

Recommendation to Adopt the Thompson County Park Master Plan and Natural Resources Management Plan

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Dakota County Planning Commission Meeting
December 19, 2019

Over the past year and a half we have been working on the Thompson County Park Master Plan ~ last summer assessing existing conditions, last fall developing a vision statement, over the winter testing alternative concepts, and in May prioritizing a preferred concept. We now have a draft document ready for community review. The documents respond to community needs and to enhancing the assets of the park: the lake, the natural areas, promoting community gathering.

Overview

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- Project Purpose & Process
- Preferred Concept
- Public Review Process
- Public Review Comments
- Plan Changes
- Questions and Discussion
- Planning Commission Action



We are requesting action today – a recommendation to the Physical Development Committee to release the Draft Thompson County Park Master Plan and Draft Thompson County Park Natural Resources Management Plan for public review

Project Purpose & Process



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Update 2005 Master Plan

- Long Term and Ten Year Plans
- Interpretive Framework
- Operations Analysis

Natural Resources Management Plan

Process

Summer – Fall 2018: *Research, Findings, and Vision*

Winter 2018-2019: *Concept Alternatives*

Spring – Fall 2019: *Plan Development*

Fall– Winter 2019: Approvals

Year and a half process – started last summer, we now have a draft document and Planning Commission Review is the first step in the approvals process

*Thompson County Park is an **urban oasis** that inspires people to participate in vibrant and healthy activities, is responsive to the **community**, and encourages people to **discover nature**.*

As you recall, last spring, the Planning Commission helped craft the Vision for the park. This vision speaks to the assets of the park and place (natural area in an urban context) and the desire to make this place that is truly for the community

GP

1. Create a welcoming and safe environment
2. Provide activity and purpose year round
3. Promote social gathering
4. Connect the community to the park
5. Enhance the lake as a **focal** point
6. Improve natural systems within the park and beyond the park's boundaries
7. Inspire learning
8. Expand and strengthen partnerships
9. Implement strategies for ongoing community feedback
10. Reduce barriers to park access and use

Plan Highlights

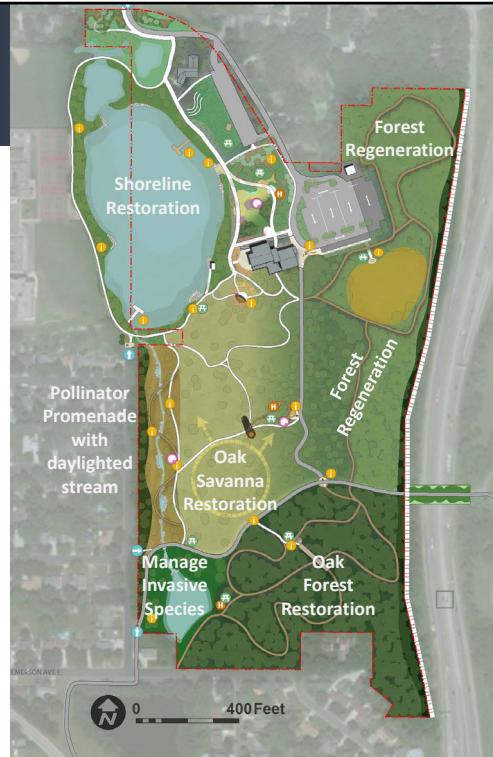
- 83% of park natural
- 38 acres restoration
- More lake access
- 1.6 miles natural surface trails
- 2.3 miles paved trails
- 8 new picnic options
- New inclusive, nature themed playground



- Approach Guided by Community Engagement
- Sticking with main goals 1) preserve/enhance NR and open up the south end of the park for discovery 2) increase interaction with lake 3) support community gathering and celebration 4) more accessible 5) more to do
- Eliminated the playground, picnic grounds, and trailhead with parking in the central part of the park
- Focused active areas on the north end of the park
- Added ability to support community gathering at many scales: Distributed picnicking at different scales throughout the park; amphitheater, north lawn
- Incorporated a paddle input and equipment rental area
- Included the pollinator promenade with daylighted stream
- Idea of evolving to more public use of Thompson Park Center
- *(NS TRAIL today there is about 1 mile)*
- *(PAVED TRAIL today there is about 1.75 miles)*

Natural Resources

- Shoreline restoration
- Oak Savanna restoration
- Oak Forest restoration
- Forest regeneration
- Pollinator promenade with daylighted stream
- Invasive species management
- Stormwater management
- Infill buffer planting



Include the action you are requesting the Board take.

Natural Resources

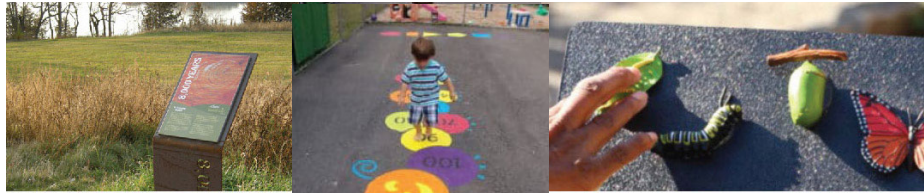
- Increase diversity of flora and fauna



Include the action you are requesting the Board take.

Interpretation

- Social Gathering: *Find community here.*
- Water Resources: *Follow the flow.*
- Natural Resources: *Leave a sustaining legacy.*
- Healthy Lifestyle: *Play in the park.*
- Cultural History: *You are part of a bigger story.*



The Interpretation section of a master plan should:

Research, synthesize and prioritize the historical themes and specific stories within that are key to understanding the park or greenway

Develop the best methods of interpretation to share those themes and stories

Because the interpretation is focused on high level themes, a follow up full interpretive plan is recommended for the park.

Social Gathering: *Find community here.*

Gather with family and friends. Join a new group or try something new. People come here for events and gatherings throughout the year—to connect and reconnect with known and new communities.

Water Resources: *Follow the flow.*

Water connects us all through pipes, streams, rivers, and lakes. Rainwater and snow melt flow from our home and neighborhoods to the Mississippi River, recharging drinking water supplies and sustaining ecosystems along the way.

Natural Resources: *Leave a sustaining legacy.*

Here, people learn to be environmental stewards and take those lessons home. Because of its size, location, and history, this urban park provides opportunities for bird-watching, nature walks, and habitat restoration.

Healthy Lifestyle: *Play in the park.*

Here, people of all ages can bike and hike, sled and skate. Whether with a group or on their own, Thompson County Park offers visitors a variety of active and passive recreational

opportunities year-round.

Cultural History: *You are part of a bigger story.*

People have been here, in this place, for thousands of years. What is now a park was once a farm, home, and haven

Phasing

- Shore fishing & pier
- Lake loop lighting/benches
- Greenway improvements
- Accessible playground
- Picnicking
- Sledding hill
- Greenway improvements
- Parking



Provided capital costs and O&M impacts as context for decision making

Most items from longterm were included in the 10 year, exception of sound wall, land bridge, renovations to TCP, Enhanced plantings

2 picnic areas moved to higher priority [Pond picnicking from long term to 5 year; neighborhood gateway from bottom of 10 year to to of ten year]; food truck parking [5 year to 10 year]

Restoration Phasing

- Phase 1 ecological core
- Phase 2 expands and buffers the core
- Phase 3 expands on better quality forest
- Phase 4 gradual forest regeneration



Restoration could be accelerated based on funding

Cost Estimate



<u>Phase</u>	<u>Total Cost</u>
5 year	\$ 5,822,000
10 year	\$ 3,018,500
<u>Long Term</u>	<u>\$13,594,000</u>
Total	\$22,434,500

High priority 5 year items are included in the 2020-2025 CIP (approx. 3.5 million)
Through item 13 on page 103
Include Contingency 10% and D&E 20%
Planning Level

Business and Operations Analysis



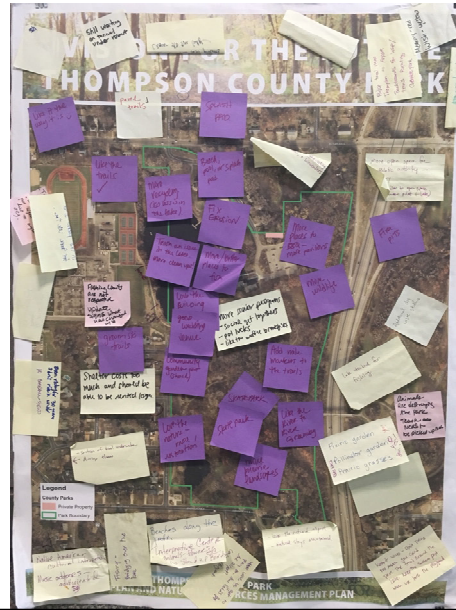
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- Estimates staffing requirements and operational costs
- Purpose is to understand annual cost implications of future improvements
- Provides a snapshot based on assumptions regarding maintenance standards, level of visitor services, and visitor services revenue
- Adaptive tool, the assumptions can be changed

Public Review

August –November 2019

- Community open house
- Intercept / pop-up input
- Web-link email to stakeholders
- Meetings with or presentations for stakeholders



COPS in the Park – Southview Park

Fix it/Swap it event & I can too – events in the park

Two open house opportunities – at park and Robert Street Bridge OH

Pop – ups – Latino Health Fair on west side of St. Paul, Food distribution

Presentations at existing events: South St. Paul Parks and Recreation Committee, Dakota

Public Arts Advisory Committee. ECFE groups, Student Groups at Sibley HS and South St.

Paul Secondary.

All other groups received web link / on-line comment or email comment.

Public Review Comments



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Overall support and enthusiasm

Top priorities:

1. Fishing pier/shore fishing
2. Canoeing and kayaking
3. Hammocking
4. Accessible play
5. Sledding hill
6. Forest restoration

Approve of everything I see – wish it could all happen this year!

This is exciting! Such great work

Red Headed Woodpecker, Blue Bunting, and Eagle sighting!

Discussion and questions focused on surveying the strength of the concepts and how well they aligned with the needs and priorities of current and potential park users. What concerns, if any, did respondents have with the draft plans? Which proposed improvements should be made a high priority for implementation? Are there any ideas that are not currently included in the draft master plan that the public feels should be considered for Thompson?

Secondary Comments:

- » Community Event Lawn
- » River to River Greenway
- » Equipment Rental
- » Play and sensory garden plantings
- » Forest regeneration
- » Pollinator plantings
- » Daylighted stream

Public Review Comments



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Suggestions:

- Skating rink
- Off leash dog area
- Bridge repair at wetland on west side of park
- Additional parking to support increased park use

Faster
timeline

I really hope
you don't
wreck the park
I love with
unnecessary
changes.

Lower
the
price
tag

I'd love it if adjoining
neighbors (like myself)
could get assistance
from the county in
controlling buckthorn

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Parking

- Existing shortage of parking at some times
- Parking demand will increase with additional park use
- Parking improvements elevated to high priority 5 year

Parking Assessment

- Parking assessment will be part of Phase 1 Design and Engineering.
- Analysis of parking demand and availability (current and future)
- Lot expansion options and costs
- Operational options

Public Engagement: Program and Service Expansion

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While the MP follow-up studies and design process will commence in 2020, engagement, outreach and expanded programming will continue with earnest. Through the TCP MP public engagement process, not only were we learning what people wanted to see at TCP, we also focused our outreach efforts on building relationships and awareness of the TCP, the park system and its offerings overall.

We heard and learned a great deal, some of the input received is reflected in the master plan, which the public may see come to life in the next couple of years (some of it may be a little longer). While some of the input can come to life immediately through programming, services and continued outreach efforts.

A master plan public engagement efforts are a touchstone in an overall community engagement strategy.

Public Engagement: 2020 @ Thompson

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2020 will be an exciting year, and not one just of “waiting until the improvements come.”

We heard through this engagement effort, which supported the goals of the Visitor Services Plan, to expand outdoor education programming and events to TCP.

In 2020, there will be more programming at TCP. At the October Nature Night held at TCP, over 200 people attended the program due to the engagement and outreach efforts! There may even be a “make your own hammock” in preparation for the future hammocking areas, one of the top priorities in the MP.

The three popular events (Trails by Candlelight, Take a Kid Fishing and Arts in the Park) held at TCP will continue and get even better with more partners!

Partners, programs and outreach are top priorities at TCP in 2020!

Next Steps

2020

- January – PDC – Seek Adoption
- Thompson Park Center Study
- Stream Feasibility Study
- Phase 1 Design
- Community Events

2021

- Phase 1 Construction

Next Wednesday at the COPS in the Park Back to school event in Southview Park

Questions and Discussion

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Requested Action



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Recommendation to the Physical Development Committee of the Whole to adopt the Thompson County Park Master Plan and the Thompson County Park Natural Resources Management Plan.

Five And Ten Year Priorities North



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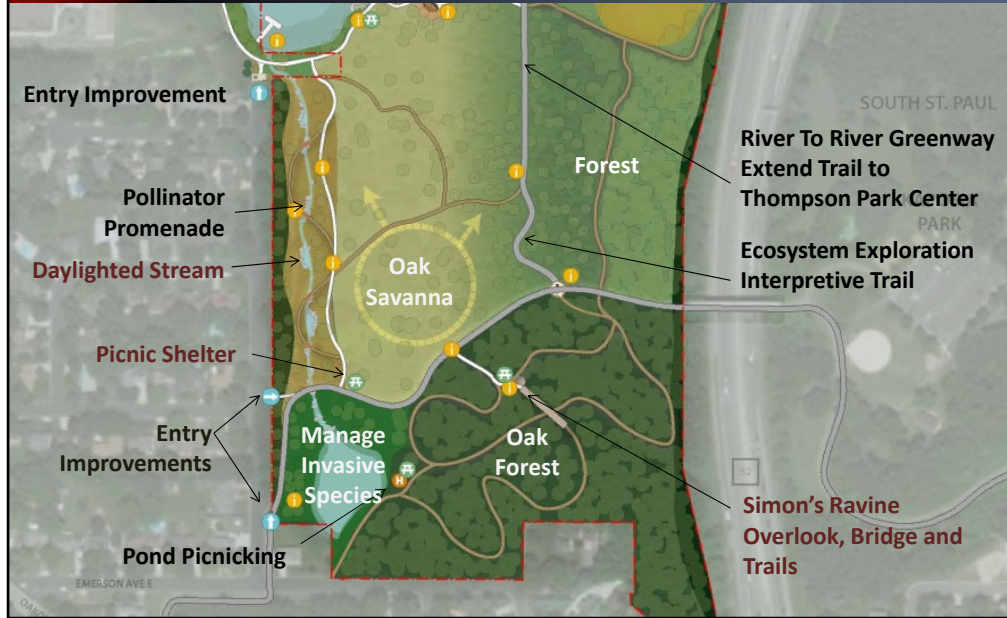


- 5 year – phase 1 NR (parkwide) and shoreline restoration
- 10 year – phase 2 NR; potentially phase 3
- 5 year – Study Greater Public access to TPC
- 10 – year interior improvements for greater public access to TPC
- Current Playground was built in ???

Five and Ten Year Priorities South



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- 5 – year study day lighted stream feasibility
- 10 year stream daylighting
- NR