

2017 Zionsville Park and Recreation Department Summary

(Prepared in part for the February 5, 2018 Town Council Meeting)

2017 saw significant progress and/or completion on a variety of projects and initiatives for the Zionsville Parks and Recreation Department and its Park Board. During this time the Department continued to carry out its responsibilities to maintain park facilities, provide and facilitate recreational programs, and carry out special projects. This report summarizes projects and activities of note. For the most part, the report will not discuss all the ongoing activities that abound in the day-to-day operation of the parks. The report will first go into a few generalities and then discuss some specific highlights.

A Selection of Major Benchmark Examples

Overly-Worman Park (Future): For 2017, this project kicked off in early January with onsite visits to the property by park staff and the consultant design team to initiate the overall conceptual design process for this future park. This 5-6 month process also involved input from several community input meetings and also online submissions. In addition there were 5-6 invited stakeholders meetings where, all told, about 40 of the invitees found the time to contribute. These invited stakeholders included invitees from the business community, special interest groups such as Chamber of Commerce and youth sports groups, Town Staff and elected officials, etc. Additionally, there were public meetings that were open to anyone to stop by. The consultants took all this input and provided feasibility recommendations to the Zionsville Board of Parks and Recreation. For example, some of the individual public recommended features that just weren't suitable for the predominately bottomland streamside area.

Once the Park Board had a chance to consider the suggestions of the public and the recommendations of the consultant team and staff... they were able to provide conceptual design direction for the next steps. The focus was then refining the vision from the three design scenarios down to a single concept, and from that the consultants calculated cost estimates and possible phasing options in case the funding has to be spread out over time. The final conceptual design anticipates that when completed, the park will have over 3 miles of mountain bike trails (which can also be used by walkers and runners), paved ADA-accessible multipurpose pathways, fishing access, two smaller areas of play equipment (2-6 yrs old and a second for 5-12 yrs old), benches and a shelter or two, a 9-hole disc golf, and several other major features. At this point the Park Board will be packaging this individual project with the results of the 5-Year Master Plan Process for the whole park system and looking towards the Town's elected officials to understand where their projects funding inclinations reside. Since they have had the opportunities to participate all along in both these major planning efforts it is anticipated the Town's elected officials will have had some time to begin to formulate which of these publically supported projects are to be funded and to what level.

Zionsville Park and Recreation 5-Year Master Plan: Every 5-year planning cycle the Department looks out 8-10 years and maps out the next 5-years of efforts towards the future. This process in and of itself is a vital undertaking for our community. And the plan that is its culmination is not only a crucial guideline document, but also absolutely a vital requirement for certain grant funds which have already brought in over one million dollars in non-tax funds to our community.

Again this planning effort was filled to the brim with input opportunities for both the general public, key interest groups, elected officials, and many others. Again there were a planned series of invited stakeholder meetings (about 70 invitees), three dedicated public input meetings (plus some additional public comments at a monthly park Board meeting or two), and a “meaty” online public survey. The public input meetings will likely have over 100 participants (there have been over 85 for the two meeting in 2017 and there is one left to hold in 2017). And the online survey component alone had almost 400 respondents. And this input portion alone indicated that the respondents overwhelmingly feel that Zionsville Parks and Recreation needs more land and facilities for parks and recreation usage in the next five years. They even strongly favored a park bond issue to fund the next 10-15 years of capital developments in the parks. This strong a response rate, its overwhelming positive nature, and the fiscal support are all highly unusual in this field... at least by Indiana’s trends. They speak to how our constituents feel about what the Town and the Park Department have done so far. They indicate we have done a good job... but the respondents are saying that now is the time to take the next revolutionary steps forward to help ensure the health and welfare of our citizens and the economic development for our community.

Major Grant Efforts: In terms of fundraising, for nearly the last decade, Zionsville Parks and Recreation has vigorously pursued grant funding (as well as other appropriate donation and fundraising efforts). In order to maximize efforts and also to not take too much resources away from the our core operations, i.e. the provision of high-quality parks and recreation facilities and even some recreational programming to our citizens... we are forced to limit our efforts to those situations where there is a significant feasible chance of success sufficient to offset the staff-time investment in preparing grant application in these *highly* competitive programs. In 2017, the Park Department was able to prepare **two** major grant applications each requiring months of efforts to prepare a competitive application. Both were reimbursable grant programs where if awarded the grantee expends the project money and submit for reimbursement, often on a 50%/50% basis (these parameters are almost a standard in the parks industry). One of these programs was for the Recreational Trails Program Grant (RTP) and we submitted a project requesting grant assistance to extend our Rail Trail southward from Eagle Creek to Zionsville Road. The second submission was for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Program. This application was to supplement a portion of the development cost on about half of the anticipated 45 acres of Overley-Worman Park. Both of these applications submission deadlines were within a single month of each other and *both* were for grants capped at **\$200,000**. The summation of where we sit with each grant program is discussed below.

RTP Application: Unfortunately we were unsuccessful in our 2017 application for this \$200,000 grant for to help extend the Rail Trail southward. The granting division of the DNR who administers these Federal funds received *three* times as many application as they were able to award. Even with this competition we were extremely close. We were awarded 26 points (out of the 27 we claimed). Our 26 points missed by only a *single point*, as the State awarded 4 grants for projects which scored between 29-27. The DNR awarded 3 projects at the full \$200,000 cap and the fourth was a partial award as their RTP grant moneys for 2017 were consumed. So we were only one point from receiving at least some grant funding and only three points off of the RTP leader this year. Nothing is guaranteed, but we feel we would have a strong chance if we reapply in 2018. And we have been directed to do so as this has the chance to save the taxpayers significantly.

LWCF Application: By 2017's end, final, formal Federal approval has not yet been received from the National Park Service (NPS). But this timetable is not at all unusual in working with grant programs as these. And excitingly, all signs look extremely positive for the success of this grant application earmarking \$200,000 in reimbursable grant funds. These will help supplement the general budgetary contributions to be targeted by the Town's elected officials towards building a portion of the future Overlay-Worman Park. The State's DNR received and ranked 15 applications, and Indiana's portion of these Federal non-tax funds appears to be sufficient to fund 5 local projects across the State (4 fully and one partial). While we expect to hear final confirmation of this in 2018, the State ranked our staff-prepared application scoring highest of all 15 submissions received in 2017. Since the current State rules only allow two successful LWCF applications per site and while project competition will change for 2018, the Park Board and the Town Fathers fully intend to submit a second \$200,000 application for June of this year. If successful and we hope to be close to number one again this year, we will garner another \$200,000 to add to the 2017 award. If we also receive a second LWCF award for a 2018 submission and are also successful in the 2018 RTP resubmitted grant, that could well mean a total of \$600,000 grant dollars to assist with extending the Rail Trail southward and beginning construction on the entire footprint of Overlay-Worman Park

Major Maintenance Efforts and Changes for 2017 (in no particular order)

Emerald Ash Borer Destruction: With all of the native ash trees occurring naturally throughout our park system we, like many other departments across the state, cannot afford the cumulatively costly treatments (every other year for the life of each tree) to combat this non-native insect pest that is killing all of the Eastern United States ash trees. While we have been trying to keep up where we can spare time from our other maintenance duties, the cycle is such that we are reaching peak die-off levels for our urban forest for the next several years.

In the early winter/spring months of 2017, we mobilized all of our limited maintenance staff and spent several days on dropping 32 dead ash trees from the south portion of the Zionsville Rail Trail (south of Oak Street). Based on professional recommendations and cost and times savings efforts, we left the biomass to return into the forested soil. We also left a few trunks as short stubs to provide vertical habitat and food sources for wildlife. This represents a major effort in that season just before mowing season really quicks in.

In addition near the end of 2017, we were able to use saved moneys from several other sources and bid a contract amongst several tree companies that resulted in another 35 ash trees being similarly handled from Oak Street to almost Bloor Lane. This effort also included some trees south of Oak Street to Eagle Creek that needed major lift-bucket work, equipment and skill sets that our staff and Town just doesn't have. Similar efforts will likely need to continue over the next several years until the peak die-off passes us by.

Non-Native Invasive Efforts: For the first time ever we were able to generate a couple of efforts at the terribly invasive tree, the Callary Pear. This is a weak-wooded tree that the DNR recommends destroying as it can easily outspread our native trees and creates a mono-culture desert with much reduced wildlife potentials. We were able to contract efforts along the central portion of the Rail Trail where our worst colony existed. It took fairly readily and we have already received unsolicited compliments from several knowledgeable citizens. In addition, with our own staff we were able to treat a second infestation in the area near Creekside Nature Park.

Other New Projects

While too numerous to mention here, our staff is continually striving to stretch their knowledge base and take on new projects in the maintenance fields. As just one example our staff borrowed the Street Department's backhoe and laid 25 feet of new drainage pipe and 15 feet of newly-created trailside swale to try to alleviate an ongoing drainage challenge along the trail at Zion Nature Sanctuary. The project certainly has helped the situation and our hope is the time we took away from our current maintenance obligations will be an investment in saving maintenance resources there for the future.

Recreation and Service Programs (in no particular order)

Zionsville Golf Course (ZGC): The Department completed another successful season at the ZGC. The dedicated staff did an outstanding job of managing the course this season and we continue to receive many compliments from our clientele. 2017 marked the first season without our previous Course Manager, Mike Maguire, and our Greenskeeper, Orlin Colman, who had both voluntarily, left us to enjoy their second, "full-retirement". Their part-time positions were filled by Scott Baron and Steve Robinson (respectively). These new-hires both worked with the existing long-time staff (who all stayed) and did a great job in the first season under this new management. Early-season weather was generally poor for golfing, with over 2 full weeks, closed in May due to 10+ inches of rain that month. June was only slightly better with 2 more days closed and 12 additional days where the weather caused us to only gross \$500 or under (and two of those days even grossed under \$100). Fortunately the weather rebounded later in the season and it turned out October was our highest gross for that month over our entire 9 seasons of public operation. While we haven't yet received the end of 2017 final numbers from Office of Finance and Records, based upon nearly complete estimates, it looks like the course generated 2017 gross operating revenue will be around ~\$219,880. If these estimates hold true, this could be as much as \$15,000 under the average of the *gross* operating profits for the two previous years.

However our staff kept the course operations very lean for 2017. Plus, we fortunately had no major equipment expenses as in past certain years. As a result when looking at the average total expenses for the two previous years and the factoring in the estimated total expenses for 2017, it looks like our *expenses* may estimate out to be some ~\$30,000 **less**.

Golf courses are traditionally expensive to operate, but ours is generally covering its yearly operational cost and almost always clearing at least some yearly profit besides. This year looks to be no exception. All estimates are pending Office of Finance and Records' confirmation, but currently estimates are that our final 2017 will show a net operating profit in the range of ~\$50,000 to ~\$55,000. For reference, 2016's net operating profits for the year were ~\$32,500. This 2016 number was negatively impacted because we had three critical unplanned capital cost items beyond the expenses planned into the budget. For comparison the 2015 net profit number, without those unexpected 2016 expenses was ~\$43,700. So even in comparison to the more robust 2015 numbers, our 2017 estimates of a *net profit* of about ~\$55,000 are even yet higher. In fact we expect 2017's net profit to place it as our 2nd or 3rd highest yearly net profit!

And as a final "capital reminder" related to the Zionsville Golf Course, we continue to earmark and protect funds for planned future major capital issues. This would be for the eventual golf cart fleet replacement anticipated around 2022 (depending on wear and tear from play levels, one can expect to need to replace a cart fleet every 10-15 years). And while at a much slower savings rate because it will take a much higher price tag; we are also earmarking additional funds for the replacement of the aging and inadequate, antiquated irrigation system. In normal years, this combined savings earmarks and accounts for the first \$40,000 of net profit the course generates.

In terms of play, about 10,000 rounds were played in the 2017 season, the vast bulk of those were played as 9-hole rounds. Our course staff hosted numerous special events, 4 regular golf leagues, many other golfing reunions/events, several middle school matches (and practices), along with school invitationals and tourneys. It's worth noting that while not totally free; the Park Board gives quite a discount for the Zionsville Middle Schools' course usage for formal practices, meets, and even a bit on some related clinics.

The Zion Nature Center (ZNC): 2017, the third full year of programing while the center was under the helm of our Park Naturalist Mindy Murdock; was a very solid year. The center started in 2002 and has been funded by the Park Department throughout its entire existence, but Ms. Murdock hire marks the first time a professionally certified Naturalist has served in this role. Our 2017 overall yearly programing attendance in the parks and visitation at the center was over ~10,500, most but not all of this was environmental programming (for example the bicycle events are also factored into this total). The numbers for environmental programming are down about ~3,100 from last year's. But since 2016 had a special event-programming opportunity that accounted for 25 programs for the Zionsville Schools and totaling over ~2,500 participants, it can be seen most of the difference between 2017 to 2016 lies in that one single program type.

On the ZNC monetary side, we generated ~\$12,500 in direct programing fee collections, within \$100 of last year's gross fees. Additionally, we had about ~\$3000 in monetary donations and an estimated ~\$1,000 in donated materials/supplies. Much of the fees go right to support their respective programs; reducing tax support need to run our programs.

One final exciting note for the Park Department, Park Naturalist Mindy Murdock received important recognition from her professional peers in the State. While Mindy was a presenter at the Environmental Education Association of Indiana's (EEAI) annual conference, had a surprise waiting for her. Based upon her work representing Zionsville Parks and Recreation in the statewide Association, Mindy had been awarded the Joe Wright Recognition of Excellence Award from her professional peers around the State. We are understandably happy and proud that she earned this recognition but feel sure the rest of the state is learning what we already know here!

Zionsville Bicycle Challenge: This was another great program, in this, its fourth year. Total registration was again stable this year at 125 registrants (with about 130 in 2016; 128 in 2015). This program is designed to introduce people to the bicycle as a tool for travel, fun, and fitness, or to bring them back to it after a long absence. It was structured over six weeks where riders chose their challenge level, targeting either 90 minutes of riding each week, or one of three mileage challenges for the 6 weeks (200, 400, or 600 miles). In 2017, total mileage for all those who chose one of the three mileage distances was very nearly **35,000 miles** (34,986 total bicycling miles in 2017, 31,383 total miles in 2016 and 33,497 total miles in 2015)!

For 2017, that is the equivalent distance of riding a bicycle from New York to Los Angeles *and back*... but doing that round-trip a total of over **seven times**! This is the equivalent of all most two more NY/LA round trips than in 2016! The same three teams competed against each other again this year for the coveted Traveling Trophy (an engraved, 100+ year old brick from Zionsville's Main Street), two teams were the Dow AgroCyclists and Zionsville Triathlon Club, and some members of each actually help park staff and board give the program. The third, Team Zionsville, is comprised mostly from the Zionsville Community and friends and family members of those same. This year, Team Zionsville was able to keep their unblemished hold on the Travel Trophy. Team Zionsville had 14,582 miles, the Dow AgroCyclists (bicycling club) had 10,829 miles, and the Zionsville Triathlon Club had 9,575 miles. As the Park Department has little staff resources to offer full-scale recreation programming like this... the support of these two cycling organizations are vital to our continued offering of such programming. Jointly they provided a total of 8-10 volunteer part-staff to lead 3 rides every Wednesday, prepare weekly newsletters, manage the prize purchases, etc.

Bicycle Family Fun Ride and Bicycle Safety Event: This annual 7-mile ride was again held as a part of the National Bike Month in May. It starts at Elm Street Green and loops by and through several of our parks, including a significant portion along the beautiful Zionsville Rail-Trail. Riders finish in the downtown area for treats at Dairy Queen, Bub's or other local venues. We generally have around 35-40 participants depending if one counts toddlers in trailers.

Mulberry Fields Bike Ride: In cooperation with one of the summer rides of the Central Indiana Bicycling Association (CIBA), Zionsville Parks and Recreation Department worked with one of CIBA's regular ride leaders to again cohost a ride out of our Mulberry Fields Park. This ride had 3 loops, each with its own internal shortcut that could be combined in various routes of anywhere from 12 to 100 miles. While attendance

can vary due to weather and other scheduling challenges, good weather usually has our ridership in the 100+ participants range.

Lincoln Park Concert Series: With the cooperation and assistance of the Park Department, the Lincoln Park Concert Series Committee (a spin-off group of the Zionsville Cultural District Committee), continues the talent-selection and scheduling for this long running program. Attendance has expanded from over the last few years and many complements are received with this co-hosted program. Thanks to the volunteers on the LPCSC for their efforts and support in keeping the long standing concert series going... as the Parks Department doesn't have the recreational staff to hold such programs. The Lincoln Park Concert Series Committee reported estimates and feel they average about 200 per outdoor concert. But rain-dates can cause them to shift to the Lions Clubhouse with much more limited seating. Those indoor concerts only have about 25-45 in attendance. While we haven't received the committee's final participation counts, they usually run between 1500-2000 average participants for a season.

Garden Plot Program: There were ~35 plots available for rent this year (\$25 each) at Heritage Trail Park. Additionally, ~30 more plots were available at Elm Street Green. Both park sites were successful and enjoyed by their respective green-thumb enthusiasts. While we have always paid for our garden-plot water usage, this year the Town was required by the Water Company to formally run water to the site with a meter-pit, meter, and all the accoutrements. They did generously waive the \$10,500 tap-in fee that would be normally required. But the install still cost \$12,000.

Youth Sports Activities: In cooperation with ZYFL, youth football continues at Mulberry Fields Park. With 100's of registrants in the sport and weekly and weekend games during the 3-month season, plus the coaches, officials, and spectators, this program accounts for 1000's of separate visits and countless hours of enjoyment for the participants.

Zionsville Rugby also used Mulberry Fields. They used these for several meets this year and all went well. Care must be taken as the rugby season is very early and the sport is playing in spring when any traffic can be much harder on the fields' turf.

In lieu of rental of these "sports-turf areas", which based on what other park departments who allow such usage charge would be several thousands of dollars, The Park Board has long only asked for agronomic practices across all the sports turf to keep it in good shape. Both these sports fulfilled their 2017 commitments in this area. They also of their own volition, keep their coaches from practicing on the fields so they can sustain them in the great condition that generates complements to both these sports organizations from their out-of-Town opponents. In addition, the Park Department spends around \$12,000 to \$15,000 in their own upkeep-contribution to this about 10 acres of sports fields.

Zionsville Creekfest: This was the fifth year of this program's successful existence (and our fourth based at Elm Street Green). This major event continues to be a cooperative effort between Zionsville Parks and Recreation Department and the Town's Department of Streets and Stormwater. While still including popular stream cleaning activities, it also again included an environmental festival component at Elm Street Green. This year's participation was another high at an estimated 125 at the cleanup with 250 at the Festival.

The non-profit group, Maplelawn Farmstead, Inc. continues to work on preservation and programming at the farmstead in our Mulberry Fields Park. This year they participated in our “Nature Play Days” by holding a very successful Open House. This meet both our organizations’ goals and they were very happy. This partnership has proven to be a valuable one for the department and the citizens of Zionsville. Maplelawn's recreational contributions were again very successful this year.

Other Events in the parks continue to increase. Lincoln Park continues to host numerous weddings, generally with an average of at least one/week during the May-October season. Some weeks there will be an additional wedding or sometimes even two in the same week. Many other examples of events abound, for example... The Sullivan Munce Ghost Walk utilizes Lincoln Park in October. The Rail Trail provided routes for numerous formal events including the Optimist Club’s “Hit the Bricks” event, the Z-Run, twice-weekly Indianapolis Hiking Club events, and the St. Vincent Cancer Walk who use several of our park sites along their route. And this is just a short listing of all the runs and walks that use our park facilities, often as a fundraiser for their respective sponsors... opportunities that would be lost if not for our park system. Furthermore, in addition to the formal cooperative bicycle ride with CIBA discussed earlier, often several other CIBA Ride Leaders and other impromptu weekly riders chose to use Mulberry Fields as a support site on their own weekly scheduled rides.

Respectfully prepared and submitted
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