Van Tour of Minnehaha Creek

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail Master Plan

August 11, 2018, 9:00am – 1:00pm
Started and ended at Minnehaha Pavilion (near Sea Salt at Minnehaha Regional Park)

CAC members present:
Caitlin Ross, Cory Schaffausen, Devin Olson, Jim Tincher, Jonathon Heide, Martha Grant, Mary McKelvey, Michael Torres, Rebecca Johnson, Richard Duncan, Ryan Seibold

Approximately 6 members of the public attended the meeting.

Staff, consultants, and speakers present:
Adam Arvidson (MPRB), Madeline Hudek (MPRB), Colleen O’Dell (MPRB), Bryan Harjes (Consultant-HKGi), Rita Trapp (Consultant-HKGi)

About the tour:
The group met at Minnehaha Pavilion and packets with maps of the four sections and an overview of the whole corridor were passed out. Adam, project manager, provided an overview of the tour structure and highlighted the locations where there would be stops. At each of the seven stops the van would meet up with the bikers to have some discussion and time to explore the area. Below is a summary of discussion points at each of the seven tour stops.

1. Tennis Courts at E 46th Street and S 32nd Ave

- This area is representative of the general character of this segment with the creek being relatively level with the surrounding neighborhood.
- More active recreation areas in this segment of the creek compared to others.
• The creek is also narrower, and the parkway road doesn’t follow the pedestrian trail.

• As in other areas along the parkway, the pedestrian and bicycle trails come together where there are pinch points and then split.

• At the bottom of the hill from the tennis courts there’s a pretreat BMP trench area. In addition to pretreating water, it also helps to take in extra water, so trails don’t flood quite as quickly during rain events.

• The south side of the creek is used for sledding and an informal dog park. The creek also typically freezes completely in this area, so skating is a high use winter activity as well.

• The tennis courts in this area are maintained through the taking up and down of nets. Resurfacing has not occurred recently as consideration will be given during the master planning process as to how many and in what distribution tennis courts will be throughout the parkway.

• Question: How can you tell what’s parkland versus home backyards? Answer: Typically, it’s clear because houses are regular city lots. Any land beyond a regular city lot is most likely parkland.

2. Southwest corner of the E Minnehaha Parkway and Cedar Avenue intersection

• Intersection best practices should be part of this master planning process.

• Where bikes and pedestrians come together at intersections is difficult because there’s not enough space for everyone.

• While there’s a pedestrian trail that now runs underneath the Cedar Avenue bridge, the clearance is too low for bike trail standards.

• Segment 3 is much wider than Segment 4 and it’s still relatively flat.
• Most of the pedestrian bridges across the creek aren’t accessible because of slope, lip, and other factors.

• Most of the bridges along the creek were built in 1978 and there are 10 historic bridges along the entire stretch. An assessment will be needed about ADA compliance. It is likely that some are not due to slope and/or a lip at edge of bridge. Consideration should be given to which bridges being ADA compliant are a priority.

• The parkway roads are owned and operated by MPRB and they should be considered as part of this master plan process. It’s not unprecedented for master plans to have roadway change recommendations.

• The current dirt trails aren’t official trails, so they aren’t managed by MPRB. However, there is an opportunity to be thinking about incorporating dirt/natural surface trails as part of this plan.

3. **Cottontail on the Trail (Bunny) Statue – east of E Minnehaha Parkway and Portland Avenue**

• Stopped here to discuss circulation and transportation of the area.

• The area where 50th heads west across 35W is a spot that needs to be looked at. How can there be a crossing for the park so it’s better aligned and safer for traffic going north?

• This location has a popular landmark – Cottontail on the Trail (bunny statue) which is a piece of public art owned by the City that’s hosted on parkland. MPRB has found that these pieces are important for users for creating routes and establishing gathering spots. Additional information about public art in the system can be found on the website.

• The creek is really channeled through this segment – greatly straightened, has stormwater drains throughout, and blowouts/erosion have occurred in various spots.

• There’s FEMA money to address erosion west of the bunny, but the project is being held off until the master plan is finished to see what comes out of the process.
• Noted that the drinking fountain in this location was removed because it did not meet EPA standards. The water source was groundwater. A drinking fountain could be reestablished with potable water through the City’s water system.

• CAC members noted that this area is a good example of where alignments with city streets should be considered in this project so that those commuting can make the connections safely. The planning process may also need to include consideration of traffic calming measures to support on-road biking in the parkway.

• As transition from segments #3 and #4 starting to see a different character. The parkway diverges and the creek is lower than the surrounding properties.

4. Bridge where bike and pedestrian trails meet south of W Minnehaha Parkway and W Minnehaha Parkway (road goes west and north towards Valleyview Place)

• Stopped here to discuss historic resources.

• There are Works Progress Administration (WPA) walls along the creek in this spot.

• The bridge along the trail may be considered historic because the parkway road used to go through where the trail is now. The parkway road was modified with the Eckbo Plan.

• The Grand Rounds is listed as historic, but not registered because the historic items listed would have to remain as they are if it was registered. However, it’s more important to think of this area as a historic landscape rather than thinking of specific items. Registering is still being considered. However, the benefit to listing are not as great since you cannot access additional funding for projects. Even just being eligible enables participation in evaluations for projects that may affect the area.

• At Lyndale Avenue there’s a Board approved project to bring pedestrian and bicycle trails underneath Lyndale. Part of the project on the west side of Lyndale is done, but the east side still needs a new boardwalk. A portion of the Minnehaha Parkway allocation, 1 million dollars, will go towards completing the project.
• Interest expressed by tour participants for more benches and some way of knowing where the benches are, particularly for seniors or those with health issues.

5. Lake Harriet Parkway and W Minnehaha Parkway intersection

• The channel that runs from Lynnhurst north to Lake Harriet (a tributary) is included as part of this process.

• A lot of design work went into reconfiguring the intersection on the southern end of Lake Harriet. It was done in a way so that there is separate striping for cyclists and pedestrians.

• Jim Tincher, CAC chair, talked about his work collecting feedback from the people living along the segment of the creek that doesn’t have a paved trail (west of Lynnhurst Recreation Center).
  o The Fulton and Lynnhurst neighborhoods had a survey mailed to them and the Armatage neighborhood was sent an online survey.
  o Neighbors were interested in porous trails, but not hard surface.
  o There were concerns around stormwater and visible stormwater infrastructure.
  o Since cow paths are the “trails” in Segment 1, they aren’t maintained by MPRB, so the trails aren’t sustainable.
  o Lines are fuzzy between homes and parkland – some homeowners may treat parts of parkland as an extension of their backyard. It was noted that part of the challenge in this area is that in neighboring Edina some property owners own to the creek and so they have private improvements adjacent to it.

• To determine property boundaries, there’s an ALTA survey being done for the entire project area. Part of this process includes looking at the title history going back to the beginning of European settlement.
6. **Morgan tennis courts – W 52nd Street and Morgan Avenue S**

- Brief stop to see the four banks of tennis courts at this area.
- The concrete path for stormwater in this area was also pointed out. The neighborhood doesn’t particularly like this feature.

7. **Parkland just west of the W 54th Street and S Upton Avenue intersection**

- Trails end at Penn and there isn’t a clear indication of where to go next. If it is recommended that trails be extended, consideration should be given to how they are transitioned when approaching the city’s boundary with Edina as there are not trails along the creek in that community.
- The Morgan courts are very well loved and there’s a group raising money to get them redone. It would be difficult to recommend something else in that area because the neighborhood is speaking loudly to keep them.
• The flow of the creek is based on the Greys Bay Dam flow controlled by the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) and an agreement with the Lake Minnetonka Homeowners Association.

• The MCWD has been strategic in releasing water before large rain events to help make it less flash flood like.

• There are more weirs in Segment 1 of the creek compared to others because there aren’t a lot of bridges to have to put water underneath.

• MPRB owns the least amount of land in Segment 1.

• The City of Minneapolis is doing two studies of flooding in two specific areas: Nokomis Groundwater Study and Southwest Harriet Surface Water Study. The Southwest Harriet study will soon be released, which includes some proposed solutions – one at Lynnhurst Park and one at Pershing Field Park.

• The master plan will need to have some direction for Segment 1 on what to do – whether it’s to keep the area as is or do something different.

• Question: Why does it seem open lawn areas are favored over wooded areas?
Answer: Wirth’s designs included open sunny areas with some specific tree areas. The master plan should illustrate where some open lawn spaces should be kept because those are important in addition to thinking about the urban canopy and filling it out.