



*Working to protect the Mississippi River
and its watershed in the Twin Cities area.*

101 East Fifth Street
Suite 2000
Saint Paul, MN 55101

651-222-2193
www.fmr.org
info@fmr.org

July 17, 2018

Mayor Myron Bailey & City Council
City of Cottage Grove
12800 Ravine Parkway South
Cottage Grove, MN 55016

Dear Mayor Bailey and City Councilmembers,

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is a local non-profit organization that works to protect, restore and enhance the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities metropolitan region. We have more than 2,400 active members, 3,500 volunteers and 1,800 advocates who care deeply about the river's unique resources.

FMR takes an active interest in working with municipalities, counties, state government, and other stakeholders to realize the full potential of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA), a unit of the National Park Service that runs through your city.

We respectfully submit the following comments regarding the Draft 2040 Comprehensive Plan and Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Plan for the City of Cottage Grove.

We commend the work you have done in crafting a vision for Cottage Grove's future. In particular, we are pleased to see that the city has identified Mississippi River Access as a key theme of your 2040 plan.

Of primary interest to us is the future of land within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA). Both the Mississippi Dunes Golf Course site and Lower Grey Cloud Island have the potential to provide new riverfront parks and natural areas, with excellent opportunities for public access, boating, hiking and wildlife watching. We look forward to participating in planning for the future of these areas, and we would welcome the opportunity to assist the city with land protection, management planning and ecological restoration at either site.

Future Land Use Map

We support the use of the Transitional Planning Area category for Lower Grey Cloud Island and the golf course site. We agree that this will give the city the flexibility needed to ensure that public riverfront open space protection would be a part of any development.

We would prefer to see the entire golf course site in the Transitional Planning Area category, including the area landward of the railroad tracks, which is guided for Medium Density Residential in the draft 2040 Comp Plan. We recommend keeping “extra density” in the toolbox, so it can be used to leverage open space dedication and/or conservation design with potential developers.

Although it is outside of MRCCA, we are also interested in development in the business park expansion area. Because of this area’s proximity to the bluffs and Grey Cloud Dunes Scientific and Natural Area, we want to see the city require good environmental stewardship by all developers and businesses in this area. Some examples are minimizing pavement, utilizing native plants in landscaping and applying best management (Low Impact Development) practices for stormwater management.

We were pleased to see the planned industrial area moved away from the north and east sides of the SNA and replaced with medium density residential. We think residential is a good land use to locate next to parks and natural areas because it provides people, who will use and value the place, keep an eye on it and help with park stewardship if needed.

Public River Corridor Views

- Thank you for including views from other communities.
- Please add Pine Bend Bluffs SNA in Inver Grove Heights. This bluff top panoramic view includes Grey Cloud Island and the rest of Cottage Grove beyond it.
- Joseph La Bathe Settler’s Island should be included if there will be public access
- We recommend using a different (better) photo from Schaar’s Bluff that shows less of the parking lot and more of Cottage Grove
- FMR has photos from some of these places that we can share for use in your final draft

Restoration Priorities

FMR has enjoyed working in partnership with the City of Cottage Grove to protect and restore land along the river and to conduct restoration at Camel’s Hump Open Space. We appreciate that the city puts a high value on protecting and restoring native plant communities.

Cottage Grove has the good fortune of miles of river bluffs and shorelines with healthy vegetation. But some of what shows up on the DNR maps as “existing significant vegetation,” includes invasive species that don’t provide the highest quality habitat for the river’s wildlife.

Although it is not a MRCCA requirement, we would like to see Cottage Grove add a policy to this section that identifies replacing invasive species with native species as a restoration priority for land within MRCCA.


Transportation

The map on page 79 shows an extension of the “Major Collector” roadway classification on Lower Grey Cloud Island. If a new road is planned for the western side of the island, more information should be provided about it in the MRCCA plan.

On page 82 of the draft 2040 Comprehensive Plan there is a short paragraph regarding a potential new bridge crossing of the Mississippi River. This information should also be included in the MRCCA plan as it has the potential to cause serious damage to the scenic character and ecological health of the river. We have major concerns about adding a bridge at this location and we will want to participate in the county feasibility process and other future studies.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. FMR has a strong interest in helping the city to realize their goals for the river corridor and we look forward to working with you as you implement your plan. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions about these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Whitney L. Clark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'W'.

Whitney L. Clark
Executive Director

Cc: John Burbank, Senior Planner, City of Cottage Grove
John McCool, Senior Planner, City of Cottage Grove
Dan Petrik, Land Use Specialist, Minnesota DNR
John Anfinson, Superintendent, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area