

Dec 6, 2023 | 📅 Athletics & Active Recreation Subcommittee

Attendees: Philip A., Tim B., Jonville C., Corky E., Mel F., Janet F., Mario F., George H., Ben K., Derek L., Steve M., and Keenan P.

Notes

- **Introductions**
 - **Background of Weaver and Prairie Parks**
 - The acquisition of Weaver was ~20 years ago (Grant was in 2002)
 - Can the Urbana Park District find a site that can combine our athletics and natural areas? (UPD found Weaver and Prairie Park site for a mixed use purpose)
 - 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
 - Schools have changed, they are more secure, we cannot gain access to school grounds for the public to use
 - Shared site (future transportation for bike corridors, KRT trail head, natural areas, and athletics)
 - Weaver and Prairie Parks are classified as a signature park; it is a destination that people come to
 - 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
 - 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 site classification**
 - 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
 - Largest of parks out of the classifications
 - 50 acres and larger
 - All include natural area
 - Sports fields, complexes, playgrounds, swimming, trail systems...
 - **Vision to Grow East Urbana**
 - 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
 - Route 130 corridor can become a developed area in Urbana

- Weaver & Prairie Parks are supposed to help grow this east area of Urbana and be attractive towards residents and non-residents
 - Enterprise zones are geographic areas that have been granted special tax breaks, regulatory exemptions, or other public assistance in order to encourage private economic development-
 - The reason we needed Weaver and Prairie is because our athletics was really spread out thin across Urbana; A lot of our sport fields need an actual location and home; Our neighborhood parks are just not ideal for hosting such large events
 - Urbana residents were not happy about using the parks in neighborhoods for athletic programs and told UPD to find a site that can cater a lot of athletics and sports fields
 - At the time, Residents encouraged the board to find a site for athletics
 - A destination athletics facility was the vision for east Urbana
 - 2005 master plan
- **Community Engagement**
 - **Public engagement completed so far**
 - Stakeholder planning committee
 - School & Community Engagement
 - Natural Resources & Environment
 - Athletics & Active Recreation
 - Trails & Kickapoo Rail Trail - (12/6/23)
 - Our initial outdoor courts, fields, and amenities survey, went through our list serves, all urbana school households; This survey served a purpose of getting an idea of where our athletics are at today compared to 2004-05
 - Athletic focused survey
 - Natural areas were mentioned in the survey, but was not a main focus of the survey
 - Nature areas evaluated with UPD Natural Areas Advisory Committee and Ch. Bo. Audubon

- 2004-05 people wanted to see the woodland protected, now it is the wetland that people care most about protecting
 - Two focus groups were held at the Phillips Recreation Center
 - One focus group centered specifically on athletic fields
 - 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
 - During our virtual public meeting in August (reviewing two draft concepts and the outdoor courts, fields, and amenities survey) people were concerned about the outcome of Weaver & Prairie Parks so that is what led us here today in our subcommittees
 - 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
 - Need more representation from the school and community subcommittee
 - Important to engage with some of the immediate neighbors surrounding Weaver & Prairie Parks
 - “You belong here”
 - Flyering the entire neighborhoods surrounding Weaver & Prairie Parks
- **Outdoor courts, fields, and amenities survey**
 - Quality of our athletics were called out
 - Soccer had a lot of challenges
 - Access to the leased soccer fields
 - Quality of our soccer program
 - Leased site, cannot make grant funded improvements
 - Skateboarding and pickle ball were two of our highest ranked activities from the survey

- **FAQs**

- Answering Athletics & Active Recreation FAQs staff have encountered
- Please send in your questions so that we may add them to our FAQs list
- Working on answering questions; we need to pull data, so it could take a little time

- **Program(s)**

- Proposed activities for prairie park have been highly anticipated
 - Splash pad - free amenity
- Changes that have happened between 2004 and 2023
 - Athletics have been reduced from what our 2005 master plan determined we needed during that time

- **Next meeting**

- After the New Year

Open Discussion

- Jonville C.** - Why are we reducing athletics in the Weave & Prairie Parks master plan?
 - Corky E.** - Survey results have told us that we do not need as many athletic fields as we needed before; the community needs have changed
 - We have room for growth for the future; high hope youth involved with ballfield activities could potentially lead to a larger appeal to ballfield activities
 - Strong upkick in the travel leagues
- Jonville C.** - Girls softball needs their own ballfield; possibly partnering back with the UPD
- Mario F.** - How are we accounting for the years ahead of us?
- Mario F.** - Is this a down year for sports? Does the survey reflect that?
 - Corky E.** - Planning for more growth and to rotate soccer fields; ballfields: maintaining what we have

- Jonville C.** - Did we actually capture what urbana residents want? Softball girls missed the survey and I missed the survey as well. So did only some stakeholders know about the survey because they were anticipating Weaver & Prairie Parks development with the Health and Wellness Center?
- Tim B.** - This group needs to focus on the change that is happening with the county - because the morale of the story is - what do we do when we cannot use that land anymore – we are left with nothing – so we need to have a plan for now and not the future
- Ben K.** - How critical is the timing for this? We have zero UPD owned soccer fields – we cannot properly treat them. If the county wanted that land for something else they would kick us off and we wouldn't have any soccer fields
- Jonville C.** - Creating ballfields can create revenue for the UPD, What is the revenue potential for facilitation/rentals?
 - Corky E.** - We will need to pull some data; however, this number will be a rough estimate. It is hard to predict an exact amount, there are a lot of factors
- Philip A.** - Clarification for baseball/softball fields – What is the difference between the ballfield on Washington, proposed ball fields for weaver, and the ball fields at blair?
 - Jonville C.** - We do not have softball fields anywhere and they are smaller in size; every game that softball plays, we have to mark the field where our actual dimensions should be for this sport
 - Corky E.** - Behind Brookens is a hardball field - meant for highschool baseball mostly; Canaday is used for T-ball
 - Corky E.** - Ballfields planned here is more of a multipurpose field where we can use it for almost anything
 - Jonville E.** - Urbana girls summer softball league - up and coming softball players will need these fields
 - Tim B.** - Executive coalition - questioned how to mitigate gun violence in Urbana - now we ask, how do we serve our community better? Lack of commitment to athletics - asking friends and families to step forward to develop something for kids and serve our community in ways we've never seen
 - Tim B.** - If we don't have the Weaver & Prairie site or the Health & Wellness Center, we cannot attract a lot of the things our youth and community are interested in

- George H.** - Strong interest in how we go after the leased land used for soccer fields by Brookens and Lierman
- George H.** - Does the community move into getting that together?
- George H.** - How do we move the people involved in sports to save Weaver & Prairie Parks and go after the other lands that are available in that area Brookens area?
- George H.** - Won't have to worry about leases if we buy that land; we can fix up those fields the way we want it
- George H.** - We need a commitment to go after the leased lands or at least try to make it happen
- George H.** - A county representative says now is the time to maybe start thinking about purchasing the leased Brookens land
- George H.** - The indigenous belong here and in this conversation, so we need to get a sense of what they want in this process – they were the first ones here
- George H.** - What is this site going to look like in 30 years? Will the nature aspect of Weaver fall off?
- Jonville C.** - is it on the table to buy the land at Brookens? Is it worth the conversation?
 - Corky E.** - As of now we don't know what their plan is for that land
 - George H.** - There is enough public involvement to entertain the purchasing of the leased Brookens land – everyone needs to know the clear plan that we want to go for this
 - Tim B.** - We do not have the funds to buy other land and develop Weaver and Prairie Parks at the same time – logistics of obtaining a new site would be very difficult. We purchased Weaver and Prairie Parks with the intentions of making this a shared use site for athletics and nature
 - George H.** - It is at least worth a try to go for that leased land at Brookens rather than not do anything about it
 - The Mowed area at Weaver could be temporary
- Mel F.** - We have tried over 20 years to find a better place for athletics and natural environments; how do we make these two things work today in tandem with each other – focus needs to be on how to maximize the natural areas

- Ben K.** - Have we thought about acquiring this land from Brookens and not purchasing it. A conversation with the county should be held about asking them to gift us the land because we are in need
- Jonville C.** - I'm all for trying to purchase the Brookens land but if it is not feasible; it could be a couple years until we obtain that land and now we have to put a pause on what we're developing at Weaver and Prairie Parks which is not ideal
- Jonville C.** - We put so much emphasis into our natural areas, we have a lot in Urbana but our children need more than natural areas. They need to be involved in athletics so we need fields and facilities to accommodate that
- Tim B.** - County and City of Urbana needs their goals considered as well, we need land for businesses (taxpayers money) vs. government services; The county might use the Brookens land in the future for those purposes
- Tim B.** - The City of Urbana notes that we bought Weaver & Prairie Parks, suggested that they would prefer we do not buy more land that is adjacent to our property that could be developed as a tax base
- Ben K.** - If we clear the Weaver land - it is only a 20 year setback on what we developed there. We planted those prairie seeds and could do so again
- George H.** - Education recreation can help people grow up valuing natural areas and not forgetting about them
 - Mel F.** - Are you afraid that Weaver will lose its natural parts and have it severely impacted? To George
- Derek L.** - We need to be cognitive about what we ask our grant managers; We do not want to portray the Urbana Park District as uncertain candidates to receive future grants
- George H.** - It becomes a problem when our natural areas are affected by lights, sounds, and more foot traffic
 - Tim B.** - Busey woods are right next to county fairgrounds and there are all types of lights and noise over there; yet, our natural area at Busey still does well
- Philip A.** - What type of lighting will be used for the new ballfields?
 - Derek L.** - Dark sky lighting, it stops from casting light migration off of the intended sites

- George H.** - Weaver & Prairie Parks are different from the other natural areas we have; there is not another area that is this close to a neighborhood like Weaver & Prairie Parks are
- Corky E.** - If we just use the Brookens fields we cannot accommodate for the diversity of sports we want to offer; we are unsure if that land can contain and has space for everything we have in our master plan
- Tim B.** - We have the responsibility to bring the trailhead facility to Weaver Park - getting consultants to design and help build that facility on the north end - finalize our plans on the site so we can communicate it to the rest of Urbana – we don't have a lot of time to kick around ideas – we need a plan for now and our near future – we do not have time to wait around for things to fall into place for us, trailhead complete by 2025
- Tim B.** - We need to make some decisions and keep moving forward
- Derek L.** - the trailhead plan we have today is based on nature center learning pavilion and is the best understanding of what we want to see today