

GENERAL INFORMATION

Applicant: City of Bloomington

Request: Informational Update – Minnesota River Valley Master Plan

APPLICATION CHRONOLOGY

Park, Arts, and Recreation
Commission Action: 04/09/14 – Study item – provided input

Planning Commission Action: 04/10/14 – Study item – provided input

City Council Action: 05/12/14 – Study item – provided input

Park, Arts, and Recreation
Commission Action: 11/12/14 – Study item – provided input

Planning Commission Action: 11/20/14 – Study item – provided input

City Council Action: 11/24/14 – Study item – provided input

Park, Arts, and Recreation
Commission Action: 04/08/15 – Study item – provided input

Planning Commission Action: 04/09/15 – Study item – provided input

City Council Action: 05/11/15 – Study item – provided input

Park, Arts, and Recreation
Commission Agenda: 09/09/15 – Study item – provide input

Planning Commission Agenda: 09/10/15 – Study item – provide input

BACKGROUND

In April and May, staff presented the recommended priorities proposed in the draft *Minnesota Valley Strategic Plan* (f/k/a *Minnesota Valley Master Plan*) to the Park, Arts and Recreation Commission, Planning Commission and City Council. The draft Minnesota Valley Strategic Plan (MVSP) identified several priority activities, including preparation of four more detailed system wide plans addressing natural and cultural resources, trails, signs, and maintenance.

At those meetings, Commission and Councilmembers requested additional details specific to the system plans and other proposed priorities in order to compare and assign priority to the list of projects. Over the summer, staff prepared detailed outlines of the proposed priority projects, including estimates of staff time and consultant assistance needed to complete each project. Cost

estimates were also made for anticipated consultant assistance. Staff also prepared a timeline to illustrate the expected duration of each project and “critical path” sequencing. It became clear that some tasks provided valuable foundational information and should be completed before other projects began, while other projects could occur simultaneously and/or independently.

The MnDNR Minnesota Valley State Trail project was also considered in the timeline. While the process and timing to complete this project is beyond the City’s control, staff concluded that certain priority projects – particularly the proposed master trail plan – should not commence until plans for the State Trail were solidified. Based on information obtained from MnDNR staff, final plans and required environmental documentation should be completed by the end of 2016, with trail construction to commence in 2017.

OVERVIEW OF UPDATE

Descriptions of the scope of work required to complete a project were prepared for most of the proposed priority projects identified in the draft MVSP. These outlines identify tasks and the associated staff and consultant time needed to complete the projects. A timeline was prepared to describe project sequencing and duration. The outlines and timeline are provided in Attachment A. Following is an overview of the information provided in the project outlines and timeline.

Tasks – Items requiring consultant assistance are called out. All other items are assumed to be tasks that existing staff can complete.

Staff time – An attempt was made to translate staff time into FTE equivalents and/or percent of work load. The staff time estimates assume that described tasks will be completed by existing staff. Staff also believes that many of the tasks can be absorbed into current workloads, particularly given the proposed project timing and duration, which allows flexibility to fit these projects in as time permits and coordinate with other staff assignments and priorities.

It is also assumed that the inter-departmental staff team convened to prepare the MVSP will continue to work together to coordinate and complete the priority projects. The MVSP has been meeting monthly or bi-monthly for much of the past two years. While staff from Planning and Parks and Recreation co-managed and led the project, tasks were shared among other team members depending on skills and expertise needed. The project team led the public engagement effort related to the MVSP (open houses, preparation of website materials, stakeholder engagement, etc.). This role is proposed to continue as needed for the proposed priority projects (e.g., preparation of system plans).

Consultant time – Estimates for consultant services were based on similar projects and discussions with potential providers. Funding for consultant services could come from allocations from the General Fund and/or strategic Priorities funding. It is noted that funding for consultant assistance with the Minnesota River Valley portion of the Park Asset Inventory is currently earmarked in the Parks and Recreation Division General Fund budget.

Timeline - The timeline assumes work on priority projects will commence in 2016, after the MVSP is approved; which is assumed to occur by end of this year. However, one priority

project – the Park Asset Inventory – is proposed to begin this fall. The timeline indicates that all priority projects could be completed over the next 2 ½ years if consistent resource allocation is provided.

REQUESTED INPUT

The purpose of this review is to get input and direction regarding the priorities proposed in the MVSP.

Project Priorities and Timing - The project sequence illustrated in the timeline reflects staff’s recommended priority for completing the priority projects. A summary of the sequencing (priority), duration, and timing is provided below.

Sequence/ Priority	Project	Duration	Timing
1	Park Asset Inventory (MnValley)	7 months	Oct 2015-May 2016
2	Resource Protection Plan (natural and cultural resources run concurrent)	11 months	Jan 2016-Nov 2016
3	Update MOU w/FWS	12 months	Jan 2016-Dec 2016
4	Maintenance Plan (re: natural & cultural resources)	6 months	Jan 2017 - June 2017
5	Master Sign Plan	12 months	Jan 2017 – Dec 2017
	Master Trail Plan	12 months	Jan 2017 – Dec 2017
6	Maintenance Plan (re: signs and trails)	6 months	Jan 2018 – June 2018

Other priorities discussed during the spring meetings were: enhancing communication (website, newsletter) and pursuing Metropolitan Regional Park Reserve designation. With regard to communication, this is really a continuation of current efforts to provide information to the public about City projects, events, and news. The recommendation is to make this effort more intentional, by assigning a staff person to serve as the liaison with the City’s Communications staff to ensure timely posting of information on the website, compile and prepare information for the newsletter, and identify opportunities to engage other outlets (e.g., social media, Bloomington Today stories, etc.).

The task of pursuing regional park preserve designation was also discussed as an opportunity to explore. Over the summer staff reached out to Metropolitan Council Regional Parks staff to begin this discussion. However, the feasibility of designation – in the foreseeable future - is unclear given the 2040 Metropolitan Regional Parks and Open Space System Plan was just adopted and does not identify the Minnesota River Valley for designation. Staff believes there is benefit to continue to explore this, but doing so is not intended to supplant any of the other priority tasks. In fact, the information provided by the proposed system plans can be used to prepare (and thus streamline) the extensive application that must be submitted to formally initiate consideration of regional park designation by the Met Council.

Key questions:

1. Do you concur that all the projects identified should be undertaken? If not, what projects should be removed from consideration?
2. Do you agree with the project sequencing/priority and duration recommended by staff? If not, what changes should be made?
3. Do you support completing the projects in the anticipated 2 ½ year timeframe, or should the timeline be extended to reduce the annual resource commitment?

Resources/Budget - The detailed project descriptions estimate staff time and consultant time/fees needed to complete the proposed projects. As noted above, it is anticipated that staff time needed to complete the projects could be absorbed into current staff workloads without significant impacts to other assignments. A rough estimate of staff hours needed to complete all the projects over the 2 ½ year period totals approximately 1,250-1,600 hours; the equivalent of about 0.25-0.32 FTE per year. This time would be shared between several staff and departments.

A rough estimate of consultant fees needed to complete all these projects is about \$95,000, not including the \$20,000 already available (2015 budget) to complete the Asset Inventory of the City's river valley properties. Based on the proposed timeline, estimated annual expenditures on consultant fees are summarized below:

Year	Project	Consultant Fees
2015	Park Asset Inventory	\$20,000 (available)
2016	Natural & Cultural Resources Plan	\$20,000
2017	Sign Plan Trail Plan	\$30,000 \$45,000
Total		\$95,000

Key Questions:

1. Do you support committing \$95,000-\$100,000 to hire consultants to assist with these projects? If not, what projects/tasks should be removed from consideration? Note – the 2016 proposed budget does not currently include funding for these projects.
2. Do you support committing the proposed staff resources to complete these projects? If not, what projects/task should be removed from consideration?

PUBLIC INPUT UPDATE

Throughout the planning process, City staff has sought input from other governmental agencies, property owners, and stakeholders. Early public input on the MVSP was received through an online survey (summer 2014), a community open house (summer 2014), stakeholder meetings (summer 2014), and through email and written correspondence. Public input over the past year has included:

- **Community Open House** –held on June 17 in the Council Chambers. About 125 people attended. In addition to City staff, staff from the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge were on hand. MnDNR staff were invited, but did not attend. Also in attendance were Mayor Winstead and Representative Ann Lenczewski. The open house provided an opportunity for public input on the draft recommendations in the MVSP. A comment box and survey were available for attendees to provide written comments on the plan. By far, the focus of most questions and comments was the Mn DNR State Trail project; specifically the proposal to provide a paved surface trail.
- **Stakeholder Meetings** – In June staff met with key stakeholders to obtain input on the draft recommendations in the MVSP. Stakeholders included other government agencies (e.g., Three Rivers Park District, Dakota County, FWS, MnDNR, and State legislators), and special interest groups (e.g., Friends of the MRV, the Izaak Walton League, and MORC). Stakeholders expressed support for preparation of the proposed more detailed system plans. There was general agreement that the Resource Protection Plan should be completed first.
- **Other Public Engagement** – The project webpage was updated to make available the draft MVSP document (revised per study session input) and provide current information on project schedule and opportunities for public input.
- **Online Survey** – An online survey was available on the website from May 20 to June 30, 2015. Approximately 86 respondents. Similar to comments received at the open house, the majority of survey responses focused on the State Trail project and proposed paved surface.

Summaries of comments received are available on the project web page at www.blm.mn/mnrivervalley, see ‘Documents Library’. Other documents related to the MVSP, including the May 2015 draft MVSP document are also available on the project web page.

NEXT STEPS

This update information is scheduled to be reviewed with PARC (September 9), Planning Commission (September 10 - study), and City Council (September 21 – study). Once staff received input and direction on the plan priorities, the draft MVSP will be revised and scheduled for final, formal review and approval as follows:

- **Finalize MVSP document** – Staff anticipates revising and preparing a formatted version of the MVSP by the end of November.
- **Final Review** – It is anticipated that the final MVMP will be ready for final review by the Commissions and City Council in November and December.

Requested Action

No formal action is required. Staff seeks input on the proposed implementation priorities in the draft MVSP.

Park Asset Inventory: Scope of Work

Tasks

- **Evaluate/analyze existing conditions and ADA compliance** *(consultant task)*
 - Site Surveys - Gather information on existing trails and trailheads including:
 - Parking (quantity, condition, design and location)
 - Features and amenities (signs, benches, etc.)
 - Trail conditions (width, slopes, surface, obstacles, etc.)
 - GPS/GIS locations of park amenities
- **Analyze constraints and opportunities** *(consultant task)*
 - Identify possible accessibility issues/barriers
 - Evaluate effectiveness of signs and information provided
 - Identify need for upgrades/changes to:
 - Existing trailheads
 - Existing trails, including braided trails
 - Existing signs
 - Identify need/opportunity for new signs
- **Develop format/template to display trail conditions information graphically**
 - Identify where to display information (trailhead signs, website, paper maps)
- **Identify priorities for investment**
 - Using findings and recommendations of consultant's report, project staff team will prepare initial prioritization of proposed projects
 - Review prioritized list of projects with PARC, PC and City Council
- **Incorporate high priority projects into appropriate Minnesota River Valley system plans and/or CIP**

Staff Time and Budget Needs

Staff Time

- 1 project manager to oversee consultant, coordinate meetings and internal review, 5% time for 6 months
- Support staff – varies, 0-5% time

Consultant Needs

- Existing conditions and ADA Compliance Analysis - \$20,000
- Funding available in 2015 Park and Recreation budget for asset inventory project

Update Memorandum of Understanding: Scope of Work

Tasks

1. Affirm area covered by MOU

- Meet with FWS staff to discuss idea of expanding (or reducing) the area covered by the MOU

2. Clarify Regulations

- Compile City regulations pertaining to the Valley, including draft sidewalk/trails usage policy
- Meet with FWS to identify and discuss conflicts between FWS and City regulations pertaining to:
 - Hours open
 - Permitted/prohibited uses (what and where)
 - Use rules and regulations

3. Clarify Roles and Responsibilities

- Compile list of what City currently takes lead on and what FWS takes lead on
- Identify desired tasks that neither City or FWS is currently performing
- Meet with FWS to discuss roles and responsibilities related to:
 - Resource management (flora and fauna, water, cultural)
 - Security
 - Maintenance
 - Annual reporting of activities completed and other correspondence

4. Revise MOU agreement

- City staff take lead preparing draft revisions
- Work with FWS to refine and finalize
- Review final draft with PARC and City Council
- Formally adopt/execute revised MOU agreement – City Council

Staff Time and Budget Needs

Staff Time

- 1 project manager (shared) to coordinate meetings with stakeholders, prepare meeting documents and reports, 5% time for 12 months (part of routine work tasks)
- Support staff – similar level of involvement as Strategic Plan
 - Participate in project meetings
 - Review documents
 - Stakeholder meeting attendance

Meetings with FWS

- Anticipate 3-5 meetings with FWS staff @ 2 hours each
 - Meetings 1 & 2 – cover tasks 1-4
 - Meetings 3-4 – review/refine MOU

Resource Protection Plan: Scope of Work

Natural Resources: Plan Tasks

1. Review past data sources

- Identify locations of sensitive natural resources, large invasive species infestations, and areas that need erosion control measures

2. Update the Natural Resource Inventory completed in 2007 (*consultant task*)

- Verify locations of sensitive natural resources using 2007 Hennepin County inventory data as a base.
- Prepare detailed inventory of sensitive resource areas
- Identify potential locations for invasive species removal, prairie restoration, erosion control and other resource protection projects
- Recommend best management practices (BMPs) for resource management based on the characteristics of the locations identified above
- Outcomes of the update:
 - Specific records on significant natural resource areas
 - BMP recommendations for preserving identified areas – specifically regarding BMPs for natural resource monitoring
 - List of potential protection and restoration projects
 - Metrics for measuring successful protection and restoration
 - High level cost estimates for proposed projects

3. Convene focus group to set criteria for project prioritization

- Invite stakeholder groups (i.e. Izaak Walton League, Friends of the Minnesota River Valley, etc.) as well as relevant agencies (i.e. USFWS, Hennepin County, etc.) to participate in focus group
- Work with focus group to set framework for project prioritization
 - For example, some areas would rank as high priority for containing unique plants species. Others would rank as high priority, because restoration could improve access/awareness.

4. Work with focus group to identify priorities for investment

- Use agreed upon framework to create a list of prioritized projects

5. Provide detailed costs estimates for highly prioritized projects

6. Work with partners to identify funding opportunities

- Create list of grant opportunities and other potential funding sources

7. Investigate processes for monitoring natural resources (i.e. status of sensitive areas, water quality, etc.) via volunteers and community groups

- Research regional and national examples of volunteer natural and cultural resource monitoring programs
- Gauge stakeholder interest in participation in such a program

8. Create metrics for measuring and tracking success

- Track items like:
 - Grant dollars won
 - Areas protected
 - Amount of vegetation re-growth

Cultural Resources: Plan Tasks

Cultural Resource Protection Tasks

1. Review existing data to identify locations of known cultural resources
2. Work with experts (i.e. state archaeologist, other SHPO staff) to determine the priorities for protection
 - Develop a list of prioritized protection projects
3. Work with experts to determine the BMPs for projects prioritized for protection
4. Estimate costs for protection projects

Cultural Resource Interpretation

1. Review data to identify a list of locations that could benefit from interpretation
2. Convene a focus group to set criteria for project prioritization
 - Invite stakeholder groups (Bloomington Historical Society, Pond Dakota Society, etc.) to participate in focus group
 - Work with focus group to set framework for project prioritization
3. Identify priority locations for investment
 - Used agreed upon framework to create a list of prioritized projects
4. Work with partners to identify funding opportunities
5. Create metrics for measuring and tracking success.
 - Track items like:
 - Grant dollars won
 - Signs installed

Staff Time and Budget Needs

Staff Time

- Project manager to coordinate meetings with stakeholders, prep materials for meetings, and reports
 - 1 FTE, 20% time for 8-12 months
- Support staff – similar level of involvement as Strategic Plan
 - Participate in project meetings
 - Review documents
 - Stakeholder meeting attendance

Consultant Needs

Natural Resources

- Approximately \$20,000 for consultant services

Comprehensive Sign Plan: Scope of Work

Plan Tasks

1. Identify signage needs

This task will build on the information compiled as part of the Park Asset Inventory project

- Coordinate with MnDNR and FWS to agree on where/what type of signs are needed

2. Coordinate display of regulations

- The following tasks will be completed via the Memorandum of Understanding update process, but will provide foundation for developing sign plan:
 - Convene agency working group
 - Invite other agencies (MnDNR, FWS, etc.) to participate in the signage planning process.
 - Conduct work sessions with agency work group to:
 - Identify issues, areas of conflicting rules or messages
 - Define approaches to resolve and/or accept conflicting messages
 - Establish City policy on when/how to display regulations in public parks

3. Develop sign design concepts

- Define signage hierarchy (*some consultant involvement in task*)
 - Major/minor trailhead, neighborhood access, wayfinding, interpretive, etc.
- Develop sign design concepts (*consultant task*)
 - Structure types and style
 - Graphic and content – design standards
 - Specialized signs (i.e. interpretive displays, etc.)
 - Explore innovative signage approaches (i.e. smart phone technology)
- Prepare high level cost estimates by sign type (*consultant task*)

4. Identify priorities for maintenance and replacement

- Prepare signage maintenance cost estimates
- Develop criteria for a routine replacement schedule
 - For example, replace unsafe or dilapidated signage first
- Routinely include costs to install, replace, and maintain signage in annual budgeting and Capital Improvement Plan discussions.

Staff Time and Budget Needs

Staff Time

- 1 project manager (shared) to oversee consultant, coordinate meetings, prep materials for meetings and reports, 5-10% time for 12 months
- Support staff – similar level of involvement as Strategic Plan
 - Participate in project meetings
 - Review documents
 - Stakeholder meeting attendance

Consultant Needs

- Approximately \$30,000 for consultant services

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Comprehensive Maintenance Plan: Scope of Work

Plan Tasks

1. Establish a natural and cultural resources maintenance plan

- Establish a maintenance plan in the Valley based on the outcomes and the maintenance cost estimates established in the Natural and Cultural Resource Protection Plans
- Investigate tree maintenance approaches to deal with Emerald Ash Boer and Oak Wilt
 - Discuss with FWS and MnDNR to establish what is being already being done and what they have planned
 - Review BMPs in the Resource Protection Plan

2. Establish a facilities maintenance plan

- Establish a maintenance plan in the Valley based on the outcomes and the maintenance cost estimates established in the Asset Inventory, Master Trail Plan, and Master Sign Plan.

3. Investigate mobile reporting technology

- Investigate latest trends and technology that would allow Minnesota River Valley users to report maintenance issues to the City via smart phones

4. Plan with partner groups for maintenance of future facilities and natural resources

- Work with partner agencies and community groups to expand existing maintenance work in the Valley.

Staff Time and Budget Needs

Staff Time

- 1 project manager, 15-20% time for 12-18 months in total
- Support staff – similar level of involvement as Strategic Plan
 - Research and technical support
 - Partner group coordination
 - Document preparation

Master Trail Plan: Scope of Work

Plan Tasks

1. Evaluate/analyze existing conditions

- Note: The following tasks will be completed as part of the Park Asset Inventory:
 - Gather information on existing facilities including:
 - Trail heads (parking, signs, benches, etc.)
 - Trails (location, slopes, surface, etc.)
 - Analyze need for upgrades/changes to:
 - Existing trailheads
 - Existing connecting trails, including braided trails

2. Form stakeholder task force

- Invite other agencies (MnDNR, FWS, etc.) and community members (ADA advocates, MORC, etc.) to participate in the trail planning process
- Gather feedback and opinions from the stakeholder taskforce on the trail planning process via a series of facilitated workshops (*consultant task*)

3. Analyze constraints and opportunities

- Compile and analyze trail use trend data and conduct basic user study
- Analyze potential for new facilities, including:
 - Westside bluff trail
 - New trails needed to connect to the State Trail
 - New trailhead amenities
 - Mountain bike skills course

4. Design Trail Master Plan (*consultant task*)

- Identify desired facilities based on the constraints and opportunities analysis
- Prepare illustrative master plan of trail system and trailhead locations
- Prepare conceptual drawings of site specific desired facilities

5. Identify priorities for investment

- Work with stakeholder group to design a framework for prioritizing proposed projects
- Use framework to create a prioritized list of projects

6. Prepare capital costs estimates for highly prioritized projects

7. Prepare maintenance cost estimates for highly prioritized projects

Staff Time and Budget Needs

Staff Time

- 1 project manager (shared) to oversee consultant, coordinate stakeholder meetings, prep materials for meetings, and prepare reports, 15-20% time for 12 months
- Support staff – similar level of involvement as Strategic Plan
 - Participate in project meetings
 - Review documents
 - Stakeholder meeting attendance

Consultant Needs

- Consultant facilitation at public workshops - \$10,000
- Expert technical consultations at public workshops - \$15,000
- Preparation of design concepts - \$20,000
- Estimated total: \$45,000

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