Minnetonka Park Board Item 5A  
Meeting of Feb. 7, 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject:</th>
<th>Mountain biking report</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Park Board related goal:</td>
<td>To renew and maintain parks and trails</td>
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<tr>
<td>Park Board related objective:</td>
<td>Renew, expand and maintain a trail system to encourage outdoor recreation and improve the connectivity and walkability of the community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brief Description:</td>
<td>Review the report for potential mountain biking trails and hear public comment.</td>
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Background

Interest in mountain bike trail development was first expressed by residents through the communitywide *Imagine Minnetonka* visioning process the city conducted in 2016. During that strategic planning effort interest in mountain biking was brought forward to the Park Board by a group of resident students associated with the Minnetonka High School VANTAGE Program. Staff worked with interested residents and Trail Source Inc. to provide and present a possible concept to the park board. That grassroots effort focused primarily on only two of Minnetonka’s 51 parks, Big Willow and Civic Center. Since that time, city staff heard from many residents regarding the potential creation of mountain biking trails. While many residents support the idea of trails, others have voiced concern over the potential project.

Therefore, staff decided to take a step back and engage with the community through a more in-depth, targeted process. The city of Minnetonka engaged with the consulting firm WSB and Associates to assist in the community outreach and engagement for the prospective mountain biking trails project. At the October 2017 Park Board meeting the park board directed staff to the population-based outreach option, consisting of two focus groups and two public meetings.

Community Engagement Process

Between November 2017 and January 2018, the city of Minnetonka hosted four engagement events to discuss proposed new mountain bike trails in Minnetonka parks. The events occurred on Nov. 8, Nov. 16, Dec. 13, 2017 and Jan. 8, 2018. Each event used a specific format.

- The first two meetings were designed as focus groups meant to get feedback on concerns and priorities from people who were concerned or interested in the trails.
- The third event was a large community conversation on three potential outcomes of the engagement process: the construction of trails in Big Willow Park, the construction of trails in a different city-owned location, and no construction of trails. Community members discussed the pros and cons of each option.
- The final meeting was a large community meeting that delved into more detail about the trail proposal, asking residents to comment on specific issues surrounding adequate space, environmental protection, and user conflict.

The engagement process highlighted key resident concerns and showed that there is enthusiasm behind the trail proposals. All feedback will be considered as this process moves forward and it is attached for review.

Discussion Points:

- Does the park board have any questions regarding the community engagement process?
Site Evaluation Criteria

At the Jan. 8 general public meeting, attendees were presented with a list of criteria established based on feedback to determine if Minnetonka’s parks could support mountain bike trails. The public used a worksheet (see attachment) to indicate if they agreed or disagreed with the criteria and provided comments. The public overwhelmingly agreed with the proposed criteria as a whole. Based on the feedback, staff made some minor adjustments/additions (shown in blue) to the criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADEQUATE SPACE</th>
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A trail system should be able to sustain a minimum of 4 miles of single track trails. This could include a single park on its own or a circuit of parks in close proximity to one another. Staff believes that less than 4 miles would not be utilized.

If a circuit of parks is considered, a given park within the circuit should be able to support a minimum of 2 miles of mountain bike trails on its own.

If a circuit of multiple parks are needed, the parks should be located within 1 mile of another and provide safe, easy and navigable travel between each location.

A mountain bike trail system should be within 1 mile of a regional bike trail and provide safe, easy and navigable travel between.

A park must contain a minimum of 20 usable acres to be considered. *Usable Acreage is undeveloped acreage that could be used to build mountain bike trails. Acreage does not include wetlands, creeks, ponds, etc.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION</th>
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Trails should be built using the highest standards for development and pursuant of sustainable trail guidelines. This would limit erosion, vegetation loss and water quality problems.

Areas containing uncommon plants and high quality restoration areas (per city natural resources staff) should be avoided.

Generally, narrow trails (approximately 24") should be built to reduce the total area of intensive tread disturbance, slow down trail users and minimize vegetation and soil compaction.

Site should be designed to minimize tree impact and removal.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>MINIMIZE USER CONFLICT</th>
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The majority of existing mountain bike trails in the Twin Cities are one-way to avoid head on interactions. If built in Minnetonka, trails should also be one-way.

Mountain bike trails should be built to minimally intersect existing maintained trails and high-use informal foot paths. *(High-use informal foot paths are trails that receive similar use as maintained trails and have experienced significant widening, erosion and impact as a result).*
Mountain bike trails should not displace existing maintained trails and high-use informal foot paths. (High-use informal foot paths are trails that receive similar use as maintained trails and have experienced significant widening, erosion and impact as a result)

Mountain bike trails should be designated as multi-use (open to runners, bird watchers, hikers, snowshoers, bikers, etc.). Ninety-two percent of all mountain bike trails in the Twin Cities are multi-use.

Adequate parking should be available at each proposed park.

Discussion Points:

- Does the park board agree with the proposed criteria?

Matrix

The following matrix shows a list of Minnetonka’s parks that have over 20 undeveloped acres and how they match with the proposed criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parks</th>
<th>Adequate Space</th>
<th>Environmental Protection</th>
<th>Minimize User Conflict/Maximize Safety</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 miles of trail total</td>
<td>If circuit, 2 miles per location</td>
<td>If circuit, 1 mile from another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone Lake</td>
<td>X X X X X X</td>
<td>X *</td>
<td>X X X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>494 Corridor</td>
<td>X X X X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purgatory</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
<td>* X</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilloway</td>
<td>X X X X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria-Evergreen</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Willow</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Center</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>* X</td>
<td>* X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jidana</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meadow</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covington</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mooney</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Rose</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crane Lake</td>
<td>All wetland remove from list</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*To be determined. If selected, would require further research.

Location Summaries:

**Big Willow Park**

Big Willow is a designated community preserve and athletic complex. While it is large in acreage, many of those acres have already been developed or are undevelopable. It has connectivity with the Lake Minnetonka Regional Trail. Parking is a concern at Big Willow Park. While there is parking for the six ball fields and one soccer field, these parking lots are at max capacity during high use times (weekends and evenings, April through October). Adding mountain bike trails would inevitably bring in bikers who wish to drive to the destination.
Big Willow is highly utilized by patrons. In addition to the maintained trails, a number of high-use informal trails that span up to six feet wide are located throughout the park. It would be difficult to create a safe trail concept that does not displace or minimally intersect the maintained and high-use informal trails. Usable acreage within the park consists of land north and south of the railroad. Bikers would have to use the maintained trail that parallels the Minnehaha Creek and crosses under the train tracks. This trail is frequently flooded during the year because of high creek levels. This leads to potentially unsafe passage between the north and south sections of the park and could potentially encourage bikers (and walkers) to cross the train tracks, trespassing on the BNSF Railway property.

With only 29 usable acres to build mountain bike trails, the ratio of acres-per-mile would be too dense to support four miles of trail. The southern half of the park contains high quality natural areas. Potential trails would put pressure on the restored woodland in this area. Big Willow is not recommended as a potential stand-alone site or circuit of trails.

*On January 30, 2018 staff received a petition regarding ‘Mountain Bike Trails being considered at Big Willow Park’. This petition is attached.

**Hilloway Park**

Hilloway is a medium sized community preserve that is tucked back into a secluded neighborhood. This park is relatively undeveloped and while it could provide mountain bike trail opportunities, it has a number of limitations. A network of high-use informal trails have been created throughout the park by walkers. These trails are up to six feet wide in locations and it would be difficult to avoid intersections with a mountain bike trail system. Further, very limited parking is available. There is no designated parking lot for this park. Adding mountain bike trails would inevitably bring in bikers who wish to drive to the destination. This would increase the number of cars parking on neighborhood streets. Patrons removing bikes from cars and gearing-up on the street would create safety concerns. Lastly, Hilloway could not sustain four plus miles of mountain bike trails on its own. In theory, it could be part of a circuit and support approximately two miles of trail.

**Civic Center Park**

Civic Center is a special use community park that is host to large scale facilities, hiking trails and soccer fields. Civic Center has connectivity to the regional trail system, ample parking and opportunity to connect with other potential trail systems. However, with only 15 usable acres and environmental concerns, a trail of two miles or more would not sustainably fit within this small footprint. Also, it would be difficult to create a safe trail concept that does not displace or minimally intersect the maintained and high-use informal trails. A park with less than 20 useable acres should not be considered.

**I-494 Corridor**

The I-494 Corridor is a parcel of city land on the west side of I-494 that narrowly stretches between I-394 and McGinty Road W. There is currently a maintained paved path that runs parallel to I-494. A mountain bike trail system could potentially run north on the east side of the maintained trail and turn back heading south on the west side of the maintained trail. It would be difficult to build a sustainable trail within this narrow footprint due to the topography. There are a few areas where slope gain could cause erosion issues and passage through low-land could be problematic. There are also areas where bikers would be detoured onto the maintained paved path before reentering a mountain bike trail. There is insufficient parking at this location.
Victoria Evergreen Park
Victoria Evergreen is a relatively undeveloped community preserve tucked back in a quiet residential neighborhood. It has good topography to support mountain bike trails. However, there is already a network of maintained trails that circumnavigate the park. If mountain bike trails were built, it would be difficult to avoid intersecting the maintained trail. Parking is a concern with only 8 spots. The addition of trails would bring in more cars and lead to an increase of users parking on residential streets. Further, this park has limited usable acreage for trail development and could not sustain a trail system on its own. It is within close proximity of the Lake Minnetonka Regional Trail, yet over a mile from another adequate park.

Purgatory Park
Purgatory Park is a community preserve that stretches and intertwines within a number of neighborhoods between Excelsior Boulevard and Townline Road. While this park is rich in acreage, much of that acreage is low-land that would not be suitable for mountain bike trails. Four plus miles of mountain bike trail in 37 usable acres is too dense of an acres-per-mile ratio. Staff recommends a minimum 10:1 ratio (usable acres per mile). The 37 usable acres in the most southern section of the park could not support four plus miles of mountain bike trails on its own and there is not a viable park in close proximity to create a circuit.

Purgatory does not have adequate parking. There is a small lot in the northern section of the park that would require bikers to ride over a half mile on the maintained walking paths in order to access potential mountain bike trails in the southern section of the park. And Purgatory Park is more than two miles from a Minnesota River Bluffs regional trail.

There are also environmental concerns with building mountain bike trails in Purgatory Park. The ridges and hilly knolls that are desirable for bikers contain the high quality woodland areas south of the creek and the remnant prairie on the east side of the park. About 10 acres of hilly land located south of the high quality woodland areas could be utilized without compromising the restoration efforts, however this amount of land area is inadequate for a trail system.

Lastly, Purgatory Park is used heavily by off-leash dog walkers which poses a safety concern with bikers.

Lone Lake Park
Lone Lake Park is a community park and preserve that has a soccer field, playground, tennis courts, picnic shelter, maintained trails and the addition of pickleball courts in 2018. A 0.6 mile paved path connects the park with the Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail. With over 52 usable acres and ample parking, it is foreseeable that Lone Lake could support four plus miles of mountain bike trails on its own. This acres-per-mile ratio is similar to other mountain bike trail systems in the twin cities.

While there is a network of maintained trails throughout portions of the park, the usable land to be considered is located away from maintained trails. There are some low-use informal trails within the usable land that would require further research for possible displacement or intersection. Lastly, restoration projects have taken place throughout the years in Lone Lake and should be evaluated when aligning a potential trail system.

Lone Lake was evaluated once prior for the addition of mountain biking trails beginning in 2000. The Park Board supported the staff recommendation to deny the proposed mountain biking plan for reasons of cost, natural resource management and budget at the April 2001 regular meeting. Since that time Lone Lake has undergone other changes.
In 2007/8 Lone Lake Park underwent the Park Renewal Process as a result of the 2001 voter-approved Park and Open Space referendum. After an involved neighborhood and park board review process, changes were made to the park infrastructure resulting in an updated basketball court, dock structure, picnic shelter modifications, trail improvements, water quality investments, parking lot changes, entrance realignment to Shady Oak Road, athletic field improvements and erosion control improvements from the water tower. Mountain biking was not brought up during that input process.

In 2009 Lone Lake Park was evaluated as a potential location to establish a dog park in the south east corner of the park adjacent to Shady Oak Road and Bren Road. This would have established an off-leash area north of the parking lot accessed via Rowland Road, east of Whitewater Dr. This area was an old homestead north and east of the walking trail, approximately 500 feet into the park. During the March 9, 2009 park board review of an off-leash dog park, the board voted 3-1 to “exclude Lone Lake Park from consideration for a dog park location and continue to support the concept of adding a dog park to the park system by identifying alternative locations with reduced impacts on residential properties.”

As noted, over time Lone Lake Park has been a focal point for the addition of new amenities to the park and trail system. Construction of six to eight (depending on bids) pickleball courts is scheduled for 2018. The addition of this amenity will increase the number of park patrons as well as parking demands in this high-use community park.

Staff Recommendation

By using the established criteria, staff recommends that Lone Lake Park be further studied as the site for potential mountain bike trails. Staff does not recommend any other park or open space be considered for mountain bike trails at this time.

If the park board recommends moving ahead with studying Lone Lake Park, the next steps in the process include:

- Establish a communication/notification plan
- Evaluate areas of environmental concern
- Create trail concept(s)
- Conduct community and neighborhood meeting(s) for public input
- Present study and concept(s) to the Park Board

Discussion Points:

- Does the park board agree with staff’s recommendation?

Recommended Park Board Action: Receive and discuss the mountain biking report. Allow for public input. Provide staff direction on mountain bike trails in Minnetonka.

Attachments:
Feedback provided to Staff
Feedback from Minnetonka Matters
Community Engagement Summary from WSB & Associates
Community Engagement Results from WSB & Associates
Twin Cities Mountain Bike Trails and Minnetonka Parks Comparison
Proposed Core Criteria Worksheet
Park Board reports and minutes – 2000/2001 Lone Lake Park Mountain biking study
Mountain Bike Trails being considered at Big Willow Park petition