



Pioneers Park Bridle Paths Action Plan

Discussion Draft: January 10, 2018

Background

Pioneers Park was established through a gift of 600 acres of land from Mr. and Mrs. John Harris. The donor requested that the land be named Pioneers Park in honor his parents, Mr. and Mrs. George Harris, and other pioneers. The park was dedicated in 1930. Landscape architect Ernst Herminghaus developed the master plan that guided development of Pioneers Park, including the signature view corridors to the Nebraska State Capitol. A system of recreational paths was included in the original master plan. A portion of these paths have been designated as bridal paths for equestrian use. Review of historic records indicates that portions of the bridle paths have been lost to development of additional facilities in the park, in particular the Pioneers Park Nature Center.

Pioneers Park was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993.

Community Engagement

Community meeting

A community meeting was held in the picnic area at Pioneers Park on July 25, 2017. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss: a) concerns regarding the condition of the bridle path and related maintenance practices, b) bridle path signage, c) communication of information regarding large events occurring in the park that limit access to the bridle path, and d) opportunities for extension of the bridle path.

Community Survey

An electronic survey was distributed to participants of the July 25 meeting with encouragement that the survey be shared with others who may use or have an interest in the bridle paths in Pioneers Park.

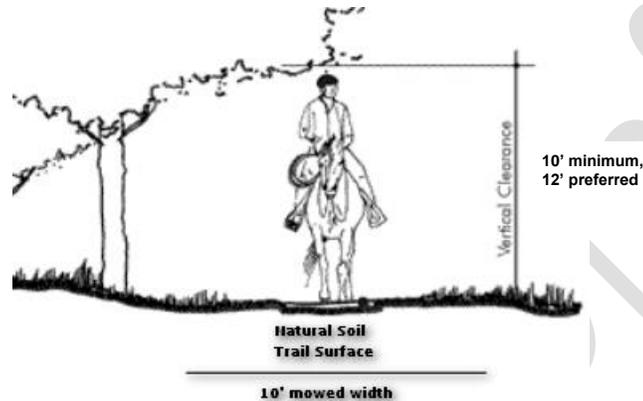
Responses were received from 34 people, and are summarized as follows:

- 47% stable their horse or live on an acreage with access to Pioneers Park.
- 59% of respondents indicated that they trailer their horse to ride on the bridle paths in Pioneers Park. 86% of those who trailer their horses to the park find access and parking for their vehicle and horse trailer to be inadequate.
- 71% report engaging in horseback trail riding weekly. 44% reported riding at Pioneers Park weekly, and 29% indicated that they ride in the park a few times a year. 6% of respondents said that they don't ride in Pioneers Park.
- All respondents indicated that they would ride more in Pioneers Park if additional areas are added to the bridle path.
- 69% indicated that they feel that the current bridle path signage is inadequate. 73% indicated that they would consider donating to development of new bridle path signage, and 64% reported that they would consider volunteering to assist in installing new signage.
- 91% reports that they are very likely or somewhat likely to visit the Parks and Recreation Department website to review the schedule for large events in Pioneers Park in preparation for horseback riding in the park.

Action Plan

Maintenance

The bridle paths in Pioneers Park are single-tread trails identified for equestrian use. The trail surface is natural soil, and the paths follow the topography of the land. The bridle path corridor is mowed vegetation. Trees are generally maintained to a minimum clearance of 10 feet, with 12 feet of vertical clearance preferred. There may be occasional temporary blockages of the pathway, with temporary routes defined and signed until the blockages can be removed. Signage is provided to assist users in identifying and following the path routes.



Bridle paths will be mowed monthly during the growing season, generally April through October. Sloping sections of the trail that are subject to erosion will be graded twice annually to maintain the surface. Clearing fallen or broken trees that block the bridle path will be given priority. A temporary route around a fallen or broken tree may be mowed to maintain continuity of the bridle path. Temporary signage will be placed at both ends of the temporary route to provide guidance to equestrians. Temporary signage will not include plastic flagging tape or anything that may move in the breeze and spook horses.

Signage

Permanent signage will be upgraded over time. New signage standards will be developed with guidance from the equestrian community. Signage should be placed at an appropriate height to make it easily visible for horseback riders. Signage will be two-sided. It is anticipated that new signage will be funded, installed and maintained through a partnership with the equestrian community. Examples of this partnership include private matching funds for purchase of signage and posts, and volunteer assistance in installation and maintenance of the signs.

Temporary signage may be placed to limit access to sections of the bridle path during special events, or to designate temporary routes in response to temporary blockages.

Webpage

The Parks and Recreation Department will establish a webpage on its website for the bridle paths in Pioneers Park and the equestrian trails in Wilderness Park. The webpage will include maps of the equestrian facilities, locations of trailheads, parking lots where vehicles and horse trailers can be parked, and hours that the equestrian facilities are open to public use. Information regarding temporary closure of equestrian facilities due to impassible conditions will be posted on the webpage. Efforts will be made

to maintain a calendar through quarterly updates on the webpage for large events in Pioneers Park that may restrict access to the bridle path.

Horse trailer parking

The existing parking lot located northwest of the bison statue circle at the east entrance to Pioneers Park has previously been designated as parking for vehicles with horse trailers. This parking lot is close to and provides access to the east leg of the bridle path in Pioneers Park. It is anticipated that this parking will continue to serve this function. Signage will be placed at the access drive indicating that the parking lot is a suitable location for parking vehicles with horse trailers. The parking lot is approximately 85 feet in width and 180 feet in length. This width should accommodate passenger vehicle parking along the west side of the parking area, a 50 foot turning radius to allow for maneuvering of a pick-up truck and tag-along horse trailer, and parking for two or three trucks and horse trailers along east side of the parking area. There is the possibility of extending the parking lot to the east if additional parking is needed for trucks and horse trailers.

Near Term Bridle Path Modifications

The bridle path in Pioneers Park will be modified and extended as follows:

- Two new crossings of the roadway between the picnic area and the nature center, including appropriate signage and roadway markings, will be established providing access to a reestablished path through the “cottonwood lane” north of Haines Branch. The roadway crossings will be monitored during a twelve month period following establishment of this new bridle path segment to assess any emerging safety concerns.
This is identified as the first priority with a goal of opening this section by April 2018.
- The path will be reestablished through the prairie meadow west of the sled run. Posts with signage will be used to delineate this new path through the prairie meadow.
This is identified as the second priority with a goal of reestablishment of this path by July 2018.
- A new path will be established in the long grass meadow northeast of the Columns Pond. Gates will be placed at the access points to this new from the primary bridle path to allow this area to be closed during the cross-country season of mid-August through October each year. *This is identified as the third priority with the goal of opening this new path by April 2019.*
- The former path along the eastern boundary of Pioneers Golf Course will be abandoned.
This former path will be closed upon adoption of this action plan.

Please refer to Attachment A.

Future Opportunities for Extension of the Bridle Path

There was discussion during the community meeting on July 25, 2017 regarding the possibility of extending the bridle path across Coddington Avenue near the east entrance of Pioneers Park to Bison Park. While there was interest by some in extension of the bridle path into Bison Park, there was opposition to this proposal due to safety concerns of equestrians crossing Coddington Avenue.

There may be an opportunity to extend the bridle path in Pioneers Park along the southern and western boundaries of Pioneers Golf Course in the future. The equestrian community and patrons of the Pioneers Park Nature Center should be engaged in planning for the potential extension of the bridle path in Pioneers Park. This new bridle path would need to be carefully interfaced with the master plan for the nature center. It is likely that fencing will be needed along a portion of the route to separate the path from native prairie areas in the Pioneers Park Nature Center. A funding strategy will need to be

developed for planning, engineering drainage crossings, and construction of path infrastructure if the decision is made to move forward with this new extension of the bridle path.

Volunteer program

The Parks and Recreation Department will organize occasional volunteer activities for special projects such as installation of trail signage, and routine projects such as trail and vegetation maintenance. The Department will maintain a list of interested volunteers and contact information to assist in planning and implementing projects involving volunteers.

Ongoing review

This action plan is intended to serve as the foundation for some initial improvements to the bridle path in Pioneers Park. It will be revised and updated in response to emergent opportunities and challenges in the future.

Discussion Draft



Pioneers Park Bridle Path Priority Phases