

# Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

## Designation Application

### General Section

Designation Application #: 14-016D      Date Submitted: 08/12/2015

Park or Trail Name: Quarry Hill Park & Nature Center

District #: 6      Map Coordinates (Latitude and Longitude): Latitude: 44.0331 Longitude: -92.4345

Location Description:

City of Rochester, Olmsted County Address: 701 Silver Creek Road NE Latitude: 44.0301 Longitude: -92.4303

Lead Applicant Organization: Rochester

Lead Contact First Name: Mike      Last Name: Nigbur

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Joint Applicant #1 Organization:

Joint Applicant #2 Organization:

Joint Applicant #3 Organization:

Joint Applicant #4 Organization:

Describe other project supporters:

### Description Section

Classification: Natural Resource Based Regional Park

Total proposed acreage:

Overview/Description of Park or Trail:

With 320 acres of prime southeastern Minnesota landscape Quarry Hill Park and Nature Center features woods, prairie, oak savanna, creek, pond, sandstone caves, fossil quarry, hiking/skiing trails as well as paved trails. The park also includes demonstration gardens for butterflies and hummingbirds, playgrounds, turf, picnic shelters, tennis courts, baseball fields, a Nature center and park operations storage area. Throughout the seasons Quarry Hill Park is heavily used for hiking, biking, picnicking, bird watching, fishing, fossil hunting, skiing/snowshoeing, natural science programs and summer camps. Quarry Hill Park is also the home to one of the largest nature centers in the state with a yearly visitation

around 100,000. The nature center originally constructed in the 1970's is used heavily year round by schools and public within the region. The summer nature camp is one of the largest run nature day camps in the upper mid-west, serving 2,400 kids over a 9 week period. The Nature Center's exploration hall features interactive displays, hands-on touch tables, an indoor observation beehive, a 1,700 gallon native fish aquarium and live animal displays featuring many different Minnesota species of birds, reptiles, amphibians and various invertebrates. Adjacent to the exploration hall is a bird observatory room, a great spot to watch and listen to birds or to observe bird banding operations as the nature center is a federally licensed bird banding site. Connected to the bird room is the children's and natural science library. The Nature Center also provides rental equipment to park visitors such as binoculars, GPS, skis, snowshoes, and guided nature exploration backpacks. The Park also has a rich human history as the grounds were once used by the Rochester State Hospital which was in operation from the 1870's until the City acquired a portion of the site in 1965. Historical remnants in the park include a cemetery, former limestone quarry, man-made sandstone caves, stone reservoir and many more ruins. In effort to continue Quarry Hill's legacy as a regional destination for outdoor recreation and natural science education while envisioning the future needs of our region there are several projects being contemplated. Those projects include: - Nature Center Exploration Hall exhibit renovation and new interpretive spaces - Safe room (FEMA tornado shelter) wall treatment: natural rockscape bouldering wall - Construction of an education building annex in prairie - Honeybee Apiary and Beekeeper's Mentorship Program - Natural play area development - Trail development and interpretation signage within the Park to key historical and educational features - Educational Programming activities for nature center - Master Plan Development

What is the Acquisition and Development Status?

- New Park or Trail (no land acquired or developed)
- Existing Park or Trail
  - Land Acquisition
    - Status: Land purchased
    - Percentage of Land Acquired: 100%
  - Development Status
    - No Development
    - Some Development, but more Proposed
      - New Facilities Proposed
      - Existing Facilities to be Upgraded
    - Fully Development

Facility Listing Section

Classification: Natural Resource Based Regional Park

Existing Facility List	Proposed Facility List
Picknicking and picnic shelters, Walking Trails (paved), Hiking Trails (natural), Biking Trails (paved), Cross-country Skiing Trails, Canoeing Facilities, Fishing Piers, Visitor Center, Nature Center/Interpretation Trails, Climbing (natural/man-made), Restrooms/sanitation building, Roads and Parking Areas, Demonstration gardens, historic structures, cemetery, playground, tennis courts and baseball diamonds.	Visitor Center, Nature Center/Interpretation Trails, Play Areas, with an outdoor theme, Climbing (natural/man-made), Honeybee Apiary

Master Plan Status Section

Master Plan Status: Master Plan meeting requirements of strategic plan is available

Describe Other Supportive Information:

The master plan has an implementation schedule for all the improvements proposed for Quarry Hill Park & Nature Center. A couple of the items have preliminary designs complete.

Classification Details Section

Classification: Natural Resource Based Regional Park

Criteria #1 Provides a High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience: Quarry Hill Nature Center, open to the public since 1974, is a 320 acre park in the heart of Rochester and enjoys over 100,000 visitors each year. This diverse audience includes approximately 35,000 school students from the Rochester and surrounding areas, 2400 participants in our Summer Nature Camp as well as groups, families, adults and businesses who enjoy the park and Nature Center. The Nature Center is admission free and open 360 days per year offering classes and programs for all ages to promote environmental awareness, hands-on natural science education and healthy active lifestyles. With the help of the United Way of Olmsted County, the nature center offers scholarships to families in need as well as special programs for minorities and immigrant populations of Rochester. Programs are provided by 9 full time staff, 3 part-time staff, 15 summer seasonal staff and almost 500 adult and student volunteers from all segments of the community including businesses, organizations, high schools and individuals who give of their time to support the nature center mission and provide quality programs for youth, families and adults.

Criteria #2 Preserves a Regionally-Significant and Diverse Natural or Historic Landscape: Quarry Hill park has many unique historical and natural features. The property was bought from the state which used it to support the operations at a state hospital, 1870's until 1960's. During the time the state hospital owned the land two areas were quarried for the limestone, pigs were raised, the land was used to grow vegetables, and caves were excavated into the limestone hills to store the vegetables. The site was also used as a cemetery to bury the patients who had died while at the hospital and had either no family or enough money to handle the funeral arrangements. These past uses have created some very unique sites to enjoy the parks history, geology and natural beauty. While hiking the many trails throughout the

park you will come across remnant pieces of structures that were used during past operations; pig farm, quarry and fire protection. The old quarries are a great place to find fossils and see how nature is reclaiming the area. Touring the caves is a unique educational experience underground. The cemetery has become a more significant record of the people who had passed away while at the hospital and buried on the grounds. A dedicated group has raised money and is installing grave stones at all the burial plots. The terrain within the park provides an opportunity to experience a variety of natural communities; Oak Savanna, Upland Woodland, Goat Prairie, Prairie, Meadows and Lowland Woodland (stream corridor). These communities host a large variety of animals, birds, invertebrates and snakes making it an important wildlife reservoir and natural study area. The hills also provide excellent vistas to look out over the city.

Criteria #3 Well-located and Connected to Serve Regional Population and/or Tourist Destination: Quarry Hill is a 320 acre park located just to the Northeast of downtown Rochester. It is located on Rochester's extensive trail system and is a short walk or bike from downtown or several of the surrounding neighborhoods. A new trail connection to neighborhoods to the NE of the park is currently in the works. The park has two neighborhood connections for vehicular traffic and one main entry with direct connection to a major county urban arterial highway. The main entry provides excellent access for cars and busses from the entire region. Quarry Hill Park and Nature Center offers a wonderful retreat for residents and visitors to enjoy nature within the heart of Rochester. The programming offered at the Nature Center attracts children from schools throughout SE Minnesota. The natural setting and variety of programs and activities offered by the nature center attracts over 100,000 visitors annual to the park.

Criteria #4 Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within the Region: Youth: At Quarry Hill Nature Center they believe that early exposure to the outdoors is critical to a child's health, well-being and development. Children are born with an innate sense of wonder and curiosity of the natural world around them which lends to a very natural inquiry approach to learning. The teaching staff at Quarry Hill Nature Center creates programs that engage a child's inquisitive nature and guide them to use their budding senses to look, wonder and ask questions. The early years are an important time to encourage children's natural inquiry and connection with the world around them. Because of this belief, outdoor programming for youth has always been the emphasis at Quarry Hill. Over 90% of our programming is for youth which includes including hands-on, exploratory science classes for all K-8 youth enrolled in Rochester ISD 535 classes, out-of-district school classes, Summer Nature Camp, pre-school classes, after school programs, teen programs and youth organizations. Families: The Nature Center offers a number of opportunities for families at Quarry Hill. Studies suggest that if entire families learn, play and enjoy nature together they often enjoy more connectedness, feel more connected to the community and often live healthier lifestyles. Maintaining and building upon on our current family programming is important to provide families the opportunity to learn, explore together and broaden their connection to nature through the arts, reading, active living and cultural connection. Adults: Quarry Hill Nature Center has made a conscious effort to increase the number of adult programs offered to our growing and aging community. The response to these adult programs has been tremendous and is helping the nature center to further their mission of "opening eyes & minds through natural science discovery" for learners of all ages.

Attachment List Section (only lists up to 10 documents)

<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
Location Map	Location map added from general tab
Location Map	Site map of Quarry Hill Park
Other	Quarry Hill Park trail map
Resolution	Resolution for Legacy Grant Submission
Master Plan	Quarry Hill Master Plan
Resolution	Resolution for Legacy Grant Submission
Master Plan	Quarry Hill Master Plan