



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Project Title: Ecological System Plan

MPRB Division: Planning

Project Manager: Adam Arvidson

As required by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board Code of Ordinances, every construction or redevelopment project undertaken within the MPRB Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is to have a community engagement plan. The plan serves as a guide for the community engagement process through the multiple phases of planning and project development. The plan may be modified as circumstance warrants during project duration. Substantial modifications are to be communicated to stakeholders and the MPRB Board of Commissioners.

Project Description

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) and the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization (MWMO) are preparing the first-ever Ecological System Plan (ESP). This plan is a critical step forward in the management of natural resources and public lands in the city and watershed. It will become a national model for improving the urban environment in the face of threats such as climate change, decreasing water quality, explosion of invasive species, increasing runoff, and fragmentation of habitat. The ecological system plan will:

- Compile, create, and illustrate city-wide ecological data,
- Craft a vision for natural resources and public lands within the watershed and city,
- Outline guiding principles for management, and
- Challenge the community to rethink the city around them—from the local neighborhood park to the Grand Rounds to backyards—in terms of ecological function, benefit, and health.

The Ecological System Plan will set a framework for managing public parcels as pieces of a broader ecological system within the city, watershed, and region. It will consider how the urban forest can better contribute to water quality and climate change resilience. It will consider how the nearly 400,000 residents within the project area can have a positive effect on the region's ecology and natural resources through habitat restoration, water management, and other practices on their own properties. It will involve the community extensively, in order to reach beyond public lands.

The intent is that the Ecological System Plan will be followed by a series of detailed management plans designed to make specific site-based recommendations and determine a process for project prioritization. The ESP itself will make a deep investigation into the ecology of the city and watershed and will set a vision for ecologically-based management. The plan will describe a wholesale change in how public lands are

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operated and maintained—by linking decision-making and on-the-ground practices to ecological systems and to the real threats facing our natural resources.

The project will unfold in four general phases:

- **Phase 1: Project Start-up.** Between March and June of 2014, MPRB staff primarily from the divisions of Planning and Environmental Stewardship will establish the various advisory groups, begin the public engagement process, and refine the project schedule.
- **Phase 2: Learn with Experts.** From April to October 2014, staff will work closely with research advisors, the project team, and hired consultants to research, map, and begin to communicate the fundamental ecological underpinnings of the city and watershed. This phase will focus on scientific fact as it relates to urban ecology.
- **Phase 3: Learn with the Community.** Beginning in August 2014 and stretching through January of 2016, staff will go into the community to learn about urban ecology from those who experience it every day. Overlap with Phase 2 will allow the experts and the community to together assist staff with gaining a deep understanding of both empirical and community-driven realities. This phase will feature community events and will significantly engage the appointed Community Advisory Committee (CAC).
- **Phase 4: Envision with the Community.** From February to October of 2016, MPRB staff will work with all advisory groups, consultants, and plan partners to develop the plan vision and communicate that vision in a broad and engaging way. This phase will feature innovative community engagement tools, such as “plan in the parks,” partnerships with arts institutions and neighborhood groups, and digital media.

It is expected that the Ecological System Plan will come before the board in a public hearing and for approval in September or October of 2016. On several occasions during the plan process and at the request of the Board, MPRB staff will present updates before the Board, for public information.

Project Funding Source(s)

<u>Capital Sources</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
General O&M Funds	\$90,000	n/a
Grant from Mississippi Watershed management Organization	\$100,000	n/a
<u>Supplemental Sources</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
n/a		

Engagement Recommendation

Level of Engagement: Consult

	Inform	Consult	Collaborate	Partner
Engagement Goal:	<i>To provide stakeholders with factual, balanced, and timely information to help them understand the project.</i>	<i>To obtain stakeholder feedback on project analysis, alternatives, or decisions.</i>	<i>To work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that perspectives are consistently understood, considered, and reflected in project decisions.</i>	<i>To partner with stakeholders in each aspect of decision making in order to develop and implement collaborative project solutions.</i>
MPRB Promise to the Public:	<i>The MPRB will keep stakeholders informed.</i>	<i>The MPRB will keep stakeholders informed, listen to and acknowledge feedback, and work to ensure stakeholder feedback is reflected in alternatives developed.</i>	<i>The MPRB will work with stakeholders for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate recommendations to the maximum extent possible.</i>	<i>The MPRB and partner entity will be accountable to their roles as negotiated in the partnership and regularly evaluate overall success of the partnership.</i>

An **appointed** Community Advisory Committee is recommended, based on the MPRB’s Community Engagement Policy, because the Ecological System Plan will set a vision and make recommendations for system-wide design, operations, and maintenance.

The CAC shall be comprised of appointments from the following:

- Park Board President Wielinski (appoints chair)
- Each of the other eight Park Board Commissioners
- Board of Directors of the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization (this agency will appoint three to five CAC members)
- Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges
- The Chair of the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners
- The President of the Minneapolis City Council
- The Chair of the Minneapolis Schools Board of Education
- The Minneapolis Community Environmental Advisory Committee (CEAC)

The Ecological System Plan CAC shall:

- Become knowledgeable about the project and its scope and advise MPRB staff and consultants throughout the planning process.
- Contribute to broad community engagement by acting as primary contact for the CAC's represented communities, and by enhancing the project's interaction with a wide range of stakeholders.
- Assist with ongoing communication of technical plan elements to the general public.

Anticipated Project Outcomes

The Ecological System Plan is as much a process of outreach and education as it is a set of visions and goals. The outcomes, therefore, are both tangible and intangible. The plan will:

- Educate community residents, park users, MPRB staff and elected officials, and partner organizations and agencies on the realities, benefits, limitations, and possibilities of the urban ecology of the city and watershed;
- Inspire all to pass along what they learn, support ecological management techniques within the city and watershed, and/or make changes in their own backyards;
- Set forth a vision for ecologically based management, to guide the MPRB, the MWMO, and their partners when considering policies for vegetation, water, construction, and other elements of public lands; and
- Establish goals and benchmarks for future detailed management plans

The project supports the following elements of the MPRB Comprehensive Plan

- Theme: Urban forests, natural areas, and waters that endure and captivate
 - Goal: Sound management techniques
 - Goal: Residents and visitors enjoy and understand the natural environment
 - Goal: Expansion and protection of natural resources
 - Goal: Knowledgeable stewards and partners

Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities

All stakeholders are expected to work collaboratively to create and refine research and take an active role in the education of MPRB staff and community members. Stakeholders shall provide input toward final project recommendations for approval by the Board of Commissioners. Participants are expected to engage in the process in a manner that promotes respectful civil discourse and enhances mutual understanding of all stakeholder viewpoints. Any requests for public or project information should be directed to the project manager.

Identification of Project Stakeholders and Advisors

The Ecological System Plan will touch, in some way, every person who lives, works, or plays within the City of Minneapolis or the jurisdiction of the MWMO. Therefore, the various groups and public outreach methods will attempt to involve, engage, and notify as many people as possible. Special attention will be paid to ensure recent immigrant groups, those living near the poverty line, and persons of color are engaged in the project.

Management Team

An interagency management team will be established to provide decision-making and frequent oversight of the entire project. The management team will be a small group comprised of MPRB Planning and Environmental Stewardship staff and MWMO staff.

Project Advisory Team

Staff will convene a PAT of MPRB staff and key staff from other agencies. The PAT will meet at least four times and will provide technical insight into the research, outreach, planning, and proposed vision and goals associated with the project. The PAT will assist with understanding of agency processes and capabilities as they relate to the plan, and will then assist with acceptance and institutionalization of the plan. The PAT will include members from the following departments and agencies:

- MPRB Environmental Stewardship (Forestry, Asset Management, Environmental Management)
- MPRB Community Outreach
- MPRB Marketing and Communications
- Mississippi Watershed Management Organization
- City of Minneapolis Public Works
- City of Minneapolis Sustainability Office
- Minnehaha Creek Watershed District
- Bassett Creek Watershed Management Organization
- Shingle Creek Watershed Management Organization
- Hennepin County
- National Park Service
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Minneapolis Tree Advisory Committee
- Friends Groups

Community Advisory Committee

An appointed CAC will assist with community outreach, and review and communication of the plan. See the full description below.

Research Advisors

Staff will convene an ad-hoc working group to guide ecological research efforts associated with the project. The research advisors (RAs) will be drawn primarily from academia and will be selected for their knowledge and prior research into the areas of climate change, ecological services, urban ecology, landscape urbanism, ecological visualization, and other applicable areas of study. The RAs will participate in at least two group conference calls, and will provide national and international experience and data to the planning process.

Artists-in-Residence

Three artists will be contracted to follow the planning process and produce artworks designed to “translate” plan concepts to a general audience. During the learning phases, these artists will work to understand the community and the ecological concepts that will give rise to the plan. During the envision phase, the artists will “translate” plan concepts by creating works reflective of the plan process, the community, and urban ecology. Three artists will participate in the planning process:

- A graphic designer/artist, who will primarily be tasked with creating evocative images of ecological concepts to be presented at community and advisory group events, and to be included in the final plan document.
- A “social practice” artist, who may use research, interviews, recordings, writings, and other methods to illustrate the concepts of urban ecology and community.
- A visual artist (painter, photographer, sculptor, etc.), who may create works to be displayed at community events and in the parks.

Plan Partners

Staff will collaborate with a variety of other agencies, nonprofits, and groups to gather input and communicate the plan through specific events and programs. Plan partners will be invited into the planning process as needed and when there exists a correlation between the mission of the partner and the goals of the plan. Plan Partners may include the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Minneapolis Parks Foundation, the College of Design at the University of Minnesota, neighborhood groups, the Minneapolis Foundation, Minnesota Public Radio, and the Minnesota Chapters of the American Society of Landscape Architects, the American Planning Association, and the American Institute of Architects.

Staff Ambassadors

As an outgrowth of the PAT, staff expects to also work with key on-the-ground MPRB staff during the learning and envisioning phases of the project. The intent will be to empower recreation center, maintenance, forestry, and program staff (all of whom often engage directly with the public) to speak about and advocate for the plan.

Outreach and Research Methods

1. Appointed Community Advisory Committee

A geographically and socio-economically varied CAC will be convened to assist with community outreach and education, visioning, organization of community events, and developing and communicating elements of the plan. This appointed CAC will meet at least five times throughout the course of the project. This committee’s will:

- Assist with collection of information from the community and park users about the interaction between ecology and everyday life,
- Assist with notifying interested groups and individuals about the plan and helping them understand how to get involved,

- Assist with organizing and designing community events, so as to acquire the best possible input and ideas from the community as a whole,
- Review and advise on educational plan graphics,
- Review and advise on “Plan in the Parks” elements, and
- Review and comment on the draft plan prior to Board presentation and public hearings

2. Community Events

At least three sets of plan-dedicated public events will take place during the course of the project. The format, locations, and exact content of these events will be determined in association with the CAC, PAT, and RAs. In general, the first two (in August and November of 2014) will focus on learning and education about the ecological underpinnings of the city and watershed. The third (in May of 2015) will work toward a vision and recommendations in the plan itself. It is most likely that each series of events will include several iterations of the same content discussed at several locations in the city and watershed across several weeks.

In addition to the plan-dedicated events, MPRB staff plans to create an evolving, simplified “road-show” that it can transport to important parks-oriented events organized by MPRB and its partners. Such events could include the City of Lakes Loppet, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday celebration, the Minneapolis Bike Tour, Aquatennial, and others. The purpose of attendance at these events will be to generally inform people about the plan, solicit comment on the plan in its current state, and connect people to engagement opportunities, especially social media.

3. Social / Digital Media

MPRB Planning staff will work with communications staff and consultants to develop a comprehensive and innovative social/digital media plan. Elements of this media plan may include, but not necessarily be limited to:

- Dedicated Twitter feeds and a Facebook page, created and managed according to policies under development by the marketing and communications department;
- Periodic “content letters” distributed by e-mail, govdelivery, or blog, and which may include content created by CAC or PAT members, RAs, project partners, or Planning staff and will be edited and curated by the project manager; and
- A regular schedule (a digital media plan) for utilizing the various social media outlets, in order to generate the most interest, awareness, and input.

4. The Plan in the Parks

During the Visioning/Planning Phase (February – October 2015), elements of the research, education, and planning will be taken into the parks in various forms. The exact nature of these temporary outreach methods will be determined during the course of the project by the artists-in-residence and planning staff, but they could include:

- Project mapping displayed temporarily on walls, on the ground, or on kiosks where appropriate;
- Project-inspired commissioned artworks (visual art, sculpture, or writing) placed in parks on a temporary basis; and/or
- Occasional performance-based works occurring in the parks, such as readings, short plays, or happenings (conceptual works).

5. Public Hearing

A public hearing on the draft plan will take place around October of 2015, followed by a public comment period on the plan. In addition, a presentation to update the Board will take place as the project transitions from the Learning phase to the Visioning/Planning phase (early 2015). This presentation will be informational.

Project Schedule

- *Phase 1:* Project initiation. CAC appointment, PAT establishment, connection with RAs, and consultant and artist-in-residence selection: March – June 2014
- *Phases 2 and 3:* Learning. Research, community and MPRB staff education, community events, mapping: April 2014 – January 2015
- *Phase 4:* Visioning / Planning. Community charettes, Plan in the Parks, creation of Draft Ecological System Plan: February – October 2015
- Plan approval and public comment: October 2015 – February 2016

Resources

A portion of the finding dedicated to staff time and consultant fees will be utilized for community engagement. In addition, the project budget includes costs of mailings and other notifications.

Evaluation Summary

Following project completion, the project manager will analyze the effectiveness of the engagement process from both stakeholder and organization points of view and will provide a brief summary statement. The summary statement will indicate how the process advances policy goals, and will assist the Board and staff in evaluating and informing an ongoing community engagement process.

Summary Statement: *Statement pending plan completion*