



# Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails Legislative Forum - January 2026

Elizabeth Wefel  
January 21, 2026

# Agenda for today



Dynamics of the upcoming session



GMPT's Legislative Agenda



Other issues to think about



GMPT's Legislative Advocacy & your role



What's next?

# DYNAMICS OF UPCOMING SESSION

- ▶ Even year - typically bonding / policy year, but nothing is typical anymore
- ▶ Not the same legislature that we were looking at last December
  - ▶ 5 special elections, so far
  - ▶ 2 more to go
  - ▶ No impact to legislative control (so far . . . )
- ▶ Retirements for next session
  - ▶ 17 true retirements (12 Senate, 5 House)
  - ▶ 5 house members seeking Senate (3 open seats, 2 incumbent challenges)
  - ▶ 9 seeking other office (9 House, 2 Senate)
  - ▶ Most notable for GMPT issues - Sen. Sandy Pappas - long time bonding chair

# DYNAMICS OF UPCOMING SESSION

- ▶ Safety/Security concerns coupled with construction make access even more difficult
- ▶ State budget still wobbly and will impact discussions
- ▶ Every election year is dramatic, but 2026 may be extra
  - ▶ Every legislative seat plus statewide offices up for election
  - ▶ Speaker of the House (plus 2 other state reps) challenging Gov. Walz
  - ▶ Two state representatives seeking to become auditor
- ▶ Gridlock may worsen
  - ▶ No one wants to give other side a win
  - ▶ Fears of primary challenges may hamper compromise
- ▶ Ongoing federal presence may worsen already frayed relationships
- ▶ Focus on fraud could result in overcorrections and/or lack of focus on other items
- ▶ Even year typically a bonding year, but . . .

# Shorter session and tighter timelines

## Calendar

- ▶ February 17 Session Starts
- ▶ March 27 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Committee deadline
- ▶ Easter/Passover break - March 27 at 5 PM - April 7 8:00 AM
- ▶ April 17 3<sup>rd</sup> Committee deadline
- ▶ May 18 Legislature must adjourn

## Practical impact

- ▶ Fewer hearings. Each House co-chair has 6 hearings before deadline
- ▶ Less time to get work done
- ▶ Less time for shenanigans

# Will they pass any bills?

- ▶ This could be a do-nothing session
- ▶ Most likely bills to pass - State Government Finance
  - ▶ Tax?
  - ▶ Bonding?
  - ▶ Legacy?

# BONDING: *IF HISTORY'S ANY GUIDE, OH BOY*

- ▶ Even year is traditional bonding year, but schedule has been off for more than a decade:
  - ▶ 2016 failed, passed in 2017
  - ▶ 2018 passed, but water funding delayed due to structure. Repassed in 2019
  - ▶ 2020 failed in regular session, passed during 5<sup>th</sup> special session in late fall
  - ▶ 2022 failed, passed in 2023
  - ▶ 2024 failed, passed in 2025
  - ▶ Could 2026 be any different?!

# WILL THEY PASS A BONDING BILL?

## WHY THEY MIGHT

- ▶ Bonding chairs/co-chairs, minority lead really want it
- ▶ Lack of local projects in 2024 bill
- ▶ Agencies and state programs still playing catch up
- ▶ Demand is high! \$3.8 billion state agency and \$2.7 billion local government requests

## WHY THEY MIGHT NOT

- ▶ Election year politics
- ▶ Increasing number of legislators who don't like bonding bills
- ▶ Worsening budget forecast
- ▶ "We passed one last year"
- ▶ "I support infrastructure, but I can't vote for that stuff"



# GMPT's Legislative Policies and Agenda

- ▶ Legislative policies guide our work at the Capitol
  - ▶ Our policies focus on ensuring that we have our fair share of funding for regional and local parks and trails, that we are supporting the Commission and they support our members, and that the Legislature does not place undo burdens on our ability to build parks and trails
  - ▶ Examples of problematic legislation include efforts to block funding for any park or trail that has used eminent domain, restricting the price at which land can be built, blocking any use of eminent domain
- ▶ Legislative agenda guides the specific issues that we will be working on.
  - ▶ We will introduce bills on some, but not all of these issues

# Legislative Agenda for 2026

The GMPT supports legislation that will update and modernize the authorizing language for the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission.

The GMPT supports legislation that would allow extend the expiration date of and allow unspent parks and trails legacy funds to be reallocated to other projects.

The GMPT supports the passage of a Legislative-Citizens Commission on Minnesota Resources bill that includes funding for the Local Trail Connections, Outdoor Recreation, and Natural and Scenic Area grant programs and for selected local and regional park and trail projects.

Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails (GMPT) supports a robust bonding bill that includes a bonding appropriation of at least \$4,000,000 to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to fund the local and regional grant programs under Minn. Stat. 85.019 and additional funding for local and regional parks and trails.

# Translating the Agenda & Policies into Legislation

- ▶ Legislation - Changes to the Commission language AND extend funding for several projects.
- ▶ Other legislation
  - ▶ Support passage of LCCMR bill that include funding for local grants as well as member projects
  - ▶ Support inclusion of local parks and trails grants in final bonding bill
- ▶ Bill numbers, handouts, more will be available when session starts

# What else could we be seeing?

- ▶ Policy restrictions -
  - ▶ Eminent domain use in legacy projects
  - ▶ Other?
- ▶ Tightened policies (and higher overhead) for grants
- ▶ Tweaks to the community grant program ??



What does this  
all mean for  
our members?

# GMPT's Legislative Advocacy & Your Role



**At its core, GMPT founded to advocate for the parks and trails of Greater Minnesota**



**Legislative Advocacy (AKA lobbying) is a team sport**

Lead at legislature is our lobbyist, Elizabeth Wefel

Board/Executive Team drives the ship with our legislative policies/agenda as the guide stone

Our members play a crucial role as voices to their own legislators and other key legislators

# Preparing for success

Strong relationships are the foundation for success

Get to know your legislator before you need to ask them for something

Your goal: Your Legislators know you by name

# How do you build the relationship?

<b>Invite</b>	<b>Invite them to a park board meeting or similar gathering</b>
<b>Arrange</b>	<b>Arrange tour or visit to city facility. Include them at all openings</b>
<b>Recognize</b>	<b>Recognize their work and contributions publicly</b>
<b>Stop by</b>	<b>Any time you are in St. Paul, stop by your legislator's office and leave a note if they aren't there</b>
<b>Repeat</b>	<b>Schedule regular get togethers. Relationships take time and persistence</b>



# How do you build the relationship?

<b>Introduce</b>	<b>Introduce yourself and your position</b>
<b>Congratulate</b>	<b>Congratulate them on winning election/reelection</b>
<b>Ask</b>	<b>Ask for a meeting - formal or informal</b>
<b>Stop by</b>	<b>Stop by in-district “office hours”</b>
<b>Attend</b>	<b>Attend a townhall meeting</b>

# What's next?!

- ▶ Get to know your legislator
- ▶ Sign up for legislative action day March 4 (coming soon!) and make an appointment with your legislator
- ▶ Read our monthly newsletter and legislative updates
- ▶ Let us know what you're hearing!



# Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails

QUESTIONS?