



May 9, 2023

Dear Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board Commissioners,

As a member of the MPRB Midtown Greenway Master Plan Technical Advisory Committee, and executive director of the major Midtown Greenway stakeholder group, I was disappointed to learn of your apparent intention to shut down our committee and cancel MPRB's work on the Master Plan.

Canceling MPRB staff work on the Midtown Greenway Master Plan would effectively mean **MPRB Commissioners would be blocking the Greenway from becoming a Regional Trail.**

This would be extremely unfortunate, because you would be making this decision largely based on conjecture, rather than facts. The purpose of the Midtown Greenway Master Plan and corresponding Interagency Operations Agreement is to *clarify MPRB's role in ownership and operations of the trail.*

If Commissioners don't review the proposed Midtown Greenway Master Plan and a draft of the Interagency Operations Agreement, how can you make an informed decision on whether adding the Midtown Greenway to the Regional Trail system – and to the MPRB portfolio of parks and trails – is in the best interest of the MPRB, the Greenway, and our community?

Blocking the Midtown Greenway from becoming a Regional Trail would also be a lost opportunity to immediately boost our efforts to **extend the trail over the river.** While the Mississippi bridge would likely be owned by Hennepin County or the State, having the MPRB at the table – and the Greenway as a Regional Trail – would provide significant momentum to our efforts. A Regional Trail connects the Region, including regional trails on both sides of the river.

Failing to add the Midtown Greenway to your portfolio of parks and trails would also be a lost opportunity for the MPRB to **increase Racial and Economic Equity in the MPRB system,** as the Greenway travels through some of the most racially diverse and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in Minneapolis.

I would like to address some of the specific concerns raised by MPRB Commissioners at your previous meeting and summarized by MPRB staff in an e-mail sent to our MPRB Technical Advisory Committee:

### **1. Fiscal Responsibility**

We understand funds are tight, but adding the Greenway to the Regional Park and Trail system would **add** money to the MPRB budget. There is no reason to spend any more than you would receive from the Met Council for your work on the Midtown Greenway.

The best course would be for the MPRB to receive the \$70K annually from the Met Council and agree to provide only the capital improvements the MPRB can implement with those funds. Ask Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis to continue to be responsible for everything else.

*This would all be worked out in the draft Interagency Operations Agreement, which you will only be able to review – and approve or not – if you allow the Master Planning process to continue.*

If for some reason the MPRB doesn't have the funds to complete the already-started Midtown Greenway Master Planning process, the best course would simply be to pause, rather than end, the project. However, you should first get a solid estimate from staff about the projected cost of the Midtown Greenway Master Plan. Since the Greenway is already completed, and many other Greenway plans already exist (created in partnership with MPRB staff), this would likely be one of the least expensive MPRB master plans ever.

## **2. Safety Considerations**

Safety was noted as a barrier, but the MPRB does not need to get involved in this area – it is well covered by Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis. The Hennepin County Sheriff drives down the Greenway every day, and the MPD can also respond if needed.

If the MPRB agrees to just spend the annual \$70K from the Met Council on incremental capital improvements, the MPRB would have zero expenses for security in the Greenway.

Hennepin County also does a great job supporting our unhoused neighbors and finding resources to help them. As a result, there are very few encampments in the Greenway anymore, and any that do pop up are soon gone after extensive social services and housing have been provided. The Midtown Greenway Master Plan and Interagency Operations Agreement should provide that Hennepin County would continue to perform this role, which they do very well.

While crime can happen anywhere, including in the Greenway, it's simply not true that the Midtown Greenway is less safe than any other park or trail in the city. The actual crime stats are very clear. Some years there are no violent crimes reported in the Greenway, and other years there are one or two. While perceptions can sometimes be tough to change, the MPRB should make decisions based on facts. The Greenway is as safe as any park or trail in Minneapolis.

## **3. Public Accountability**

Multi-jurisdictional ownership requires additional work, but it can be done, and can produce great benefits to the public. As you know, the MPRB already has several inter-agency agreements that successfully manage trails, golf courses, and other public lands. The Midtown Greenway would be another very successful interagency operation.

While overall Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis live up to their obligations to the Midtown Greenway, and do some things very well, the truth is the Greenway is not meeting full expectations as a public trail. Compared to other nationally-recognized trails, and even trails right here in Minneapolis, the Greenway is falling significantly behind in terms of wayfinding and other amenities. This is because neither Hennepin County nor the City of Minneapolis have expertise in park/trail management. *We need the MPRB – which manages the nation's best urban park system – to help manage the nation's best urban bike trail.*

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As you may know, our founders had the idea for the Midtown Greenway and worked for years to get it built in partnership with government agencies. It has been a wild success, to say the least, leading to billions of dollars of economic development and over 1M bike trips taken on it each year. The Midtown Greenway is the crown jewel of our bike network in Minneapolis, and has been called the *best urban bike trail in the nation*. It's even in the Rails to Trails Hall of Fame, which recognizes the premier bike trails in the nation.

We were very pleased when the Met Council added the Greenway to their Regional Parks Policy Plan and said it was *eligible* to be added to the Regional Trail System. But only the MPRB can make it happen, and the next step is to complete the Midtown Greenway Master Plan.

The Met Council would most certainly approve the MPRB's Master Plan, so now it's up to the MPRB to determine whether the Midtown Greenway will become a Regional Trail or not.

On behalf of the Midtown Greenway Board of Directors and thousands of Midtown Greenway trail users and supporters, I urge you to direct MPRB staff to complete the Midtown Greenway Master Plan and draft Interagency Operations Agreement, so you can make an *informed* decision based on facts, not conjecture.

I am confident that once MPRB Commissioners have reviewed the completed Midtown Greenway Master Plan, you will enthusiastically approve it, as will the Met Council. Then the Midtown Greenway will officially become a Regional Trail, as it so greatly deserves.

Sincerely,



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P.S. The nation's *best urban park system* should include the nation's *best urban bike trail*. I urge you to direct MPRB staff to complete the proposed Midtown Greenway Master Plan and draft Interagency Operations Agreement, so MPRB Commissioners can make an *informed decision* about MPRB's role – and whether or not you will allow the Midtown Greenway to become a Regional Trail.

To:

Commissioner Alicia D. Smith  
Commissioner Becka Thompson  
Commissioner Becky Alper  
Commissioner Billy Menz  
Commissioner Cathy Abene, P.E.  
Commissioner Elizabeth Shaffer  
Commissioner Meg Forney  
Commissioner Steffanie Musich  
Commissioner Tom Olsen