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https://www.hometownsource.com/sun_post/news/local/joint-powers-agreement-for-new-sochacki-park-in-robbinsdale-golden/article_f586dc97-c94c-5fd5-9310-c12cfc9a314d.html

Joint Powers Agreement for new Sochacki Park in Robbinsdale, Golden Valley

By Gina Purcell Mar 25, 2015

Golden Valley and Robbinsdale are one step closer to including a Three Rivers Park within their communities.

Earlier this year Three Rivers Park District staff and city staff discussed the potential to join three area parks or nature areas into one large park.

Combining Sochacki Park in Robbinsdale, Mary Hills Nature Area and Rice Lake Nature Area in Golden Valley would provide 67 acres of natural park land.

According to Three Rivers Park Board of Commissioners' Vice Chair Daniel Freeman, it will be the first Three Rivers park in a first-ring suburb.

"I'm looking forward to some exciting things that can come out of this joint powers agreement," he said.

The green oasis could include paved trails, a natural bicycle motocross area and dog park among other amenities. Three Rivers also heard resident interest in improving the water quality in the ponds located within the park.

Although the water will likely never be swimmable, it may be improved enough to allow for recreational uses such as kayaking.

"Short-term the initial phase will be to complete the paved trail throughout the park," said Three Rivers Park Associate Supt. Jonathan Vlaming. "Other than that we are also exploring adding some sizzle to the park."

The "sizzle" could include an interactive art feature but details are unknown at this time.

Another large part of the park's operations will be environmental education classes through the Park District.

"We see Sochacki as a stage to bring those programs to the first-ring suburbs," Vlaming said.

Three Rivers Supt. Bo Carlson said the park will be one-of-a-kind.

"This is a first for us," he said. "This is the first type of park of this nature that we've explored and a unique opportunity that we're very excited about, our board is very excited about."

Three Rivers parks typically consist of 100 acres or more.

"We recognized the unique aspect of the first-tier communities that land is one of those premiums that just doesn't exist anymore," Carlson said. "We think this can be a model that can be applied in other areas and other regions throughout the first-tier communities ..."

On March 17, both Golden Valley and Robbinsdale provided unanimous approval of the joint powers agreement. The park district had already provided approval prior to the meetings.

The agreement

When working to combine property, several technical elements must be discussed. The joint agreement is designed to lay out each technical aspect of the plan to avoid confusion.

A Governance Policy Board will be created with two members from each contributing party. Three Rivers will provide the Chair and District Commissioner, Robbinsdale and Golden Valley will each provide its mayor and one council member to serve.

The board will meet at minimum once per year. It will be responsible for considering dispute resolutions, appointing an Operations Committee, creating operational bylaws for the policy board, reviewing the budget and funding opportunities, discussing park objectives and priorities, reviewing the capital improvement plan and taking action on any policy items related to the park.

The Operations Committee will be comprised of Robbinsdale and Golden Valley city managers and Park District superintendent. The committee will meet twice annually as needed to discuss execution of the three-year capital improvement plan, modifications to the agreement and other operational items.

Also included in the agreement is definition of ownership.

Robbinsdale will maintain ownership of the original Sochacki Park and Golden Valley will maintain its parcels, formerly known as Mary Hills Nature Area and Rice Lake Nature Area.

Although the Park District will not own any land, it will be responsible for providing environmental education and recreation programming in the park.

The district will be responsible for maintaining all paved trails year-round and new and refurbished recreational facilities and signage.

Robbinsdale will be responsible for trash removal, maintenance of existing infrastructure until removed or refurbished and all city-owned utilities, infrastructure and storm water management.

Golden Valley is responsible for the same.

In addition to those responsibilities, each city will be accountable for vegetative and wildlife management.

The district will be responsible for design and construction.

When it comes to policing the area, a specific agreement will be included within the larger

one at a later date.

As for funding?

Three Rivers Park District will lead efforts to obtain funding to complete the capital improvements. Additional funding sources may include all parties, metropolitan, state and federal or private sources.

Lastly, if any party wishes to terminate the agreement it must give written notice one year prior to the date of the desired termination.

If that occurs, the park will remain open as long as one party agrees to continue maintaining and operating the facility.

Moving forward

Both Golden Valley and Robbinsdale city councils had nothing but positive things to say about the project.

"I'm excited," said Golden Valley Mayor Shep Harris. "I don't think I've been modest about it. Mayor Regan and I rather see a high ropes course and other types of adventurous activities but this is a really good start."

Robbinsdale Councilmember Bill Blonigan voiced some comments prior to his city's vote.

"I just want to say how appreciative I am of the Three Rivers Park District, your attitude that this is not in the box," he said. "You're going to do something that's out of the box and we can't tell you how many times different units of government have told us no..."

Now that the agreement has been unanimously approved by all parties involved, the designing phase will continue.

Three Rivers Park District wants to throw a big party to celebrate the creation of the 67-acre park land sometime in June.

More information will be provided as it becomes available.

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