



Como Long-Range Plan - Design Advisory Committee Meeting #2 - Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: May 9, 2023

Meeting Time: 5:00-7:00pm

Meeting Location: Como Streetcar Station, 1224 Lexington Pkwy N, St. Paul, MN 55117

Committee Members Present: Britta Belden (CRWD), Joni Chacich (resident), Dillon Clements (resident), Allison Cole (resident), Grant Cooper (MnDOT), James Cowles (resident), Amy Gage (Friends of the Parks and Trails), Sasha Mackin (former president, Hamline-Midway Coalition), Zack Mensinger (St. Paul Bike Coalition), Dave Montgomery (resident), Greg Williams (chair, Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Commission), Han Zhang (resident)

St Paul Parks and Recreation Staff: David Ronzani (Project Manager), Anne Gardner (Supervisor) & Max Sell (Landscape Design Associate)

Presentation was conducted with questions interjected throughout. Discussion points are grouped by topic for simplicity.

1. Meeting Agenda, Introduction, Framework

- a. Meeting length has increased from 1 ½ to 2 hours. Meeting #3 to be 2 hours as well.
- b. Final DAC meeting date is tentatively set for July 11th. Final date and time to be determined by DAC member poll.
- c. Final DAC meeting will take place in person, with Como streetcar station the preferred location. Members have requested that a portion of the meeting take place outside.

2. Project Overview: Metropolitan Council Goals, Guiding Principles, Name Change

- a. Provide update to existing Master Plan for Como Regional Park for adoption by Metropolitan Council.
- b. Met Council requests plan updates every 20 years. The current Como Regional Park Master plan was adopted 36 years ago.





- c. \$150,000 available funding for planning and development. Construction funds may be applied for following plan adoption.
- d. Improve connections between Park trails to Saint Paul Grand Round.
- e. Include potential amenities for visitors and other items for city operations and maintenance staff.
- f. New park plan must mesh with larger city vision, including 2040 Comprehensive plan, 2015 Bicycle plan (2023 bicycle plan near adoption), and 2019 pedestrian plan.
- g. While a mission statement is in development for the new park plan, it must reflect the design values of the City, including universal accessibility, equitable maintenance, and sustainable design.
- h. The Metropolitan Council proposes use of term “long-range plan” in place of “master plan” for all future planning efforts for the regional parks and trails system. Parks is hereby referring to this project as the Como Regional Park Long-Range Plan.

3. Project Overview: Design Advisory Committee Role and Principles

- a. DAC members represent interests of their communities, not just their own.
- b. As representatives of their communities, the DAC serves as one voice- along with others like Operations and Maintenance – to provide guidance to Parks toward desirable outcomes for the planning process.
- c. Members are encouraged and expected to hold conversations within their Communities between DAC meetings and share added community input with City staff.

4. Community Engagement Summary

- a. Review methods for community engagement. Emphasis placed on Engage St. Paul site, which allows for real-time commenting, organic dialogues, and the most current feedback. Feedback on Engage St Paul site was positive, one inquiry asking about its possible use at Ramsey County.





- b. Review common comment groups (pedestrian, bicycling, traffic, intersections, exploration, and future considerations). Not everything mentioned in comments is included on the slide but gives a general sense of types of improvements people are interested in.
- c. Project approaches Como Regional Park by breaking park down into smaller areas for closer examination of characteristics and contents (Woodland Outdoor Classroom, West Picnic Grounds, Ballfields, and Como Lake).
- d. Comment concentrations are shown to highlight areas of particular interest. The areas with the most comments were around the Lakeside Pavilion; near the intersection of E. Como Blvd/Maryland Ave/ Wheelock Pkwy/Victoria St; and in the West Picnic Grounds.

5. Woodland Outdoor Classroom

- a. Existing conditions show area is comprised of:
 - A shared-use East-West trail along Como Ave.
 - A shared-use loop from a fork on the Western edge of the park leads to the pool, connecting back to the East-West trail near the intersection of Como Ave. and Lexington Pkwy.
 - Many paths within the Woodland are pedestrian-oriented and may be unpaved or use a loose aggregate for stability.
 - Users of this space enjoy the wild character of the area, feeling like “an area of woodland within the city.”
 - Maintenance facilities located along Jessamine utilize some of the space for storage, result in unsightly construction material being found in Woodland.
- b. Potential improvements shown to the committee include:
 - Lighting along the East-West shared-use path.
 - Improving trail surfacing.
 - Additional signage.
 - An Expanded Operations and Maintenance facility.
 - Future stormwater BMP.
- c. Suggestions made by committee members included:



- Removal of debris in Woodland (City staff to follow up with Operations & Management).
- An additional sidewalk connection along the West side of Beulah Ave. toward Jessamine Ave. to the South. Vehicles often park along Beulah for sporting events, forcing pedestrians into unsafe areas.
- Dislike of the idea of paving paths in this area, contradicting identity of area. If path improvements are necessary, consider types of pavement (permeable, aggregate, etc.) carefully.
- Use of aggregate material or leaving paths unpaved cause accessibility issues. Ensure there is an accessible loop for this area at minimum.
- Speak with organizations who program at the Woodland Classroom to find out need for accessible pathways.

6. West Picnic Grounds and Ballfields

- a. Existing conditions show area is comprised of:
 - The Grand Round trail runs East-West along the North of Como Avenue, turning North to travel beneath Lexington Pkwy toward the lake.
 - Interior trails are shared use.
 - Perimeter trail along Southern edges of Midway Pkwy and Estabrook Dr. are shared use and primarily connect to parking areas and picnic locations.
 - Many paths within the Woodland are pedestrian-oriented and may be unpaved or use a loose aggregate for stability.
 - The northern portion of the picnic area holds a large parking lot and miniature golf course.
- b. Potential improvements shown to the committee include:
 - A dog park is shown overlaid on the ballfields in the northwest corner of the picnic area. The size and location of a potential dog park have not been determined at this time.
 - Lighting improvements consistent with adjacent stretches of Grand Round.
 - Path widening appropriate to intended use.
 - Additional wayfinding and park history signage.
 - Crossing improvements.



- c. Suggestions made by committee members included:
- The path on the West of Lexington Pkwy. and South of Wynne Ave. is often covered in snow drifts and could use a wind break. This pathway also needs resurfacing.
 - A dog park in this location is too close to the zoo. Its location should be reconsidered. The dog area needs to be more than just a fenced field and should consider design elements to make play for dogs safe.
 - One alternative use for this space could be the beginning of a disc golf course. This could get people moving through the park in different ways. Some members of the committee expressed reservations about needing to be mindful of flying objects while on the picnic grounds.
 - Another suggestion for repurposing the Northwest ballfields was for a bicycle pump track, or skills course for young riders to learn proper bicycle safety techniques.
 - Balance introduction of new impervious surfaces – minimize new paved pathways, introduce only if needed for accessibility reasons.
 - Consider exploring a temporary or partial closure of Midway Pkwy. between Como Ave. and Estabrook Dr.

7. Como Lake - Northwest

- a. Existing conditions show area is comprised of:
- A small section of the bicycle trail along Lexington Pkwy. Is two-way, with the remainder of bike circulation signed as one-way. There is a strong demand from the public that the bike trail is made two-way around the lake, while the Grand Round is intended to facilitate two-way traffic throughout.
 - A sidewalk spur North of E. Como Lake. Dr. dead ends before meeting the surrounding neighborhood on the Northwest edge of the park. There is some ambiguity to whether this area is part of the park or part of the neighborhood. Work with Public Works on sidewalk additions.



- A sidewalk spur along the West side of Lexington Pkwy. Toward the clubhouse dead ends in both directions. The trail does not connect to the clubhouse or to the trail along Lexington Pkwy. North out of the park. West of Lexington is a two-way bike trail.
- b. Potential improvements shown to the committee include:
 - Improved crossing at Lexington Pkwy. and E. Como Lake Dr. intersection.
 - Connecting path spur North of E. Como Lake Dr. to new sidewalk toward Nebraska Ave.
 - Connecting path spur West of Lexington Pkwy. to clubhouse and adjacent trail to the north.
 - Wayfinding signage at bridge over Lexington Pkwy.
 - Circulation improvements around pavilion.
 - Continued shoreline restoration.
- c. Suggestions made by committee members included:
 - The picnic area to the West of the pavilion feels disconnected and could use a direct pedestrian path.
 - In addition to continuing the sidewalk North to Nebraska Ave from the spur at E Como Blvd., add sidewalk to East along E Como Blvd.
 - The pavilion is one of few areas within the park with sufficient bike parking. More bike parking could be considered at underserved areas such as the streetcar station.
 - Rental equipment such as surreys available at the park are too large for two-way shared use paths and may need to be reconsidered.
 - A small play area near the lakeside pavilion would help keep children occupied. Presently, many use the Hamm's fountain for recreation.
 - Work with County on traffic calming measures along Lexington Pkwy.

8. Como Lake - Southwest

- a. Existing conditions show area is comprised of:
 - The confluence of paths to the Northwest of the streetcar station combined with a lack of signage and topography make this area challenging to navigate as intended. A clear path of travel has been worn into the grass that cuts the right angle turn to the North cyclists are expected to make.



- The intended Grand Round route has several right or acute angle turns that make navigation difficult.
 - One-way, counterclockwise bicycle traffic around lake.
 - Separated pedestrian paths, though within a constricted space along Nagasaki Rd. that leaves the two separated by less than a foot in some areas.
- b. Potential improvements shown to the committee include:
- Two-way bicycle traffic around lake.
 - Path widening where two-way bike traffic and pedestrian traffic converge.
 - Lighting near Lexington Pkwy. underpass.
 - Wayfinding signage where trails meet to the North of streetcar station.
- c. Suggestions made by committee members included:
- Drinking fountains are needed (or need to be upgraded) in this area at places of congregation, such as the streetcar station, near the trail entrance along Nagasaki Rd, and in areas further South along the lake.
 - Bathroom locations needed, possibly porta-potty with enclosures.
 - Wintertime plowing needs to be clarified, as it forces bikes and pedestrians onto one trail. Requests for clearing both trails continue, but the path clearing should be at least remain consistent around the lake.
 - White Bear Lake is suggested as a precedent to examine the use of trails which alternate being at street level and along pedestrian paths (something we may need to consider in areas of tight spatial constraints, such as that along Nagasaki Rd.).
 - One committee member asked about separating pedestrian paths as well, with speed between walkers and runners being mentioned as one potential criteria.
 - Signage to address behavior – larger walking groups need to make room for smaller groups or individuals.



9. Como Lake - Southeast

- a. Existing conditions show area is comprised of:
 - Area features two complicated intersections: at Nagasaki Rd/E. Como Blvd., and the five-way intersection between E Como Blvd., Maryland Ave., Victoria St., E. Como Lake Dr., and Wheelock Pkwy.
 - One-way bicycle route running counterclockwise.
 - An underutilized area south of Nagasaki Rd., which features a perimeter sidewalk along its Southern edge and an undersized shared-use path leading to a crossing toward the fishing pier.
 - Stretches along the East side are exposed to sun and wind.
- b. Potential improvements shown to the committee include:
 - Two-way bike traffic around lake.
 - Additional tree planting.
 - Shoreline restoration pursuant to CRWD plan.
 - Improved bike path alignment at Nagasaki Rd./E. Como Blvd. intersection.
 - Improved intersection crossings, which may include full or partial road closures, route modifications, non-motorized circulation, and other safety considerations.
 - Improved or repaired lighting in area South of fishing pier.
- c. Suggestions made by committee members included:
 - The decorative brick gates at Nagasaki Rd. make site lines for drivers very difficult, particularly for those making a right onto Nagasaki Rd. Need to adjust traffic routes (either vehicular or bicycle) to improve lines of sight.
 - Nagasaki Rd. is a route used by commuters/cyclists who prefer to operate above trail speed limits. Need a way for their route to be safe as well, possibly by working to reduce size of travel lanes or create a dedicated bike lane on one side of Nagasaki Rd.
 - Committee is questioning whether additional signage would be helpful or more confusing for users at complicated intersections. This area may be a good place to study reducing directives for faster decision-making.
 - Committee suggests continuing to explore closing E. Como Lake Dr., though are open to a non-permanent closure as well (seasonal, weekends, specific times, or events, etc.).



- Bathroom or porta-potty should be included along the southeast or southwest side of lake.

10. Como Lake - Northeast

- Existing conditions show area is comprised of:
 - One-way bicycle route running counterclockwise around lake.
 - Constrained space for bike and ped paths. Most of these paths are adjacent to one another and are separated by a space between <1-6'.
 - Low point along E. Como Lake. Dr contributing to seasonal flooding along path and erosion by stormwater outflow.
 - Parking lot pavement in poor condition.
 - Paved trails in need of repair or replacement.
 - Meandering pedestrian paths between Duck and Compass points.
- Potential improvements shown to the committee include:
 - Additional tree planting where space allows.
 - Working with CRWD to improve stormwater treatment areas and updated informational signage.
 - Improved pavement conditions.
 - Exploring possible use of shared-use paths in areas with restrictive spatial constraints.
- Suggestions made by committee members included:
 - Crossing the parking lot aprons on bike is one of the worst experiences for cyclists circling the lake, as they are below the grade of the path and cause for an uneasy feeling while riding.
 - Parking area access is confusing. Simplifying this lot to one shared entry and exit point is preferable to its current configuration.
 - Tree maintenance is just as important as tree planting. Committee would like either more active maintenance routines or longer-term warranties on trees included in a long-range plan.
 - A possible volunteer tree planting event would provide an educational experience for participants and instill a sense of responsibility for trees within the park.



11. Group Discussion

- a. Committee was split into two groups to discuss 1) whether there were additional improvements they would like added to plan, and to discuss 2) which improvements they liked and why.
- b. Additional improvement responses:
 - Disc golf preferable instead of dog park
 - Bike pump track or skills park
 - Wayfinding
 - Children's play area near pavilion
 - Drinking fountains with water bottle filling stations
 - Get rid of unneeded paved surfaces, such as former statue pads
 - Murals on the walls of the tunnel under train tracks along Lexington (like Dodge Nature Center)
 - Better secure bike parking
 - Be sure to align Grand Round w/ new Bike Plan
 - Organize/formalize community volunteer group for trail stewardship
 - Work to ensure good ADA/ accessibility
 - Fitness areas with pull up bars, etc.
 - Replace grass with native gardens
 - Close golf course, repurpose as mountain biking area
 - Pavilion as warming area for ice skating in winter
 - Pickleball courts
 - Accommodation of different speeds of use – do we need separation/signage/consideration of different modes of transportation?
 - Addition of more native prairie, maybe near ballfields
 - Public Art
 - Playground near pavilion (maybe geared toward younger kids)
- c. Please discuss which improvement you like and why?
 - Two-way bikeways
 - Signage, wayfinding, and general info
 - QR codes that link to different languages
 - General trail condition improvement
 - Planting and maintaining trees



- Close E. Como Lake Dr. – gates to close off street that can be opened for maintenance, seasonal closures
- Remove one-way [bike] signage. It is naturally used as two-way already
- Improved snowplowing
- Improved crossing/path along Lexington to Golf Course. Finish sidewalk to somewhere
- Combine efforts with St. Paul Public Works to improve sidewalk access to park

Meeting End: 7:00 PM

Notes:

1. Meeting minutes are intended to capture overall participation and summarize comments from City Staff and Advisory Member participants.
2. Visit (stpaul.gov/como-regional-park-projects) for more information and presentation graphics.

This document shall serve as the official record of the community meeting and information shared. If there are additions or modifications that are required, please contact Max Sell via email max.sell@ci.stpaul.mn.us by 5/17/2023

