

Attachment: 2050 Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems Plan Vision Plan Public Review Comment
Summary and Plan Response

Dakota County 2050 Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems Vision Plan

Summary: Public Review Period Comments and Draft Plan Changes

Community engagement activities for the Public Review phase of the 2050 Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems Vision Plan (2050 Vision Plan) update were held April 22 – May 20, 2025. The purpose was to offer Dakota County residents, park visitors, stakeholder representatives, partners, and staff the opportunity to review the plan, to suggest changes, and provide feedback priority goals and strategies.

For the most part, feedback was supportive of the plan vision, goals and strategies. For those who provided feedback, the five most important goals are:

- Protect, improve, and manage the natural resources of Dakota County.
- Nurture the reciprocal relationship between people and nature.
- Expand environmental stewardship through outdoor programs, learning, and volunteerism.
- Locate new park units close to people or to protect natural areas and recreational assets.
- Provide safe and positive core services, amenities, and experiences.

Participation in the final round of engagement was not as robust the first round. While certainly helpful, the results are likely not representative of the breadth of interests held by County residents. Survey responses and input received was weighted toward interests already engaged in the county and city park systems rather than non-park users.

Below is a summary of comments and plan changes. Changes responding to comments are noted in the table below and are highlighted in yellow in the plan document. A more robust summary of comments can be found in the 2050 Vision Plan Document, *Appendix B, Community Engagement, pages 162-169*. Full comments and meeting summaries are in *Appendix B, Community Engagement, pages 318-356*.

Comment	Plan Changes
Dakota County Disability Advisory Council	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall support for the plan vision, goals and strategies (strategies related to goals B and C were discussed at the meeting) Request that parks have more representation from the disability community on future project committees. Access should be integrated into everything (e.g. infrastructure, park locations, visitor services, communications, operations). Appreciation that the plan aims to go beyond ADA – that is the floor, not the ceiling. 	<p>No changes General comments.</p>
Goal B Strategy 9 should be clarified – what kind of advisory committees?	<p>Page 29 Strategy #8 clarified to include advisory committees at the regional, county, parks, or project level.</p>
Goal B, Strategies 4 and 7 could be combined to reduce the overall number. Suggestion <i>Establish accessibility goals to reduce barriers to park services through supportive, accessible, affordable services.</i>	<p>Page 29 Strategies combined into new strategy #4.</p>

Numbering of the goals implies importance/priority. They should be lettered.	Pages 27, 28-42 Goal numbers replaced with letters. Minor reordering of goals to group similar goals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Parks Department needs to acknowledge what will be done to improve access in the future as well as communicate about when ADA is not possible because the impact to natural resources is too great (example, redwood forests in CA). Create a page on the County website to list of all the accessible facilities/spaces in one location. Include information on what to expect in each location and virtual tours. Include a comment box on the website to report maintenance needs/safety issues – make reporting easy and the process clear. An overall park accessibility assessment is needed and tracking when issues have been addressed. 	Page 63 Edited existing language to clarify that the website information should be centralized. Added: - Include information on what parks will do to improve access in the future. - Consider virtual park tours to help visitors understand what to expect in each location. - Include information about when ADA is not possible and why. - Include a process for reporting maintenance and safety needs. - Develop a public facing tracking to communicate progress being made to improve access.
Dakota County Planning Commission	
Under Goal L, Seek and sustain values-based and mission driven partnerships, add nature-based nonprofits to the list of organizations to seek strategic partnerships with.	Page 39 Nature based nonprofits added to the first bullet.
There is inconsistency in the Core Services and Amenities Chart. It indicates that there will be non-motorized access with a paved trail in <u>many (M)</u> regional parks and that there will be bicycling on a paved trail in <u>all (Y)</u> regional parks. Change biking to many, to maintain consistency.	Page 57 Introduction edited to better explain the purpose of the Core Services and Amenities exhibit. Page 59 Biking in regional parks changed from all (Y) to many (M).
General Public	General Public
At engagement events and in the on-line questionnaire participants were asked “What is the most important thing Dakota County could do to improve Parks, Greenways, and Natural Systems?” Themes included <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be good stewards of the land Keep parks natural Focus on comfort facilities and amenities Build for all ages Expand and maintain trails and greenways Take care of what we have 	Page 30 Most of the themes heard were like themes heard in the first round of engagement and addressed. A strategy was added to goal C to address taking care existing facilities and lands.
Suggestions included many specific ideas to support the goals and strategies.	No change

	Specific suggestions will be considered as tactics in the operational plan updates.
Comment: provide recreation in all seasons	Page 31 Goal D, strategy 4 revised to reflect year-round recreation.
Please pursue any rails to trails possibilities in the county and provide separate walking and bicycle paths where possible.	Page 49 Section about converting rail corridors to trails added.
Oheyawahe Task Force/City of Mendota Heights	
Oheyawahe isn't a park, avoid classification, or refer to as open space.	Pages 7-10 <i>Locally Managed Land</i> text edited to clarify purpose and include more nature-based recreation locations and to remove the park description.
Physical Development Committee	
Develop staffing model with less dependence of seasonal staff is very specific. Generalize.	Page 41 Goal N Strategy 1 revised. Page 73, Next Steps <i>Develop staffing model with less dependence on temporary staff for year-round operations</i> edited to <i>Develop a staffing model that addresses the shift from seasonal to year-round services.</i>
Interest in Dakota County supporting local trail connections and loops to greenways by assisting cities political and technical support.	Page 35 Goal H, strategy 9 revised Page 73, Next Steps Language added regarding establishing the level of support for local trail loops connecting to greenways and nature-based recreation in city parks adjacent to greenways in the update for the 2010 Greenway Guidebook.
Indigenous Engagement Workshop	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns about mound management and funding Issue that places are sacred but unfamiliar to many Dakota/Indigenous people. Need a forward-thinking plan for and with Dakota/Indigenous community members. Encourage cross-generational knowledge sharing. Concern about how state and tribal teachings will be address, how artifacts will be cared for. Priority to have elders involved in processes. Create an Indigenous Committee in Dakota County. 	No changes. Goal G strategies address partnership with Dakota/Indigenous community, reconnecting Native people with park lands, naming, and public awareness. Goal B, strategy #8 addresses advisory committees.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the 100-year plan? 	
Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization	
<p>Add the types of rare species for the restoration bullet point? How about the naming the invasive species that were eradicated?</p> <p>Within <i>Protected Places</i>, consider mentioning partnerships with VRWJPO and Trout Unlimited for trout stream protection/enhancement projects.</p>	<p>Page 4 Example species added.</p> <p>Partnerships added.</p>
<p>The VRWJPO also operates a Watershed Wetland Bank Easement program (similar to BWSR easements). Please include under <i>Locally Managed Land</i>.</p>	<p>Page 7 Added VRWJPO wetland bank easement program.</p>
<p>Valley Lake Park in Lakeville provides fishing opportunities, trail surrounding the lake (ADA accessible), two pollinator gardens (one with nature-based play equipment), a rain garden, an additional conservation area, etc. Please include.</p>	<p>Pages 9-10 Edited section listing nature-based parks to be a more complete representation of nature-based recreation locations.</p>
<p>Can you add watersheds to the partnerships on pages 32, 39, and 74?</p>	<p>Pages 32, 39, 74 Added.</p>
<p>Goal J, would it be possible to state the names of the watershed organization (VRWJPO) in item 2 under strategies?</p>	<p>Page 37 All 6 Watershed organizations listed.</p>
<p>The Vermillion River is the only stream in the TC metro that supports a naturally reproducing trout population. Please consider highlighting this amenity by adding a strategy that protects/enhances natural areas adjoining/near this unique recreational asset.</p>	<p>Page 37 Added ‘springsheds’ to the important areas to protect to protect coldwater trout stream springs.</p>
Wilderness in the City	
<p>Overall support for the plan and the emphasis on natural systems. Common themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns expressed about changing the Parks tagline of “Forever Wild”. Support for the plan’s overall focus on natural resources. Support for the connector trail not being shown on the map in the plan. 	<p>Page 21 Added a bullet addressing the need for on-going and increasing funding needs for natural resource management.</p> <p>Page 29 Goal B, revised strategy 9 to: <i>Consider developing a process for modification of the Dakota County Parks tagline to better reflect new vision and mission as well as community feedback.</i></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern about finding sustainable funding source for natural resource management projects (post restoration). 	
Dakota County Staff	
Typos, corrections, and clarifications	Throughout document, not highlighted
Edit introductory text to reflect current board goals.	Page 1 Update made.
Add the year that the parks system was started, 1960	Page 1 Year started added.
Update visitation with 2024 numbers	Pages 2, 19 Update made.
Define the terms shown in Exhibit 1.2: <i>Restored, managed stabilized, yet to be restored.</i>	Page 3 Definitions added.
In the <i>Connected Places</i> text, add interpretive plans, recognize the Garlough tunnel mural, and define greenways.	Page 4 Updates made.
County Park Conservation Areas, remove the “or” from this statement: “that are preserved for environmental benefits and/or natural resource-based recreation.” Currently, the only ability to own these parcels in fee is under the County Parks authority in Minn. Stat. 398.32, which requires recreational purposes for the use of the land.	Page 5, 47, 50 <i>Or</i> removed, and <i>access</i> replaced with <i>for public park purposes and related outdoor recreational purposes</i>
The definition of SNA and WMA are inaccurate.	Page 7 SNA and WMA definitions corrected.
Map 1.1 correct the greenway ring route to show long term alignment, differentiate between Master Planned Greenways and Greenway Search Corridors.	Page 8 Map 1.1 corrected.
In the <i>Parks History Timeline</i> , add information on establishment of Lebanon Hills Campground, Lake Byllesby Campground, the Spring Lake Retreat Center	Page 12 Additions made.
Update the community engagement summary to include Public Review Draft engagement.	Page 14 Update made.
Add that increased operations will be needed with system growth.	Page 15 Added.
The use of the term Over-Represented seems odd in this context.	Page 16 Definitions of overrepresented and underrepresented added.
Under findings, <i>programming is limited compared with other metro area park systems</i> , add that limited indoor program space impacts the ability to provide outdoor education programming throughout the park system, that Dakota County has fewer outdoor education staff than other regional	Page 18 Update made.

park agencies, and that the seasonal and temporary staffing model impacts program delivery.	
Under findings, <i>the changing climate threatens natural systems and recreational opportunities</i> , add air quality and fire danger to the impacts to recreation, programming, and visitor experience.	Page 20 Update made.
Include the current Parks Department Mission.	Page 26 Draft mission replaced with current mission.
Goal A, add volunteer involvement to the metrics	Page 28 Addition made.
Goal G, remove first metric, <i>Consistent presence of Native American people in the system</i> , there is no way to measure this.	Page 34 Metric removed.
Goal H, replace <i>additionally</i> with <i>or</i> .	Page 25, 35 Update made.
Goal I, a strategy is needed for designating resource sensitive areas to better manage and protect natural features, species, and/or cultural sites. Add acres restored and acres maintained to metrics.	Page 36 Strategy #10 added. Metrics added.
Goal J, add strategy <i>Restore and manage natural spaces to support and nurture wildlife and plant communities</i> .	Page 37 Strategy #7 added.
Goal K, add metric “number of public art installations”	Page 39 Metric added.
Goal L, revise goal from <i>Seek values-based and mission-driven partnerships</i> . To <i>Seek and sustain values-based and mission-driven partnerships</i> .	Page 25, 39 Goal revised.
Goal M, include strategies to explore possibility of a parks district and voter approved bond referendum. This goal is missing a strategy speaking to sustainable funding. Add strategy: <i>Identify and allocate consistent and dedicated funding for operations and maintenance</i> .	Page 40 Strategies added.
Goal O, strategy # 1, <i>In long range and natural resource management plans, identify how broader economic systems are being served/enhanced</i> , is overly specific and prescriptive. Revise to: <i>In future planning efforts, consider how broader economic system are being served and enhanced</i> . Strategy #7 is written in a confusing way. Reword to clarify.	Page 42. Strategies revised.
Location description for Regional Park Reserves is incorrect.	Page 47 Location description updated consistent with Metropolitan Council 2050 Regional Parks Policy Plan.
Map 3.2, differentiate between existing and planned greenways and greenway search corridors, update symbol	Page 51 Map updated.

and include long term alignment for greenway ring route, change the symbol for the Mill Towns State Trail.	
Add a map that depicts the 2050 vision.	Page 55-56 Map 3.4 added.
Core Services and Amenities Chart – review and edit to remove errors and inconsistencies.	Page 57-62 Corrections to the <i>Core Services and Amenities</i> table made.
In the next steps chart, “Continue to implement the acceleration of the 2030 Greenway Vision” is listed twice, replace with “Continue to incorporate self-guided interpretive features in parks and greenways.”	Page 74 Change made.
Next steps chart, <i>Funding</i> , add three next steps: - Evaluate benefits of creating a special parks district; - Explore options for a park referendum. - Increase revenue generating programs and facilities.	Page 75 Addition made.
Build in a way to update the plan to address changes in the parks that have significant impact.	Page 75 Updating the plan addressed.
Public Review Draft Plan - engagement and comments.	Pages 162-169 , not highlighted Summary – Process and Key Findings Pages 318-356 , not highlighted Comments, meeting/event summaries, on-line results.