



Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

Stearns County License Center – Service Center
3301 County Road 138, Waite Park, MN 56387

Minutes for May 22, 2024

APPROVED

Commissioners Present: Tom Stoa, Tom Schmitz (virtual) , Jen Foley (virtual) Brad Bonk, Jonathan Wolf, Beth Pierce (virtual), Tim Engrav, Rob Mason, Barry Wendorf and Peg Furshong.

Commissioners Absent: Rick Anderson, Reid Huttunen and Karlin Ziegler

Consultants Present: Renee Mattson-Executive Director, Joe Czapiewski–System Plan Coordinator, Tess Dandrea-Administrative Assistant (virtual)

1. **Call to Order** – Vice Chair Engrav 10:02

Meeting Goals – Complete meeting on time or ahead of schedule.

2. **Acknowledge Members of the Public in Attendance**

Drew Hatzenbihler-Environmental/Recreation Manager at Morrison County

Welcome and overview of Stearns County Park System by Ben Anderson, Stearns County

Parks Director. Stearns County is 1,400 square miles in size. They operate 18 parks and three recreational trails, there are seven designated facilities with six of them operated by Stearns County and the Beaver Island Trail operated in cooperation with the city of St. Cloud. They have 2,800 acres of parkland along with 100 miles of trail, the largest being the Lake Wobegon Trail. Stearns County has a very urban area in the east and very rural in the west. HKGI is working on updating their comprehensive plan.

3. **Approval of Agenda for May 22, 2024, Minutes from March 27, 2024 and Treasurer’s Report through March 2024.**

Motion by Furshong to approve a \$3000 transfer from Marketing/Promotion to Commission Expenses

Second by Mason

Motion Approved

4. **Executive Director’s Report**

Discussion with LCCMR Executive Director Becca Nash about their fee to the DNR for grant administration was enlightening. They pay a \$270,000 fee which is set by the DNR based on the actual cost of grant administration, which clearly refutes the DNR claim to GM that they

have no way to account for the time spent on grant administration. It's interesting to note the DNR builds in staff time and expenses in their grant applications to the LCCMR, essentially charging for their own cost to administer a grant. Discussion as to why historically this might be different for GM and what to do going forward.

Logo signs for Designated Parks and Trails will be given to all facilities in our system. It will be helpful to have the exposure as we come up to the amendment reauthorization.

We do need to have a discussion about a plan for our request to the legislature in the next session. We know we want to have language in a bill that rolls over unused grant funds, and we should discuss how we move forward on the administrative fee charged by DNR. They have refunded us almost \$60,000 in fees and as well did not charge us for administering the Lottery in Lieu funds.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure form – all Commissioners need to sign this form annually.

5. System Plan Coordinator's Report

In middle of the FY26 funding application cycle. Number of applications have started and we will get more as we get closer to the deadline. Interest in learning about process is high and the tutorial videos are getting good traction. Czapiewski was asked about GIS mapping feature on the website. We have recreated link now and can zoom in and out to have a better sense of what parks/trails are nearby. This is a particularly helpful tool for the regional analysis needed for designation. Commissioners were asked to look at it and provide feedback.

Discussion about broader use for visitors, how to make it more useful for a new audience and how to keep it updated. Can it be linked to the Explore Minnesota Tourism website?

Minnesota Great Outdoors site is not as useful as ours. Is it possible for us to help smaller parks and trails get better visibly by assisting with website creation?

Mattson said they can bring information and possible partnerships to Commissioners. Any entity has ability to link to Explore Minnesota, maybe we could help small entities develop a link? Each entity would have to update their own sites. Who would monitor to ensure the websites are updated.

Furshong then inquired about the possibility of adding a part time or even a full time marketing position to help build capacity. We should be strategic about planning for the next four to six years. Schmitz added he agrees with moving forward with this. Agenda item for Marketing/Communications person for next meeting

6. Items from Members and Letters to the Commission

Schmitz – Annual MRPA convention in September in Mankato and could we give seminar and or be there in person in some capacity? Czapiewski asked for connection to organization to follow up. Schmitz will forward to him. It is scheduled during our monthly meeting.

Pierce, Foley, Mason and Stoa - nothing to report

Wolf – Ran Lake Wobegon Trail Marathon and said it was a good race and good draw, people from all over.

Bonk – Rob Baumgarn out for knee surgery but working on a funding application for Robbins Island Park. They will address the resolution issue this year.

Furshong – New additions to Memorial Park and the trail opening has been successful with a lot of social media presence. There are eagle pairs now in the wetlands with chicks in a nest.

Engrav – Green up has moved to Northeastern Minnesota, and he recorded 4.2 inches of rain recently and that slows down fire season danger significantly.

Wendorf – In the Isanti county park system there are two Legacy development grants in the works. Trail Source just completed over three miles of single track mountain bike trail at Springvale County Park and they will be coming back to finish up after they acquire 18 acres in another Legacy grant. Busy with five acquisitions they are working on, two are Legacy grant funded and busy with events including the annual Disc Golf tournament in April and a Spring Bird Hike event with 55 bird species counted, which wasn't the high count, the high count was 88! And they had the 5th grade conservation day with over 500 students at park event.

7. New Business:

7.1 Policy for Environmental Review Rolling Grant Fund

Environmental/Archaeological Review grant had been in effect for one year. So far, we haven't had an application for this grant, but with the new format of a rolling grant available for application any time, we may see much greater interest as it's much more useful when it is not dependent on applying in a set timeframe.

The proposed new policy language was introduced and following discussion the amount was changed from the proposed \$50,000 annual amount to \$100,000.

Motion by Stoa to approve \$100,000 for the Environmental Review Rolling Grant Fund

Second by Wendorf

Motion Approved

7.2 2024 Budget Update and Grant Fund availability

Supplemental grant dollars are available with the passage of the bill providing the surplus Legacy funds now rather than waiting a year. There are also recaptured funds and emerging opportunities dollars available, increasing the amount of the supplemental grant round significantly at \$2,478,265. This amount is less the \$100,000 to seed the environmental review grant for 2024/2025. Next year's Legacy budget is not yet known but will have the working numbers by the November forecast.

Motion by Bonk

Second by Furshong

Motion Approved

Commissioner Foley joined group in person

8. Old Business:

8.1 Art in the Park Update

Pilot project is finally launching and building momentum. Regular weekly meetings will start and currently have agreements with four parks. Materials fund may need adjusting. Budgeted \$40,000 per artist, plus travel, and material expenses for one year. Each system gets three artists.

What happens to the art and is it permanently in park? Each park will decide with community input as to what to do. Park would own work which would remain there and not artist.

8.2 Round II Funding Application

On August 5 the application cycle will open, September 6 applications close and at the September 25 meeting final decisions will be made. Czapiewski and Mattson will working closely with the applicants and make the site visits quickly.

Motion by Bonk to accept time frame for the supplemental funding application
Second by Wendorf
Motion Approved

8.3 Placer a.i. Contract

This is an extension of the research done in the StreetLight project with the Coordination Among Partners funds, and the Placer a.i. platform is much more robust. Negotiated from a starting quote of \$44,000 to \$28,800, which seems reasonable and appropriate.

There is more information available as to where visitor is before and after a park or trail visit. No limit for usage to look at the information for all our parks, trails and designation eligible facilities, or that of the other two systems. Service starts as soon as contract signed. Not all visitors have cell phones and children’s phones cannot be utilized, so a multiplier is used.

Motion by Wendorf to approve a one-year contract and use the funds from the Planning Initiatives budget
Second by Furshong
Motion Approved

9. Approval of April and May 2024 Expenses

April	\$24,014.53
<u>May</u>	<u>\$22,955.32</u>
Total	\$46,969.85

Motion by Furshong to accept as presented
Second by Mason
Motion Approved

10. Next Meeting and Agenda Items

June 26, 2024 at the Best Western in St. Peter. Following the meeting will be a tour of Lake Washington Park. Mattson has room block at Best Western.

Meeting Adjourned 1:07pm