



Public Engagement Plan  
Thompson County Park  
Master Plan and  
Natural Resources Management Plan



# 1. Introduction

Public engagement is a critical aspect in ensuring that all Dakota County government services are performed efficiently, effectively and in a responsive manner. Dakota County strives to ensure that the proper level of public engagement is realized in all projects. To identify this proper level of engagement, the County utilizes a public engagement process tool that is standardized across the organization and results in consistent approaches and outcomes. If a project scores a 1-3 a public engagement plan must be created. The levels of engagement and what each entails in terms of description and specific examples can be seen in the table below.

Level	Description	Examples
<b>Level 1 – Inform and Listen</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain, educate or gather information.</li> <li>• Use when priorities and decisions are still being shaped.</li> <li>• Can explain the issue, while gathering information to understand and perspectives and ideas of citizens.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public meeting with information presentation and collection of comments.</li> <li>• Open houses.</li> <li>• A webpage with information about a project but also provides an email address for people to submit questions or comments.</li> </ul>
<b>Level 2 – Discuss</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally involves two-way information exchange in which the public discusses a policy, issue, or research priority.</li> <li>• Discussion among and with different stakeholders is encouraged.</li> <li>• Can deepen knowledge by exploring and responding to ideas and concerns described by individual participants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public meeting with information presentation and collection of comments.</li> <li>• Open houses.</li> <li>• A webpage with information about a project but also provides an email address for people to submit questions or comments.</li> </ul>
<b>Level 3 – Involve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different perspectives are shared and parties can influence each other and develop consensus.</li> <li>• Allows the organization and participants to explore and work through issues together, understand each other's perspectives and values, and consistently address concerns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public meeting with information presentation and collection of comments.</li> <li>• Open houses.</li> <li>• A webpage with information about a project but also provides an email address for people to submit questions or comments.</li> </ul>

# 1. Introduction (cont.)

## Project Description:

The Thompson County Park Master Plan was last updated in 2005. The 2018 update will reflect the 2008 Park System Plan, the 2017 Visitor Services Plan and the 2017 Natural Resources Management System Plan. The master plan update will address potential market for park visitors; interpretive opportunities; and include a business and operations analysis that positions recommendations for implementation. The Thompson County Park Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP) will be the first for the park and will inventory existing conditions and guide future natural resource stewardship. Integrating the NRMP and master planning processes will allow for recreation and natural resources management recommendations that support a unified park vision.

## Engagement Level:

3 - Involve

Based on the above engagement level score, this plan will utilize certain methods and tools to reach stakeholders based on the table from the previous page.



## 2. Public Engagement Objectives and Approaches

The purpose of this Public Engagement Plan is to serve as a means of process planning and engagement designing in order to achieve a desired level of public engagement. An important aspect in achieving this is identifying the key objectives and potential outcomes and then deciding which approaches are best suited to achieving those outcomes. The following lists the key objectives and approaches for this Public Engagement Plan.

### **Key Public Engagement Objectives:**

To help identify park needs for recreation, interpretation, natural resource restoration, and natural resource management.

To evaluate alternative concepts and strategies to meet those needs.

To build new and strengthen existing relationships with stakeholders and project partners.

To build new relationships with County residents and provide opportunities for them to help shape plan recommendations.

### **Public Engagement Approaches:**

Engaging with stakeholders and the general public and allowing the opportunity to shape plan recommendations and offer feedback during the project.

Listening to and learning from residents.

Establishing, renewing, and maintaining relationships with stakeholders.

Listening to and learning from stakeholders.

Updating stakeholders throughout the planning process.

Reaching out to those who do not currently use the park to better understand desired activities for the park.

### 3. Major Groups to Engage and Methods

A holistic public engagement process requires a diverse group represented by various populations that are involved from start to finish. A process that involves diverse stakeholders assists in achieving a project that is reflective of the County’s diverse interests and ever-changing population. However, in order to effectively reach and involve various stakeholders different types of specific engagement methods need to be used as their effectiveness can vary from one group to another. Major groups to engage and methods of engagement most likely to be successful are listed in the following table.

Groups to Engage	Scientific Survey	Workshops	Focus Group	Open House	on-line survey	Technical Advisory Committee 
Local government and agencies			X	X	X	X
Regional agencies			X			X
Recreation interest groups		X	X			
Nearby residents			X	X	X	
General public		X		X	X	
Hard to reach audiences			X		X	
Potential Visitor Service Providers		X	X		X	
Existing stakeholders		X	X			X

The Dakota County Planning Commission will act as the advisory committee for the project and will provide guidance at every major project phase.

A Technical Advisory Committee made up of agency stakeholders will be considered.

Stakeholder listening sessions will be used to engage recreation user groups, agency stakeholders, and hard to reach audiences.

Community open houses and/or workshops will be held to engage current park users, those that live close to the park, and the general public

On-line questionnaires will engage the general public and current park users who may not be able to or want to attend a meeting.

Interviews will be held with some stakeholders and residents.

Opportunities for input at existing events outside of the park will be used to gather input from the general public.

## 4. Key Questions to Ask

Once the methods of engagement have been identified the questions that need to be asked then need to be created. Questions that are asked in the public engagement process must address the major concerns and issues of the proposed project. Questions that do not necessarily lead discussions towards the end goals of learning about the major issues can result in a more disjointed discussion that lacks effectiveness which is why it is important that questions are well thought out and refined. Questions needs to be asked in such ways where they encourage participation and dialogue amongst those people asked to respond. They should also be asked in a way to solicit responses from a variety of groups rather than only a limited amount. Similar to the methods of engagement, certain types of questions can be more effective than others in garnering a response from certain groups of individuals.

### **Project Issues to Address with Questions:**

What are the priorities for County investment in the park in the areas below?

Natural Resources

Recreation

Interpretation

Visitor Services

### **Public Engagement Questions:**

What natural resources improvements are needed in the park?

What activities would you like to do when you visit the park?

What programs and visitor services would improve the park experience?

What are the important cultural resources and natural resources should be interpreted in the park?

How can the park be more welcoming to you?

What are the highest priority improvements?

## 5. Action Plan by Project Phases

<b>Phase I</b>	<b>Organization</b>	May -June 2018
Planning Commission meeting Finalize detailed community engagement plan		
<b>Phase II</b>	<b>Research, Findings, and </b>	July-Oct 2018
Planning Commission meeting Notify park neighbors Stakeholder outreach Input at existing events outside of the park and 'pop-up' events in the park Community open house On-line input		
<b>Phase III</b>	<b>Park Concepts</b>	Nov -April 2019
Planning Commission Meeting Input at existing events outside of the park and 'pop-up' events in the park Stakeholder outreach Community open house On-line input		
<b>Phase IV</b>	<b>Plan and Approvals</b>	May-Oct 2019
Planning Commission Meeting Stakeholder outreach Community open house On-line input		

## 6. Available Resources and Budget

The Dakota County Board of Commissions authorized entering into a \$140,000 consultant contract with Hoisington Koegler Group, Inc. for the Thompson County Park Master Plan and Natural Resources Management Plan. Community engagement will be conducted by the project consultant and County Staff. Resources for community engagement to be conducted by the consultant is included in the overall project budget and contract.

**Briefly discuss any increased project costs, project delays and additional staff/consultant resources required by this public engagement plan, if any.**