

2018 Zionsville Park and Recreation Department Summary

(Prepared in part for the March 1, 2019 Town Council Meeting)

2018 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 operations of the parks. The report will first go into a few generalities and then discuss some specific highlights.

A Selection of Major Benchmark Examples

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.

Overley-Worman Park LWCF Application: This was for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Program. This application was to supplement a portion of the development cost across about half of the anticipated 45 acres of Overley-Worman Park. The matching grant is a 50%-50% reimbursable grant program grants capped at **\$200,000** in grant dollars per approved application. Even though we had actually applied prior to 2018, final, formal Federal approval had not yet been received from the National Park Service (NPS) by 2017's end. Such a timetable is not at all unusual in working with grant programs as these. After all, there were 15 applications submitted and in some years the State (who administers the Federal funds) has only been able to fund a small handful. Excitingly, our application was ranked **first** out of all the submissions that cycle. So about 2/3rds of the way through 2018 we received our grant contract document with State. Right now the project awaits identification from the Town-elected official level as to just what level of investment the overall Town budgets will support. Will it be the grant dollars plus the bare minimum to match the grant (completing about 25% of the overall park project)... or will it be folded into a larger project so as to build more of the entire park and save money overall through economies of scale. Plus such would complete the park with less phasing or perhaps even in only a single phase. Either way, the Department needs and plans to start into the construction documentation stages this year as soon as the investment level is communicated.

Starkey Park LARE Grant Project: Another reimbursable grant (as most are), this to the Lake And River Enhancement program (State Funds). Application had been for ~\$175,000 dollar investment in biological-engineering bank stabilization in Starkey Park

(note this is the kind of engineering work the State feels is most appropriate and effective and therefore it is more likely to get funded in this program). But note the Grant will reimburse \$100,000 of the overall total. While the application was in early 2017 and notice of award had occurred by mid to late 2017, due to the permitting requirements for working in the waters of the State, there was effectively no way to start the project until late-summer or fall of 2018. And after the State pushed the Fawn River project ahead of ours, we were finally able to mobilize the contractors onto our site October. Much of the work is complete with the rest targeted here in 2019.

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.

So all told in 4 separate projects throughout the year, we contracted the dropping of 55-60 ash trees. Per the best management practices we leave this biomass as homes for wildlife and the base of the food chains and eventually they become fertilizer for the remaining forested stands throughout our system.

In addition our staff has spent an estimated over 100-staff hours pruning and trimming on other trees such as those in Mulberry Fields park and other locations

Non-Native Invasive Efforts: We have started into efforts on the preponderance of nonnative invasive species on the donated land coming to us as a part of the Overly-Worman Project. Through no fault of ours or the Vonterra developer, this site was always known to need some serious attention. The private owners construction practices just naturally tended to promote disturbed conditions and invasive species, some quite harmful, abound. SO we have expended some \$16,000 in the control of invasive woody species and another \$9,000 on various herbaceous species. Our staff certainly continues our ongoing efforts in other parks as well but these mentioned above represent some new challenges as we bring them back to our standard of care in the rest of the system..

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 field.

Rail Trail Dredging Efforts: As just one example our staff borrowed the Street Department's min-excavator, backhoe and two of their large, single-axle dump trucks and we tackled an area near the Big-4 Trail where sediment-laden stormwater runs off the adjacent property and silts in the drainage way alongside of the trail corridor in that area. This area has had to be dredged at other times in the past but it has never been done before with entirely Park Department efforts alone. We were able to remove 15 truckloads of material. It did take all of our maintenance staff a full three days of time

(and pulling us away from other projects) but it represents a calculated investment of \$10,000-\$15,000 in time, equipment, etc. It's calculated that if bid though, that work did "save" us something more like twice that on the open bid market. Especially right now since many contractors are quite busy with work already.

Increased Maintenance Levels: Additionally in 2018, the decision was made to change and increase the maintenance standards in the park system. And in general these standards are higher than those across the state for park systems... even many that are larger than our system and certainly those that are our size. We don't want to give the idea that in general most of our public feels our parks were in poor shape. Evidence strongly suggests just the opposite. In the recent Master Plan Survey only 1.6% of the Zionsville respondents reported feeling our maintenance staff had been keeping the physical conditions of the park as "Poor". We had a very robust response to the online survey; our consultants stated we had 3-4 times the number seen in other communities. And in fact on that same question asking how they would rate the physical condition of our parks, nearly 15% said "Average" (14.97%), additionally nearly 60% reported they thought our park's physical conditions were "Good" (58.29%). And over 25% reported they felt our park's conditions and maintenance were "Excellent" (25.13%). Again, consultants report that statewide these are very high satisfaction numbers.

However Zionsville is not a community that tends to rest on its laurels. And we want to reflect that. So in 2018, we targeted over \$65,000 of investment into the trees, greenery, and maintenance side of the parks. This also includes increased efforts in the application of fertilizers and other chemical-based agronomic care procedures that are standard in turf care industry.

And as just another example alone, for the Creekfest event in Elm Street Green, our maintenance crew spent almost 100 staff-hours bringing the park up to these higher levels in the areas that could be addressed more immediately, without long term chemical applications. Similarly Lincoln Park received increased, size-proportional, attention.

Further examples include, we usually plant 10-15 new trees a year in an annual Fall planting project to replace landscape trees in our park that may not be thriving or in areas supplement them with others. Fall/winter is the best time to do this and both we and the Street Department frequently use such a schedule. Oftentimes we do some or all of these 15 trees in house. However in 2018 we tripled this planting project and placed 45 trees through primarily three parks (Mulberry Fields, Elm Street Green, and Heritage Trail Parks). This represented a \$17,175 invest we we able to pull from the budget by placing some planned 2018 projects on hold and cancelling other projects.

And one other sample (of many)... we spent an additional \$2675 on 35 trees and plants at American Legion Trail Crossing bring those plants to a higher standard.

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 and we continue to receive many compliments from our clientele. 2018 was a very exciting and

land mark year for another reason, though because it marked the start of the long anticipated irrigation replacement project.

In terms of basic play-levels, the vast bulk of rounds were played as 9-hole rounds. Our course staff hosted numerous special events, 4 regular golf leagues each running weekly for several months, 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.

Perhaps not wildly known, but the course reportedly hit it's 50-year anniversary in 2018 (although only about the last 10 years in municipal ownership). And while the irrigation system hasn't been in place that entire time, it is very old and antiquated. The greens had to be watered in the wee hours after midnight, by someone travelling from one to the other green by hand and using quick connect couplings. Also the piping was decaying enough that in some places we had to come back and address the same leaking 100-foot segments 8 times in the same summer. The Park Department had been saving a significant slice (about 1/3) of each year's net profits each year to contribute towards this major capital project. It would have taken several more years to save enough except the Town-elected Officials led by Mayor Haak placed in our budget a sum representing about 60% of the overall amount to go with what had been saved. This enabled the project to occur ahead of the original plans. A very experienced golf course irrigation consultant provided the design plans for this system and following his firm's recommendation, the project was bid in late summer for a fall construction (drier conditions, leagues finish in Sept, and less disruption of general play). Through a major competitive bid, a very experienced national golf irrigation firm won the bid and the bid included higher quality heads than the base bid at no extra cost to us. The only slight downside is they came in from projects in Montana and Georgia and started a bit later than we had planned... finishing the irrigation system installation after Thanksgiving and in snowfall conditions. But 2018 saw the installation of all the piping and over 200 irrigation heads. Left for early 2019 is the final drilling of the new well and connection to the new pump control system already delivered to our site, and along with wiring in the new electrical. The new system should last for decades to come and be much less labor intensive to operate.

Golf courses are traditionally expensive to operate, but ours is generally covers its yearly operational cost and almost always clearing at least some yearly profit besides. However 2018 will be one of the rare exceptions. All estimates are pending Office of Finance and Records' confirmation, but currently estimates are that our final 2018 will show a net operating profit of less than ~\$130. This 2018 number was severely impacted because we had started the long awaited irrigation project (which will be completed in 2019). We have saved a significant amount towards this (nearly half) and the Town's elected officials, led by Mayor Haak, placed additional moneys in the ZGC budget to get us the rest of the way to our goal. Note this represents the only time during its municipal ownership that the course has not covered its own ongoing operational costs. But while this was planned and known that it would be a large number, it is still an actual expense and is shown that on the books as such. As the project bridges across two years, it's likely the remnant payments will also pull down 2019's overall numbers somewhat but what overall effect that will have will be dependent on the 2019 golfing season's viability.

And as a final “capital reminder” related to the Zionsville Golf Course, we plan to continue earmarking 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 *had* been also earmarking additional funds for the replacement of the aging, inadequate, and antiquated irrigation system. After the new irrigation project finishes in early 2019, we still anticipate saving for other long term items like cart path replacement and in some cases new categories where no savings have yet been accumulated; capital equipment, etc. In normal years, this combined savings earmarks had been accounting for the first \$40,000 of the course’s net profit.

The Zion Nature Center (ZNC): 2018, the fourth full year of programming with our Park Naturalist, Mindy Murdock, at the ZNC’s helm; was a solid year. Our 2018 overall yearly programming attendance in the parks (all types) *and* visitation at the center was over ~11,500. And most, but not all, of this was environmental programming (for example the dog walk program is more of a traditional recreational program but those participants are factored into the overall total). The numbers for environmental programming itself are up about 9% from the previous year with about 1,000 more than 2017’s figure (which itself, had been about 3,100 less than 2016’s). But note that 2016 had a one-time, special event-programming opportunity that accounted for 25 programs for Zionsville Schools and totaling over ~2,500 participants. So it’s normal for overall totals fluctuate across years.

On the ZNC monetary side, we generated ~\$11,777 in direct programming fees, slightly under, but within \$1000 of last year’s gross programming fees (\$12,500 for 2017). Additionally, we had gifts, grants, and monetary donations that brought in more funds than just these gross program fees. As just one example Ms. Murdock was able to secure nearly \$5,000 as a donation from the Duke Energy Foundation for six, themed Traveling Teacher Trunks (\$4,887). In terms of gross program fees and other actual cash amounts in hand, 2018 saw a total of ~\$21,755. Of course much of this went right back out to support the various programs for which it was collected (day camps are one prime example). Additionally, we had an estimated value of ~\$1,560 in donated and in-kind materials/supplies. Note that while we don’t charge fees for all programs, when we do charge, much of the fees go directly to help support their respective programs; reducing general tax support needs for operations.

2018 also marked the voluntary dissolution of the Friends of the Zion Nature Center. This group of interested citizens had first formed back in the early 2000’s to support the formation of a Nature Center in Zionsville. And while the Park Department had always fiscally supported the cause from day one, in part with maintenance support on the building and also with a very large amount of public sector funds in total over this same duration (much of it for part-time and later fulltime staffing): the Friends further fundraised and helped put on various events and programs and in later years even some that were primarily “their own”. At one point the funds raised to support the Zions Nature Center resulted in yearly bank account totals that were upwards of \$15,000. Unfortunately, for many groups as membership ages and potential new members are pulled in a variety of different directions and for a variety of causes, it became more

challenging for the members who are left. So where in the past our Friends of the Zion Nature Center were able to generate donations and other fundraising efforts that resulted in more than \$15,000 in the bank, their available donation funds at the end were less than \$4,000. Once their decision was made to dissolve and as was proper, the last ~\$3385 in their donations account went to the cause for which they had been accepting the public's donations all along... the Zion Nature Center.

One other 2018 ZNC note: The Parks Department also was awarded a donation from the Boone County Solid Waste District for \$5000 to be used for recycled materials in production of picnic tables. This was a department-wide concept but Mindy was asked to prepare most of the application material for submission as about 2/3rds of the tables will be utilized at the nature center. Due to the nature of the program and usage, that money will be received in 2019 so it's not actually reflected into the dollar figures above. It's more appropriate and matches Town Hall's book keeping more closely if we report the dollars in 2019, when actually received.

Zionsville Bicycle Challenge: This was another great program, in its fifth year. Total registration was nearly stable again this year at 120 registrants (with 125 in 2017, 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. And we typically have at least 25% new sign-ups, so it is a good outreach program. It is structured over six weeks with riders choosing their challenge level, targeting 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 **25,000 miles** (34,986 total bicycling miles in 2017, 31,383 total miles in 2016 and 33,497 total miles in 2015)!

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), a team each from the Dow Agrocyclists and Zionsville Triathlon Club, and some members of each of those groups significantly assist us in providing the program. The third, Team Zionsville, is comprised mostly from the Zionsville Community and friends and family members. This year, Team Zionsville was able to keep their unblemished hold on the Travel Trophy. 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 these co-sponsoring groups provided a total of 7-10 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 average around 35-40 participants depending if one counts toddlers in trailers. This and that immediately above are part of National Bike Month.

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 50-100+ participants range. 2018 was no exception with ~75+ riders.

Lincoln Park Concert Series: With the cooperation and assistance of the Park Department, the Lincoln Park Concert Series Committee (a Subcommittee of the Zionsville Cultural District Committee), continues their talent-selection, scheduling, and provision of this long running program. Many compliments 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 150-200 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 full, accurate participation counts, only estimates, concerts probably run between 1000-1800 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.

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 Park. They used the park 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. Rugby fulfilled their 2018 commitments in this area. ZYFL football got caught with their scheduling and weather and have committed to a spring treatment in 2019 (for the 2018 due from 2018) and then a fall commitment to cover the 2019 season "fees". These sports groups also, and originally recommended to parks of their own volition, keep their coaches/teams from practicing on the fields so they can sustain them in the great condition that generates compliments 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 sixth 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 planned as including the popular stream cleaning activities, it also has an environmental festival component at Elm Street Green. While

high waters prevented the cleanup in 2018, this year's participation at the festival was another high at 320+ 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 met both our organizations' goals and they were very happy. This ongoing 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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