



Park Notes

A newsletter of the Friends of St. Paul and Ramsey County Parks
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Plan for Lilydale park under fire

Excessive parking, tall buildings and general ‘over design’ top the complaints of citizens reviewing the plans for the Lilydale Park upgrade. With approximately one million in cleanup of the old river front marina area nearing completion, members of the Lilydale Park Task Force met in January to review preliminary plans for a future roadway, bike paths and shelters. They were not happy with what they saw. Lilydale park is a short distance from the heavily developed Harriet Island and is now a more natural area with unique natural features and a rustic history.

The city presented design shows three lighted, nearly three-story pavilions on a “picnic hill” with nearby parking for nearly 200 cars. The Friends of the Parks as well as the Friends of Lilydale Park expressed skepticism and called for revisions to the plan to proposed pathways, the pavilion and the parking. Saint Paul Parks and Recreation staff agreed to review the plan with revisions available in March. A public open house to view and comment on the plans will be held later in the spring.

“We all love Lilydale Park and everyone wants it developed in a way that preserves its natural beauty,” said John Kerr of The Friends of Lilydale Park.

Winter wonderland at Lilydale Park

Thanks to snow as well as snowshoes provided by the National Park Services (NPS) sixty-five hearty souls of all ages enjoyed a morning expedition into Lilydale Park in early January. Jointly sponsored the NPS, Friends of Lilydale and the Friends of the Parks, the event guided visitors to Pickerel Lake and the surrounding backwater area. Hikers also viewed giant icicles hanging from riverbluff walls at Ivy Falls.

The comment that summed up the event, “A morning of stunning winter beauty.”

For more information about the Friends of Lilydale Park events and upcoming activities, please visit them on facebook or subscribe to e-mail updates at lilydalepark@oldmanriver.com

A day in the woods... working

To volunteer contact Peggy Lynch at 651-698-4543 or visit the website at www.friendsoftheparks.org

Critical area in critical condition

On March 26 from 8:30 am to 12:30 pm volunteers will help restore the natural areas in Snail Lake Regional Park. If you are big enough to follow directions, walk in the woods and pull 20-30 pounds, you are eligible for this project. Individuals, families, youth groups, community and corporate groups are invited to roll up their sleeves, pull on their boots and gloves and make a difference.

The Friends of the Parks are partnering with Great River Greening on the project to remove invasive species and restore the overgrown native oak savanna. Snail Lake is home to oak woodlands, floating vegetative mats on Grass Lake, wetlands and grasslands that provide habitat to creatures including deer, fox, herons, egrets and other waterfowl. These habitats are being invaded by nonnative plants which are permanently altering the area. Volunteers are needed to haul brush such as buckthorn and other invasive trees and shrubs. Without restoration efforts the oak savanna and prairie will be lost, taking with it the diverse flora and fauna that make this urban park unique.

The Mississippi River Critical Area program is again under attack thanks to a missed deadline, lack of understanding of the current rules, and general hostility toward the program at the legislature. Bills in both the House and Senate propose to kill the Department of Natural Resources rule making authority and passage of those bills seems likely.

Background: For thirty years the Mississippi River Critical Area program has safeguarded the River corridor through the Twin Cities and surrounding communities. The authority to provide that river protection over building heights and set-backs from the bluff are drawn from a 1979 Executive Order.

Because it was an Executive Order rather than legislation, authority has sometimes been unclear. To modernize and clarify these regulation the 2009 legislature directed the Department of Natural Resources to develop rules. While the legislation was controversial, the subsequent rule making process was even more tumultuous. After 18 months of work, the DNR missed a key deadline to complete the rules and re-authorization, a development cheered by some business interests and lamented by environmentalists.

“The Critical Area Program is complicated and many of the reports about it are just plain wrong,” said Friends Executive Director Peggy Lynch. “The DNR administers the program and has the authority to approve local Critical Area plans and regulations to determine if the plans and regulations are adequate to protect the state or regional interests. One of the controversies in the rule making process was that people thought they were talking about new restrictions when in fact the restrictions have been in place for over 30 years.”

The Friends will monitor legislation and what appears to be an effort to reverse decades old environmental protections, protections which were put in place by former Republican Governor Al Quie.

Saint Paul billboard numbers drop to 498

With the recent condemnation and removal of 8 billboard faces along the river near the Lafayette Bridge, the total number of billboards in Saint Paul has slipped below 500 for the first time in many decades. These last billboard removals are particularly gratifying for those touting the scenic beauty of Saint Paul and the Mississippi River. The boards came down due to the planned reconfiguration of the Hwy 52/I-94/7th Street interchange. Ant it came with a cost, a steep cost.

Although MNDOT had no say in the erection of the billboards, they and Minnesota's tax payers are the ones who must pay to have them removed. It is anticipated that many hundreds of thousands of dollars will go from the State's transportation budget to Clear Channel to get the boards removed. The final cost is not yet known as it is still in negotiations.

One of the boards to be removed is the digital billboard near the Downtowner Carwash that went up four years ago before the City had it's current regulation in effect. The cost of buying out that board will likely be substantially greater than the cost of buying out the other boards because the price is based at least in part on the future revenues generated for Clear Channel by the boards. The digital boards are vastly more lucrative than are traditional boards.

Saint Paul has finally surrendered its title of 'billboard capitol' of Minnesota with Minneapolis now in the lead with 510. Ward 4 on the western side of the city has the most boards at 125 with Ward 2, which includes the river area and down town following with 117. By comparison Bloomington has 8. Saint Paul has reduced the number of boards from 561 in January 2009 to its current number and no new boards can be built in the city. For more information about billboards in Minnesota visit www.scenicminnesota.org

Port Authority slight of hand? Maybe.

The Port Authority, which among other things, manages the commercial uses of the river, wanted to improve barge terminal facilities and they put together a grand scheme designed to please almost everyone. They would move the existing barge facility further down river from its current location directly across from downtown Saint Paul. In 2008 the Port sought and received permits from the City of Saint Paul to allow for the move.

Saint Paul agreed to the move with conditions. The exiting facility needed to be removed and cleaned up and the land given to the City for park and recreation purposes. With a \$2 million grant from the Minnesota Department of Transportation added to \$1.5 million of Port money (also public funds) the Port completed the new facility in 2010. And, that is when the project went off the rails, so to speak. The Port decided they did not want to eliminate the existing facility after all, skip the clean up and the park and recreation purposes. The title to the land had not been transferred to the City as required under the permits.

The Port Authority has a brand new plan, regardless of the previous agreements. They want to tidy up the exiting area a bit and give to the City

Tree Sale 2011



some other land instead of the highly desirable riverfront land included in the earlier agreement. The lands they propose to exchange are tiny, inaccessible parcels of land which are unusable for any purpose. One parcel is a tiny spot on a steep sloop that has a utility pole on it.

The Friends do not think this deal smells quite right and are asking questions like: why has the existing agreement not been enforced? And, are the community's interests in improved access to the Mississippi being ignored along with the legally binding agreements with the Port Authority?

There are sure to be interesting times ahead on the Mississippi River. The Friends will keep you posted.

With the cold weather still lurking outside your door, the Friends challenge you to think spring. Think annual tree sale. The tree sale is now officially underway and the new brochure should arrive in your mailbox soon. If you receive more than one brochure, please pass it on to your friends, neighbors or family.

The tree sale is the Friends' only fundraiser. Please consider buying a tree or shrub for your yard and a tree for the parks. With the area facing the loss of tens of thousands of ash trees, contributed trees for parks are critically important for rejuvenating the urban forest.

Large trees: Sugar Maple; Heritage Birch; Swamp White Oak, Black Hills Spruce.

Small/midsized trees: Copper Curls Lilac tree form; Honeycrisp apple; Evan Bali Cherry.

Shrubs: Regent Serviceberry; Autumn Magic Chokeberry; Snowflake Mockorange; Vanilla Strawberry Hydrangea; Tinkerbelle lilac; Como Park Rose (it will be in bloom when you pick it up).

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