

2015 Zionsville Park and Recreation Department Summary

(Prepared in part for the February 1, 2016 Town Council Meeting)

2015 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): A 107 home subdivision (Vonterra) was approved by the Plan Commission in October, 2015. But of more impact for the Park Department, as it is constructed there will eventually be a ~55-acre donation of new parkland to the department. This will include about 45-48 acres of bottomland, similar to, and across from our current Starkey Park. The remainder acreage will be the raised bed of the abandoned rail corridor which is farther to the north across Eagle Creek and is already part of the Zionsville Rail Trail. Through negotiations with the project's development firm, the developer will also construct a 15-foot wide asphalt trail starting at Zionsville Road continuing back towards Eagle Creek with slightly over 1000 feet of the ~3000 feet of distance between the road and current end of the rail trail. Overall, this represents the equivalent of a **\$200,000** donation to the Park Department and the citizens of Zionsville.

Lake and River Enhancement (LARE) Construction Grant Awarded: In 2015, we applied for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources LARE Funds, a 70%/30% matching reimbursement grant (capped at \$100,000 in grant funds). We were extremely pleased to not only receive funding, but to be the only LARE construction project across the state to receive the maximum award of **\$100,000**. In fact, of the 23 total projects, only two others were awarded amounts over \$60,000.

This project requires low water conditions to successfully construct. This project started about a month later than planned... almost in October, because of an unusual wet spell in the summer. So that was one challenge to be addressed. Still the project was mainly completed before December and has successfully weathered the flooding around Christmastime. Another Challenge was in less than two years since the original DNR assisted study, the two floods that occurred, the bank erosion along this section had cut 10 feet deeper in and extended the arc of eroded cliff face by 100 more feet. This cost the project an additional ~\$20,000 to address that change in conditions. Fortunately we were able to work with the DNR and get them cover almost \$15,000 of this additional cost. So in one sense we still had to cover about \$5,000 more than originally expected due to Mother Nature's curve ball. But we also were earlier able to work with the Army Corps of Engineers to have them drop their initially required full-scale wetland delineation. That saved us \$5,000, which essentially covered the extra erosion cost that would have

been on our plate. So all told, we were able to garner over \$115,000 in grant monies and cost savings. This money greatly overmatched the required local share and helps us address a badly eroding and potentially dangerous bank situation.

Zionsville Bicycle Challenge: This was an excellent second year for this popular program! Participation was up more than 50% in its inaugural year (with 128 riders in 2015). We had new categories for families and newer riders. Over 25% of our total participants this year were either new riders or people returning to the bike after years of absence. All in all the 128 participants logged over **33,497 miles!** And in one of the new categories, Just for Fun participants logged in over *5500 minutes* of riding for the same 6-week challenge window. Just as a reminder, 2014's totals were 85 participants, who logged a grand total of 23,721 miles (no minutes category in 2014).

A Sampling of Grants and Additional Generated Funding (mostly non-tax dollars)

\$18,500 Indiana State Department of Health Grant: This 50%/50% matching reimbursement grant was actually originally denied to us in 2015. However, Zionsville Parks and Recreation was very excited to hear in late summer that we were one of only 4 total departments out of 23-25 in the entire State to be funded for a community-wide Pedestrian and Bicycle Trails Plan. This funding is to help promote health and economic development in communities by increasing the opportunities to walk and bike within those communities. The process is primarily going on in the first half of 2016, but will shape Zionsville as a walkable bike-able community for the next several decades.

Capital Improvement Projects, Capital Maintenance Projects and Similar Efforts

Zion Nature Center Capital Improvements: As part of the planned and ongoing capital maintenance program, the Park Board had planned and budgeted for the replacement of the roof on the existing center (in the building south of Eagle Elementary and owned by the school system). However as the situation evolved and discussions were held between the Town Council members and the members of the School Administration (and at far higher level than the Park Board), the Town decided to go a different direction. The Town may have need for availability of a short term (and perhaps emergency) usage of some structure to serve some interim needs as an alternate or temporary Town Hall, and because the Parks Board has the long term hope to someday have a purpose built Nature Center on better suited property such as one similar to Starkey Park. In 2015, the Town Council and the Park Board decided to combine efforts and budgets (\$300,000 each). The purpose would be to build a structure on the northernmost 2 acres north of Heritage Trail Park in the general area where the future Fire Station will go. This structure could be used as a smaller interim Town Hall (for critical staff), if needed for emergency purposes, or if the Town Council decides that the Current Town Hall needs to be replaced. It may also be used someday as a portion of a future Fire Station project. But the building would primarily be used as a (perhaps interim) Nature Center. We could stay in the structure until, and unless, we would one day build a full-scale purpose-built Nature Center on some sort of property hopefully similar to Starkey Park. But that is clearly a significant capital investment and certainly only a long range goal. This building near Heritage Trail Park would be a very fine interim solution and at the point where we might move the

Nature Center from this use near Heritage Trail Park. Some Park Board members have mentioned it might be valuable to the community to retain this building as a small recreational programming center. Also all Park Board members have expressed a hope that if we move out that their budgets be refunded \$200,000 of their over \$300,000 in investments.

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). While at a much slower rate because this 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 earmarking accounts for the first \$45,000 of net profit the course generates.

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 managing the course this season and we continue to receive many compliments from our clientele. Weather generally cooperated very well until the bottom dropped out in October and November. Up until that point we were on track for a very decent year. Once October rolled around, rain and cold temperatures, often with frost in the mornings, really cut into our play time. Weather (mostly too low temperatures or rain) forced closures. While the Office of Finance and Records hasn't yet closed out the books and provided final official figures, it looks roughly like even with the unusually poor end of the season weather, the course still generated a gross operating revenue of ~\$234,494.

While golf courses are expensive to operate, ours is generally covering its yearly operational cost and almost always clearing a yearly profit besides. This year looks to be no exception. All estimates are pending Office of Finance and Records' final numbers, but currently estimates are that our final 2015 will show a net operating profit in the range of ~\$39,000 to ~\$43,000. For reference, 2014's net operating profits for the year were ~\$12,699. This 2014 number was impacted because we had planned and budgeted for two pieces of capital equipment replacement totaling over \$34,000. If these two pieces of equipment hadn't needed replacement in 2014, our ending 2014 figures would have been very similar to what we are ending up near for 2015, telling us that the two years were otherwise close in terms of final profits.

About 15,000 rounds were played in the 2014 season (compared to 15,400 in 2014), the vast bulk of those played as 9 hole rounds. Mike Maguire, Orlin Coleman, and the rest of the course staff hosted numerous special events, 4 regular golf leagues, several middle school matches (and practices), along with school invitationals and tourneys.

The Zion Nature Center (ZNC) Programming: 2015 was the first full year of programming for the Park Department's Zion Nature Center after the 2014 retirement of the previous full-time staff person. The Park Board is pleased to report our overall yearly programming

attendance and visitation at the center was 9872, a 72% increase from 2014's artificially shortened year.

We had over \$12,000 in direct programming fee collections and almost \$5,000 in various donated items and materials. And much of the fees collected went right back out to help support their respective programs, thereby reducing the tax support need to run our programs. When all is totaled up and the various monetary and material donations, including some to the Zions Nature Center and our "Friends of..." group we garnered over \$20,000 dollars in total. This is a 30% increase over the last time we had a full year of operation (2013 under the now-retired staffer).

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 Farmers' Market area for treats. 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 70-100 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 hosting of this long running program. Attendance has expanded from over the last few years and many complements are 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. This year's overall total attendance may well have been the highest ever. The Lincoln Park Concert Series Committee estimates the overall attendance on this program to be over 2,500.

Garden Plot Program: There were 60 plots rented this year (\$25 each) at Heritage Trail Park. Additionally, 30 more plots were available at Elm Street Green. Both park sites were very successful and well enjoyed by their respective green-thumb enthusiasts. Elm Street Green's plots were all completely booked within 3 hours of the reservation opening! By the end of the first day of reservations Heritage Trail only had 19 plots left.

Youth Sports Activities: In cooperation with ZYFL, youth football is going strong at Mulberry Fields Park. With 100's of registrants in the sport and weekly games during the 3-month season, plus the coaches, officials, and spectators, this program accounted for 1000's 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 it is anticipated both will be returning next year. And the Zionsville Lacrosse Leagues is in negotiations to return to Mulberry Fields after leaving of their own accord to go to Jennings Field Park several years ago. Care must be taken as their season overlaps rugby and the two sports are both playing at a season when any traffic can be much harder on the fields' turf.

Zionsville Creekfest: In the third year of this program's existence, it continues to be a cooperative effort between Zionsville Parks and Recreation Department and the Town's Department of Streets and Stormwater. While it still included the popular stream cleaning activities, this year organizers expanded the event to include an educational, environmental festival component at Elm Street Green. This year with our expanded format, we attracted at least 180 Creekfest participants, with 90 of that number being actually in Eagle Creek working on cleaning activities. Citizen-angler Todd Settle, Gavin Merriman of the Street and Stormwater Department, Park Naturalist Mindy Murdock, and Park Superintendent Matt Dickey served as the primary Organizational Committee. Andy Pickell and other key volunteers also assisted for the day of the event. Once again, our local business community is supporting our efforts with significant donations.

Bronze Level Bike Friendly Designation for the Town: While this was a team effort of citizens and various Town Departments (of which the Park Department was only one key player), Zionsville is very honored to have received this award, a Bronze designation as a Bicycle Friendly Community. This is a rare, national recognition (one of only 358 nationwide) and there are only 9 others in the entire state of Indiana.

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. Many weeks there will be an additional wedding or sometimes even two in the same week. Many other examples abound, a short listing includes... The Sullivan Munce Ghost Walk which utilizes Lincoln Park in October as well. Creekside Park hosts the annual Creekstomp with our ZNC and assistance from the Town's Stormwater Coordinator. 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. Furthermore, in addition to the formal cooperative bicycle ride with CIBA discussed earlier, several 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 this year.

Respectfully prepared and submitted

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