

March 14, 2024

Cuyler Dinegan, Coordinator  
East Bde Maka Ska Neighborhood Association  
2801 Hennepin Ave S., #813  
Minneapolis, MN 55408  
[info@eastbdemakaska.org](mailto:info@eastbdemakaska.org)

Dear Coordinator Dinegan,

Residents of the East Bde Maka Ska neighborhood are aware that the commissioners of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board have approved a proposal to enhance an area known as the Loon Lake Trolley Path. The Trolley Path runs, in part, along the west side of the property at 3540 James Ave. S.—and several other properties and residences—and terminates, on its south end, at the intersection of East Bde Maka Ska Parkway and West 36<sup>th</sup> Street.

The following quote is from page 333 of the MPRB’s Southwest Service Area Master Plan, which describes the proposal for the Trolley Path:

“The development concept focuses on preserving the somewhat more remote and naturalized feeling of this linear park space while enhancing safety and access. The trail that runs the length of the park north-south will remain and be upgraded with natural soft surfacing and ground-level lighting along its entirety. At each end, enhanced wayfinding and gateway feature will clearly mark the trail as a public facility. Two new types of spaces will be formally incorporated along the trail—small nature play nodes using natural materials and overlooks with views of the lake that can also include public art or interpretive signage highlighting the transportation and environment related history of the area. The former streetcar stairway which connects Conairis Way to the trail will remain, along with its unique pine cone-shaped finials.”

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Residents of the EBMS neighborhood are concerned about the changes the MPRB is proposing for the Trolley Path. These concerns, which fall into the following categories, deserve careful thought and recommendations in order to avoid negative outcomes for people and for properties.

### **Crime and Safety**

Residents of the EBMS neighborhood are concerned that the changes the MPRB is proposing for the Trolley Path may invite increased traffic along the edges of properties abutting the path, which may lead to an increase in noise, trash and crime. Trees and underbrush conceal the Trolley Path from public view, which makes it less safe than walking paths around the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes. Introduction of platforms, benches and/or play equipment to the area at East Bde Maka Ska Pkwy. and West 34<sup>th</sup> St. may lead to a congregation of parked vehicles, creating a focal point for vandalism of and theft from parked cars.

Recommendation: That the MPRB provide funding for design and construction of a barrier at the public-private property boundary along the Trolley Path to deter path users from trespassing on private properties. That the MPRB prohibit vehicle parking at the dead end of West 34<sup>th</sup> St., which would distribute parked vehicles along adjacent streets.

**Lighting**

Residents of the EBMS neighborhood whose properties abut the Trolley Path are concerned that adding lighting to the path may create “light pollution” in the evenings, disrupting their ability to sleep, to watch sunsets over the lake and to stargaze.

Recommendation: Ideally, lighting would create visibility for users of the Trolley Path without disrupting property owners’ ability to sleep or to enjoy views. Assess the impact of proposed lighting in terms of wattage, angle, size and height.

**Loitering**

Residents of the EBMS neighborhood are concerned that introducing platforms, benches and/or play equipment to the Trolley Path may encourage more people from outside the neighborhood to loiter on the path, play music, smoke, and/or engage in criminal activity. Loiterers may also intimidate law-abiding users of the path.

Recommendation: Add only gravel or mulch to the Trolley Path. Install benches, signage and/or equipment on the north end of the path, which is large enough to accommodate visitors in an area visible to a public street.

**Maintenance**

Residents of the EBMS neighborhood are concerned about disruptions, such as noise, associated with MPBR staff performing routine maintenance on potential updates to the Trolley Path.

**Natural-Habitat Preservation**

Residents of the EBMS neighborhood are concerned that increased activity along the Trolley Path may discourage wildlife that call trees and shrubs along the path home: raptors, song birds, woodpeckers and small mammals.

Recommendation: Identify species of fauna and flora now living along the Trolley Path and the potential impacts on those species from MPBR staff working on the path; from increased bicycle and pedestrian traffic on the path; and from increased on- and off-leash dog walking on the path.

**Noise**

Residents of the EBMS neighborhood are concerned that developing the Trolley Path may encourage more people to use it and, in turn, may result in more noise during the day and night.

**Signage**

Residents of the EBMS neighborhood are concerned that adding signage along the Trolley Path may encourage more people from outside the neighborhood to use the path and to linger on it as they’re reading signage. More people using the path may lead to overcrowding at the northeast corner of the intersection of East Bde Maka Ska Pkwy. and West 36<sup>th</sup> St.

Recommendation: Place signage—about the trolley crossing of West 36<sup>th</sup> St. and the origin of the Trolley Path—on the southwest or southeast corner of the intersection. The southwest corner offers the space and the parking to accommodate large numbers of people and their cars. The

southeast corner offers the termination of the current historic trolley operation and the space to accommodate large numbers of people who may stop to view signage, the former crossing and the surrounding trolley features.

**Trespassing**

Residents of the EBMS neighborhood are concerned that introducing platforms, benches and/or play equipment to the Trolley Path may encourage more people from outside the neighborhood to trespass more often onto properties that abut the path. This may lead to an increase in invasions of privacy, opportunistic thefts, monitoring of residents’ habits (for future theft, possibly), and/or vandalism. Trespassers may intimidate law-abiding users of the Trolley Path, which may lead to fewer “eyes on the street” to help deter crime. Fences or low walls exist between the Trolley Path and some properties that abut the path. Other properties that abut the path have no manufactured barriers along it and, as such, are open to trespass.

Residents of the cooperative located at 3540 James Ave. S. witness bicyclists and pedestrians trespassing across their property to reach either the Trolley Path or James Ave. S. Crowds of youth flowed July 4, 2023, from the shores of Bde Maka Ska onto the property located at 3540 James Ave. S., where they for hours loitered, shouted, detonated mortar-style fireworks and frightened neighborhood residents.

**Unauthorized Use**

Residents of the cooperative located at 3540 James Ave. S. have witnessed during the last four years motorized vehicles using the Trolley Path. The driver of a car accessed the Trolley Path at West 34<sup>th</sup> St. and traveled, southward, along the path to the intersection of East Bde Maka Ska Pkwy. and West 36<sup>th</sup> St. The drivers of three All-Terrain Vehicles accessed the Trolley Path from the southeast corner of the intersection of East Bde Maka Ska Pkwy. and West 36<sup>th</sup> St. and traveled rapidly, northward, along the path. Three people abandoned a rental car—which residents later learned was stolen—on the snow-covered Trolley Path, from where a crew had difficulty winching and then towing it a couple days later. (Photos available upon request.)

Recommendation: Add only gravel or mulch to the Trolley Path. Install bollards on either end of the Trolley Path to prevent unauthorized use of the path. Review boardwalks along Nine Mile Creek, located in Edina, Minnesota, and other barriers that keep users on public paths but do not detract from the natural look of paths or adjacent properties.

Sincerely,  
Mary Niforopoulos  
3540 James Ave. S., Apt. 205  
Minneapolis, MN 55408

Cc: Representative Aisha Chughtai of the City Council; Assistant Superintendent Michael Schroeder of the MPRB; Commissioner Elizabeth Shaffer of the MPRB.

## **Meeting with Commissioners Elizabeth Shaffer and Meg Forney re: Loon Lake Trolley Path**

### **Time, date, place**

5:30 p.m. Tuesday, February 20, 2024 via Zoom

### **Invitees**

Elizabeth Shaffer, District 4 commissioner of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board; Meg Forney, at-large commissioner of the MPRB; residents of the cooperative located at 3540 James Ave. S.; co-op's caretaker; co-op's community manager; three neighbors of the co-op's building.

### **Purpose**

To learn about changes the MPRB is proposing for the Loon Lake Trolley Path, which runs in part alongside the west property line of 3540 James Ave. S.

### **Questions for Commissioners Shaffer and Forney**

1) Will there be changes to the existing path leading up the hill from [the intersection of E. Bde Maka Ska Pkwy. and] W. 36<sup>th</sup> St.?

The Park Board has not initiated any process for changing the existing path. The long-range plan states:

"The trail that runs the length of the park north-south will remain and be upgraded with natural soft surfacing and ground-level lighting along its entirety. At each end enhanced wayfinding and gateway features will clearly mark the trail as a public facility."

That would be interpreted best as the creation of a wood-chip or similar soft surfaced trail with limited lighting.

2) Are "play nodes" really necessary?

The addition of "play nodes" resulted from engagement of the community during the long-range plan process. As that plan is now approved, play nodes will be components of the project.

3) Describe the lighting and signage the MPRB is proposing for the Trolley Path.

The long-range plan indicates interpretive signage as part of the experience:

"...interpretive signage highlighting the transportation and environment related history of the area."

The signage has not been designed and the messaging for signage has not been defined. However, there was interest from the neighborhood organization (Anja Curiskis) in 2022 to apply for a grant that would advance the design and content and implementation for the signs.

4) The two aerial shots—one of the current landscape and the other of the proposed path—show changes to our current back lawn. The shots suggest the space of our back lawn (going toward the lake) would be half or less than it is now and that a row of trees would be planted between the renovated trolley path and our property, casting shade all over our back lawn and occluding our views of the lake. Is this the plan? How much lawn would we lose? How much view would we lose?

The Park Board will be constructing improvements only on its property. Beyond the acquisition of 1699 West 34<sup>th</sup> Street, there is no intention for further acquisition. The Park Board will be confirming property boundaries prior to initiating work beyond the direction shared in the long-range plan.

The design, including a planting design, has not been defined.

5) The proposal invites increased traffic along the edges of our lawn and several neighbors' lawns up to 34th street. Is it pedestrian traffic only to be allowed on the path? Or is it bikes, motorcycles, and other such equipment?

The intention is a non-motorized connection between the neighborhood and the regional park. As a soft-surfaced trail, it will be accommodating to pedestrians and still passable for bicyclists. A design for the trail has not been initiated.

6) We all remember gangs of marauding youth coming from the lake on July 4 up our hill and flooding into our property and street. Will the project have barriers to prevent incursions by people using the path on ordinary days as well as holidays? What are the other safety measures that would prevent assaults, robberies, rapes, and indecent exposures on the path—such as phones like the ones on the UMN campus? <https://safe-campus.umn.edu/getting-around>

A design for the trail that would suggest barriers has not been initiated. It is not likely the MPRB would support a trail that includes barriers to public access.

7) Developing the Trolley Path is undesirable because it would probably increase after-hours activity in the area, which may lead to an increase in crowds, noise, trash and crime. How would the MPRB propose maintaining and patrolling a developed path that's so sheltered from public view? How would the MPRB ensure the security of residents who live adjacent to the path? Where would MPRB secure the funds to do so?

The trail connection has informally existed for some time. Establishing the trail as a more definitive connection between the neighborhood and the regional park will legitimize its use. That said, a design for security of the trail has not been initiated.

8) How would the lighting design create safety while also not adding “light pollution” to residents’ enjoyment of lake views and sunsets at night?

A design for the lighting of the trail has not been initiated. The long-range plan suggests illumination would be directed to covering the surface level features of the trail connection.

9) How will the design proposal prevent loitering along [the Trolley Path] below adjacent residents’ homes?

A design of the trail has not been initiated.

10) Will the Park Board consider design options and funding for a barrier at the park/private property boundary along the path to prevent access to upslope private property/residences/church grounds?

The design has not been initiated by exploring options to separate the trail from private properties can be a part of the design process. Parks in the MPRB system do not typically employ barriers or fencing to define boundaries.

11) [The Trolley Path] is the only natural walking trail at Bde Maka Ska and one of very few undeveloped trails at Minneapolis lakes. What is the purpose of developing [the Trolley Path], a pristine neighborhood jewel that is home to birds, fox, flying squirrels and a variety of flora?

The Park Board understands that formalizing this trail connection with soft- surfacing has long been a desire for the neighborhood, as expressed in the Southwest Service Area Master Plan and the Bde Maka Ska-Harriet Master Plan processes. For the Park Board, developing should not be consider synonymous with paving.

12) Why is the MPRB proposing spending one-million plus of the public's money on such a short trail when there are biking paths and walking paths, open to the public, around Bde Maka Ska and on the beautiful grounds of Lakewood Cemetery, which is now classified as an arboretum?

Planning processes that engaged the neighborhood indicate strong support for the trail connection. It will provide an experience different than the one park users experience on the shores of Bde Maka Ska. As opposed to walking paths in Lakewood Cemetery, the Loon Lake Trolley Path would be fully public.

13) How much input [will] residents have, especially those of us who are directly affected by these proposed changes and embellishments along our property lines?

The Park Board has not initiated a community engagement process for its work to advance the work shown in the Southwest Service Area plan. At a point when funding becomes available the Park Board will prepare a community engagement assessment and plan. Residents will be made aware of planning and design meetings and will be welcome to participate.

March 14, 2024

Michael Schroeder, Assistant Superintendent  
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board  
2117 West River Rd. N.  
Minneapolis, MN 55411  
[mschroeder@minneapolisparks.org](mailto:mschroeder@minneapolisparks.org)

Dear Michael Schroeder,

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## **Trespassing**

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## **Unauthorized Use**

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Recommendation: Add only gravel or mulch to the Trolley Path. Install bollards on either end of the Trolley Path to prevent unauthorized use of the path. Review boardwalks along Nine Mile Creek, located in Edina, Minnesota, and other barriers that keep users on public paths but do not detract from the natural look of paths or adjacent properties.

Sincerely,



Glenda Marsh  
3540 James Ave S, #103  
Minneapolis, MN 55408

Email CC:

Elizabeth Shaffer, Park and Recreation Board Commissioner  
Cuyler Dinegan, East Bde Maka Ska Neighborhood Association  
Vice Chair Aisha Chughtai, Minneapolis City Council

March 13, 2024

Aisha Chughtai, Minneapolis City Council  
Cuyler Dinegan, East Bde Maka Ska Neighborhood Association  
Elizabeth Shaffer, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board  
Michael Schroeder, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

Hello All,

I have been a resident of East Bde Maka Ska for 38 years, from 1986 through 2004 at 3430 Humboldt Avenue South (a single family home) and from 2005 to the present at 3540 James Avenue South (a cooperative). I write to express my deep concern over the plan to renovate the old Loon Lake Trolley Path as a public space with new ground surfaces, seating, play nodes, lighting, signage, and other features that are supposed to attract the public.

Many of us who live on properties adjacent to and nearby this path have serious concerns about disruptions we will experience from lighting, noise, trash, motorized vehicles, parked cars, and especially irresponsible and dangerous people who may commit crimes on both the pathway and adjacent areas. You will hear about these problems in more detail from East Bde Maka Ska residents who also contact you, but I want to emphasize that the renovation plan, as currently conceived, invites a variety of crimes.

1. I am concerned about sexual predation against children and women using the path, which is to be sheltered by trees and bushes. Some years ago when my running partner and I regularly ran the lake path, we were frequently confronted by a male flasher who would lie in wait on the hillside precisely below the trolley path and then jump onto the lake path wiggling his privates at us. What is the plan for preventing such displays on the trolley path, which you know will be used by children as well as adults?
2. I am concerned about individuals and groups using the trolley path as a site for drug dealing and consumption, again because it is sheltered from visual monitoring. We have already seen other less visible parts of the city, often near I-35 or in garage alleys, used for those purposes. What is the plan for preventing drug dealing and consumption on this path?
3. I am concerned about crowds, small groups, and individuals using the path to gain access to private properties where they intend to commit crimes. On July 4, 2023, 3540 James Ave South and adjacent properties were over-run by hundreds of youths who were running up and down, shooting fireworks, screaming threats, peering in co-op windows, and, on my small half-block below St. Mary's, damaging cars and home siding as well as burning one resident on her leg and another on her back. This rampage began around 10 pm and was not quelled by the police until after 2 am. On other occasions, I and other co-op residents have seen individuals or small groups hiking from the lake to our lawn or parking lot and then testing our windows and doors. What is the plan to prevent such incursions? At the very least I recommend (a) non-permeable fencing, (b) warning signs about private property, and (c) an improved response time from police.

Last, the Park Board and the City Council need to realize two things. First, the plan that has been circulated and the few discussions that have been held have used upbeat rhetoric that tends to cast the trolley path renovation as an idealistic facility that preserves local history, nature, and lakeside amenities. But planning needs to consider negative outcomes such as those concerns expressed by residents. Second, if the project goes forward according to the plan, slanted as it is, the cost will exceed the already exorbitant amount of tax dollars needed to pay for it. It will be even more expensive because the city and park board will be inundated by complaints and lawsuits about damages to properties and (god forbid) persons.

In short, I am saying that the planners need to hear from area residents about their concerns and revise the plan so that both residents and lake visitors do not experience harms.

Sincerely,

Ellen Messer-Davidow  
3540 James Ave South  
Minneapolis MN 55408  
612 823-3351 (out of town to May 22)  
Email: emd@umn.edu