



# Park Notes

A newsletter of the Friends of St. Paul and Ramsey County Parks  
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## Solar panels and lot line collide

Efforts by a homeowner to install solar panels to reduce electrical consumption ran into a snag recently along Saint Paul's Mississippi River Boulevard. The snag? The homeowner planned to construct the panels on park land adjoining his property. What followed could best be described as a solar flare.

The land in question is located at the corner of Mississippi River Boulevard, MRB, and Summit Avenue where the road curves sharply around the river gorge. Saint Paul parkland runs on both sides of the road and the depth of the park varies considerably as MRB winds along the rivers edge toward down town. There is no clear demarcation between public and private land. Like maintaining the boulevard along other city streets, it is the homeowner's responsibility to mow and water the lawn and shovel the sidewalks, but it is the city's responsibility to maintain the trees and walkways. The shared responsibility can make it easy for homeowners, and sometimes the city, to lose track of just whose land it is. That seems to be what happened in this case.

## The first oops

Several diseased trees were located in the area in question. The city forester noted the trees and ordered that the homeowner remove them because they presented a potential safety and environmental hazard. The homeowner complied, only later discovering that the trees were on city owned property and should have been removed by the city. The city has since offered to pay the cost of the tree removal.

## The second oops

Strongly committed to solar power to reduce costs and damage to the environment, the homeowner installed electrical conduit to the area where they intended to install the solar panels. Then they applied for a construction permit which required a survey. Low, the intended location of the panels was solidly on park property.

The homeowner requested that the city 'swap' another parcel or sell him the park property next to his house, thus turning over to him the segment of the parkway he wanted to build on. Parks staff and the Saint Paul Park Commission rejected the idea because of the precedent it would set for future park encroachments, the need for additional variances and discomfort with the

## Great River Passage Master Plan unveiled

prominence of the large structures so close to the parkway. They felt the solar panels would change the character of the parkway in that area.

Encroachment on parkland is an ongoing issue wherever residential property butts up to parkland. Typically the encroachment begins innocently enough with the property owner mowing the lawn next to their lot. Sometimes the area being used by the homeowner gradually expands and sometimes construction without permits is done. In recent years encroachments have included an in-ground swimming pool, a garage and numerous fences. When the encroachments are discovered the homeowner is ordered to remove it. This seldom occurs without significant pain for all involved.

Saint Paul is taking a step toward preventing this problem. Under the 2009 comprehensive plan all parks and parkways will be zoned as parkland. This should make it more clear where parkland begins and private property ends.

In the mean time, if you live near a park, survey before you build. It could save you a lot of trouble.

With the unveiling of the long awaited Great River Passage Master Plan the process which will determine the appearance, protection, and use of the river for decades to come is underway. Once approved it is anticipated that it will take thirty to fifty years to implement all of the recommendations in the plan. That means it is essential that the recommendations meet the needs of today as well as the needs of citizens in 2062, when many of the folks reading this newsletter and dreaming this dream have long since departed. Once something is included in the master plan it can be quite difficult to remove or alter it.

The Mississippi River Corridor in Saint Paul includes 3,500 acres of parkland, flows 17 miles and has 26 miles of shoreline, more than any other city along the entire length of the river. The master plan recommendations are included in a 180 page document which is available on the city's website <http://www.greatriverpassage.org/> and Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/greatriverpassage> Recommendations are made for twelve segments:

**Shepard & Warner Roads:** propose to convert to an urban parkway with 35 mph design and posted speed. As currently configured Shepard and Warner Roads are a barrier to the river for pedestrians and bicyclists. Additional trees, flowers and other parkway amenities are planned.

**The Gorge:** Minneapolis city limits to Fort Road, propose to provide interpretive programs at Meeker Dam and the overlooks, restore Shadow Falls and Creek as well as other small tributaries, restore the shoreline to provide fishing access and improve the multi-use trail for bicycling and pedestrian use and enhance street crossing from the neighborhoods.

**Hidden Falls:** propose to restore Hidden Falls and Hidden Falls Creek,

improve trails and access to the river for fishing, canoeing, and Kayaking, and add a dog park at the Ford site.

**Watergate Marina:** propose to provide a canoe and kayak launch, fishing access, new trails, construct a major interpretive center and commercial center to include a café, outdoor recreation sales, rentals and sporting goods repair facilities.

**Crosby Farm:** propose to expand the bluff-top park, main park trail, rustic hiking trails, fishing access and restore the shelter and restrooms.

**Victoria Park & Lower Crosby Farm:** propose to improve existing grade separated connection between Crosby Farm and Victoria Park, extend the park trail between the two and add canoe and kayak landing areas.

**Lilydale & Cherokee Parks:** propose to improve trails through the parks and connect the Lilydale trail to the Big River Trail, restore and interpret the fossil beds and historic brickyards.

**Island Station:** propose to establish a major recreation area with a climbing wall/ice wall, pond hockey rink, bicycle skills course, and provide public access to the river.

**Downtown:** propose to enhance Harriet and Raspberry Island Regional Park, Kellogg, Upper and Lower Landing parks; create a river balcony along the downtown edge with a continuous balcony between Union Depot and the Science Museum.

**West Side:** propose to extend the regional trail from Harriet Island along Plato Boulevard to South Saint Paul and Dakota County.

**Lower Landing, Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary & Indian Mounds Park:** propose to improve trails, “daylight” and naturalize Trout Brook and Phalen/Swede Hollow Creeks which are currently diverted underground.

**Flood plain:** propose to: expand park access, establish a buffer for natural areas and improve connections to the river.

A few hundred word summary of a 180 page document is a dangerous thing. There are many recommendations for play areas, mountain biking, dog parks, picnic area, interpretative center and more. Check out the master plan and call your city council member with you ideas and concerns. There will be a public hearing before the Parks Commission on February 29 and the Planning Commission on May 18. These hearings are your opportunity to help chart the course for the river for the next 100 years. If you have questions about the recommendations or the process, call Peggy at 651-698-4543.

The Friends will provide comment, analysis and recommendations to the plan and those recommendations will be posted on the Friends’ website at [www.friendsoftheparks.org](http://www.friendsoftheparks.org)

## Redevelopment in Vadnais-Snail Lakes Regional Park

Increase shore fishing and scenic rest areas are part of the plan for the redevelopment of the Vadnais-Snail Lake Regional Park. Some residents will miss the old road that cut between the two lakes, but up-to-date design standards to provide safety and environmental protection for the waterway require significant changes.

The plan calls for two-way roads from Vadnais Boulevard and County Road F with an interconnecting pedestrian/bicycle trail, thus eliminating the road from the narrow causeway between the two lakes. Fishing nodes and a rest area will be constructed in the causeway.

The plan has been approved by the Ramsey County Park Commission and will be presented to the Vadnais Heights City Council for approval. For more information contact Scott Yonke, Ramsey County Director of Planning at 651-748-2500.

## Park dedication ordinance

Saint Paul will revisit the issues of park dedication, the dedication of land or money when development occurs. When density increases, the need for parks, trails and open space also increases. The question is, how does a city assure that funds and land are available when housing expands?

Suburban communities have traditionally accomplished this goal by requiring that developers set aside either land or money when new development begins. While this approach has worked well when the land being converted to housing is farmland, it has been hard to find a similar solution when properties like warehouses are converted to high density residential housing. Those warehouses which once held only people going to work and then going home, now are home to people who expect to be able to find a park, trail or playground nearby. A fair expectation, but one that takes land and money to meet.



Maple in fall



Apple Blossoms

In 2007 Saint Paul adopted an ordinance that based the developer's park contribution on the number of new parking spaces. It wasn't long before it became clear that this method provided little support for the park system when high density housing was built along transit corridors which encouraged the use of public transportation and discouraged the use of cars.

So, it is back to the drawing board for Saint Paul. As we go to press there is a public hearing set before the Planning Commission to rewrite the parkland dedication ordinance. The Friends' recommend that all land be turned over to the city at the time the parcel is platted.

Please visit the Friends's website for developments on this somewhat arcane but important issue as negotiations and amendments are considered.

[www.friendsoftheparks.org](http://www.friendsoftheparks.org)

## Tree Sale 2012

Now is the time to think trees for 2012. The Friends offer hardy trees and shrubs for use in your own yard or trees and shrubs you can donate to public parks. The tree sale is officially underway and the tree brochure is enclosed with this newsletter. If you receive two brochures, please pass one along to a friend. If you have a friend who wants to order a tree but you don't have an extra brochure, please let us know or simply refer your friend to our website: [www.friendsoftheparks.org](http://www.friendsoftheparks.org)

The tree sale is our only fundraiser. Please consider buying a tree or shrub for your yard or for a park. The Friends will contribute a 'tree gator' to accompany trees donated to parks. The 'gators' are heavy plastic watering bags that zip around the trunk of young trees. The bag can be filled regularly so the much needed moisture gradually seeps into the soil, providing adequate moisture during the tree's first years after transplant. We are in the middle of a drought and trees planted this spring will need some extra help. The gators make it possible for parks staff and volunteers to get water to the trees regularly and efficiently without most of the water draining away. Trees available for 2012:



Hope for Humanity rose

**Large trees:** Northfire Maple, Northern Red Oak\*, Princeton Elm, Black Hills Spruce

**Small/midsize trees:** Thornless Cockspur Hawthorn, Candymint Crab, Sweet Sixteen Apple

**Shrubs:** Regent Serviceberry\*, Twist-n-Shout Hydrangea, Snowbelle Mockorange, Little Devil Ninebark, Sensation Lilac, Hope for Humanity Rose.  
\*native

Visit our website at [www.friendsoftheparks.org](http://www.friendsoftheparks.org) for a complete description of the trees and to download an order form.