



TO: Sen. Carrie Ruud, Chair, and Committee Members of the
Senate Environment and Natural Resources Policy and Legacy Finance
RE: Senate File 836, Article 3, Sec. 4: Metropolitan Council Parks and Trails Legacy Fund

Sen. Ruud and Committee Members:

Wilderness in the City, a 501(c)3 organization based in Eagan, is dedicated to preserving and enhancing natural areas throughout the Metropolitan Regional Park System for the benefit of people and wildlife now and in the future.

Included in the Legacy Omnibus bill are appropriations to the Metropolitan Council for projects throughout the Regional Parks system. We have concerns over the process for how this project list is generated and several of the individual projects. In context with this bill, two of these concerns are highlighted below for your consideration.

To help assure desired outcomes of the 25-year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan are met and to better reflect the intent of the Legacy Amendment, **we urge you to oppose SF836, Article 3 Section 4 unless changes are made as follows:**

Article 3, Sec. 4 (b) line 59.23: Money appropriated under this section and distributed to implementing agencies must be used only to fund the list of projects approved by the elected representatives of each of the metropolitan parks implementing agencies.

The Metropolitan Council's request includes appropriations for projects that have not been approved by locally elected representatives, nor vetted in any public process.

- Dakota County is requesting \$1.249 million for projects in Spring Lake Park Reserve which are based on a yet to be created master plan update. That update has not yet started, and as such those projects have not been approved by the elected representatives nor has there been any public engagement to date.
- In addition to Dakota County's request, a document obtained from the Met Council on 10/17/2018 shows there are five additional requests for appropriations for projects that are not part of an approved master plan.
- It is unclear how those funds will be spent, the public has not had any opportunity to provide feedback on the specific projects, nor have projects been approved by elected representatives or the Met Council.
- When funding is obtained prior to public comment, subsequent public input has negligible, if any, effect.

Thus, to help assure transparency and compliance with the 25-year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan, **we request that appropriations not be approved until after projects have been vetted and the public has had a meaningful opportunity to participate in the process.**

Sec. 4 (b) line 59.32: Any money remaining after completing the listed projects may be spent by the implementing agencies on projects to support parks and trails.

This furthers the lack of transparency in how Legacy funds are being spent. **It would benefit citizens of the metro region and improve accountability if this language be revised to state that any money remaining be returned to the parks and trails fund for future appropriation.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Holly Jenkins, Director, Wilderness in the City