

## Summary of Feedback on the Draft Minnesota River Valley Strategic Plan

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 1. 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 1: Dates of Presentations**

<b>Question Number</b>	<b>Date of Presentation</b>
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.

To see a full list of attendees and notes from the focus group meeting please see the appendix attached to this document.

## 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.

To see a full list of attendees and notes from the focus group meeting please see the appendix attached to this document.

## Public 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's plans to build a paved trail in addition to the current natural surface trail, there were also a number of paved trail advocates, including advocates for persons with disabilities. The feedback gathered at the meeting reflects the focus on the State Trail. To see a full list of comments received at the open house please see the appendix attached to this document. A summary of the survey results is discussed in the next section.

## Survey

The purpose of the survey was to gauge how respondents would prioritize the recommendations listed in the draft plan related to the plan goals. The survey was posted online and was promoted via the City's

July 2015

website. Hard copies of the survey were also made available at the 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, it is only one of many pieces of information the City can use to gauge the appropriateness of the draft plan recommendations. A separate online survey was conducted in summer 2014 to obtain information on how people use the Valley and what uses and facilities are most important. A summary of that survey can be found on the project website in the document library.

### How the Data was Analyzed

There were 86 total responses to the survey, however the response rate decreased as respondents moved through the survey questions as shown in Table 2. 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 2: 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

$$X_1W_1 + X_2W_2 + X_3W_3 \dots X_nW_n$$

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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 3, 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 3: 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 4.

**Table 4: 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 5, 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 5: 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 6.

**Table 6: 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 included in an appendix attached to this document.

## **APPENDICES**

- 1. Community Stakeholder Focus Group Notes**
- 2. Agency Stakeholder Focus Group Notes**
- 3. Comments submitted at June 17, 2015 Open House**
- 4. Comments submitted via survey**

**Minnesota River Valley Master Plan Community Stakeholder Meeting**  
**June 9, 2015**

1. Introductions

- Randy Quale: City of Bloomington Park & Rec Manager
- Julie Farnham: City of Bloomington Planning
- Elizabeth Heyman: City of Bloomington Planning
- John Crampton
- Bob Williams
- Larry Granger
- Vonda Kelly
- Dick Duerre
- Ed Crozier
- Roger Willette
- John Hickman
- Steve Thomforde
- Stan Danielson
- Jim Goodermont
- Dennis Porter
- Representative Ann Lenczewski
- 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 discusses, 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:

- 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.
- Complete System Wide Plan:
  - 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.
  - 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Funding:
  - 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.
  - 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.
  - 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?
  - 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.

- Open for Comments:
- 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,
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

- 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.

## Minnesota River Valley Master Plan

### Agency Stakeholder 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.

## **Comments received at June 17, 2015 Minnesota River Valley Open House**

### **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 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!

## Comments received via the Minnesota River Valley Strategic Valley Prioritization Survey

These comments were collected via an online survey. The survey was posted on the City's website from May 20, 2015 to June 30, 2015.

### 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.  
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.
- 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

*Three Rivers Park District Commissioner John Gibbs submitted a letter via the survey. His letter is included in full below.*

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