



Discussion And Direction On Parks, Greenways, And Natural Systems 2050 Vision

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Planning Commission

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Overview



- Project purpose and process
- Review 2030 vision and goals and provide direction for 2050 updates
- Review 2030 Vision and identify priority areas for future discussion
 - Great Places
 - Connected Places
 - Protected Places
 - Consistent Funding

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Project Purpose



- Update the vision to take the parks department into the next 25+ years
- Extend the goals for the 2017 Visitor Services Plan (VSP) and 2017 Natural Resource Management System Plan (NRMSP)
 - VSP and NRMSP will be updated in 2025

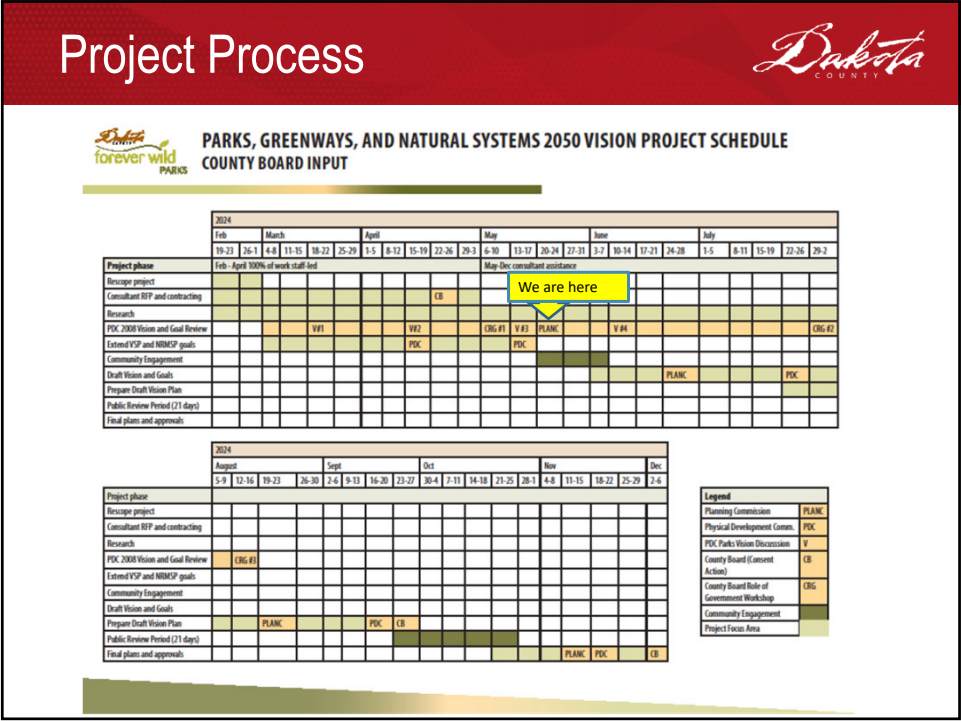
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Project Purpose



- Integrate the 2020 Land Conservation Plan vision and goals
- Respond to changing demographic and outdoor recreation trends
- Respond to critical issues facing society
- Establish goals for Indigenous engagement and partnership to protect culturally sensitive resources
- Evaluate potential for new park, greenway, and conservation units
- Identify consistent funding sources and partnerships

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System Growth



	2006	2022	% Change
County Population	391,613	442,038	12%
County Population as a Percentage of Metro	12.14%	12.0%	-1.17%
Parks	6	7	17%
Park Acres	4,750	6,280	32%
Park Conservation Areas	0	7	New
Park Conservation Area Acres	0	204	New
Private Inholding Acres in Parks	1,025	569	-44%
Greenways	3	10	233%
Greenway Trail Miles	14	46	229%
Annual Visits	911,000	2,919,323	220%

The 2008 Park System Plan contains 32 goals and 275 strategies. Significant progress has been made on all goals.

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Great Places

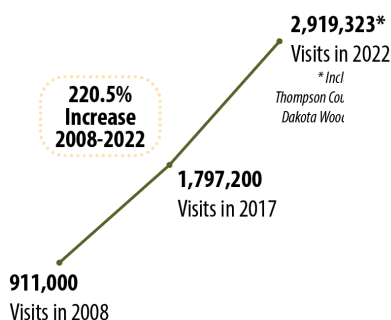


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Visits



- We are keeping pace with other Metro agencies in park acreage and greenway (regional trail) miles
- Visits have increased 220%
- As the 3rd most populous area of the ten implementing agencies, Dakota County is 6th in visitation



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Visitation



- Visitor demographics do not reflect County resident demographics
- Populations underrepresented in park visits include people of color, women, youth, elderly and low income
- Dakota County's population will be more diverse in the future

2021 Visitor Snap Shot



	Under - Represented	On - Target	Over - Represented
AGE			
12 - 17	✓	✓	
18 - 24	✓	✓	
25 - 34		✓	✓
35 - 54			✓
55 - 74			✓
75 +	✓	✓	
HOUSEHOLD INCOME			
Less than \$40,000	✓	✓	
\$40,000 - \$79,999	✓	✓	
\$80,000 +			✓
GENDER			
Male	✓	✓	
Female	✓	✓	
RACE			
People of Color	✓	✓	
White			✓
ETHNICITY			
Hispanic/Latino	✓	✓	

Data from 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study and 2022 US Census ACS Estimates, Table DP05.

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Recreation Offerings





Dakota County Parks Facilities

Parks and County Park Conservation Areas

- 7 parks, 6,280 acres
- 7 County Park Conservation Areas, 204 acres



Buildings

- 34 operated buildings
- Square footage of operated buildings: 79,586 sf



Campgrounds

- Lebanon Hills (93 sites)
- Lake Byllesby (83 sites)
- Whitetail Woods (5 cabins)



Youth Camp

- YMCA Day Camp Spring Lake at Spring Lake Park Reserve
 - Held at Camp Spring Lake Retreat Center
 - Archery games, outdoor education, arts, canoeing, swimming



Bathrooms

- 17 permanent and semi-permanent restrooms
- 2 facilities with restrooms available free of use to public, not included above



Play Areas

- 6 play areas
 - 5 for ages 5-12
 - 1 for ages 2-5
 - 1 inclusive play structure
 - 2 nature play areas



Other Facilities

- 1 community garden
- 1 dog park

What we're not doing that other Metro agencies are:

- Concessions (food and alcohol)
- Social spaces
- Event stage/performance space
- Nature center
- Waterpark
- Athletic facilities
- Lighted areas to use at night
- Bridging Facilities
- Special Feature
- Indoor gathering area or picnic shelter for 200+ people
- Snowmaking
- Ski area
- Art center

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2030 Vision- Great Places



Great Places: Improved Parks, New Parks

Serve County residents and park visitors by enhancing the overall park experience. Make parks great destinations by realizing the potential and unique qualities of these remarkable settings.

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2030 Vision – Great Places



Dakota County is known as a leader in providing exceptional nature-based recreation, with the following hallmarks:

- Balanced variety of quality, popular, year-round activities to promote healthy lifestyles
- Welcoming to visitors of all backgrounds and abilities to a conveniently accessed network of parks, trails, and greenways
- Innovative, sustainably-designed recreation to protect our natural legacy
- Quality education that builds appreciation of natural and cultural resources and inspires greater stewardship

How will Dakota Count provide exceptional outdoor experiences over the next 25+ years?

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Goal 1



Provide a balanced variety of high-quality, popular, year-round activities to promote healthy active lifestyles

What We've Heard So Far

- *Does the Dakota County Parks System need to remain solely a "nature-based system"?*
- *Greater emphasis on physical and mental health*
- *Consider economic development impact of parks and open space*
- *Do the recreational activities offered meet the needs of the changing demographics of the metro area?*

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- *New activities that appeal to new visitors (more active recreation and cultural options)*
- *Expanded commercial use (e.g. restaurant, recreation equipment outfitter)*
- *Provide more than one location for most popular signature activities (e.g. new mountain bike facility in the southern part of the County, addition of nature center(s))*

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Goal 2



Welcome visitors of all backgrounds, interests, and abilities to their parks.

What We've Heard So Far

- We need to move beyond just "welcoming" to a create sense of "belonging"
- Ensure public safety
- Consider partnerships to expand services to those not currently being served

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- More equitable, accessible, and inclusive facilities, programs, and activities
- Bridging facilities (Met Council designation)
- Level of services for each park
- New park units closer to where people live
- Explore park unit partnerships with other agencies (e.g. Fort Snelling State Parks, City Parks)
- Public and bike-walk transportation to parks
- Continued growth in outreach and engagement programming and experiences
- Diversifying and training staff for a more inclusive and supportive culture

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Goal 3



Exemplify sustainability and innovation as recreation trademarks of Dakota County Parks.

What We've Heard So Far

- Incorporate the international horticultural expo
- Move to current language of "adaptation and resiliency"

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- Keystone species re-introduction
- Climate resiliency and adaptation planning and development guidelines
- Sustainable trail design
- On-site stormwater treatment
- Public and non-motorized transportation to parks
- Adaptation and mitigation strategies for increasing environmental threats/changes (challenges to snow-based activities, expansion of warm-weather recreation season, risk to visitors from extreme weather events)

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Goal 4



Enhance provision of quality outdoor and environmental education.

What We've Heard So Far

- More emphasis on natural, historic and cultural interpretation
- Incorporate art into the park system provision
- We need to move beyond just "welcoming" to a create sense of "belonging"
- Greater emphasis on physical and mental health, of both individuals and communities

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- Meeting unmet demand in youth programming
- New nature center(s)
- Guided programs at more parks
- Facilities and logistics (e.g. transportation) to support school field trips
- Outreach and mobile programs
- Continued growth in partnerships
- Focus on unique park amenities and facilities
- Interpretive plans
- Greater emphasis on programming to support mental and physical wellness
- New programs/activities based on public interest and changing demographics

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Goal 5



Provide exceptional service delivery and build public awareness of recreation opportunities.

What We've Heard So Far

- Ensure signature activities in each park
- Develop a signature event/feature for lesser visited parks
- Role of parks, greenways, natural lands in economic development opportunities

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- Provide programs and activities to meet community demand and interests
- Role of Dakota County park system in creating vibrant, healthy, and livable communities
- Special feature for Dakota County Parks that is unique to the region
- Collaborating with community partners to enhance program offerings
- Reframing access to nature as a basic human right and an essential service provided by the county
- Strategic marketing/promotions approach to building awareness of the park system

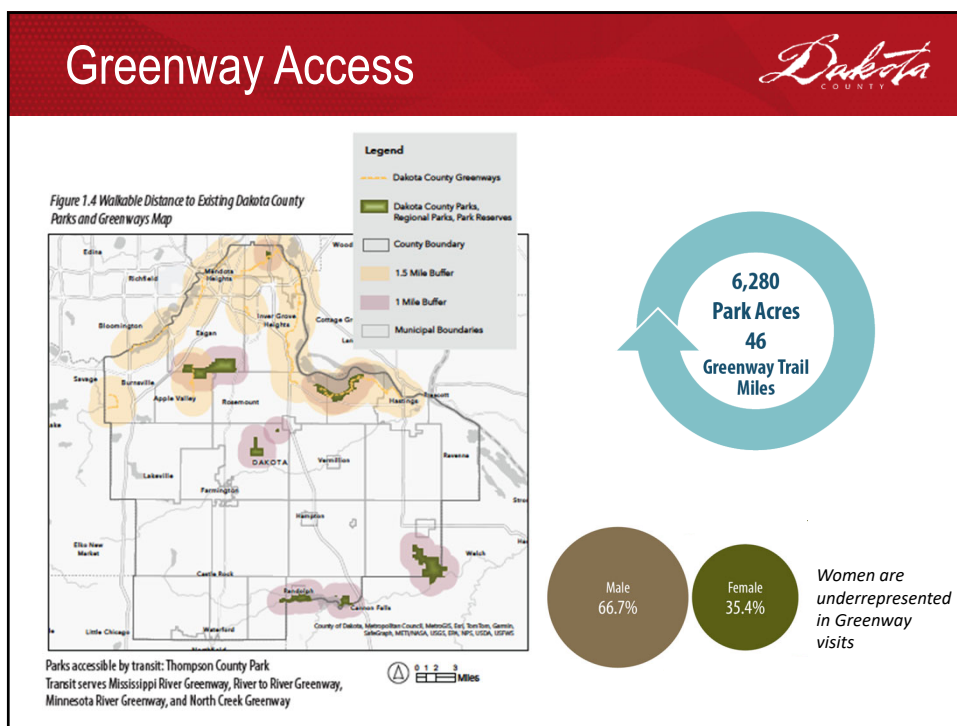
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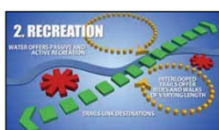


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2030 Vision – Connected Places



Create a seamless and interconnected greenway framework of parks, natural areas, lakes, and rivers, from which to provide convenient and high-quality recreation for our citizens and protect and restore Dakota County's natural systems.



How will Greenways change over the next 25+ years?

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Goal 6



Protect, restore, and connect Dakota County's urban natural areas and open space (green infrastructure), using recreational greenways as a building block.

What We've Heard So Far

- Geographic equity in communities

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- Focus on better integration of habitat and water quality with greenways particularly in the urban and suburban areas
- Consider new search corridors (e.g., Dan Patch, Soo Line)
- Include trail connection between east and west Lake Byllesby Regional Park units in the regional trail or regional greenway network (per Met Council staff guidance)

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Goal 7



Provide convenient and accessible recreational open space.

What We've Heard So Far

- Integrate art, culture, and history into the greenway experience
- Integrate playful elements like selfie stops
- How is electrification (electric bikes, wheelchairs) impacting use of the greenways
- Connect both local and regional parks to the greenway system
- Focus on accelerating the 'hard to do'
- Add community loop trails
- Promote the greenways with community events.

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- Broaden appeal of greenways-provide more for people to do at trailheads and neighborhood gateways
- Include separate walking and biking trails in high traffic areas

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Goal 8



Create a Greenway Collaborative to achieve mutual objectives for greenways and trails.

What We've Heard So Far

- What is the role for the county in local trail and sidewalk loops?
- Policy guidance for cost share

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- Expand collaboration to include city loops that combine water quality, habitat, transportation, recreation, art, culture, and heritage
- Collaborate with state and national partners for expanding corridors along the Mississippi (MRT) and Cannon Rivers (MTST)

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Protected Places



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2030 Vision- Protected Places



Protected Places: Green Infrastructure Includes Parks, Greenways, Open Space, and Natural Areas

- Healthier Natural Systems Countywide
- Healthier Park Landscapes



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2030 Vision – Protected Places



2030 Vision for Park Resources in Dakota County Parks:

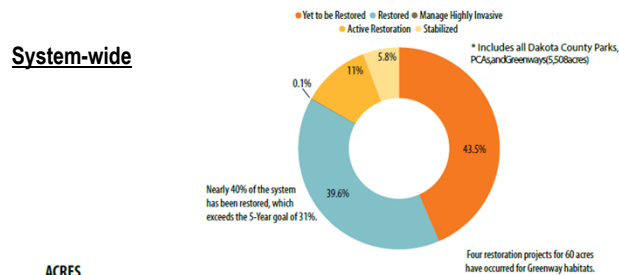
1. A healthy and biologically diverse mosaic of resilient landscapes and waterways that represents the natural heritage of Dakota County and supports a range of nature-based recreation activities.
2. Cultural resource management that preserves the irreplaceable and increases understanding of our collective past.

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Restoration



System-wide



ACRES RESTORED



- 1,434 acres of vegetation were restored from 2017-2023.
- 35 projects improved habitat for species including rare species.
- Natural Resources Management Plans for 4 greenway corridors were developed from 2017-2023.



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Goal 9



Develop a comprehensive, strategic park natural resource management approach to:

- 1) Preserve the highest quality resources**
- 2) Restore targeted areas that bring economic and ecological value**
- 3) Enhance visitor experiences**
- 4) Enter all parkland into appropriate and sustainable management regimes.**

What We've Heard So Far

- Assess the need for a natural resources management systems plan if we have a natural resources management plan for each park
- Improve soils
- Expand native seed propagation

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- Reclaiming landfills as open space after they are capped
- Expand management on land with county easements
- Manage lands for climate adaptation and resiliency
- Protect highly sensitive areas
- Natural resource management on county land beyond parks (highway right-of-way, library, service centers)

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Goal 10



Protect, design, and maintain scenic park viewsheds to enhance visitor experience.

What We've Heard So Far

- No comments to date

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- Acquire conservation land to protect key viewsheds (may require legislative action)

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Goal 11



Protect park cultural resources and offer appropriate opportunities for visitors to experience them.

What We've Heard So Far

- Interested in how we will interpret cultural sites
- Explore interpretation through art

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- Consider inclusion of significant cultural sites within conservation focus areas
- Partner with Indigenous community to
 - Co-manage sacred sites
 - Develop appropriate interpretive exhibits
- Work with Indigenous communities for traditional knowledge and interpretation
- Identify, develop and implement stewardship and interpretation plans for all cultural sites

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Goal 12



Design and maintain park facilities sustainably, to reduce and avoid negative environmental impacts.

What We've Heard So Far

- No comments to date

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- Environmentally appropriate lighting, maintain dark skies
- Wildlife friendly design (e.g. tunnels for wildlife under roads, bird friendly windows)
- Design for climate mitigation and adaptation
- Sustainable trail design
- Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification for park development
- Utilize existing best practices as identified by state and federal agencies and emerging technologies
- Carrying capacity of park visitation to limit environmental impact

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Goal 13



Expand resource management partnerships to leverage skills, policies, and access.

What We've Heard So Far

- No comments to date

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- Pursue climate action grants
- Facilitate partnerships among easement landowners to increase their resource management skills
- Joint-powers agreement with other counties to share equipment
- Remove barriers to collaboration and work with private landowners and other agencies
- Partner with Indigenous community to integrate traditional land management practices
- Explore partnerships to improve habitat for keystone species

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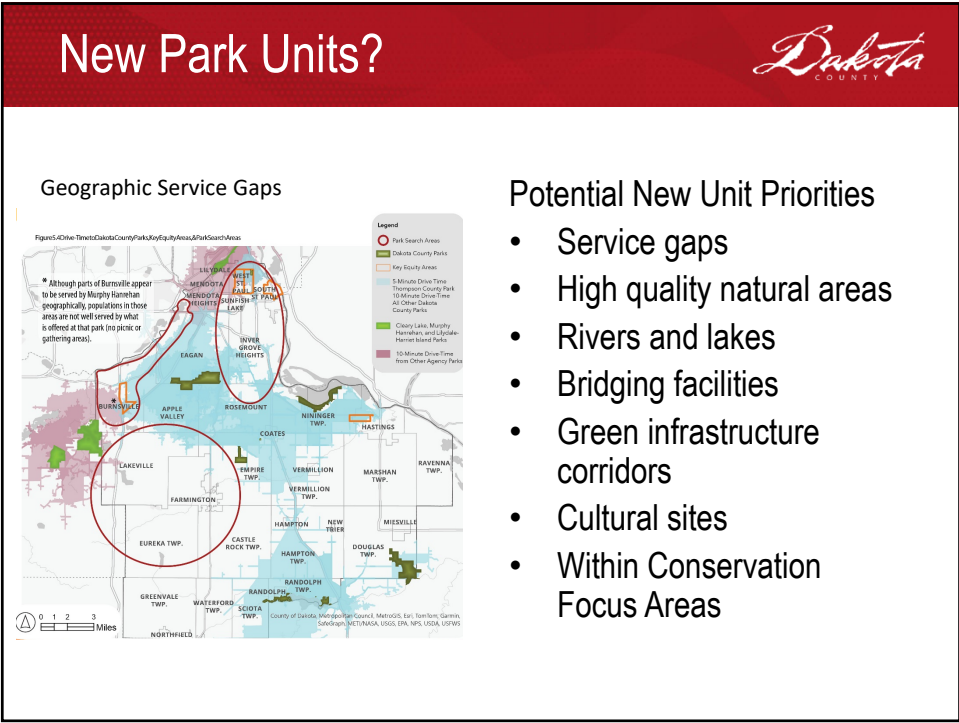
2030 Vision – Protected Places



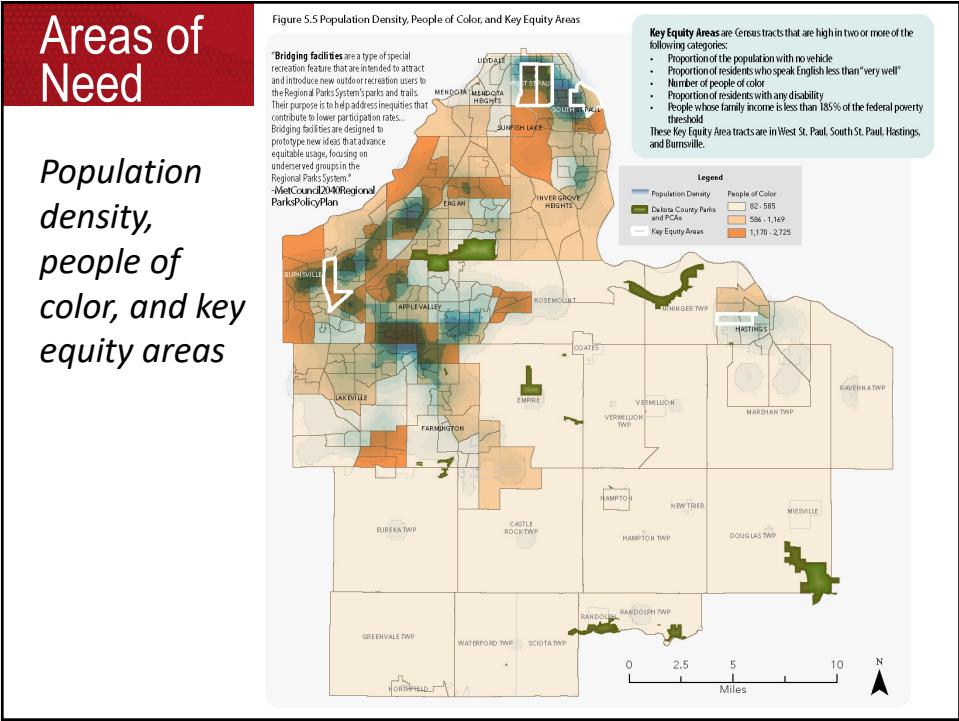
2030 Vision for Parkland Acquisition and Protection in Dakota County Parks:

- Acquisition and protection is focused on parklands with high quality natural resources, priority planned recreational areas, and enhancing connectivity of parks.

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Goal 14



Acquire and protect parklands and regional trail right of way through a strategic and comprehensive approach.

What We've Heard So Far

- Create and implement interpretive trail loops using greenways as a spine
- Make sure the older generation has access to parks
- Many of Dakota County's parks are far from communities of color. Perhaps making Thompson/Kaposia Park/Kaposia Landing a regional park or a new park in the Marcott Lakes area
- Lakeville and Burnsville residents do not have convenient access to Dakota County parks
- Need for parity across the system
- Closely coordinate with cities and their planning efforts

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- New units along the Mississippi River and Minnesota River
- Connect existing parks with ecological corridors
- Explore options for new units in areas where there are County park service gaps
- Partner with cities to create new loop trails, including trails around lakes

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Goal 15



Develop and enhance collaborations that advance County parkland acquisition and protection.

What We've Heard So Far

- Partner and coordinate with city, state, and federal park providers
- Avoid duplication of services

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- Explore partnerships with other park providers for bridging facilities (new Met Council park classification)
- Develop partnerships with a focus on climate mitigation and adaption
- Meet with Commissioners individually to discuss options for new units

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2030 Vision – Protected Places

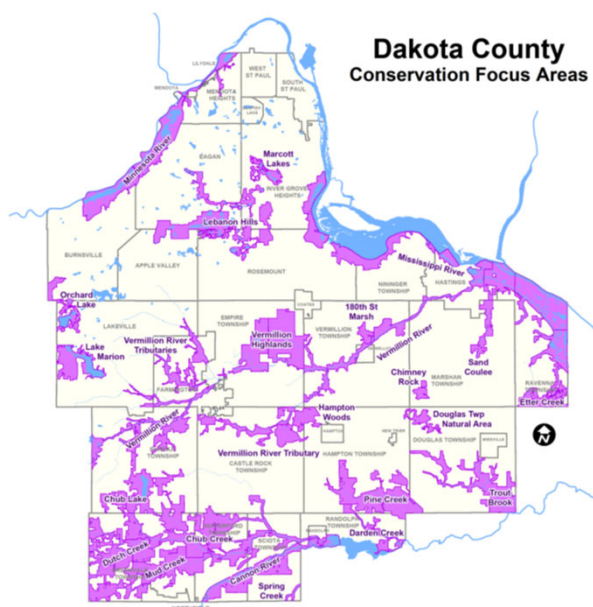


2030 Vision for Green Infrastructure in Dakota County Parks:

- Through a unique intergovernmental and public/private partnership model, a comprehensive and interconnected system of parks, natural areas and other lands in Dakota County will be protected and sustained to provide multiple economic, ecological and social benefits for current and future residents.

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Land Conservation



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Goal 16



Protect public-value lands through a strategic and comprehensive approach.

What We've Heard So Far

- Continue to protect land in conservation focus areas identified in the Land Conservation Plan
- Strengthen partnerships with watershed organizations

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

- Partner with public and private landowners to establish ecological corridors that connect parks in urban and rural areas of the county
- Work with the transportation department on wildlife crossings
- Consider wildlife habitat relations, species requirements, and habitat corridors when designing and establishing corridors

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Next Steps



Upcoming Discussions

- June 11 PDC – Connected Places
- June Community Engagement
- July 23 PDC – Review Draft Vision and Goals
- July 25 Planning Commission – Review Draft Vision and Goals
- August 13 County Board Strategic Planning Workshop – Funding

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