

City of Lansing Parks Board Annual Report December 2015

LANSING RIVER TRAIL

The Lansing River Trail continues to be the most popular feature in our park system and has undergone some big changes in the last several years.

- Ingham County passed a millage for trail maintenance and expansion.
 - With the City of Lansing residents representing 40 percent of the Ingham County population on this millage, the board is emphatic that City concerns be at the forefront of the discussion with how to allocate the dollars.
 - Board members have been speaking to County Commissioners and planning sessions are underway in the form of Ingham County Trails and Parks Regional Network Plan Meetings. Board members will be present at meetings to monitor.
 - The Board wishes to convey in the planning process that there are immediate repair issues of concern, but we also share interest of the other partners in millage in regard to expansion.
- Opened new section of the River Trail by Frances Park and are getting ready to open expansions.

FIVE-YEAR MASTER PLAN

The 2015-2020 City of Lansing Parks and Recreation Master Plan was completed in 2015 and was developed as a guide for the City as it works to fulfill the Department's mission over the next five years. The plan will not only provide guidance, but is necessary to be eligible for grant funding through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

The plan was formulated based on information gathered, analyzed and compiled from the following sources:

1. Input from the citizens of Lansing through:
 - A community survey
 - Six (6) public meetings in conjunction with monthly Park Board meetings
 - Public Meetings
 - Park Board – Draft Review
 - Public Hearings
 - Park Board
 - City Council
 - Data gathered from various Parks Department surveys
2. Collaboration with other City planning efforts including:
 - The City-Wide Master Plan
 - The Non-Motorized Transportation Plan
3. Evaluation of:
 - Demographics

- Natural features
- Parks and Recreation trends

4. Data compiled from previous Recreation Plans and City Policies.

The Master Plan addressed several themes of note, including:

- *Naturalization* - The Master Plan addressed administration's request to explore naturalization in the City. Partnerships were made with Michigan State University to develop plans for naturalized parks and to deepen our understanding of what naturalization actually means. The initiative became a vehicle for hearing from constituents, who voiced their desire for things like more milkweed, tree planting and generally keeping focused on native species. The Board anticipates continuing to partner with the Grounds Department on this initiative and for strategic naturalization to continue throughout the park system where appropriate.
- *Connectivity* - The Master Plan expands the utility of existing park space by making it connected and available to population that doesn't use motor vehicles, thus leveraging our most valuable parks asset, the River Trail.
- *Right Sizing* - As a result of the problems posed by budget shortfalls, the Board undertook a survey of current facilities to ensure that we had the right fit of facilities, population and budget. We know that the City population has changed, both in size and in demographic. We're in tune with these changes, as is seen in the two new soccer facilities, which address the increasing demand for these facilities from international communities. The soccer complexes also garnered presence and participation from non-government entities who are interested in investing in recreation in Lansing, which is crucial to sustainability of facilities. Both the Hope and Beacon soccer fields are booming with players.

CREGO PARK

After almost 20 years, we've completed the clean-up at Crego and brought it back into the system with expanded opportunities as well as handicapped access to water sports. Amenities include a 15-acre lake, ADA canoe/kayak boat launch, fishing dock, stocked lake for recreational fishing and access to the Lansing River Trail.

PROGRAMMING

- 3,651 participants enrolled in 290 classes.
- After school and no school day programs had an attendance of 15,922.
- Teen recreation had an attendance of 3,802.
- Letts Center Senior program had an attendance of 6,082; Schmidt Center program had an attendance of 4,853.
- There were 236 youth teams and 213 adult teams with 3,518 participants in sports programs/leagues.
- Total concert attendance was 7,700.
- Special event attendance (Mayor's Walk, Night Out, Senior Fair, July 4th Parade) was 3,050.

- Summer Kid's Camp had 1,977 youth enrolled over all eight weeks.
- Swim attendance at Moores Park was 5,537 and Hunter Park was 12,805.

There was a growth in enrollment and attendance in the afterschool program and summer camp. We continue at a maximum ratio of participants to staff to correspond with our licensing through the State of Michigan. Kids' camp received good reviews from the online survey. Licensing will continue through the State of Michigan for Kids' Camp.

This fall we are cooperating with the Lansing School District to provide activities on Wednesday mornings at Letts, Gier and Foster Centers for the late start program. This allows parents to drop off their children at 8 a.m. and the busses pick up at the centers to deliver kids to the appropriate schools.

PERSONNEL

The Department successfully retained two full-time positions that were vacated this year and hired new staff for the positions of community center programmer and lifetime sports coordinator. The part-time aquatics position was also filled.

FENNER NATURE CENTER AND POTTER PARK ZOO

Relationships with Fenner Nature Center and Potter Park Zoo represent new types of partnerships for the Board and Department.

- *Fenner Nature Center* - Fenner and the City formed a unique partnership several years ago in response to the changing economy and times. Today, Fenner is the park systems' best example of public/nonprofit collaboration. When the Department suffered cutbacks during the economic downturn, it prepared for the reality of having to make Fenner a passive use park – meaning no educational programming.
 - A group of Fenner friends rallied and contracted with the City to divide the responsibilities, which worked very well and serves today as a model for other facilities.
 - Today, the City handles the maintenance of the parking lots and helps keep the buildings in good repair, where the Conservancy delivers the top-notch programming, education and events and manages the staff.
 - For many urban Lansing students, Fenner is the only place they can come to connect with and learn about the outdoors and natural resources.
 - The Fenner Board reports that they are operating with a positive, healthy budget, meaningful fundraising and programming and a steady roster of personnel after some changes in 2014.
- *Potter Park Zoo* - The zoo is operated in agreement with Ingham County and the relationship is going well. The Board reminds administration of the ongoing responsibility for infrastructure issues as the current owners of the zoo. The most pressing infrastructure need is the emergency exit for the zoo, which goes into a Lansing neighborhood. Maintenance of the emergency exit and replacement with Dakin Street Bridge is underway and construction will begin in 2016.

CONCERNS

- *Forestry Department* - The Board respectfully requests a greater deal of communication from the Forestry Department.
- *Overpopulation of deer* - Parks and gardens throughout the city, particularly in areas around river and Fenner Nature Center are experience high herbivory due to the expanding deer population. Meridian and East Lansing have been very aggressive in combating the issue after identifying deer with Chronic Wasting Disease. The Board recognizes that sometime in the not too distant future the City will have to deal with both CWD and overpopulation as our ecosystem is favorable, and lacks apex predators.

FRIENDS THE LANSING RIVER TRAIL

The Board is pleased at the formation of the Friends of the Lansing River Trail, a countywide organization that shares many of our concerns. They've been great partners in both millages and we're looking forward to working with them in the future.

The notion of friends groups for parks and natural features is growing in popularity in the region, something the Board is excited about. Friends groups assist with planning, operation and new programming for smaller parks and system features, allowing the Department to maximize relationships and reach.

LANSING PARK MILLAGE

In August 69 percent of the city supported the Lansing Parks Millage. This is an indication of overall and continued public support of the Department's approach and management.

The Board wishes to thank the Mayor's Office for bringing our board close to full quorum. The 2014-2015 year brought many new voices to the table as well as much optimism and energy for the future. We look forward to continuing to serve the great asset that is the City of Lansing Parks and Recreation system.

Sincerely,

Rick Kibbey, President

Veronica Gracia-Wing, Vice President