



Park Notes

Friends of the Parks and Trails of St. Paul and Ramsey County
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GREAT RIVER PASSAGE

City planners in St. Paul recognize that the Mississippi River is our greatest natural asset. Our city has more miles of Mississippi River than any other municipality along the entire length of the river – 17 miles of running river and 26 miles of river frontage. Recent planning for the use of land adjacent to the river was started by the City of St. Paul in 2010.

Consultants were hired, community meetings were held. In 12/11 the City issued the first draft of the plan. The Park Commission held a public hearing in 6/12. Changes made based on input from citizens resulted in a revised plan in 7/12. Another public hearing was held before the Planning Commission on 9/21/12. The Friends of the Parks testified at each public hearing.

Making the river a beautiful and welcoming “front yard” for the city was a priority, as was public access to the river. The Friends are pleased that the GRP is being developed looking at the river corridor as a system, not as distinct parcels. The plan may take a years to come to fruition, but the details thus far are very impressive.

The Friends are especially pleased with these aspects of the GRP:

- * Converting Shepherd and Warner Roads to parkways
- * Day-lighting as many streams as possible
- * Providing bridge trail access on the south end of Pig’s Eye Lake
- * Improving facilities for pedestrian use
- * Providing bridge trail access on the south end of Pig’s Eye Lake



- * Coordinated planning for improved recreational access to the river, especially on the east side.
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Items we would like to see added or changed in the Master Plan:

- * Explore day lighting Hidden Falls Creek on top of the bluff as part of the Ford Motor Company redevelopment.
- * Expand Hidden Falls Regional Park to include more bluff-top open space by acquisition of a portion of the Ford site east of Mississippi River Boulevard between Ford Parkway and the scenic overlook.
- * Relocate Mississippi River Boulevard near the Ford Plant away from the bluff to create more park space for separated pedestrian and bike paths, picnic tables and benches.
- * Remove the concept of the Environment Learning Center (ELC) at Watergate Marina. The Friends support ELCs as resources for kids and adults; however, the Watergate Marina site is located in the floodplain, which floods during periods of high water. It is wise to relocate. Even if the ELC is raised above the floodplain, it will be impossible to access Hidden Falls Park during periods of high water, as the park is flooded. There have been many periods of flooding on the Mississippi River in recent memory, including this past summer.

Communities all along the Mississippi River and the Red River are removing buildings from the floodplain because of flooding. St. Paul should not be building an education center in the floodplain.

Overall, the Friends of the Parks are excited about the GRP, and all it brings to the front door of the City of St. Paul. However, in planning for development along the river we must respect the hydrology of the river, and help educate our residents and visitors to the fact that the river cannot be contained. It is stronger than any of us!

MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

Controversy has dogged Harriet Island-Lilydale Regional Park Master Plan for a long while. Park and elected officials work to move forward with planned park enhancements while some citizens cry "foul!" and call for the Master Plan to be scrapped in favor of one with less developed area. People on both sides of the debate are frustrated and angry. So, how did we get to this point?

It all starts with the Master Planning process. Parks that fall into the category of "Regional Parks," which typically are larger parks that attract users from a greater geographic area and are part of the Metropolitan Regional Park System, are required by law to have a Master Plan. That plan is often just a broad plan that lacks fine grain detail.

The Master Planning process often takes several years and involves "affected and interested" people as well as public and private groups. The planning process may be led by city or county staff, or the lead agency might hire an outside consultant to lead the process and produce a final report. In the case of Harriet Island-Lilydale Regional Park, the process began in 2008 with a goal of revising the existing plan.

A task force was set up by the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department to assist in developing the plan. Serving on the task force were neighborhood representatives including the Friends of Lilydale, representatives of large park groups such as the Friends of the Parks and the Friends of the Mississippi, as well as representatives of special interest groups such as dog park proponents and other interested individuals. A total of 16 people served on the task force. The group met about four times, each time reviewing various aspects of the park and its potential development. There was also a public open house to obtain broad community input on the conceptual site plan.

Although there was some controversy (the Friends of the Parks opposed what seemed to be over-development and over-building in some areas), the Master Plan was approved by the majority of the Task Force in 2009. This only marked the beginning



of the journey. The plan was then forwarded to seven other governmental bodies for final approval. In its final form it includes cleanup of the marina demolition site and the Lilydale dump site, creation of two picnic shelters, restrooms, realignment of the roadway, a dog park, riverbank restoration, plus construction of an amphitheater, a fishing pier and wildlife viewing platforms.

Voting to accept the amended plan were: the Saint Paul Park Commission, Saint Paul Planning Commission, the City of Lilydale, the Saint Paul City Council, the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and the Metropolitan Council. With funding in place to begin the early phases of the project, reality hit.

In reality, the nature of the road construction, plus the size of the parking areas and picnic shelters, was more massive than they appeared on paper. Some would like the entire process reversed and a new Master Plan created. Most observers think that revising the Amended Master Plan is unlikely so soon after its completion and with so many voting in support of it.

The Friends, one of only two groups on the task force to vote against the plan, would like to see redevelopment proceed in phases, with ongoing evaluations of the use of the park, so that adjustments can be made in the size of the developments.

Contributed by Jeanne Weigum

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I-694 PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE STUDY

The Minnesota Department of Transportation and Ramsey County have partnered to co-lead a study of pedestrian and bicycle needs in the I-694 corridor through Ramsey County. The study recognizes that a connected pedestrian and bicycle network in the area is important to ensure that the I-694 corridor is not a barrier to pedestrian and bicycle travel. The study area includes existing and potential future crossings of I-694 from Silver Lake Road to Highway 120, as well as trail, sidewalk, and bikeway connections leading to those crossing locations.

Working in partnership with the cities along the corridor, the study will:

- Document the existing network of pedestrian and bicycle facilities;
- Document future plans or projects that provide opportunities to improve pedestrian and bicycle mobility;
- Identify critical connections that should be preserved, maintained, or enhanced to ensure connectivity around and across I-694.

A public open house was held on September 27 to gather input from area residents on ways the system could be improved. More than 40 attended the open house to talk with city, county and MnDOT staff about pedestrian and bicycle needs in the area.

Materials from the open house are posted on the MnDOT website for those who are interested. Comments were collected through October. Check out the site at:

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/metro/projects/694expanded/publicmeetings.html>



When complete, the study will assist local agencies (MnDOT, Ramsey County, Metropolitan Council, and various cities) improve coordination and prioritization of pedestrian and bicycle investments as future funding and project opportunities arise.

For questions or comments about the study contact:

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ESTATE GIFTS BEAUTIFY PARKS

When **Paula Culp** died in the fall of 2007, she generously donated nearly \$100,000 “for the use in providing trees in Ramsey County, including Highland Park.” Since that time the Friends have used Paula Culp’s donation for many things, including upsizing trees. The Friends match donations to provide larger and more mature trees. This helps alleviate vandalism problems of broken branches or disfiguring of smaller trees.

The Friends also used Culp’s donation to supply the gators (heavy green bags) that you see around the base of young trees. We ask the foresters to use the gators until the trees are three years old. The water in the bags drains out over a six-hour period, delivering water to the roots. The cities and county agreed to fill the bags once a week, to assure the trees’ survival during the drought.

In 2009 the Friends used Culp’s donation, in cooperation with MPR, for planting 100 trees at remodeled Tamarack Nature Center. A grove of trees along Montreal Avenue in Highland Park was planted in Paula’s memory and honor in 2010. All of these efforts are the result of Paula Culp’s generous estate donation to the Friends of the Parks.

Last year **Laura Sweney** left a bequest to the Friends. This year we will use her gift to plant trees in Lake Phalen Park and to upsize trees donated to parks outside of Ramsey County.

*Park Notes is published quarterly by the Friends of St. Paul and Ramsey County Parks.
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