

Item 23-0903: Resolution #8-R-23 Creating Appleton Conservancy Park

Parks and Recreation Committee

Mon, Jul 24, 2023 6:15PM

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 01:30

So, moving on to action items. Our one and only 23-0903 resolution 8-r-23 Creating Appleton conservatory Park.

Alderson Patrick Hayden (District 7) 01:44

Motion to approve.

Alderson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 01:45

Second

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 01:47

Director Gazza, do you have...? Oh. Alderson Van Zeeland. What microphone are you? Okay. The floor.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 01:57

Thank you, chair. I am extremely excited as the alderperson of the fifth district to put forth this resolution for the conservancy. As I'm sure you are all sick of hearing about, the south side is under-parked especially in the community park area, and I see this as an excellent opportunity to right that wrong. And I'm open to any questions that you might have about the resolution. Thank you.

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 02:25

Alderson Siebers.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 02:29

Help me, Dean in regards, did we not—was there an area that we were talking about designating as the park some time ago?

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 02:40

Your memory serves you correct. For quite a while we were looking at what was called the [Renn?] Farm. And we were very hopeful that we could secure that. And at one time the capital improvement plan indicated that we were going to do that as one of three municipalities with Harrison and Menasha there to I am create a joint community park. And as time went on, Menasha stepped out of it, and then eventually, Harrison stepped out.

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 03:16

But one of the things, that property was in our growth area, but then was taken out of our growth area. So, then we brought forward a couple pieces of property for just consideration, something requested of alder people, alderpersons, and at the cost for acreage it was near feasible and the pieces of property were not ideal, but they were just the biggest pieces of property we could locate at the time.

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 03:49

So yeah, we, you know, we're excited that this piece of property, in particular, is unique and different than what we were originally discussing. Because I think there was an argument at one time even when we were going to participate as one of the three communities that the park would is better serve their communities than ours, and so with the type of park with playgrounds and active is areas. This park is more about preserving what's

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there. It's very unique, and as far as the canopy of trees and the plants, the birds, you know, and everything that's down there.

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 04:28

And so, we've been talking about it for a little while when Director Harkness was here and found out that it was a wetland. It was like what is the best use for that? So, I know we had discussed about, you know, this is an idea, but it had not been brought forward until now which is which is exciting.

Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 04:49

Can I just follow up? So, are you saying—are you saying that because this is wetland, this cannot—this parcel cannot be developed for commercial or industrial at all?

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 05:07

Correct.

Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 05:08

None of it?

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 05:09

None of it that I'm aware of. I don't know that 100%. But that area was considered wetland area and that whole parcel was blocked off separate from the rest of the parcels as being considered a wetland area that could not be used then for the industrial park or the business park. And so far, the discussion began, what do not could it be used for? And so, it just so rich in resources that this made the most and best use, you know, most sense for the best use of the property.

Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 05:46

What's the earliest that you could develop this?

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 05:51

There's a kind of a mix in when you talk about develop. Because generally in a conservancy you're trying to preserve, so you're not trying to develop as much as you normally would. So, what we're working on is, we would work on is about an—18 month, 24 months out—a plan in order to come up with the improvements in regards to trails and so forth. So, a conservancy generally has walking trails. They're not paved. They're not lit. They're, you know, they don't affect the environment that's there. And so, it'd be for walking trails, cross country skiing trails, and we envision some biking trails in there. And then people would be able to go in there and, you know, get away from the city and it would experience nature and so forth.

Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 06:42

So, 2026?

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 06:44

Yes. What—the other point would be is if someone were to step forward. So, we'll So, talk to some So, of the organise—local organizations too. People are, you know, relatively excited about teaming. So, we'll—east central planning Regional Commission, you know, we'll talk to them, see what opportunities there are, if there's grants out there. If there are, something could happen sooner if we had the money, but as of right now, not having any commitments or anything like that, if we were working on our own timetable, it would be that timeframe out.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 07:20

Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 07:21

You're welcome. Alderson Van Zeeland.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 07:23

Thank you Chair. I just wanted to add to Director Gazza's information about the South side and the access to that park, just to let everyone know that on my side of Calumet, there are—there's a park on Calumet and Matthias, Lions Park, most people know that. The other park that's in the neighborhood is actually used as the playground for the school. So, it's not actually available to most of the public during the day. But I see this as a very different opportunity. We don't have a community park like others have—Memorial Park or Pierce Park—you know, that really big park where you can get out for recreation, walking. And that's what I see this as. And I just wanted to add also that in looking into this further, the DNR actually offers grants for the type of work that we want to do in that wetland, and I haven't been able to discuss where we're gonna go with this yet, but the discussions have started. When you—as I understand it, when you apply for a permit as a business to develop area around a wetland, you pay a fee, and those fees get put into a pot for projects just like this. So, I just started with talking with the mayor and with some of our local state representatives about moving forward with that. So that might be an option, but that grant is not due until December. Thank you

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 08:52

Alderson Schultz.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 08:54

Thank you Chair. I'm just hoping to, you know, have a little bit more discussion about what this project means given its location and our history with the WE Energies trail project, and I guess I—just a couple questions for the Director Gazza's. You know, we tried to move a project forward along the trail, which—it's a little bit separate from this parkland that's being proposed, but I am it is defined as proposed public trail dedication for this park space in the trailhead that connects to that WE energies trail segment, and I know that we got close to approving that but there were issues with the cost of remediating the wetlands situation with portions of that trail. So, I want to I want to have a clear understanding about approving this project, establish that as a park space with the trailhead that connects to the WE Energies trail segment, which I think is still problematic from that standpoint that it's going to cost—it's going to—there are some costs that will be necessary to remediate that to actually create what is defined at least on the map as proposed public trail. And so, I just want to have a clear understanding about how this influences that project may be going forward, and what's the vision of Parks and Rec, as we look at, you know, that segment and how it connects to this park space. I just want to—I want to have an understanding about how we think we're going to move forward on this and remediate some things that previously caused us to put a hold on a project because of the remediation cost.

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 10:26

Absolutely. Despite that, you know, that setback in that section—so we may not be able to use that specific property to get on, you know, to stay on the trail. But we would end up possibly having to get on street or something like that, and then coming back to the trail. So, the trail that from that point, all the way through the business park back, that one, the majority property is an easement or already secured by the city. So that trail can happen, and it doesn't have the same issues that that property does have. So even though that segment of trail would not be part of the, you know, continuous trail system, might have to get on street for a while and come back on to the trail itself.

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 11:15

But what's nice is when you do get to the park, there will be a trailhead there. And so, if you're driving, you could park and at least get out and walk. If you were in the immediate neighborhood, or to at least that neighborhood, you would have access by bike or walking. So, it would provide, you know, some direct trail access. But we'll have to figure out what we'll do for that section that we are in—that's unbuildable or not feasible to build on. I should say it's buildable, but the cost is just—I don't, we don't see it as feasible at this point.

Alderman Nate Wolff (District 12) 11:48

Alderman Hayden. I just don't—Oh, Okay.

Alderman Alex Schultz (District 9) 11:55

Just a quick follow up, then it just—do you foresee a situation where we might revisit that project build up for the WE Energies Trail, if we could find some support for it or additional funding or something that we could make this connection more solid to this park space?

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 12:12

I wouldn't count it out from the standpoint that if a company stepped in—at first there was, you know, some company that was potentially interested to minimize the cost for the city or a particular, you know, some other funding source that really minimized it to make it feasible on our part. I think so if it was—especially if it was the only piece left in the puzzle.

Alderman Alex Schultz (District 9) 12:35

Thank you.

Alderman Nate Wolff (District 12) 12:38

Alderman Hayden.

Alderman Patrick Hayden (District 7) 12:39

Thank you, Chair. One a, you thing I'm excited about is what I think of KK and how it's been developed, it's kind of become a bit of a traffic jam. And it's getting to be more like the Appleton or the Fox Crossings Mall. So, I like projects like this, that are creating green spaces in those areas to alleviate traffic concerns and also break up the congestion there. Because when we look at projects in Grand Chute, you'll see it at Meier, you see around the Fox Crossing's mall, you see it around a lot of the others areas. They're not creating those green spaces, and they're running into problems with tenants not being able to have customers get to their properties, because they're not breaking up—they're not building out in a sustainable way. And I think what you have here is a sustainable development, that not only allows us to create parks for neighborhoods that need them, but it also creates a business client—or a business community where businesses want to invest, because we're building out in a way that they see a future there. And they don't have to worry about challenges that might come in down the road. So, I appreciate all the work that you're doing here.

Alderman Nate Wolff (District 12) 13:50

Alderman Alfheim.

Alderman Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 13:52

Thank you, Chair. I think this looks awesome. I mean, every—everybody should have an opportunity to enjoy space like this. I love that the creativity in the land that we're using. My question is, in any way does this new

opportunity push back any of the other plans that we have? We have a number of parks in line that need action. Is this going to trump anything? Or is this being added in?

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 14:20

You know, it's a fair question. I don't see it pushing anything back from the standpoint it's not going to be major investment. So, I don't see that. So yeah, I would answer it that way. I mean, yeah. It's not a major investment, yeah, to come in there. And I think if we partner or if we get grants, that's our goal. And I think we probably—we'll do the planning part of it, but we wouldn't do the build out until we would have secured some funding would be the goal, you know. So, it—there's no hurry with this other than the planning portion of it. But at least getting it dedicated and knowing that, you know, some planning can now take place, we can take that, and if it takes 18 to 24 months, or if it takes a little bit longer, it would take a little bit longer.

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 15:11

And it could start off very small. It could start off with some walking trails, and then eventually develop into something else. Like every park we had, it's never completely finished on day one. So, it would have to, you know, back itself into what the priorities are already have, not overtake a priority is the way I see it. Because personally, throughout the park system, some of the things that have been moved back, you know, are just as high, if not—or remain a higher priority at this time.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 15:42

I appreciate that. And I'm not sure everybody understands how hard you work, to be outside looking for those grants to come in and allow this to take place without trumping any other project. So, it's a beautiful opportunity, I hope that we take advantage of it.

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 15:57

One comment, chair, I'd like to make is the property you know, when you walk the property, interesting about it's not been, I would say, managed right now. So timber falls in it, nobody's cleaning it up. There's homeless shelters that are in there. There are deer stands. So, there are things in there that I think by also doing this now it would be looked upon, managed, and taken care of, and I think that only kind of benefit the business park too and the people that are riding their bikes and using that—are in that area. So, there's a lot of I see pluses from that. Otherwise, yeah, it just continues to be kind of, you know, disregarded at this point. And so that'll be a big benefit. And when that will you get people walking through there and so forth, then itself, self-police's itself too.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 16:58

Alright, Aldersperson Siebers then Aldersperson. Schultz.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 17:02

Director Gazza, I'm gonna put you on the spot. I remember you made a statement some time ago during—I think it was during budget time. Then we talking about the expansion of the city. We're talking about more parks, and more parks, we need more personnel.

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 17:23

Absolutely.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 17:25

So, with that in mind, are we going to need more personnel in the future to maintain the new parks? Especially this one?

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 17:36

Not—if we just added this park, I would say no. It's you know, you wouldn't add a person. But I but I have brought it, you know, to would not everyone's attention that if we want to maintain the same quality, then, yes, we need more people. We will need more people if we are able, if we are able to you know we lower our standards, are willing to lower standards, then then it's a different situation. But absolutely.

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 18:07

Not only when you add parks, but we get you know—every special event that signs up to us a park, they require some level of support from us. And you know, it's grown to about 75 special events. So, there is going to be a tipping point. We have been relying on more seasonals throughout the summer, and then we somewhat struggle in the shoulder months. So, we've been able to get some people that have been retired. So, it's gonna be an interesting balance, because you can figure so many part time for so long, but you need that internal knowledge. So, you know to answer your question, absolutely, if we continue to grow. This park by itself, I wouldn't be asking for more staff.

Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 18:52

I just want my fellow colleagues as well as my colleagues out there that aren't here. This has a price tag to it—and I'm gonna vote for it—but it has a price tag, you know. So, at some point in time, we're going to have to vote on you know, the plans. We're going to have to vote on possibly more staff, etc, etc. That's going to come at a time when we're going to talk about more staff for Fire, more staff for Police, etc, etc. So, the challenges are going to be pretty big

Alderman Nate Wolff (District 12) 19:23

Alderman Schultz.

Alderman Alex Schultz (District 9) 19:27

I would agree with Alderman Martin's points there.

[Note: calling Alderman Siebers “Alderman Martin” was a joke, and there was laughter. I’m assuming it was a reference to Alderman Joe Martin who was the former alderman for District 4.]

Alderman Alex Schultz (District 9) 19:37

I guess so the city stocks a fish pond at Memorial Park. Is that correct?

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 19:42

The DNR does as part of the program but they big will call us up and say "We're in the area. Can we stop by?" and then they—yeah, they stock it.

Alderman Alex Schultz (District 9) 19:54

So, given that there's interest in hunting could we start this with quail and pheasant and grouse?

Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 20:01

And we already got the deer stand.

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 20:03

I'm not aware of that program, but...

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 20:06

I had to throw it out there. Sorry. Now, the serious question, though is, I'm looking at the map, and I'm seeing a predefined space of private property north to south on the west side of that space. And I'm gonna assume most of that is commercial because the north part of that is commercial. I don't—maybe you can't even answer the question, but I guess what I'm looking at is the blue space that the city owns or is defined on the map as sitting on property to the east and north of this proposed parkland, do we know what the intentional use of that space is? Will this be future residential? Do we have a sense of what the zoning is for that space? I'm sure we do. I just—I'm not aware of what.

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 20:50

So, it's all part of the Southpoint business park. So, lots are being marketed for...

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 20:55

Lots of commercial business entities?

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 20:58

Absolutely.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 20:58

Okay.

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 21:01

Alderson Van Zeeland.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 21:03

Thank you, Chair. And I'd just make this clear that we're not counting on surrounding municipalities working with us in this venture. But I just want to remind everyone, the last time that all of this fell apart was during a time where there was also a border disagreement with our previous administration. And I would hope that something like this might help open the lines of communication with the other municipalities, especially Harrison, which is really building in that area. Thank you.

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 21:35

Alderson Fenton.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 21:38

Thank you, Chair. And I don't know that Director Gazza can do this because I don't have it in front of me. Am I understanding that, you know, we're in the process of creating a tax increment financing district for Southpoint? Am I understanding correctly that this the conservancy area would be outside of that? I've got my boundaries correct?

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 22:08

I can't answer that. I don't know.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 22:10

Okay. I mean, obviously, this is coming to planning commission, and it's coming to CEDC. So, I will have time to do my research before them. But I was just kind of thinking about funding and where that TIF boundary is. Alright. Thank you. Apologies.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 22:25

I can just add to that. Thank you. I think that will get ironed out in some of our other committee meetings as far as questions I had about funding going into the TIF versus the, you know, money that's typically reserved goes back into the park, the—sorry, the commercial business park, not the Conservancy Park. So, I think some of those questions will get answered moving forward through these committees.

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 22:25

Good Question.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 22:59

Anybody else? I will say that I'm excited and that I think it's a really cool thing we're doing. And congratulations to Aldersperson Van Zeeland.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 23:10

Don't. Knock on wood, everyone.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 23:15

Yeah, with that, let's take a vote. All those in favor, say aye. Chair votes, aye. All those opposed? The ayes have it five zero.