

**MINUTES
OF THE JOINT WORK SESSION OF THE
EDINA CITY COUNCIL AND THE
THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT COMMISSION
HELD AT SOUTH VIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL
SEPTEMBER 29, 2010
7:04 P.M.**

ROLLCALL Answering rollcall were Members Bennett, Brindle, Housh, Swenson and Mayor Hovland. Members of the Three Rivers Park District Commission in attendance were: Chair Larry Blackstad, and Commissioners Marilyn Corcoran, Rosemary Franzese, Barbara Derus Kinsey, Dale Woodbeck, and Sara Wyatt. Three Rivers Park District staff in attendance were: Kelly Grissman, Senior Manager of Planning; Cris Gears, Superintendent; Boe Carlson, Associate Superintendent; Don DeVeau, Director of Planning and Development; Jonathan Vlaming, Chief of Planning, and Ciara Schlichting, Planner with Bonestroo. Attending from Edina's staff was John Keprios, Park and Recreation Director.

PRESENTATION MADE – NINE MILE REGIONAL TRAIL

Park and Recreation Director Keprios welcomed all to the joint work session and explained the purpose of tonight's meeting was to formally present study results on the Nine Mile Creek regional trail and provide an opportunity for the Edina City Council to ask questions of the Three Rivers Park District Commissioners and staff. He advised that a public hearing would be scheduled at a future date and encouraged residents to submit questions in writing for response by staff. Mr. Keprios thanked all who had participated in this process and acknowledged the attendance of Edina Park Board Members in the audience. Mr. Keprios recapped the ten-year process under which this trail had been considered and support of the Edina City Council for the Three Rivers Park District to implement a regional trail corridor and complete an environmental assessment worksheet (EAW) for potential segments within the City of Edina.

Three Rivers Park District Senior Manager of Planning Grissman welcomed all to the meeting and provided a presentation detailing the project background; maps depicting the District's regional trail system, creek-based and road-based routes for review and consideration; and, next steps to take. She stated the intent was to develop one preferred route through Edina. Ms. Grissman displayed graphs that summarized resident survey results that identified 86% of respondents indicated a need for walking and bike trails; 66% indicated a need for natural areas and wildlife habitat; 64% ranked park and recreational facilities as being the most important; and, 66% indicated a willingness to fund walking and biking trails with additional tax dollars.

Following a presentation of the City's 2007 Comprehensive Bicycle Transportation Plan and Plan maps, Ms. Grissman advised of the composition and role of the Community Assessment Team (CAT), which was established by the City to review all routes under consideration. The CAT also gathered and prioritized information related to social, technical and economic factors, and conducted a voluntary environmental assessment. The voluntary environmental assessment concluded that potential environmental impacts were addressable in design, permitting, construction, and operation phases so an environmental impact statement (EIS) was not warranted. She explained wetland impacts identified in the environmental assessment and how the impacts would be mitigated within the immediate area. With regard to wildlife, it was determined the only impacted regulated species was the Blandings Turtle and that potential affect would be addressed, if needed.

Ms. Grissman reviewed the opportunities available for public input and indicated that all public comments had been compiled and summarized. Of the 118 comments received indicating support for the trail, only one preferred the road-based route. Comments expressing objections were based on the costs being too high, environmental concerns, the trail being unsafe for non-trail users, and that priority should not be given to recreational trails.

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Ms. Grissman described the alignment for each segment of a creek-based route and displayed pictures depicting different types of trail construction including boardwalks. She then described the alignment of each segment of a road-based route and displayed examples of road-based trails. Ms. Grissman stated the third alternative was no trail within Edina, creating a gap in the regional trail system.

Ms. Grissman presented the considerations determined by the CAT that the most important items to be considered were the number of adjacent homes, distance of the home to the trail, driveway/roadway crossings, availability of right-of-way, and what the trail would cost. A chart was displayed that detailed each of CAT's findings including pros and cons for a creek-based route and a road-based route. Ms. Grissman advised that if a route was not found in Edina, the District's funds would be directed to other park projects and access to the Edina High School complex north of Highway 62 would continue to be on sidewalks along Gleason and Tracy Avenues.

With regard to project costs, Ms. Grissman stated that a creek-based route was estimated at \$20 million and a road-based route was estimated at \$17 million. Operations and maintenance costs for the entire regional trail was \$185,000 annually regardless of type of route. She noted that about 20-25% of the project cost was for the two bridges over Highways 62 and 100. Ms. Grissman reviewed financing options for capital costs and partnership opportunities and indicated it was not anticipated to raise local property taxes to fund these costs. Operation and maintenance costs were funded from the District's general operating fund that included property taxes and funds from the Metropolitan Council.

Ms. Grissman explained the approval process through the Edina Park Board, Edina City Council, Nine Mile Creek Watershed District, School District, and finally the Three Rivers Park District. She stated that if the project moved forward implementation steps would include: completion of a master plan, cooperative trail agreement, securing of trail easements, grant applications, and once funding was in place construction would commence. The federal grant application for funding in 2015 and 2016 was due June of 2011 so a project decision would be needed from the Edina City Council by March of 2011. If the project were not approved by that point, the trail segment would be delayed by an additional two years.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION HELD

Mayor Hovland commented that the regional trail was one of the most important issues to face Edina and that the Council was committed to analyze all of the data, gather comments, and analyze the facts before reaching a conclusion. He indicated this topic would be on the Council's October 5, 2010, meeting agenda for discussion of the process and to consider whether the matter should be referred to the Park Board and other entities for analysis and recommendation. Mayor Hovland recognized the attendance of CAT members and expressed the City's appreciation for their contribution. He described the steps that would be followed and emphasized that the Council was mindful and sensitive to the resident's interests and would continue to be so throughout the process. He indicated that when the matter was finished, he would like the City to say they had worked on it as a community and regardless of the outcome would remain a community.

The Council raised the issue of a 35 mph speed limit for bicycles on the trail. Associate Superintendent Carlson advised that the Three Rivers Park District does not have an ordinance to set an arbitrary speed limit. Rather, it was based on utilizing trails under a manner of control for existing conditions. He indicated that all trails were multi-use.

The Council asked if the Three Rivers Park District would fund the preferred route whether it was creek-based or road-based. Superintendent Gears stated the Three Rivers Park District Board

does fund different types of trails, both on- and off-road. In this case, the Board would review whatever route the City preferred, the cost in relationship to other District projects, and make a decision on funding. Three Rivers Park District Board Chair Blackstad explained that regardless of trail location, the intended funding was a federal grant covering 80% of the cost and requiring a 20% match from other entities, some of which could come from the District's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget. Mr. Carlson advised that a creek-based trail may score better with a federal grant and whether road- or creek-based, funding may include federal, state, and other entity funding.

With regard to maintenance of trails, Mr. Carlson indicated the Three Rivers Park District was responsible for the trail improvements and maintenance. Mr. Gears advised that in addition to regional rail corridors, the Three Rivers Park District also had more than 200 miles of paved trails, many built under conditions similar to Edina's alignments. Both operations and maintenance costs were paid through a separate capital fund, and the District maintained a pavement condition data base to assure all trails were in a safe condition for users.

The Council asked whether the EAW addressed potential impacts to nearby homes from heaving construction equipment during boardwalk installation. Ciara Schlichting, Bonestroo Planner, stated they recommend that construction in wetland areas occur during the winter when the ground is frozen and potential for impact was greatly minimized. Director of Planning and Development DeVeau stated the District had no information that led them to believe construction of boardwalks in summer or winter would impart any construction impacts to residential or adjoining properties. He advised that boardwalks do not use extremely deep footings.

The Council discussed the timing of construction and asked if 2015 would be the earliest date for project commencement. Ms. Grissman stated there might be some immediate opportunities in some locations if the trail project was done concurrently with road reconstruction projects contained in the City's CIP. With regard to financing, Mr. Gears stated the District may borrow money to construct earlier than receipt of federal grant funds in 2015 or 2016.

It was indicated that during summer sporting events, the parking lots at Edina City Parks along the proposed routes were oftentimes full. The need for parking was discussed by the Council, and the question arose whether additional parking lots would be constructed. Ms. Grissman stated the District believed existing parking lots in City parks, on-street parking, and other parking infrastructure could be capitalized so they would not anticipate constructing new parking lots

Chief of Planning Vlaming indicated that over one-half of regional trail users lived within three-fourths of a mile from the trail. Thus, they would not expect most trail users to drive a vehicle to and from the trail system. In addition, the District's maps identify locations of parking lots and designated trailheads, as preferred by local authorities. Mr. Vlaming assured the Council that the creek-based trail would have sufficient points of access. Three Rivers would work with Edina as to which parking lots, parks and bathrooms would be named on their map if any.

The Council asked how much boardwalk was being contemplated with a creek-based route, especially in segments 9 and 11, and whether that information would be available in advance of the Council's decision. Ms. Grissman advised of the off-road trail segments that would incorporate a boardwalk and explained that the exact percentage would be determined during the design and development stage. Mr. Vlaming provided a detailed description of locations where boardwalk was proposed. With regard to the height of the boardwalk above the surface and vertical dimension including railing, Ms. Grissman explained that level of detail would be determined during the design and development stage and would depend on the regulatory agency since requirements vary. She stated in general, boardwalks were constructed two to three feet above the ordinary high water mark with 42 inches from the decking to the railing. Mr. Vlaming suggested a good example of boardwalks would be the Luce Line Regional Trail where the boardwalk could not be seen from the road and vice versa. Ms. Grissman explained that

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boardwalk would only be constructed in designated wetlands. The trail would be built at grade if located in a floodplain. Mr. Gears stated the District would prepare a map that identified areas where boardwalks were anticipated at designated wetlands.

The Council next addressed screening between the trail and private property and asked if it was the responsibility of the District or homeowner. Mr. Carlson stated the Dakota Trail was an existing railroad corridor, adding in many cases the private property had encroached on the railroad easement. In some areas, the railroad sold property to the private property owner so they could improve their property. Mr. Carlson explained with the Dakota Trail project District staff had met with each resident who had concerns relative to privacy or limited easement areas. Cooperatively, District staff and property owners identified vegetative or fencing solutions. The District paid for all pediments, fencing, and improvements made within the right-of-way. In some instances the property owner chose to do something (plantings or fences) on their own property and in that case the property owner paid for the improvement. Mr. Carlson reviewed the screening options available that included berming, a variety of vegetation, and wooden board-on-board or split rail fencing.

Mr. Carlson explained that Three Rivers Park District was responsible for downed tree removal and would work cooperatively with City staff if they became aware of a maintenance issue. He noted that trail signage included guidelines, courtesy messages, and contact telephone numbers.

The Council asked the District to address how it handled its current debt and additional debt for this segment of trail. Mr. Gears stated the District had a ten-year project forecast and within that ten-year window, was anticipating a major expenditure for trails within first-tier suburbs. Each year, the District borrowed money for capital projects, but the District had also been able to retire bonds each year so it balanced with bonds being sold. In this case, the District would not borrow \$20 million, since a federal grant would cover 80% of the costs, phased construction would be used, and other funding sources were available to lower the District's contribution.

A discussion ensued regarding drafting a competitive federal grant application. Mr. Carlson advised that grant applications receive a higher score if the project was within a first-tier suburb with a high density. Other features that score well were tying in key elements to increase pedestrian flow such as pedestrian crossings over roadways and creating connectivity to schools and churches in areas with limiting freeway system boundaries.

Mr. Gears stated funding agencies also looked at the number of street crossings managed or mitigated, usability and safety for the user, and whether the project was park/trail oriented or transportation oriented. Mr. Carlson commented that another component that scored well was the organization's ability to bring "money to the table" and sufficiently match money. He indicated the Three Rivers Park District was well positioned to receive a grant for this project because of its broad tax base.

The Council noted bicycling was a popular activity in Edina. They asked if directness of the proposed route was a consideration. Chair Blackstad stated that was a consideration because if a route was not typically bicyclists would use the streets. He explained if this trail was not federally funded, the Three Rivers Park District would consider how this segment fit its priorities. It was noted that if the Edina segment was not constructed that would create a missing link for the entire region, not just the Three Rivers Park District.

Three Rivers Park District staff was asked to provide the City with additional information on the percentage of boardwalk being contemplated, elevation and height of the boardwalk, sight lines from abutting properties, and building material that would mitigate noise impacts.

Potential impact to butting residential property values was discussed. Mr. Carlson clarified that the issue was the proximity of the home to the trail, not the proximity of the property line to the

trail. He advised the District had found that abutting property owners had no issues regarding safety or trash, and that was evident because there were no instances of police reports. Mr. Carlson stated their police department submits quarterly reports on every call received that identified the location and type of call. Those quarterly reports were reviewed by staff and the Board to determine if there were trends. Mr. Carlson advised that the largest complaint, system wide, was trail-on-trail activities like conflicts between a bicyclist and dog walker and patrons not obeying regulatory signage. In addition, there had been no serious accidents between bicyclist and pedestrian. The Council asked Ms. Grissman to provide internet links with respect to impact on property values as well as a study from Indiana on homes located near trails. Chair Blackstad referenced a study conducted in Hennepin County that found a positive correlation in home values if located along a trail that was equivalent to adding a fireplace or bedroom. With regard to public access to this data, Ms. Grissman stated the assessment findings were posted to the District's website, and they would research the study mentioned by Chair Blackstad because it may be relevant.

The Council asked whether the police call data captured calls made to local police departments. Mr. Carlson stated the District's calls were dispatched through Hennepin County and if identified on a Hennepin County or Three Rivers Park District facility, the District took note of that call. The District may not get the call information if a local police officer responded or the call was not routed by the Hennepin County dispatch system, but the District police chief had a good working relationship with municipal police chiefs.

Ms. Grissman and Mr. Keprios indicated that correspondence received from residents would be posted to the District and City websites within the next week or two.

Three Rivers Park District Commissioner Corcoran advised of the District's "safety on wheels" that patrolled trails, created a "presence," and could help if something happened. She reviewed several areas in the metropolitan area where homes existed or had been constructed near regional trails and that when listed for sale; the trail proximity was highly marketed.

Three Rivers Park District Commissioner Kinsey felt a key finding was that a road-based trail had 30 road crossings compared to 11 road crossings with a creek-based route. She stated she understood that a creek-based route was not popular with a number of homeowners, but the number of road crossings addressed a safety issue, which might also be a consideration to gain funding.

The Council indicated it desired to have an effective voice in the final design process to assure impacts were minimized, noting three homes would be within 25 feet of a creek-based trail. Mr. DeVeau explained that every city had a different process so the District would ask for that acknowledgement from Edina on final design was welcomed.

With regard to the City providing the trail easement to the Three Rivers Park District, Mr. Gears advised an easement was not ownership of property but the right to use the property for an exclusive use. He stated that having the easement would be directly tied to the District's ability to gain funding. Mr. Gears stated the District wanted to assure an investment of this size had a long life, and the term of the easement would have to be at least as long as the term for debt payments, typically 20-25 years. The Council asked whether a conditional easement was an option in case trail funding was not obtained. Mr. Carlson assured the Council that the Three Rivers Park District would have no need to retain the easement if the trail was not constructed and would turn it back to the City.

The Council asked about the contemplated width in segment 7 if a road-based route was selected. Ms. Grissman explained that in segment 7 the shoulder width would be narrowed or parking removed, and the design would have to still meet engineering and MSA standards. The Council discussed the proposed trail location in Walnut Ridge Park near the hockey rink and impact to

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trees. Mr. Gears stated the District would work with Edina to minimize impact to natural resources, trees, and close proximity to park amenities. Mr. Keprios stated at one point that trail alignment went through the south end of Walnut Ridge Park but was moved to the north because of water table and park use issues. He indicated the placement of this trail section might be worth revisiting. Chair Blackstad noted there had been no police reports on conflict with children crossing the trails.

Mr. Keprios questioned application deadlines of which the Council should be mindful. Mr. Gears stated the District now had funding for first-tier trail construction in its ten-year plan, and the Edina project was high on the list for funding in the near term. He referenced the aforementioned federal grant application deadline of June of 2011, meaning a Council decision on a preferred route was needed by late February or early March. If not determined by that time, the District would apply for federal grant funds for another project and delay the Nine Mile Creek trail by two years.

Kevin Bigalke, Nine Mile Watershed District Administrator, advised that the creek bank stabilization field assessment was funded in the Watershed District's 2011 budget. The streambank reconstruction would occur over several winter seasons, 2013-2015, to minimize impact to soils and vegetation. He stated the Watershed District wanted to coordinate its streambank project with any trail construction to minimize disturbance.

The Council complimented the Three Rivers Park District staff on its informative presentation and cooperative work with Edina's residents to gain their input.

Chair Blackstad stated the District Board appreciated the opportunity to meet with the City Council and looked forward to working with Edina's Park Board and staff.

There being no further business on the Council Agenda, Mayor Hovland declared the joint work session adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra A. Mangen, City Clerk

Minutes approved by Edina City Council, October 5, 2010.

James B. Hovland, Mayor

Audio Copy of the September 29, 2010, Work Session available.