



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

Date: 11/20/2025

Minutes prepared by Liz Hansen

Location: Western Service Center, Apple Valley, L139

Attendance

Members Present

- Amy Hunting
- James Guttmann
- Tony Nelson
- Barry Graham
- Ibrahim Abdinasir
- Kelly Kausel
- Steve Shurts
- Jerry Rich
- Dennis Peine
- Paul Nasvik

Dakota County staff members attending:

- Kurt Chatfield, Planning Manager
- Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator
- Tom Lewanski, Manager Parks - Natural Resources
- Lil Leatham, Planner Principal
- Mary Jackson, Planner Sr
- Niki Geisler, Parks Director

Member(s) Absent:

- Andrea Vaubel
- Lori Hansen
- Jill Smith

Meeting Called to Order

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

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 Nelson, approving the agenda. Voice vote: Ayes – 10 Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (from September 25, 2025)

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

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

MOTION: Commissioner Shurts moved, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, approving the previous meeting's minutes. Voice vote: Ayes – 10– Nays – 0 - Unanimously Approved

County Natural System Plan Update Kickoff – Information (Tom Lewanski – Parks, and Mary Jackson- Planning)

The Planning Commission received an update on the County Natural System Plan Update Kickoff.

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

Planning Commissioners asked a question about whether funding sources for natural resource protection and restoration have been reduced, especially at the Federal level. *Staff responded that funding sources exist at the Federal, State, Metropolitan, and County level. For private land easements, funding is sourced from the Outdoor Heritage Fund. In many instances Dakota County does not acquire fee title but acquires a conservation easement. Most of the funding for natural resource protection and restoration is not from the Federal level, so it is not having a major impact on this program.*

What are some of the eligible activities allowed on land protected by easements? *Staff responded that easements are individually prepared. Easements prohibit development, but the underlying landowner maintains control of the property and manages the natural resources on that property. It is important that Dakota County and the landowner have a common understanding of Dakota County's expectations for natural resource management when the easement is prepared. Dakota County has also valued some level of public access either on the protected land or adjacent land (e.g. a shore-fishing location) so that others can benefit from the easement over private land.*

The Planning Commission discussed the plan objective to build capacity in the natural systems management workforce. A statement was made that the main problem may be the number of career opportunities available, and not that there were not enough people entering the field. It would also be nice to see more people from diverse backgrounds have an opportunity to work in the natural systems management field. *Staff agreed with the comments.*

How does Dakota County work with the School of Environmental Studies to cultivate interest in natural systems management careers? *Staff responded that they regularly work with students from the School of Environmental Studies and engage classrooms on natural resource projects. Students work with County staff in the park, and County experts periodically visit classrooms.*

Planning Commissioners made positive comments about the organization of the plan. A point was made that the plan should set priorities along with estimated completion targets along quarterly timeframes.

A comment was made in support of language that addresses the need to plan for and adapt to climate change and the stresses that it places on natural systems.

Several comments were made about strengthening the “strategy” level of the plan and perhaps use terms such as “actions” that are more specific and measurable.

A recommendation was made to keep a prioritized cue of projects in the implementation chapter that can be accomplished when funding becomes available.

Staff thanked the Planning Commission for their comments and then discussed the next steps in the planning process.

County Public Art Plan – Information (Lil Leatham - Planning)

The Planning Commission received an update on the County Public Art Plan.

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

Planning Commissioners were asked a question regarding future public art programs: What is one word you would use to describe public art in Dakota County? Their responses are noted below.

- Unambiguous – A lot of art is beautiful but is difficult to understand. Concepts should not be too abstract. They should be clear.
- Intriguing – Whether it's because you can interpret it or you can't, it makes you want to look at it.
- Inclusive – appealing to more than just one group
- Organic – Content fits the site and may change, may address the roots of Dakota County
- Unexpected – lightens the mood, makes you curious about what you might see next
- Blends in – Fits in its surroundings
- Accessible – easily found, easily approached
- Engaging – makes you think, it is interesting
- Enriching – makes the place better
- Celebrates the seasons – May be temporary or seasonal celebrating harvest for example

- Pop Up Art – May also be seasonal and can be moved to different locations for others to experience
- Representative of the place – connected to what is going on around it
- Properly sited – in places where people want to be, want to gather
- Transformative – helps make the place somewhere you would like to be

The Planning Commission was asked to respond to the following vision questions:

1. What impact can public art have in Dakota County?
2. What kinds of projects do you think would be most successful? Why?
3. What are the places or types of places where you think public art would be successful?

Their responses are noted below.

Planning Commission members discussed how using public funds on public art can be difficult to justify. It may be easier to do when the art is integrated into the function of a structure (e.g. mural in a tunnel, railing on a bridge, building design)

A comment was made that a good architect may be able to integrate art into design, as opposed to art that is “tacked on”.

A comment was made that even the structural features of a bridge can be designed to resemble the surrounding trees in a forest context, as is the case at Spring Lake Park Reserve. Several other related comments were made about the using the technique of incorporating features that relate to the surrounding environment.

A comment was made that community participation in art projects can create powerful results, such as group participation in a community mural.

The Planning Commission discussed temporary art, such as music. People have a wide variety of musical tastes which may be a challenge to program in some circumstances. Many cities host orchestras or more contemporary forms of music on public stages.

Art may provide an opportunity to incorporate education. Similarly, art can incorporate culture, such as Native American poems and imagery.

Parks and libraries serve important functions as community spaces. At the state level, a key location is the state capital, while at the county level, courthouses and boardrooms play a significant role. Enhancing the business conducted in these settings and the atriums of administrative buildings is essential.

Art may also be designed to address the needs of people at a certain location. If it is a stressful setting such as a courtroom, art can be incorporated into the lobby areas to help people feel more comfortable and relaxed.

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:

- Adopted Solid Waste Management Plan
- Adopted Mississippi River Greenway Natural Resources Management Plan
- Authorized funding request to State Park Road Account to pave west Spring Lake Park Reserve entrance roads

Upcoming Public Meetings – Community Outreach

County 42 Project in Hastings (Trail and safety Improvements)	December 3, 5pm-7pm Hastings YMCA, 85 Pleasant Drive
Open House	
West Lake Byllesby Park Improvements (from the master plan)	December, TBD
Open house	

Planning Commissioner Updates

A Planning Commissioner asked about the County's role in approving data centers. *Staff responded that Dakota County has a very limited role. The County can comment on proposed data centers in the environmental review process, but generally lacks authority in the permitting and approval process.*

Staff and Planning Commissioners discussed the status of the potential future Nelson aggregate mining operation in the Mississippi River near Spring Lake Park.

Adjournment

MOTION: Commissioner Graham moved, seconded by Commissioner Kausel, to adjourn the meeting at 9:07 p.m. **Voice Vote:** Ayes – 10 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved.

Next Meeting: Thursday, January 22, 2026, 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