



ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES ADVISORY COUNCIL

City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation
Regular Meeting

Switchyard Park – Pavilion
Wednesday, December 13th, 2023
4:30 - 6:00 p.m.

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I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:33 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

Autumn Brunelle, Dave Parkhurst, Kim Brackemyre, Jeff Ehman, Bill Jones, Marne Potter
Staff: Joanna Sparks, Rebecca Swift, Steve Cotter, Haskell Smith, Sophia Gilliland

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – October 2023

IV. AGENDA

A. Public Appearances

A-1 Public Comment Period

None.

B. Old Business

B-1 Construction Project Updates (Griffy Loop Trail Phase II, Bicentennial Gateway Project)

The City of Bloomington has been focused on creating a sustainable approach to the construction of the Griffy Loop Trail that goes around the western section of the lake. During construction, extra measures were taken to create a trail that will last for generations. Spectrum was hired to construct the natural surface trails and reroute existing trails. Scenic Design was hired to construct the dam trail crossing and build a new set of wooden stairs to allow users to access the trail from the parking lot located near the Griffy Lake dam. The construction at Griffy has been progressing well. The ongoing construction on Griffy Loop Trail Phase II will soon be completed. Spectrum agreed to use their equipment to help block off existing trails that will be closed due to the unsustainable nature of those trails. Temporary 'You are Here' signs have been installed at trail intersections on the south side of the lake. Additional trail access points have been added along Dunn St with the help of volunteers. Parks staff have been collecting Geographic Information Services (GIS) data while construction has been underway. This data will be important for future analysis, construction plans, maintenance needs, and it will help park users navigate new trails.

The Bicentennial Gateway project will install a new gateway element at the north end of Miller-Showers Park in the triangle of land between College Avenue, Walnut Street, and the Old State Road 37 crossover between them. The City shared artist renderings of the North Gateway, redesigned with feedback collected through 2023, on Nov. 30. Feedback on the redesigned gateway concept was accepted between Nov. 30 and Dec. 15, 2023 online and by phone. The redesigned concept for the North Gateway, incorporates stacked limestone blocks approximately 10' high and the word "Bloomington" in backlit letters mounted to the limestone. The Bloomington Arts Commission will collaborate with Parks and Recreation to solicit design proposals and select the final art installation concept. Landscape architects Rundell Ernstberger Associates will develop the final North Gateway design to include a platform and dimensions for the public art installation.

B-2 Fall Prescribed Burn at Griffy Lake Nature Preserve

Habitat Solutions was contracted to perform a 9 acre burn on a parcel located in the northwest corner of the property, near the Griffy Dam. Cotter noted that the prescribed burn went smoothly. The support of the Bloomington Fire Department was essential to a safe and successful burn. Parks Trail Staff prepared 12 ft. wide fire breaks surrounding the burn unit to ensure the fire did not escape the management area. There was some smoke that blew over the lake, particularly concentrated around the dam area, but it dissipated soon after the burn was completed. Weather conditions were ideal for the burn, low wind gusts and fairly low moisture levels.

Moving forward, the changing climate is expected to bring extreme droughts and flash flooding events. Future burns will need to be adjusted accordingly. A plant community map generated by Kevin Tungsveick, Senior Ecologist at Eco Logic, will assist with management decisions in 2024.

Prescribed burns allow more sunlight to reach the forest floor to creating better conditions for regeneration of oak and hickory trees, which are currently being shaded out by other species. Restoration of native oak and hickory forest is desirable for the increased habitat diversity it brings, benefiting insects, birds, reptiles, and understory plants including spring ephemerals.

Warning signs were posted during the burn and on-site personnel maintained a safe environment during the prescribed burn. Public safety during prescribed burns is the top priority.

C. New Business

C-1 Education Update

During the ongoing education update, acknowledgements were extended to ERAC members Autumn Brunelle and Cathy Meyer for their willingness to help facilitate stations as well as Angie Shelton for her help recruiting her high school biology students to be Group Leaders throughout the field trips. Swift noted that Nature Days have been a longstanding tradition, spanning 16 years thanks to the funding support from the Raymond Foundation and the Summer Star Foundations. Griffy Lake Nature Preserve hosted 548 4th grade MCCSC students and Leonard Springs Nature Park hosted 569 6th grade MCCSC students in 2023.

Swift announced 9 new interpretive signs were being installed at RCA Community Park along the Early History Trail and Interpretive Trail. In an effort to make the information more accessible, each sign includes a QR code that links user to Park's YouTube page so users can listen to an audio transcription of each sign.

The City is planning several events related to the upcoming total eclipse in April 2024, anticipated to draw over 100,000 visitors to Bloomington, as well as the Annual Bike to Earth Day event on April 20th at Switchyard Park and an Arbor Day celebration on April 26th at Crestmont Park. Furthermore, initiatives are outlined for the continuous improvement of the OuterSpatial mobile app using updated GIS technology, alongside the planning of 2024 guided outings and adding more community events.

The update highlights accomplishments regarding successful community engagement, including encroachment concerns, weed wrangles, and the participation of IU student groups in service work. The weed wrangle events had many repeat volunteers over the season, and they had a great turn out at every event. The update also includes the planting of roughly 100 pine trees at Lower Cascades, along with the successful relocation of 76 larger trees.

C-2 Stiltgrass & Vegetation Management Updates

Sparks provided updates on invasive stiltgrass and vegetation management progress and innovations being made. A new Vegetation Management Dashboard, created by ITS, is now accessible to the public on the COB website. Field maps (GIS software) is utilized to monitor the areas covered by vegetation, staff, and volunteers.

A total of 250.3 acres have been treated, utilizing mechanical and chemical methods, with herbicide used on 117.2 acres, primarily targeting Japanese stiltgrass and garlic mustard.

The dashboard also tracks restoration efforts, including tree planting and native seeding, alongside other activities such as trash pickup. It is noted that task titles are suggested for editing to improve clarity. Walking mileage is recorded for each area, with Griffy Lake Nature Preserve showing the

highest treatment for stiltgrass and garlic mustard. Volunteers currently lack access to the app, limiting location tracking to staff members.

A 10ft buffer is applied when categorizing acres using polygons in field maps. Emphasizing the ongoing nature of invasive management, plans are underway to incorporate goals, achievements, and outcomes into the dashboard to better illustrate the purpose of treating invasive species. Efforts are also being made to share raw data with the public, with a link to the Invasive Species Initiative soon to be integrated into the site for enhanced transparency and engagement.

C-3 Urban Forestry Updates

Smith provided updated on the City's tree planting initiatives, with plans to plant between 300-400 trees using Bicentennial Bond funding. Moreover, there are plans to extend this effort to include the planting of approximately 1000 trees in total throughout the City in 2024. Development issues concerning the City of Bloomington Utilities (CBU), have prompted adjustments, slowing progress of the number of planted trees.

As a testament to the importance of urban forestry, the budget for these initiatives, regarding tree, planting has been doubled, showing the commitment to enhancing green spaces within the city. Priority locations for tree planting have been identified, with a focus on disadvantaged areas, aiming to offer tree removal services and plant trees on private properties. Additionally, efforts are underway to support tree planting on private properties, furthering the goal of expanding urban tree canopy coverage. Crestmont Park also celebrated its 40th anniversary of having playgrounds, marking a significant milestone in community recreation. The upcoming program guide, set to go live on December 15th, will provide further insights into ongoing urban forestry efforts, including the Arbor Day celebration on April 26th, 2024.

A motion to draft a letter of support for a grant was initiated. ERAC members were in favor of sending a letter of support to the Indiana Community Forestry Association. The letter will be drafted by Jeff Ehman and signed by ERAC Vice-chair, Angie Shelton.

C-4 Deer Hunt Results

Cotter reported that fewer deer were harvested this year compared to the past few years at Griffy Lake Nature Preserve. This decline may be attributed to warmer weather conditions, a decrease in the deer population, or other factors. Deer management is essential for encouraging native plant growth and controlling the deer population. The number of participating hunters was highest on the first day and decreased gradually in the subsequent days. To address the issue of declining deer hunters, the City is contemplating offsetting the costs associated with deer hunting and meat processing fees. This measure may incentivize more hunters to participate in the program.

It's important to note that the goal of deer harvesting is to allow native plants to grow large enough to reproduce. The data regarding deer and hunters provide valuable insight for future planning and management of the deer harvesting program. Deer browse pressure on vegetation in the Preserve is monitored by Kevin Tungesvick, Senior Ecologist at Eco Logic.

C-6 2024 Appointments & Meeting Agenda Items

Members will need to reapply for the next year, as ERAC operates on two-year terms. Members are advised to submit their resumes for reapplication. Updates regarding appointments will be communicated via email by Swift.

Future ERAC meetings will cover recent upgrades at Rogers Family Park, ongoing development of OuterSpatial, encampment management, and discussions on yearly department goals.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was called to order at 6:08 PM.

**NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14th, 2023
CASCADES GOLF COURSE– CLUBHOUSE**