

Minutes

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Meeting date: March 5, 2026

Time: 4:00 PM

Location: 390 Robert Street North

Members present:

Chair, Tony Yarusso,
at large

Monica Dillenburg, District A

Makiza Johnson, District B

Tess Bouska, District C

David Yakes, District D

Chris Suerig, District E

Vacant, District F

Anthony Taylor, District G

Amanda Duerr, District H

Wendy Wulff, Council Liaison

= present

Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgment

The Metropolitan Council acknowledges that the land we currently call Minnesota and specifically the seven-county region is the ancestral homeland of the Dakota Oyate who are present and active contributors to our thriving region. As part of the Metropolitan Council's commitment to address the unresolved legacy of genocide, dispossession, and settler colonialism and the fact that government institutions, including the Metropolitan Council, benefitted economically, politically, and institutionally after the forceable removal of the Dakota Oyate, the Metropolitan Council is dedicated to instilling Land, Water, and People Commitments in regional policy. These commitments support the Dakota Oyate, the eleven federally recognized Tribes in Minnesota, Ho-Chunk Nation, and the American Indian Communities representing over 150 diverse Tribal Nations that call the seven-county region home.

Call to order

With a quorum being present, Committee Chair Yarusso called the regular meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to order at 4:00 p.m.

Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgment

The Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgment was acknowledged by Chair Yarusso.

Agenda approved

Committee members did not have any comments or changes to the agenda. Agenda approved.

Approval of minutes

It was moved by Dillenburg, seconded by Suerig to approve the minutes of the February 5, 2026, meeting of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. **Motion carried.**

Public invitation

None.

Business item

Appointment of a Vice-Chair to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission for 2026

In accordance with the terms of the MPOSC bylaws, Chair Yarusso stated he would like to appoint

David Yakes as Vice-Chair subject to approval by the Commission. The term would commence on April 1, 2026 and go to the first meeting of the Commission in January 2027.

It was motioned by Chair Yarusso and seconded by Dillenburg that the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission approve the appointment of David Yakes as the Commission's Vice-Chair for 2026

With no further discussion, Chair Yarusso called for a vote on the motion. **The motion carried.**

Information Item

Understanding Minnesota's Changing Climate: Observations, Trends, and Projections (Kenny Blumenfeld, Senior Climatologist, MNDNR)

Blumenfeld gave a presentation on understanding Minnesota's changing climate including observations, trends and projects outlined in the materials provided. He discussed how these changes will affect park usage, for example, winter recreation conditions and trends.

Dillenburg asked about changes in climate and weather-related technology and its connection to the data shown. Blumenfeld noted that much of the technology used today to measure temperature and precipitation is similar to what was used 100 years ago.

Chair Yarusso asked if heat island trends differ across areas of the state? Blumenfeld responded generally it does not, however there are exceptions. Central Minnesota urban heat island affects have been significant, but rates of warming are similar across the state.

Chair Yarusso asked if we have measured 'ideal' weather days. Blumenfeld discussed the 'summer glory days index'. The emerging smoke factor from Canadian wildfires, especially during 2025, must be factored in.

Chair Yarusso asked about potential impacts to capital investments based on changing weather trends. Blumenfeld stated he is trying to create reflexive models that help people think as broadly as possible about weather and climate. He has added susceptible activities, activities sensitive to heat, among others. Increasingly, the summer season framed as Memorial Day to Labor Day is no longer relevant. Seasons are changing and with it related activities, e.g., last October, temperatures were in the mid-80's and the Twin Cities Marathon was cancelled due to the heat index.

Climate and Natural Systems Agency-Council Workgroup Update (Kevin Phan, 651-602-1333 and Colin Kelly, 651-602-1361)

Kelly and Phan gave an update on Climate and Natural Systems Agency – Council Workgroup as outlined in the materials provided.

Chair Yarusso raised the question of how we identify which open space should be a part and how to avoid redundancy with other conservation units.

Taylor felt there are some implications with adjacency. He would like an example of what unit would look like. He believes there will be some value to communities as well as protecting current units. Be clearer about what the intent of this classification is and what's the future implications.

Chair Yarusso discussed "private" open space lands and noted that there may be opportunities for engagement and coordination, i.e., putting them on our maps. Chair Yarusso noted that some of this could be inter-connected to existing areas within our parks.

2026 Work Planning: Met Council Regional Parks and Trails Team (Colin Kelly, Emmett Mullin)

Mullin and Kelly gave a presentation on the 2026 Work Plan as outlined in the materials provided.

Yakes would like to see more information on hyper-scale data centers. How do we prepare for these centers and impacts on our water resources? He is concerned about the extreme amount of water to be used and noted that they are bound to have an impact on our parks. Lisa Barajas,

Executive Director of Community Development, stated this is a topic that has emerged through our environmental review processes. Staff have been looking at what the overall large volume of water impacts will be as well as their wastewater volumes. Staff are looking at the resource impacts and how these centers may impact household and community growth. She stated that she is happy to share a presentation and the link to a past Council conversation on this topic. Yakes stated he would like to have a discussion in addition to getting the data.

Chair Yarusso asked, in the context of parks, will they draw their water from surface water or from aquifers? He also asked what the impacts are on parks, wildlife and their patterns of movement. Lisa stated she would connect with team members and be in touch.

Reports

1. Chair – Chair Yarusso noted that District F vacancy is posted. He also asked about meeting on July 2 and asked if we want to move the meeting. Staff will follow up with an email and poll members.

Chair Yarusso asked about further discussion on open meeting laws regarding meetings being done virtually.

2. Committee Members – None.
3. Council Liaison – None.
4. Staff – Mullin introduced Celina Blanco-Ramirez, Associate Outreach Coordinator for the Parks Ambassador Program. He then gave a brief legislative update, including a legislative proposal that would make Park fines administrative and not misdemeanors. Finally, Mullin noted that Chair Hutchenson would like to visit MPOSC at our next meeting in April.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 6:22p.m.

Certification

I hereby certify that the foregoing narrative and exhibits constitute a true and accurate record of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting of March 5, 2026.

Approved this 2nd day of April 2026.

Council contact:

Sandi Dingle, Recording Secretary
Sandi.dingle@metc.state.mn.us
651-602-1312

