INTRODUCTION

The Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Master Plan portrays a vision to establish a greenway from the Village at Mendota Heights to Lebanon Hills Regional Park.

A Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Master Plan, prepared for the Dakota County, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Metropolitan Council, and the Dakota County Greenway Collaborative, was prepared.

The Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway travels 8.5 miles through Mendota Heights, Inver Grove Heights, and Eagan. Today, the landscape is largely suburban. Remaining agricultural areas, primarily in River Grove Heights, are expected to develop over the next 20-30 years. This will allow for future development patterns in this area to be organized around and shaped by the greenway’s natural, cultural, and recreational amenities.

The Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway connects neighborhood parks, the Mendota-Heights-Magalath Park, and the Lebanon Hills Regional Park.

The Master Plan Purpose

- Provides strategic guidance for future greenway development and improved water quality stewardship
- Provides recommendations for natural and cultural resource protection and development
- Integrates recreation, transportation, natural resource management, and improved water quality design direction
- Identifies a greenway realignment, interpretive themes, and development phasing
- Recommends implementation strategies for land protection and funding

The Master Plan is a planning tool intended to guide future development.
First priority projects are those that are needed to create a continuous, functional greenway experience. It is intended that recreation, water quality, and natural resource elements be integrated into the greenway at the time of initial construction.

Second priority projects will enhance the greenway experience. These are things such as grade separated crossings, trailhead development, and enhancements to existing trail segments.

Grade separated crossings will be installed as funding, partnership, or construction opportunities arise.

Funding

Funding will also be a collaboration between the County, Cities, and the Minnesota DNR as appropriate. Cost share roles will be determined based on the strengths of each agency and circumstances of each project. In-kind contributions of land, easement, design, engineering, construction, maintenance, and operations are encouraged and will be outlined in individual joint powers agreements between agencies.

It is anticipated that most future capital projects will be positioned to secure regional, state, and federal funds for recreation, water, and habitat, and that these sources will account for the majority of capital construction costs. In many cases, but not all, Dakota County, as the regional agency, will be in the best position to pursue outside funding. Examples of outside funding sources include:

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway travels through a suburban landscape with a mix of land uses. The northern terminus of the greenway is at the commercial area near Highway 110 and Dodd Road encompassing the Village at Mendota Heights and Mendota Plaza. The greenway then travels through residential areas and Inver Grove Heights’ Northwest Area, which today is a mix of farmland and open space, but will develop in the future heightening the importance of the greenway’s connective green infrastructure. Traveling south, the greenway connects to commercial and employment uses near Highway 149 and Yankee Doodle Road. South of this area, the greenway travels down Dodd Road, a local road fronted by single family homes; this stretch of greenway has the opportunity to be a heritage route and take on a parkway like feel in the future. The greenway then connects to Lebanon Hills Regional Park, the largest natural area in the vicinity.

Cultural Resources

Every place has a unique history with resources with which people have an emotional connection. Crossing the greenway corridor, there are many resources that have important cultural meaning. There are key historical corridors including an early railroad connecting Minneapolis and St. Paul with Chicago, Highway 55 that roughly parallels trails that have been used for centuries, and perhaps most significant, Dodd Road. Within Dakota County, there may not be a more historic corridor. The corridor has adapted to new forms of travel through the years but the path that is seen today is roughly the same as the path that was likely travelled for centuries by Native Americans and early settlers.

Natural Resources

Consistent with suburban development in the greenway corridor, natural resources are mostly remnant of patches of woodlands and wetlands within neighborhood parks and residential areas. Many of these, such as Friendly Marsh Park in Mendota Heights and high quality lakes in Eagan are locally significant. The largest natural area in the corridor is Lebanon Hills Regional Park, which contains the only area designated by the Minnesota County Biological Survey as ecologically significant within the corridor.
ways depending on the situation and land ownership. As greenway segments are built, formal joint powers agreements between Dakota County and collaborating agencies will need to be established to outline specific agency responsibilities. These agreements will outline who has control over the trail right-of-way, as well as who will operate and maintain the trail and how they will do it. Similarly, responsibilities for land acquisition, construction, stewardship, operations, and maintenance will depend on the particularities of each segment.

**Land Protection and Stewardship**

Dakota County’s greenway concept expands the traditional concept of a corridor to include recreation, transportation, ecological, and water quality components in a 100’-300’ corridor. Because securing the entire width of the corridor is not feasible, a dual approach to securing greenway lands is recommended.

- **Land Protection** - protecting land is essential to make the greenway usable to the public. For the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway, this means securing lands needed for the trail corridor and trailheads. For land owned by other public agencies, Dakota County will need to permanently protect the trail corridor and trailheads for greenway trail use with easements or joint powers agreements. For land that is currently privately owned, the County will need to protect the trail corridor for public use. Land protection strategies include: park dedication, direct purchase with resale of land not required for the trail, permanent easements, land donation, bargain sale, life estate, and negotiations with cities and developers.

- **Land Stewardship** - refers to the care of native landscapes and habitat within the wider greenway. Generally, Dakota County will not be the lead agency in stewardship activities outside of the 30’ trail corridor, but will work as steward partners with local jurisdictions, agencies, and private landowners with funding and expertise.

**Phasing and Priorities**

Greenway segments have been prioritized as either first priority projects or second priority projects. It is anticipated that first priority projects will be built in advance of second priority projects but the Master Plan remains flexible so that any project can be implemented as partnership or funding opportunities arise.
The Stewardship Plan

The linear nature of the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway will require natural resource management strategies that are geographically targeted, cooperative, and realistic. The plan recommends restoration and protection efforts be focused on the trailhead locations, where there is the greatest opportunity for greenway users to see the results of activities. Stewardship activities in the larger greenway corridor will need to be in cooperation with public and private landowners. All stewardship actions should be evaluated through the lens of sustainability—is the stewardship effort sustainable over the long-term, from both an ecological and economic perspective.

IMPLEMENTATION & MANAGEMENT

Implementation will depend on multi-jurisdictional collaboration. Without continued coordination between the communities and agencies that the greenway travels through it is unlikely the greenway, as it is envisioned, will be built. While the 30’ regional trail corridor will be the jurisdictional and operational responsibility of Dakota County, the larger greenway corridor will be governed in many
THE PLAN

The Development Plan

Development of the Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway hinges on a continuous, paved trail for nature-based recreation and non-motorized transportation. The trail is a connective feature linking recreation destinations (places people go for outdoor recreation), activity centers (gathering places along the trail), and trail connections.

Design features that are signatures of Dakota County Regional Trails include:

- Follows natural resources and has a natural design signature
- Frequent access points at full service trailheads with restrooms, picnicking, water and vehicle parking (every 3-5 miles) and smaller, more frequent, neighborhood gateways between trailheads
- Paved trails that are plowed in winter
- Grade separated crossings at major roads
- Cultural and natural resource interpretation
- Wayfinding
- High quality furnishings at trailheads, gateways and rest areas
- Universal accessibility
- Utilizes sustainable building practices and materials
- Lighting where evening use is anticipated

Wayfinding is discussed as an important part in the Development Plan for the greenway. Above are concepts for a Gateway Landmark wayfinding element.

Trailheads will be located at major access points along the greenway.

The Interpretive Plan

The interpretive plan identifies an interpretive theme and subthemes that provide a framework for cultural and environmental interpretive education. The plan recommends that the theme and subthemes be integrated into the greenway design and interpretation concentrated at trailheads and neighborhood gateways.

The Greenway follows Dodd Road for 2 miles. This route was an early Native American and trader’s route. The rich cultural history offers opportunities to integrate interpretation into The Greenway.

Interpretive Theme

Cross sections: The Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway traverses landscapes that highlight our history and suburban development.

Subthemes

- Crossing important corridors: Understanding what shaped our region.
- A Suburban Landscape: The Mendota-Lebanon Hills Regional Greenway is a cross section of suburban development
- Active Living: Counting the Benefits