

Park Notes

A newsletter of the Friends of St. Paul and Ramsey County Parks
1621 Beechwood Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota 55116 651- 698-4543
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River Corridor Plan

Saint Paul must provide further protection for the Mississippi River for its Corridor Plan to be approved by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The City must change its plan language to strengthen protection for the bluff face, enhance protections for native vegetation along the river, comply with state laws for development in areas without public sewer, regulate the impacts of navigation related facilities, protect views of and from the river and maintain close contact with the DNR on all development plans requiring a public hearing.

The Saint Paul Planning Commission adopted the recommended DNR amendments at the November meeting and the revised plan will now go to the Council for final adoption.

“We are extremely pleased with the additional protection for the river corridor,” said Friends’ Executive Director Peggy Lynch. “We were deeply concerned about the original plan because it did not provide the level of protection which has been required by the legislature the last twenty years. Without these amendments the river would suffer and Saint Paul might not have been eligible for federal development funds in years to come. With the amendments we will be protecting the river for the next generations.”

Holiday gift trees

Sure, you can wait until next spring to purchase your tree from the Friends, but an even better idea is to give a tree as a holiday gift to a park or as a gift for someone you love.

Gift trees can be purchased for a park in the following communities:

County parks: Anoka, Dakota and Ramsey;

City Parks: All cities in Ramsey County, Apple valley, Bloomington, Brooklyn Park, Champlin, Cottage Grove, Eagan, Mendota Heights, Saint Louis Park and Woodbury.

Since some parks prefer a specific species, select a shade or evergreen on the Holiday Tree Order Form. Trees for parks will be planted next spring by park department employees.

Gift trees for colleagues, friends or loved ones will be available next spring. We will remind you at planting time to come and pick up your tree. Select Northwood Maple, River Birch, Autumn Purple Ash, Black Hills Spruce or Eastern White Pine.

Each gift tree costs \$50.00. We will send an attractive gift card announcing

Celebrate the holidays, commemorate a birth, remember a life, celebrate an important milestone, give to future generations. A tree keeps giving. Not just now but for decades to come.

Friend's vision for the future

commemorative tree gifts or informing recipients that a tree has been purchased for them and will be available next spring.

For additional information call 651-698-4543 or see our web site at www.friendsoftheparks.org.

Bluff protection, tree protection, maintenance of the Mississippi River Bluff and stable park funding are among the key issues Friends' President Theresa Benda emphasized in testimony before the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Commission hearing on the vision for Saint Paul Parks and Recreation in November.

The Commission, as part of its 2002 goal setting process sought input on issues of long-range and city wide importance. The core question, "How can the Division of Parks and Recreation provide the best programs and services during a time of limited resources?" The Friends focused on protecting our natural assets, the bluff, the river and our trees as well as finding ways to protect the Division and the parks from wild swings in funding from year to year.

Bluff protection

The Mississippi River bluffs and other steep wooded slopes are recognized as one of Saint Paul's dominant environmental features. As St. Paul developed, sadly, hills were leveled and valleys were filled. Even today, poor development choices are diminishing these fragile resources. There is currently no system in place that protects this vulnerable terrain and its fragile beauty.

Many bluff areas are publically owned but others are in private ownership. Even public ownership does not translate to bluff protection since only those bluffs inside the Mississippi River Critical Area enjoy special protection.

Early pictures show imposing bluffs rising above the river. Now these natural features are almost invisible because of building, invasion of Buckthorn, or even filling and leveling. A 1887 description of Saint Paul in Harpers Magazine read, "The business part of the town lies on a spacious uneven elevation above the river, surrounded by a semi-circle of bluffs, averaging something like two hundred feet high."

"Early visionaries sought to protect the bluffs and enhance Saint Paul with boulevards to show off their magnificent views. We should build on those early efforts," said Benda.

Tree protection

Flying into the Twin Cities reminds one of just how blessed we are with shading trees. There are stands of old oaks, maples and other natives which should be inventoried. Steps need to be taken to protect their health and long life. The City should assist private land owners in understanding and care of this valuable asset. But even oaks eventually die. While University Avenue has a surprising number of 100 year old oaks there are no five year old oaks. They do not sprout and grow naturally because of mowing and other maintenance. If these and other areas are to remain forested, they will need help. Old stands on public land should be monitored and new growth encouraged.

Tree trimming saves trees and neighborhoods. The devastating winds which flattened trees in Highland Park in 1998 would likely have been less destructive had the tree crowns been trimmed so the wind could blow through them. The dollars saved by lengthening the tree trimming cycle were tens of dollars lost to a man-encouraged 'natural' disaster which will take decades to recover from.

Mississippi Bluffs

Newly planted trees must be watered during the dry times of late July and August. Unless deeply watered, these young trees may die of the drought itself or be so weakened that they later succumb to a harsh winter, pests or disease. The investment in new trees is lost when they are not well cared for until they are well established.

The Friends, in partnership with the City, have used a State Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR) grant to clear 5 miles of river front of exotic invasive vegetation. The canopy is opened up for new growth below. Unless the invasives are kept out until natives have a chance to reestablish themselves, in a decade the Buckthorn will be back and the bluff will be in even worse shape than it was before the project began. The maintenance plan developed as part of the project calls for continued removal of buckthorn, periodic burning of specific areas and treating re-sprouts. The city must budget for this continued maintenance or there will be no way to prevent an environmental relapse.

Stable funding

Parks compete for general fund dollars and competition is stiff. Police and fire command a large chunk of general fund revenues. In a head-to-head fight for funding, parks often lose. Yet the quality of life in St. Paul is tied to quality parks and recreation services.

Vento honored

A cold (make that icy) wind off Lake Phalen did not spoil the celebration as the Burlington Northern Trail was rededicated as the Bruce Vento Regional Trail on October 16. Vento, who represented Saint Paul in the United States Congress for twenty-five years was a strong voice for the environment. Virtually every piece of environmental legislation during the last two decades had Vento finger prints on it. It is only fitting that St. Paul and Ramsey County remember Vento in a way and in a place that would most symbolize his life long concerns.

The new Bruce Vento Regional Trail head is located on the Eastside near where Vento grew up and went to school, where his roots remained throughout life. Marking the trail head is a grove of Kentucky Coffee trees (a native despite the name) and a magnificent boulder with a plaque dedicating the trail and grove in his honor. Trees for the grove were contributed by members of the Friends and the general public.

Vento's family (see cover photo) attended the dedication. The speakers were a virtual who's who of Saint Paul and Ramsey County elected officials, each with a story to share of how their life was touched by Vento, his vision and his work.

Urban Rivers under attack? Maybe

How do state and municipal laws designed to protect rivers affect the central business area of communities along Minnesota rivers? Answering that question is the task of the State Planning Agency under instructions from the 2001 legislature.

Saint Paul could be affected by any recommendations made by the Agency. The Mississippi flows 17 miles through Saint Paul and provides 29 miles of shoreline. It passes through four physically and economically varied subareas: Pig's Eye Flood plain, Central Business district, natural river Valley and Fort Snelling . Saint Paul has more Mississippi River shoreline than any other community along the river.

The Friends will closely monitor the process and will oppose any loosening of protective regulations in the Critical Area, (see June 2001 news letter).

Leasing of park land

The Saint Paul Park Commission approved a draft ordinance to regulate leasing of park lands and facilities in Saint Paul. The new ordinance would plug the gap in current city code which closely regulates the out-right sale of park lands and facilities but allows 30-50 year leases without any public input.

If a park or park facility is to be sold, there must be public hearings, the sale must be at market rates, and income from the sale can only be used for purchase of additional park lands and facilities. Long term leases, some as long as 30 years with two 10 year renewals at \$1.00 per year, avoid these requirements but yet take the facilities out of public use for half a century. The proposed ordinance would require public input before any park facility could be leased.

The City Council will hold a public hearing December 5. For additional information contact 651-698-4543 or check the Friend's website, www.friendsoftheparks.org.

Ramsey County plans newest golf course

The Master Plan for a new golf facility in Maplewood adjacent to the Ramsey County Correctional Facility was approved by the County board with golfers ready to tee off in the summer of 2003.

The 9-hole regulation golf course and state-of-the-art practice facility makes a strong effort to protect the environment and take advantage of all of the unique features of the site, including access to an unending stream of willing workers. The Master plan preserves and enhances all wetland areas. The natural topography and other natural features will provide an interesting, challenging and aesthetically attractive facility.

Low impact turf will be planted on fairways and tee areas and new varieties of bent grass will be used on greens. These grasses require less fertilizer which helps keep costs down while preventing undesirable water pollution. The course will have storm water management ponds and plantings around existing wetlands will help reduce direct runoff.

The correctional facility has an existing nursery program which will supply some of the landscaping materials for the course. That makes it at least a two-fer. Correctional residents are employed in the educational nursery program and by being able to participate in the landscaping process, they will gain even more experience which will transfer to "outside" employment.

The clubhouse will be sited to have a scenic view without detracting from natural areas. It will be about 2,500 square feet and likely built with a red brick base, white shakes and a muted red colored roof.

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**The Friends of Parks & Trails
in Saint Paul & Ramsey County
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**CHANGE SERVICE
REQUESTED**