

Information Item

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Meeting Date: February 5, 2026

Topic

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

District(s), Member(s):	All
Policy/Legal Reference:	<i>2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan</i> , Section Two, Action 1-classifications
Staff Prepared/Presented:	Jessica Lee, Planning Analyst (651-602-1621)
Division/Department:	Community Development

Proposed Action

Information item; no action is proposed at this time.

Background

The Regional Park Implementing Agencies expressed an interest in discussing bridging facilities during a 2025 Agency - Council work planning conversation to identify shared meeting topics. After an initial discussion, several agency staff volunteered to serve on a workgroup to take-up a further examination of the bridging facilities policy that emerged from the new Imagine 2050 policy plan. This workgroup included representatives from seven of the ten agencies. The workgroup met twice during the summer.

- During the first meeting, many agencies expressed concern that if bridging facilities were included in the annual use estimate, they would face pressure from their boards or neighboring communities to add local or county parks to the regional system in order to receive more funding. The group realized that the inclusion of bridging facilities into the annual use estimate was their main concern. They quickly reached consensus on language that removed bridging facilities from the annual use estimate.
- For the second workgroup meeting, Council staff proposed a few language clarifications for the next update of the policy plan, as well as language that clarifies that bridging facilities will be not included in the annual use estimate. The workgroup shared the proposal at the December 2025 partner meeting, and it was fully supported.

Below is the current language from the 2050 policy plan and the proposed language for the next policy plan update. The proposed language is meant to serve as guidance for the agencies to help them as they consider whether they want to pursue bridging facilities during the upcoming system additions process. This language could change slightly before being approved in the next policy plan, but it will help agencies navigate the upcoming system additions process. There are no existing bridging facilities in the current system that will be affected by this proposed language change. The main changes to the language include reorganization of information for readability and clarity, a new section added for "exclusions" to address the agencies concerns about local and/or county parks, and a new "Funding and Operations Maintenance" section to address concerns about the annual use estimates.



Current 2050 Policy Plan Language

Bridging facilities are a sub-classification within the special feature category. They may be nested within a regional park, park reserve, or trail. They seek to attract and introduce new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks and Trails System. Their purpose is to help address inequities that contribute to lower participation rates among prioritized communities.

Bridging facilities have a clear and unique purpose. Bridging facilities are not designed as a one-size-fits-all approach. They introduce new visitors to the Regional Parks and Trails System across race, ethnicity, national origin, income, ability, and age; as well as encourage greater participation by the future stewards of our region's natural and recreation resources -- young adults, teenagers, and children.

Use: Bridging facilities are designed to prototype new ideas that advance equitable usage, focusing on underserved groups in the Regional Parks and Trails System. These facilities engage people with the wide array of opportunities that exist across the system through interests, innovative strategies, and collaboration. Bridging facilities seek to build on community strengths, establishing partnerships with the communities they intend to better serve.

Service Area: Bridging facilities serve a specific community or communities. For example, a city or a specific group. When planning for bridging facilities, implementing agencies will identify the population(s) to be better served and the inequities that will be addressed, working directly with the community to create, design, and develop them.

Site Attributes: Bridging facilities may:

- Be a stand-alone facility or network of facilities, located in an area not currently well-served by existing regional parks, park reserves, and trails. “Stand-alone” bridging facilities that exist outside of a regional park, park reserve, special feature, or trail, are eligible for Regional Parks System funding, as permitted through the appropriate state laws and statutes.
- Be nested within an existing regional park, park reserve, special feature, or trail, welcoming new users to the unit and then connecting them with the opportunities that the broader facility provides.
- Have a mobile element to allow outreach to extend beyond the existing boundaries of the Regional Parks and Trails System, going into communities that have been historically underserved. Mobile elements may be temporarily housed in a partner facility, such as a local park, school, or nonprofit organization. Mobile bridging programming must be connected to a base regional park or trail system facility and will need to articulate, track, and report their results. Participants in mobile programming events outside of a regional unit are not counted as part of the annual use estimate.
- Include a programmatic element embedded in a partner facility, such as a school or nonprofit organization, allowing the implementing agency to access and build on the organization’s existing relationships with communities.

Size: The size of a bridging facility is dependent on the feature itself.

Site location: Bridging facilities are located close to their target audience, which includes historically underserved communities.

Funding: Bridging facilities must have a long-range plan that is approved by the Met Council to request funding. Implementing agencies proposing a bridging facility will:

- Provide a clear statement of purpose for what it is intended to accomplish, consistent with the above defined purpose, recognizing that these facilities will differ within and across agencies, and must evolve and change over time, in order to stay relevant and effective
- Include a plan for an awareness-building, programming, or marketing component, to promote regional parks and trails to users facing obstacles to access the Regional Parks and Trails System
- Provide a programming plan through park agency staff or through a partnership arrangement.



- Only bridging facilities that are designated as a unit of the regional system or are nested within an existing unit of the Regional Parks and Trails System will be included in the annual use estimate.

Proposed Language for next policy plan update

Bridging facilities are a sub-classification within the special feature category. These facilities seek to attract and introduce new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks and Trails System by addressing inequities that contribute to lower participation rates among prioritized communities across race, ethnicity, national origin, income, ability, and age. Bridging facilities encourage greater participation by the future stewards of our region's natural and recreation resources -- young adults, teenagers, and children.

Bridging facilities must have a clear statement of purpose for what it is intended to accomplish. They must be consistent with the above defined purpose, recognizing that these facilities will differ within and across agencies, and must evolve and change over time to stay relevant and effective. The long-range plan must include an awareness-building or marketing component to promote regional parks and trails to users facing obstacles to access the system. The plan must also include a high-level description of how the agency will operate the facility, including partnership arrangements.

Use: Bridging facilities are designed to prototype new ideas that advance equitable usage, focusing on underserved groups in the Regional Parks and Trails System. These facilities engage people with the wide array of opportunities that exist across the system through innovative strategies and collaboration. Bridging facilities seek to build on community strengths, establishing partnerships with the communities they intend to better serve.

Service Area: Bridging facilities serve a specific community or communities, for example, a city or a specific group. When planning for bridging facilities, implementing agencies will identify the population(s) to be better served and the inequities that will be addressed, working directly with the communities to create, design, and develop them.

Site Attributes: Bridging facilities may:

- Be a stand-alone facility or network of facilities, located in an area not currently well-served by existing regional parks, park reserves, and regional trails.
- Be nested within an existing regional park, park reserve, special feature, or trail, welcoming new users to the unit and then connecting them with the opportunities that the broader facility provides.
- Have a mobile element to allow outreach to extend beyond the existing boundaries of the Regional Parks and Trails System, going into communities that have been historically underserved. Mobile elements may be temporarily housed in a partner facility, such as a local park, school, or nonprofit organization. Mobile bridging programming must be connected to a base regional park or trail system facility and will need to articulate, track, and report their results. Participants in mobile programming events outside of a regional unit are not counted as part of the annual use estimate.
- Include a programmatic element embedded in a partner facility, such as a school or nonprofit organization, allowing the implementing agency to access and build on the organization's existing relationships with communities.

Site location: Bridging facilities are located close to their target audience, which includes historically underserved communities.

Exclusions: Local, city, and/or county parks are not eligible to become bridging facilities unless they have been completely reimagined to focus on introducing new users to the regional system.



Funding and Operations and Maintenance:

- Bridging facilities must have a long-range plan that is approved by the Met Council to be eligible for funding.
- Bridging facilities that are owned or operated by an Implementing Agency may use Regional Parks funding for capital expenditures.
- Bridging facility status is not required to use Parks and Trails Legacy and Equity grant funds for programming to promote the regional system.
- Only 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, partner facilities, and mobile facilities will not be included in the annual use estimate, operations and maintenance funding, and acreage counts.

