Criteria Based System for MPRB Regional Park and Trail Capital Project Scheduling

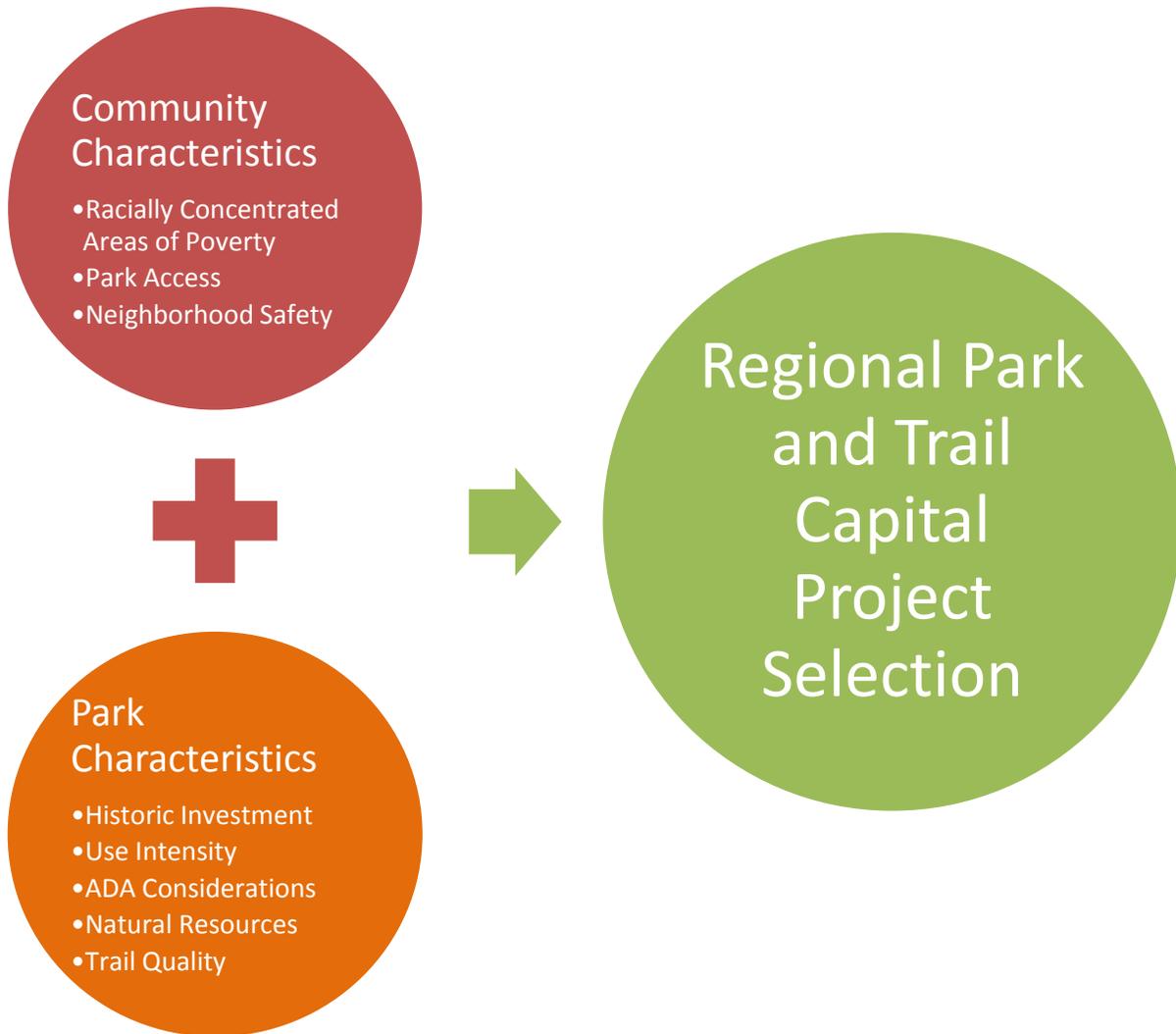**Minneapolis**
Park & Recreation Board

July 19, 2017

Background

Beginning with the 2017-2022 Capital Improvement Program (CIP), MPRB used equity-driven metrics for selecting projects in neighborhood parks. This process was driven by the 20 Year Neighborhood Parks Funding Plan and its associated ordinance requirements.

Across the 19 Regional Parks and Trails owned, managed, and/or overseen by MPRB, projects have been historically selected based on known facility needs and a general investment in parks on a repeating cycle. This has led to some inequity in historic investment in certain parks, and also does not take community characteristics into account. Therefore, beginning with the 2018-2023 CIP MPRB is seeking to create a similar but distinct set of equity metrics for selecting regional park projects.

This effort—like the one for neighborhood parks put in place the previous year—is meant to quantifiably evaluate regional parks and trails, and ensure that investments are equitably targeted and support the MPRB's Comprehensive Plan with particular focus on the Comprehensive Plan's Theme 3: *Dynamic Parks That Shape City Character and Meet Diverse Community Needs*. The criteria are a combination of community and park asset characteristics using multiple data sources. Regional park and trail properties that rank high according to the criteria are prioritized for investment.

Community Characteristics

- Racially Concentrated Areas of Poverty
- Park Access
- Neighborhood Safety

Park Characteristics

- Historic Investment
- Use Intensity
- ADA Considerations
- Natural Resources
- Trail Quality

Regional Park and Trail Capital Project Selection

Building Equity into Park and Trail Investments:

The investment of large amounts of funding for capital and major rehabilitation projects into public amenities and infrastructure is something that should be done with clear guidelines for how projects are selected and prioritized over other, also important projects. The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, in allocating public money for rehabilitation and replacement of park amenities and facilities has selected the following criteria to guide the rehabilitation and capital improvement program of regional parks and trails across Minneapolis.

How This Works:

Each of the 19 regional park properties in Minneapolis was classified as to whether it is an existing part of the regional park and trail system or whether it is an "opportunity facility." Opportunity facilities are those that are not yet substantially connected into the regional park system, either because of limited land control by MPRB, or because of incomplete pedestrian and bicycle connections to and between other regional facilities. These Regional Opportunity Facilities (ROFs) will see allocations each year until they can be considered part of the existing system, under specific criteria unique to each ROF.

The remaining parks—those that are part of the existing system—were given an objective score for each of the following Community and Park Characteristics criteria. Community Characteristics were determined relative to all the community areas a park or trail touches. Park Characteristics focus on the attributes of the park itself. Community Characteristics have a higher collective point total because investment priority is most critical in areas where overall community need is greatest.

Criteria Categories		Maximum Possible Points
Community Characteristics		[12 of 23 Total]
	Racially Concentrated Areas of Poverty	5
	Park Access	5
	Neighborhood Safety	2
Park Characteristics		[11 of 23 Total]
	Historic Investment / Acre	3
	Use Intensity	2
	Asset Condition: ADA Considerations	2
	Asset Condition: Natural Resources	2
	Asset Condition: Trail Quality	2

Community Characteristics:

These criteria are selected to help ensure that MPRB prioritizes parks with a focus on racial and economic equity.

1.   Racially Concentrated Areas of Poverty [5 Possible Points out of Possible 23 Total Points]
About the measure: Areas of concentrated poverty are census tracts where more than 40% of the population has a family income below 185% of the federal poverty threshold. Racially Concentrated Areas of Poverty (RCAPs) are defined as Areas of Concentrated Poverty where more than 50% of the residents are people of color. This measure is identical to the Metropolitan Council's "Areas of Concentrated Poverty where 50% or more of residents are people of color (ACP50)." Regional parks, in contrast to neighborhood parks, are so large they may not always lie within RCAPs. In addition, some regional parks touch the edge of an RCAP while existing largely outside of them. For this reason, scoring under this metric for regional parks and trails is based on whether a regional park or trail is **SIGNIFICANTLY ASSOCIATED** with a particular RCAP or ACP50. Due to the large size of many regional parks and trails, this metric takes into account the *overall* community character in close proximity to that park or trail, rather than limiting it to whether it happens to touch an RCAP or ACP.

The following chart identifies each park and its associated RCAP or ACP. Significant association means that the park either has broad overlap with an RCAP/ACP or has extensive frontage on an RCAP/ACP.

Regional Park	RCAP	ACP
Above the Falls	N/A: ROF	N/A: ROF
Cedar Lake Trail	None	None
Central Mississippi	None	None
Columbia Parkway	None	Northeast Minneapolis
Grand Rounds Missing Link	N/A: ROF	N/A: ROF
Kenilworth Trail	None	None
Luce Line Trail	North Minneapolis	North Minneapolis
Minneapolis Chain-of-Lakes	None	None
Minnehaha Park	None	None
Minnehaha Parkway Trail	None	None
Mississippi Gorge	South Minneapolis	South Minneapolis
Nokomis-Hiawatha	None	None
North Mississippi	North Minneapolis	North Minneapolis
Northeast Diagonal	None	Northeast Minneapolis
Ridgway Parkway	None	Northeast Minneapolis
Shingle Creek Trail	North Minneapolis	North Minneapolis
St. Anthony Parkway	None	Northeast Minneapolis
Theodore Wirth Park	North Minneapolis	North Minneapolis
Victory/Wirth Memorial Parkway	North Minneapolis	North Minneapolis

ROF = Regional Opportunity Facility

RCAP	1. WEIGHT
Racially Concentrated Area of Poverty	5
Area of Concentrated Poverty	3
Neither	0

Data source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5 Year Estimate for 2009-2013.

Why this is important: Residents who live in poverty often have less access to open space and recreation options and are more likely to experience a variety of chronic health problems, some of which are impacted by their physical environment. In addition, communities of color and areas of poverty often experience a lack of public and private investment relative to other areas. Finally, individuals who live in poverty are less likely to have access to private transportation which means that regional parks in closer proximity to them can provide more benefit by being readily accessible. In building a more equitable park system, it is important for the MPRB to target investment of public funds into parks in areas with concentrations of people of color and low-income households.

NOTE: The Metropolitan Council has ceased using the term "RCAP" based on feedback from the community, instead using the term "areas of concentrated poverty where more than half of residents are people of color" or "ACP50." The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) still uses the RCAP term, however, and it was used by MPRB in the neighborhood equity metrics. Staff is still discussing this nomenclature and is using RCAP for the time being for consistency with the neighborhood metrics.

2.   **Access** [5 Possible Points out of Possible 23 Total Points]
About the measure: This metric is an average of a park's ease of access by three modes: walking, transit, and automobile. A park is scored on each mode on a zero-three-five scale, then the park's three scores are averaged. Data is not currently available for effectively measuring bike access.

- Walking Access: the population within ½ mile of a park, regardless of city boundaries.

½ MILE WALKSHED POPULATION	SCORE
More than 40,000	5
20,000 to 40,000	3
Less than 20,000	0

Data source: 2016 Population Estimates-ACS Community Survey

- Transit Access: the number of transit (bus and rail) stations immediately adjacent to or within a park.

NUMBER OF TRANSIT STOPS	SCORE
20 or more	5
10 to 19	3
9 or less	0

Data source: Metro Transit system maps analyzed by MPRB staff

- Vehicle Access: the number of MPRB parking spaces per acre of parkland, including off-street MPRB lots and on-street parkway parking. This measure does not include on-street parking around a park or trail.

PARKING SPACES/ACRE	SCORE
More than 3	5
1.5 to 3	3
Less than 1.5	0

Data source: MPRB

Why this is important: Ability to access regional parks is regularly cited as a significant barrier to park use. However, the mode by which people access parks is not related to race or economic factors. According to Metropolitan Council studies, people of color are just as likely to arrive to a park by car as by transit or on foot. Therefore, parks should be considered for their overall accessibility by a variety of modes. The easier it is to get to a park by any mode, the more benefit the park provides to underserved populations.

3.   Neighborhood Safety [2 Possible Points out of Possible 23 Total Points]
About the measure: The Minneapolis Police Department reports crimes against persons data, which includes the offenses of Criminal Homicide, Forcible Rape, and Aggravated Assault. Data is reported at the neighborhood level. This measure looks at all the neighborhoods in which a park sits and then determining the total number of crimes per 1000 people.

Crimes against persons/1000 people	4. WEIGHT
>10.0 / 1000	2
4.1-9.99 / 1000	1
< 4.0 / 1000	0

Data source: Minneapolis Police Department –
Uniform Crime Reporting Program data

Why this is important: Metropolitan Council studies suggest that most people, regardless of economic or ethnic background, feel safe in regional parks. However, another Met Council study found that non-users of regional parks who are people of color consider park safety to be a barrier to park use. Keeping parks and park and recreation facilities safe is critical to community wellness. Developing and maintaining safe access to nature is important to building and sustaining strong neighborhoods and healthy populations. In those areas where crime in neighborhoods is higher or more reported, more investment should be made in parks to ensure they can be safe havens for community gathering, recreation, and respite.

Regional Park and Trail Characteristics:

For this group of metrics, MPRB analyzed assets within each park and trail to identify the highest priority parks and trails for investment. Factors considered include historic investment in a park or trail, which can provide a window into the overall quality of park and trail facilities; the intensity of use of a park or trail, which can suggest the likely wear and tear on facilities; and three specific asset condition metrics. Unlike with neighborhood parks, which are composed mainly of built assets like pools and playgrounds and buildings, the primary purposes of regional facilities are to provide protection of natural resources and access to nature-based recreation. In addition, assets in regional parks and trails are often far flung, difficult to comprehensively assess, and include natural resources that require very different consideration than built assets. Therefore, instead of a single overall asset condition ranking (as was done for neighborhood parks), these metrics include three, which together provide a general picture of the quality of the most important assets in a regional park: the degree to which the park or trail is accessible to people of all ability levels, the quality of natural resources, and the quality of trails—the most used facility in the regional system.

4.   Historic Investment [3 Possible Points out of Possible 23 Total Points]
About the measure: This measure is calculated as the amount of capital invested since 2000 relative to the acreage of the park or trail. Unlike the neighborhood metrics, overall built asset value is not used as an equalizer between parks because it is impossible to quantify a regional park's total asset value once natural resources are taken into account. Regional parks, however, vary widely in size, so this measure is used to create consistency between parks. In other words, we need to identify parks where the least ongoing capital investment has been made over the last 16 years, relative to the park's size, and prioritize those parks for new investment.

INVESTMENT/ACRE	4. WEIGHT
Up to $10,000	3
$10,001 to $50,000	2
$50,000 to $100,000	1
More than $100,000	0

Data Source: MPRB Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

Why this is important: Measuring previous investments in existing park and trail assets is an important way to identify parks and trails that have historically received lower levels of investment. Parks where a smaller dollar-per-acre amount has been invested since 2000 are much more likely to be due for significant reinvestment. The per acre criteria captures MPRB's history of investment and is a good approximation of where additional investment is needed by highlighting regional parks and trails that have received lower levels of investment between 2000 and 2016. This category is given a moderate priority of 3 possible points, with parks that have received lower historic proportionate investment receiving higher points.

5.   Intensity of Use [2 Possible Points out of Possible 23 Total Points]
About the measure: This measure looks at visitor count data and divides that number by a park or trail's acreage. A very large park with moderate use may not, therefore, see the same intensity as a small park with moderate use. Those parks with the highest intensity of use receive more points.

VISITS PER ACRE	5. WEIGHT
More than 20,000	2
5,000 to 20,000	1
Less than 5,000	0

Data source: Metropolitan Council Annual Regional Park Visitor Counts

Why this is important: How often a park is visited has much to do with the likely quality of its facilities. More visitors translates to more wear and tear and a greater need for investment. Intensity of use is a general stand-in for overall facility quality and can suggest which facilities may be declining in quality.

6.   Asset Condition: ADA Considerations [2 Possible Points out of Possible 23 Total Points]
About the measure: Using the MPRB's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan, this measure considers the total cost of resolving identified ADA considerations. Those parks with farther to go toward compliance receive more points, in recognition of the likely older, possibly more worn character of facilities in the park. However, there is no current ADA standard for accessible trails; thus, the Transition Plan did not evaluate them. Therefore, Regional Trails all receive the same standard weight, in the middle of the spectrum, at "1." The reason for this is that though the trails themselves have no standard and are therefore technically compliant, it is likely that many curb cuts, pedestrian ramps, benches, drinking fountains, and other associated assets have compliance issues. This measure makes the assumption that Regional Trails have less work to do toward compliance, but still have ADA considerations to be taken into account.

ESTIMATED COST OF IMPROVEMENTS	6. WEIGHT
Parks more than $200,000	2
Parks from $100,000 to $200,000	1
All Regional Trails	1
Parks less than $100,000	0

Data source: MPRB ADA Transition Plan

Why this is important: Considering ADA compliance is important for two reasons. First, ensuring that people of all abilities can access regional parks and trails creates equity across the system. Second, parks that are less compliant with ADA likely have older assets that have not been updated in some time. ADA considerations, then, are a stand-in for overall asset quality in parks. Parks with greater need in terms of achieving ADA compliance likely have greater need for improvement in general.

7.   Asset Condition: Natural Resources [2 Possible Points out of Possible 23 Total Points]

About the measure: This metric is an average of a park's or trail's natural resource quality and importance under three factors: remnant native plant communities, tree canopy, and water quality. A park is scored on each factor on a two-point scale, then the three scores are averaged. Facilities without water resources only have two scores averaged. Unlike other condition metrics, which give higher scores to poorer condition, the natural resources score does the opposite. When it comes to natural resources, it is most important to protect those areas of highest quality before restoring new areas. To lose, say, Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden would be more egregious than to never restore Above the Falls riverine habitat.

- Remnant Native Plant Communities: presence or absence of remnant native plant communities in a park

REMNANT NATIVE PLANT COMMUNITIES	SCORE
Present in park	2
Not present in park	0

Data source: MPRB Comprehensive Plan

- Tree Canopy: percent of park rated with "good" tree canopy quality

% GOOD TREE CANOPY	SCORE
Greater than 50%	2
25% to 50%	1
Less than 25%	0

Data source: MPRB Forestry Department

- Water Quality: based on trophic state index (TSI) rating, or, where TSI is unavailable, the number of total impairments

TSI RATING	SCORE
Good	2
Fair	1
Poor	0

Data source: MPRB Environmental Management Department

Why this is important: Natural resources and nature-based recreation is the primary purpose of the regional park system and goes back to the system's founding in 1974. As the "State Parks of the Metro," Regional Parks and Trails provide large-scale opportunities to interact with natural environments. It is therefore critical to consider this factor as a measure of park need.

8.   Asset Condition: Trail Quality [2 Possible Points out of Possible 23 Total Points]
About the measure: This measure considers the overall average trail condition in each park. Parks with poorer trails get more points.

AVERAGE TRAIL QUALITY	8. WEIGHT
Low	2
Moderate	1
High	0

Data source: Trail pavement condition index prepared by MPRB Planning staff

Why this is important: Trails are the most heavily used asset in regional parks and trails, according to user surveys. Therefore, the overall trail condition will have impact on peoples' choice of and number of visits to parks.