

Bridging Facilities Workgroup Results and Proposed Language Changes for Next Policy Plan Update

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

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What is a bridging facility?

The 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan describes a bridging facility as:

A facility owned or operated by a regional park implementing agency that:

- Seeks to attract and introduce new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks and Trails System.
- Prioritizes communities across race, ethnicity, national origin, income, ability, and age.
- Helps address inequities that contribute to lower participation rates among prioritized communities.
- May focus on young adults, teenagers, and children, to encourage greater participation by the future stewards of our region's natural and recreational resources.

Workgroup formation and background

- Bridging facilities was a topic at an agency partner meeting with the directors in the spring of 2025
 - Great discussion, needed more exploration
- Several agency staff volunteered to serve on a workgroup to explore bridging facilities in depth and to find out the key concerns
 - Seven of ten agencies were represented
- The workgroup met twice over the summer
 - Agency staff shared their concerns, Council staff responded with proposed solutions, and consensus was quickly reached

Workgroup meetings discussion

- Several agencies discussed potential bridging facility sites, including city parks, nature preserves, county parks, and trails
- Concerns that agencies may be encouraged or directed by their boards or communities in their jurisdiction to pursue these sites, particularly if they count towards visitation; could be driven politically and not necessarily by park agencies
- Concerns especially around local parks; units not owned or operated by agencies shouldn't be eligible
- Could encourage adding new facilities when there's not enough funding as it is
- Concerns that some facilities could balloon O&M costs

Workgroup meetings discussion

- Remember what the purpose is- to reach underserved communities
- Bridging facilities should not use counts- if they're doing their job, it will be reflected in the Agency's counts
- Taking out counts will solve majority of issues
- Group majority doesn't recommend removing bridging facilities completely, but consensus on removing counts
- Side note on mobile bridging facilities:
 - Makes sense as a component of a larger bridging facility site
 - Stand alone mobile facilities shouldn't be designated as bridging facilities

Agency support

Development of proposed policy language changes

- The workgroup findings were brought back to a monthly agency partner meeting
- The agencies supported the workgroup's suggested direction
- Staff then developed new language to replace existing policy plan language for the next policy plan update
- Proposed language was shared at another partner meeting and was supported fully
- The proposed language will serve as a guideline for the agencies in the interim as they consider whether they want to pursue bridging facilities, especially for the next system additions process
- There are currently no bridging facilities that will be affected by the language change
 - Three Rivers Park District has an approved bridging facility search area, but they won't be pursuing it in the near future

Proposed policy language changes

- Local, city, and county parks are not eligible to become bridging facilities unless they have been reimagined to focus on introducing new users to the regional system.
- Facilities that aren't owned by a regional park agency or operated through a use agreement are not eligible to become bridging facilities.
- Bridging facilities that are nested within existing units of the Regional Parks and Trails System will be included in the annual use estimate, operations and maintenance funding, and acreage counts.
- Stand-alone bridging facilities and mobile facilities will not be included in the annual use estimate, operations and maintenance funding, and acreage counts.
- Bridging facilities that are owned or operated by an Implementing Agency may use Regional Parks funding for capital expenditures.
- Reminder that Legacy and Equity Program funds may be used to support programming outside of regional units if it serves a regional purpose.



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