# Meeting Minutes: Dakota County Planning Commission Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes-FINAL

Date: 10/22/2026
Minutes prepared by Liz Hansen
Location: Western Service Center, Conference Room 106

## Attendance

- **Members Present**
- Amy Hunting
- James Guttmann
- Tony Nelson
- Barry Graham
- Steve Shurts
- Kelly Kausel
- Lori Hansen
- Mike Reed

- **Member(s) Absent:**
- Jerry Rich
- Andrea Vaubel
- Dennis Peine
- Jill Smith
- Abdinasir Ibrahim

- **Dakota County staff members attending:**
- Niki Geisler, Parks Director
- John Mertens, Principal Planner
- Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator
- Tony Wotzka, Greenways Manager
- Michael Honer, Project Manager

## Meeting Called to Order

- Time: 7:00 p.m.
- By Chair Guttmann
- Commissioner Hansen arrived at 7:08 p.m. Action items were deferred until her arrival.

## Pledge of Allegiance

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

## Public Comments

- Comments/Notes: A member of the public was present and provided comments during the discussion. Public comments are summarized in the applicable sections below.

## 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 Graham moved, seconded by Commissioner Shurts, approving the agenda. Voice vote: Ayes – 8 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved**

## Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (from July 23, 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 Hansen moved, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, approving the previous meeting's minutes. Voice vote: Ayes – 8 – Nays – 0 Abstain – 0 – Approved**

## Welcome New Planning Commissioner Mike Reed (Barry Graham – Vice Chair)

The Planning Commission welcomed Mike as the new District 4 appointee, following Paul Nasvik's resignation. Mike shared his enthusiasm for joining the Commission and contributing to the community, bringing a background in technology and planning.

## Greenway System Plan & Design Manual Update – Information

Tony Wotzka, Greenways Manager, and Michael Honer, Project Manager, provided an update on the Greenway Systems Plan Design Manual. The initiative will consolidate the 2010 Greenway Guidebook and the 2020 Design Guidelines into a single comprehensive document addressing planning, design, operations, and maintenance.

The updated manual is organized around four key pillars: habitat, recreation, water quality, and transportation. Staff are evaluating cost-sharing models with city partners and working toward consistent maintenance practices across jurisdictions, including Hastings, Farmington, and Burnsville. The county's greenway system includes more than 50 miles of trails.

Questions and comments from Planning Commission members, along with responses from staff (italicized):

- The Commission discussed trail user experience, safety, and potential enhancements to the greenway system. Topics included the visibility of construction signage for motorists and pedestrians; opportunities to explore riverfront areas and destinations beyond the main trails; and the potential for additional outdoor classrooms and collaboration with Google Maps to support route planning.
- Members also discussed trail etiquette and safety concerns involving e-bikes, scooters, and dog leash lengths. Suggestions included using volunteer trail ambassadors to promote safe trail use. Additional discussion focused on improving wayfinding and digital mapping by providing information about terrain, trail difficulty, and route accessibility.
- The Commission considered how the design manual could address evolving technology, including e-bikes, while remaining flexible and avoiding guidance that could quickly become outdated. *Staff noted that technology changes are being monitored and that maps and kiosk systems are being reevaluated.*
- The Commission also discussed opportunities for geocaching along the greenway system.

## Preliminary Draft Mississippi River Greenway Long Range Plan – Review and Comment

John Mertens, Principal Planner, provided an update on the preliminary draft of the Mississippi River Greenway Long Range Plan, which covers a 35-mile corridor extending from St. Paul to Goodhue County. The plan focuses on enhancing the visitor experience, with an emphasis on art, interpretation, and placemaking in addition to the greenway's existing priorities of water quality, habitat, recreation, and transportation.

Potential improvements discussed included a pedestrian bridge connection in South St. Paul, boardwalks and other enhancements at Heritage Park, overlooks at Kaposia Landing and Pine Bend Bluffs, improvements near the Swing Bridge, and opportunities to support birding and fishing along levee sections.

Questions and comments from Planning Commission members and the public, along with responses from staff (italicized):

- The Commission discussed the importance of balancing the plan's long-term vision with financial and implementation considerations. Members emphasized the need to prioritize projects to ensure the plan remains realistic and achievable. *Staff noted that subsequent phases will include cost estimates and prioritization to categorize projects as high, medium, or low priority.*
- The Commission discussed parking capacity at greenway locations, including the challenges visitors face when parking areas are full and the need for clearer communication regarding parking availability and applicable rules.
- Members complimented the plan's graphics and overall presentation, noting that the document would benefit from an executive summary to help readers quickly understand its key points. The Commission also discussed the importance of presenting a cohesive plan that builds confidence before it is brought to the County Board for consideration.
- The Commission generally supported the plan's broad vision and did not feel the proposed improvements were excessive. Members emphasized, however, that project costs and prioritization will

be important considerations. Grant funding and partnerships with other organizations were identified as potential ways to support additional improvements as the trail system is developed and expanded.

- The discussion also highlighted the importance of integrating natural resources and cultural themes throughout the plan. Members raised considerations related to low-impact development, access to trails for lower-income residents, and ensuring that people without access to reliable transportation can benefit from the greenway system.
- The Commission also discussed challenges associated with the final seven miles of the corridor following landowner petitions opposing a proposed trail along County Road 54. *Staff noted that the county is considering a feasibility study for an off-road alignment through Ravena toward Goodhue County. Wider, bikeable shoulders along County Road 54 are also being considered as an interim improvement for cyclists. Staff will continue to pursue outside grant funding for larger projects, including a proposed loop near Inver Grove Heights.*
- The Commission discussed opportunities to highlight destinations and amenities that visitors can access without undertaking a long bike ride.
- The Commission discussed the importance of integrating natural resource and cultural themes throughout the plan, including consideration of sensitive natural resource areas and Indigenous perspectives and interpretation. Members also suggested including physical and mental health as a pillar alongside habitat, recreation, water quality, and transportation.
- The Commission discussed funding considerations, including a recommendation to reconsider the 80/20 cost-sharing arrangement with cities. Members also emphasized the importance of project costs, prioritization, grant funding, and partnerships in implementing the plan.

## Planning Manager Update and County Board Actions

Comments/Notes: John Mertens, Principal Planner, provided the Planning Commission with an update on the following County Board Actions:

- Natural Systems Plan – Draft plan released for public review; natural resource restoration and grant-funded projects continue.
- Spring Lake Park Reserve Cultural Landscape Management Plan – Consultant contract authorized;
- planning work underway.
- Greenway System – Multiple projects advancing, including North Creek, Lebanon Hills, Mississippi River
- and Minnesota River Greenways.
- Veterans Memorial Greenway – Phase 1 interpretive features and mural progressing; future phases
- moving into construction/design.
- Park Ordinance 107 – Amendments adopted addressing park use, electric-powered devices, motorized
- recreation and enforcement.
- 2050 Comprehensive Plan Update – Research and public engagement phase underway; work will
- continue into 2027.

## Upcoming Public Meetings/Community Outreach

Comments/Notes: John Mertens, Principal Planner, provided the Planning Commission with a list of upcoming Public Meetings/Community Outreach opportunities.

- October 21, 2026 – Wentworth Avenue Trail Open House: 5–7 p.m., West St. Paul City Hall, 1616 Humboldt Avenue. Public open house regarding the Wentworth Avenue Trail.
- October 22, 2026 – Dodd Boulevard and Kenwood Trail Projects Open House: 4–6 p.m., Antlers Pavilion, Lakeville. Opportunity for community members to provide input on proposed improvements to Dodd Boulevard (CSAH 9) and Kenwood Trail (CSAH 50).
- November 10, 2026 – Lexington Avenue (CSAH 43) Trail Gap Open House: 4:30–6:30 p.m., Eagan City Hall, 3830 Pilot Knob Road. Public engagement regarding the proposed trail gap between Kenneth Street and Highway 55.
- December 1, 2026 – Dakota County Budget and Property Tax Open House and Public Hearing: Open house from 5–6 p.m., followed by the public hearing from 6–7 p.m., at the Dakota County Administration Center in Hastings.

## Topics for next meeting (Thursday, November 19, 2026, 7 – 9 p.m.)

John Mertens, Principal Planner, provided an overview of next month's meeting topics:

- 2050 Comprehensive Plan Update – Project Introduction
- Spring Lake Park Reserve Cultural Landscape Management Plan – Project Introduction
- 2026 Planning Commission Work Plan – Year-End Lookback – Review of progress on 2026 projects and activities

## Planning Commissioner Announcements/Updates:

The Commission received a brief update on the hiring of Lil Leatham as the new Physical Development Planning Manager. Lil is expected to attend the next Planning Commission meeting.

## Adjournment

Chair Guttmann asked for a motion to adjourn.

**MOTION: Commissioner Hunting moved, seconded by Commissioner Hansen, to adjourn the meeting at 9:05 p.m. Voice Vote: Ayes – 8 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved.**

## Next Meeting: Thursday, November 19, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., Dakota County Western Service Center, Apple Valley

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator