



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

Date: 07/23/2026

Minutes prepared by Liz Hansen

Location: Western Service Center, Conference Room L139

Attendance

Members Present

- Jerry Rich
- James Guttman
- Tony Nelson
- Barry Graham
- Andrea Vaubel
- Kelly Kausel
- Lori Hansen
- Dennis Peine
- Jill Smith

Dakota County staff members attending:

- Mary Jackson, Sr. Planner
- Niki Geisler, Parks Director
- Tom Lewanski, Natural Resources Manager
- Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator

Member(s) Absent:

- Amy Hunting
- Steve Shurts
- Paul Nasvik
- Abdinasir Ibrahim

Meeting Called to Order

- Time: 7:00 p.m.
- By Chair Commissioner Guttman
- Commissioner Peine arrived at 7:02 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 Guttman asked if there were any changes to the agenda.

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

MOTION: Commissioner Vaubel moved, seconded by Commissioner Rich, approving the agenda. Voice vote: Ayes – 8 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (from May 28, 2026)

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

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

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

Draft Parks Natural Systems Plan, release for public review – Action

Tom Lewanski, Parks Natural Resources Manager, and Mary Jackson, Sr. Planner, provided a detailed update to the Planning Commission on the Agenda Topic.

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

How many acres are designated as agricultural easements within the Conservation Focus Areas (CFAs)? *Staff responded that the total for ag easements is 7,799 acres and most are within the CFAs. Most of the state and federal lands, county conservation easements and many county parks are also located within the CFAs. The remaining CFA lands mostly involve connecting corridors that follow waterways and link various protected lands, forming a network of conserved lands.*

Is the county working with state agencies on encouraging agricultural easement landowners to adopt more Best Management Practices (BMPs)? *Staff responded that we primarily work with the Soil and Water Conservation District as they do extensive outreach to agricultural landowners on BMPs.*

The percentage of land in Dakota County that is publicly held appears to be quite high compared to other regions. *Staff explained that 9% of the land is estimated to be public open space, based on their research for the land conservation plan. While this may seem elevated locally, it is lower than state figures (Minnesota is estimated at 24% public open space) and national figures, as larger public land holdings are common in the Western United States.*

Are the goals for acquiring ten new natural area easements realistic? *Staff mentioned that several landowners are interested in pursuing easements, and plan to follow up with them. The numbers is also a projection, based on past Land Conservation Program performance and how many easements the program has secured each year over time.*

Maintenance funding comes from landowners, though their willingness to contribute may be limited. *Staff indicated that some volunteer effort, or sweat equity, is necessary for the restoration work. Additionally, such effort is essential for implementing and monitoring the natural resources plan. Landowners are paid for their easements and the hope is that they will use some portion of those payments for long-term stewardship of the land.*

If the land has restrictions, does that result in a tax benefit for the landowner as well? *Staff responded that they do not believe their real estate taxes are reduced. Although the appraisal value would be lower, leading to decreased taxes, staff will need to follow up to confirm this.*

A comment was made expressing gratitude to the staff for their prioritized consideration of the various funding scenarios.

At the Association of Minnesota Counties, can we prioritize statewide maintenance efforts? *Advocating for enhanced maintenance funding from the state and region is supported by staff. Staff are also exploring additional options; external grants for maintenance show promise.*

The Planning Commission examined the chart on Page 45 and observed a notable difference in the funding figures compared to the earlier version. *Staff clarified that the content shown in the presentation that evening had the correct numbers, based on a meeting earlier that week that discovered a lack of clarity with the original set of numbers.*

You may want to incorporate some narrative language into the paragraph above the table. *Staff indicated that the revised lead-in text to the table provides more clarity than the earlier version of the draft that the Commission received. The table in the meeting presentation is in a simpler format, identifying external funds and county funds.*

Please include a list of acronyms used throughout the document to serve as a handy reference for everyday readers. *Staff responded that this was a good idea, and one would be added.*

On page 56, in the volunteerism section, the number listed is 1,102. Are these figures accurate? *Staff responded that the volunteer participation numbers were received from the County's volunteer coordinator.*

Also, there is interest among volunteers in taking on more responsibilities, as current restrictions limit us. Additionally, securing more organizational naming rights could support the park's restoration efforts.

Does Dakota County have a policy regarding volunteer work when extreme weather or wildfire smoke prevents the work from taking place? *Staff responded that the county would notify volunteers about any weather-related adjustments.*

MOTION: Commissioner Rich moved, seconded by Commissioner Graham, approving the recommendation to the Physical Development Committee of the Whole to release the draft of the Natural Systems Plan for a 30 day public comment review period. Voice vote: Ayes – 9 – Nays – 0 Abstain – 0 – Approved

Planning Manager Update and County Board Actions

Comments/Notes: Mary Jackson, Sr. Planner provided the Planning Commission with an update on the following County Board Actions:

- Authorized executing contract with consultant for Spring Lake Park Reserve Cultural Landscape Plan
- Authorized executing contract with contractor for river access at Bud's landing
- Authorized entering into an agreement with Farmington for North Creek Greenway at Jim Bell Park
- Parks Ordinance 107 Amendment – Scheduled public hearing and comment period
- Veterans Greenway Mural installed near Rich Valley Athletic Complex

Upcoming Public Meetings/Community Outreach

Comments/Notes: Mary Jackson, Sr. Planner provided the Planning Commission with an update on upcoming public meetings and community outreach:

- County Road 50/County Road 5 Interchange at I-35 in Lakeville (CP 50-33) Public Open House - Thursday, August 27 (4:00-6:00pm) John Hennen Pavilion in the center of Antlers Park – 20141 Ipava Avenue, Lakeville MN 55044
- Minnesota River Greenway ribbon-cutting Save the Date: Wed. August 26, 11:30am-1pm Minnesota River Greenway, Lone Oak Trailhead, 2995 Sibley Memorial Hwy, Eagan

Topics for next meeting (Thursday, September 24, 2026, 7 – 9 p.m.)

Mary Jackson, Sr. Planner provided an overview of next month's meeting topics:

Mississippi River Greenway Long Range Plan – Release draft plan for public review

Planning Commissioner Announcements/Updates:

No planning commissioners gave any announcements or updates.

Adjournment

Chair Guttman asked for a motion to adjourn.

MOTION: Commissioner Nelson moved, seconded by Commissioner Smith, to adjourn the meeting at 8:32 p.m. Voice Vote: Ayes – 9 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved.

Next Meeting: Thursday, September 24, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., Dakota County Western Service Center, Apple Valley

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator

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