

## Tomahawk Parks & Recreation Visioning Session Notes

July 14, 2009

Eighteen Tomahawk stakeholders met on July 14 to discuss the future of the city's parks and recreation facilities. Members of the city's Parks and Recreation Committee and the department's director were part of the audience and contributed to the discussion. They were facilitated by the UW-Extension, Lincoln County Community Resource Development educator. This discussion began a planning process that will largely be guided by representatives from North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.

Listed in no particular order, the following major discussion themes were prevalent throughout both segments of the evening's discussion.

- First, provide ongoing maintenance of what we have.
- Do things that will generate revenue while at the same time enhancing the natural beauty of parks.
- Make certain that parks have amenities ("creature comforts") such as bathrooms, drinking and showering water, etc. Parks are underutilized because they lack "creature comforts."
- Link various walking, biking and other trails throughout the park system and city.
- Develop advantageous partnerships/collaborations that will help us maintain and improve the parks.
- Promote the history of the parks and the city through the park system.

### I. Overarching Vision

Attendees were asked to envision a broad, general future for the city parks system using the following scenario.

*You are asleep for 15 years. When you wake up, you find that miracles have taken place in all of the Tomahawk parks. Someone told you that the city's Park & Recreation Department resources increased little over the time you were asleep. **What has happened that made Tomahawk parks the most pleasant to visit in Wisconsin?***

Their responses were:

- Extensive volunteer involvement
- Silent winter sports have become important again
  - sledding, ice skating, x-c skiing, hiking, etc.

- The Wisconsin River in Tomahawk is the hub of northern Wisconsin related activities. The area includes resorts, restaurants, marina, camping, etc.
- City has sustainable sources of funding to maintain and improve parks.
- Distressed trees are managed
  - Dead trees are removed in the effort to create more attractive parks
- Enhanced natural walkways and well maintained trail system.
- The notion that parks and recreation system fulfills all needs and wants no longer exists. Specific priorities/goals are set and we focus on achieving just those things.
- Enhanced natural beauty.
- “Creature comforts” exist in all parks
  - Restrooms, drinking water, benches, etc.
- Water resources within all the parks are utilized and marketed to the fullest extent possible.
- Parks are illustrated in a tour guide book
  - History of how parks were developed and used is detailed
  - “Creature comforts” located on a map
  - Describe the natural beauty of the parks in the guide and provide easy to read trail maps
- Kids and adults use the parks to help promote healthy lifestyle activities and to improve their own health.
- Tennis courts added and maintained.
- Safe parks are welcoming to residents and tourists
- Whoever comes to the parks find the quality of what we have. It’s a draw. “Creature comforts,” uniqueness, etc. Parks are multi-season, attracting users year around.
  - Parks are easy to maintain
  - Parks are easy to winterize

## **II. Specific Ideas to Improve the Parks**

Attendees were asked to mention specific projects taking into consideration the following criteria.

- a. Degree to which implemented measure has the potential of generating consistent revenue over a long period of time (many years).
- b. High number of potential desirable and measurable community impacts (other than revenue generation).
- c. High importance. (Will there be negative consequences if the measure is not implemented soon?)

- d. Capacity of Parks & Recreation Department to take the lead in implementing the measure.
- e. Potential number of partner agencies/individuals (in addition to Parks & Recreation) interested in working together and having the collective capacity to implement the measure.
- f. Ability of Parks & Recreation and/or other partners to provide maintenance and upkeep related to the newly implemented measure.

### ***Ideas Related to Particular Parks***

#### *Bradley Park*

- Walking history tour with vandalism resistant monuments. Monuments would showcase things like the industry in town, founder William Bradley, etc. Local businesses could perhaps sponsor the monuments. The primary idea is to tell the story about how Tomahawk came to be and how it has developed over the years.
- Build an observation tower. (A great way to view the lakes throughout the city and just outside.)
- Proceed with existing land management plan. (Tree management; perhaps use lumber to build observation tower?)
- Photograph gallery to demonstrate history of the parks and downtown. Can be done at Bradley as well as other parks.
- Replica band stand with music and glockenspiel characters. (Like Disney World)
- Remove poison ivy, so it does not take over the park.
- Restore camping (use as revenue generator). "Outpost" closed. 500 campsites closed and people still talk about how much economic activity that facility brought to Tomahawk retailers.
- Harvest diseased trees for making rustic furniture in parks.
- Build raised wetland walkways to appeal to birders, hikers and bikers. This will have the effect of showing off Bradley Parks' many different types of natural areas.
- Develop and promote cross country skiing and dog sledding (skijoring.)

#### *SARA Park*

- Bathrooms & changing rooms are needed.
- Possibly look to do camping on city owned land such as Box Island by SARA Park.
- Develop more boat landings.
- Create boat docks -- possibly funded by volunteer groups. They will also serve the purpose of better accommodating fishing events.
- Improve existing campsites. Add shade trees, and open the brush for campers to have direct access to the water.
- Improve campground sites
  - Open up river access

- Allow fishing from campsites
- Campers' amenities; water, electric, etc.
- Adequate restrooms
  
- Complete current campground project

#### Frenchtown

- Upgrade bathrooms (add bathrooms for park and beach). Need these "creature comforts" for all parks. This helps to drive park use.
- Add another tennis court. Maintain the court that is already there.

#### Squaw Point

- Add picnic tables, canoe access, and water fountain. If possible, somehow display the history of the park in the park.

#### Jersey City Park

- Is the park expendable? Money is being spent to cut the grass and maintain what little is there. If we are not going to develop it, should we get rid of the park to save money in the long run?

#### Washington Square

- Install skating rink at Washington Square instead of Pride Park so people can walk to it (more centrally located), and it is separate from the hockey rinks.

### **General Suggestions Not Specific to Any Park**

- Walking trail throughout city. Monuments identify points-of-interest. Marked trails/mile markers.
- Pursuit of Canadian National Railway segment to join river trail.
- Work on ways to develop and market the uniqueness that unifies the parks. An example would be an arts council. Exhibit art work based on a Tomahawk theme at various places throughout the park system.
  - Totem poles in every park?
- What symbol unifies Tomahawk?
  - Hodag is for Rhinelander
  - A new arts council could manage placement of art-for-sale
- Amphitheater/music shell in one of the parks
  - Where? Between library and Canadian National land and river trail. It is a natural amphitheater.
- Establish a boat taxi or tram/train service that would take people from park to park. In the winter, use a snowmobile or sled service. Snowmobile or sleds could be taken out to Box Island in the winter utilizing the frozen lake.

- Snowmobile trails
  - Revise access throughout the city
    - Bradley Park to SARA Park and vice versa. Perhaps also utilize the frozen lake areas in Bradley Park.
    - Establish group to provide snowmobile trail rides for a fee. Utilize snowmobile club system.
- Establish ATV club route through the city. Work with ATV clubs to do this.
- City Council members should be required to spend 40 hours per year volunteering in parks so they can learn more about them.
- We need to provide ongoing maintenance of what we have. Keep it in good condition. We must provide the money now. Volunteers will be crucial in this effort.
- In general, finish existing projects and maintain them.
- Create a non-profit foundation or some other infrastructure to accept and manage donations for developing and maintaining parks. Part of the set – up would be to encourage people to make donations.
- Create procedures to segregate funds for park facility development and maintenance. (To ensure that the money does not go into the general fund).
- User fees need to be charged to create consistent revenue source. Take those who don't pay to court. Charge for using utilities in the parks. Charge for boat launching.
- Allow ATV and snowmobile use on town roads, state highways, and city roads. This will create transportation linkages and make it easier to get to parks around town.
- Foster mutually beneficial partnerships between volunteer groups, clubs and parks.
  - Create "Friends of the Park" groups.
- Establish a boat landing in a non-congested area to access the river as soon as the ice thaws.
- Post way-finding signs to direct people to parks from primary roads.

**Tomahawk Parks & Recreation  
Visioning Session Notes  
August 11, 2009**

Approximately 20 residents attended the second Tomahawk Parks and Recreation visioning session on August 11. Leading the discussion was the UW-Extension, Lincoln County Community Resource Development educator.

After a review of the major themes that were discussed during the previous meeting (July 14), attendees identified specific projects related to each. Following this discussion, consensus was used to identify which broad themes (i.e. issues) are the most important for the city, the Parks and Recreation Department, and volunteers, etc. to focus on in the next decade. Two themes emerged as priorities. Those were:

- Revenue Generation: Very little ongoing maintenance and new projects can take place without more money being garnered from a variety of public and private sources.
- Ongoing Maintenance: Throughout the two meetings, most of the people in attendance agreed that constant maintenance of what already exists in the parks is vital. It does no good to develop new infrastructure if the existing infrastructure is not well maintained.

The group recognized that these initial discussions form merely a foundation upon which further conversations will take place with the aim of developing a comprehensive parks and recreation plan. Most subsequent discussions will be guided by representatives from the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.

**Specific Projects Categorized Under Major Themes**

Attendees were asked to refer to the list of projects that was generated at the previous meeting. New projects were also listed. A voting process was used to identify which specific projects under the primary two themes chosen (Revenue Generation, & Ongoing Maintenance) are most important and most feasible.

Two additional major themes were added, **“ADA Compliance/making existing facilities compliant with the American Disabilities Act”** and **“New Projects.”** ADA compliance was mentioned primarily related to developing or updating “creature comforts.” Several specific projects, both from this meeting and the last, are listed under the “New Projects” theme (G) below.

**A. First, provide ongoing maintenance of what we have.**

Of all the projects listed under this theme, three easily rose to the top as being the most important and most feasible. In priority order with #1 receiving the most votes were:

1. Ongoing maintenance of existing buildings in every park, but especially those in Bradley Park. Regular seasonal maintenance and age mitigation. Maintenance should be done with the goal of promoting use of the buildings, especially the historically significant edifices found in Bradley.
2. Maintaining "creature comforts" in every park (e.g. bathrooms, trash pickup, etc.)
3. Geese control: The presence of geese and their waste has become a major problem over the past few years, diminishing the experiences of those who come to the parks and keeping other people away.

Other items receiving votes were:

- Managing park waters. Cleaning and managing foliage along waterways to address erosion issues.
- Control invasive species (related to above bullet). Partner with lake groups, etc. to accomplish this.
- Snowplowing and removal, including on lakes to prepare them for ice skating. (Lake snow removal primarily at Bradley Park.)

Others:

- Maintenance of street trees, etc. in partnership with the street department.
- Trees in parks – remove some dead ones, add new ones. Ongoing pruning to promote fullness.
- Regular maintenance of roads, parking lots, and paths.
- Plan the maintenance of a facility in the design phase of new facilities.
- Remove toxic weeds such as poison ivy and poison oak.

- Removal of dog/cat feces, - possibly create ordinance?
- Increase room tax. 50% of room tax revenue goes to the Parks Dept.

**B. Do things that will generate revenue while at the same time enhancing the natural beauty of parks.**

Of all the projects listed under this theme, two rose to the top as being the most important and most feasible. In priority order with #1 receiving the most votes were:

1. Institute more user fees for things like boat launching and camping. It was recognized that in order to effectively do this more boat launches and campsites may have to be developed.
2. Find people (paid or volunteers) to research and write grants for specific projects. A coordinated effort to obtain grant dollars is very much needed.

Other items receiving votes were:

- Building and facility rental. We have some of this but need to look into doing more.
- Institute dumping fees. This would be primarily for garbage, brush and sanitary dumping.
- Solicit more voluntary donations.

Others:

- Identify and join regional and state initiatives that Tomahawk can be a part of.
  - Urban forestry
  - Lakes management
- Create antique boat center/training building off of SARA Park such as the Great Lakes Visitor Center near Ashland. Classes held would generate revenues to support the park system.
- Charge fees for acquiring potable water. (The city allows people to do this already without charge.)

- Rent canoe or boats.
- Maybe establish a boat taxi.
- Charge concessionaires to operate within parks.
- Maintain revenue that already exists.
- Annual fundraising banquet to benefit park system. (Seek youth involvement.)

Several items under this theme were also included under the theme “develop advantageous partnerships/collaborations that will help us maintain and improve the parks.” Those items were:

- Organizations should be allowed and encouraged to “adopt” parks. This may be a very good source of revenue generation, but some may be...
  - Concerned that specific organizations may exclude the public.
  - Concerned that groups may wish to keep developing a park, beyond what the park can handle.
  - That very careful action planning will be needed.
- Take up church collections to help fund park maintenance.
- City Council members should adopt-a-park.
- Businesses should partner with other organizations to create and sponsor mutually beneficial events to be held in or near parks.

**C. Make certain that parks have amenities (“creature comforts”) such as bathrooms, drinking and showering water, etc. Parks are underutilized because they lack “creature comforts.”**

- Any park that has facilities should at least have restrooms that are ADA compliant. For example, Frenchtown needs bathrooms.
- Install showers at Bradley Park.
- Determine which parks need what facilities.
- “Creature comforts” should be installed and maintained in only those parks where it makes sense, where other amenities are present. For

example, it would not make sense to put “creature comforts” in Jersey Park or Squaw Point.

- Maintain revenue that already exists.

**D. Link various walking, biking and other trails throughout the park system and city.**

- Link city parks with paths throughout city and connect city trails with township trails and state trails.
- Create trailheads with restrooms and showers. (This item also relates to the theme “make sure that parks have amenities/“creature comforts” such as bathroom, drinking and showering water...”
- Link Bradley Park with natural geologic trail behind park, where old ski jump and snowmobile trails are located. (old RR r-o-w)
- Use/extend riverwalk to create park linkages.
- Join SARA and Bradley parks. Use mileage and directional signage to help with this.
- Signage, historical significance
  - Place GPS coordinates, or phone numbers connected to recorded messages on them
- Construct underpass at 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Memorial Bridge. (Could be part of the upcoming North 4<sup>th</sup> Street reconstruction project.)
- Immediate area is lacking ATV trails. Bring trails into Tomahawk proper. Work with various volunteers/clubs and towns like Harrison Hills.

**E. Develop advantageous partnerships/collaborations that will help us maintain and improve the parks.**

Specific projects also listed under theme B above.

- Organizations should be allowed and encouraged to “adopt” parks. This may be a very good source of revenue generation, but some may be...
  - Concerned that specific organizations may exclude the public.
  - Concerned that groups may wish to keep developing a park, beyond what the park can handle.

- That very careful action planning will be needed.
- Take up church collections to help fund park maintenance.
- City Council members should adopt-a-park.
- Businesses should partner with other organizations to create and sponsor mutually beneficial events to be held in or near parks.

**F. Promote the history of the parks and the city through the park system.**

- Signage. (Also mentioned above under theme D.)
- Develop art gallery type set up throughout the park system. Display works of art in parks. (Perhaps collaborate with the owners of a new art center being located in the downtown area in the Citizen's Bank building.
- Monuments placed throughout park system documenting the history of the area and park development
- "800" phone number on signs to play recorded message about sites.
- Carve historical information into rocks in parks.
- Annual banquet to benefit parks. (Seek youth involvement. Also under theme B above.)
- Maps for: -trails -historical sites -walking, etc.

**G. New Projects**

- Antique boat and/or training center – to be located on the west end of SARA Park.- marina, & boat rental - skills center (tech college classes) -museum. (This concept is also included under theme B above.)
- Band shell to promote a "music on the river" concept. Perhaps locate in Memorial Park.
- Community/Senior Center – specifically in SARA Park.
- Trailhead development. (Also mentioned under theme D above.)

- More camping spaces
  - a. establish primitive camping areas
  - b. develop camping areas with dump stations and pads for RVs
- Ice skating at Washington Park
- Toboggan and sledding primarily in Bradley Park/Mirror Lake.
- Marina development.
- Ice skating at Washington Park.
- Tennis and basketball courts combined at Washington Park. Basketball is already there.