

# 2016 Zionsville Park and Recreation Department Summary

(Prepared in part for the February 6, 2017 Town Council Meeting)

2016 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 ½ the width of former railroad ROW. This is the same raised bed of the abandoned rail corridor which farther to the north (across Eagle Creek) is already part of the former Zionsville Rail Trail (which in 2016 was renamed the Big-4 Rail Trail in 2016). 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. 2016 saw the first groundwork being laid for Phase-1 of the subdivision (about 30- homes). Since the developer is only donated the future parkland in parcels based upon their internal phases of development... Phase-1's donated features to the Park Department only includes about 1.5 acres of land which will include their ~1000 feet of 15-wide asphalt trail. It's anticipated this donation will occur by January, 2017.

*\$18,500 Indiana State Department of Health Grant:* Zionsville Parks and Recreation was very excited to hear in late in 2015 that we were one of only 4 departments out of 23-25 in the entire State to be funded for a community-wide Pedestrian and Bicycle Trails Plan. This is a 50%/50% matching reimbursement grant and is awarded to help promote health and economic development in communities by increasing the opportunities to walk and bike within those communities. While this was a Town-wide process and not just a Park Department one, the Park Board felt so strongly that this was critical to the Town's health and economic development, the targeted \$40,000 of their The lengthy planning process was primarily held in the first half of 2016. The outgrowth of this planning process produced the Zionsville Strategic Trails Implementation Plan or Z-STIP. The process involved a very competitive planning process to bring on an extremely knowledgeable consultant team experienced in trail planning and construction. Five firms were invited via a Request for Proposals (RFP) and the steering Committee of 10; composed of elected officials, Town Staff, trail users, and other community members narrowed that down to

two finalists, both of these consultant teams then had a second round of competition and in-person presentations.

The planning process was very in-depth and involved and it basically took the existing Town Council Trails Plan (routes) and took a much more detailed look at the potentials of these routes across the entire Zionsville community. The process had several public input meetings. Also, there were other public input avenues including a 22- question online survey that was completed by over 800 individuals. Also there was an online route mapping component that let participants suggest path routes (or suggest areas that should not have paths), identify specific challenging locations or “roadblocks”, and comment on others suggestions within that survey tool. This online mapping tool 800 participants and generated over 1000 additional comments as input.

The goal was looking beyond the pre-existing routes plan (which is still in use as a valuable initial planning tool) to identify key, critical routes from the overall network of trails shown in the earlier documents. Additionally, the public process identified 10 “Keystone Projects” in short-range, mid-range, and long range categories. These projects looked at an estimated - minute and 10-minute walk to the particular Keystone Project. And then the process used those ranges to identify the number of homes and the number of people able to very easily make use of that new facility based upon the homes currently built within these two radii. These projected direct-impact numbers expand greatly when one adds in the potential to bike to the Keystone Project portion. Furthermore the process identified several easily sign-able routes that are essentially “low-hanging fruits” should the Town Council wish to implement them.

All and all, a bargain on a very detailed and crucial tool for health and economic well-being of our future Town and a living document that will shape Zionsville as a walkable and bike-able community for the next several decades.

*Lake and River Enhancement (LARE) Construction Grant Awarded:* Early in 2016, we applied for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources LARE Funds, an 80%/20% matching reimbursement grant (capped at \$100,000 in grant funds). We were extremely pleased to not only receive funding, but also to be told we had a project so important and such a well-prepared application, that the State awarded the maximum amount of **\$100,000**. In fact, of the 33 total projects, only two others were so awarded this max. After those, only two projects below the first three received awards higher than \$50,000. This is the second such \$100,000 we have been awarded from the State’s LARE program and the third grant from this same program overall... for a full total of over \$252,000 (in the last 4-5 years)

The 2017 project is for about 120 feet of biological reconstruction along a steep, highly eroded, and potentially dangerous bank situation. To construct properly, it requires low water conditions. So the likely project start is sometime in September to October of 2017.

*Zionsville Bicycle Challenge:* This was another great program, in this, its third year. Total registration was stable (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 the riders chose

their challenge level, either a target of a 90 minutes of riding each week, or one of three mileage challenges per week (200, 400, or 600 miles). For those who chose the minutes challenge (usually more of the beginners category or those with really tight schedules), total minutes ridden by all the participants over the six week was the equivalent of nearly *9.5 full days!* Total mileage for all those who chose one of the three mileage distances was over **31,383 miles** (33,497 total miles in 2015, and 5500 minutes or 3.8 days in 2015 for those who had chosen the time challenge)! For 2016, that is the equivalent distance of riding a bicycle from New York to Los Angeles and back... but doing that round trip 5 and ½ times total!! 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 in a hotly contested race, Team Zionsville was able to keep their unblemished hold on the Travel Trophy. But the normal title-challenger, Dow AgroCyclist Club was only just a hair under 1000 miles behind, so quite close this year. Team Zionsville needs more riders next year!

### **A Sampling of Other Grants & Additional Generated Funding (mostly non-tax \$'s)**

*\$9,500 Fundraising Effort for a New Exhibit/Home for our Box Turtles:* This was a concept developed by our Park Naturalist, Mindy Murdock. As originally discussed it was thought to need about two years to generate the funds and instead we finished it in about a year. Many individuals responded very positively to the effort, including an entire class at Union Elementary School. But the biggest single donation came from our Friends of the Zion Nature Center support group. While when originally approached at the beginning of the project, the Friends didn't quite feel comfortable granting the full \$9,500. However, after about 9 months as the fundraising efforts neared the halfway mark, the group did graciously donate \$5,000 to get the effort over the top! It could easily have taken much longer without their help!

*\$2,100 Recycling grant from Boone County Solid Waste Management District (BCSWD):* This 50%/50% matching reimbursement grant was for a three-bay, indoor recycling station to be placed in the Zions Nature Center. It was one of the few from that year's applicants to be granted the full amount the applicant had requested. Even though the new Center was not built this year, we can use the station in the old center until such time as we may be moving and then shift it to the new location.

### **Capital Improvement Projects, Capital Maintenance Projects and Similar Efforts**

*Potential New Zion Nature Center:* 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 owned by the school system and immediately south of Eagle Elementary). 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 near the general area where a future Fire Station could go. In the case of limited emergencies, this park department structure could be used as a smaller interim Town Hall (for critical staff). But the building would primarily be used as a 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 mid-range 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 would be valuable to the community to retain this building as a small recreational programming center. Also all Park Board members expressed a hope that if we move out with no remaining Park Department use of the structure, that their budgets be refunded \$200,000 of their over \$300,000 of investment.

In January 2016, a design committee met for the first time to begin planning implementation for this joint project between the Park Board and the Town Agencies was held. This group was well attended including the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, Department heads from the Parks, Fire, Streets, and Planning/Economic Development Departments. The group also included a Park Board Member, the Park Naturalist, and members of the two firms (construction management and the architectural firm) that had been selected by the Town. The concept for this group is to discern the joint design principles that are important for a hybrid building that could have functionality beyond a Nature Center should the Parks Department move beyond such use at the identified site, just north of Heritage Trail Park along the south side of CR400S. Of course the ability to move out may be dependent on whether the Park Board can recoup some of their funds used in implementing this structure since, if the Park Board does have to move they will still need a Nature Center building in some further location. The design firms, on their own, came up with a possible concept that does not absolutely require the Fire Department or some other non-park use to someday supplant the nature center and require it to be moved off-site (i.e. uses could coexist on site).

As the process has evolved it became clear there is indeed room for a Nature Center and a future fire station (if such is the need) to exist and operate independently on the two acres just north of Heritage Trail Park. The decision to split and build a separate stand allowing Park Facility buildings on the property was confirmed with Deputy Mayor Mitro. And that discussion was also bumped up to Councilor Jeff Papa, who as Mayor Papa back in 2015 was one of the “godparents” of the building concept. The current mayor, Mayor Haak was also consulted in the decision to split into two buildings and all agreed this was the right thing to do This will allow a standalone Park facility to exist on that site in perpetuity and will not absolutely require us to move our Nature Center at a future date. And if some donation of a fantastic piece of land someday provides a better home for

some future nature center, this building can be converted by the park department to a recreation facility that could hold small classes and workshops.

Unfortunately, as was reported to the media, the new Nature Center bids came back surprisingly much higher the Consultant Team's estimates for the building. And the amounts were significantly more than the combined monies earmarked by both the Town and the Park Board for the project. Currently, the project's been put on hold while the Town's consultants look both at the building's original cost estimates to determine if there were any inaccuracies (and if so, to assess the extent this may have affected the bidding process), and to consider to what degree the currently highly active construction project environment may be contributing to the unexpectedly high bids. If it turns out significantly more monies are indeed needed to achieve this building, such will have to be carefully considered. The best scenario for 2017, is the hope it might be determined it was 2016's bidding environment and perhaps the project could be repackaged and put out on the market for a successful bid, with perhaps a new building being completed in 2018.

### **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. Weather generally cooperated until the bottom out of the thermometer for the last portion of November. While we still haven't matched our numbers yet with the Office of Finance and Records, based upon their numbers, it looks like the course generated a gross operating revenue of ~\$234,533. Ironically this was less than \$40 higher than last year!

While golf courses are expensive to operate, ours is generally covering its yearly operational cost and almost always clearing at least a small 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 2016 will show a net operating profit in the range of ~\$30,000 to ~\$34,000. For reference, 2015's net operating profits for the year were ~\$44,000. This 2016 number was negatively impacted because we had three critical unplanned capital cost items beyond the expenses planned into the budget. For example one was the large preexisting concrete culvert near the western edge of the course suddenly developed such a severe crack that rains were washing soil down through the split in the top of the pipe. This caused a sinkhole to develop in our cart path running over the top. We tried various filling approaches in the hope it would stabilize and hold until we could plan it into a budget process, but it was not working. While this was only one of the three items, it was the worst and we spent nearly \$15,000 for the repairs (based upon the lowest quote). These extra expenses impacted us so much, we had to shift moneys away from several normal agronomic practices, for example try as we might; we had to forgo our usual yearly greens aeration and shift that money (along with other line items to cover these extra expenses).

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 15,000 rounds were played in the 2016 season (compared to the same, ~15,000, in 2015), the bulk of those were played as 9-hole rounds (~10,500). Mike Maguire, Orlin Coleman, and the rest of the course staff hosted numerous special events, 4 regular golf leagues, 7 other golfing reunions/events, several middle school matches (and practices), along with school invitationals and tourneys.

*The Zion Nature Center (ZNC) Programing:* 2016, the second full year of programing while the center's under the helm of our Park Naturalist Mindy Murdock; was an outstanding year. Mindy now has 2 and ½ years with us after the retirement of our previous full-time staffer at the center. The Park Board is pleased to report our overall yearly programing attendance in the parks and visitation at the center was an all-time record of 13,596, up about 2000 visits from the previous high in 2013 (the last full year before we hired Mindy). The center started in 2002 and has been funded by the Park Department throughout its entire existence.

On the monetary side, for 2016, we generated over \$12,600 in direct programing fee collections and almost \$10,000 in various donations (monetary, items, supplies/materials, etc.). This programming fees total is within a few hundred of last year's. But donations were nearly twice as much. Most of that was due to our new turtle exhibit fundraising drive where our Friends of the Zions Nature group was able to assist us near the process's end by donating \$5,000 to help us get over the top on that effort. Also part of that fundraising effort was a \$2,100 grant we got for a new, indoor recycling center received from the Boone County Solid Waste Management District.

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 25% increase over 2015's total and over a 120% increase from the last full year of operation before Mindy's hiring (which had been 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 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 were received. Thanks to the volunteers on the LPCSC for their efforts and support in keeping the long standing concert series going... 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 (of which they had an unusual 4 in 2016) cause them to shift to the Lions Clubhouse with much more limited seating. One of those indoor concerts only had 25 in attendance. So it is much more likely that concerts overall were around 100-1500 participants instead of the 1500-2000 average that is more normal.

*Garden Plot Program:* There were ~40 plots rented 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.

The Zionsville Rugby and Lacrosse Leagues also use Mulberry Fields. And the Zionsville Lacrosse Leagues returned to Mulberry Fields after leaving of their own accord to go to Jennings Fields several years ago. Both these programs went well and it is anticipated both will be returning next year. Care must be taken as their seasons overlap rugby and the two sports are both playing in spring months when any traffic can be much harder on the fields' turf.

*Zionsville Creekfest:* This was the fourth year of this program's existence (and our third based at Elm Street Green), and the 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 was to again include the environmental festival component at Elm Street Green. Unusually extensive storms on the last few days in the week before the August event coupled with a 45-minute lighting storm as the event would have started on that Saturday morning. These harsh conditions required the event's cancellation. The stream was too high and dangerous from the previous rains and the lightning on the day-of made holding the festival portion ill-advised. Because we are involved with so much other programming in the weeks before and especially after the event and because so many volunteers schedule the date of the event itself and shift their family activities to the surrounding weekends... it is impractical to have a rain date. We would be hard-pressed to staff it. And for the public attendance levels, it would be difficult to predict how much lower it would go.

*The non-profit group, Maplelawn Farmstead, Inc.* continues to work on preservation and programming at the farmstead in our Mulberry Fields Park. And this year the Maplelawn non-profit group petitioned the Mayor and the Town Council to loosen the Town's prohibition against alcohol in the parks so that they may have an additional source of fundraising. The powers-that-be acquiesced and the Town Ordinance was changed to allow alcohol only in this park's farmyard location (inside the current fencing only). 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, a short listing includes... The Sullivan Munce Ghost Walk which utilizes Lincoln Park in October. 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. 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.

*Staffing Changes:* 2016 was a year of considerable change in regards to the department's staffing. The largest change to the face of the department was the retirement of long-time employee Al Smith (with nearly 28years of service). Al was originally a part-time employee and later became the full-time superintendent for the department. In 2009, he chose to become the Assistant Superintendent for Maintenance Services when the department's head position had the direct responsibility for the park system maintenance split out from its duties. He continued admirably serving the department for another seven years and then retired, wanting no parties, gifts, or fanfare. His good humor and smiling face will be missed.

Additionally two long time and beloved faces out at the Zionsville Parks Golf Course are retired at the end of 2016. Mike Maguire and Orlin Coleman both decided to enter their "second retirement". While technically both were "only" part-time employees, both worked very hard and for long hours making our course the best 9-hole course this area. Mike was our Course Manger and Orlin our course's Greenkeeper, and both served the golfing community for the eight full seasons the Town has owned the course. They also will be sorely missed. Their positons were filled early in January, 2017. And the course and its new staff will be ready for its late March opening.

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Respectfully prepared and submitted

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Superintendent of Parks & Recreation