

Wilderness Park Strategic Planning
and Community Advisory Committee
Minutes

February 22, 2017, 3:00-5:00 p.m.
PPNC Conference Room

Present: Andy Campbell, Aaron Druery, Nicole Fleck-Tooze, Matt Gersib, Sara Hartzell, Chris Heinrich, Bob Henrickson, Dan King, Tim Knott, Chris Myers, Rosina Paolini, Dan Schlitt, Dan Schulz, Joeth Zucco

The meeting was called to order at 3:00.

Introductions

Purpose and Expectations

To discuss the needs of Wilderness Park in context of established goals, prioritize projects, identify sources of additional funding, and identify projects appropriate for volunteer assistance.

Sara Hartzell asked everyone present to keep the overall goals in mind and to take the discussions begun here back to everyone's respective stakeholder groups.

Review of Community Survey

706 people participated in the online survey, which is 400 more than a 1999 study of a random sampling conducted by UNL. Results of the two surveys were compared. Key findings include:

- More than 50% listed Wilderness as their favorite park in Lincoln
- Walking was by far the favorite activity of people visiting parks
- 93% found Wilderness Park very valuable to the community
- The most critical challenge facing Wilderness Park was continued urban development
- Over 50% of survey respondents were interested being on a mailing list for possible volunteer opportunities

There were 35 pages of additional comments that survey takers contributed. Sara Hartzell offered to email them to anyone upon request. A suggestion was made to publicize the survey results both through a news release and on the Parks & Rec website.

Summary of 2000 Management Recommendations

Sara Hartzell highlighted the recommendations made after subarea studies in 2000. An ecosystems critique was conducted, as well as studies of ecosystems, land acquisition, hydraulics, transportation, and public opinions.

The overall vision of Wilderness Park was to have it remain in as natural a state as possible. That sparked discussion among the committee. Rosina Paolini pointed out there was some debate in the 1980s and 1990s if Wilderness could be classified as a savannah, which many experts have since determined is unlikely. There are two areas that have a more upland character.

It was also indicated the scope of trees on the prairie has changed because of Dutch elm disease and the impending arrival of the Emerald Ash Borer. South Lincoln was bare prairie when it was founded in the 1860s, but now Lincolniters have come to expect trees at Wilderness Park.

With the prairie vegetation, Dan Schulz also said it is important to recognize there is the possibility of unwanted fire. It may be worth exploring doing management to prevent it.

Review & Discussion of Overall Goals (2003 Edition)

Sara Hartzell introduced the 2003 goals. She reminded the committee the goals here are more scientific in scope, due to the fact it was written more by scientific and government entities rather than speaking to the layperson's user experience or expanding educational opportunities.

The bullet point "Eradicate invasive exotics" brought several comments ranging from cat's claws being found all along trails to leafy spurge being found less often and the rise of garlic mustard and coralberry. Perhaps it would be better to word the bullet point "Eradicate invasive exotics and aggressive native species."

Signage also generated a lot of ideas. While upgrading to fiberglass signs over wooden ones is an improvement, committee members expressed the desire to identify opportunities for proper signage. Signage that is already in place has not been maintained. Cohesive and easy-to-understand signage could better educate all users how traffic flow works on paths and what trail users can do to increase safety for everybody.

There was also discussion of a one-directional trail for cyclists. This would eliminate confusion for hikers and reduce what could be perceived as a lack of courtesy between cyclists and hikers. Matt Gersib indicated many people both ride bikes and hike, and they work well in tandem. Appropriate signage would only increase this harmony. Trails were originally designed to keep hikers, bikers, and equestrians separated as much as possible. Combining user types on trails could lead to conflicts and safety issues. Some user types also impact trails in ways that may reduce the experience for other user types, for example, bicycle tires create ruts with two constant points of contact on alluvial soils.

Situations could arise where stranded trail users cannot describe where they are so emergency personnel can reach them, but Chris Myers indicated most people have

smartphones with GPS capabilities that would allow first responders to find them efficiently.

A desire was also expressed to identify, evaluate, and prioritize the need for bridges. There used to be eight, but how many is sufficient for 2017 and beyond?

Summary of Upcoming Projects Which May Affect Wilderness Park

Sarah Hartzell reported on upcoming projects that affect Wilderness Park and its environs:

1. A wastewater main being laid on the north side of Old Cheney
2. Grade and bank stabilization – planned for 2018
3. County bridge repairs to Old Cheney and Pioneers Bridges
4. Highway 77 improvements – planned after 2020. This could include closing Old Cheney off at 1st Street.

Dan Schlitt asked about the proposed South Beltway. Should Wilderness be extended along Salt Creek? Once development happens around the beltway, that could increase the risk of flooding along the creek. Sara Hartzell reported easements have been built into place with conservation in mind as the beltway project continues to take shape.

Issue Identification Exercise

Sara Hartzell asked all committee members to take teal sticky notes to indicate their favorite spots in Wilderness Park, yellow ones for spots they have questions about and red ones for the areas they worry about. Committee members wrote their comments and affixed the sticky notes to a map of Wilderness.

The meeting adjourned at 5:05.

Next meetings:

- Trails & Facilities – March 8, 3:00 p.m.
- Ecosystem – March 22, 3:00 p.m.