



July 28, 2022

Ms. Susan Pye, Chair and President
South Suburban Parks and Recreation
4810 E. County Line Rd.
Littleton, CO 80126

Dear Ms. Pye:

South Metro Land Conservancy (SMLC) would like to offer additional comments for your consideration in the drafting of the proposed update of the 2017 South Suburban Parks and Recreation (SSPR) Master Plan. In addition, SMLC thanks SSPR for including us in the very productive stakeholder May roundtable at which we offered initial comments.

SMLC is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1993 and is mostly known for its extensive work purchasing and acquiring open space in the south metro area. Today, SMLC is working to increase awareness of the importance of natural areas in neighborhood parks as these areas provide important habitat close to home; create opportunities for children to enjoy and learn about nature; and increase connectivity. SMLC is dedicated to educating community members on the importance of these values in an increasingly urbanized region.

In December 2016, SMLC provided an enthusiastic letter of support endorsing the 2017 Master Plan draft. The proposed document was an immense improvement in the way SSPR engaged citizens in the District's future and articulated the four principles: quality first; enrich wellness; connect to nature; and lead sustainability. SMLC further commented about the importance of natural open spaces in parks and encouraged SSPR to explore additional opportunities to inform citizens about the importance of natural open spaces.

We have examined the background information you provided on your website which includes a list of "2017 Master Plan Accomplishments." SMLC offers a general comment: there is no indication of how any of the accomplishments address the guiding principles, especially, connect to nature and lead sustainability. It is a major drawback to your outreach process that these accomplishments are not addressed in the context of the guiding principles. While the list of accomplishments is impressive, it's difficult for citizens to discern what progress is being made where the guiding principles are concerned.

In May, during the stakeholder roundtable, SMLC emphasized the need to focus on the following in the Master Plan update:

- Environmental sustainability
- More natural areas in local parks
- Powers Park Reimagining

The purpose of this communication is to offer additional comments as the District proceeds with the drafting of the document. **These comments focus on the guiding principles, “connect to nature” and “lead sustainability”, as well as equity.**

- When the 2017 Master Plan was finalized, there was recognition in the document that an area requiring improvement/action is to “encourage meaningful connections to nature.” SMLC urges the District to explain what has been done and what is planned to address this area of needed improvement.
- The Master Plan update is a major opportunity for SSPR to fully flush out policies and goals for the two guiding principles, connect to nature and lead sustainability. Updating the defunct 1999 “Open Space Management Plan” would go a long way to guiding the District’s work in addressing these two principles according to best practices. SMLC was told (March 11, 2020 Board meeting) that the subject matter addressed in the 1999 document was included in the 2017 Master Plan. This is not the case. The 2022 update document can ameliorate this significant deficit by committing to its development.
- A new, detailed “Open Space Management Plan” also would go far in helping the District educate residents about the natural areas in their parks and why they are important. The District mentions grasslands in the 2017 Master Plan relative to saving water and minimizing mowing – both important goals to address the two principles. We urge the District to put forward best practices for natural areas and commit to informing citizens why these are important for habitat and preventing our communities from being habitat wastelands.
- The Master Plan update requires a whole-hearted commitment to the lead sustainability guiding principle. SMLC has serious concerns about the District’s commitment to this principle. Until recently, the sustainability section of the website was given spare attention and now we notice that several additions have recently been made to that page. In addition, the District’s Sustainability Committee, which presumably would organize, focus, and centralize the District’s sustainability efforts, has been defunct for many years (Clicking the link for the Sustainability Committee leads to a “page not found” error.) Reconvening this Committee, making its proceedings public, and inviting relevant outside stakeholders to serve as committee members are important next steps that the District needs to take.
- SMLC is left with the strong impression that most of the items listed now on the sustainability page were not undertaken for their role in sustainability, but instead served goals that the District considered higher priority, and incidentally had an environmental benefit. In addition, there is a lack of specificity in the claimed achievements on the “Sustainability” page. For example, one item is “use of recycled content in fences and benches.” Which benches? How much fencing? What percentage of recycled content? The “Sustainability” page also seems to put the District’s

participation in a roofless solar program forward as the District's marquee sustainability achievement. But, there is no information about how much fossil-fueled electricity this is allowing the District to offset. The Master Plan update is the time for SSPR to truly demonstrate a commitment to sustainability: to systematize and measure its efforts and publicly share the specifics.

- The District outlines a process in the 2017 Master Plan document that guides prioritization of project funding but SMLC is unclear as to how this process works in reality. Our confusion arises over planning funds recently being committed to Jackass Hill Park. SMLC was told by the District that Powers Park was not in the CIP so that SMLC would have to fund initial concept work for it to be considered for the CIP. As Powers Park is located in a diverse, less affluent neighborhood without an organized HOA, this inevitably raises questions in our mind about equity. These questions are not raised lightly. Recent actions regarding Jackass Hill Park combined with a lack of basic amenities at Powers Park until one year ago (benches and picnic table) and still no availability of doggie bags – compel us to ask these questions.

SMLC believes that the master plan update needs to fully embrace SSPR's mission: *to foster healthy living through stewardship of the environment, parks, trails and open space and by providing recreational services and programs.* Given climate change and its effects – and the District's management of 3800 acres of land, 2500 of which is open space -- now is the time for the District to be a leader and wholeheartedly embrace its environmental stewardship role. SMLC stands ready and willing to work with you to fulfill that role and to build on the excellent foundation of the 2017 Master Plan.

Sincerely,

Patricia Cronenberger

Patricia Cronenberger, President

Cc: Mr. Rob Hanna, Executive Director
Ms. Melissa Reese-Thacker, Planning Manager

