Business Item

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Community Development Committee Meeting: September 15, 2025 **For the Metropolitan Council:** Sept. 24, 2025

Business Item: 2025-220

Release the Draft Amendment to the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, Modernizing Mapping, for Public Comment and Set Public Hearing Date

District(s), Member(s):	All
Policy/Legal Reference:	Minn. Stats. 473.147
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Division/Department:	Community Development / Regional Parks

Proposed action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Amend Section 2, System Plan, of the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan to designate the Regional Parks and Trails Geographic Information System (GIS) dataset as the Met Council's primary reference for regional park and trail boundaries, and to align the boundaries described in the System Plan with those delineated in the GIS dataset.

2. Require Park Implementing Agencies to reflect the updated boundaries in the Regional Parks and Trails Dataset and their park and trail long-range plans. If any outstanding, substantial inconsistencies exist between Agency plans and the Council's System Plan, then Agencies should submit an amendment request to the Council by December 31, 2026.

3. Authorize Council Parks Staff to administratively review these long-standing, regional park and trail long-range plan amendment requests that resulted from the adoption of the GIS dataset boundaries.

Background

The Modernizing Regional Parks and Trails Mapping project proposes to amend Section 2, System Plan, of the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, to establish the:

1. Regional Parks and Trails Geographic Information System (GIS) dataset as the Met Council's primary reference for park and trail boundaries; and

2. Align the boundaries described in the System Plan with those delineated in the GIS dataset.

While no policy changes are being proposed as part of this Policy Plan amendment, this proposed action seeks to formalize the Met Council's use of the Regional Parks and Trails GIS dataset as the primary reference for regional park and trail boundaries for planning and funding purposes.

The GIS dataset will also serve as the primary reference for regional parks and trails regardless of the long-range plan status, providing the regional parks and trails system with a consistent, reliable

mapping approach to delineate the park and trail boundaries.

System Plan Mapping

The Regional Parks and Trails System has grown substantially since its inception in 1974, making it necessary to embrace technological advancements and policy plan process improvements.

The Regional Parks and Trails System mapping system is comprised of many dimensions including the System Plan mapping, approved long-range plan boundaries, proposed GIS data, and legal land records.

- The Met Council is responsible for preparing a system plan for the Regional Parks and Trails System. The System Plan provides a regional view of the Met Council-recognized regional parks and trails including units that are open to the public, planned units, and units in a search status. Maps of the System Plan and park and trail unit lists are regularly updated on a 4-year review cycle and are often amended even more frequently.

- Regional park and trail long-range plans are high-level, long-term planning documents that define a regional unit's boundaries, acquisition plans, development, and operation of regional facilities. Long-range plans are updated on an infrequent basis (approximately every 10-15 years). They are amended when the original acquisition or development plans change.

- The Regional Parks and Trails GIS database was developed over a 4-year period for a more accurate, detailed and interactive way to define regional park and trail boundaries and calculate acreage. The GIS data is updated annually in partnership with the ten regional park implementing agencies as part of the Operations and Maintenance Program fund distribution process.

- Land Records serve as the legal document that describe and bind individual parcels to funding restrictions. Land records are generally written descriptions of individual parcels that are amended when land ownership or a restriction is changed.

Proposed Uses for System Plan Mapping

Each component of the System Plan mapping has a particular use in the land management system.

- The Regional Parks and Trails System Plan will continue to be the Met Council's recognized boundary as shown in the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan.

- The Regional Park and Trail Long-Range Plans will continue to serve as the vehicle for Met Council approvals. These plans are a descriptive reference for specific land acquisition. development funding requests, and planning questions.

- The GIS data is proposed to be the primary reference for regional park and trail boundaries for planning and funding purposes. It will be used for acreage dependent calculations and reporting. For example, this data is used for the operations and maintenance funding distribution and for the Policy Plan's requirement to calculate the cost to complete the system. The data will also be used for Policy Plan, web, and promotional mapping.

- Land Records are used for land transactions such as acquisitions, boundary adjustments, and land conversions.

Long-Range Plan GIS Corrections

As part of the Met Council's Modernizing Regional Parks and Trails Mapping project (formerly the GIS Improvement project), Council staff have been working closely with regional park implementing agency staff to ensure consistency between the GIS data and the approved long-

range plans on file. After careful review of the plans and GIS data, it has become clear that there are several corrections needed in the data to ensure the System Plan reflects the actual regional park and trail boundaries. These changes can be characterized in the following two ways:

- The first category includes long-standing implementation updates where the current boundaries are consistent with the overall vision for the plan, but the GIS dataset boundaries do not accurately reflect the most recent Council approved long-range plan. For these more significant corrections, Implementing Agencies will have until December 31, 2026, to submit a "GIS correction" long-range plan amendment to the Met Council. As part of this business item, Council staff propose that the Met Council designate these amendments as eligible for administrative review. In addition, Implementing Agencies will need to include a letter of board support for each of these proposed changes. Council staff are committed to working individually with each of the agencies in this category.

- The second category includes minor errors where the boundaries are consistent with the long-range plan vision included in the most recent Council approved long-range plans, but minor inconsistencies persist. These park and trail boundary errors just need to be corrected. For minor situations like these that address internal inconsistencies between the existing Council approved long-range plans and the GIS dataset, Council staff request that agencies update these mapping corrections the next time they update their long-range plans as well as include these corrections in the agency's 2026 data submittal.

With these two categories of proposed GIS corrections, the Met Council aims to amend the Policy Plan's System Plan to reflect the actual boundaries and utilize the significant improvements that the GIS mapping technology brings to the regional system, making the GIS dataset the primary reference for regional park and trail boundaries.

Next Steps

On September 4, 2025, Parks Staff will initiate the Modernizing Regional Parks and Trails Mapping business item with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting.

Next, staff will return to the Community Development Committee on September 16, 2025, to share this Modernizing Regional Parks and Trails Mapping business item, to ensure the System Plan is consistent with the GIS data. As this proposal requires an amendment to the adopted Policy Plan, it will include a public comment and hearing process that will run from September 24 to November 17 (Figure 1).

This proposal was shared earlier with both the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission on June 5, 2025, and with the Community Development Committee on June 16, 2025. It has been refined and clarified to reflect the feedback received.

Rationale

The Met Council is responsible for reviewing and updating the System Plan for planning and funding purposes. The Met Council partners with the 10 regional park implementing agencies to annually update map datasets to reflect the most status of the system. Aligning the System Plan with the Regional Parks and Trails GIS dataset and using the GIS data as the primary reference for regional park and trail boundaries is a more accurate and effective way of supporting the Regional Parks and Trails System.

Imagine Lens Analysis

On February 12, 2025, the Council adopted Imagine 2050, which builds on the policy direction established in Thrive MSP 2040. Under Imagine 2050, this Policy Plan Amendment is consistent with the Regional Core Value of Stewardship. The Met Council's investment in the Modernizing Mapping Project is providing an accurate GIS database for park and trail acreage calculations for use in long-range planning and funding process. This is consistent with several of our Regional Goals including "Our communities are healthy and safe" and "We protect and restore natural

systems".

Figure 1. Schedule for Imagine 2050 amendment resulting from Modernizing Regional Parks and Trails Mapping project

Date/Timing	**Milestone**
September 4, 2025, MPOSC September 15, 2025, CDC September 24, 2025, MC action; next day notice, period opens	Release the Draft Amendment to the *2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan*: Modernizing Mapping Project for Public Comment and Set Public Hearing Date
November 5, 2025 (week of) Committee of the Whole or MC	Public Hearing on the draft amendment to the *2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan*: Modernizing Mapping Project
November 17, 2025	Public comment period closes
End of November	Final public comment reports prepared
December 1 CDC; December 4 MPOSC; December 10 MC or December 17 Committee of the Whole	Accept the Public Comment Report and Adopt the *2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan* Amendment: Modernizing Mapping Project, System Wide