

**Parks Consensus Meeting**  
**6:30 – 8:30 p.m. Monday, April 27, 2009**  
**Oshkosh Public Library**

League approved a study to update the local Parks and Recreation position at the 2007 and 2008 annual meetings. A parks committee was formed to review the position. The committee visited and evaluated all city and area parks, researched various issues, hosted two Food for Thought lunch programs with the city arborist and the city's storm water utility engineer, and met with local planning and park staff. Following is a summary of our findings. Please review the information and come to the meeting prepared to update the position for adoption at the annual meeting.

**Consensus Questions**

The consensus is divided into two sections.

**Part I. Existing Position.** Review each statement of the existing position. Should the statement (1) remain as is (2) be revised, or (3) be eliminated?

**Part II. New Issues.** These topics are partially or not covered by our existing position. Review each statement. (1) Do you agree with it? (2) Are there other issues to be addressed?

**Existing Parks and Recreation Position\***

The Oshkosh Area League of Women Voters supports adequate park and recreational facilities to meet local and areawide needs.

- A. Promote provisions for parks wherever new areas are subdivided.
- B. Encourage alternate methods of financing park acquisition.
- C. Support protection of park areas from encroachment.
- D. Support acquisition of new park land; emphasis on preserving and restoring natural features of acquired and existing parks; implementation of the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.
- E. Encourage inclusion of hiking and biking trails in parks; development of a recreational trail plan.
- F. Support continuation of the Parks Advisory Board.
- G. Encourage development of marine facilities to accommodate many types of craft.

**New Issues**

- 1. Support adequate funding for park maintenance, improvements and acquisition.
- 2. Promote cooperative park-related activities among the city, school district, county and towns and encourage regional facilities and town parks where feasible.
- 3. Ensure environmentally sound maintenance and management practices.
- 4. Support an aggressive urban reforestation program.
- 5. Maintain attractive and clear signage where appropriate.
- 6. Support a comprehensive events policy that considers neighborhood needs.
- 7. Support equitable distribution and maintenance of facilities in all parks.
- 8. Ensure availability of adequate information about park and recreation facilities.
- 9. Support timely updating and implementation of the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.
- 10. Support interdepartmental cooperative planning between Parks, Community Development and Public Works where their missions overlap (e.g. tree planting, parks acquisition, storm water pollution reduction, etc.)
- 11. Promote public access to the waterfront wherever possible.

\*Note: The committee is recommending combining or expanding several of the topics in the original position. These changes are noted in the supporting information.

## **Part I: Existing Position**

### **A. Promote provisions for parks wherever new areas are subdivided.**

*(recommended: combine A & D, and separate “implementation of the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan” as an additional item).* **Support acquisition of new park land within the city and promote provisions for parks wherever new areas are subdivided. Put an emphasis on preserving and restoring natural features of acquired and existing parks.**

No new parks have been created since the Leach Amphitheater and Pollock Water Park. Both of these were made possible by large grants from local citizens. The Parks Department notes it “hasn’t done a thing” in regard to new parks because of “our [financial] position.”

To acquire park land, the Community Development Dept negotiates either park land dedication or fees in lieu of land. When appropriate, land can be dedicated using a formula in the Parks Plan. The city can ask for up to 1100 sq ft per single family unit and 900 sq ft per attached multi-family unit. Where land dedication is not appropriate, the current fee structure is \$400 per single family home and \$330 per multi-family unit. Currently there is about \$250,000 in the park land fund. These funds must be used within 10 years and specifically for parks. Most cities use the payment in lieu of land dedication approach rather than the impact fee approach; it is easier to gain a developer’s cooperation. Darryn Burich, city Director of Planning, says the city does not use the impact fee process because it requires a thorough study and has more stringent conditions. The Town of Algoma uses the impact fee process with a fee of approximately \$825 per single family lot.

It should be noted that in 2006-07 fees in lieu of land dedication were not collected because of a state law, and prior to that the city never collected such fees on multi-family buildings. This fee structure varies from community to community. Old information about other cities is found in the Parks Plan Table 4-1.

Community Development works with the Parks Department to design and construct a park in newly developed areas. This will occur in the Lesnick Farm development west of Highway 41 and north of Highway 45. The Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan has designated areas where it is desirable to create parks. Roughly these areas are on North Westhaven Drive north of Witzel and south of Highway 21; along the Lake Winnebago shoreline south of 20<sup>th</sup> street; west of Highway 41 south of Highway 44; east of Highway 41 south of 20<sup>th</sup> street; and along the lake shore of Lake Winnebago north of the city, east of the Canadian National Line tracks. New parks and park areas on the “radar screen” would be the Riverwalk area, that portion of the Wiouwash Trail that falls within the city limits after the renovation of Highway 41.

### **B. Encourage alternate methods of financing park acquisition.**

*(recommended: reword as No.1 under New Issues)* **Support adequate funding for park maintenance, improvements and acquisition.**

Oshkosh park acquisition is generally funded through land dedication or fees in lieu of land at the time a subdivision is platted, or with grants. The Community Development Department spearheads this process with some input from the Parks Department. Once the land is platted, it is up to the Parks Department to obtain funding for improvements. Evidently other cities also assess fees in lieu of land or impact fees to help with park acquisition and improvements, allegedly some as much as \$1500-\$2500 per lot. No current comparison is available. Our fees may be low. Grants may also be used, as in the case of the Sawyer Creek Trail adjacent to Carl Traeger School. However, grants require matching funds. The Waterways Commission funded a 50% matching grant for floating docks adjacent to the Leach Amphitheater; this project is on hold.

Capital Improvement Projects for Parks have averaged \$436,900 over the last five years (2005-2009), supplemented by \$140,000 in outside funds (\$100,000 for Amphitheater storage building, \$40,000 to renovate the skate park) plus \$675,000 from the city's general fund to build Leach Amphitheater restrooms. Capital improvements are funded by issuing municipal bonds or notes.

Parks operating expenditures have remained at approximately \$1.4 million since 2005. Significant private donations have funded major improvements at the zoo and eliminated zoo entrance fees. Major private donors also funded the new Pollock Water Park and the Leach Amphitheater.

**C. Support protection of park areas from encroachment.**

Encroachment on park land has not been an issue in this area. If anything, it has been the reverse: the city sometimes attempts to encroach on private recreational lands (e.g. Westhaven retention ponds.) Several months ago, a private development in the highway 21/41 area proposed infringement on the edge of Lakeshore Golf Course, but no development occurred, possibly because of upcoming reconstruction of Highway 41. Recently WisDOT negotiated for some golf course land for the highway 21/41 interchange. The city will be compensated for the land exchange.

Encroachment is always a possibility, however. A few years ago Fond du Lac faced a controversial situation involving proposed private marina and museum construction in Lakeside Park. Citizen protests stopped development.

**D. Support acquisition of new park land; emphasis on preserving and restoring natural features of acquired and existing parks; implementation of the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.**

*(see A above)*

**E. Encourage inclusion of hiking and biking trails in parks; development of a recreational trail plan.**

The Parks Department offers a one page handout classifying the following as trails:

- Abbey Park, Westhaven Drive... bark trail
- Glatz Nature Preserve (Doty and South Main)... bark trail
- Menominee Park.. asphalt trail
- North High Park... bark trail
- Roe Park, Washington Ave... asphalt trail
- Sawyer Creek Nature Preserve-Rusch Park... asphalt trail
- Shapiro/UWO owned... asphalt trail
- South Park... asphalt trail
- Carl Steiger... asphalt trail
- Willian Steiger... asphalt trail
- Stevens Park... asphalt trail

A portion of the Wiouwash Trail is also within the city. The Wiouwash Trail currently extends across four counties. The configuration and future plans for this trail and the Mascoutin Valley Trail can be found on Winnebago County's park web site. While there is no comprehensive trail plan for the city, the city has a plan for the Riverwalk and is hiring a consultant to update the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

The Parks Department currently displays no maps, brochures or detailed information about its trails. The YMCA has a flyer showing the principal trails, but it is not on display and had to be hunted up when

asked. An attractive full color brochure was published by WINGS (Winnebago County Geographic System Project) in 2006, but few copies were distributed and it would be costly to reprint.

#### **F. Support continuation of the Park Advisory Board**

Established in 1977, the Park Advisory Board meets the second Monday of the month at 6:00 PM in Room 404 of City Hall. It has eight members who applied for membership and were appointed by the mayor for two year terms; the terms are staggered. One member of the City Council is appointed by the mayor to this board. Currently that member is Dennis McHugh. Most members have been on the board for years. Three recent appointments were made due to the death of one member and the departure from the city of two others.

Since its inception, board members have primarily been interested in sport and recreation uses at the parks. It is not clear if there is representation reflecting the major role parks play in preserving green space and providing environmental benefits. Members with environmental backgrounds would be helpful in dealing with parks fronting lakes, rivers and creeks; tree planting; cemetery care; etc. A balance between members interested in sports/recreation and members interested in environmental, sustainable practices might offer more comprehensive recommendations.

The Board recommends items for approval by the City Council. Most of these items arise from the Park Department itself although the Board may recommend an item that it has developed. Citizens interested in having an item on the Parks Advisory Board meeting agenda, may do so by contacting the Park Director or offering a statement during the public comment portion of the meeting.

#### **G. Encourage development of marine facilities to accommodate many types of craft.**

The City of Oshkosh has four large boat launch facilities at Rainbow Park, Fugleberg Park and 24<sup>th</sup> Ave. boat launch along S. Main St., and Menominee Park. There is also a small boat launch facility at Steiger Park adjacent to FVTC on the Fox River and at the Mill St. boat launch on Lake Winnebago. Sailboat mooring and docks restricted to sailboats are offered in Millers Bay. Larger sailboats need to use private marinas. Oshkosh boating facilities are very popular and have a good reputation, according to Tom.

The boat launch fee has raised about \$471,000 (approx. \$60,000 per year) since its inception in 2002. This money has been used for improvements to launch sites, docks, and boat related activities, and for operational expenses such as the ranger who enforces the rules. The fee is lower than other municipalities; Oshkosh charges \$3 daily while the average is \$5.

The city is considering adding new launch ramps at Fugleberg Park and on the north side of Rainbow Park in response to high demand. Longer range plans call for boat launch improvements in the south shore redevelopment area at the end of Michigan St. on the Fox River. Transient docking is available up to 48 hours at Rainbow Park, Riverside Park, and Millers Bay per ordinance. Weed control has been practiced in Millers Bay but other launch sites may also need it. No dredging is needed at this time.

The county maintains seven boat launch sites. All but one (Eureka) have toilet facilities. Some have picnic areas. A boat launch permit is required, with daily fees posted at \$5. The county spends about \$45,000 annually from these fees to maintain the landings. The county also spends \$85,000 annually to place and maintain 121 lit and unlit buoys as navigational aids. In addition, the Sheriff's Department appropriates approximately \$32,000, along with state grants, towards operating its boat patrol.

## **Part II: New Issues**

### **1. Support adequate funding for park maintenance, improvements and acquisition.** *(see B above.)*

### **2. Promote cooperative park-related activities among the city, school district, county and towns and encourage regional facilities and town parks where feasible.**

The Parks Department concentrates on city facilities. While there is some cooperation with the school district relating to recreational activities, for the most part each entity maintains its own facilities. The city has little, if any, interaction with the towns or the county. The county park is located in the city but owned and maintained by the county. It is considered a regional park for the area, with 275 acres. Facilities include shelters, fields for various sports, a dog park and swimming beach. Fees are collected for various activities.

Winnebago County also maintains a second community park in Winneconne: Lake Winneconne Park, 28 acres on the lake with swimming, fishing, picnic and restroom facilities and a boat launch. It also manages four preservation nature areas, three with some amenities and one undeveloped, 269 acres in all. The county also maintains 21.5 miles of recreation trails as part of the multicounty Wiouwash Trail and tri-county Mascoutin Valley Trail. In addition, the county maintains 7 boat launches on the Winnebago system.

The towns immediately adjacent to Oshkosh include some county facilities, with the Town of Algoma the only town with its own personal investment in parks and a park plan. These consist of two small play lots, one at the Town Hall which is adjacent to a wooded area with grounds for an annual community picnic. Algoma also has 34 acres of undeveloped marsh and contributed both land and financial support to the Sheldon Nature Preserve managed by the school district. The Old Omro Road bike-hike lanes are scheduled to be connected to the Wiouwash Trail. Minor easements to connect future trails are in place. There are two small access points to the lake, neither of which has parking.. Algoma funds its park system thru an impact fee of \$825 payable by all new residences before occupancy and with property taxes.

The Town of Algoma has a comprehensive plan which shows considerable trail and green space areas. It also has an up to date park ordinance and has considerable funds for parks. What it doesn't have is the will on the part of the Town Board for park development, nor, at the present time, any real park enthusiasts. A further barrier is Highway 21 which cuts the community in half. The Park Advisory Committee has recently hired a planner to inventory town owned land and possible areas for parks, and to submit ideas for crossing the highway.

The towns of Oshkosh, Black Wolf, Nekimi and Algoma are covered by state law mandating extraterritorial planning authority by the City of Oshkosh. The Town of Algoma and the City of Oshkosh have entered into a boundary agreement. The city has the ability to plan in the area of Algoma designated for annexation, opening up the potential for a regional park on the west side. Other towns are working with the city to develop similar boundary agreements

### **3. Ensure environmentally sound maintenance and management practices.**

Except for the golf course, the Parks Department no longer sprays chemicals in the city's parks. The Parks Department now appears to be more sensitive to environmentally sound park management practices. The immediate impetus for instituting these practices may be economic. For example, fertilizer is no longer used. Biodegradable herbicides are used only in spot situations—around trees or to get rid of noxious weeds. Mowing extends only to where the riding mower can reach; for our waterfront parks, that translates into a more natural looking waterfront. The creeks throughout the city are left in their natural state. Cost savings projects for energy conservation are also on the drawing board: insulating buildings, a

review of park lighting, converting to automatic on-and-off lights in restrooms open 24/7, installing sensor systems timed to lock and unlock doors, and elimination of automatic flushing in men's restrooms.

In addition to cost savings, state and federal regulations may provide an impetus for environmental improvements. The city is under urban requirements to reduce polluted run-off. Oshkosh solutions have been mainly construction of retention ponds and catch basins through the Stormwater Utility. Public Works and the Stormwater Utility apparently are proceeding with stormwater management planning with little or no input from the Parks Dept., although Parks is charged for its impervious surfaces. Opportunities exist to incorporate rain gardens, shoreline buffers, fewer mowed areas, native prairie plantings, increased native tree and shrub planting and fewer hard surfaces for parking and play areas. These ideas are on the radar screen. A rain garden may be incorporated in the South Park parking lot and in the new parking lot proposed for the 400 block on Main Street. A consultant's plan for Millers Bay proposes enhancing the shoreline with native shrubs and trees. The same plan proposes purchase of a weed harvester to control weeds around the boat launches, rather than continued chemical treatment in the water.

The city has recently responded positively to two environmental issues in parks. To address citizen concern, the city has negotiated with UWO to test water quality regularly at the beach in Menominee Park during swimming season for no cost. Citizens also protested the proposed construction of piers at Riverside Park because of unstable and polluted sediments in that part of the river. The project has been stopped while conversations with various regulating agencies continue.

#### **4. Support an aggressive urban reforestation program.**

The city arborist, Bill Sturm, with a crew of four, is caretaker of all trees in parks, terraces and city property in Oshkosh. His research indicates Oshkosh has the fewest trees citywide compared to several other cities our size. Oshkosh is estimated to have 10,000, Fond du Lac 20,000, Appleton 40,000-60,000, and Eau Claire 75,000. Oshkosh's budget for tree planting is also considerably smaller than neighboring cities--\$3,000 compared to about \$20,000 for Fond du Lac and \$50,000 for Appleton.

The city planted about 250 trees last year. Many were privately funded through the Memorial Tree and ReLeaf Oshkosh programs. A popular site for memorial trees is the northern section of Miller's Bay. ReLeaf Oshkosh also uses private donations to plant terrace trees. About 3,000 trees are currently located on terraces. The city is in the process of surveying its trees and so far has entered 7500 in its GIS system. When completed, this survey will help target areas where trees need to be planted and improve eligibility for state grants. As a source for future trees, the city has established a tree nursery on the north end of Riverside Cemetery.

The city recently passed an ordinance requiring tree planting on terraces in all new subdivisions. Other policies about tree planting and replacement are at the city arborist's discretion. When trees are about to be destroyed because of sewer or other development in public areas, the arborist works with the project director to save what large trees he can and develops a plan for replanting. Efforts are also made to replace trees lost in storms, although we had a major set back in the storm of June, 2001. For trees on private land, the arborist can act if the tree falls on or is a danger to the right of way. The arborist also will respond to private inquiries about tree problems.

Increased community interest in beautification, stormwater reduction, and climate change is expected to gain support for more tree planting. The Rotary Club, Progress Oshkosh, the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation and the Sustainable Oshkosh Advisory Board already are working to help the city maintain its status as a "Tree City" In addition, Oshkosh is currently undergoing a four-month community visioning process. The consultant, in all seriousness, said we should plant a million trees. Areas suggested for massive plantings are the state and county highway corridors, terraces, parks, the landfill and downtown.

## **5. Maintain attractive and clear signage where appropriate.**

Some parks currently have no identification signs. The Parks Department has removed what it considers “tacky” signs and is in the process of redoing them. Eventually they will redo all identification signs for a consistent look. Department personnel construct signs during slow times at a cost of about \$300-400 each. Parks also display instructional metal signs where needed. For example, all boat launches have warnings about the spread of VHS, an invasive virus that could devastate fish. A few signs mark historical events; more of these, especially along the Riverwalk would enhance the area. Lacking also is descriptive signage referencing when a park was founded, how it got its name, etc.

## **6. Support a comprehensive events policy that considers neighborhood needs.**

Many cities in Wisconsin about the size of Oshkosh have special events policies in place or are currently working on completing such policies. Appleton, Janesville and Waukesha have special events policies and Madison has a very detailed one just for parks. Oshkosh city attorney Lynn Lorensen said city department heads (including the Parks Department) are now working on a general special events policy anticipated to be finished by the end of 2009.

Oshkosh hosts a wide range of special events that make use of city property and resources. Without a special events policy, permission for events is currently given by the city council on an individual basis. Events are required to have proper insurance, food vending and liquor licenses, and to comply with city ordinances on the serving of liquor and noise restrictions.

At this time, no public notice is given nor input sought on the type or number of special events. Also not addressed is the cost to the city of services such as police, park workers, and sanitation. Without a proactive policy, parking, traffic, and emergency situations accompanying special events are not anticipated with plans and there are no limits on attendance numbers or frequency of events scheduled.

## **7. Support equitable treatment and maintenance of existing facilities of all parks.**

The parks system consists of 324.3 acres of mini, neighborhood, community, regional, special purpose, and open space parks. Park facilities include playground equipment, playing fields, recreational trails, picnic areas, shelters, boat launch facilities, open space areas, concessions, beaches, and a roller hockey rink. We have a state of the art aquatic facility, amphitheatre, and skate park.

The committee reviewed information in the 2003 Outdoor Recreation Comprehensive Plan and visited each park, assessing it on a number of factors. After pooling specific recommendations for each park, we concluded the following:

- Parks are generally clean and well-maintained.
- Most are family oriented.
- Playground equipment appeared to be safe; some is new.
- Signage is lacking in some parks or needed additional information
- Restroom facilities are well-maintained but lack environmental features, e.g., automatic lighting systems. Although recommended in the plan, no new restrooms have been built.
- Splash pad and skateboard facilities are lacking on the east and north sides
- Few small trees or bushes are evident
- Waterfront areas lack vegetative buffers
- Walking trails/sidewalks along the river are in poor condition
- The riverfront lacks observation decks
- Quarry Park’s methane problem limits its usefulness as a park
- Many of the recommended facility improvements in the Outdoor Recreation Plan had not been implemented.

**8. Ensure availability of adequate information about park and recreation facilities.**

Winnebago County distributes a very nice small booklet describing its parks and boat launches. Its Web site also provides information about park facilities. The city has nothing similar. If asked for information about parks, it offers a one page sheet from the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan with a matrix indicating what facilities are found where. While the Web site shows required fees, it has little descriptive information about city parks, although it has recently launched a separate Web site for the Leach Amphitheatre which is top notch. The Parks Department also distributes no literature showing the public trail system. We tracked down a brochure from 2006 showing trails in six parks, including Menominee Park, South Park and North High. The city and county were noted as joint publishers. The Parks Department was not familiar with it. The Y also distributes a trail map, but it is not readily available. Our committee had to compile its own list of swimming facilities. We have collected considerable information about all the parks and are exploring options about making it available to the public.

**9. Support timely updating and implementation of the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.**

The current plan (2003) was to be updated in 2008. Clearly this did not happen. Data in the plan is used for procuring grant money for park projects; therefore, an up to date and statistically correct plan is necessary. Citizens should be encouraged to participate in discussion updating the plan.

**10. Support inter-departmental cooperative planning between Parks, Community Development, and Public Works departments where their missions overlap (i.e. tree planting, parks acquisition, storm water pollution reduction plans, etc).**

The Community Development Department takes primary responsibility for negotiating parkland dedication or payment in lieu of land dedication at the time new subdivisions or certified survey maps creating land divisions are approved. The Parks Dept is consulted but does not appear to take an active role. The Parks Dept becomes responsible for any improvements on the park land when the subdivision is developed.

The Public Works Dept and Storm Water Utility are responsible for building and maintaining storm water detention/retention facilities, including landscaping with appropriate plant materials. The Parks Dept horticulturist/arborist is apparently not consulted. Parks Dept is assessed by the Storm Water Utility for impervious surfaces within the parks system, but there seems to be little or no cooperative planning to utilize the parks to assist with storm water pollution reduction. Public Works street construction projects may result in removal of terrace trees; replacement trees are not required.

There has been no communication for several years between the Town of Algoma and the city for long range parks planning. We are not aware of on-going discussions between the County Parks Department and the City Parks Department.

**11. Promote public access to the waterfront wherever possible.**

With the large amount of city waterfront redevelopment now going on, numerous opportunities are available to restore public access to what was once closed because of the type of development. While the Riverwalk affords areas for park creation and the Pioneer site now will retain public access, other areas may be closed off depending on the type of development. Retail, restaurants, marinas, hotels and other types of private development open to the public allow continued access to the riverfront, and serve as public open space. Opportunities also exist for additional recreational and educational activities in waterfront parks. A proposed Lakes Education Center sited in Riverside Park, promoted by the Winnebago Lakes Council and supported by the city's Parks and Community Development departments, the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation and the Convention and Visitors Bureau might offer an

aquarium, water taxi, café and other water-related activities. With community support and private dollars, this is just one type of proposal that could take advantage of waterfront access. In other waterfront parks on the river and lakes, observation decks and possible fishing areas offer potential for increased public use.

**Parks Committee**

Jan Scalpone, *Chair*

Tina Haffeman

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