 2 under strategies?	<b>Page 37</b> All 6 Watershed organizations listed.
The Vermillion River is the only stream in the TC metro that supports a naturally reproducing trout population. Please consider highlighting this amenity by adding a strategy that protects/enhances natural areas adjoining/near this unique recreational asset.	<b>Page 37</b> Added 'springsheds' to the important areas to protect to protect coldwater trout stream springs.
<b>Wilderness in the City</b>	
Overall support for the plan and the emphasis on natural systems. Common themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerns expressed about changing the Parks tagline of "Forever Wild".</li> <li>Support for the plan's overall focus on natural resources.</li> <li>Support for the connector trail not being shown on the map in the plan.</li> <li>Concern about finding sustainable funding source for natural resource management projects (post restoration).</li> </ul>	<b>Page 21</b> Added a bullet addressing the need for on-going and increasing funding needs for natural resource management.  <b>Page 29</b> Goal B, revised strategy 9 to: <i>Consider developing a process for modification of the Dakota County Parks tagline to better reflect new vision and mission as well as community feedback.</i>
<b>Dakota County Staff</b>	
Typos, corrections, and clarifications	<b>Throughout document, not highlighted</b>
Edit introductory text to reflect current board goals.	<b>Page 1</b> Update made.
Add the year that the parks system was started, 1960	<b>Page 1</b> Year started added.
Update visitation with 2024 numbers	<b>Pages 2, 19</b> Update made.
Define the terms shown in Exhibit 1.2: <i>Restored, managed stabilized, yet to be restored.</i>	<b>Page 3</b> Definitions added.
In the <i>Connected Places</i> text, add interpretive plans, recognize the Garlough tunnel mural, and define greenways.	<b>Page 4</b> Updates made.
The definition of SNA and WMA are inaccurate.	<b>Page 7</b> SNA and WMA definitions corrected.



Map 1.1 correct the greenway ring route to show long term alignment, differentiate between Master Planned Greenways and Greenway Search Corridors.	<b>Page 8</b> Map 1.1 corrected.
In the <i>Parks History Timeline</i> , add information on establishment of Lebanon Hills Campground, Lake Byllesby Campground, the Spring Lake Retreat Center	<b>Page 12</b> Additions made.
Update the community engagement summary to include Public Review Draft engagement.	<b>Page 14</b> Update made.
Add that increased operations will be needed with system growth.	<b>Page 15</b> Added.
Under findings, <i>programming is limited compared with other metro area park systems</i> , add that limited indoor program space impacts the ability to provide outdoor education programming throughout the park system, that Dakota County has fewer outdoor education staff than other regional park agencies, and that the seasonal and temporary staffing model impacts program delivery.	<b>Page 18</b> Update made.
Under findings, <i>the changing climate threatens natural systems and recreational opportunities</i> , add air quality and fire danger to the impacts to recreation, programming, and visitor experience.	<b>Page 20</b> Update made.
Include the current Parks Department Mission.	<b>Page 26</b> Draft mission replaced with current mission.
Goal A, add volunteer involvement to the metrics	<b>Page 28</b> Addition made.
Goal G, remove first metric, <i>Consistent presence of Native American people in the system</i> , there is no way to measure this.	<b>Page 34</b> Metric removed.
Goal H, replace <i>additionally</i> with <i>or</i> .	<b>Page 25, 35</b> Update made.
Goal I, a strategy is needed for designating resource sensitive areas to better manage and protect natural features, species, and/or cultural sites. Add acres restored and acres maintained to metrics.	<b>Page 36</b> Strategy #10 added. Metrics added.
Goal J, add strategy <i>Restore and manage natural spaces to support and nurture wildlife and plant communities</i> .	<b>Page 37</b> Strategy #7 added.
Goal K, add metric “number of public art installations”	<b>Page 39</b> Metric added.
Goal L, revise goal from <i>Seek values-based and mission-driven partnerships</i> . To <i>Seek and sustain values-based and mission-driven partnerships</i> .	<b>Page 25, 39</b> Goal revised.
Goal M, include strategies to explore possibility of a parks district and voter approved bond referendum.	<b>Page 40</b> Strategies added.

This goal is missing a strategy speaking to sustainable funding. Add strategy: <i>Identify and allocate consistent and dedicated funding for operations and maintenance.</i>	
Goal O, strategy # 1, <i>In long range and natural resource management plans, identify how broader economic systems are being served/enhanced</i> , is overly specific and prescriptive. Revise to: <i>In future planning efforts, consider how broader economic system are being served and enhanced.</i>  Strategy #7 is written in a confusing way. Reword to clarify.	<b>Page 42.</b> Strategies revised.
Location description for Regional Park Reserves is incorrect.	<b>Page 47</b> Location description updated consistent with Metropolitan Council 2050 Regional Parks Policy Plan.
Map 3.2, differentiate between existing and planned greenways and greenway search corridors, update symbol and include long term alignment for greenway ring route, change the symbol for the Mill Towns State Trail.	<b>Page 51</b> Map updated.
Add a map that depicts the 2050 vision.	<b>Page 55-56</b> Map 3.4 added.
Core Services and Amenities Chart – review and edit to remove errors and inconsistencies.	<b>Page 57-62</b> Corrections to the <i>Core Services and Amenities</i> table made.
In the next steps chart, “Continue to implement the acceleration of the 2030 Greenway Vision” is listed twice, replace with “Continue to incorporate self-guided interpretive features in parks and greenways.”	<b>Page 74</b> Change made.
Next steps chart, <i>Funding</i> , add three next steps: - Evaluate benefits of creating a special parks district; - Explore options for a park referendum; - Increase revenue generating programs and facilities.	<b>Page 75</b> Addition made.
Build in a way to update the plan to address changes in the parks that have significant impact.	<b>Page 75</b> Updating the plan addressed.
Public Review Draft Plan - engagement and comments.	<b>Pages 162-169</b> , not highlighted Summary – Process and Key Findings <b>Pages 318-356</b> , not highlighted Comments, meeting/event summaries, on-line results.



# 2050 VISION PLAN

DAKOTA COUNTY PARKS, GREENWAYS, AND NATURAL SYSTEMS

*Nature Protected, Community Reflected, All Are Connected*

JUNE 13, 2025



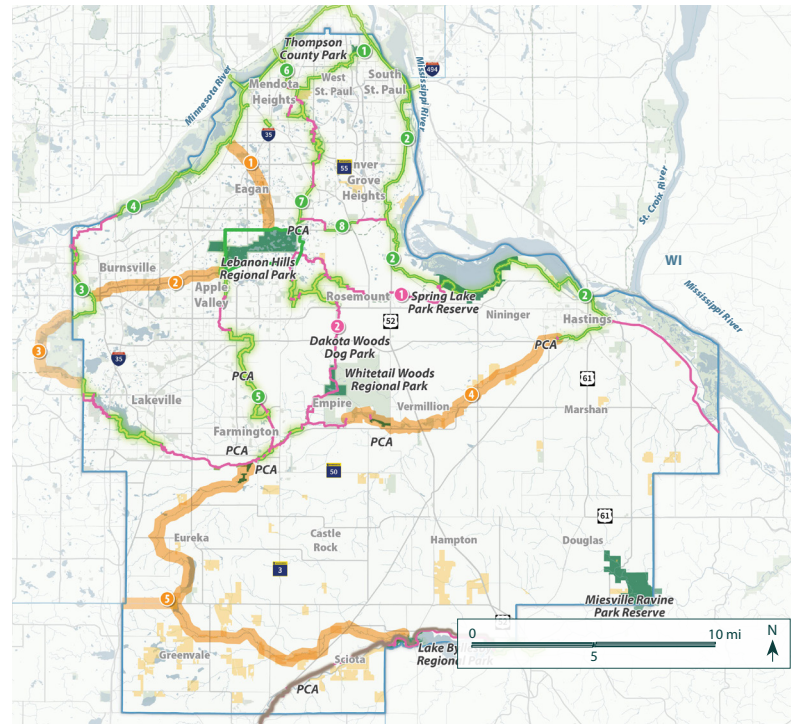
# INTRODUCTION

During its 60+ year history, the Dakota County Parks System has played a pivotal role in protecting and stewarding lands, enhancing environmental quality, developing and caring for recreational facilities, and serving residents and visitors through access to the outdoors and nature-based education and recreation. Community members routinely share that the work of Dakota County Parks is fundamental to their quality of life. The system operates in a diverse and dynamic environment, serving a wide range of stakeholders with varying interests. The lands and services of Dakota County Parks are emblems of community desirability as a place where people thrive, a healthy environment, a robust atmosphere for business and jobs and excellence in public service. Dakota County parks are a reflection of the County's overall strategic plan goals.

Dakota County is one of ten regional park implementing agencies across the Twin Cities metropolitan area. As a result, the County derives some of its park funding through the State and Metropolitan Council. In return, Dakota County protects, develops, and programs its designated "regional" facilities according to certain parameters established for regional facilities.

This plan looks to the next 25 years, suggesting how community values continue to shape an evolving vision for Dakota County's park system, greenway system, and natural system.

**Map 1.1, Existing Parks, Greenways, and Conservation Easements**



## LEGEND

- Reserves, Regional Parks, and County Park
- Conservation Easements
- Non-County Public Lands
- Non-County Trails
- Mill Towns State Trail
- Regional Greenway and Trail Search Corridors
  - 1 Lebanon Hills - Minnesota River Greenway Regional Trail
  - 2 Lebanon Hills Lake Marion Regional Trail
  - 3 Lake Marion to Big Woods Regional Trail  
'Coordinate with Scott County'
  - 4 Vermillion River Greenway Regional Trail
  - 5 Elko New Market Blakely-Dayle Kennefick Regional Trail  
'Coordinate with Scott County'
- Planned Regional Greenways, State Trails
  - 1 Rosemount Greenway
  - 2 Vermillion Highlands Greenway
- Greenway Linking Route
- Existing Regional Greenways
  - 1 River to River
  - 2 Mississippi River
  - 3 Lake Marion
  - 4 Minnesota River
  - 5 North Creek
  - 6 Big Rivers Regional Trail
  - 7 Lebanon Hills
  - 8 Veterans Memorial Greenway

## FINDINGS

Recent decades have been a time of growth and increasing depth for Dakota County's park system, much of it shaped by visionary and thoughtful planning. The planning process for the 2050 Vision Plan has also included analysis of Dakota County as well as the outside influences that shape it.



**The percentage of park visitors who are youth, people of color, lower income, and older adults is lower than their percentage of County population**



**Dakota County park visitors expect more accessible facilities**



**Visitation of Dakota County Parks is lower than metro area average based on population**



**A growing County population will expect additional parks and greenways**



**Programming is limited compared to other metro area park systems**



**Awareness has grown about park's essential role in supporting physical, mental, and spiritual health**

*A more detailed summary of engagement efforts and analysis reports can be found in the Appendices*



**Dakota County is viewed as a leader in providing nature-based recreation and education**



**The changing climate threatens natural systems and recreational opportunities**



**Urbanization impacts remaining natural areas, habitat, and water quality**



**Securing consistent and sustainable funding is a growing challenge**



**As the system ages and grows, capital reinvestment and operations demands will also naturally grow**

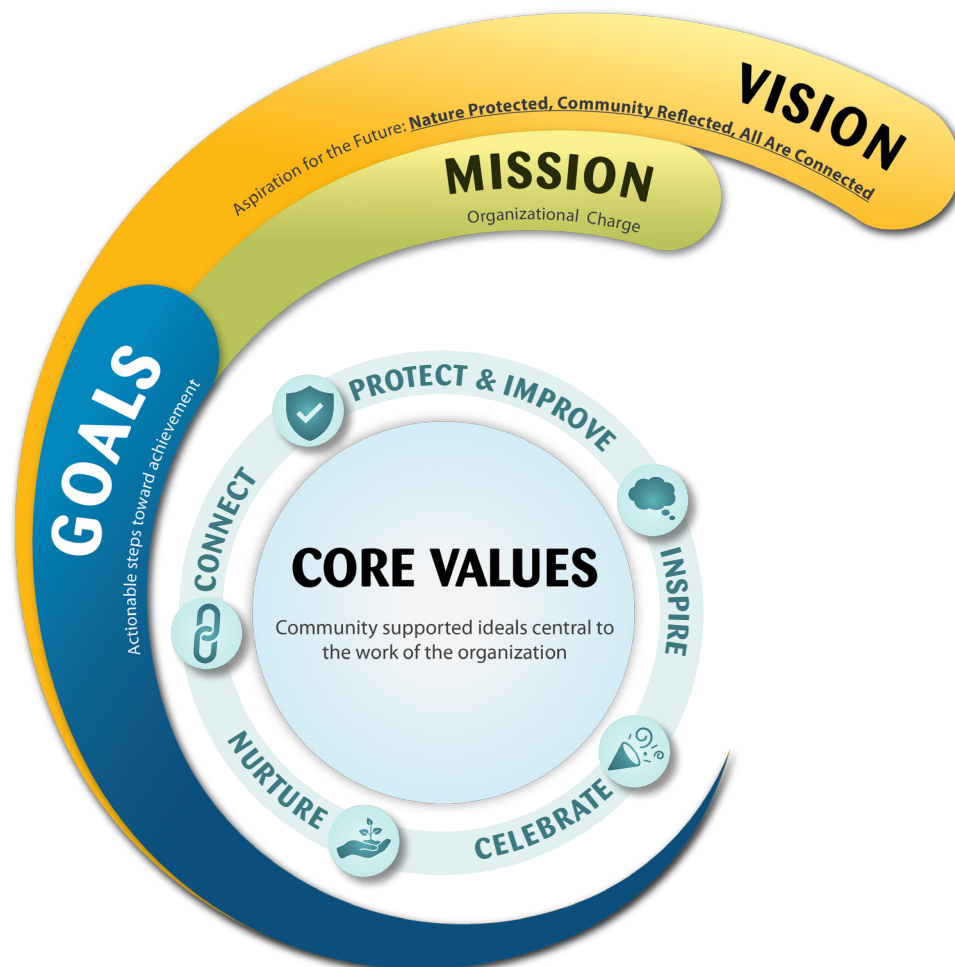
### Data Sources:

2024 Engagement Online Survey  
 2024 Engagement  
 2024 Tribal Engagement Meetings  
 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails Visitor Study  
 2022 US Census ACE Estimates  
 2022 Minnesota State Demographic Center, Long-Term Population Projections for Minnesota, 2020  
 2023 Dakota County Adult Health Survey  
 Metropolitan Council Local Forecasts to 2050  
 2020 Dakota County Parks Awareness and Promotion Plan: Report of Community Engagement Findings  
 July 2023 Met Council Annual Use Estimates

# VISION FRAMEWORK

The Dakota County 2050 Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems Vision Plan serves as a forward-looking guide to the protection, enhancement, and development of the county's cherished outdoor spaces. The Vision Framework sets a foundation for ensuring that lands, facilities, operations and visitor services meet the needs of the county's growing and diverse population now and in the

future. By clearly articulating long-term goals and the actionable strategies required to achieve them, Dakota County is preparing for a future that includes environmental stewardship, recreational opportunities, and the well-being of its residents and visitors. The full plan document articulates strategies associated with each goal.



**Exhibit 2.2,** Vision Framework



In alignment with Dakota County's core values of Integrity, People, Service, and Innovation this plan's core values are:

## CORE VALUES

### To Connect...

people to each other and the natural world, fostering a sense of belonging for all.

through engaging and inclusive outdoor experiences.

### To Protect & Improve...

natural spaces, ensuring a resilient and healthy environment for future generations.

### To Nurture...

and heal the vital relationship between people and nature.

### To Celebrate...

our vibrant and richly diverse communities.

### To Inspire...

wellbeing, wonder, adventure, and learning

## VISION

### Vision Statement

Nature Protected, Community Reflected, All Are Connected

## MISSION

### Mission Statement

To enrich lives by providing high quality recreation and education opportunities in harmony with natural resource preservation and stewardship.

### Goal A

Nurture the reciprocal relationship between people and nature.

### Goal B

Cultivate belonging by engaging and serving the community, with an emphasis on those who are under-represented in the outdoors.

### Goal C

Provide safe and positive core services, amenities, and experiences.

### Goal D

Create dynamic spaces with unique and memorable experiences.

### Goal E

Expand environmental stewardship through outdoor programs, learning, and volunteerism.

### Goal F

Offer opportunities to improve physical, mental, and spiritual health.

### Goal G

Strengthen partnerships with Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities for the protection of lands and traditions.

### Goal H

Locate new park units close to people or to protect natural areas and recreational assets.

### Goal I

Lead and support on ecological stewardship and climate resilience.

### Goal J

Protect, improve, and manage the natural resources of Dakota County.

### Goal K

Elevate cultural richness through arts, historic preservation, interpretation, and, storytelling within the park system.

### Goal L

Seek and sustain values-based and mission-driven partnerships.

### Goal M

Care for the system through sustainable and innovative funding.

### Goal N

Invest in a thriving parks workforce that represents the communities served.

### Goal O

Support local and sustainable economic development.

## GOALS

# PARKS, GREENWAYS & LAND CONSERVATION



The Dakota County system has three basic categories of land holdings: conservation lands, greenways, and parks. Together, these areas form a diverse and well-integrated network that plays a crucial role in preserving the county's natural resources, fostering outdoor recreation, and enhancing overall community well-being.

## CONSERVATION FOCUS AREAS

Dakota County's 2020 Land Conservation Plan identifies and prioritizes land protection based on the combination of natural features, connectivity, hydrology, and land ownership with a renewed emphasis on water. Protection of these lands, called Conservation Focus Areas, aims to increase voluntary protection and stewardship of private lands and improve coordination with other land conservation agencies and organizations.

## GREENWAY SEARCH CORRIDORS

Dakota County is home to a diverse and growing network of greenways that serve as essential connections between communities, natural landscapes, and recreational destinations. Dakota County intends to build out this system, fill current gaps, and expand into future residential growth areas; ensuring that greenways remain accessible, functional, and ecologically beneficial for generations to come.

In 2010, Dakota County created a program called the Greenway Collaborative as a model for building greenways with partners (local

communities, developers, and stakeholder organizations).

## PARK SEARCH AREAS

Park search areas represent a strategic approach to ensuring that residents across the county have equitable access to high-quality nature-based parks, especially where they serve demographic groups who visit parks at a lower rate than expected, compared to the demographics of the county population.

## COUNTY PARK CONSERVATION AREAS (CPC'S, DAKOTA COUNTY OWNED)

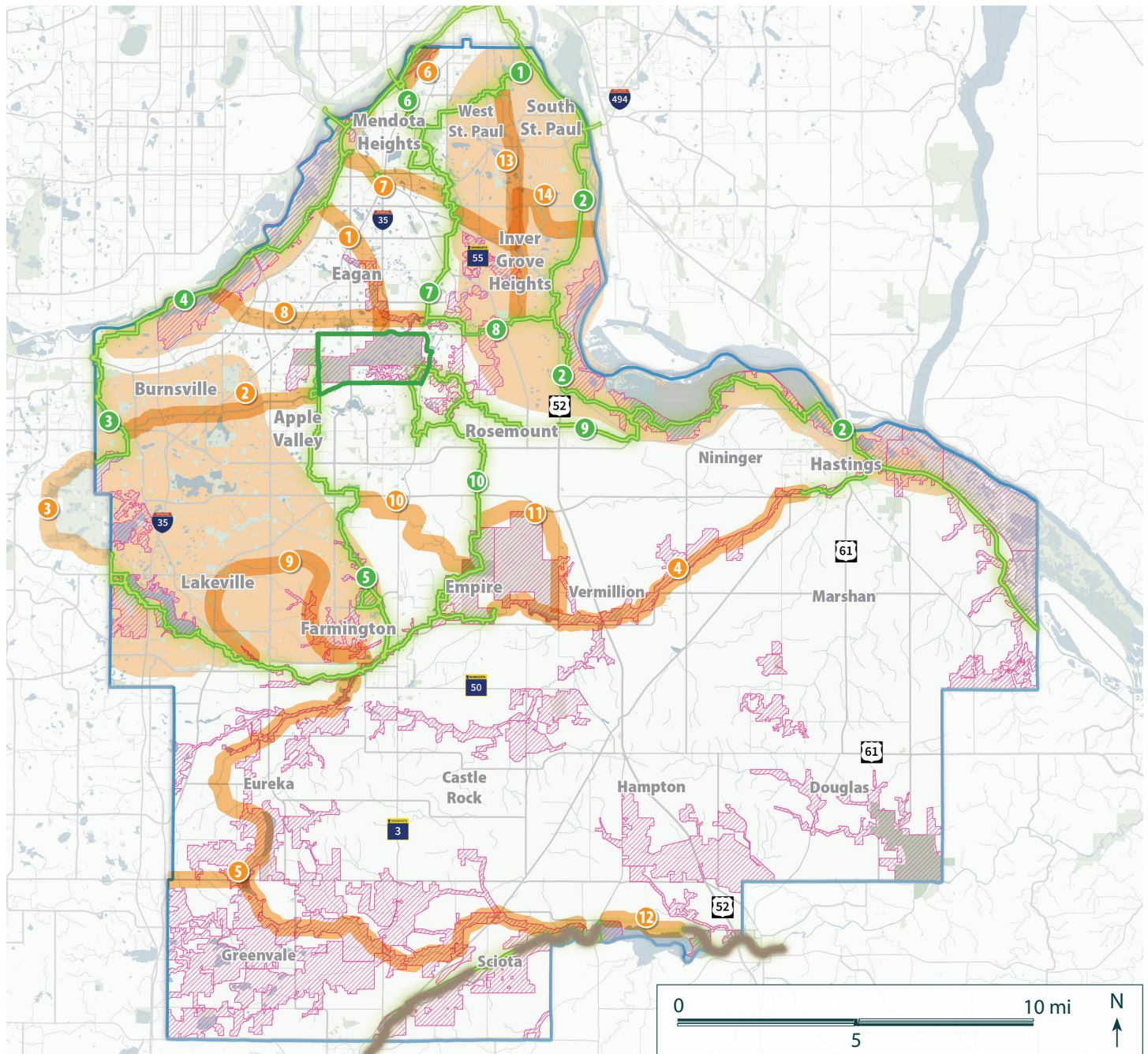
County Park Conservation Areas are a tool for land protection using fee title ownership by Dakota County. The focus is on natural quality such as watercourses, wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, rare species, high quality habitat (or potential restoration of) that are preserved for environmental benefits and/or natural resource-based recreation

## PRIVATELY OWNED RECREATION AREAS

In addition to the park candidate sites identified, Dakota County will consider preserving land previously owned/operated by private or public entities that may no longer be in active use, but provides significant community recreation or natural resources value, by transforming it into protected public open space.



Map 3.4, 2050 Vision Map



## LEGEND

### Existing and Planned Regional Greenways

- 1 River to River
- 2 Mississippi River
- 3 Lake Marion
- 4 Minnesota River
- 5 North Creek
- 6 Big Rivers Regional Trail
- 7 Lebanon Hills
- 8 Veterans Memorial Greenway
- 9 Rosemount Greenway
- 10 Vermillion Highlands Greenway

- Greenway Linking Route
- Regional Greenway and Trail Search Corridors

- 1 Lebanon Hills - Minnesota River Greenway Regional Trail
- 2 Lebanon Hills Lake Marion Regional Trail
- 3 Lake Marion to Big Woods Regional Trail  
'Coordinate with Scott County'
- 4 Vermillion River Greenway Regional Trail
- 5 Elko New Market Blakely-Dayle Kennefick Regional Trail  
'Coordinate with Scott County'
- 6 Lilydale - St. Paul
- 7 Soo Line

- 8 Highland Trail
- 9 Farmington - Lakeville
- 10 Empire Greenway - Mining Lakes
- 11 Vermillion Highlands to Vermillion River
- 12 Lake Byllesby Greenway
- 13 Highway 52 Trail
- 14 Lebanon Greenway to Mississippi River

- Preliminary Conservation Focus Areas
- New Park Search Areas
- Mill Towns State Trail



## CORE SERVICES AND AMENITIES

Goal 3 highlights the importance of core provisions in fostering safety and comfort in parks. Establishing a foundation of facilities that provide essential visitor support and the most sought-after activities helps visitors know what to expect and look for. For some visitors, particularly first time or infrequent visitors, large natural areas can be disorienting. The goal is to allow all visitors to enjoy the full park experience with the comfort of knowing that they are supported along the way.

### Three tiers of activities can be expected in most parks:

1. Base activities and facilities that can be expected in all parks (Y)
2. Activities that have broad popularity and can be expected in many parks (M)
3. Activities that can be expected in some parks to provide unique experiences (S)

## SIGNATURE FACILITIES

Many activities and facilities will occur less frequently within Dakota County parks and along greenways but contribute greatly to a park or place's overall identity. Strategically locating these unique amenities across the system, paired with core services, creates a consistently supportive park environment that also offers a variety of experiences.

## Signature Experiences

If an activity is not indicated as base, or appropriate for most or some parks and greenways, it can be considered as a signature activity for that park and greenway classification as part of the unit long-range plan

## ACCESSIBILITY

Embracing accessibility and universal design are an important way for Dakota County to set expectations that make visitors confident and comfortable in core services. Universal design strives to move beyond "separate but equal" access to make all places and facilities functional for everyone. While the goal is to strive for universal design across the system, this standard is especially critical for the core services and amenities. Inviting all people to integrally use the essential visitor support functions in every area sends a strong message about belonging and equity. This section of the full plan provides initiatives and guidelines to maximize accessibility across the system.



# IMPLEMENTATION

The Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Natural Areas 2050 Vision Plan lays out a bold and transformative path for the future of the county's outdoor spaces. To bring this vision to life, a well-structured implementation strategy is essential; one that balances ambition with feasibility, leverages available resources, and fosters strong partnerships.

## FUNDING TOOLS

Dakota County has historically and continues to apply a broad range of funding tools to its system of parks, greenways and natural areas. A key next step will be exploring financially sustainable options for revenue and funding. The following list offers a snapshot of general funding sources that are either relatively standard (sustainable) or require unique actions (innovative) with more detail offered in the full plan.

**Regional Funding** (sustainable)

**County Levy** (sustainable)

**Federal Grants & Programs** (innovative)

**State Grants & Programs** (innovative)

**Bond Measures** (innovative)

**Sponsor Recognition** (innovative)

**Philanthropic Donations** (innovative)

**Program & User Fees** (sustainable)

**Public/Private Corporate Partnerships** (innovative)

**Revenue-Generating Activities** (Sustainable)

**Special Park District** (innovative)

## PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERSHIP

The partnership with a philanthropic organization could enhance funding, engagement, and long-term sustainability. Agencies with philanthropic partners can experience benefits through private donations, grants, and sponsorships while fostering community involvement and stewardship.

A critical early decision in partnering with a philanthropic partner is determining the extent of direct engagement by Dakota County. Some agencies find success through direct formation and hands on operational leadership while others take an arms-length approach to the relationship with a not-for-profit specifically organized to support the mission of the park agency. The earlier may demand special legislative authority.

## COST RECOVERY

In recent years, park agencies across the United States have been rethinking their cost recovery models to prioritize equity and access. Traditionally, these models were designed to maximize revenue generation through user fees, partnerships, and sponsorships. However, as communities recognize the vital role parks play in community well-being, agencies are shifting to models that ensure access for all.

The transformation of cost recovery models to prioritize equity and access represents a fundamental shift in how park services are valued. Rather than over-emphasis on revenue-generating entities, parks are increasingly recognized as vital public assets that should be accessible to everyone. As this shift continues, the challenge will be balancing financial sustainability with the goal of ensuring that no one is excluded from the benefits of parks due to cost.

## REVENUE GENERATING ACTIVITIES

Even in evolving approaches to cost recovery, revenue generating activities remain an important subset of services. They are intended to generate at least as much revenue as the cost to provide them. They serve to buffer challenging financial times, bolster operating efficiency, and enhance visitor experience. Most importantly, they diversify revenue streams to support the broader mission and vision. Revenue generating activities can:

### Generate & Diversify Revenue

### Increase Operational Efficiency & Cost Recovery

### Enhance Infrastructure Investment & Asset Optimization

### Enhance Marketing, Branding, and Community Connections

Leveraging innovative revenue streams, strategic investments, and efficient operations through revenue generating activities can deepen a healthy balance between community service, conservation, and fiscal responsibility.