

# **APPENDIX A: Summary of Public Input on MVSP**

## **1. Surveys**

- 2014 (*full list of comments available on city website*)
- 2015

## **2. Open House Comments**

- 2014
- 2015

## **3. Stakeholder Meetings**

- 2014
- 2015

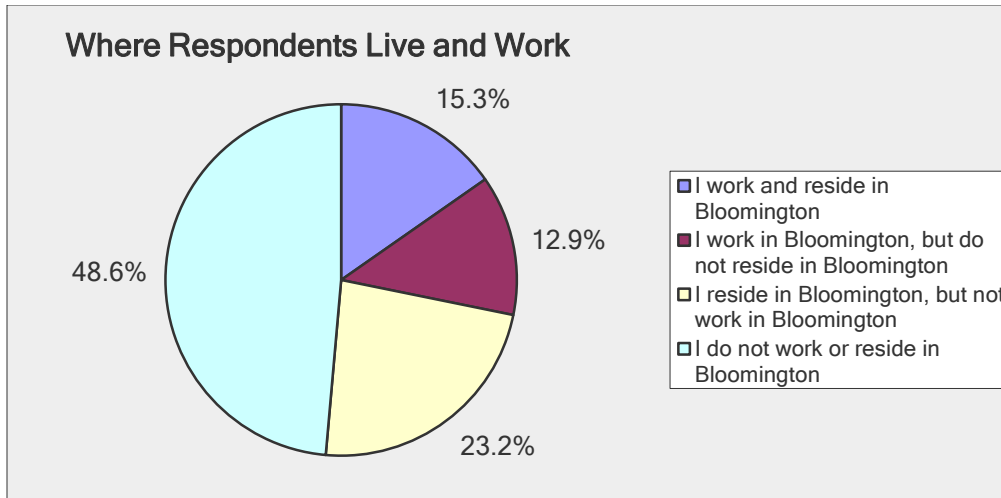
## On-Line Survey 2014 - Summary of Comments

### General:

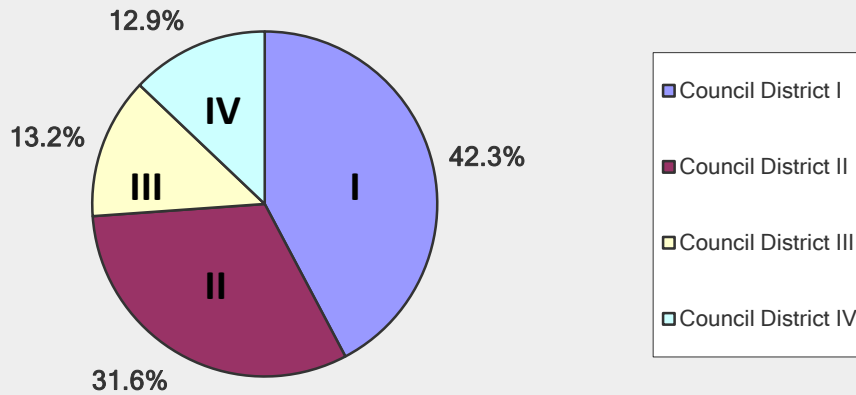
- The survey was available on-line (City website) from 06/26/14 through 08/15/14.
- The survey consisted of 14 questions focused on general use, desires and concerns related to the Minnesota River Valley.
- Not a scientific or statistically relevant survey; purpose was to get a sense of how people use of the River Valley.

### Who responded?

- A total of 989 people participated to the survey (38.5% are Bloomington residents).
- Not all respondents completed all 14 questions.
- A majority of respondents who are Bloomington residents live in areas that abut the City owned portions of the River Valley (Council districts I and II)
- A majority of respondents indicated some connection to bicycling organizations.



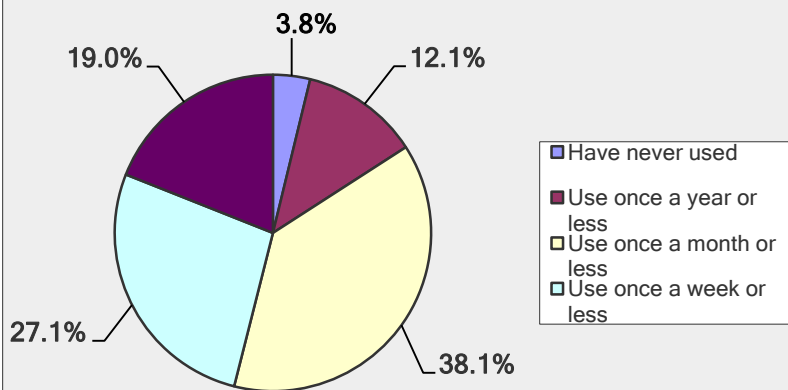
### Where Bloomington Respondents Reside



### Q. How often do members of your household visit the Minnesota River Valley in Bloomington?

- All 986 persons participating in the on-line survey responded to this question.
- Overall, more than 84% visit the Minnesota River Valley more than once per year.
- About 46% of respondents stated they visit more than once per month.

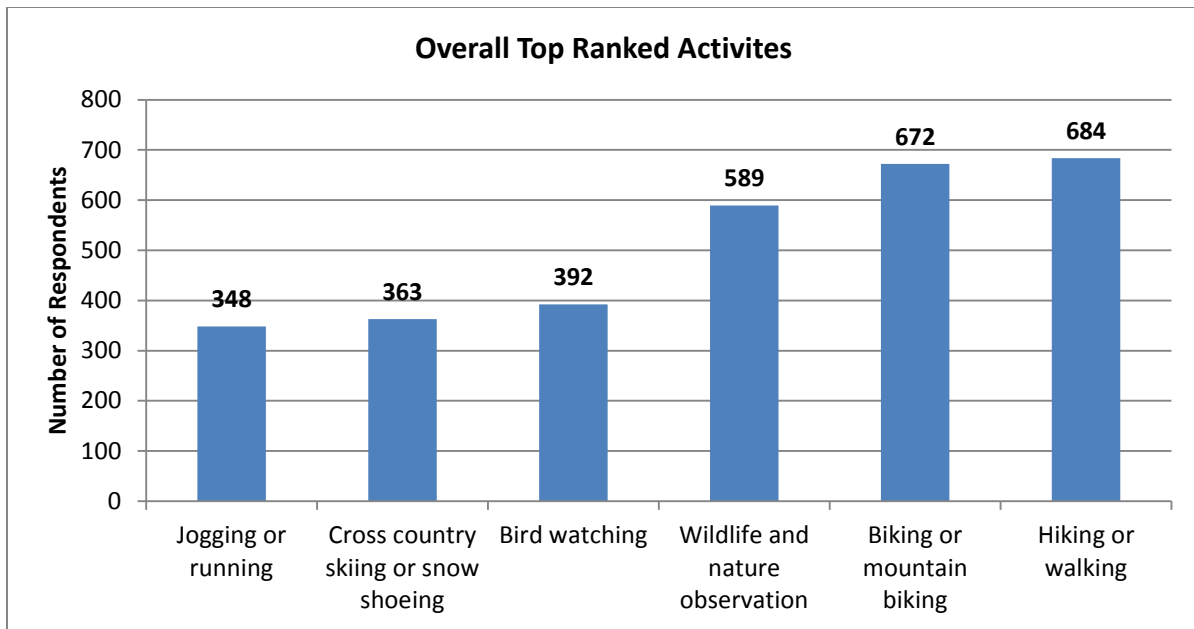
### Frequency of Visits



**Q. In which activities have you or members of your household participated within the Minnesota River Valley during the past three years? Check all that apply.**

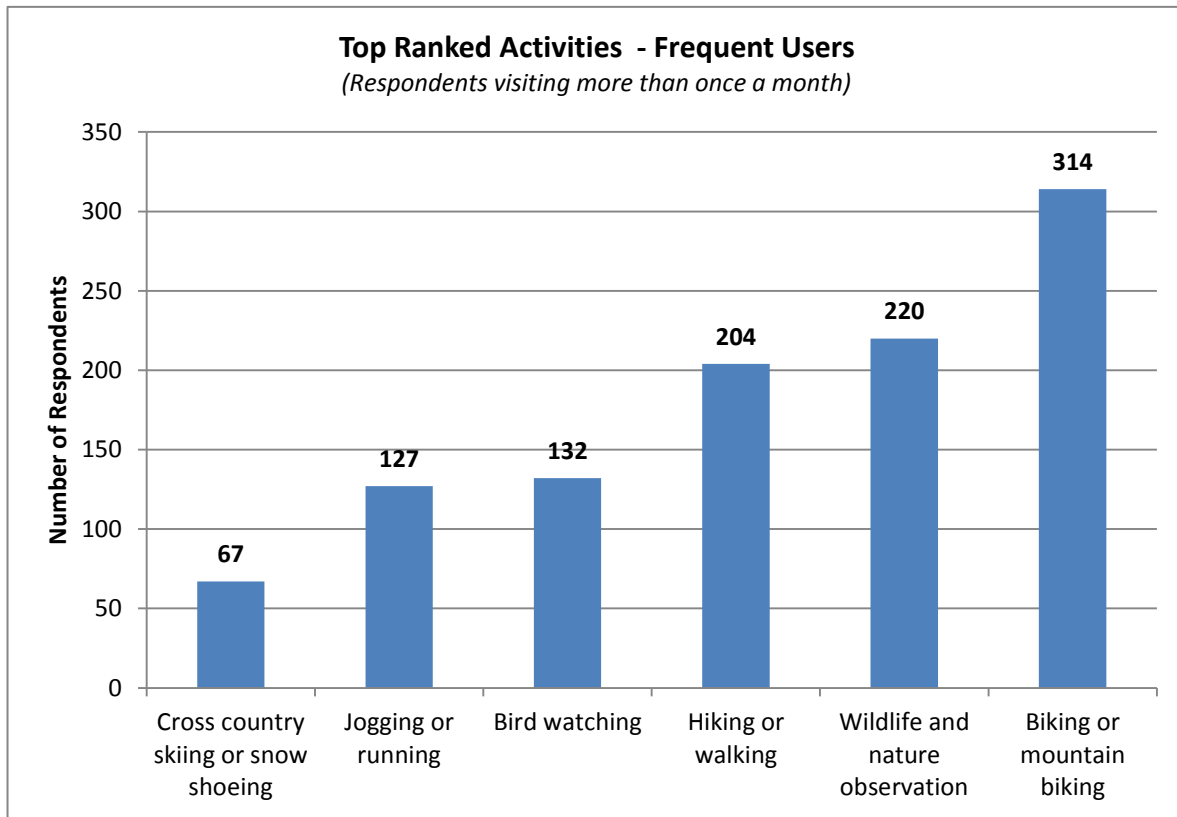
The activities receiving the most responses include:

1. Hiking or walking (77%)
2. Biking or mountain biking (75.8%)
3. Wildlife and nature observation (66.4%)
4. Bird watching (44.4%)
5. Cross country skiing or snowshoeing (40.9%); and
6. Jogging or running (39.2%)



The top five activities by respondents who visit more than once per month include:

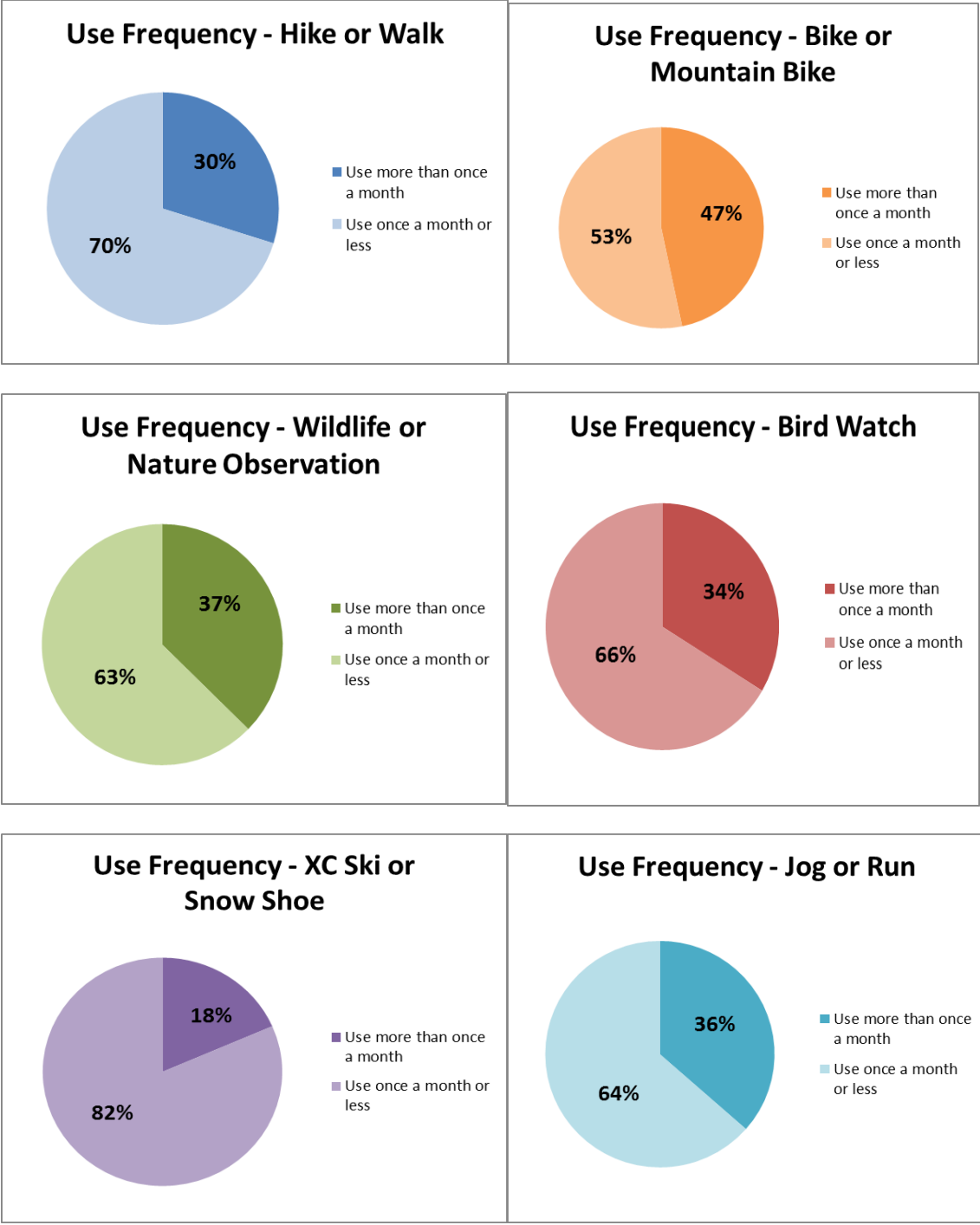
1. Biking or mountain biking
2. Wildlife and nature observation
3. Hiking and walking
4. Bird watching; and
5. Jogging or running



The top five activities by respondents who visit less than once a month include:

1. Hiking and walking
2. Wildlife and nature observation
3. Biking and mountain biking
4. Cross country skiing and snowshoeing
5. Bird watching

This “infrequent use” category seems to reflect that some activities are weather dependent and/or seasonal, which may limit participation through the year. It is noted that three activities (1. hike/walk, 2. bike/mountain bike, 3. wildlife observation) were ranked highly in both “frequent” and “infrequent” user categories, which indicates the universal popularity of these activities. The graphs on the following page illustrate the frequency respondents participate in these six most popular activities.



The activities most cited by respondents as “do not use” include:

1. Fishing
2. Picnicking
3. Cultural or historical interpretation

Fishing and cultural/historical activities may be considered “niche” activities, which could explain the low number of responses.

**Q. If you or members of your household don’t use the Minnesota River Valley, what are the reasons? Please check all that apply.**

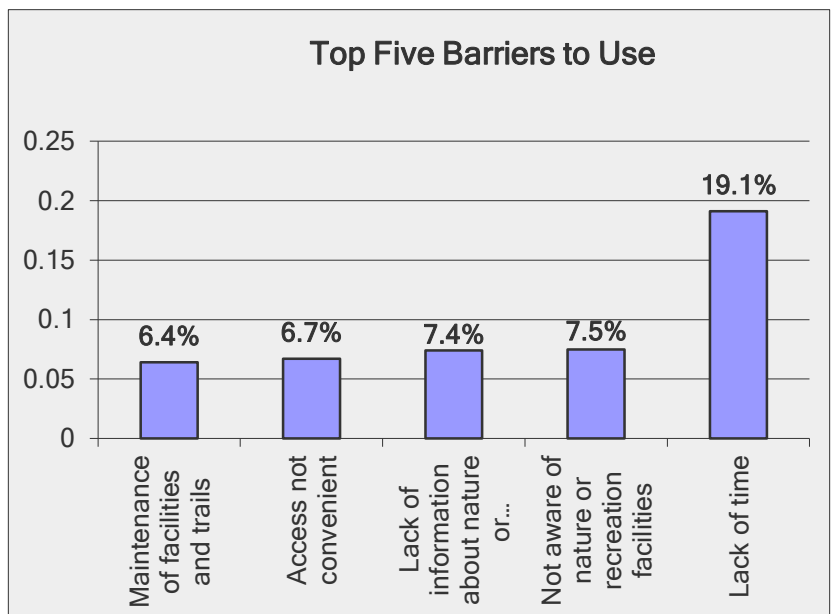
This question was intended to identify the primary barriers to use of the River Valley. Of the 865 people responding to this question, 61% indicated there were barriers to their use of the River Valley. By far, the most cited barrier to use was **lack of time**.

All of the other noted barriers relate to key goals of the *Minnesota River Valley Master Plan*, namely:

- Enhance Access
- Increase Awareness

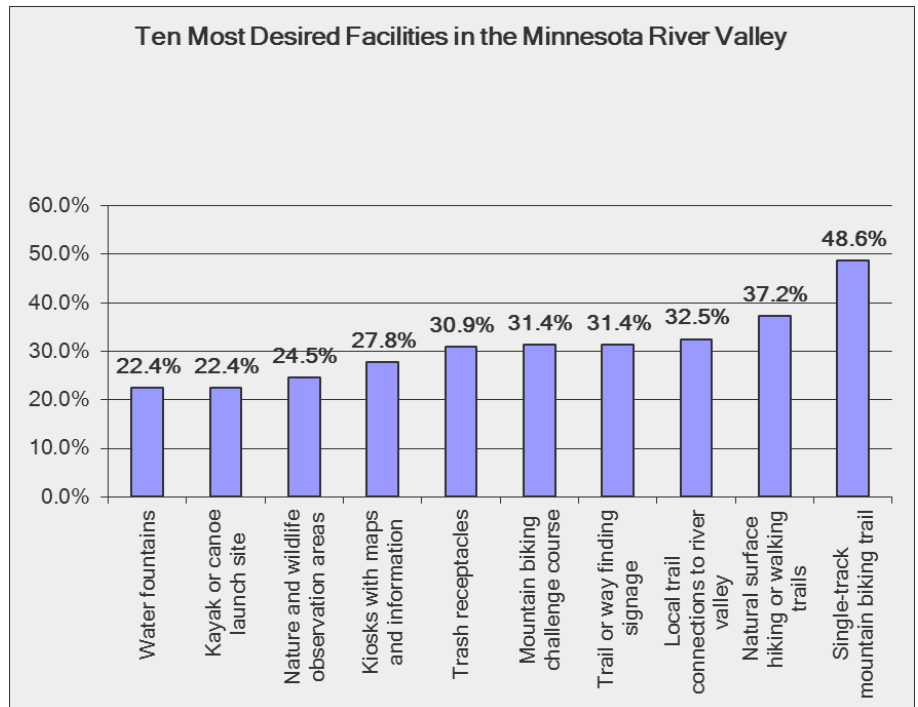
Other barriers noted:

- Weather (cold, flooding)
- Bugs



**Q. What type of facilities to you feel should be provided or improved in the Minnesota River Valley?**

Responses to this question indicate a strong preference for trail related facilities and improvements. This may reflect the predominance of respondents who indicated an affiliation with a bicycle group or organization.



Facilities that ranked lower all involve man-made structures and/or more active forms of recreation (e.g., marina, restrooms). Some of the lower ranked facilities also coincide with activities that ranked lowest in use by respondents (e.g., fishing).

The responses are consistent with messages the City has received generally, and at the open house and stakeholder meetings. The primary message is that respondents want to keep things “as is”, preserve the natural character of the area, and do not want a significant amount of new “development” (i.e., structures, pavement).

### **Q. How satisfied are you with the following elements of the Minnesota River Valley?**

This question asked respondents to rate numerous facilities and characteristics present in the Minnesota River Valley today. Level of satisfaction was rated on a scale of 1 to 5 as follows:

1 = Very Unsatisfied

2 = Unsatisfied

3 = Neutral

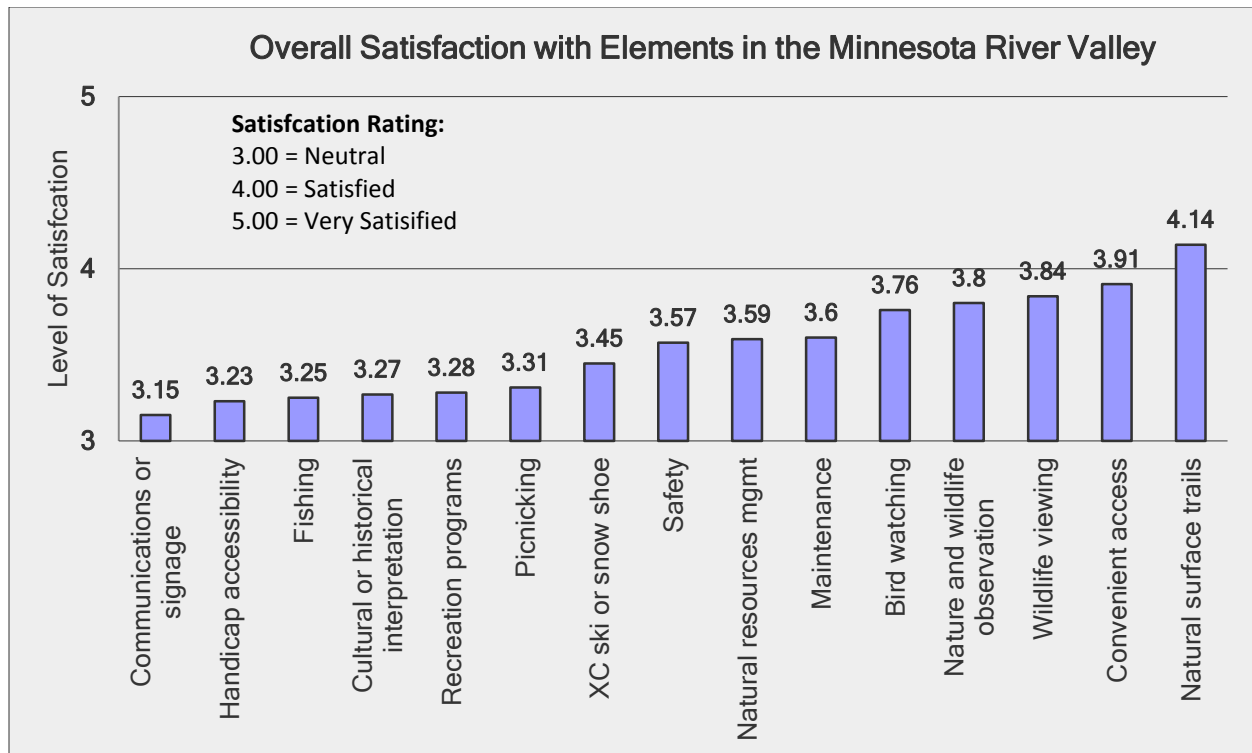
4 = Satisfied

5 = Very Satisfied

All elements received at least a Neutral rating, while only one element – natural surface trails – received a rating of Satisfied or higher. This suggests that there is no significant dissatisfaction with elements or conditions in the River Valley and is consistent with the message “keep as is”.

The elements rated lowest correspond with items noted as barriers to use (lack of information, convenient access) as well as facilities ranked lowest in terms of use (fishing, cultural/historic interpretation, picnicking). Again, two key goals of the Master Plan are to identify strategies to enhance access and increase awareness of the River Valley in general, but also with regard to its cultural and historic significance.





**Q. What priority does each element hold for your household in the future?**

This question attempts to get a sense of what elements or facilities users feel are most important to retain to ensure their continued and future use of the River Valley. Level of priority was rated on a scale of 1 to 5 as follows:

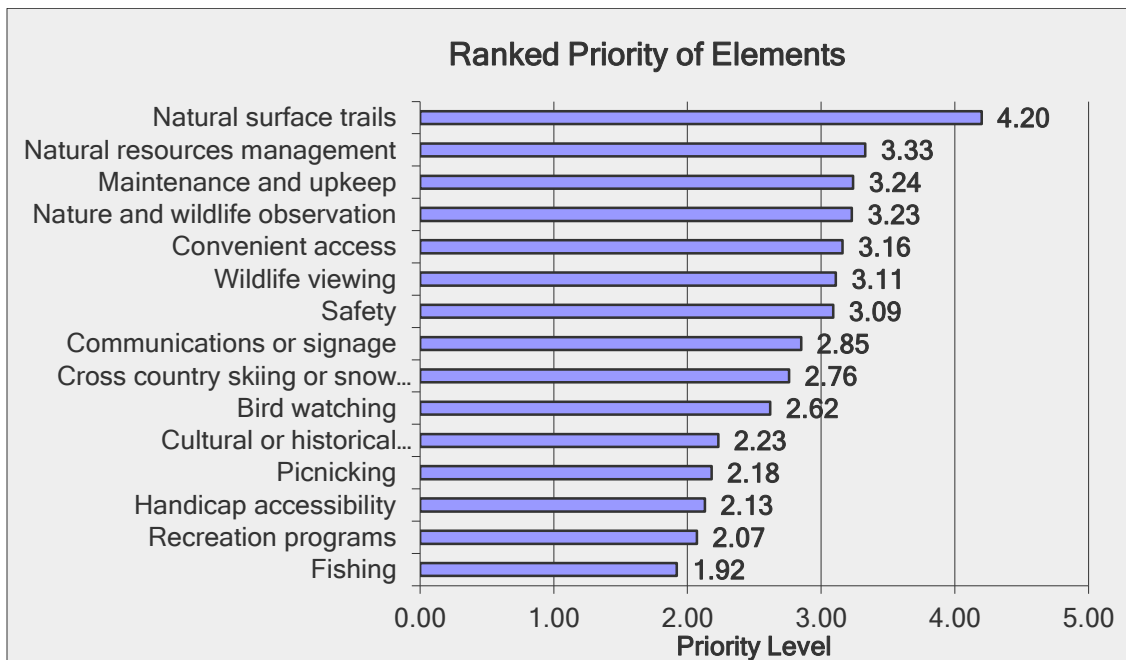
- 1 = Lowest Priority
- 2 = Low Priority
- 3 = Medium Priority
- 4 = High Priority
- 5 = Highest Priority

Elements rated at least a medium priority include, in rank order from high to low:

1. Natural surface trails
2. Natural resources management
3. Maintenance and upkeep
4. Nature and wildlife observation
5. Convenient access
6. Wildlife viewing [not sure how this differs from #4 above]
7. Safety

Natural surface trails was the only element that rated High Priority. This likely reflects the high number of respondents who indicated they are mountain bikers and/or hikers. It also may reflect current mobilization within the mountain biking community around the design of the Minnesota Valley State Trail with both a paved trail and a natural surface trail. The top ranked elements are also consistent with the primary message to keep the River Valley as natural and undeveloped as possible.

The lowest ranked elements correspond to items ranked lowest in terms of use (e.g., fishing, picnicking, cultural/historical interpretation).

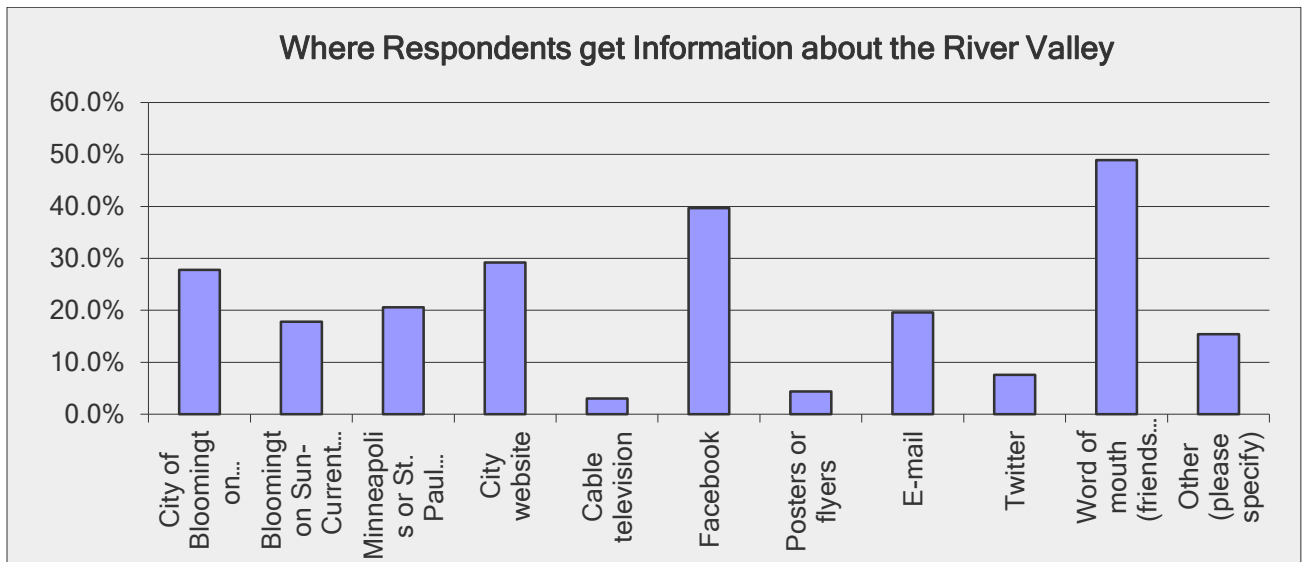


## Q. Where people get information about the River Valley

A question was asked about where respondents get information about the River Valley and/or the City's Minnesota River Valley Master Plan. Respondents were able to identify multiple sources. The most common source of information was "word of mouth", with about 49% of respondents indicating this as an information source. This was followed by Facebook (40%). The City's primary information sources – CityWeb and the Briefing, ranked third (29%) and fourth (28%), respectively. This suggests that the City's information sources are well used.

Written comments received with this question indicate that many respondents get information from websites and blogs affiliated with trail and bicycle-related organizations, retail businesses, and advocacy groups.

Another question served as a means for respondents to sign up for the City's email list to get updates on the Minnesota River Valley Master Plan. A total of 303 respondents requested their email be added to the list. It's likely that some of the 633 respondents who skipped this question are already on the City's email list.



## Conclusions

- This survey provides one snapshot of the preferences and priorities of a limited sample of users. It is clear that a majority of respondents were affiliated with bicycle advocacy groups, particularly mountain biking. It is likely that many of these respondents were motivated by concerns regarding the Minnesota State Trail design.
- Responses underscore comments the City has received previously, with the key message being that respondents want the River Valley to remain as natural as possible with limited new "development".
- It is unclear from responses whether items ranked low in terms of use and priority are due to the current absence of these items (signage, picnic facilities) or pure lack of interest. It is also possible that these items are viewed as additional "development".
- Responses provided some mixed messages. In particular, two of the cited barriers to use – lack of convenient access and lack of information – were also ranked lower in terms of priority. Again, it's unclear if they were ranked low priority due to their absence (so nothing to compare with) or because respondents didn't feel they are necessary elements, despite acknowledging the lack of these items as a barrier to use.

## On-line Survey 2015 - Summary of Comments

The purpose of the survey was to gauge how respondents would prioritize the recommendations listed in the draft *Minnesota Valley Master Plan* related to the plan goals. The survey was posted on the City's website from May 20, 2015 to June 30, 2015 and was promoted via the City's website. Hard copies of the survey were also made available at the MVSP open house on June 17, 2015. Respondents also had the opportunity to leave open ended comments at the end of the survey.

It should be noted that the data gathered in this survey is not statistically significant. The data only provides a snapshot of information reflecting the interest of the small number of engaged respondents who attended the open house or filled out a survey online. Therefore, survey comments are only one of many pieces of information the City can use to gauge the appropriateness of the draft plan recommendations. A summary of that survey was posted on the project website in the document library.

### How the Data was Analyzed

There were 86 total responses to the 2015 survey, however the response rate decreased as respondents moved through the survey questions as shown in

Table 1. Four respondents skipped the ranking questions completely and only left an open ended comment. All the open ended comments received are included in the appendix attached to this document.

**Table 1: Number of Survey Respondents by Question**

Question Number	Number of Respondents
1	82
2	71
3	64
4	64
5 (Open Comments)	25

The results for each survey question are shown as a 'ranking average' which represents which answer choice was most preferred overall. The answer choice with the largest ranking average is the most preferred choice. The ranking average is calculated as follows, where:

W = weight of ranked position  
 X = response count for answer choice  
 T= total number of responses

$$\frac{X_1W_1 + X_2W_2 + X_3W_3 \dots X_nW_n}{\text{Total}}$$

Weights are applied in reverse. In other words, the respondent's most preferred choice (which they ranked as number one) has the largest weight, and their least preferred choice (which they ranked in the last position) has a weight of one.

For example, Question 1 had four answer choices and the weights were assigned as follows:

- The #1 choice has a weight of 4
- The #2 choice has a weight of 3
- The #3 choice has a weight of 2
- The #4 choice has a weight of 1

## Results

### *Survey Question 1: Awareness and Understanding*

As shown in Table 2, when respondents were asked which recommendations were most important to take to increase awareness and understanding in the Minnesota River Valley there was no clear recommendation that was most preferred among respondents. The ranking average was very similar across all four recommendations.

**Table 2: Responses to Survey Question 1: Awareness and Understanding**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Rating Average</b>
Work with partners to expand on events in the Valley (i.e. River Rendezvous, mountain bike racing, etc.)	2.76
Master Trail Plan	2.64
Better Promotion of the area via City media outlets	2.43
Master Sign Plan	2.22

### *Survey Question 2: Utilization*

When respondents were asked which recommendations were most important to implement to improve utilization of the Minnesota River Valley the most preferred recommendation was to complete the Resource Protection Plan for both natural and cultural resources, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Responses to Survey Question 2: Utilization**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Rating Average</b>
Resource Protection Plan for both natural and cultural resources	4.76
Comprehensive maintenance plan	3.65
Work with partners to expand on events in the Valley (i.e. River Rendezvous, mountain bike racing, etc.)	3.51
Master Trail Plan	3.32
Master Sign Plan	3.03
Better promotion of the area via City media outlets	2.86

***Survey Question 3: Protection and Preservation***

The resource protection plan, as shown in Table 4, was also the most preferred recommendation when respondents were asked to rank the most important step to take to ensure protection and preservation of natural resources in the Minnesota River Valley.

**Table 4: Responses to Survey Question 3: Protection and Preservation**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Rating Average</b>
Resource Protection Plan for both natural and cultural resources	5.10
Comprehensive maintenance plan	3.94
Master Trail Plan	3.55
Work with partners to expand on events in the Valley (i.e. River Rendezvous, mountain bike racing, etc.)	3.15
Master Sign Plan	2.97
Better promotion of the area via City media outlets	2.47

***Survey Question 4: Access***

Finally, when respondents were asked which recommendations were most important to take to enhance access to recreational opportunities in the Minnesota River Valley respondents rated all four available recommendations very similarly, as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Responses to Survey Question 4: Access**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Rating Average</b>
Master Trail Plan	2.62
Comprehensive maintenance plan	2.60
Work with partners to expand on events in the Valley (i.e. River Rendezvous, mountain bike racing, etc.)	2.58
Master Sign Plan	2.29

***Survey Question 5: Open Ended Comments***

Full text of the comments received via the survey is provided below:

## Compendium of Comments received via On-line Survey - 2015

For readability, comments collected via an online survey are organized below under topic headings.

### Comments regarding priorities in the Valley

- I think that the MN River Valley should remain natural. Protection of the ecosystem should be a priority.
- I believe the highest priority should be to protect the fragile environment of the flood plains. The very unique Minnesota River Valley is worth keeping wild and a place to experience nature without "over civilizing" it. Lots of people like it just the way it is.
- Natural resource preservation, management and enhancement is the #1 priority when considering any project that effects the MN River Valley
- Improve access: connect new paved trail with existing trail systems  
Improve stewardship: committee involving all user groups and stake holders  
Improve awareness: include trail system in region and statewide information sites (such as MNDNR trails and waterways web site)  
Keep options for all existing users, and separate as necessary (ex. mountain bikers and birdwatchers)
- I hope the overall goal for any effort will be to expand the opportunities for more people to access the river valley. Expanding access beyond the mountain biking trails should be a high priority.
- In my experience, most visitors now are hikers and mountain bikers. The first priority should be to keep these users happy. I believe that means 1. maintain what is already there; 2. install better signage; 3. try to avoid changes that take away from the natural experience these users are seeking out. New trails should expand accessibility, but not replace what is already enjoyed by so many.
- Walking trails, both paved and natural, is the most important area for improvements.  
Will Loew-Blosser

### Comments regarding other recommendations

- Assure master trail plan and regional trail coordination.
- Maintain strict development standard on lands adjacent and contiguous to the Minnesota River bluff lands.
- Re-affirm the principles and guidelines established in the City' Bluff District Plan.
- Preservation and protection of pre-historic resources working with the Office of the State Archaeologist and the Mn Indian Affairs Intertribal Council.

- JUST LEAVE IT ALONE LIKE YOU SAY IT'S BEEN THERE FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS
- This is a terrible survey. I'm not sure what I expected you to want to know from a constituent, but I don't feel very satisfied with being able to rank the same 4-6 answers repeatedly. My major concern is that whatever you do to the river bottom resource, it should be sustainable and non-intrusive. Less is more in this context. Practice restraint in "developing" this unique resource. My hope is that it will not feel developed when its completed. I use it for birding, trail running, and mountain biking and I frankly like it just the way it is with the modest trail improvements to mitigate erosion and avoid impacts to sensitive slopes and seepage areas. It is a good idea to coordinate with the National Wildlife Refuge and put in place consistent signage. You can't allow mountain bikes on one end and expect that they will know not to travel to the other end when there is no signage at the property boundary to let them know that use is suddenly restricted. Bike travel into and through the refuge lands would be a fantastic attribute to enhance the regional trail system. I also think it would be a great idea to provide bike access at the Queen Ave access point down into the 9-mile creek valley and into the MN River Valley corridor. I see people biking there occasionally when I am running. That trail is a suitable slope for access. Access from that location would enhance the use of the corridor for bicyclists who now have to ride or drive over to Lyndale to access the trail on the bottom. Unfortunately I have not taken the time to link to partner organizations that are hosting volunteer resource management workdays along the corridor. I do think it is important to help maintain the ecosystem that I enjoy while I use these recreational resources.

### **Comments regarding protecting and preserving nature**

- Please leave nature alone. Let us enjoy the area the way God made it! Quit defacing every beautiful natural spot in Bloomington. Its such a shame what you have done
- This survey is worthless and gives no real options. The focus here should be on preserving the natural environment for wildlife and not expanding human uses into this space. Humans have enough opportunities for recreation and have already destroyed plenty of natural environments.
- The area needs to be kept as natural as possible. we don't need asphalt trails. This is one of the few places close to home where one can actually walk in the woods. We don't need to see nature destroyed to add wide paths that are paved over.
- Nature does not equal a paved path!



## **Comments regarding the Minnesota River Valley State Trail**

### ***Opposing a paved trail***

- I think the money is better spent on improving the parking lot facilities for the MRV especially the Bloomington Ferry trailhead. There would be a great benefit for there to be garbage cans and toilets along with more parking spots and maybe even potable water. I am a Bloomington resident and I am totally against paving the river bottoms trail. I along with my wife use the Bloomington Ferry trail head frequently and I'd say that the city has a jewel of a trail with no need to pave it. The people that are pushing this crap are horrible representatives for this community, especially Ann Lenczewski.  
Love,  
Dustin Johnson  
7437 Landau Drive  
Bloomington, MN 55438
- DO NOT PAVE the River Bottoms! It's too expensive, no one wants it.
- I'm a tax paying 15 yr old and I know this is a huge waste of tax payers money and we should promote in ways not building a path
- I oppose the paved trail.
- Please keep the area natural and reject plans to pave the entire trail from Cedar Avenue to the Bloomington Ferry Bridge.
- DO NOT PAVE A SIDEWALK ALONG THE MN RIVER BOTTOMS. KEEP IT NATURAL.
- PLEASE, never EVER pave paths in our only neighborhood oasis!

### ***Supporting a paved trail***

- To provide greater access, the primary need is a trail that is usable by people of varying abilities. (I am a 74 year old active biker and some of the sand pits on the current trail are difficult to nearly impossible for me on a high quality mountain bike). I cannot trust myself to cross the "bridge" at 9-mile Creek. Almost as important is regular access points so that people can choose their length of ride and return by a different route. Best wishes for success!!
- Have a paved trail and additional access points
- Vary simple wheelchair users need a hard surface there are ADA Regulations that need to be adhered too

### ***Other comments on paving (via email letter from John Gibbs)***

The Minnesota River Valley is perhaps the most significant and loved wilderness and near wilderness experience in Bloomington and the southwest metro. It will be important to protect that feel so that our young people have ready access to such magic and our broader community can access that experience. As we consider development of

trails and other uses, I think our primary concern should be to not displace that sense of wilderness.

A big issue is the Minnesota River Trail, and further development of it. This can be great, but only if we are careful regarding alignment and surface etc.

I have been involved in a lot of park and trail planning over the past few years in my role representing Bloomington, Eden Prairie and Richfield on the Three Rivers Park District Board. When it comes to trails, whether at the river bottoms or elsewhere, I have come to think that the sound policy is:

“put the right type of trail in the right location”. I think this can serve as a useful lens through which to view trail development.

**Paved Trails.** In Bloomington, we have scores of miles of paved bike trails, paved multi-use trails and paved designated bike lanes. These are located throughout the city - in parks, neighborhoods, throughways and transportation corridors. They are the result of a combination of Three Rivers Park District, City of Bloomington, Hennepin County and state and federal resources and efforts, and they are something to be proud of.

For its part, Three Rivers has independently and in collaboration with various agencies developed paved trails through Hyland Park, helped establish paved bike paths and lanes in the West Bloomington area connecting Hyland Park trails to the Minnesota River trails to the south and, soon, the Nine Mile trails to the north, and is currently developing the Inter City Regional Trail from Minneapolis, through Richfield and East Bloomington and, ultimately, the Minnesota River trails.

**Natural Trails.** Three Rivers has also established natural trails throughout its West Suburban focus area including natural hiking trails at Hyland Park in Bloomington and natural bike trails in several locations outside of the Bloomington area. Among others, the natural bike trails include the single track mountain biking trails at Elm Creek Park Reserve in Maple Grove and Murphy-Hanrehan Park Reserve in Scott County. With the advancement of technology and the onset of high school mountain biking, the demand for natural mountain bike and fat tire bike trails is growing fast.

Three Rivers does not provide any natural bike trails in Bloomington. In fact, there really is only one natural bike trail in Bloomington – the multiuse Minnesota River Valley Trail. It is in the perfect location: a river bottoms area that floods at least one time nearly every year and self-renews. It is unique. The “raw” nature of it (rather than asphalt or asphalt-adjacent) makes it special. The natural surface of it attracts users and respects the river environment and habitat. The trail is a great one and loved by many. It is truly unique in this metro area. It works for people who bicycle, it works for people hiking, it works for bird-watching - and it has many entry points, making it accessible throughout our city: East, Central and West. With improved bridges, culvert work, and

some carefully considered paved loops to further enhance accessibility, it will be even more outstanding.

Without care, paving trails in the Minnesota Valley can be a subtraction for Bloomington and the region. If not done judiciously it could actually displace much of the current and future use. If the unique wilderness character is lost, that unique natural character of the river bottoms is lost forever. The reward, more paved trails, will not bring a material increase in the overall amount of paved trails available in Bloomington. But the cost, in dollars and the experience, could be high.

As plans get made, we should avoid adding excessive pavement to the wildlife areas and natural trails if the effect of such addition is to actually eliminate some other experience or offering. Paving has a place if it enhances accessibility through on-ramps, for example, and perhaps manageable, appropriate length loops. But paving would not be appropriate everywhere, and likely not for the entire length.

In our planning and stewardship of the Minnesota River Valley in Bloomington, and MN River State Trail in particular, let's not lock in to any one surface or idea. Rather, let's take care to involve users, agency experts, environmental scientists, community members and policymakers and let's build consensus around alignment, surface and purposes and work to assure the right trails in the right places.

I look forward to helping.

John Gibbs  
Commissioner, Three Rivers Park District  
District 5

# MVSP July 31, 2014 Open House – Summary of Comments

## State Trail

- Don't change existing trails
- Prefer natural surface
- Paved trail will involve higher maintenance costs; doesn't make sense in floodplain
- Don't widen and chop down trees
- Alignment – keep to south side of "Opus Marsh"
- Need more information and opportunity for input
- Conduct a comprehensive archeological study in alignment area
- Don't be afraid of hard surface trail; will serve persons of all ages and capabilities
- Insufficient funding

## Accessibility/Use

- Allow public access at Queen Ave.
- Create public access at Ceridian [note: resident who works at Ceridian gave contact info]
- Create more access points along Old Shakopee (in South Loop)
- Create access point at James Ave
- Ensure ADA standards met
- Improve access for elderly, disabled, people with strollers, etc.
- Uses should accommodate wide variety of interests
- Don't increase parking in neighborhoods (specific reference to Normandale)
- Install more benches along trails

## Natural & Cultural Resource Protection

- Preserve wilderness character
- Protect rare species
- Don't cut trees
- Restoration of natural environment
- Allow for wildlife movement
- Preserve and protect historic sites
- Conduct a comprehensive archeological study

## Trail Design (general)

- Prefer natural surface
- Consider paving Nine-Mile Creek trail and allow bicycle use

## Signage/Information

- Need better access point markers
- Add more mileage sign posts
- Update trailhead signs
- Better communicate to public when new trails become available

## Maintenance & Safety

- Install gates where you want to prohibit vehicle access
- Need to separate bike and ped trails
- Repair eroded trails
- Organize volunteer groups to assist in maintenance

## MVSP June 17, 2015 Open House

A public open house was held on June 17, 2015 to present the draft plan to interested community members. Approximately 125 people attended the event. This was the second open house held during the Minnesota Valley planning process. The format was an open meeting and attendees had the opportunity to review displays summarizing the plan recommendations as well as discuss issues with City of Bloomington and U.S. Fish and Wildlife staff. Mayor Gene Winstead and Representative Ann Lenczewski were also in attendance. Attendees had the opportunity to fill out a survey on the draft proposed recommendations. The survey also included space to provide open ended comments. The overwhelming topic of discussion at the open house centered on Minnesota Department of Resources (MnDNR) plans for the Minnesota Valley State Trail. While the majority of attendees voiced opposition to MnDNR plans to build a paved trail in addition to the current natural surface trail, there were also a number of paved trail advocates in attendance, including advocates for persons with disabilities. The feedback gathered at the meeting reflects the focus on the State Trail. A full list of comments received at the open house, organized by topic, is presented below:

### 2015 Open House – Summary of Comments

#### Comments regarding restricting bicycle use

- Please consider the safety of pedestrians and hikers and birders. No biking on the Bluff Trail period!!

#### Comments regarding signage

- I believe signage and supporting the existing trail will serve to increase trail use. More than anything, signage at trail heads and restroom facilities would be much more effective at luring additional users to the valley.
- \*Use mile makers on the trails for bikers/walkers \*Have adequate parking for us that would drive to use the trail.
- \*Use groups to clean and remove nonnative plants \*Have a lot of signage for native plants and historical significance

#### Comments regarding ADA accessibility

- \*Establish ADA access trail and make appropriate signage consistent throughout system.  
\*Develop and maintain accessible trail heads consistent with ADA compliance.  
\*Protecting natural resource is obvious in such a delicate ecosystem and must be

balanced with the availability of people of all ages and physical abilities to enjoy and participate in. \*More resource would be required to oversee the developments in relation to preserving eco system i.e. bike trail use in wet conditions. \*As plan stated utilizing “partner” relationships will be extremely important in both establishing and maintaining assets such as the ADA compliant trail signage consistent throughout off road “bike paths”

### **Comments regarding nature**

- Keep the area as natural as possible

### **Comments regarding promoting awareness of the area**

- Utilize the state trail to encourage more people to the river so they become familiar with the conservation needs of the river and thus support cleanup efforts. Use the river valley as an economic plus for the city as natural areas and trails are to Lanesboro, MN etc. There are few areas in the USA that have such a great natural area so close to millions of people. Publicize the uniqueness of the proximity.
- I feel as if more people knew about the river bottoms, there would be a great interest. I’m fairly new to riding the trails but it is my favorite thing to do in the Twin Cities. I’m a 33 year old woman who has been riding the greenway system and lakes for 13 years & honestly can’t believe I hadn’t heard of these trails. I do think it could be a good idea to have a reserved area for people more interested in walking but paving a flood plain isn’t the answer for the popularity of the trail. Events & promotions/signs/preserving the natural environment are the best ways to make these trails as amazing as they are and could be.

### **Miscellaneous Comments**

- \*School involvement; field trips in science and recreation classes \*Business involvement \*Signage \* Signage – what is available
- Richfield paved a very nice bike trail from the 12<sup>th</sup> Ave thru Best Buy, having something similar in Bloomington would be helpful for cyclists when needing to navigate through busy Bloomington streets. Also, all over passes crossing busy 494 are dangerous for cyclists. The roads are narrow and the traffic patterns are difficult for cyclists so attention to the river is good but think about ways to better connect to cities leading into downtown.

- This is NOT good. Not good at all. The master plan will create nothing but pain in the heart of nature and all those who truly enjoy this space. Those who want to change this space don't like the way it is. So they push against the majority who do enjoy the way it is. THIS IS NOT GOOD. Karma will hit you.

### **Comments regarding the Minnesota River Valley State Trail**

- The Minnesota River Valley is the last wild place in the Twin Cities. It is where my father introduced me to the wonders of nature. Where I saw my first deer. Where I hope my children will also fall in love with the woods. We have enough parks, zoos, paved trails etc. The specialness of this place rests in its wild nature. The fact that wilderness is so easily accessible is what makes Bloomington such an amazing place to live. I urge you to put the natural environment first, protect this unique and special resource. Don't invest in heavy infrastructure in a flood plain. Let it remain unique, special, and the best thing about living in this city, the access to the spirit of the woods. Do not pave the river bottoms.
- Utilize time and funding by maintaining the wildlife and plant life preservation and organization of untouched land. To preserve the natural resources and beauty of this land, do not develop. It is already, as it is in its current state, entirely accessible to the citizens of Bloomington. Without a trail, one can fully appreciate how this ecosystem functions on its own/ If any amount of interest in hiking, biking, or just enjoying this natural land, they can do so without the use of a developed trail that cuts habitat potential by 12%. Taking invasive species and cleaning up older developments occurs and more preservation happens, (and simply cleaning up after ourselves) we will have more land in the valley to appreciate. I encourage, along with many others of this very opinion. That you spend tax-payers money on better and more respectable tasks, other than over developing a once natural location.
- Do not pave. 1) There has been no environmental impact statement. 2) No user study 3) No real estimate of the cost 4) Who is going to maintain and at what cost 5) Natural surface trails are the trails of the future = example = Cuyuna, Lebanon 6)
- I have major concerns over putting a paved trail on the flood plain. The maintenance of such a trail will cost a ridiculous amount of these funds need to be approved every 2 years. What happened when these funds aren't there, how are they going to be maintained, there's only so much money. Currently the trails are beautiful and maintained by volunteers. It is my absolute favorite place in the metro because of the fact that it's not paved a commercialized. Putting a paved trail down there will run this

and when it's not maintained due to the large amount of money needed to keep it up every year. \*\*This really is not a survey this feels like you all are trying to keep pushing your agenda despite all the opposition and concern over this path which is very concerning. Who wants this path? Because the people who love it like it is are here showing a lot of opposition but I don't see the supporters. I also am concerned greatly this will turn into great dis-array like the current trail in Shakopee. That trail is a mess and almost unrideable by road bikes

- It's fantastic that focus is being placed on preserving the River bottoms and increasing awareness. Unfortunately, the provision to pave part of the trail offsets the good. I can't understand the logic of creating a bill to preserve the natural habitat and including a provision as invasive as ripping out a natural trail, excavating and paving it. Honestly, I've tried to rationalize this. Even siting quality of life of anyone with mobility issues not able to access the current trail is incredibly weak and no way out balances the destruction suggested. The money earmark for building and maintaining such a trail is better used elsewhere. Continuing to leverage current partnerships, such as MORC, to help preserve, maintain and expand the trail system. Contracting help to widen the trail is still a better idea than paving. The River Bottom is the first trail that I ever mountain biked. It's the trail that I always bring friends for the first time. It's my go to trail because of what it is. It's natural, beautiful, changes with nature as it's meant to!! I live in the north metro because I won't commute for work. I will drive any day of the week to bike this trail. Don't destroy it because of some misguided decision to sneak a provision in an otherwise thoughtful and well-meaning bill. I've never seen a trail with such diverse usage where everyone gets along so well. I've crossed paths with many other bikers, hikers, runners, people walking their dogs, families with children learning to mountain bike and everyone says "hello" and is respectful of each other! Don't waste money to destroy a good thing. Use the money where it is actually needed!
- While having a master plan is of utmost importance, if it is the wrong plan, it can be equally damaging. As a biker and a trail runner, I see that adding a paved trail to the river bottom as being damaging. First of all, it will be costly and intrusive to build as most of that area is shifting sand. Secondly, it will be even more costly and intrusive to maintain when it washes out. A hike down Nine Mile Creek to the river and back again from 106<sup>th</sup> Ave will show the water marks on the trees indicating flood levels from previous years. Thirdly, many paths don't there are quite narrow to be able to effectively introduce a two trail system and still preserve the natural ambiance and beauty of the natural setting. I believe that if the goal is to have a commuter trail, that could be better done with bike lanes along Overlook Drive. They will be much easier to



maintain year round and not subject to flooding. Finally, a trip to any national park will show you that not all area is to be accessed by anyone, some trails are too difficult and strenuous for casual or inexperienced or handicapped people to take on.

- How is the trail going to be funded? The river tends to flood every year, I have a hard time believing an asphalt trail will withstand years of flooding!? The current trail crossing 494 is in such poor shape why not repair it and many other trails in Ft Snelling? Wasn't Black Dog Road permanently closed due to flooding and continue maintenance? Why do a trail that will have the same issues? I don't think this is the best way to spend out City tax dollars.
- As a Bloomington resident and biker and lover of nature I oppose any paving in the area. It is one of the last free places to take my children for a wild experience and it is 10 minutes from my home. Signs on trail would be helpful and better bridges over water crossings would be nice.
- My experience on current River Valley trails makes me concerned about trail maintenance and construction. How will the trail be maintained? How will equipment to build get to the appropriate locations?
- The MN river bottoms is a natural, rugged wildlife area that currently exists in a self-sustaining manner that is attractive to many current trail users. There is no reason to install pavement of any unnatural surface whatsoever in the MNRV. The area is special because it is remote. It is prone to flooding and very difficult to reach. As such it will be an exponentially expensive project to complete and maintain resulting in repeatedly invasive measures needed to create and maintain a paved trail. There are countless paved "natural" areas in the metro area already that are easy for people to access regardless of physical ability or disability. This MNRV area represents a place that is difficult to reach now and would be destroyed if it were made accessible to machinery or people. This plan is short sighted and an obvious waste of long term funds. The voice of the public is being disregarded in back door deals that are not in the interest of the land of the population.
- \*Trail improvements are needed in some areas but paving the trail is not a fiscally responsible idea. The DNR cannot afford to maintain all the trails that currently exist. How would they afford to maintain a trail in a flood plain? It is also shameful that voices of over 3,000 trail users are being ignored and no official user study has been

completed. Rep Lenczewski is lying and we do not agree with her last minute antics to insert wording.

- \*Survey the users and share the results \*A concrete trail will not be able to handle the elements. The connecting trails are already in disrepair. Flood plain. \*I personally moved to Bloomington to buy a house 15 years ago. I choose the area due to the proximity to the River Valley (as it is today). I have raised a family and my kids use it (as is). There is no need for more concrete. I do not want my taxes going here. Current property tax \$6,800
- We would like an ADA compliant trail
- The access is not the problem. More parking, signage and “natural” trails would be best. The last thing a natural area needs is asphalt paths. There are many, many miles of asphalt trail throughout the cities. What makes this area unique is the natural environment. The area is already used by cyclists, hikers, runners, walkers. A little bit of maintenance of the trails, more parking and signage would be the best use of the area.
- The trail between Normandale and Moir Park is used by my family several times per week year-round. We walk, bike and ski. Watching wildlife is a major attraction. Being able we are not deterred by dead falls, silt, 9 Mile Creek etc. Only high water stops us. We are well aware of the impact of high water years. An improved trail will cost many times its installation costs in maintenance expenses. Still, we are not as opposed to the asphalt as we are the inevitable loss of trees. Only by leaving the trail natural can the mature forest be preserved. We are astonished to see the “improvement” to Irwin Ave. If that is an example of the hard surface trail design, there will be no mature trees left between Coleman Lake and the river. Please consider a minimum impact paving method.
- Installing a paved surface in one of the last remaining natural multi-use areas in the metro will be a travesty. Flooding has proven disruptive in this area time and time again. Trail closures due to buckled surface will cost tax payers too much. I do support paved trails, but NOT in flood plains. Why has there not been a survey of current users to find our preference? Why didn’t we see maintenance budget/cost predictions? A law passed in 1969 specified the trail surface, sneaky Ann L put that verbiage in in 2015 without proper due diligence to make sure it makes sense... since when is Ann an expert on asphalt surfaces? If we proceed with a two trail plan it is prudent to make sure the

natural trail is constructed to current IMBA standards and not dictated by a “corridor” that is arbitrarily defined.

- This doesn't feel like it's giving me the option for a NATURAL trail – the trail that already exists. It is perfect as is. No need for this trail to be paved.
- Just leave the trail alone. Please don't waste our tax dollars putting a trail in a flood plain. I have used the trails as is or the last 20 years and it floods all the time.
- Leave the MNRV alone. In its current state it is perfect. Nothing needs to be done about it. I don't understand why you're so concerned with this chunk of land. If you have to destroy a bunch of nature and pave a trail through to attract people that is not right. If those people can't walk through the woods without a paved trail then they shouldn't. Let nature be nature. I disapprove with your plans and overall do not like the master plan at all. I've enjoyed this place my whole life and to see a giant trail go through there it would pain me. You are wasting tax payers dollars on insane projects. PLEASE STOP
- I do not believe the master plan should include a paved trail in the MNRV. I have my reasons why I believe this so I will include a few here. The most common sense of why not to pave a trail is because this is a flood plain and why would you make a paved trail in a flood plain. Currently the trail changes year to year depending on the flooding. With a paved trail this seems like a very expensive endeavor to pursue- with the construction and maintenance year to year seems like it would be so high that it would not be worth tax payer dollars in balancing worth to money ratio. I understand the need to promote the MN River Valley but there are plenty of other ways to do this to attract people. I in fact like the native and nature area of this river valley and the paved paths would disrupt this. Please do not put pave paths in the MN River Valley – it is a flood plain and not the conditions for a paved path.
- As you may have noticed – the idea of creating a paved trail within the boundaries of the 13 mile stretch along the Minnesota River has become a very “sticky” subject. It appears that it's time to talk actual trail surface. A bitumen surface will #1 be very expensive, #2 it will be very hard to maintain a consistent surface through frost heave and regular flood events that are prone in this area. Water turbulences is extraordinarily effective at lifting chunks of pavement and moving them out of the trail corridor. What kind of budget is in place for this inevitable cost outlay? I fear continuing maintenance has been overlooked. Please, a strong look deserves to be taken at a fine

aggregate surface for this trail. Why? It's a far superior surface for an environment such as this. Water (flood water and heavy rainwater) wash right over the trail. Maintenance after a hard flood event is as simple as a grader and reapplication of fines to the surface. ADA access is still available – especially in the dry, the surface is hard and smooth. A surface like this allows access to all bikes for precisely the same reason. It is hard and compact. One only has to look to what is probably the nation's most well-known trail, the Elroy – Sparta and frankly nearly ALL of Wisconsin trails to see how well these surfaces hold up. Yes, there is a seasonal transition when the surface is too soft to use. We are ALL used to this though and know to stay away in the softer seasons. Building this trail and keeping it as a mostly natural surface trail will keep more users happy in the long run. Again, I do fully realize that the trail installation is a bygone conclusion at this point, and it's fine to start working with ALL the other user groups out there – hikers, bikers, birders. I know this goes beyond the purview of this form, but it may be time to strongly look at creating a gravel trail (aka Elroy-Sparta) all the way to LeSueur. This will be a unique project for Minnesota and a great way to explore the outdoors for a wide spectrum of users.

- Ways to do so w/o being invasive to the lands would be to allow the youth to be more involved w/park rangers & whatnot. Allow activities, geocaching, nature hikes, wildlife watching, and wildlife celebrations. Get the community involved w/o destruction of the land. Can easily accommodate that budget w/more staff & more PR. We have so many other paved trails in Bloomington from Highland, 9 mile, across the river in Eagan, Hiawatha & Ft Snelling it's extremely unnecessary.
- Place bridges at strategic points to make stream crossways easier. DO not change the nature of the trail! There are other areas with paved trails. Paving a trail that is a flood plain is a waste of money. Plus, with the flooding, it will be additional maintenance headache! Put the money towards maintaining the existing trails that have been built!
- 1. Leave is as is. You can fix the bridge, improve the parking lot, don't pave the trails. Don't "enhance access"; the FEWER people, the better. Don't impose on the wildlife for the sake of "access" and "environmental awareness". Continue to do River Rendezvous—don't RUIN the woods I have walked in for 45 years, please. What you have planned is NOT representative of the residents of Bloomington. The people who currently use the trails LIKE to get away from modern conveniences like asphalt and cement and crowds! Why is your plan moving forward? Not happy.

- As far as I have heard, there has been no study conducted to survey the current user group numbers, and there does seem reluctance to do it. For two decades a group-a large group- of cyclists all over the country have ridden on and enjoyed “the bottoms” in their natural state. A getaway within the metro and a feature not many cities can claim to have. The users are not a “fringe group” as I have heard them reformed to- these are men, women, kids, and families. There are countless other opportunities for citizens to ride paved rails without damaging pristine river front nature. Promote the trails as they are and see the results. Look north of Duluth to see the results of promoting mountain bike trails! Most importantly, there seems to be no acknowledgement of the fact that the area is a flood plain. Who will pay to maintain that? Has the cost of maintenance been proposed to Bloomington tax payers? The plan seems ill-conceived and a missed opportunity to promote a protest something unique. There is no need for a trail.
- I oppose paving the existing Minnesota River Valley State trail. It is a one-of-a-kind resource that serves the needs of hikers and mountain bikers from the entire metro area. In addition, I’m concerned about other factors of this project:
  1. A user study has not been presented that justifies the project. There is no user study to determine how people use the current trail.
  2. The maintenance of a paved trail is going to be extremely expensive, give the poor soil surface and frequent flooding the DNR can’t afford to fix the trails they have now.
  3. Over 3400 people have signed a petition opposing paving the trail. See [change.org](http://change.org) and search Minnesota River Valley.
  4. No plan has been presented by the city of Bloomington or the DNR for public review.
  5. Bloomington’s MNRV survey shows the majority of residents prefer a natural trail. I oppose the paved trail –Chas Porter
- Preserve our River-waterways-and build the trail of the flood plain- so we have a trail and the resources of the river are preserved. As in come up with a revised plan! Then everyone is happy 😊 And less tax dollars are spent.
- This “survey” does not address my concerns. Please consider a user/use study to determine the true value of paving the river bottoms. I feel very strongly that my tax dollars should be better spent. The in long term and ongoing repairs that will be necessary do outweigh the initial investment. It is a waste to try to pave and maintain an area that floods regularly. Black Dog Road is a perfect example. Clearly more research is necessary before this project is approved. Please, do not pave the river

bottoms trail without further consideration for what residents of Bloomington want and need.

- While I can understand the desire for access and awareness my main concern is further paving of a natural area within a city that is already highly paved. I feel that many who live in Bloomington and elsewhere already know of the many other beautiful trails that we have, even in the immediate area. Moir Park and the trail along Nine Mile come to mind. I do question the wisdom of creating a paved path in a floodplain. We see nearly every year a massive flooded area, so I can only imagine that an elevated path would be the only sustainable solution (which sounded horrible). A ground trail would be subject to corrosion every year not only from spring floods, but also the winter effects from deep cold and reheating. I find that the current amount of trail usage is what makes the experience so special, and that MORE exposure could potentially ruin the experience for everyone who goes down there...
- I have been working on this for a couple of year now with Geezer Squad. When discussion began I did not know if I wanted paved trails. Walking along the river as it naturally has been cool. But the more I walk the more bikers try to run me over. Thus two trails are definitely needed. As to a paved trail or non paved trail. I grew up by Nine Mile Creek and Minnehaha Falls walking on natural trails. When they are muddy it is difficult to walk while trying to go up or down slopes to avoid mud piles. Therefore I am for paved trails. Yes they do wash out sometimes but so do natural trails. But once it dries out paved is better while the mud remains on the natural. I am a walker but I feel that to have a paved path for kids, skateboarders, handicapped and elderly would serve a larger segment of the population who pays for the park should be able to enjoy it. To leave it to one segment of the population, i.e. bikers is unfair to the rest of the population.
- As a current user of the beautiful natural trail, I believe that changing it will remove the beauty and nature. Pavement is not natural, takes trucks and major changing of the area just to install. Then, after 4 springs of major flooding, where will the money come from to fix it? This trail is so used! On a Saturday/Sunday morning there are no parking spaces available. It is always being used. Most of my friends taught their kids to ride "off road". It is perfect for a first trail. Take it away and then where can we go? There are other "man-made" trails in other areas, but this is the last truly natural trail. It needs to stay!

- If one truly appreciates the rich potential of the MRV offers they would already have enjoyed it without the dependence on an over-developed path. People who didn't care before will be all over the fact that there is now a trail cutting through some of the most beautiful wildlife I have experienced in Bloomington and the entire metro area.
- I am an employee in Bloomington, but a resident of Minneapolis. I choose to use the river valley trail in its current form because of its unique natural setting in the twin cities. Should a paved trail be put in along the river, I would have much less reason to travel into Bloomington to use the trail. I also question the wisdom of the paving of any sort in the flood plain. With water covering the existing trail every 2 years or so, frequent maintenance to remove silt and correct water damage would be necessary. This same damage has proven difficult and expensive along Black Dog Road, leading to its closure, and along the currently paved portion between Bloomington Ferry and Chaska, leading to extended trail closures and poor trail quality. It seems a poor use of funding to set a trail up for failure, and I have seen little attention paid to the repair funding to any improved trail. As a trail user, I would greatly welcome restroom facilities at the major trailheads, and better signage throughout. These improvements would require much less impact, and have the greatest return.
- I live on Columbus Road and my backyard abuts the trail. I love watching my niece and her friends run down into the woods and up and down the trail. I love watching the runners and hikers. I especially love watching the bikers in the winter – all winter long. Who are these people? I love the turkeys, raccoons, fox, birds, deer and fawn. They visit my backyard, even the occasional possum and coyote! More kids, dogs, bikers, hikers etc. will not increase my backyard happiness – but it is important for everyone to get out in the nature and that is good. I am concerned about more traffic on Columbus Road en-route to the parks picnic ground. I've been living in the area for 26 years. I've spoken to several women who won't walk the trails alone because of the perceived safety concerns. Especially their spouses don't want them hiking the trails alone. I have never heard the safety issues addressed and wonder if there is a reason for the concern. My greatest concern when I have been on the trail are off leash dogs and fast bikers – but I've had no personal experience. My preference would be to “do nothing” to the trails in Bloomington for another 20 years when I'm sure to be dead. There are lots of developed places already for recreation, biking and wheelchair access in nature. I think we'd spend a ton of money developing building and maintaining the trails and over the time mother nature will win. Eventually will have nice access around the parking lots and the more distance places will go into disrepair. I can live with whatever happens. Let's just not mess too much with Mother Nature.

- I have run and biked in the area of the proposed paved trail for 15 years. I am very opposed to taking away the trail from runners and mountain bikers to civilize it from its natural state. For peace of mind, Bloomington needs this area to be left to the people who use it year around now for running/snowshoeing/hiking/biking. The natural environment of sand and dirt cannot be matched by what some consider an improvement by paving it. Please leave it to the users who are there now.
- Before any plan is put in place, a broad survey should be conducted in order to assess the wishes of those who use the existing trail system. There are many people, myself included, who would stop using the trails if they were to become paved, as mountain biking on paved trails is pointless. Additionally, a full assessment of the costs is necessary to proceed given the trails; proximity to the river, ongoing maintenance costs are likely, to be high given the potential for flooding along the river.
- Accessibility to nature and wild places is important to all and people with PTSD or other mental disabilities need natural spaces which are very rare in metro areas. The specific section that is proposed to be developed is already well used and lived by many. In no way should a floodplain be developed. The area could need to be preserved in its natural state as sacred land by the Dakota Sioux- Bloomington should require and demand a user study. Honesty regarding funding and ongoing maintenance. The city of Bloomington will be on the Hoore DNR Asset Preservation is tremendously underfunded. Do not pave in a floodplain sacred to many.
- Not to pave this area as it is highly unsustainable and would require large amounts of money to maintain. This would be a huge misuse of funds which would be better used elsewhere. This trail system natural surface and other current volunteer groups whom are around the area involved than the responsibility to build repair and maintain the trail system. This is one of the most natural areas in Bloomington; to pave this would not only destroy much of the area but also increase litter, crime, and tax payer funds for maintenance. Keep it natural, keep it alive, keep it clean. This is highly flooded each year, please look across to Burnsville and see that they have abandoned
- Again, this area is unsustainable for paving and be a gross misuse of taxpayer funds. Keep it natural, especially in an urban area when natural areas are becoming rarer each year.
- Utilize time and funding by maintaining the wildlife and plant life preservation and organization of untouched land. To preserve the natural resources and beauty of this



land, do not develop. It is already as it is in its current state entirely accessible to the citizens of Bloomington. Without a trail, one can fully appreciate how this ecosystem functions on its own. If one has any amount of interest in hiking, biking or just enjoying this natural land they can do so without the use of a developed trail that cuts habitat potential by 12%. Taking invasive species and cleaning up older developments (sign plan etc.). If less development occurs and more preservation happens, (and simply cleaning up after ourselves). We will have more land in the valley to appreciate. I encourage, along with many others of the very opinion, that you spend tax payers money on better and more respectable tasks other than overdeveloping a once natural location.

- The Minnesota River Valley is the last wild place in the Twin Cities is where my father introduced me to the wonders of nature. Where also I saw my first deer, where I hope my children will also fall in love with the woods. We have enough parks, zoos, paved trails etc. The specialness of this place rests in its wild nature. The fact that wilderness is so easily accessible is what makes Bloomington such an amazing place to live. I urge you to put the natural environment first. Protect this unique and special resource. Don't invest in heavy infrastructure in plain. Let it remain unique, special, and the best thing about living in this city the access to the spirit of the woods. Do not pave the river bottom.
- Please do a user study! You will find so many current trail users – both bikers and hikers- do not want a paved trail. A paved trail is not sustainable – it will flood, erode and collapse. Leave the trail as it is. It costs the community nothing and provides so much.
- I am still quite concerned that the tax payers money will be spent on a paved trail that will be destroyed in Spring floods. Where are the usage studies? What is the maintenance cost? Where in the plan does it suggest that the existing trail (mtn bike) stays intact?
- No need for a paved trail at the river bottoms. It's perfect as is. Considering the many times I've seen the trail flood, a paved trail seems ridiculous.
- Master Plan great. Linked trail system, signs, water, restrooms great. Please don't pave it – it will flood and waste money.

- As a user of the current Minnesota Valley Trail area I strongly support keeping the trail a natural surface trail. There are few areas left that are untouched natural areas with no pavement. Not all areas need to be accessed by everyone. It's an area that already is enjoyed by many people the way it is. A paved trail makes no financial sense.
- Building in a floodplain is just plain stupid. The river floods on a regular basis, sometimes multiple times a year. Don't waste money on a paved trail. Keep it low maint. and natural if you're going to force this plan through. Remember those who fail to remember their history are doomed to repeat it.
- It is only natural once! Do you want your legacy to be part of the group that got rid of nature? I know other towns; counties have fried river bottom trails and roads. Seems like most of these have failed. What makes this trail different?
- Who will pay and how quickly can repairs be made? FEMA is slow, govt. response is slow! If we have to wait months after flood season for repairs we will miss the entire season of use!
- Who is asking for this trail? Lots of people do not want improvement/changes. Where are the people asking for it?
- If I wanted to bike on pavement, I could do that anywhere. If I wanted to walk on pavement, I could do that anywhere. My point is, we have a lack of these trails, we have a lack of nature. I think it's a great place to go Mt biking and there isn't many of those. I'm a 12 year old kid and I have a lot of fun on these trails and it's a place where I can be with my family. Please don't do this people can still walk on the trail. Please just keep it as it is PLEASE.
- The state trail as it exists right now is a much enjoyed for biking and hiking without paving it. It could be improved but it is an area that floods so pavement would be a costly trail to maintain. A raised trail would be impossible as well. Take a look at the history of the flooding and you'll see the issue at hand. The thinking that every trail needs to be connected is something that needs to stop. Our youth need a nature area not a paved trail roadway. Keep the river bottoms! ADA cant have a trail everywhere because it is not feasible or necessary. Put a trail for ADA where it makes sense!

## Summary of Stakeholder Input - 2014

Three meetings with stakeholders were held in July 2014 to provide an overview of the City's process and purpose for preparing the Minnesota Valley Master Plan. At the time of the meetings, the City had identified a vision and four primary goals for the MVMP. The meetings were also intended to solicit initial input from stakeholders regarding the vision and goals and identify key ideas and concerns to address in the MVMP.

### Partners Meeting #1 - July 21, 2014 (1:30-3:30 p.m.)

#### 1. Introductions

- Randy Quale: City of Bloomington Park & Rec Manager
- Julie Farnham: City of Bloomington Planning
- Cindy Wheeler: MN Department of Natural Resources
- John Mertens: Dakota County
- Mark Morrison: City of Bloomington, Recreation Supervisor
- Rachel Hintzman: DNR Parks and Trails
- Scott Pariseau: Fish and Wildlife Services
- Vicki Sherry: Fish and Wildlife Services
- Sarah Inonye-Leas: Fish and Wildlife Services
- April Crockett: MN Department of Transportation
- Brandon Jutz: Fish and Wildlife Services
- Tim Bodeen: Fish and Wildlife Services
- Jen Desrud: City of Bloomington Engineering
- Jim Gates: City of Bloomington Engineering
- John Gibbs: 3 Rivers Park District
- Judy McDowell: 3 Rivers Park District
- Maggie O'Connell: Fish and Wildlife Services
- Alison Evans: City of Bloomington

#### 2. Purpose/Overview of the MN River Valley Plan

- We are here to undertake a Master Plan for the MN River Valley in order to create better public awareness and utilization of the valley. Also, we would like to preserve and protect the natural lands. This meeting is a part of the public engagement process which also includes online surveys, partner and focus group meetings and open houses. This plan will focus on the City owned land.

#### 3. Topics for Input and Discussion:

- a. Project Vision and Goals:
  - On the right track for the vision and goals with the groups thoughts.
- b. Access Opportunities:
  - Different types of access points such as a trailhead or just an access point. Does the map provided have an appropriate amount of access

points/trailheads? Should there be improvements made? Currently, the Old Cedar Ave bridge area is being considered as an option for a major trailhead working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to undertake that project. This may include updated parking, enhancing trails and connections and potentially a restroom facility.

- Jim: The rehabilitation of the bridge is planned to be completed and open in early to mid-summer of 2016. This should increase the already very active usage of this area, making this a good site for a major trailhead.
- Tim: We have an Urban Wildlife Initiative that encourages us to reach into communities and get people to talk about conservation and get into the area for recreating. Having a major trailhead site like this could support this initiative by creating a more park like area that encourages usage.
- John Mertens: We would like to see some bike pump stations put in at major trailheads. There is a program through Health Partners that may fund some or all of the costs.
- Cindy: I think water fountains would be an important amenity at these type of sites.
- Meg: It seems like there is a big gap near France Ave. for access points and trailheads.
- Randy: This is a problematic area due to the wetlands. Another possibility of an area the City would like to develop would be the land North of 86<sup>th</sup> street by potentially working out a deal with the Cyprus parking lot that is currently being used for overflow or construction parking.
- John Gibbs: The map looks compatible with a study that was done by 3 Rivers Park District regarding diversity and inclusions. Creating more access points on the east side of Bloomington would comply with this study.

**c. Utilization Opportunities:**

- City staff provided a concept map with utilization ideas and ideas of where they could possibly be located in the MN river valley. Examples included: picnic rounds, campgrounds, marina/boat rentals, mountain bike skills course or bike loop and others. Asked for thoughts or other suggestions.
- Brandon: What about a Children Discovery area or wildlife and outdoor themed programs. It looks like there are a lot of things aimed at adults, but we would like to get children out in the valley as well.

**d. Trails:**

- Currently there are many different types of trails in the river valley and many different types are being proposed including natural surface, and two trail corridor and others. Better signage and enforcement is being worked on.

- Many attendees commented on the need for better signage and enforcement, improved safety and additional clear connections. Discussion regarding the debate between a paved trail and a natural surface trail occurred, City staff reminded attendees that this meeting is not to focus on the type of trail, but the amount of trails, locations and accessibility.
- Randy: The state trail is proposed to be an approximately 100' wide corridor which would contain two trails, a 10' wide bituminous trail and a separate natural surface mountain biking/hiking trail. MN DNR staff indicated that a bituminous trail would be easier to maintain in a flood plain rather than a natural or crushed aggregate surfaced trail.
- Meg: Questions about the State Trail running through the refuge, City property and 3 Rivers property, how will roller blading, skateboarding etc. be handled with different bodies having different rules.
- Randy: It's possible that the trail could have its own rules but once you leave the trail you are bound to that entities rules, for example if you were to go on to City property after 10 pm you would be in violation.
- MORC organization has provided maintenance on the natural surface trails in the valley for years and the city intends to continue to work with MORC to design maintain and improve these trails.

**e. Awareness:**

- Possibility for interpretive signage, maps with QR codes, interactive connection to the website etc. Would like to identify locations and share information with the public in a correct manor.
- Julie: We would like to make sure that all of the efforts are coordinated to keep the flow throughout the trail.
- Meg: QR codes are not as popular as they once were. ESRI story maps may be a better option. Should do our best to tie a lot of the updates into technology and smart phones. Consider use of National Grid Locator System for way finding/emergency services response.
- Tim: Very good idea to provide opportunities to learn about the wonderful history of the valley.
- Rachel: will all maps be standardized for the state trail for way finding, interpretive etc.?
- Randy: What type of branding will be used? Is everyone's logo on every sign? Should we come up with a MNRV trail logo?
- Meg: Important that it looks good and is welcoming and comprehensive for the user
- John: Try to keep the amount of signs down, had heard public comments of too many signs.

**f. Protection and Preservation:**

- Would like to do a better job of managing the pristine areas in the river valley such as Ike's creek and the trout streams. Plan to work together

with the City, Fish and Wildlife, Great River Greening and many others. Thoughts on following the rule the Met Council uses as 80% natural and 20 % developed for the City owned property.

- Tim: We have a unique opportunity next to the mall that attracts 60 million visitors to provide those visitors with a natural experience in the river valley right next door. Has the long eared bat been considered a protected species and should it be addressed in the valley?

**g. Overview of the project schedule:**

- Randy: Will continue to get input from the stakeholders and partners in the upcoming two meetings and open house. Thinking the schedule may be pushed back slightly into next year to get a complete plan together. Next steps would be to create a draft to send out for review and comment and then have another open house.

**h. Questions for City Staff or topics that didn't get touched on:**

- Meg: Has an overall survey of the City residents been completed to address what they are looking for in recreation? A City wide survey was done but with limited questions regarding recreation. 3 rivers does this every 5 years and can provide that information.

## **Focus Group Meeting #2 - July 22, 2014 (1:30-3:30 p.m.)**

### **1. Introductions**

- Randy Quale: City of Bloomington Park & Rec Manager
- Jim Goodermont: Long time neighbor
- Ed Crozier: Long time involvement in the valley
- John Crampton: Pond Dakota Society, Izaak Walton League, MN Valley Geezer Squad
- Bob Williams: MN River Valley Audobon Chapter
- Larry Granger: Bloomington Historical Society
- Susannah: MN
- Dong Youngdah: Mountain Bike Rider, Trail work volunteer
- Matt Andrews: MORC, IMBA
- Mark Morrison: City of Bloomington
- Alison Evans: City of Bloomington

### **2. Purpose/Overview of the MN River Valley Plan**

- We are here to undertake a Master Plan for the MN River Valley in order to create better public awareness and utilization of the valley. Also, we would like to preserve and protect the natural lands. This meeting is a part of the public engagement process which also includes online surveys, partner and focus group meetings and open houses. This plan will focus on the City owned land.

### **3. Topics for Input and Discussion:**

#### **a. Project Vision and Goals:**

- Ed: How will this plan coordinate with the other management agencies? It seems like there should be a combined plan for the valley.
- Randy: Each agency has their own plan already established and we are trying to work in concert with what they have

**b. Access Opportunities:**

- Different types of access points such as a trailhead or just an access point. Does the map provided have an appropriate amount of access points/trailheads? Should there be improvements made? Currently, the Old Cedar Ave bridge area is being considered as an option for a major trailhead working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to undertake that project. This may include updated parking, enhancing trails and connections and potentially a restroom facility.
- Ed: What about at the end of the Norman dale for a trail head?
- Randy: That could be considered an access point, but there is not enough room for parking to be a trailhead. The area right at 86<sup>th</sup> Street and Old Shakopee Road has been discussed as a location for a trail head by working with Cyprus and MAC to create a use agreement for the parking lots.
- Jim: Would be nice to have that trailhead especially with the mall nearby and the upcoming South Loop district.
- Matt: Some bicycle repair stations would be a good amenity to have at a trailhead as well as some bathroom facilities, at least a portable toilet and a changing area. Also a Mountain biking skills course would be nice.
- Mark: A potential water bottle station would be great as well.
- John: I would suggest the gateway trailheads as a model for this area. Lots of people want to see the historic things as well so make sure people can use the trail to get to the Pond House to draw more attention to it.
- John: Identity signs, all the signage should work in QR codes or something for smart phones.
- Ed: Kids are more interested in interpretation through media rather than a sign. I would recommend looking up [discovernatureapps.com](http://discovernatureapps.com) as an example.

**c. Utilization Opportunities:**

- City staff provided a concept map with utilization ideas not necessarily exactly where they could be located in the MN river valley. Examples included: picnic rounds, campgrounds, marina/boat rentals, mountain bike skills course or bike loop and others. Asked for thoughts or other suggestions. Thoughts on following the rule the Met Council uses as 80% natural and 20 % developed for the City owned property.
- Matt: Picnic areas, skills course or mountain biking loop can change the atmosphere just by bringing in a positive recreational opportunity. We have a couple of case studies that show this if you would like.

- Don: Regarding trails, the last time I heard the Fish and Wildlife was opposed to a paved trail. I'm concerned overall from the different land managers, who will dictate each area?
- Randy: This will require the 3 agencies to get together and have discussion, at this point we have not heard no or yes from other agencies. We will do our best to do what will benefit the majority of the people.
- Larry: Bloomington will grow more east of the mall and in the south loop area so we need to consider that area. Also trails in combination with the old cedar bridge, there will be a major influx of more urban folks. We need to look 20-30 years out on who will be using this area and make the best decision from there. There may need an increase of law enforcement with the number of users.
- Don: What are the plans for the environmental review? Are you planning on assessment worksheets?
- Randy: The DNR would do the full review required by law including archeological review. What does everything think about the concept of prohibited uses? There are regulations that are different between the different jurisdictions, how do we handle that? For example, the City has a 10 p.m. close time, Fish and Wildlife go to sunset and the DNR trails are 24/7.
- Matt: whatever is decided should be a constant message. Education is key for the user conflicts and the whole trail is one collaborative project with the same rules throughout.
- Ed: Good point. They should be unified regulations.

**d. Awareness:**

- We want to celebrate the opportunity to provide interpretive planning, programs etc. and also recognize locations and showing the ways of doing it. We have extended invitations to the Dakota community and leaning heavily on our friends from the Bloomington Historical Society for guidance.
- Larry: We have to have specific ways to balance this. You need to do a whole study before doing interpretation, and shouldn't hint at probable locations until you truly investigate it. There are funds available through the Legacy dollars that could be used for this. I would also like there to be some commonality for the whole river valley with everything including the trail issues, recreation amenities and trailheads.

**e. Protection and Preservation:**

- Would like to do a better job of managing the pristine areas in the river valley such as Ike's creek, the bass ponds and the trout streams. Plan to work together with the City, Fish and Wildlife, Great River Greening and many others. Thoughts on following the rule the Met Council uses as 80% natural and 20 % developed for the City owned property.



- John: Area of a very strong interest. This is a major attraction and we really need to plan this out and get a natural landscape plan. This goes beyond getting rid of buckthorn. There is a real gem at the end of nine mile creek. Izaak Walton league can be a partner and many other groups would like to get their hands dirty and learn a little bit.
- Mark: Tip of the iceberg with Pond Dakota native prairie and the interpretation and now we have much more similar planning to do in the future within the valley.
- Jim: There are some areas that have turned from walking trails to mountain biking trails and there are so many historical and cultural site along the valley, are you going to be sensitive to these sites? There are also many unique plants and historical sites that I am worried about.
- Randy: we are not proposing to increase the number of trails, but take better care of what we have and minimize impacts and reduce conflicts between users.
- Mark: be assured that any kind of work will include a survey of the area first

**f. Overview of the project schedule:**

- Randy: Will continue to get input from the stakeholders and partners in the upcoming two meetings and open house. Thinking the schedule may be pushed back slightly into next year to get a complete plan together. Next steps would be to create a draft to send out for review and comment and then have another open house.

**g. Questions for City Staff or topics that didn't get touched on:**

- Ed: is there an 80-20 rule now within the City?
- Randy: It is the policy that the Met Council has for park reserves and we follow those rules as far as Hyland, Normandale and Bush Lake.
- Don: How do you measure the 80-20?
- Randy: We would go through and take reasonable measurements based on usage and maintenance.
- Don: Would like to sum up my chief concern which is the paved vs. improved surface trail. If a paved trail is going to be building the river bottoms, I think it would be benefited to all users that the trail closest to the river be the natural surface trail, with the paved trail further from the river to have the least amount of maintenance needing after flooding.
- Ed: I concur with Don.
- Randy: Regardless of what the State will be putting in for the trial, we want to come up with something that is acceptable to the majority of people.
- Jim: We think it's a great idea to have a master plan for the future for the area.

## **Focus Group Meeting #3 - July 22, 2014 (4-6 p.m.)**

### **1. Introductions**

- Julie Farnham: City of Bloomington
- Jim Gates: City of Bloomington
- Tim Sandy: Sustainability Coalition
- John: Resident
- Vonda Kelly: Bloomington Historical Society
- Larry Granger: Bloomington Historical Society
- Matt Moore: MORC
- Dennis Porter: Former PARC member, ATP Taskforce
- Reed Schmidt: MORC
- Mark Morrison: City of Bloomington
- Alison Evans: City of Bloomington

### **2. Purpose/Overview of the MN River Valley Plan**

- We are here to undertake a Master Plan for the MN River Valley in order to create better public awareness and utilization of the valley. Also, we would like to preserve and protect the natural lands. This meeting is a part of the public engagement process which also includes online surveys, partner and focus group meetings and open houses. This plan will focus on the City owned land.

### **3. Topics for Input and Discussion:**

#### **a. Project Vision and Goals:**

- Enhance access, increase awareness, improve utilization and protect and preserve

#### **b. Access Opportunities:**

- Different types of access points such as a trailhead or just an access point. Does the map provided have an appropriate amount of access points/trailheads? Should there be improvements made? Currently, the Old Cedar Ave bridge area is being considered as an option for a major trailhead working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to undertake that project. This may include updated parking, enhancing trails and connections and potentially a restroom facility.
- Jim: Primary trailheads are at the 169 bridge, 35W with MN DOT reconstructing the bridge beginning in 2017 that would create a path there and the Old cedar ave bridge. Any funding left over from the bridge rehabilitation could be used toward trails.
- Matt: is there a plan to connect through fort Snelling state park?
- Jim: Right now the DNR did not receive all of the funding that they were hoping for, but plan to construct as much of the trail as they can. It will be constructed in pieces.
- Julie: During the open house there will be an exhibit on the state trail with people from the DNR that have information not available to us tonight.

- Tim: The trailheads, are there existing trail there's today or will they need to be added?
- Julie: Some would require updating others would need additional trails.
- Dennis: if the funding is there, does that mean they will for sure be constructing a paved trail? And once constructed who is responsible for the maintenance of the portion on City land?
- Julie: we are not sure on the decision yet, but as of right now the plan is to have a corridor with two trails. The actual state trail would be maintained by DNR. Connecting trails constructed on City land would be the responsibility of the city to maintain.

**c. Utilization Opportunities:**

- City staff provided a concept map with utilization ideas not necessarily exactly where they could be located in the MN river valley. Examples included: picnic rounds, campgrounds, marina/boat rentals, mountain bike skills course or bike loop and others. Asked for thoughts or other suggestions. Thoughts on following the rule the Met Council uses as 80% natural and 20 % developed for the City owned property.
- Reed: For any of these uses will there be an environmental assessment done?
- Julie: at this point we haven't identified anything that would require an environmental assessment.
- Tim: The campground seems like a great idea, but most campgrounds are lawn again. I would like to see minimal lawn space and less trees being cut down. I think if a campground would be considered it should fit in with the already natural area and be more primitive.
- John: has there been any consideration of using the trail for cross country skiing in the winter?
- Dennis: Bituminous is not a good surface for cross country skiing and the people with snow shoes would not use a paved trail either. I think a natural surface trail would be the best for everyone. I've talked with bikers and hikers and families and they go to the valley for the natural experience, because they feel like they are a million miles away. They are not looking for another paved trail.
- Larry: We need to get an agreement with the Fish and Wildlife and the DNR to come up with a coordinated plan for the trail development. How can we bring more people in but maintain the natural area and manage the resources? You also need to be ADA compliant.
- Matt: ADA does not require that all facilities be designed and accessible for all people. It is only done where it is practical. I support access for people with disabilities but the idea of a paved trail through the whole length of the river does not seem necessary. I see a great opportunity from Cedar to Fort Snelling. I don't think this should be an all or nothing proposition.

- Dennis: There are not current numbers available for usage of the trail as it is now. There are loads of people that already use the trails. The FWS don't have a great deal of money to maintain and patrol it as it. Without MORC volunteering to do some of the work, it might not be available. Paved trails will be in very rough shape in 5 years. Not every trail needs to be like Lanesboro, we don't need to approach it as a cookie cutter plan.
- Julie: It comes down to a balancing act, how are we all going to work together. Not everyone is going to be happy with everything; there are too many conflicting desires. We have to work with priority areas and work through the challenges.
- Tim: We also need to keep climate change into account as we think decades out. What about extreme weather events and flooding.
- Matt: I live by Lake Nokomis and years ago they put in some water retention ponds and people were upset because they like the open spaces, but after this past June, the ponds did their job and helped prevent the flooding. As a 25 year user, we see many of these spring floods with lots of sediment. Other state trails do not have this same challenge and the topography is different so it should be treated differently.

**d. Awareness:**

- We want to be aware of the cultural/historical and environmental awareness as well as way finding and branding. This is a balancing act between providing too much information and not even information.
- Mark: There are all sorts of sites up and down the valley and we are trying to create a Dakota interpretive area near the Pond house. We could use smart phone technology and QR codes. When on the state trail, you'll be able to go check out some historical program at the Pond Dakota Park and hopefully get a lot more visitations at this site and others because of the awareness of this project.
- Julie: We are talking with the agency partners to coordinate way finding so it isn't a maze of signs. We would like there to be design coordination within the entire valley.

**e. Protection and Preservation:**

- Tim: has there been discussion about zones where a particular zone would be more focused on minimally invasive and other zones may be more for recreation activities?
- Julie: We will be. We will identify areas that are priority levels of protection and will be looking at the natural resources inventory to help identify the areas.
- Mark: We would love to hear any other ideas of spaces that you think should be a part of the protected area, outside from the major three already mentioned.

- Matt: Where does the 80-20 come from? I know Hyland has the same idea.
- Mark: The Metropolitan Council provides this guideline for its regional parks.
- Tim: I think a 90-10 would be a better guideline. Start there and go back to 80-20 if necessary. Start with the lower goal. Are you going to manage it is a wildlife reserve with a little bit of development or a park and hope for the best in terms of keeping the preserve.
- Larry: I think we need to get more people involved not just staff. We need to get a commitment to stewardship to the area so they are willing to step forward and do something.
- Matt: I was a part of the Citizen's Advisory Committee for Theodore Wirth Park and it was 3 year process with 22 meetings. It is a significant resource to the city and it's worth the time to get it done right because you don't get a do over.

**f. Overview of the project schedule:**

- Julie: Will continue to get input from the stakeholders and partners in the upcoming two meetings and open house. Thinking the schedule may be pushed back slightly into next year to get a complete plan together. Next steps would be to create a draft to send out for review and comment and then have another open house.

**g. Questions for City Staff or topics that didn't get touched on:**

- Larry: If you want to create more public interest, spend more money, offer bus tours to the 3 current trailheads so you can expose people to the river valley and the existing trail.
- Dennis: The MN River Valley trail is already a destination trail. We would like to improve user conflicts but in the long run its draw is its natural environmental feel. There are access points we could have for ADA and other ones for biking. You wouldn't want a paved trail next to the swampy area. A lot of kids want the adventure, go run around in the woods, not a paved trail, that is boring for kids.
- Julie: Take away message of be careful about the amount of development and preserve the natural. This is a special place; don't move too fast to change because you can't get it back.

## Summary of Stakeholder Input – 2015

The first draft of the *Minnesota River Valley Strategic Plan* was released for public review and comments in spring of 2015. A combination of strategies was used to solicit feedback on the draft. This document summarizes the feedback received throughout this process.

### PARC, Planning Commission and City Council Presentations

A summary of the draft plan recommendations was presented to the Park, Arts, and Recreation Commission (PARC), Planning Commission, and City Council on the dates shown in Table 6. PARC and Planning Commission members agreed with the plan recommendations and were supportive of creating a plan to ensure investments in the Valley are strategic and fit into a comprehensive approach. The City Council asked staff to provide more detail on the Plan recommendations. Specifically, the Council was interested in information regarding costs, timing, and level of staff effort required for each recommended task.

**Table 6: Dates of Presentations**

Question Number	Date of Presentation
PARC	April 8, 2015
Planning Commission Study Session	April 9, 2015
City Council Study Session	May 11, 2015

### Community Stakeholder Focus Group

A summary of the draft plan recommendations was presented to a community stakeholder focus group on June 9, 2015. This was the second time the group had met to give input on the Minnesota River Valley planning process. The feedback from the group was wide ranging and often mixed. However, there was a general consensus that the City's recommendation to continue planning and raising awareness of the Valley was a positive step for the area. Some specific feedback from this group included the following:

- Agreement that completing ongoing projects in the Valley should be a top priority.
- Some interest in conducting a Minnesota River Valley user study.
- Focus group members discussed multiple water quality issues and how that affects citizens' use of the area.
- Some interest in including information regarding how the Valley offers economic benefits to residents and the City.

A list of attendees and notes from the community stakeholder focus group meeting follows:

### **Community Stakeholder Group Meeting - June 9, 2015**

#### **1. Introductions**

- a. Randy Quale: City of Bloomington Park & Rec Manager
- b. Julie Farnham: City of Bloomington Planning
- c. Elizabeth Heyman: City of Bloomington Planning
- d. John Crampton
- e. Bob Williams
- f. Larry Granger
- g. Vonda Kelly
- h. Dick Duerre
- i. Ed Crozier
- j. Roger Willette
- k. John Hickman
- l. Steve Thomforde
- m. Stan Danielson
- n. Jim Goodermont
- o. Dennis Porter
- p. Representative Ann Lenczewski
- q. Alison Warren: City of Bloomington

#### **2. Refresher on Background Information** Regarding the Minnesota River Valley Master Plan

- We are here to review the Master Plan for the MN River Valley. This meeting is a part of the public engagement process which also includes online surveys, partner and focus group meetings and open houses. The draft of the Master Plan has been available online and an example of the design for the final document was passed around at the meeting. The portions focusing on vision and goals, existing conditions, the online survey, the community open house, the initial recommendations and the draft recommendations are complete. This meeting is to help determine what the top priorities are for the Minnesota River Valley, to hear feedback and to talk about the next steps.
- The initial recommendations were shared again with the members at the meeting including, retaining natural character, enhancing maintenance and improving signage. In regards to the trails the recommendations are to retain and maintain, create connecting trails, potential mountain bike skills course and construct the state trail. The need for interagency coordination, as well as

strengthen the existing partnerships were also discussed especially in relation to implementing best practices and undertaking restoration projects.

- Ed: Is there consideration of using smart phone technology on the signage? The response was that the technology is ever changing and that the different options are being explored.
- Dennis: What is the lifespan of the signage? What are the priority resource protection areas? Emerald Ash Borer is coming and the River Valley is filled with Ash Trees; what is the plan? The response stated that staff in Park Maintenance has been speaking with other organizations around the country regarding their current plans and a City Wide plan is being discussed, including the River Valley.
- Steve: Suggests a resource management plan and a comprehensive list for the City as a whole, including the River Valley to include things that need to be done and protected over the next 5 years. The response stated that staff have participated in a prioritization exercise, but more information is needed and there is limited funding available.
- Ed: Inquired as to the ability to sell land or create an MOU for additional land in the River Valley.

### **3. Top Priorities for the River Valley:**

- a. Complete On Going Activities:
  - Examples of ongoing activities to be completed include the Park Asset Inventory, the Old Cedar Ave Bridge Reconstruction and the Minnesota River Valley State Trail.
  - Dennis: Is a user study included in the Park Asset inventory? The response stated that at this time the inventory is focusing on current resources and their life cycles.
- b. Complete System Wide Plan:
  - i. System wide plans include the Master Trail Plan, the Master Sign Plan, a Comprehensive maintenance plan and a resource protection plan. All of the plans should work together.
  - ii. Ed: Would it be possible or make sense to create an overall Master Plan for the River Valley and include all of the partners. Response stated that at this time other agencies may have their own plans completed. It was also mentioned that there should be one set of rules and regulations.
- c. Quale stated that there is the potential to seek the regional park designation for the City-owned parklands in the River Valley. This would increase awareness and enhance marketing of the Valley parklands to the region. This designation could also add some additional protections to the parklands and some potential



funding sources for operations, maintenance and improvements. Further exploration is needed to determine this idea's potential. It was also noted that a Master Plan for the River Valley parklands is required as part of the regulations put forward by the State and the Met Council.

- d. Julie stated that at this time this is more of a strategic plan and framework for the more in depth plans. The idea is to set some big picture priorities and then if we need help to get some inventories or come up with some sign design guidelines those would come later. This plan will lay the ground work so we can set up the next steps and develop actionable plans.
- e. Larry: What is the planning horizon for the Master Plan? How many years does the plan include? The response stated that it depends on the funding, but at this time there is no timeline. Larry expressed his desire to have a 50+ year rolling plan similar to Minneapolis and St. Paul's waterfront plans. He stated that this should include a real analysis of bluff lands, flood effects and worst case scenarios. Larry also expressed his concern for the archeological sites in what he believes are the trail pathway.
- f. Funding:
  - i. Current funding includes: the general fund, the storm utility fund, the strategic priorities fund, the park dedication funds, grants and partnerships. Potential new funding resources include Legacy funds through the Park Reserve designation.
  - ii. Ann: Shared her desire to look at Legacy dollars as a serious funding source and option. She stated that there is lots of potential in this area.
  - iii. Ed: What are the economic benefits to the City as part of the plan? Will there be growth in tourism because of this area? Should that be considered?
  - iv. Stan: Are all of the trailheads owned by the US Fish and Wildlife? Does the City have any say in what happens to those areas? The response stated that there is possibility for some say in the trailheads, but they are not City owned. It was also mentioned that they should still be comprehensive.

#### **4. Open for Comments:**

- a. Dennis: – I am encouraged by more information and more studies. We also need more information from the DNR. User studies are also very much needed. We don't know what 20 years down the road what people will be looking for as far as recreational opportunities,

- b. John: I would favor completing the current projects that have the funding and the momentum. Increases awareness. Have to have some deliverables and can't study things forever. Get people down there and get more people using it. Example (Canon Valley trail) – friends of the trail have not only sold the trail but a variety of other improvements and water quality monitoring. Can get different user groups who can assist the area.
- c. Ed: There is a lot of focus on cleaning up the Minnesota River, but people do not know about it or appreciate it. This plan could get a lot more people going down into the valley, realizing the value and cleaning it up.
- d. Julie: Look at this as an opportunity to make things clearer for continuing to study and make improvements in the valley. Help us decide what the next steps are and help us to come up with a critical path of action.
- e. Ann: I am not a big fan of the studies because studying doesn't bring in the money. My job is to get as much money from the State to bring to the assets in my community. I would hope we could push to study as little as possible and get to action plans and City funding initiatives. It's going to require more partnerships with State and Met Council to get the money in the valley to keep all of these amenities. We have to get people there first for people to see it and then there will be support. Need more access. Wants to create a user map for access points on the Bloomington side of the river including the hidden parts where if you don't live close or someone hasn't taken you to it, you would not know that you can access the valley. They aren't facilities; this is just where people are coming in. Things like this can build momentum.
- f. Dennis: I would still advocate for a user study because the mountain bikes groups have been advocating for many other people that we encounter in that area. By discounting the current user groups in numbers and survey you are making an uneducated guess or decision.
- g. John Hickman: The Nine Mile Creek has a significant amount of sediment especially in the case of a run off event. This is continuing to pollute the Minnesota River. We need to find a way to lessen the City's impact on the water quality. I would recommend that the Nine Mile Creek Watershed District is included in the potential partners for the planning document.
- h. Dick: I took a clarity reading at the end of Lyndale Ave., the river is getting worse. I've been monitoring it for 10 years and it's not improving. I also monitor the run off out of Black Dog Lake and that for 9 years that has been dirtier and running into the river. Suddenly this year the Black Dog Lake water is cleaner. The power plant has converted from coal to gas and I suspect that has something

to do with it. We should be aware how dirty the river is and the sources of some of that in Bloomington on our stretch of the river.

- i. Dennis: You can see it in the past nine years the river has flooded nine times and the amount of sediment that is left in the Valley is growing yearly. Those are areas I haven't seen in over 30 years due to the sediment.
- j. John Crampton: What we consider recreation today may not be the same at 25 years ago or 25 years from now. At the Bush Lake Chapter of the Izaak Walton League we had a wetland that nobody even knew it was there because it was covered in buckthorn, we cleaned it out a couple years ago and got some native plants and over the course of the past two years we got funded again by Nine Mile Creek Watershed District. We do native plantings and getting rid of the buckthorn and making some trails and observations points and now people have said we are joining because of the restoration work. Action can help to gain momentum and interest.
- k. Steve: The economic benefits would be a good thing to throw in to the plan. You should get the focus groups together again and maybe these people can identify really quick railways of what we would need to do and package some projects up that we can start doing and go to legislature and get some funds for the projects. Where can we get some projects on the ground right away? We need a little of both going at the same time.

## Agency Stakeholder Focus Group

A summary of the first draft plan recommendations was presented to the agency stakeholder focus group on June 11, 2015. This was the second time the group had met to give input on the planning process for the Valley. Overall, the group expressed an interest in building on existing relationships to work more collaboratively on issues in the Valley. There was also a general consensus that the recommended natural resources plan should be the first plan to be undertaken. Some specific feedback from this group included the following:

- Recommendation that the trails master plan should build on upcoming projects like the Inter-City Regional Trail, bicycle and pedestrian improvements planned as part of the reconstruction of the I-35W bridge over the Minnesota River, and planned trails in Dakota County.
- The group discussed the potential to create a loop trail using the proposed I-35 W crossing and the renovated Old Cedar Avenue Bridge.
- The group was interested in receiving more information regarding the feasibility of applying for a Metropolitan Regional Parks System park reserve designation.
- The group was interested in investigating how transit could be used to better serve the Valley.

- Recommendations were made to include information on safety and ADA accessibility in the Valley.
- A recommendation was made to consider developing a marketing plan.

A list of attendees and notes from the agency stakeholder focus group meeting follows:

**Agency Stakeholder Group Meeting - Thursday, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2:30 – 4:30PM**

Attendees: Bridget Olson (USFWS), State Senator Melissa Wiklund, State Representative Ann Lenczewski, Cynthia Wheeler (DNR), Sandi Kinzer (USFWS), Matt Bourne (Eden Prairie), Kurt Chatfield (Dakota County), Brandon Jutz (USFWS), Kelly Grissman (Three Rivers), John Gibbs (Commissioner – Three Rivers), Linda Loomis (Minnesota River Watershed)  
 City of Bloomington Staff: Randy Quale, Julie Farnham, Liz Heyman, Jen Desrude,

- Randy Quale and Julie Farnham presented an overview of the draft plan recommendations.
- Attendees asked how the City marketed the 2014 survey and if it represented the general public.
  - Quale/Farnham: No, it does not represent the general public because, one, many of the respondents said they did not live in Bloomington, and two, it wasn't a statistically significant survey.
  - Quale/Farnham: The survey was marketed via the City's website, the City newsletter and at the City's Farmers Market.
  - An attendant asked the attendees from the US Fish and Wildlife Service if they have current any user preference data.
    - They answered that no, they do not, because strict federal regulations make it cumbersome to create surveys.
  - An attendant asked if the City could separate out the results by where citizens lived and isolates responses from Bloomington residents.
    - Quale/Farnham: Responses showed that it was really a regional asset – not just a City of Bloomington asset, so that type of analysis was not completed. A summary of survey results is on the project website.
- An attendant asked how much the survey was used to make recommendations.
- Quale/Farnham: It was one piece of information. It was not the main tool or impetus for recommendations. It was intended to take the pulse of respondents at that time rather than create statistically significant data .An attendant asked how the project goals were prioritized.
  - Quale/Farnham: The goals are not prioritized. The text of the documents explains that the goals are interdependent.
- Quale told the group that some stakeholders had expressed interest in the City conducting a user study in the Valley.

- Kelly Grissman from Three Rivers Park District said they would be happy to share their intercept survey. They said they couldn't staff such a study, but they could help with logistics.
- An attendant asked what was the impetus for the master plan?
  - Quale/Farnham: The Bloomington City Council expressed interest in creating a plan for the Valley, because no comprehensive planning had previously been done for the area.
- John Gibbs complimented staff on where the project is at so far. He said he has received many inquires about the project from his constituents.
- Cindy Wheeler gave an update on the State Trail project.
  - Construction will start in fall 2016 at the very earliest. Bridges and culverts would be the first things completed. Work on the trail would follow starting in 2017.
  - Environmental review will occur prior to any construction. Wheeler did not know the level of environmental review that will be required. She indicated that due to Federal requirements, this review may take a year to complete.
  - The DNR is in contact with Xcel Energy, Twin Cities Rail Road and the two private property owners regarding easements in the Valley.
  - There currently is \$2.165 million available for the project.
  - The current construction estimate for the project is \$2.5 million.
    - An attendant commented that she thought this estimate seemed very low.
    - Wheeler answered that the estimate was based on 2013 data.
- Grissman discussed the Intercity Regional Trail project. It was stated that the project is fully funded within the City of Bloomington and will connect to the City's trail segment leading to the Old Cedar Bridge trailhead.
- Attendants discussed the I-35W replacement project.
  - The new bridge will include a bike/ped connection.
  - The project is currently in the design phase.
  - City of Burnsville is working on creating a trailhead at the southern end of the bridge.
  - The new I-35W ped/bike crossing could facilitate a high quality trail loop route in Bloomington and Dakota County utilizing the Hwy 77 bridge.
- Attendants discussed the feasibility of applying for a regional park reserve categorization for the City lands in the Valley.
  - Grissman mentioned that for the application to be successful the park would need to look very different than the Hyland Park Reserve.
  - Kinzer mentioned that the USFWS would need more details on how such a designation would affect their lands in the Valley as well as how it would affect the MOU with the City of Bloomington.
  - Grissman and Gibbs mentioned Three Rivers conducted a study that shows the need for certain types of regional parkland in east Bloomington. They will share the findings with the City.

- Kurt Chatfield mentioned that Dakota County is using a CDBG grant to study how their park system can better serve underserved populations (i.e. low income, minority populations). Dakota County is willing to share the results of the study with other partners.
- Grissman from Three Rivers commented that the natural resource master plan in the Valley should be completed first before the other recommended master plans.
- The attendants discuss how transit could be used to serve the Valley, specifically how better information and coordination with Metro Transit could make riders more aware of how to use transit to access the Valley.
- Olsen noted that the draft plan as is does not address safety in the Valley.
  - Kinzer said USFWS would like to strengthen their partnership with the City's police force.
  - Suggestion was made to develop a public safety plan which could include officer patrols as well as volunteer trail safety patrols.
  - A good signage plan with maps provides peace of mind as trail users find comfort in knowing where they are and where they want to go.
  - Smart phone applications with map features should be explored.
- Linda Loomis asked that the watershed district be included in future group discussions.
- An attendant stressed the need to develop a marketing plan for the Valley and for joint programming between the City and USFWS.
- The need to provide access to the Valley via public transit was discussed. Suggestion was made to rename the 34<sup>th</sup> Ave. LRT station as the "Refuge Station."
- Suggestion was made to work with local watershed districts to delineate wetlands; some of this work is already underway.