



ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES ADVISORY COUNCIL

City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation

Regular Meeting

RCA Community Park - Shelter
Wednesday, October 11th, 2023
4:30 - 6:30 p.m.

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I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:40 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

ERAC Members: Cathy Meyer, Angie Shelton, Dave Parkhurst, Autumn Brunelle, Denise Gardiner

Staff: Tim Street, Joanna Sparks, Sophia Gilliland, Rebecca Swift, Steve Cotter, Gillian Field

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – June 2023

IV. AGENDA

A. Public Appearances

A-1 Public Comment Period

None. Member of Public present: Heidi Brown.

B. Old Business

B-1 Miller-Showers Park Management Plan

It was expressed by multiple ERAC members that the human history and land acknowledgement of the Miller-Showers Park would be a valued addition to the management plan. Gillian Field noted that the Monroe County Public Library is a fantastic resource, providing extensive information on anthropological history and provided a thorough labor and land acknowledgement. When researching Miller-Showers Park in the Monroe County Public Library, one tribe was mentioned in a land acknowledgement statement that was not acknowledged in the City of Bloomington's statement. Swift then noted that the City of Bloomington worked with Indiana University First Nations Educational & Cultural Center to draft the City's land and labor acknowledgment. There is a plan set in place to verify and update current land acknowledgments for all adopter programs. The members and staff of ERAC emphasize that it is committed to gathering historical and anthropological information to provide the public with a complete understanding of the diverse history associated with the City of Bloomington parks.

It is also noted that students have been conducting Hoosier Riverwatch water quality testing at both the inlets and outlet of Miller-Showers Park. The sampling showed that the water quality is higher at the output than at the inputs. Shelton noted that water treatment was not given the recognition it deserved in the report, Swift agreed that a section highlighting the purpose and design of Miller-Showers Park would be included. These samples indicate that the Miller-Showers structure is successfully working to filter and improve water quality.

The cyclone chambers are vital to the structure and filtration process. The chambers separate the excess sediment and floating trash from the water, so the structure does not get clogged. If not cleaned out regularly, buildup can hinder the structure from functioning to its full capacity. City of Bloomington Utilities has been assigned the responsibility of cleaning and dredging the

structure. The data showing the success of water treatment has been recorded, but the information needs to be gathered, analyzed, and publicized. It is noted that open, shared PDF files are edited between personnel, but not publicized on the City of Bloomington website. The new edited documents will be updated once a year on the site.

B-2 Park Ridge East Park Management Plan

The same concepts discussed regarding Miller-Showers Park apply to Park Ridge East. The management plans will be reviewed and updated once a year on the site.

C. New Business

C-1 Education Update

Swift gave updates regarding the education outreach programs with the City of Bloomington. She also expressed her gratitude and appreciation for the staff and volunteers during the busy summer and fall season. The Office of the Mayor sent invitations for ERAC member appreciation event, RSVP by the 9th for this event. Nature Day season has progressed smoothly, and will soon be coming to a close at the end of October. Leonard Springs Nature Days are scheduled on Tuesdays and Griffy Lake Nature Days take place on Thursdays. The program hosts all MCCSC 4th and 6th grade students.

Bug Fest at Karst Farm Park was well attended (~1300 people); however, some attendees felt the park was spread out too far. The area of the park closest to the disc golf course (shelters 3, 4, and 5) was utilized for the festival. There was a miscommunication between staff and soccer attendees. Soccer players and families parked in designated overflow parking for Bug Fest. There were many attendees for Bug Fest, so the miscommunication resulted in tight parking near Bug Fest. Four food trucks were expected to attend the event, but only two showed up. While these two situations were unexpected, they highlight areas for growth in communication and clarification for future events. The monarch migration station and WildCare booths were the most popular vendors. There will be further discussion regarding the location of future Bug Fest events. Bug Fest can rotate park locations each season (note that Switchyard Park is booked through July 2024), or it can remain at Karst Farm Park. Bug Fest was able to save money by using restrooms in the park instead of renting mobile restrooms. The majority of ERAC members and staff agreed that Karst Farm Park would be an ideal location for any future Bug Fests.

IDEM will be hosting Hoosier Riverwatch instructor training in March 2024 at Karst Farm Park. More details to come when registration links go live. This will include training to receive an Instructor certificate as well as access to equipment for stream water quality testing. BPRD will be cohosting the Bike to Earth Day event on April 20th, 2024 along with the Economic and Sustainability Department (ESD) at Switchyard Park (SYP). Additionally, BPRD and ESD will be hosting monthly climate access workshops at SYP on the second Wednesday of the month starting in January 2024. As weather becomes more severe in Indiana, these workshops will help educate and prepare the public. Attendees will have the opportunity to meet with our City Urban Forester and will learn more about tree planting, trimming, and how to prepare trees for strong storms. Additionally, Community Gardens Manager, Sarah Mullins, will also lead workshops focusing on specific garden plants that are most resistant to climate impacts. A potential way to boost attendance could include providing coffee and refreshments to the workshop attendees. With these workshops, the City of Bloomington hopes to provide low-barrier education opportunities for the community to promote sustainability and climate action.

The 200th Weed Wrangle is being celebrated on October 11th, 2023, with over 3000 volunteer hours logged this season. An Indiana University Biology class and Bloomington High School South have helped significantly with soil and water conservation projects. Weed Wrangling takes place around City parks every day of the week except Sundays, showing the volunteer's dedication to helping the environment and community. The Winslow Wildlife Corridor Project is being developed; it will include the Winslow Woods Sports Area. This project involves many

volunteers and will create a green corridor throughout City parks. Outreach has been extensive throughout this process and displayed the urgency of reaching out to Hispanic and Latin communities. To ensure effective communication a translator has been hired to produce a translated Spanish brochure to be distributed throughout the Hispanic and Latin communities. It is emphasized that it is important to involve the community in identifying and managing invasive species. Gillian Field is pushing boundaries and opening doors with innovative outreach strategies to educate and engage the public. Field adds that it is vital for the community that people understand why weed wrangling and conservation matters in the first place.

Brunelle provided updates on behalf of Monroe County Parks and Recreation. The county has the only member-paying dog park, and members often share updates and information. Recently, members have expressed concerns regarding poison ivy in the dog park. While staff has not located any poison ivy, they did locate Virginia Creeper. Park management plans are being developed to address such scenarios.

The Annual Harvest Fest has been cancelled this year due to numerous external factors. However, staff hopes to revive the festival next season. Many city park and trail employees participated in the Indiana Master Naturalist 2023 workshop. This class was co-hosted by the Purdue Extension Office and included field experience/coursework on conservation, birding, and water quality. Plans for another Indiana Master Naturalist workshop are in motion for next fall.

Gardiner provided updates on behalf of the Sassafras Audubon Society (SAS). The development of a summer youth bird program has been set into motion. This youth bird program could potentially be a subset of young naturalists. Around 30 kids have shown interest in a younger birders program. SAS is hosting Citizen Science for the Birds on October 21, from 10:00- 2:00 PM at Karst Farm Park. The event features bird walks and information about how you can help our local birds survive and thrive. Additionally, SAS is hosting Ducks and Donuts on November 11, from 8:00-11:00 AM at Stillwater Marsh. Lastly, SAS hopes to host a Bird Fest event in 2024.

On April 8th, 2024, a total solar eclipse will take place. Despite two years of preparation for this event, the county commissioners have declared April 8th, 2024, a day off, posing challenges for county park preparation and event execution. An alternative to the original festival is the Totality Awesome Scavenger Hunt. Participants can visit the office to obtain solar viewers, and it is encouraged for participants to explore exhibits and parks to learn more about the eclipse. Commemorative t-shirts could be an incentive for participation in the scavenger hunt. A collaboration with Indiana University Astronomy is a possibility. Further discussion is required on how to prepare parks without staff. Meanwhile, the City is planning to host a large event at Switchyard Park over the eclipse weekend (April 5th – 8th).

C-2 Construction Project Updates

The Gateway project has generated a strong public response, with concerns focusing on potential harm to birds and light pollution. Street provided clarity on the project design. The proposed structure features a dim light design, covered in a metal lattice with a vertical profile and no up lighting. The structure will be turned off during peak bird migration, raising questions about who will monitor these instances and determine when the structure can be on or off. Currently there is no defined path forward for the Gateway project. The City already attempted to address these concerns twice, with the first proposal receiving less attention, but more positive feedback, while the second proposal generally received public opposition. The City expressed a commitment to recognizing public opinion. Moving forward, it is vital to recognize and respond to ongoing dialogue, learning from the community's responses for future initiatives accordingly.

Rogers Family Park has made significant construction progress, with the completion of the Goat Farm Barn rehabilitation and the installation of new park amenities. Since the official ribbon cutting event in August, the park has seen an increase in users. Moving forward, the park requires ongoing ecological restoration on the 5 acre prairie located on the south side of the barn.

The Griffy Loop Trail project phase II is well underway. Located south of the Griffy Dam, approximately half of this section of trail has been built using existing trails as well as newly blazed routes. A new stairway is being built from the parking lot along Dunn St to the top of the dam to improve trail access. The project includes removing trees and understory vegetation from the trail route and installing some species along erosion areas, creating a more sustainable trail design. The “roller coaster design” of the trail will result in better drainage, less erosion, and increased longevity. This approach ensures minimal sediment runoff into the lake. The goal is to complete the 6-mile loop by the end of next year, with the dam crossing and the south section of trail scheduled for completion within six weeks. New trail signs will be installed, including intersection signs for the loop and boot brush stations. This project aims to establish safer, clear connections to existing access points around the Griffy Lake Nature Preserve. When the dam crossing and southern loop trails are complete, there will be a ribbon-cutting event planned in December with the support of the Office of the Mayor.

C-3 Fall Prescribed Burn at Griffy Lake Nature Preserve

Cotter provided an update on the prescribed burn at Griffy. BPRD hopes to have the prescribed burn at Griffy Lake Preserve this fall, but it depends on the contractor’s availability and weather conditions. If it doesn’t happen this fall there is a possibility of the burn taking place in spring. Prescribed burning reduces competition from maple and beech species. The project goal is to improve habitat conditions for oak and hickory species that support a much higher diversity of local wildlife. There is a desire to maintain this strategy for future environmental management of Griffy Lake Nature Preserve.

C-4 Encroachment Challenges

Several neighbors have been encroaching on park property, engaging in activities such as mowing on park grounds, spreading mulch beyond property lines, littering, excavation, and vandalism on park premises. In a more unconventional instance, a group of people dug a large hole and filled it with water. When approaching this topic, Field wanted to create an educational, learning experience for park neighbors (Winslow Woods Park). She took the initiative to meet with any homeowners living next to park property, and started a discussion regarding how these actions impact the park. Field explained why it is important to care about these seemingly small activities, and how they can lead to large effects on the environment. Field also sent out customized postcards explaining the concept of encroachment, how to avoid it, and highlighting the environmental consequences. Her efforts were well received and resulted in community outreach and education.

C-5 December 2023 Meeting Agenda Items

Stilt Grass Management & Vegetation Dashboard, Storm Resiliency Plan, Deer Management

IV. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:58 PM.

**NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13TH, 2023
SWITCHYARD PARK – Pavilion**