



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

Date: 9/25/2025

Minutes prepared by Cindy Tonsager

Location: Western Service Center, Apple Valley, L139

Attendance

Members Present

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

Dakota County staff members attending:

- Kurt Chatfield, Planning Manager
- Cindy Tonsager, Admin Operations Manager
- Tony Wotzka, Manager Parks - Greenways
- Michael Honer, Parks Project Manager

Member(s) Absent:

- Paul Nasvik
- Andrea Vaubel

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 Guttman asked if there were any changes to the agenda.

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

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

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (from July 24, 2025)

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

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

MOTION: Commissioner Hunting moved, seconded by Commissioner Kausel, approving the previous meeting's minutes. Voice vote: Ayes – 11– Nays – 0 - Unanimously Approved

County's Greenway Plan Kickoff - Information (Tony Wotzka and Michael Honer – Parks, and Kurt Chatfield - Planning)

The Planning Commission received an update on the process for Dakota County's Greenway Plan Kickoff.

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

Planning Commissioners engaged in a discussion about what they like about the County's current greenway system, specifically:

- Especially like greenways where water (lakes, rivers, streams) is within the corridor
- Absence of cars/noise
- Like that, greenways are in open space corridors
- Opportunities to interact with nature
- Beautiful views and overlooks
- Peaceful places to walk
- Nice trails
- Opportunities to learn about area history
- Protected natural spaces
- Trails are accessible for people who have disabilities

- Tunnels or bridges make it safe and easy to cross major roads
- Provides kids with a place to play in nature within their neighborhoods
- Opportunity to visit many different types of parks that are along greenway corridors
- Greenways can be pollinator corridors
- Greenways take people to unique places
- Represents many of the different landscapes that are found in Minnesota
- Greenways may have different themes that make each one unique

Planning Commissioners discussed opportunities to improve the current greenway system:

- Maybe have some rental bikes, similar to the Hastings outfitter under the Hwy 61 bridge
- Think about how people can explore their hobbies within greenways (flowers, history, bird watching)
- Provide connections between where people live or are planned to live so that they can get to greenways
- Address safety concerns such as high-speed users, or areas that are very busy and lead to user conflicts

Planning Commissioners discussed the following issues that could be addressed in the update of the Greenway Plan:

User Conflicts

A Planning Commissioner suggested that some busy parts of the system may need to have dual trails, similar to the Minneapolis lakes.

Consider forming a volunteer trail patrol, similar to ski patrol or the volunteers that serve the mountain bike trails at Lebanon Hills.

Use signage, such as the speed check signs adapted for bicyclists, to check the speeds of faster users.

It was noted that at some locations in the system, such as Kaposia Landing, there are good sightlines, and that e-bikes and walkers do not seem to have many conflicts.

A suggestion was made to collect and track accident data to identify locations that could be prioritized for safety or enforcement.

A comment was made that certain segments of the greenway system may need different rules and restrictions than other segments based on the context and the character of the greenway.

The County may need an education campaign to help reduce user conflicts on the system.

Increasing the Appeal of the System

Several commissioners mentioned that the system already has broad appeal and that, outside of marketing and communication that the County should not change the existing greenway system very much.

There was general discussion about what types of events could occur on the system, and that some of the events are likely to be scheduled by private groups independently of County Park programs.

A comment was made that the County should look at opportunities to make connections to the Public Transit system to make the greenway trails more accessible to more people.

Improved wayfinding will increase use and result in more people learning about greenway trails and where they go.

School field trips and volunteer events along the greenways will increase exposure to the system and result in more use.

Greenway Widths

Planning Commissioners discussed greenway widths of the wider natural corridor, and of the trail itself. A comment was made that it is important to limit impacts to the natural area corridor when installing trails by doing everything possible to narrow construction limits.

If the County knows that a section of trail will be popular, it would be better to plan for a wider trail upfront to minimize user conflicts.

Planning Commissioners stated that they are interested in having this discussion at a follow-up meeting, when the discussion can be informed by natural resource experts who will be able to provide information about minimum widths for habitat, wildlife corridors, and water quality.

Role for Interpretation Along Greenways

The majority of comments were favorable for including a strong role for interpretation along greenways.

Interpretation may be especially important for the segments of greenways that are along roads or less interesting segments that could be improved by interpretation.

Interpretation may be about area history or may incorporate the work of local artists.

A comment was made that the Veterans Memorial Greenway may be a special case because the memorials along that greenway are important, but they are not place-specific.

Importance of Local Trail Loops and Connections

Planning Commissioners commented on the importance of trail loops and that they are especially important to people who are not able to walk very far.

A comment was made that trail loops and access points are important for local economic development and provide access to local businesses along greenways.

Several examples of the importance of local trail connections in cities such as Hastings and South St Paul were referenced in the discussion.

Role of Collaboration Along Greenways

Planning Commissioners commented on the importance of collaboration. Several mentioned the importance of collaborating with cities and recommended that we engage city staff as part of the plan update process.

A comment was made that the County should collaborate not just with cities but with groups such as art committees and other groups that may donate or collaborate with Dakota County.

A comment was made that the County has strengths, such as expertise in natural resources and trail design, and that cities have strengths, such as landowner contacts and local knowledge. Collaboration creates the opportunity to combine these strengths.

The discussion on the Greenway Plan Update concluded with staff outlining the process to hire a consultant, engage stakeholders in the process, and return to the Planning Commission for additional comment.

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:

- County Board authorized grant application for PFAS settlement program
- Metropolitan Council is reviewing proposed city/county changes to the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (RBTN)
- System Statements are scheduled for release this month, kicking off the round of local comprehensive plan updates due in 2028

Upcoming Public Meetings – Community Outreach

Public Art Plan Pop-up open houses	1) Sept. 20-21 st , Lakeville Arts Festival 2) Sept. 24, 5pm-7:30pm, Art Extravaganza at Wescott Library 3) Sept 27, 1pm-3:30pm, Pet Portraits at Wescott Library Dakota County Public Art Questionnaire
Lebanon Hills Greenway Design (formerly the Lebanon to Mendota Greenway) Pop-up open house	October 3 rd , 3:30pm-6:30pm. Lebanon Hills Visitor Center Lebanon Hills Greenway, Inver Grove Heights and Eagan Segment Dakota County

Planning Commissioner Updates

Commissioner Hansen informed the Planning Commission about the 2025 World Booya Championship in South St. Paul scheduled for October 4th, 2025.

Adjournment

MOTION: Commissioner Nelson moved, seconded by Commissioner Shurts, to adjourn the meeting at 9:17 p.m. **Voice Vote:** Ayes – 11 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved.

Next Meeting: Thursday, October 23, 2025, at 7 p.m., Western Service Center, Conference Room L139

- No topics are scheduled for this meeting at this time.

Respectfully submitted,

Kurt Chatfield, Planning Manager