

Information Item

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Meeting Dates: June 30, 2026

Topic

Regional Parks and Trails System 2027 Competitive Equity Grant Program Draft Notice of Funding Availability

District(s), Member(s):	All
Policy/Legal Reference:	Minn. Stats. §§ 473.325 and 473.315; <i>Regional Parks Policy Plan</i> , Chapter 8, Finance Strategy 3
Staff Prepared/Presented:	Jessica Lee, Planning Analyst (651-602-1621)
Division/Department:	Community Development

Proposed Action

Information item; no action is proposed at this time.

Background

The Regional Parks and Trails Competitive Equity Grant Program was created in 2019 in response to the Council's commitment to strengthen the equitable use of regional parks and trails across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability. The Council committed Council bonds to the pilot program that resulted in funding three capital projects. In 2021, the Council dedicated its interest earnings from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund to the program to provide funding for non-capital and capital projects, which resulted in \$2 million total funding and 23 projects. Another \$2 million dedicated in 2024 which funded 22 projects.

There is \$7 million in parks interest earnings and \$1 million in Council bonds available for the 2027 grant cycle. This is significantly higher than previous years, so the Council is encouraging agencies to consider programming projects larger in scope (minimum of \$100,000) and creative capital projects up to \$1 million.

At this Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPSOC) meeting, staff will share the key information from the draft Notice of Funding Availability (see attachment 1) and ask for feedback and discussion before finalizing the NOFA and bringing it back in September for approval.

Imagine Lens Analysis

On February 12, 2025, the Council adopted Imagine 2050, which builds on the policy direction in *Thrive MSP 2040*. Under the Imagine lens, this request is consistent with the regional core value of abundant and accessible parks and trails. The Council's investment in the equity grant program will help increase access to the region's parks and trails for underserved communities.

The 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, Finance Section 8, Action 2: Improve equitable use of the Regional Parks and Trails System states that the Met Council will continue to fund and

administer an equity grant program for projects explicitly aimed to strengthen equitable usage of the Regional Parks and Trails System.

