



Park assessment workshops

Citizens respond to park land use

By SCOTT LOWDER
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The city took another step toward developing its new park Friday and Saturday when Jeffrey L. Bruce and Company held two needs assessment workshops.

"We want to listen to as many people as we can," Richard Horton said at the start of the two-day program.

Horton, director of leisure facilities planning for Bucher, Willis and Ratliff Corporation, helped moderate the workshops. His company was contracted by JLB to determine the desires and needs of residents.

The workshops started with members of the recently formed stakeholders group giving their suggestions for the new park. Stakeholders include Jamie Miller, Brenda Frese, Christina Sanderson, Cody Burnett, Jason Crum, Kevin Gardner, Councilwoman Andi Pawlowski, Brian Bode, Bob Maggio, Councilman Harland Russell, Mike Smith and Mayor Kenneth Bernard. Crum also is director of the Parks and Recreation Department.

VOLUNTEERISM

"We have a long history of volunteerism," Jason Crum told Horton as he described the city's current parks and recreation system. "Even today we have a lot of volunteers. They take on a huge responsibility and do an amazing job."

As an example, Crum said the 13 volunteers who serve on the Parks and Recreation Board coordinate all of the department's sports programs for youth.

Crum said one of the challenges facing the park system is the lack of additional funding for improvements. He also said a lot of the city's parks were not planned for future growth. As an example, he said the baseball fields at City Park would have been designed differently if there was a plan in place before the fields were built.

PROUD OF THE TRAILS

Although Crum said parks could benefit from more money, both he and Burnett said there are several positive results from the current program. Burnett is the park superintendent.

"I'm proud of our trails," Burnett said in reference to the recently expanded trail at Kelly Grove Park.

Horton said exercise walking is the No. 1 activity, with more than 85 million Americans participating.

"If you're not doing trails, you should be," Horton said. "Trails are what turns



Chronicle Times photo/Scott Lowder

Shannon Gordon points to a map of Lansing's new city park as Stan Rathjen offers his opinion for developing the land. Gordon, a representative of Jeffrey L. Bruce and Company, solicited suggestions from residents like Rathjen Friday during a needs assessment workshop at city hall.

everyone on."

Crum and Burnett also praised the department's other activities.

"I'm proud of our special events," Crum said. "We manage to do a few top-notch events every year."

LACKING SOME FACILITIES

Despite their pride in Lansing's parks, Crum said the park system does lack some specific facilities. He also said the parks program offers very few activities for adults.

"Everything is youth oriented," Crum said.

Frese, a stakeholder who is a local business owner, said she wants to see activities for every age group.

Crum said he would like to see the new

park incorporate "interpretive nature items," such as an information kiosk or an outdoor classroom. He also said he could envision a community center attached to an aquatics center.

"I want you to think about trends," Horton said. "There is a difference between fads and trends. The most important trend is citizen involvement. It's easy to do — just ask people."

SUGGESTIONS

Crum and other members of the stakeholders group also gave suggestions for the type of activities that should be considered. Their list included an aquatics center, trails, gardens, a lake, a major playground, sports fields, a horse shoe pit, sculptures and an area for bocci. Some of the other suggestions presented during the assessment workshops include a spray park, a climbing wall, picnic areas, a farmers' market, an amphitheater, tennis courts and a batting cage.

Two children who participated in the first workshop also gave their ideas. Amanda Sellers, 9, and Cassie Pawlowski, 8, said they want several amenities as part of the proposed aquatics center. They said they want a "lazy river," a water slide, a jungle gym in the pool and a large bucket that would pour water on guests.

"If we knew what some of the trends were nationally it would spur some ideas," Crum told Horton.

Horton said an average of 20 to 30 percent of parks are preserved for passive recreational opportunities, such as bird watching.

OUTGROWING SPACE

As they identified popular programs and how parks are currently used, Crum also cautioned the master planners about the city's current park space for programs.

"We're going to outgrow our space slowly," Crum said.

Crum said the Parks Department served nearly 2,000 children as part of the 2004 programming schedule. He said spring soccer had 284 participants; baseball had 398; the fishing derby had 150; the cheer program had 44; football had 126; fall soccer had 215; the Spooky Center attracted 700; and basketball had 237 participants.

"We'll continue to use what we've got," Crum said. "Right now, we don't have any options."

"We're doing good with what we've got," Burnett said.

MAINTAINING PARKS

However, Horton said the No. 1 request made by residents is that they want their park land to be maintained.

"If you don't have a budget, it's not going to magically appear," Horton said about maintenance funding.

In addition to providing suggestions for what they would like to see in the new park, the stakeholders and workshop participants also started evaluating how some of the park attractions could generate revenue.

AQUATICS CENTER

Crum said the aquatics center could charge a fee to enter, and shelters could be reserved for a specific cost.

"I would be cautious," Horton said in reference to expectations that the aquatics center could generate enough money to be self-sustaining. "Dream right now, but somewhere toward the end of the process think realistically."

Although the results of the workshops will not be available until JLB develops the master plan later this year, several area residents said it was important for them to participate in the planning process.

"We're the ones who are going to paying for it, so we should have some input," Stan Rathjen said as a resident who participated in the first workshop session.



Chronicle Times photo/Scott Lowder

Richard Horton speaks to members of a focus group that met Friday as part of an assessment workshop for Lansing's new city park. Horton, an employee of Bucher, Willis and Ratliff, was brought in by JLB to conduct a survey of needs for the park.