

Olbrich Plan – Parks Staff Recommendations 12-10-08

Softball complex

Reduce softball to two fields (keep 1&2) over a period of years. Softball is declining in use, and other field options are available. (*Regular season softball peaked at 977 teams in 1984, down to 444 teams in 2008. Lighted softball fields were added at Bowman 1983 and Elver 1983-85 to meet peak demands.*) The removal of fields 3 and 4 is not expected to occur immediately in the phased development of the Gardens, probably phased removal in the 5-15 year range. The Parks Division can also continue to provide fields for MSCR and other users of softball fields by utilizing fields at other park locations. It is also expensive to rebuild a third diamond and renovate lighting (\$535,000) for three fields at Olbrich. A third field would require additional parking somewhere. Staff recommends improvement of other fields at Demetral and Reindahl to provide quality fields to meet the need. When the creek parking near field 4 is eliminated, neighborhood street parking for fields 1 and 2 will increase. The parking lot at Walter Street could be expanded by 50% if the neighborhood prefers that alternative for parking. Staff recommends against adding softball on the lake side of Atwood. It would force relocation of other current users there, and would block the views of the lake.

Garden expansion

Keep a comparable amount of garden expansion and support area as shown on current master plan, but relocate the garden expansion across the creek north of Atwood to phase out two softball fields and the boat launch/parking area. Expansion of gardens toward the lake is not viable due to access problems and the desire to keep the lakeshore open.

Garden plan south of railroad

Keep the concept to revise the parking layout and relocate the main visitor entrance to the west side of the complex, with building expansion to the north. Revise the road and trail crossings of the RR to recognize the only existing legal crossing.

North plat natural area

Staff recommends expanding the natural area on the north plat from 4.7 acres in the existing plan to 16 acres, and consolidating it in a 200-foot to 500-foot strip along Starkweather Creek.

Garden maintenance area

The maintenance area is essential to the continued operation and growth of the garden. Staff recommends combining maintenance, materials handling and in-ground nursery functions into the 3 acres west of the Garver building, and furthest from the creek.

Garver buildings, parking and access

Staff recommends that the building entrance and drop-off be at the north front center of the building as proposed by Commonwealth.

160 parking spaces, as recommended in the Commonwealth parking plan, can wrap around the north, east and south sides of the building.

The current access road from Fair Oaks is recommended, to avoid bring the access through the maintenance area, and to keep it on a solid base of fill material. With the significant expansion of the natural area along the creek, the roadway is adequately separated from the creek.

Overflow parking / dog park / unallocated area

Potential overflow parking is reduced from 3.8 to 1.4 acres. Staff recommends that this area be designated as unallocated space until the detailed design of facilities and other planning efforts are further developed, and other creative solutions are sought to meet the peak parking demands. Potential uses of this site include a dog exercise area, overflow parking maintained as grass "field parking," future expansion of paved parking, future expansion of garden maintenance area, or future expansion of the natural area. It is recommended that a different site be found for City snow storage prior to December, 2009.

Natural landscapes and natural shorelines

Natural areas and shorelines on the north plat will be expanded by relocating gardens across the creek, and moving garden maintenance closer to the RR.

Enhance other natural landscapes and shorelines throughout the park by adding and managing for native vegetation.

Field sports

Improve the field sports area along the lakeshore on both sides of Starkweather Creek. Some poor-quality and non-native trees may be removed, with leveling, addition of topsoil and reseeded to improve turf. The sports fields can be used with minimal visual obstruction for soccer, ultimate frisbee, and other activities that do not require permanent structures.

Neighborhood parks

Maintain the five neighborhood park areas according to existing plan.

Parking/paved area

Staff does not recommend reductions in existing parking that will be necessary to support the approved uses. However, it is recommended that the versatility of shared-use parking be expanded, and that any peak use overflow parking be designed as non-paved surface.

Boat launches

Remove the launch site and parking at the softball field and include it in garden expansion. If needed, expand the number of launch ramps at the lake launch. Expand parking at the lake launch by adding two rows of trailer parking on the grass, to be

opened only for weekends, holidays and other special events. At other times direct boaters to other multiuse locations for trailer parking, including on Atwood Avenue. The center island of the beach parking lot should be removed to provide double stalls that can also be used for trailer parking.

Mowed/landscaped areas

Some of the mowed areas can be better utilized by improving them and adding them to the field sports area. Other mowed areas can be converted to natural areas, such as prairie restorations near the sledding hill oaks.

Improve connectivity – linkages – walking paths along wetland, shorelines, creek.

See maps utilizing the one existing legal RR crossing point, and other alternatives for bike and pedestrian paths. Hiking trails have been focused on the west side of the creek to take advantage of the only legal crossing of the RR, and to avoid conflicts with the boat landing and the ditch behind the Thai pavilion. Additional exit-only gates can be added to the garden to facilitate neighborhood walks through the gardens.

Winter recreation

Staff recommends revision of old Lakeland Avenue (bike route and parking below sledding hill) into a separated bike path and parking lot.

Preserve views of the lake

The goal of better vegetative buffers along the shoreline may block views of the lake. Planting designs and maintenance should be carefully considered to preserve views.

Dog Exercise Areas

Consider areas at Olbrich along with other near East Side areas. Along Fair Oaks near Kessenich's may have some potential.

Recommendations by Kevin Briski, Parks Superintendent and Si Widstrand, Parks Development Manager 12-10-08