



April 29, 2024

Chair Pappas, Chair Lee, and Capital Investment Committee members,

I am writing to provide comments on Metropolitan Council related provisions for [HF 5220](#) (Lee, F)/ [SF 5251](#) (Pappas) and [HF 5162](#) (Lee, F)/[SF 5201](#) (Pappas), the 2024 capital investment package.

Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails Grant Program (HF 5220/SF 5251)

Governor Walz recommended \$2.5 million for grants to the Metropolitan Regional Parks implementing agencies. The capital investment package funds this program at \$8 million. We appreciate having this program included in the bonding bill. The Met Council matches bonding dollars under this program – for every \$3 received in state bonds from the legislature, we provide \$2 in regional funds. If this program were to be allocated \$8 million in general obligation bonds, the Met Council would add \$5.33 million in regional funds, for a total amount of \$13.33 million. These dollars are distributed by formula to the 11 regional parks implementing agencies and fund important regional infrastructure in our regional parks and trails systems.

Metropolitan area Tree Planting Grants (HF 5220/SF 5251 and HF 5162/SF 5201)

Both bills in the capital investment package contain funding for metropolitan area tree planting grants. HF 5220/SF 5251 contains \$8 million in general obligation bonds and HF 5162/SF 5201 contains \$4.08 million in general fund cash. Governor Walz did not have a recommendation for metropolitan tree planting grants in his capital investment recommendations.

Removing and replacing ash trees in light of Emerald Ash Borer is a major concern across the metro, where ash is estimated to comprise about one-third of the region’s canopy. Many cities in the region have already removed ash trees or have had canopy loss due to other major storm events. Expanding canopy, as well as addressing ash, would go further to address issues in low-income neighborhoods that might also have high rates of asthma or other similar health outcomes. The Met Council has been conducting research in recent years about tree canopy coverage and the impact that tree canopy coverage can have in the fight against climate change. Communities that are lacking in tree cover can experience temperatures that can be as much as 15 degrees hotter than more verdant parts of the region. We have developed a tool called “[Growing Shade](#)” to help communities in the metropolitan region track where tree canopies are thin, and then prioritize where cities and communities can get the most impact from new planting.

While we appreciate the interest by the legislature in planting more trees in the metropolitan region, we do have concerns about the language tying the tree planting grants to a newly proposed program in HF 3911, HF 5220/SF 5251, and HF 5162/SF 5201.

Inflow and Infiltration (I/I) Grant Program (HF 5220/SF 5251)

Governor Walz recommended \$5 million for grants to cities in the metropolitan region to address excess inflow and infiltration into the regional wastewater treatment system. The capital investment package funds this program at \$15 million. We also appreciate having this program included in the bonding bill. The language in HF 5220/SF 5251 ties the bonding funding to criteria that were put in law last year as part of [Minnesota Statute 473.5491](#).

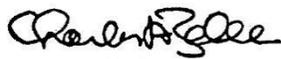
We appreciate the desire of the legislature to target communities that have lower-income residents, but have concerns that tying all of the funding for this program to the criteria in statute will limit our ability to provide a regional approach to this work. Public I/I construction does not necessarily help the specific neighborhood and, to the contrary, could be somewhat disruptive. I/I investments in one community could help a city 15 miles away, which means that tying funding for I/I to census tracts may not work as intended.

Funding for arterial bus rapid transit

Governor Walz recommended \$37 million to advance the H Line, an arterial bus rapid transit (ABRT) project that would run from downtown Minneapolis to the Sun Ray Transit Center on the east side of St. Paul, largely in the Como/Maryland corridor. While this important project did not receive funding in the delete-everything amendments posted earlier this week, I would like to note that we remain committed to this recommendation and look forward to continuing the conversation about its inclusion in a final bill.

The Met Council has greatly appreciated the past support of the legislature in providing funding for all of the previously designed ABRT lines (A through G), in addition to the two highway BRT lines in operation: Gold Line and Orange Line. The vast majority of previous state funding for our bus rapid transit network came from state bonding funds.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.



Charles A. Zelle,
Chair, Metropolitan Council