



WORTHINGTON PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

Minutes of the Tuesday, November 21, 2017 Meeting

Members Present - The members present were Dan Armitage, Laura Ball, Bob Burpee, Dave Kessler, Michele Miller, Rob Wendling, and Darren Hurley, Director of Parks & Recreation.

Marc Zody and Lynda Chambers were present representing the Community Garden.

Scott Brown, Parks Manager and Michael Burgdorfer, Recreation Supervisor were also present.

The minutes from the October 17, 2017 meeting were approved.

McCord Park Master Plan – Community Garden Options – Mr. Hurley introduced Mr. Zody and Ms. Chambers, Community Garden Volunteers, and thanked them for their volunteer service to the community. He then reviewed the McCord Park master planning process going back to the public open house. He reviewed the themes that came from the open house and the discussion of the Commission Members during their walking tour of the park. Using the display screen, Mr. Hurley described how the concept plan for the park had changed from the public open house to the drawing brought forward in October. This included changes to the multi-use trail connection coming from the All Children's Playground, changes to the playground layout moving it from being located close to the reservable shelters and now being a play trail concept stretching from the shelters to the current location, and the removal of the garden from its current location. In order to consider this option further, members had requested staff further research options for alternative locations for the garden. Mr. Hurley then continued using the display screen to show five locations that were identified by staff as meeting some of the basic criteria of no shade, possible water access, parking, and small or no impact to neighbors. He shared the following locations and the pros and cons identified:

1. Sharon Township Police Department (E. Wilson Bridge Road)
Pros: Easy access, parking, no shade, water, location
Cons: Additional partner to manage, some potential neighbor concerns, possibly need to open up to township residents (increased demand)
2. Sharon Township Memorial Hall (161 & Morning Street)
Pros: Easy access, parking, no shade, water, location, flat land
Cons: Additional partner to manage, some potential neighbor concerns

3. Snouffer Road Park

Pros: Parking, no shade, proximity to school for partnership, large area – could accommodate entire existing garden

Cons: Would require removal of trees (ash) although they are already planned for removal as they are dying, possible parking conflicts with other uses, location not as central

4. Linworth Park

Pros: Parking, no shade, water access

Cons: Possible parking conflicts with other uses, location not as central, possible conflicts with sports uses

5. The Flats (Mirolo Pavilion)

Pros: Parking, no shade, water access, other related uses, possible partnerships with schools

Cons: Additional partners to manage, lots of potential user conflicts

Following the presentation, Mr. Burpee inquired about the lease term with the school district pertaining to Snouffer Road Park and whether it would need reviewed for this use. He also felt the island in the parking lot would be a positive location considering the close parking. He had not observed the lot being regularly full so he thought parking for gardeners wouldn't be an issue. Mr. Hurley indicated he had been in touch with school district officials and they were open to dialogue about various sites but there would be some challenges at many of the locations. Mr. Brown added that the ash trees currently there will be removed regardless of a garden install and his staff could replant on the ends of the island. Mrs. Miller was in favor of The Flats location because it has plenty of parking and space that is currently only used for dog walking as far as she knows. Mr. Brown added that there would be increased maintenance challenges with spreading out smaller gardens throughout the city and he would like to keep it to one or at the most two locations for ease of maintenance. Mr. Hurley agreed stating that most of the other locations in neighborhood parks would be more challenging from a maintenance standpoint and would really only be viable if neighbors around the park joined together and approached the city wanting to garden and would be willing to meet certain requirements. Otherwise, each park would be its own process in terms of building consensus, working through neighbor concerns, and identifying space residents would be okay with changing use. His recommendation if moving the garden would be to focus on one or two sites that could accommodate the existing garden and provide an opportunity for growth. If over time gardening in neighborhood parks was desirable it could be looked into further.

Mr. Hurley introduced Mr. Zody, long-time Community Garden Volunteer Coordinator, stating he invited him to attend tonight to hear the ideas being considered and to provide his input about the challenges of potentially relocating the garden and any ideas he had about the garden and the current park plans. Ms. Chambers was the Parks & Recreation Director when the garden was installed and was a key player in its growth. Retired, she now enjoys gardening and assists Mr. Zody with the garden operations. Mr. Zody began by stating that when he first saw the latest concept plans for McCord Park in a previous meeting with Mr. Hurley he was excited about having a paved pathway near the garden. He added that it would not take much alteration to keep the garden and move one of the playground pods along the path and continue with a pathway through the garden. He stated the gardeners would be open to that. If the garden had to be moved, it would be very upsetting to those who have invested significant time and money into their plots. He also stated that garden funds had been used to install the current water source. Moving the garden would be a monumental task and would most likely lose many existing gardeners including himself. Mr. Kessler responded by stating his involvement from the beginning when he worked with Mrs. Chambers on the garden installation and having a plot of his own there once. He declared it was originally proposed as a trial to be put into place and see how it goes. However, the past years have proven to him and his neighbors that it does not make a good neighbor for aesthetic reasons and the wildlife it attracts. He acknowledged that the gardening concept has proven itself successful and he would like to see it expanded in a different area with more structure and amenities like standard fencing. Ms. Chambers asked what would need to change in the garden for it to be more desirable. Mr. Kessler responded that some don't take care of their plots and the weeds become an aesthetic issue. Both Ms. Chambers and Mr. Zody

acknowledged that there are some challenges in the group that register for a plot but get overwhelmed by the time and work that needs to go into taking care of it and therefore the weeds grow and become unsightly. They added that despite their efforts to keep up with the inefficient plot owners, there are some unsightly areas but that is a common issue with any community garden.

Ms. Chambers stated that there are currently 31 gardeners registered with 17 on the waitlist and over a period of eight years they have had 74 gardeners total. She added many gardeners share plots and have family members involved so more than just the registered users benefit from the plot. Ms. Miller stated that she would like to see the garden moved because she feels the 15,000 square feet of space in this location could be better utilized for a larger population than 31 people. She does not feel this is the best use of space and is confused as to why individual gardeners would feel entitled to having any right to this space in a public park beyond the annual term of their agreement.

Mr. Wendling inquired of the gardeners how many they thought had perennial plants. Mr. Zody replied that there were many but did not have an exact number. He also knows some registered participants garden all year round. Mr. Zody added, to acknowledge the aesthetic discussion, that fencing has become a necessary need to prevent deer from eating the vegetation and they have been researching professional fencing options as many gardeners have installed their own. Mr. Wendling said he liked the idea of satellite garden operations closer to residents but feels it would be a huge undertaking. Mr. Hurley restated that multiple gardens in neighborhood parks would require volunteers to manage them.

Ms. Miller stated if this garden was just a pilot program the property is not owned by or promised forever to the gardeners. She inquired about what the end of this pilot program should be. Ms. Chambers explained that when she was the Director of Parks and Recreation she was called to City Hall in a meeting with Sustainable Worthington and told to make this program happen. There was not a discussion about an ending time to it. Mr. Kessler reminded that he was a supporter of the garden from the beginning but has since decided that it needs a new home. He agreed that it should not be eliminated and supports making a new one better with initial infrastructure improvements, like soil treatment and a water source. Ms. Ball acknowledged that the renovation of McCord Park has been years in the making and the main focus of this renovation is improving all aspects of the park and having the garden adjacent to neighbors can be an issue. Mr. Zody understood the concerns of unsightly weeds and the aesthetic issues they can cause, however, he stated he still strongly believes that the current garden could remain and be incorporated into the new concept plan. He stated he would be disappointed if the members decide to recommend otherwise.

Mr. Zody, Ms. Chambers, and Mr. Burgdorfer left the meeting. Members asked Mr. Hurley their options for moving forward. Mr. Hurley indicated they could consider the feedback they have received tonight and continue discussing options at their next meeting or they could make a recommendation if they feel they have reached a consensus. He suggested no motion on a plan recommending the relocation of the Community Garden should occur without a clear statement of intent for what to do with it. Ms. Miller compared this process to the naturalization of previously maintained areas in the Olentangy Parklands from several years ago in that sometimes decisions are made to move forward even when some people object. She indicated she was one of the people who objected to that change. Mr. Brown discussed where we are with that project. Mr. Hurley asked members to come back to the current discussion and we could revisit that project at a later time if they would like. Members discussed where they were overall with their planning process for McCord Park after hearing the garden volunteers' feedback and decided they felt the concept plan in front of them was still the best overall plan for the long term benefit of the park.

Members discussed various language options and then unanimously passed the following motion:

Be it moved that the October concept drawing of the McCord Park Master Plan be approved with the alteration of the northeast corner parking lot to be shown as a possible garden location and with the understanding that the current Community Garden will be relocated to one or two alternative locations and that the City of Worthington will invest in and develop a transitional plan for the existing gardeners to include soil preparations and provision of a water source at the new location(s).

Mr. Wendling recommended that when the preferred locations are chosen, soil samples should be tested at each location before a final site is chosen. The resulting information can be used to promote the soil quality and encourage new gardeners.

Snouffer Road Park Mound Project – Mr. Hurley recalled during the park master planning process staff shared ideas regarding some challenges facing the Snouffer Road Park ball diamonds and the mounds around the backstops. This presented a challenging situation as many people enjoy the shade provided by the trees that are on the mounds. However, staff continues to experience concerning safety issues due to the inability to grow grass on the mounds and the resulting erosion of mud into the dugouts, onto the sidewalks, and onto the trail causing a mess and a slippery path.

Mr. Brown presented a map and photos of the mound locations at Snouffer Road Park. He began with background information of the original construction of the mounds and now current problems with the trees located on those mounds. He described how the roots are exposed because the surrounding dirt is washing away and no turf has been able to grow in that dirt. Mr. Brown pointed out which trees could stay and which needed to be removed on the map. He proposed the plan to remove the specified trees, grade down the mounds and then finish by planting new trees. He advised that the Arbor Committee would weigh in, but he would recommend replanting a fruitless hackberry, tulip poplars for fast shade, or a maple of some variety. Mr. Hurley understands the concerns of the community about losing the shade of these trees and proposed a proactive approach including information on the city's website, outreach prior to the spring baseball season through Worthington Youth Boosters, and ensuring staff all understand the full reasoning for the project. Mr. Burpee volunteered he would coordinate the communication with Worthington Youth Booster coaches and parents. Mr. Brown reviewed that the ash trees located in the center island of the parking lot will also be removed due to varying degrees of emerald ash borer damage. Replanting in the center island would not take place until a location is determined for a possible Community Garden relocation. Mr. Brown also spoke of his plans to remove honeysuckle from the wooded area on the property and hopefully increase the mow line. Mr. Burpee motioned to approve the proposed plan for the removal of the mounds at Snouffer Road Park, Mr. Wendling seconded, and all other members agreed.

Godown Dog Park Parking Expansion Update – Mr. Hurley stated that work was underway at the Godown Dog Park to expand the parking lot. This project was initiated by Worthington Organized Off-Leash Friends (WOOF) providing \$30,087 as they ended their organization and donated that money to the parking lot expansion. Mr. Hurley displayed drawings of the new parking lot design. Worthington worked with Columbus and initially planned to split the remaining costs up to \$45,000. As planning began Columbus approached Worthington about exchanging Worthington's share of the capital costs for this project in exchange for adding to Worthington's years of taking care of maintenance. Mr. Hurley described that the city felt that was a good scenario and intends to redo the lease agreement and add years on in exchange for our share of the construction costs once the project is completed. Bids for the project came in at a total of \$208,585. The expansion will add 33 spaces to the existing capacity of 48 parking spaces. Strawser Paving was awarded the contract and work is expected to be completed by the end of the year. Staff do not anticipate having to close the park for any excessive period of time.

Other – Ms. Miller received a turf complaint from Godown Dog Park. She inquired if there was a way to shut down half of the park to let the turf grow back and then rotate. Mr. Brown replied that his crew has tried a few things over the years to improve turf conditions but nothing takes due to the heavy usage and the fact we do not close the park in adverse conditions like rain or snow. Mr. Hurley described how the park is so popular and well used that it could be a challenge to reduce the size for even short periods of time and that in his research even if you established nice new turf and opened the park back up the heavy usage and usage in wet conditions would almost immediately destroy it again.

Ms. Miller also reported she noticed new graffiti at the skate park. Mr. Brown said his crew would take care of it. Ms. Miller then reported a large tree had fallen in an open field in the parklands. Mr. Brown was aware of it but was waiting until the ground dried out or for the first hard freeze to get equipment back there to take care of it. He hoped the weather would allow that to happen in the next week.

Mr. Armitage described an issue he had recently had in the south parking lot of the Community Center. He stated the traffic pattern is such that exiting cars from the main parking lot to the South

entrance can easily collide with oncoming traffic turning left into the south parking lot in that area. He recommended evaluating that portion of the lot and possibly adding a stop sign.

Mr. Armitage inquired about the schedule for the All Children's Playground doors at the Community Center and whether they would be locked due to darkness before closing in the evenings. Mr. Hurley indicated he would review.

Being no further business, the motion for the meeting to adjourn was granted.