

McNelly Park

General Management Plan/Visitor Use Plan

May 11, 2009

The ideas you contributed during the scoping phase on April 8, 2009 and again on April 28, 2009 are the basis for the various design alternatives and the preferred alternative. The alternatives are also based on the park's purpose, significance and mission. These statements provide us with some limits which the general management plan and visitor use plan may be developed. The alternatives that were considered by the public represent four potential visions for the park's future; each proposing a different way of managing the park. The preferred alternative is a culmination of ideas to preserve the property as it currently exists with some slight improvements to protect the resource and visitor experience. The plan also sets some measurable goals for proper management of the site. As you review final alternative, keep in mind that you do not have to agree with the final package as presented. You still have the option to select parts of the plan that you like or that you don't agree with.

Again, we are counting on your comments and ideas to move forward with the general management plan and visitor use plan. The purpose of this document is to give you an opportunity to review the management alternatives and the preferred alternative. It contains a great deal of information. We encourage you to spend time reading and thinking about the material and then responding. Written comments are needed to document the process and assure the correct interpretation of the intent of the comments is received.

We want to emphasize that we have not made any final decisions concerning general management strategies. We want you to respond to the preferred alternative, and we want your thoughts on what actions you think are most appropriate for the future of McNelly Park. Once comments are received in written form, the planning team will reconsider the range of alternatives, and make modifications and revisions. Then a draft general management plan will be developed that include environmental impacts statement and cost estimates.

We appreciate your continued support and look forward to receiving your comments on the preferred alternative. At any time during the planning process, please feel free to write me at P.O. Box 2364, Whitehouse, Ohio, 43571-0364 or e-mail at james.speck1@yahoo.com.

Sincerely,

James A. Speck, ASLA
Landscape Architect

The general management plan and visitor use plan for McNelly Park will identify the overall direction for park management over the next 20 years. It will also provide a framework for the city to use when making decisions about such issues as how to best protect the park resources, how to provide a quality visitor experience, how to manage visitor use, and what kinds of facilities, if any, to develop in the park.

McNelly Park

The mission, purpose and significance statements were developed by our advisory committee based off of the initial public comment. The statements are presented here because they provide a valuable context and basis for understanding and evaluating the draft alternatives.

Purpose

The purpose for McNelly Park identifies why the park exists:

The purpose for McNelly Park is to protect remnants of the Oak Openings ecosystem for the adjacent neighborhood's understanding, appreciation and enjoyment.

Significance

Significance statements indicate specifically why McNelly Park was established. It focuses on what park resources and values are significant to warrant its existence. The significance statements help the city to set priorities for projects and activities:

McNelly Park is significant to the neighbors because:

- *It provides peaceful, quiet solitude for its visitors*
- *It contains some of the northwest Ohio's best areas of spring wildflowers*
- *The mature trees create a buffer from outside distractions*
- *The park is in the flyway for migratory birds and shelters various types of wildlife*
- *It balances residential development with natural areas*
- *It preserve the hydrology of a wet woods*

Mission

It is important to have a mission statement for McNelly Park to identify the particular goals of the park. The mission is developed by analyzing the purpose and significance, in general terms, to avoid precluding any legitimate alternatives from being studied during the resource planning process.

It is the mission for McNelly Park to preserve natural area within the local neighborhood to enhance the quality of life for its residents.

Management Prescription Zones

Visitors come to McNelly Park for very different and sometimes conflicting reasons. By providing a diversity of settings, visitors can theoretically select which experiences most closely match the reason they came to the park. In planning for a diversity of experiences, it helps to avoid the conflicts that often occur among visitors who want different things from their visit. This element, the planning team has determined what resources and managerial conditions and visitor experience opportunities should exist in the park.

Through the description, this prescriptive and proactive approach will describe;

- What visitor experience opportunities are provided in the park
- What essential elements of those experiences are, how much land should be allocated to various visitor experience opportunities
- Where in the park should these opportunities be provided.

We cannot expect to ensure that a diversity of experiences will be available at every facility in McNelly Park nor is it intended to protect all experiences in all zones.

In developing a range of potential resource conditions and visitor experiences, the potential management zones define:

- Resource Conditions
- Social Conditions
- Kinds and levels of visitor uses
- Kinds and levels of park development
- Kinds and levels of management activity

Management zones for McNelly Park are:

Buffering Zone

Visitor Experience – Visitors would not be restricted from this zone but will not be accommodated within the zone. This zone would be enjoyed from outside the zone since it protects and mitigates impacts between zones and from the park looking outside its boundaries. This zone preserves natural and historical integrity of the park.

Resource Condition – The resources in this zone would be removed to support the type/style of buffering necessary to preserve adjacent zones.

Level of Development - This zone could contain berms, trees, fences. Park boundaries are identified and preserved.

Water Monitoring and Management Zone

Visitor Experience – The park visitor would enter this zone for the purpose of education and understanding of the natural processes related to water quality. Within this zone, visitors will encounter others that are alone or in small groups.

Resource Condition – Resources within this zone would be protected from development and monitored for impairment from internal and external sources.

Level of Development - Development will be specific to standards set for wetland/floodplain construction which may include no filling within the zone and elevated boardwalks. All areas will be accessible to all visitors.

Vegetation Management Zone

Visitor Experience – Visitors would not be accommodated within this zone but would not be restricted from this zone. Experiences within this zone would be off trail, wild and wooly.

Resource Condition – The resources within this zone would be managed to control non-native plant material and promote the reestablishment of a balanced native natural area.

Level of Development - There will be no development within this zone.

Visitor Service and Support Zone

Visitor Experience – In this zone, park visitors would receive their orientation and be provided with support services necessary for a positive park experience.

Resource Condition – Resources would be removed from this area in order to accommodate the appropriate facilities.

Level of Development – This zone can contain parking lots, restrooms, paved trails, playgrounds, sitting platforms and shelters.

Natural Trail Zone

Visitor Experience – Visitors within this zone will be immersed into a natural experience. Intrusion by other park visitors would be low.

Resource Condition – The resources within this zone will have minimum modification to accommodate its use.

Level of Development - Development within this zone would be limited to mowing or mulching a footpath not exceeding six feet in width.

To note, there will be no historic zone or passive recreation zone at McNelly Park. These zones are present in other parks the city owns but there is no indication from the public that these uses are appropriate for this park.

Design Alternatives

The alternatives mentioned below are the underlying cohesive rationale or philosophy that directs and shapes a vision for visitor experiences and/or resource condition. The final selection (preferred alternative) will perpetuate, refine, or redefine the park's character. The themes of the four descriptions are as follows:

Alternative A – No Action (Preferred alternative)

- The property is managed to control invasive and hazardous plant material
- Visitor use is uncontrolled and not monitored (except for safety and security)
- The ditch is managed to assure drainage of upstream properties
- The current trail will remain as the only trail in the park. Surface material will remain as exposed earth
- Pedestrian bridges will be constructed to allow safe crossing of the ditches
- The property line will be marked with boundary markers
- The entrances to the park will be improved with signage and an interpretive panel
- No facilities are provided for any type of visitor use

Management prescription zones used for the preferred alternative

Buffering zone – Perimeter of site denoted with boundary markers – no fence

Water Quality and Management Zone – Route of ditch

Vegetation Management Zone – Majority of the property

Nature Trail Zone- On existing trail route

Visitor Service and Support Zone –Only at entrances

Alternative B – Safe and secure from all (Not selected)

- Perimeter is secured with lockable gates
- The property is enjoyed from the outside looking in unless the user is a key holder
- Any visitation is controlled
- The property is managed for invasive plants with low maintenance from the city
- Visitors to the site should expect use by other neighbors with low noise levels
- Experiences within the boundary are rustic

Management prescription zones used

Buffering zone

Water Quality and Management Zone

Vegetation Management Zone

Natural Trail Zone

Alternative C – Education and appreciation of the natural resource (Not selected)

- Activities, planned and unplanned, support passive interaction with the natural resource
- The park is developed for education and appreciation
- Threatened and endangered species are identified and monitored
- Invasives are controlled
- Programming can be active or passive
- Group usage may be expected on a scheduled basis
- Trails are developed to support year round and all weather use
- The perimeter of the site is fenced
- Partnerships are developed with outside agencies to manage and operate the park

Management prescription zones used

Buffering zone

Water Quality and Management Zone

Vegetation Management Zone

Visitor Service and Support Zone

Alternative D – Neighborhood retreat (Not selected)

- The park is developed for family socialization, recharge and moments of solitude
- Resources are managed to promote natives and aesthetics
- Benches and site lighting are provided for extended and monitored usage
- The park would be able to support family groups or individuals
- A paved trail route is developed to support walking and gathering/rest areas
- The perimeter of the site is fenced

Management prescription zones used

Buffering zone

Water Quality and Management Zone

Vegetation Management Zone

Visitor Service and Support Zone

Scoping survey results

To better understand how the purpose, significance, mission statement and design alternatives were developed, it is important to see what the survey results were. We had a total of 31 questionnaires that were taken out at the April 8th meeting. Thirteen of those questionnaires were returned. The comments are shown below, in order, by the number of responses provided to the various topics that were common between respondents.

- 10 – Maintain as a natural preserve
- 9 – Protect the spring wildflowers
- 7 – Protect and enjoy wildlife
- 6 – Don't do anything to the property
- 6 – Create a walking trail/bridge
- 5 – Do not extend Belfour though the park
- 4 – Appreciate the trees
- 3 – Maintain the park for the neighbors to enjoy
- 3 – Preserve the peaceful, quiet solitude
- 1 – Do not provide for any visitor experience
- 1 – No playground structure
- 1 – Provide benches and a grill
- 1 – Provide opportunities for children to interact with the resource
- 1 – Provide bird blinds
- 1 – Preserve the Oak Openings

Management comments to be used in the development plan

- 7 – Stop dumping yard waste, city debris and trash
- 6 – Stop cutting trees
- 5 – Maintain the creek/ditch
- 4 – Sign the park/provide interpretive signage
- 3 – Manage unauthorized use

At the meeting of April 28, the responses from the participants reflected a strong preference to Alternative A – No action with a few minor improvements to protect the resources. The responses were as follows:

Trail

There was a significant amount of response for keeping the trail as it currently exists with the improvement being a bridge over the ditches. Any educational component would take place at the entrance to the park so the visitor would learn about a plant or animal that may be seen on the trail. The typical visitor would be from the neighborhood and either be an individual or small group of two or four people.

Boundary

Many concerns were expressed about dumping of yard waste. It is recommended that in place of any type of fencing that the boundaries of the park are signed at various points to remind neighbors that the property is designated as parkland and dumping is not allowed.

Vegetation Management

The park will be monitored to control invasive and non native plants. Fallen trees and trees that are a hazard to adjacent properties or the trail will be removed. The ditch will be checked periodically for blockages.

Response Form

Please use this response form to share your thoughts about the preferred alternative for McNelly Park. If you need more space, you are encouraged to add additional pages as required. Your comments will be compiled and analyzed by the planning team and considered in the decision making process. Please send your responses back to me by June 1, 2009 at James A. Speck, Landscape Architect, P.O.Box 2364, Whitehouse, OH 43571-0364 or via e-mail at james.speck1@yahoo.com.

Do you agree with alternative A as modified? If not, what changes could be made to make the plan more agreeable to you?

Do you have any other ideas that were not presented in these alternatives but should be considered? Please describe.

What are your thoughts for the short and long term operation, maintenance and/or function of McNelly Park?