

Developing the 2050 Vision Plan for Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems

The [2030 Parks System Plan](#) identifies a vision that incorporates three elements:

- **Great Places: more to see and do in Dakota County's Parks**
- Connected Places: Greenways that connect parks and community places
- Protected Places: Protect and manage natural and cultural resources in Dakota County's Parks

Great Places: Improved Parks, New Parks

Serve County residents and park visitors by enhancing the overall park experience. Make parks great destinations by realizing the potential and unique qualities of these remarkable settings.

Improve Recreation and Services:

- *Offer more activities, more choices.*
- *Fill gaps in popular “basic” recreation. (biking, picnicking, trails, shorter paved trail loops).*
- *Enhance delivery of recreation services.*
- *Promote awareness of recreation opportunities.*
- *Plan and open Vermillion Highlands Regional Park.*
- *Explore opportunities with South St. Paul for a regional park combining Thompson County Park, Kaposia Park, and Port Crosby Park.*

The 2030 vision element of *Great Places* was focused on how visitors experience Dakota County Parks and prioritizing improvements to deliver high quality balanced recreation and education opportunities with excellent visitor service delivery and park information, in a setting of healthy park landscapes.

The Dakota County Parks System is evolving. Fifty years ago, the focus was on acquisition and land protection, 20 years ago, on developing the park system with access and basic facilities, while fostering resilient and healthy landscapes. As we move into the next 25 years, how **people** experience and interact with both the natural and created environments will require greater consideration than in the past. The world has changed since 2008 when the 2030 vision was adopted. Dakota County residents are more racially diverse and older. The population is more connected to technology. Climate change is impacting recreation with beach closures due to water quality and warm winters with little snow. Children are less likely to play outside and experience nature. People are more sedentary, there are greater health disparities, and there is a mental health crisis. How will Dakota County parks adapt to these issues in the next 25 years so that the County remains a great place to live with quality natural areas? What will Great Places look like in 2050?

The purpose of the April 16, 2024 discussion is to request input from the Physical Development Committee of the Whole regarding changes, edits, and additions to the **existing** 2030 vision, goals, and objectives in the area of Great Places are needed to take the Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems into the future.

2030 Vision for Recreation and Education in Dakota County Parks:

Dakota County is known as a leader in providing exceptional nature-based recreation, with the following hallmarks:

- Balanced variety of quality, popular, year-round activities to promote healthy lifestyles
- Welcoming to visitors of all backgrounds and abilities to a conveniently accessed network of parks, trails, and greenways
- Innovative, sustainably-designed recreation to protect our natural legacy
- Quality education that builds appreciation of natural and cultural resources and inspires greater stewardship

Goal 1 Provide a balanced variety of high-quality, popular, year-round activities to promote healthy active lifestyles

Objectives

1. *Balance recreational offerings to ensure that the most popular and inclusive nature-based activities are available at all parks.*
2. *Enhance and improve the availability of year-round recreation opportunities.*
3. *Trails are the recreational backbone of Dakota County's parks. Provide a trail system that exceeds expectations with improved accessibility within parks and enhanced trail access to parks.*

What We've Heard So Far

Does the Dakota County Parks System need to remain solely a "nature-based system"?

Greater emphasis on physical and mental health

Consider economic development impact of parks and open space

Do the recreational activities offered meet the needs of the changing demographics of the metro area?

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

New activities that appeal to new visitors (more active recreation and cultural options)

Expanded commercial use (e.g. restaurant, recreation equipment outfitter)

Provide more than one location for most popular signature activities (e.g. new mountain bike facility in the southern part of the County, addition of nature center(s))

Goal 2 Welcome visitors of all backgrounds, interests, and abilities to their parks.

Objectives

1. *Expand park opportunities for visitors of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities.*
2. *Improve the overall park recreation experience by enhancing basic visitor safety, hospitality, and support facilities.*

What We've Heard So Far

We need to move beyond just “welcoming” to a create sense of “belonging”

Ensure public safety

More spaces developed with universal design principles

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

More equitable, accessible, and inclusive facilities, programs, and activities

Bridging Facilities (potential new Met Council regional park facility designation)

Level of services for each park (e.g. is there a staffed facility that offers visitor orientation and programming?)

New park units closer to where people live (new units or units in partnership with other agencies)

Explore park unit partnerships with other agencies (e.g. Fort Snelling State Parks, City Parks)

Public and non-motorized transportation to parks

Continued growth in outreach and engagement programming and experiences (or offerings)

Diversifying and training staff to better represent a more inclusive and supportive culture

Goal 3 Exemplify sustainability and innovation as recreation trademarks of Dakota County Parks.

What We've Heard So Far

Incorporate the international horticultural expo

Move to current language of “adaptation and resiliency”

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

Keystone species re-introduction

Climate resiliency and adaptation planning and development guidelines

Sustainable trail design

On-site stormwater treatment

Public and non-motorized transportation to parks

Adaption and mitigation strategies for increasing environmental threats/changes (challenges to snow-based activities, expansion of warm-weather recreation season, risk to visitors from extreme weather events)

Goal 4 Enhance provision of quality outdoor and environmental education.

Objectives

1. *Increase visitors' understanding and enjoyment of Dakota County's natural and cultural resources, sustainability, and healthful outdoor recreation with high quality staff-led and self-guided education opportunities.*
2. *Through education opportunities and key messages, inspire visitors to practice stewardship of natural resources, the environment, and self through healthful activity.*

What We've Heard So Far

More emphasis on natural, historic and cultural interpretation

Incorporate art into the park system provision

We need to move beyond just “welcoming” to a create sense of “belonging”

Greater emphasis on physical and mental health, of both individuals and communities

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

*Meeting unmet demand in youth programming
New nature center(s)
Guided programs at more parks
Facilities and logistics (e.g. transportation) to support school field trips
Outreach and mobile programs
Continued growth in partnerships
Focus on unique park amenities and facilities
Interpretive plans- development and implementation
Greater emphasis on programming to support mental and physical wellness
New programs/activities based on public interest and changing demographics*

Goal 5 *Provide exceptional service delivery and build public awareness of recreation opportunities.*

Objectives

- 1. Provide service excellence through an integrated service model.*
- 2. Improve visitor and public awareness of parks, recreational opportunities, and services.*

What We've Heard So Far

*Ensure signature activities in each park
Develop a signature event/feature for lesser visited parks
Role of parks, greenways, natural lands in economic development*

Other Potential 2050 Vision Plan Priorities

*Provide programs and activities to meet community demand and interests
Role of Dakota County park system in creating vibrant, healthy, and livable communities
Special feature for Dakota County Parks that is unique to the region
Collaborating with community partners to enhance program offerings
Reframing access to nature as a basic human right and an essential service provided by the county
Strategic marketing/promotions approach to building awareness of the park system*

*What vision, goals, and objectives changes would you like to see?
Are there new goals of interest in that are not reflected in the 2030 Goals for Great Places?*