

**Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission
Meeting Minutes for October 28, 2013
Room 107 State Capitol Building**

Members Present: Rita Albrecht; Rick Anderson; Bill Bruins; Mike Hulett; Al Liefkort; Marc Mattice; Keith Nelson; Bryan Pike; Tom Ryan; Tom Schmitz; Barry Wendorf; LuAnn Wilcox

Excused Absence: Anita Rasmussen

Guests: Greg Knopff; Tom Landwehr; Bob Meier; Laura Preus; Erica Rivers; Jeff Schoenbauer; Kathy Schoenbauer

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Tom Landwehr, Commissioner, MN DNR

Mr. Landwehr commenced the meeting in the governor's absence by thanking the newly appointed members for their service on the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC). He characterized the commission as an "Outstanding group of representatives," and the meeting as a "Very important kick-off." He remarked that it is a timely meeting that coincides with the fifth anniversary of the passage of the Legacy Amendment. He said there had been "bloodletting" during every legislative session since its passage, and that it is "Very apparent" that "more form and function" is needed around a statewide system of Parks and Trails.

The legislative creation of the GMRPTC was needed to provide a voice for greater Minnesota; to have a vision developed, priorities vetted, and funding packages deliberated on. Prior to the creation of the GMRPTC, the DNR became the "De facto coordinator for the outstate parks and trails development process" because it is currently serving as the granting organization. Mr. Landwehr doesn't believe the DNR should be in that position and would like to see the GMRPTC be independent, self-sustaining, and self-governing, representing greater Minnesota like the Metropolitan Council does for the Twin Cities area. He stated that the DNR is invested in and absolutely committed to the success of the GMRPTC, but hopes the long term outcome is that the group "Stands on its own," with support from the DNR.

Mr. Landwehr challenged the members of the GMRPTC to "Take your hometown hats off" so as to look collectively at a statewide vision, and to think about what a statewide system of parks and trails will look like in ten years. He acknowledged that it will take some time to organize, deliberate, and integrate systems, and to determine how the group will function, plan and prioritize to accomplish its statutory mission. The GMRPTC is charged with developing a strategic framework for a comprehensive, vital parks and trails system. He described the work of the commission as "A huge task" and reiterated the DNR's supportive role for "much work to be done."

2. Member Introductions

After Mr. Landwehr concluded his opening remarks, he turned the meeting over to Erica Rivers to facilitate the agenda until a Chair was elected. She introduced herself and welcomed the members, and stated that the main task for this initial meeting would be to discuss the draft operating procedures. She encouraged the members to be "comfortable with ambiguity" and described the first meetings as a "learning process" in dealing with the "logistics, constraints, and opportunities" of the commission's work.

Members and guests introduced themselves, provided a brief description of their backgrounds, and described their interests regarding service on or with the GMRPTC. It was suggested that members provide a summary biography to get better acquainted, utilize individual expertise, and post on a GMRPTC website.

3. Review of Statutory Authority

Greg Knopff, a non-partisan analyst with the state senate, provided written information and an overview of the statutory establishment, governing documents, and obligations of the GMRPTC.

Minnesota Statute 85.536 describes the establishment, functions, and processes of the GMRPTC. Mr. Knopff instructed the members to pay particular attention to the charge of developing a strategic plan; adopting criteria for funding eligibility; the district planning process; and definitions in Subd. 6 – “Regional significance.”

Mr. Knopff stated that members of the GMRPTC are “Public officials” as described in statute 10A.01, Subd. 35, and as such are subject to the law regarding Conflicts of Interest under statute 10A.07 and Gift Prohibitions under statute 10A.071. Members may not lobby for or vote on projects that they have a direct interest in, and must avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest in all discussions and decisions relating to the functions of the GMRPTC. Mr. Knopff also briefly discussed statute 15.0575 which pertains to membership terms, compensation, removal of members and filling vacancies.

As a public body, the GMRPTC is also subject to Chapter 13D Open Meeting Law, which states that meetings must be open to the public, advance notice made public, and a quorum cannot gather outside of meetings, among other restrictions. Subcommittees are subject to the same provisions and restrictions. Mr. Knopff called attention to 13D.015 and 13D.02, which govern meetings by telephone, other electronic means, and interactive TV.

Mr. Knopff said that the mandated report which is due to the legislature by January 15 could be a one page submittal. He also pointed out that appropriations for Parks and Trails under Laws of Minnesota, Chapter 137, are not made directly to the GMRPTC, necessitating an agreement with the DNR on how funds will be administered. The DNR receives 4% for administration of the grant. It is assumed that in 2015 the GMRPTC will operate autonomously. He said that “the big task” ahead for the GMRPTC is to make recommendations for the 2015 legislature.

Erica Rivers said she would seek clarification on grant processes, meeting notices, and commission appointments.

4. Election of Chair

Erica Rivers opened nominations for Chair from the floor. Tom Ryan nominated Al Lieffort and the nomination was seconded by Rita Albrecht. There were no other nominations. Keith Nelson moved to close nominations and vote by acclamation; the motion was seconded. Al Lieffort was elected Chair by unanimous voice vote.

5. Review / Discuss Draft Operating Procedures

Al Lieffort thanked the commission members for electing him Chair, saying he was “honored, flattered, and happy.” He asked for forbearance as he becomes better versed on Roberts Rules.

He outlined some of the immediate tasks to be undertaken by the commission and the role members will play in their respective districts. He asked members to familiarize themselves with the Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan, published January 2013 by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Coalition, and suggested that GMRPTC adopt the plan and its criteria in order to meet the GMRPTC statutory mandate.

The strategic plan calls for establishing peer teams within each district that will consist of the two GMRPTC commissioners along with five district representatives from cities, counties, and other stakeholder entities. The peer teams will review master plans for regional parks and trails.

Print copies of the draft operating procedures were distributed to members and guests. The statute describes the duties of the GMRPTC as: parks and trails system planning; recommendations to the legislature; developing a strategic plan.

Peer teams will employ established criteria, utilizing a checklist for reviewers, to determine a priority listing of proposed projects by January 1 of each year. For the first two years, while peer teams have not yet been assembled, the DNR devises the prioritized list. Al stated that the job of the GMRPTC is to support state parks and trails by coordinating and interconnecting with them on lands that are not owned by the state. He discussed the four “pillars,” or strategic directions, set forth in the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan:

- Connect people and the outdoors
- Acquire land and create opportunities
- Take care of what we have
- Coordinate among partners

He said that coordination among partners will be a primary focus of the GMRPTC and that the other strategic directions will be addressed through the district teams and master plans. He asked that members provide comments and suggestions.

Al discussed the need to hire or contract for an Executive Director or Project Manager, as described in Section IV of the draft operating procedures, who would serve the administrative functions of the commission’s work. There is \$100,000 for the first year and \$103,000 for the second year to cover administrative and meeting expenses. Later in the discussion, Laura Preus suggested that while there can be some flexibility [in the use of funds] “to get the work done,” the grant will be directed toward “capacity building.” The grant to cover GMRPTC expenditures will reference the statute regarding planning and other commission activities, and outline “deliverables” that address capacity building. Laura said the GMRPTC “would have a fair amount of latitude to do what it needs to do.” Al said there will have to be procedures and vouchers for attending meetings.

Individual members will handle per diem and meeting expenses as per their own agency policies and submit vouchers accordingly. Bob Meier will supply the voucher form used by the DNR to use as a prototype. Bryan passed around a list for members to estimate meeting expenses they will request reimbursement for, which totaled approximately \$3,000 per meeting.

Al asked Rita Albrecht to approach the City of Bemidji about the possibility of serving as the fiscal agent for GMRPTC funds, and she reported that the city manager and finance director had agreed. Rita also stated that there “wasn’t a concern” about compensating the city for staff time. Tom Ryan suggested that there be formal approval of this relationship via city council resolution which also defines the funding term. Al said the process will be that the DNR grants the funds to the fiscal agent, the commission and/or its members submit vouchers, and the fiscal agent pays

bills approved by the GMRPTC Chair. A motion by Keith Nelson and seconded by Marc Mattice to appoint the City of Bemidji as fiscal agent for the Commission. Motion passed unanimously.

6. Future meeting dates and locations

Members discussed the pros and cons of meeting in districts versus meeting at the state capitol or DNR headquarters. The Chair tabled a vote and suggested the use of meeting planner software to determine future meetings dates and locations.

7. Review of Strategic Plan

Jeff and Kathy Schoenbauer of Schoenbauer Consulting, LLC provided an overview and led a discussion regarding the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan, for which they served as Planning Consultants. The plan, also known as “The 175 Plan,” is suggested as the “starting point” from which to derive policy direction and define regional objectives.

The plan has a list of criteria for “high quality, legacy worthy projects” which will serve as the basis for funding decisions and statewide system planning. It is designed to complement and dovetail with other parks and amenities. It should be regarded as “dynamic” – to be adapted as appropriate.

Much discussion centered around the concept of the Regional Park and Trail Proposals Evaluation Team, also referred to as the Peer Team. The composition and function of this team is described on page 7 of the plan.

8. Discussion: 7-member District Planning Committees

Mr. Schoenbauer described the peer teams as a voice for local ideas and a resource for feedback and advice. He said the suggested district planning process would be:

- Ideas brought forth from local sources
- Ideas that fit master plans and criteria are invited to submit a preliminary proposal
- Proposals accepted would fully develop a plan of integration and implementation
- Submitted plans are evaluated and prioritized
- The prioritized list is submitted to the GMRPTC

This process removes the GMRPTC from the direct evaluation of specific projects and leaves that in the purview of the district teams.

Jeff suggested that funding through the GMRPTC will focus on recreational features and access, not natural resource features and preservation, although those objectives will often be interdependent. Measuring economic impact, and using that to leverage general funds, bonding, and other complementary funding sources will also stretch the efficacy of legacy funds.

Adjournment