

Zionsville Department of Parks & Recreation

2013 Park Department Summary

(Prepared in part for the February 3, 2014 Town Council Meeting)

2013 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, it won't discuss all the extra and 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.

Benchmarks

In mid-2012, the Park Board initiated work on its 5-year Master Plan. As is normal for good master planning processes, this project continued on well into 2013. This process had begun with 6 meetings which were attended by 40 stakeholders. Additionally, the Board developed an online survey which received 442 responses from Zionsville citizens. Plus, general public input meetings were held to solicit additional input on several distinguishing topics ranging from funding to programming. As the process continued into 2013, Park Board and staff worked to finalize the meat of the plan, its text and action items, fleshing out the Board's plan framework over the next 5 years. The 5-year Master Plan helps the Park Board meet Department of Natural Resources (DNR) standards, and is required to qualify for certain grant programs. The \$200,000 grant we were awarded for our design and construction of Heritage Trail Park is one example and would have been unavailable without the existence of an approved Master Plan and a Park Board.

Grants and Additional Funding (primarily non tax dollars)

While supplemented with grant funding actually awarded earlier than 2013, grant projects such as those listed below, like many road projects, can take considerable time until completion (and the all-important grant-reimbursement of funds back to the Town). In 2013, all of the grants discussed below were completed or constructed, their final reimbursement monies received, and the books closed on these particular grant portions of the projects. All told we completed and/or received over \$225,000 in reimbursements on grant funded projects. Sometimes those funds were rolled into the project to make it even better, but in many cases (such as with the \$200,000 immediately below) the moneys were reimbursed into the funds that helped initially support the grant project. If one considers the value of volunteer efforts such as the Eagle Scout projects mentioned later and other grants not mentioned in this report, we likely easily have an additional \$10,000 in value added.

Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant (LWCF): This \$200,000 Grant was one primary factor in the successful construction of Heritage Trail Park. Because the Heritage Trail Park project scored so highly through its efforts to extend the Zionsville Rail-Trail (a corridor identified on the State Visionary Trails Plan), create Trail-head support, improve youth recreation opportunities through the creation of a tot-lot playground and

hard-court area for basketball and other activities for older children, plus many other features... our project ranked second amongst considerable competition. There was only sufficient grant dollars statewide to fund 4 projects (with the last being partial funding).

Urban Forestry Grant: The \$15,000 UF Grant jointly benefitting the Park and Street Departments was completed in 2013. We were able to benefit the Street Department by providing funding allowing them to complete a street tree inventory for the Town that had not been updated since 1997. The grant also allowed them to greatly expand the original study area, a critical benefit since our urban forest has greatly grown and matured in the last 16 years. The Parks Department portion was multi-faceted and also helped us be more competitive in that particular grant cycle (we were the second highest funded project out of a significant amount of competition). Park Department's ongoing efforts benefited with grant funds supplementing the Department's efforts on native tree plantings at Heritage Trail Park, further native tree plantings in the reforestation area at Elm Street Green, and a major project to improve the native wooded area along the southern portion of the Zionsville Rail Trail. For that particular component, the wooded corridor along the Zionsville Rail Trail lying south of Oak Street down to Eagle Creek, and for 50-feet on either side (or to the property boundary if that was closer than 50 ft.); was extensively policed for Asian Bush Honeysuckle and several other deleterious non-native species. These species were cleared from the area in a very attractively priced (and grant-fund supported) grant project component. The three bidding firms were all experts in the native plants field. The work of the low bidder was exemplary and their price was outstanding. Their fee was 40% under the *average* of the three firm's quotes.

Boone County Solid Waste District Grants: Two separate \$5,000 grants from this government entity were completed in 2013 within the confines of our newest major feature, Heritage Trail Park. Both of these grants were in support of using recycled materials and other low-impact design/fabrication principles. The broad-based selection committee awarded us their maximum funding amount in two consecutive, and very competitive, grant cycles. We are the only entity to date that has been so blessed and we are very grateful for not only the monetary support, but the acknowledgement of our green efforts.

Capital Improvement Projects

Heritage Trail Park: As alluded to above in the grants section, Heritage Trail Park was completed in winter of 2013 (soft-opening with the park publically accessible, but formal ribbon cutting to be in the spring of 2014). This park extends the Rail Trail toward Whitestown and Lebanon, creates an internal trail loop of about ¼-mi in length, creates a playground for ages 2-5, a hard-court for basketball and other similar activities, a bocce court, a picnic shelter, lower maintenance native plantings, green-infrastructure bio-basins to mitigate stormwater quantities and also improve stormwater quality, plus other park features. This is our first park in what had previously (prior to consolidation) been in unincorporated and rural portions of the Township. Future phases are planned to include further trail linkage along the abandoned rail corridor (eventually connecting to Whitestown's efforts to come east), further trails inside the park, additional play equipment for 6-12 year olds, and possibly other components.

Starkey Park Boardwalk: Life Scout Jacob Massie helped renovate a short boardwalk at Starkey Nature Park as part of the capstone for his Eagle Scout designation. The new boardwalk, which he built with help from scouts, friends, family, and the Department, is surfaced with recycled plastic decking for low maintenance and extended life. In close coordination with Park Staff, Mr. Massie and company adapted a pre-fabricated boardwalk support kit made of pressure-treated wood to provide the structural components under the recycled material.

Historical Interpretative Display: Life Scout Kirk Horn conceived of and constructed an educational display using annual tree ring growth to draw attention to key dates from the past. This was built onsite from a large tree which was nearly dead and had to be dropped, and whose remains were left specifically for educational and biological reasons. The new display, which he built with help from scouts, friends, family, and the Department, helps even further enhance the educational effect. In close coordination with Park Staff, Mr. Horn and company cut and finished a tree-trunk slab, hoisted it under a protective roof-cover, and will label it (in 2014) with the dates and explanatory text.

Elm Street Green Native Planting Efforts: Life Scout Chris Hansen helped reduce the past negative impacts from the non-native plant species that had developed on the private land that later became Elm Street Green. His planting project, which he built with help from scouts, friends, family, and the Department, installed 35 new trees in our growing reforestation area within the park. In close coordination with Park Staff, Mr. Hansen and company also planted over 400 small native plant plugs as well.

Town Hall Park/Rail-Trail link: The pathway linking Town Hall to the Rail-Trail was enhanced with a second wider connection (suitable for emergency vehicular access). This pathway connection has been an ongoing joint project between the Street and Park Departments. Street Department employees provided necessary machinery, skills, and concrete. Park Department designed the link and supplied and installed bike racks as part of the enhancement.

Recreation and Service Programs (in no particular order)

Zionsville Golf Course (ZGC): The Department completed another season of operation at the ZGC. The dedicated staff did an outstanding job of running the course this season in a very trying year. Even with the major fiscal impact of the largest flood since the late 1950's (and a smaller, earlier flood in January), and the fact that weather caused us to be closed for the entire day on 42 days this season (14 of those due to the April flood), and for 19 additional days there was only limited play... the course still managed a gross operating revenue of ~\$258,696. While golf courses are expensive to operate, ours is generally covering its yearly operational cost and this year looks to be no exception, even with the odds against us. All current estimates are pending Clerk-Treasurer Office's final numbers, but it looks like our final 2013 will add between \$20,000 to \$30,000 above and beyond the fiscal-point at which we started the year.

Over 16,323 rounds were played in the 2013 season (compared to 18,525 in 2012), the bulk of those played as 9 hole rounds. Mike Maguire, Orlin Coleman, and the rest of the course staff hosted numerous special events, 5 regular golf leagues, a youth golf league, several middle school matches, and additionally, school invitationals and tourneys.

League play was expanded with one new adult league. And a new Zionsville Boys & Girls Club golf camp was held on our course as we further expand into youth golf. The Department thanks all the Zionsville Golf Course staff for making 2013 a good year in trying circumstances.

The Zion Nature Center (ZNC): ZNC and its programs continue to be popular. While our Interpretative Naturalist's final report has not yet been completed at the time of this report's preparation... According to summations from her monthly reports, this year our naturalist, Therese Burkhard, her staff, and with assistance from a small group of dedicated volunteers; hosted over ~10,500 visitors. Although direct program participation accounts for many of ZNC's visitors, Therese's monthly reports suggest that this ~10,500 number also includes as part of it, some ~6000+ visitors just dropping in to view the educational exhibits at the center.

In addition to funding staffing that helps enable these dedicated individuals to touch these visitors lives, the Park Department spent several thousands of dollars in a planned maintenance effort replacing the oldest of the center's air conditioners (if the budget request goes through, we plan the same concept with the oldest of the two furnaces next year). The Department thanks all of the Zion Nature Center staff and volunteers for making the center a wonderful place to visit in 2013.

2013 Family Fun Ride: 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. The riders finish in the Farmers' Market area for treats. We had a record number of participants this year at 40, including a couple of families pulling 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 most experienced ride leaders to 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. Even with rain right up until the start, and wet pavement for much of the time, the ride attracted some 60 participants. Because of Zionsville's strong bicycling community, we hope to continue this ride and expand with other bicycling opportunities in 2014.

Zionsville Eagle Creek Clean-up (ZECC): With a local angler acting as a catalyst and spokesperson, the Zionsville Parks Department teamed up with the Street and Stormwater Department to stage the first large scale cleanup of Eagle Creek in Zionsville. The stream between Elm Street Green and Creekside Parks was selected primarily because of the easy access and staging points. Organized on a fast timetable, volunteers enthusiastically

responded with Church groups, sports, clubs and just families teaching their children stewardship. Forty-two hardworking souls removed 2600 pounds of material (mostly metal) from the stream. Plans are already underway for 2014's event.

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), attendance expanded from over the last few previous years and many complements were received. Thanks to the dedicated volunteers on the LPCSC for their efforts and unswerving support in keeping the long standing concert series, not only alive, but flourishing.

Garden Plot Program: There were 60 plots rented this year (\$20 each) at Heritage Trail Park. And new for this year was the addition of the planned 30 plots at Elm Street Green. Both park-sites were very successful and well enjoyed by their respective green-thumb enthusiasts. We had an additional gardening spin-off by coordinating a 3-speaker gardening presentation to kick off the season. This new program was very well received.

Youth Sports Activities: In cooperation with ZYFL and also the Zionsville Boys and Girls Club, youth football is still going strong at Mulberry Fields Park. With several 100s of registrants in the sport and weekly games during the 3-month season, plus the coaches, officials and spectators, this program accounted for 1000s of separate visits and countless hours of enjoyment for the participants.

The Zionsville Rugby League also uses Mulberry Fields. Both these programs went well and will be returning next year. And the Zionsville Lacrosse Leagues is scheduled through the School system for play at our Jennings Field Park.

As mentioned above, the Zionsville Schools continues their rental use of Jennings Field (\$1) for practices and special events. Also the Zionsville Middle School uses the nearby Mulberry Fields park for cross-country practice/meets and occasional other uses.

Other Events in the parks continue to increase. Lincoln Park continues to host numerous weddings, generally at an average of at least one a week during the May-October season. The Sullivan Munce Ghost Walk utilizes Lincoln Park in October as well. Creekside hosts the annual Creekstomp with the ZNC and Stormwater Department. The Rail Trail provided routes for numerous formal events including the Optimist Club's "Hit the Bricks" event, the Z-Run, weekly Indianapolis Hiking Club events, and the St. Vincent Cancer Walk (which brought in approximately 850 attendees and additional visits several other of our parks). Furthermore, in addition to the formal cooperative bicycle ride with CIBA discussed above, three other CIBA Ride Leaders chose to use Mulberry Fields as a support site on their own weekly scheduled rides.

The non-profit group, Maplelawn Farmstead, Inc. continues to work on preservation and programming at the farmstead in our Mulberry Fields Park. 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 in 2013. Highlights from their

programs this year included a continuation of their previously successful offerings. Past successes were expanded in 2013, such as the movie night expanding to 3 different movies and the day camp programs growing as well.

Maintenance Efforts

Mowing Contract: Per departmental policy implemented in 2010, the contractual mowing for the department was again placed out to bid. While we do maintain a mower for certain specialty areas and types, when it comes to larger, regularly-shaped, traditional turf zones, it's often cheaper for park departments to contract the mowing rather than staff and maintain a fleet to do so. A Request for Proposals was sent out to 7 contractors and a good response and attractive pricing resulted. In fact the price on the Contractor selected by the Park Board for two years of mowing was less than it had been the previous bidding cycle. Plus, that previous bid cycle had also resulted in a reduction from the levels before. Our maintenance staff is tasked with monitoring closely to ensure quality does not adversely suffer.

Municipal Services Building: Just like Police and Street Department being responsible for the interior maintenance of the building and the maintenance on the exterior surface of the building, the Parks Department is responsible for the outside landscaping beds and turf. This year we voluntarily expanded that to the outside light poles that are scattered in the turf areas. These needed considerable attention and we spent nearly \$4,500 on a variety issues such as repairing rusting stanchion bases and rerunning wiring where the Town's own fiber optics efforts had destroyed a conduit to the point where the electricians felt it was important from a safety point of view to run new. This was above and beyond our normal budget funds but with frugal effort and sacrifices in other line-items we were able to complete this (hopefully) one-time maintenance.

Snow Removal: 2013 had an unusual early winter with 3 separate snow events before Christmas of sufficient level to trigger the Street and Park Departments to roll plows. Snow removal was completed at nearly all of the applicable parks including the Rail-Trail, the parking lots at Mulberry Fields, Elm Street Green, Starkey Park and others. Plus we assist the Street Department with some clearing efforts on their street-side trails while they are tied up on the more critical plowing of the roads.

Training: Park Maintenance staff completed a number of educational courses in 2013, most free (often from our insurance carrier); including Avoiding Strains and Sprains, Safety Procedures for Lawn Mower Operators, Blood Borne Pathogens Training Workshop, Snow Plow Safety training. Pesticide training and Class 3a ornamentals and Class 3b turf certifications and/or CEUs were also continued.

Respectfully prepared and submitted

Matthew L Dickey,
Superintendent of Parks & Recreation