

ParkNotes

A newsletter of the Friends of St. Paul and Ramsey County Parks
1621 Beechwood Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota 55116 651- 698-4543
V. 23, N 1 www.friendsoftheparks.org February, 2008

Tamarack Nature Center: *Destination for Discovery*



Tree sale 2008

Tamarack Nature Center (TNC), a 320 nature area within Bald Eagle-Otter Lakes Regional Park is poised for a major make-over, a multi-year project called Destination for Discovery.

The re-developed Center is based on the goal of integrating personal exploration of nature with art, play and active investigation. “Huh?” you say? The inspiration for the project lies in the book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* by Richard Louv. After looking at what is being lost in our increasingly urbanized society, TNC will attempt to create opportunities many of us had as children, but few children have today.

Louv reports that there is mounting evidence on the positive effects of playing outdoors and equally strong evidence of the negative consequences of couchpotatodom. Depression, obesity and attention deficit disorder are associated with indoor, sedentary lifestyles. Yet the opportunities for children to wander the prairie or muck about in the woods simply no longer exist for most children. The opportunities to create whole new worlds without the computer, using nothing but imagination and the natural world around them is becoming increasingly unusual.

TNC hopes to reverse that trend and create a wonderful natural world for young people to engage nature, art, their bodies and their imaginations.

The revamped nature center will help put visitors in advantageous places to experience nature. It will focus on serving a wide variety of informal and organized audiences ranging from family groups to scouting/Boys & Girls Clubs. Programs will include arts and humanities and be available throughout the week and evening.

Ramsey County Parks and Recreation, which manages TNC, received project funding from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources and the Institute for Museums and the Library Services. There is a funding request to the Minnesota Legislature to complete the first phase of the project, the Children’s Garden and Nature Play area, observation and indoor exhibit area.

Downtown park now official



Tree sale 2008

Foundation jump starts Parks Endowment

It took seventeen years but a small downtown play space for children is finally a fully certified Saint Paul Park. Its very existence is testimony to the changing face of Saint Paul.

When the city completed the Master Plan for downtown in 1980, children were not part of the mix. Few people lived downtown and the notion of it being a place alive with children was anything but part of that plan. With the major shift of shoppers to malls and the internet and the retooling of warehouses to homes, all that began to change. By 1990 Lowertown became Saint Paul's fastest growing neighborhood as families moved into new and renovated buildings. Day care centers and several schools opened their doors.

The CapitolRiver Council recognized the need for a downtown play space for children and sought funding to create just such a venue at 4th and Sibley in Lowertown. They created a unique transportation-oriented children's park.

The park, however, was constructed on land owned by the Housing and Redevelopment Authority, the development arm of the city. The land was leased to the Parks Department. This arrangement gave the park a temporary feel with the risk that at any time the park could become a prime site for development. In the fall of 2007 the HRA agreed to sell the land to the city. The City Council accepted the land for the Parks department, thus ensuring the play space is a permanent part of the park system.

Thanks for Saint Paul's newest park go to Councilmember Dave Thune who represents Downtown, the CapitolRiver Council, Mayor Chris Coleman and many individuals who worked to make a permanent play area for the children who live and visit downtown.

Using a grant from the McKnight Foundation, the City of Saint Paul is establishing a Parks Conservancy Fund to raise money to sustain the parks through the peaks and valleys of public financing. The Conservancy will function as an endowment with the principal remaining intact but the income will be used to supplement tax generated funding, which will continue to be the core of park funding.

The "parks system is not receiving the financial support needed to ensure its health, maintenance and sustenance for future generations," said Mayor Chris Coleman as he announced formation of the Conservancy. He added that Saint Paul is one of the few large city park systems that does not have a community organization to help raise money to sustain it during periods of economic downturn or shifts in legislative priorities.

How will this organization differ from the Friends of the Parks? Good question, easy answer. While the Friends have provided financial support to the Saint Paul and Ramsey County Parks systems through the tree program and support of summer interns, the Friends primary mission is advocacy on behalf of parks. Examples of the Friends advocacy work include: creating a long range plan, advocating for "No Net Loss" of parklands, a provision which

If you would like more information about the Saint Paul Parks Conservancy contact Jim Olsen, Consultant to the Saint Paul Parks Conservancy, at 651-487-9711.

Council supports trail connection

Special thanks to the Saint Paul City Council for showing vision on this important project.

Bonding request

Ramsey County:

is now in both the Saint Paul and Ramsey County Charters, establishment of park commissions in both Saint Paul and Ramsey County, developing trail and trail connections, acquisition of land at the TCAAP Rice Creek land and water trail, and removal of invasive species and restoration of the Mississippi River bluffs.

“The Conservancy will raise money for the park system to help maintain a stable source of funding. We see this as a very positive step for the Saint Paul Parks system. Some people may initially find the existence of two separate organizations, the Friends and the Conservancy, to be confusing, but our work is very different and complimentary,” said Peggy Lynch, Friends Executive Director.

The Saint Paul City Council wants the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) to include a bike/pedestrian trail on the replacement Lafayette Bridge. And for good reason.

The current Lafayette Bridge is considered to be one of the most fragile bridges in Minnesota. When the I-35W bridge fell into the river, there was no shortage of those who asked, “Can the Lafayette Bridge be far behind?” MNDOT has begun the planning process for the bridge but to date they have not sought any public input nor have their plans made any effort to incorporate any mode of transportation but motor vehicles.

The Lafayette Bridge is strategically placed in the middle of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area and the National Park systems has been planning for a continuous trail on both sides of the Mississippi River within the National park and they plan for connections across the river.

The City wants MNDOT to design the bridge with bike and pedestrian access. They see the bridge this as a key link in connection Kellogg Boulevard and trails along Warner Road and integrating them into the regional trail system.

The Friends will work with the City and participate in and monitor discussions with MNDOT to assure that the new bridge serves more than motorized vehicles.

The ‘short session’ at the Minnesota legislature is the bonding session, the time when law makers make the long term investments in the state’s infrastructure. The bonding bill will include projects ranging from a new roof on a university building to bridge funding. This is the time when the cities and counties ask the legislature for bond funding for their long term projects. Several requests are on the table for park projects:

\$750,000 for Tamarack Nature Center (TNC) to implement priority elements of the Destination for Discovery Master Plan. (See page one story)

\$450,000 for a match for a federal grant of \$720,000 to complete the Lower Afton Trail from McKnight Road to the Mississippi River Great River Park.

Saint Paul:



Tree sale 2008

Spring park cleanup

Tree sale 2008

The trail connects neighborhoods in Saint Paul, Maplewood and Woodbury. This final trail segment extends the trail constructed in 2007.

\$1.5 million for a snow making system at Battle Creek Regional Park winter recreation area. The total cost of this project is \$3 million and the remaining money will be raised from private sources, the city, county and school districts.

\$4,300,000 for the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary Interpretive Center. The money will be used for acquisition, relocation, remediation/clean-up, and design of the Interpretive Center.

\$1,200,000 for Lilydale Regional Park for acquisition of blighted properties and infrastructure improvements.

The Friends are supporting these bonding requests for park improvements. Citizens who would like to express their opinion about these projects should contact their state senator or state representative. If you do not know the name and contact information for your legislator, you may call 651-296-2146.

Want to help spruce up your nearest park? Help with the annual Saint Paul spring clean up set for Saturday, April 15 8:30 - 11 am. Contact Meghan at 651-632-2459 or email environment@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Your 2008 tree brochure is enclosed and is posted on the Friends' website where there are links to more information and color photos. The tree sale is the Friends' only fund raiser and we count on sales to support our work. Please support the Friends by purchasing trees or shrubs for yourself, and to contribute to parks AND by sharing the brochure and website with your friends, co-workers and neighbors. It is hard to think about planting a tree in February, but by spring when the trees arrive, you will be in the mood. Visit our website at www.friendsoftheparks.org .

**The Friends of Parks & Trails
in Saint Paul & Ramsey County
1621 Beechwood Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55116**

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Saint Paul, MN
Permit #3413