

Dec 11, 2023 |

📅 Trails & Kickapoo Rail Trail Subcommittee Meeting

Attendees: Philip A., Chris B., Tim B., George H., Riley J. (John Zeman), Derek L., Keenan P., Bob V., Mary W., and Jeff Y.

Notes

- Introductions
 - Brief introductions
 - **Background of Weaver and Prairie Parks**
 - The acquisition of Weaver was ~20 years ago (Grant was in 2002)
 - Urbana Park District needed to find a site that could combine our athletics and natural areas (Weaver and Prairie Parks combined would make a mixed use site that includes athletics and natural areas)
 - Other districts have higher quality athletic programs (Normal, Champaign, Decatur, Springfield) these sites have a variety of athletics and some have amenities that also serve a shared use purpose for natural areas
 - Shared site (future transportation for bike corridors, KRT trail head, natural areas, and athletics)
 - Wetland was a success for Scottswood Subdivision (there was flooding prior and this is why the wetland was created)
 - Concepts from the first master plan was a shared site with prairie, woodlands, and active recreation
 - Creating a way for people to visit Weaver and Prairie Parks (Health & Wellness Center and athletics) is the way to bring awareness to nature aspects that the parks have to offer
 - Most park projects work in 5-10 year phases, Weaver and Prairie Parks operated differently due to the lack of resources and opportunities in the past. We now have a great opportunity and resources to continue what we started with our 2005 Master Plan for Weaver and Prairie Parks
 - Approximately \$1M of the \$11.2 million from ITEP will be purposed to build the trailhead

- ITEP was awarded to the City of Urbana; usually there is a local match that is associated with grants; however, the ITEP grant was awarded the full \$11.2M at once
 - Our mission is not solely focused on conserving and preserving natural resources like a forest preserve district. We value our natural areas but we aim to round out our parks by providing a little bit of everything for all of Urbana
 - Leaving Weaver and Prairie Park alone and not doing anything is not something that is feasible for us; that is not the plan we are aiming for
 - Making a plan to get out of county property; we cannot apply grants to short term leased or rented property
 - Buying other land is off the table; we are lacking the resources and we have land that we bought for this which is Weaver and Prairie Parks
 - Weaver and Prairie Parks is surrounded by a high hope neighborhood and UPD capitalized by buying the land for future development for athletics and natural areas
 - The board wants to see UPD, steering committee and residents come together to make a plan for Weaver and Prairie, but not to leave it alone. The goal is a shared use site that provides for many interests and needs.
- Park classification breakdown
 - Signature park (Weaver/Prairie, Meadowbrook, Perkins Rd Park Site/Dog Park/Webber, Crystal Lake) - We consider these parks destination parks that combine multiple use areas and natural areas.
 - Park classification breakdown dates back to 2 strategic plans ago
 - Neighborhood Park (e.g. Blair Park), Community (e.g. King Park), and Signature Parks (e.g. Meadowbrook Park, CLP, and Perkins/Webber)
 - All of our signature parks have some aspect of natural areas; cannot have a signature park without a natural area
 - Vision to grow east Urbana
 - By making Weaver & Prairie more attractive with a Health & Wellness Center and a shared use site for recreation and passive recreation
 - In the past 20 years, there has been more development on the east side of Urbana and the city has also pushed to make this development happen

- Weaver & Prairie Parks are supposed to help grow this east area of Urbana and be attractive towards residents and non-residents
- Community Engagement
 - Public engagement completed so far
 - Initial outdoor courts, fields, and amenities survey focused on athletics to see what in the 2004 Master Plan was still valid today in terms of athletic needs so we could update the plan based upon current needs/interest; There was very little in the survey about natural resources but rather we worked with our natural areas advisory committee, Audubon, and focus group participants to identify which resources were in highest need for protection and buffering
 - Did include questions about natural areas and trails but heavily athletic focused
 - We have reached out to gain additional members for the School and Community engagement committee which was not well attended. We have added two neighbors and are seeking additional representation from the school district. We welcome the trails subcommittee assistance if they know of folks
 - Stakeholder planning committee
 - School & Community Engagement
 - Natural Resources & Environment
 - Athletics & Active Recreation
 - Trails & Kickapoo Rail Trail
 - Two focus groups were held at the Phillips Recreation Center
 - One focus group centered specifically on athletic fields to determine 2023 needs vs 2005
 - The other focus group was centered on recreation, natural areas, and trails
 - The district also consulted with its citizen advisory committee and natural areas committee to help establish priorities for the Weaver & Prairie Parks plan updates
 - Country Squire Neighborhood Watch Event

- Shared information about the Weaver & Prairie Park planning process and provided updates on the construction of the new Health and Wellness Center at Prairie Park
- ADA and accessibility needs
 - ADA access - in the process of receiving our 2nd transition plan
 - New consultant - Jennifer Skulski
 - Staff is being trained on all different types of accessibility
 - Newer requirements - All new constructions/additions will be made to accommodate the latest ADA regulations
- Upcoming trail projects
 - ITEP trail
 - City of Urbana is the applicant and awardee of the ITEP grant
 - 2nd time applying for it
 - Connects Washington St. to Main St. through Bakers Lane on the east side of Weaver Park
 - Also connects to sidewalk that leads toward the future Health and Wellness Center
 - Awarded 100% of project cost, usually there is a local match of 20%
 - Crosswalk with flashing lights across Main St. and Washington St.; like the crosswalk in front of Grainger Engineering Library on Springfield Ave
 - Made contact with the owner of the property North of the future ITEP trail which allowed for the development of the trail - property has been acquired
 - Waiting on missing link; property that was abandoned by a “rail company”; this will assist in the development of the trail
 - \$11.2m DCEO fund for Weaver Park trail into Vermillion County
 - Multi-use 10ft trail
 - 2005 master plan proposed loop trail within Weaver & Prairie in respect to ITEP trail - this will be the north/south addition on east side of park

- Interpretative node or overlook by wetland that people can stop at; Southern portion of wetland and ITEP trail might be best location
 - Proposed connections into the Scottswood neighborhood at E Illinois St. and E Elm St.
- FAQs
 - Answering Trails & Kickapoo Rail Trail FAQs staff have encountered
- Next Meeting
 - Discussing the agenda for next meeting
 - Date and time
 - Future subcommittee meetings will take place in January, after the holidays

Action items

- Jeff Y.** - Example of a community park?
 - Derek L.** - King Park
- Riley J.** - Length of the trail should not go longer than what was pitched in the ITEP grant
 - Should not be a problem changing the trail from the schematic shown (moving the portion that meanders out west to the north of the wetland back east toward the tree line)
- Bob V.** - I think you need a double trail but not two paved trails; I'd like to keep the mowed trails and have one paved path
 - Moving the bike path into the prairie will rip out a lot of prairie; should run west of the tree line
 - Trail can swerve in and out of the tree line, straighten path running south to move inside away from the wetland so the trail does not cut in too much of the prairie by the wetland
 - ITEP trail should just run along the tree line
 - The prairie getting cut out is too diverse to destroy it
- Derek L.** - We're going to try and stay away from just a straight path running north to south; studies show that people are more interested in trails that meander a little bit

- Chris B.** - I agree with Bob
 - Paved path north to south; narrow mowed walking paths that meander in
 - Move trail in east as it goes into higher value prairie around the wetland
- Jeff Y.** - Where is the interpretative area?
 - Derek L.** - Currently right by the wetland (the saddle area), where the trail meanders in towards the wetland (Illinois St.), will need to go somewhere more accessible
- George H.** - Will there be parking between Elm and Illinois St.?
 - Tim B.** - There will be street parking by or around those streets if people want to park over there
- George H.** - Trees over a trail is good infrastructure for a trail; I like the idea of moving out of the prairie but also meandering a little bit for the trail users sake
- George H.** - When you go into Meadowbrook and see those paved paths... it takes a little bit of that soft nature element away from the site...we should try and avoid that with the ITEP trail
- Derek L.** - What are the requirements for lighting? - To **Riley J.**
 - Riley J.** - The idea would be to put some degree of lighting on the trail... preferably dark sky lighting
 - Derek L.** - Lighting can help stop some of the dumping that goes on behind Baker's Lane
 - Derek L.** - No issues with neighbors from dark sky light along trails in Missoula, MT which has a dark sky ordinance
- Mary W.** - What's mostly lit at Middle Fork – Forest Preserve is the campground; preserve is big enough to keep certain areas dark; dark sky bollards, motion detected along trails
- George H.** - The wetland hill might affect ADA requirements
- Mary W.** - Is that a natural berm? The saddle area next to the wetland?
 - Tim B.** - No, its meant to hold in that excess water and what makes the marsh
 - Bob V.** - Couple of 4 in. rainfalls and we have not had an issue along Bakers Lane flooding into scottswood

- Jeff Y.** - 1st St. all the way down to Windsor Rd. - lights that are dim but brighten as you approach
- Derek L.** - With bollard lighting, you won't be able to see faces, so that may be a safety issue with people on the trail not seeing who is in front of them but it does have a softer light than pole lights
- Derek L.** - If we meander less, the path will definitely get shorter and not longer
- Jeff Y.** - It's nice to see who's coming ahead of you on a trail – I've had a few scares on trails before by not being able to see a runner or biker coming
- Tim B.** - Biking and walking are our highest recreation pastimes
- Riley J.** - Time table on ITEP trail – consultants should be getting the design within the next few months; City has since confirmed 2025 construction
- Mary W.** - Does the ITEP grant cover design and construction?
 - Tim B. and Derek L.** - I believe so
- Derek L.** - Approximately 15 years ago, an easement for a sewer main was in the thoughts for running through Bakers Lane
 - Sewer infrastructure easement would go below Bakers Lane and across the north side of Weaver; okay to have a trail on top but no permanent facility development should be on top
- Derek L.** - Quite nice and old trees along Bakers Lane that we want to be extra careful about
- Derek L.** - Trailhead for KRT; Grant funds are around \$1M for trailhead infrastructure
 - Pavilion - similar to new UPDAC pavilion
 - 2 multi-gender restrooms but no storage closet
 - No fireplace
 - Parking lot - originate from the curb cut
 - Roughly 2 years to complete the work, 2025
- Mary W.** - Width of the sidewalk on the north end of Weaver, that connects to Bakers Lane?
 - Derek L.** - 8ft.

- Mary W.** - width of future ITEP trail?
- Derek L.** - unsure of the correct width; since confirmed 10ft.
- Bob V.** - Minimize the turf around the trailhead as much as you can
- Jeff Y.** - Was there a small play area off of the trail head?
 - Derek L.** - Yes, there was
 - Philip A.** - What kind of lighting for the parking lot area?
 - Derek L.** - Dark sky lighting
 - Bob V.** - Turf area is too large for pavilion and play area; almost half of a soccer field
 - Jeff Y.** - Trailhead would serve as a trailhead but also serve as an area for kids and others to be for soccer games/other large events
 - Bob V.** - We need a serious discussion of getting rid of those small practice fields towards the south – we can possibly plant more prairie there
 - Philip A.** - The large soccer fields can be broken down into smaller fields for different ages so those practice fields could possibly go
 - Philip A.** - There is an issue with wanting to rotate the fields
 - I've just discovered that the University does not rotate fields; but, they slide them up 15 - 20 ft and this takes care of worn areas in front of the goal in the same way rotating them would
 - Four main fields for option one design and we do not need those practice fields
 - If fields are rotated, could run into the problem of people running into the prairie to retrieve soccer balls; had problems at the university
- Bob V.** - Buffer more of the marsh
- Bob V.** - Put the playground towards the ball diamonds
- Bob V.** - Berm on the east edge of fields all the way down the fields
- Bob V.** - Are we doubling the damage for the wetland with additional parking?

- Tim B.** - Let's remember, the wetland already serves as a drainage for parking with minimal or no treatment
- Derek L.** - New Weaver parking drainage will have bioswales for treatment
- Bob V.** - keep in mind cutting that parking area down; we should not need as much parking as Lincoln Square Mall
- Mary W.** - Permeable surface for parking lots?
 - Derek L.** - Maybe on the ends of the parking lot where water run-off will be the most heaviest - need to cultivate cost and materials
- Jeff Y.** - MTD parking is all permeable