

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC INITIATIVES COMMITTEE
REQUEST FOR ACTION

Meeting Date: 06/05/14

Business Item: Old

Item Number: **4A**

Division:
Planning, Design & Technology

Originating Source: Jonathan Vlaming,
Associate Superintendent

Agenda Sochacki Park Initiative Update

Superintendent's Recommendation:

INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION OF AN EMERGING EQUITY INITIATIVE

The following information was prepared by Jonathan Vlaming and Ann Rexine, Planner.

Background:

The Sochacki Park/Mary Hills/Rice Lake Nature Area Initiative held a public visioning session on April 16th. The ideas and themes developed during that meeting were then reviewed by a project team consisting of Three Rivers, Robbinsdale and Golden Valley staff, and served as the basis for the team's identification of potential capital projects, natural resource initiatives, and programming initiatives.



The purpose of this briefing is to bring the Board up to date on the work of the project team prior to moving forward. The next major steps in this process are:

1. Discussion on appropriate partnership structure (early June): This discussion would involve the Superintendent and the City Managers for Robbinsdale and Golden Valley, along with appropriate staff.
2. Elected officials discussion (mid-June): This meeting would continue the discussion on the partnership structure, but would also include two Three Rivers Board members, and the Mayors of Robbinsdale and Golden Valley.
3. Public Workshop (June 30 @ Brookview Community Center): The public will have the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed recommendations for site amenities, strategies/action items and stewardship goals and objectives.
4. Official review and approval (August or September): The Three Rivers Board and the City Councils of Robbinsdale and Golden Valley will review the conceptual plan and the proposed partnership. This could be done individually, or in a joint-meeting format.

Once official review and approval occurs, an implementation plan will be developed and pursued, and if appropriate to the partnership preferences, the parks complex would be added to the Bassett Creek Regional Trail Master Plan as a "Pocket Park/Nature Node" component of the trail. That would then allow for regional and state funding to be available.

The potential amenities and actions identified by the public and Project Team can be grouped into three categories: Capital Projects, Natural Resource Initiatives, and Programming Initiatives:

Capital Projects:

The project team identified up to ten potential amenities that are capital projects. These amenities reflect the public input from the visioning session with a theme of minor improvements that retain the wild character of the park complex. Not all projects need to occur for the park complex to be successful, and in a few cases, projects are mutually exclusive of each other. Timing is also flexible and would reflect availability of funds over a period of years and budget cycles. An illustrative map shows the project locations, and an accompanying table provides more detail and rough cost estimates (**Reference 1**).

Natural Resources initiatives:

The primary natural resources goal identified by the public is to improve the water quality of the ponds within the park complex, and the water quality of Bassett Creek. The specific actions to achieve that goal need to be identified in partnership with the Bassett Creek Watershed Management Committee, and could involve actions such as water diversions, pond excavation, and construction of water retention structures.

The public likes the variety of wildlife within the park complex, and would like to see wildlife habitat improved and expanded. NRM staff would work with Eagle Scouts and other volunteer and educational organizations to install wood duck houses, bat boxes, and establish pollinator gardens.

Large-scale vegetation management poses a difficult challenge within the park complex. The public has an interest in keeping the park complex "As is" but at the same time likes the idea of getting rid of invasive species. The majority of the park complex is a significantly disturbed site (it was a dumping ground for concrete and asphalt from Minneapolis street projects 50 years ago). The soils are poor and the majority of vegetation is buckthorn and other invasive species. Eradication would significantly alter the existing forest-atmosphere, and native species planting would be very difficult to maintain due to the poor soils. Consequently, NRM staff recommends a focus on small scale interior projects such as the pollinator gardens, and pond-edge vegetation management.

Natural resources management costs for the above actions are expected to be minimal, given the idea of enlisting the aid of outside agencies and volunteers.

Programming Initiatives:

Education staff envisions on-site offerings centered around interpretation of how nature has reclaimed the disturbed site; and on the water resources in the park complex using the outdoor H2O classroom and trail system. Noble Elementary is a few blocks away from the park, and staff would work with teachers to develop an on-going nature education program that partners the school with the park complex for experiential learning opportunities.

Low impact and non-intrusive outdoor recreation programs such as geocaching, slack-lining, and shallow water exploration with kayaks would also be offered in the park complex.

Reference 1 Map here

Reference 1 – continued

Preliminary List of Potential Capital Projects for Review

Project	Description	Rough cost
1. Future Trail Connection to Crystal Lake Regional Trail	This trail would connect Sochacki Park to the Crystal Lake Regional Trail via 36 th Ave N and would be a critical link in a very scenic loop trail going through the park complex and then through the Grand Rounds.	\$253,000
2. Dog Off Leash Area	The public is split on the idea of a dog park within the park and this idea needs further review. The Project Team envisions the dog park, if desired, to be small and located near the northern end of the park.	\$15,000
3. Expanded (north) Parking Area	The dog park would drive the expansion of the northern parking lot, adding 12 parking spaces. If the dog park were not to be developed, this lot could be removed and the parking focused on the interior parking lot, or this lot could be expanded and the interior lot removed.	\$30,000
4. Road to Trail Conversion	The interior parking lot has been somewhat problematic, with “shady characters” sometimes hanging out there because it is so remote. If the final decision is to remove the interior lot, then the existing road to that lot would be converted to a paved trail. If the road remains, it would be a joint road & trail.	\$55,000
5. Removal of existing parking area (interior parking area)	The public needs to weigh in on this idea. While it provides a quick way to access the interior and ponds area of the park, the public has identified problems with this lot as described above.	\$18,000
6. Outdoor H2O Classroom	The outdoor H2O classroom is envisioned as a boardwalk platform (approx. 1,000 SF) that allows water access for canoes/kayaks and which serves as an education staging area for water-based interpretive programs. It would be accessed by the gravel trail/boardwalk along one of the two ponds, or could be along both ponds at a smaller scale.	\$75,000
7. New boardwalk and gravel walking trail	The public expressed interest in both a paved trail and a gravel trail. The gravel trail would focus on nature experiences, meandering through the lower two-thirds of the park and providing direct access to the two interior ponds. The boardwalk accounts for \$450,000 in the cost estimate, and could be scaled back.	\$522,000
8. Pave existing gravel trail	The public expressed a strong interest in a paved trail through the entire park, ideally connecting in the north to the Crystal Lake Regional Trail, and to the south to the Bassett Creek Regional Trail and the Minneapolis Grand Rounds.	\$40,000
9. Increase landscape buffer adjacent to LRT	The Bottineau LRT is proposed to run adjacent to the park complex along the existing rail corridor. Construction of the LRT will require temporary easements along the eastern edge of the park complex and will result in significant loss of vegetation within the easement. The conceptual plan calls for the LRT to replace that vegetation loss with high-quality screening materials, with the cost being the responsibility of the LRT project.	\$75,000 (LRT responsible for this)
10. Extend paved trail to Bassett Creek Regional Trail	The current interior trail exits on a residential street. As proposed, the paved trail would be extended to connect directly to Bassett Creek Regional Trail. The design of this connection will be impacted by the LRT and the proposed LRT station immediately south of Golden Valley Road. Additional costs may be incurred, ideally being the responsibility of the LRT project.	\$100,000

Note: Project prioritization will be explored in the next Public Workshop