

Committee Report

Community Development Committee



Community Development Committee: Sept. 8, 2026

Metropolitan Council: Sept. 23, 2026

Business Item: 2026-143

Regional Parks and Trails System 2027 Competitive Equity Grant Program Notice of Funding Availability

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council authorize the 2027 Regional Parks and Trails System Competitive Equity Grant Program Notice of Funding Availability attached to this report.

Summary of Community Development Committee Discussion/Questions

Jessica Lee presented the staff report to the Community Development Committee on September 8, 2026.

Chair Lilligren asked if the \$7 million in interest earnings was more funding than has been available in the past. Lee responded that yes, it is much higher this year and staff are excited for the larger amount. Council member Carter commented that she appreciated that agency partnership requests are encouraged by letting them apply beyond their individual limit of four if they partner together.

Motion by Council Member Obisakan, seconded by Council Member Wulff, the motion carried.

Committee Report

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Community Development Committee: Sept. 8, 2026

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Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council authorize the 2027 Regional Parks and Trails System Competitive Equity Grant Program Notice of Funding Availability attached to this report.

Summary of Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission discussion/questions

Jessica Lee presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission on September 3, 2026.

Commissioner Lisa Freese asked how the interest earnings were used prior to the equity grant program. Lee responded that the interest earnings were previously legislatively directed to the North Mississippi Regional Park. Chair Tony Yarusso further explained that North Mississippi was a high priority area for underserved communities in the urban core and at the time needed funds for acquisitions. Once acquisitions were completed, the funds weren't being used so the legislature removed the direction and gave the Council the ability to use the funds to more broadly improve the regional parks and trails system. In keeping with the original equity intent, the Council determined to use the funds for the equity grant program.

Motion by Commissioner Monica Dillenburg, seconded by Commissioner David Yakes. Motion carried.



Metropolitan Council

Business Item

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Community Development Committee Meeting: Sept. 8, 2026

For the Metropolitan Council: Sept. 23, 2026

Business Item: 2026-143

Regional Parks and Trails System 2027 Competitive Equity Grant Program Notice of Funding Availability

District(s), Member(s):	All
Policy/Legal Reference:	Minn. Const. art. XI, sec. 15; Minn. Stat. § 473.315; <i>2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan</i> , Section 8, Finance Action 2: Improve equitable use of the Regional Parks and Trails System; FM 15-2 Grant/Loan Approval Policy, FM 14-2 Expenditures for the Procurement of Goods and Services Policy.
Staff Prepared/Presented:	Jessica Lee, Planning Analyst, 651-602-1621
Division/Department:	Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council authorize the 2027 Regional Parks and Trails System Competitive Equity Grant Program Notice of Funding Availability attached to this report.

Background

The Regional Parks and Trails Competitive Equity Grant Program was created in 2019 to implement the Council's commitment to strengthen the equitable use of regional parks and trails across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability. The Council committed regional bonds to the pilot program that resulted in funding three capital projects. In 2021, the Council added its interest earnings from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund to the program to provide funding for non-capital and capital projects, which resulted in \$2 million total funding and 23 projects. Another \$2 million was dedicated in 2024 which funded 22 projects.

There is \$7 million in parks interest earnings and \$1 million in Council bonds available for the 2027 grant cycle. This is significantly higher than previous years, so the Council is encouraging agencies to consider programming projects larger in scope (minimum of \$100,000) and creative capital projects up to \$1 million. Partnerships and collaboration are always encouraged.

Staff shared the draft Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) and sought feedback at the July Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting, the July Equity Advisory Committee meeting, and the August Committee Development Committee meeting. The draft NOFA was also shared with the Regional Park Implementing Agencies. All feedback has been considered and incorporated into the final NOFA (attached). One adjustment of note, made as a result of Council Member comments, is a revised, shortened timeline to ensure minimal program disruption as a result of the upcoming Gubernatorial-Council transition.

Rationale

The 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, Finance Section 8, Action 2: Improve equitable

use of the Regional Parks and Trails System states that the Met Council will continue to fund and administer an equity grant program for projects explicitly aimed to strengthen equitable usage of the Regional Parks and Trails System.

Imagine Lens Analysis

On February 12, 2025, the Council adopted Imagine 2050, which builds on the policy direction in Thrive MSP 2040. Under the Imagine lens, this request is consistent with the regional core value of abundant and accessible parks and trails. The Council's investment in the equity grant program will help increase access to the region's parks and trails for underserved communities.

