Meeting Minutes: Dakota County Planning Commission Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes-Final

Date: 05/28/2026
Minutes prepared by Liz Hansen
Location: Lebanon Hills Maintence Facilty

Attendance

Members Present

- Jerry Rich
- Amy Hunting
- James Guttmann
- Tony Nelson
- Barry Graham
- Steve Shurts
- Andrea Vaubel
- Kelly Kausel
- Lori Hansen
- Dennis Peine
- Jill Smith
- Abdinasir Ibrahim

Dakota County staff members attending:

- Mary Jackson, Sr. Planner
- Niki Geisler, Parks Director
- Kurt Chatfield, Planning Manager
- Sam Talbot, Natural Resources Specialist
- John Mertens, Principal Planner
- Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator

Member(s) Absent:

- Paul Nasvik

Meeting Called to Order

- Time: 6:00 p.m.
- By Chair Guttmann
- Commissioner Smith arrived at 6:02 p.m.
- Commissioner Vaubel arrived at 6:05 p.m.
- Commissioner Kausel arrived at 6:28 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

- The Planning Commission opened the meeting by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comments

- Comments/Notes: No audience member wished to address an item not on the agenda.

Approval of Agenda

Chair Guttmann asked if there were any changes to the agenda.

The Planning Commission advised no changes, additions, or deletions.

MOTION: Commissioner Shurts moved, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, approving the agenda. Voice vote: Ayes – 9 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (from March 26, 2026)

Chair Guttmann asked if there were any changes to the previous meeting's minutes.

The Planning Commission advised no changes, additions, or deletions.

MOTION: Commissioner Graham moved, seconded by Commissioner Hunting, approving the previous meeting's minutes. Voice vote: Ayes – 9 – Nays – 0 Abstain – 0 – Approved

Draft Parks Natural Systems Plan – Implementation Chapter

Mary Jackson, Senior Planner, provided a detailed update to the Planning Commission on the Natural Systems Plan.

Questions and comments by the planning commissioners, along with responses from staff (italics):

In her presentation, she reviewed the plan's current status, summarized recent stakeholder engagement efforts, and walked through the new implementation-focused content. She emphasized that overall collaboration has been strong, particularly noting a positive working relationship with the "Wilderness in the City" group.

Mary mentioned a few recent changes and ongoing initiatives. The project website and related email distribution list have been updated to better share information and reach interested community members. She observed that stakeholder participation has shifted somewhat over time.

During discussion of outreach methods, Planning Commissioners and staff discussed engagement tools, such as use of dot boards used at community events. A question was raised about whether the dot boards dot

distribution varied by library location and whether, in the future, it might be beneficial to randomize the order of questions on the dot boards to remove question order bias. *Staff agreed that randomizing the order would be a better way to gather participant input in the future.*

Planning Commissioners discussed the challenge of collaborating with easement owners on land stewardship. Commisisoners commented that working with multiple landowners can be difficult and sometimes fraught with misunderstandings but agreed it remains an excellent and important initiative that should be approached thoughtfully.

Mary identified the Prairie Enthusiasts as an additional opportunity for partnership, particularly in habitat management and stewardship. Planning Commissioners acknowledged that the natural areas created so far are of high quality and represent a significant accomplishment. However, they also noted an ongoing need for active management to maintain these areas over time. Questions were raised about whether staff working with volunteers have an effective and consistent communication channel, and it was suggested that the process for soliciting feedback from volunteers could be improved to strengthen this relationship.

Funding and long-term financial sustainability were discussed as significant concerns. One Planning Commissioner asked whether current funding constraints are affecting other planned or ongoing projects and expressed concern about the possibility of funding drying up. *Staff responded that they share these worries: financial resources are being stretched thin, and it is generally easier to secure grants and funding for new restoration work than for ongoing management and maintenance. This imbalance poses a risk to the long-term success of completed projects.*

Overall, the Planning Commission's discussion reflected strong support for the Natural Systems Plan and related initiatives, alongside a clear recognition of the challenges of volunteer coordination, long-term land management, and sustainable funding.

Planning Manager Update and County Board Actions

Kurt Chatfield asked Niki Geisler, Parks Director, to provide an update on proposed amendments to Park Ordinance 107. Niki provided an update on proposed changes to the ordinance, and mentioned that there may be changes to speed enforcement on trails. The Planning Commission discussed the issue of e-bikes and user conflicts at length. Niki proposed to return to the Planning Commission at their next meeting to discuss this topic in more detail.

Comments/Notes: Kurt Chatfield, Planning Manager, provided the Planning Commission with an update on the following County Board Actions:

- Authorized the scheduling of a public hearing to receive public comments on proposed amendments to Dakota County Ordinance 113, Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems
- Authorized entering into a Joint Powers Agreement with the City of Lakeville for the North Creek Greenway trail and trailhead at East Lake Park
- Provided direction on the county's transportation cost share policies with city partners
- Provided direction on the role of the county for the upcoming Public Art Blueprint plan

- Status of Lake Byllesby Regional Park Improvements
- Proposed amendments to County Park Ordinance

Topics for next meeting (Thursday, July 23, 2026, 7 – 9 p.m.)

Kurt Chatfield, Planning Manager provided an overview of next month's meeting topics:

- Natural System Plan – Release draft plan for public review

Planning Commissioner Announcements/Updates:

Kurt Chatfield informed the Planning Commission that this would be his last meeting, as he is retiring in July after many years of dedicated service. Planning Commissioners thanked Kurt for his hard work, professionalism, and steady leadership, and expressed deep gratitude for his positive, thoughtful, and encouraging contributions to the Planning Commission and the community it serves. Several members noted that his insight and guidance have helped shape important decisions over the years, and they wished him well in his retirement and future endeavors.

Tour of Lebanon Hills New Greenhouse and Maintenance Building

Sam Talbot, Natural Resources Specialist, led the Planning Commission on a tour of the new Maintenance Facility and greenhouse, which support expanded restoration efforts.

The 41,000-square-foot complex replaces aging maintenance structures in a sensitive ecological area of the park, where staff previously worked in temporary "hoop house" tents. The new 5,000-square-foot greenhouse will triple native plant production, enabling year-round growing and education, and ensuring a steady supply of locally sourced seed and plant material for restoration across parks and greenways.

The main building adds workspace and storage for Grounds Maintenance, including heated indoor storage with wash bays, office and meeting space, a headhouse with laboratory and walk-in cooler, and a hoophouse for additional plant growth.

Adjournment

Chair Guttmann asked for a motion to adjourn.

MOTION: Commissioner Shurts moved, seconded by Commissioner Smith, to adjourn the meeting at 8:06 p.m. Voice Vote: Ayes – 9 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved.

Next Meeting: Thursday, July 23, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., Dakota County Western Service Center, Apple Valley

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator