



Friends of the Mississippi River

360 North Robert • Suite 400 • Saint Paul, MN 55101 • 651/ 222-2193 • Fax 651/ 222-6005

Working to protect the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities Area.

August 8, 2008

Alice Messer
Landscape Architect
Department of Parks and Recreation
City of St. Paul
25 W 4th Street
St. Paul, MN 55102

Dear Alice,

Thanks for all the work you and the Lilydale Task Force have done creating several excellent alternative visions for Lilydale Park. As you know, the Friends of the Mississippi River is a 15-year-old organization committed to restoring and protecting the river and the lands along the Mississippi for their long-term ecological and recreational value. As such, we are thrilled to see the City of St. Paul take an active interest in restoring this unique site.

To that end, we have reviewed your alternative concepts for the site, and would like to respectfully submit the following comments for your consideration. We welcome and encourage you to share these comments with others as well.

- Like others, we are particularly intrigued by the option of moving a portion of Lilydale Drive off of Pickerel Lake, as shown in the recreational concept for the park. Any option that creates a more sinuous road helps to calm traffic as it drives through the park. The decision around how Lilydale Drive traverses the park impacts several other design considerations.
- The routing of Lilydale Drive proposed in the recreational concept opens up pedestrian-friendly access to the lakeshore - an amenity that has been sorely lacking as the park is currently configured. That move helps to more effectively realize two elements we really like in the plans - a new walking trail along Pickerel Lake, and the creation of a picnic/interpretive center on the lakefront. Further, it provides impetus for you to move the regional trail

closer to the river. And notably, by only moderately adjusting the route of Lilydale Drive, you are able to achieve significant improvement in access without substantial need for additional funding or substantial new impacts on vegetation.

- We appreciate the considerations given to the trail system. As previously noted, we support moving the regional trail closer to the river, while creating a new trail along (and, if possible, around) Pickerel Lake. We like the possibility of adding other nature trails to the park as well, though we would caution against an overabundance of these trails (as illustrated in the recreational concept). We encourage you to make as many of the trails continuous as possible – for example, it would be good to connect the base of the Brickyard trail to the regional trail on the Riverfront without needing to go directly through a parking lot. Finally, we would note that much of the existing regional trail floods to the point of being completely unusable during wet weather. We recognize that most of the park is in the floodplain, but we think there may be areas of the park that are less prone to flooding than portions of the current trail routes. One of the factors that should be prioritized in routing primary trails are its ability to be accessed in most or all conditions.
- We like the idea of the wildlife viewing areas and platforms found in the ecological concept. Perhaps there would be a way to consolidate these around a wildlife trail in the final design.
- We appreciate the careful thought you have given to canoe access on the lake. We like the idea of the main picnic shelter area being used as the central location for canoe access, and possibly canoe rental. We suggest having one or two other destinations on the lake that would be made canoe accessible. For example, it might be possible to make the trailhead area for the Brickyard Trail accessible via canoe. Likewise, it might be worth creating small picnic area on the south side of the lake that is accessible only via canoe which would provide a destination spot for canoers. We are unclear exactly how canoes would get across the proposed boardwalk to get access to the north portion of the lake, but imagine that will be addressed as design continues. While we don't want to prematurely dismiss the idea of a water connection from the River to Pickerel Lake, we think the benefits of the connection would likely be outweighed by the costs and potential ecological impacts.
- We like the expansion in uses you contemplate encouraging in the park design. The park is already used as an urban campsite, and expanding this use makes sense. We also think the idea of an off-leash dog park on-site deserves consideration either in Lilydale Park, or at a site somewhere nearby. If a dog park is sited on the other side of the river near the high bridge then we don't see a need to duplicate that use in Lilydale Park.

Lilydale Park suffers from the perception that it is unsafe due to the isolated nature of some areas of the park and the current low-levels of activity. By bringing in additional uses such as a dog park with its visitors at all times of day and during all seasons we can begin to make the park a safer place to visit.

- The new Brickyard Trail is an incredible and welcome new resource, and it too would seem to benefit from extra attention in the long term. Near the bottom, we see significant opportunity to improve visitor access, wayfinding and interpretation around the cave and kiln sites - currently they are buried back in the brush, and not as obvious as is ideal. We also see the need to stabilize and improve access to the small waterfall overlook on the Brickyard trail, without overly-formalizing the natural setting. At the top of the bluff, just northeast of Vento's View exists another incredible view looking down-valley toward downtown. We would urge an upgrade of the trail to this overlook and to the overlook itself. This view alone is worth the trip to the park and yet it is a hidden gem at present.
- Adjacent to this view is a very large section of bluff which is subsiding and suffering serious erosion which is visible for miles. It should be a top priority to stabilize and repair this situation as soon as possible before more of the bluff top is lost.
- Finally, at the top of the Brickyard Trail, a fence runs along Sibley Memorial Highway, causing trail users to feel somewhat boxed-in and would-be park visitors excluded. We urge the city to explore additional gateways to the park along Sibley Memorial Highway that would make the park more accessible to the neighborhoods to the south and visitors who arrive from Sibley Memorial Highway. This is a wonderful amenity that should be celebrated and accessible not closed-off and limited.
- We would encourage you as much as possible to centralize activity centers such as trailheads and parking lots within the Park. For example, there is already a substantial parking lot that serves the boat landing; that parking lot often sits underused, and we think it could capture additional capacity without need for expansion if the dog park were to locate nearby. Likewise, we wonder if the location of a separate interpretive building near the base of the Brickyard Trail is warranted. Perhaps there could be additional investment in self-interpretation in that area, combined with a greater commitment to the picnic/interpretive area on the south side of Pickerel Lake. We would hope that the main facility at Pickerel will house a picnic shelter, fireplace, water access, restrooms and some basic interpretive signage or displays. We hope that the City will be able to minimize the area devoted to parking near Pickerel Lake. Perhaps parking bump-outs along the road could relieve demand at peak times around the lakefront.

- Portions of the park have been heavily impacted by past human activity, and may require specific solutions. Specifically, plans should call for removal of the slab of asphalt that we understand caps the site of a former gas station, and the contamination underneath be dealt with as appropriate. The Pickerel Lake shoreline also needs a great deal of attention. We would urge the City to restore native vegetation and carry-out shoreline erosion mitigation where necessary to improve the ecological functions as well as the aesthetic beauty of the lake. We would also love to see any reduction in power lines through the park - both big and small, though we recognize the enormity of that particular challenge.

We wish to thank all involved in creating these plans for their work and thoughtful contributions to three excellent alternatives. Feel free to call us with questions. FMR welcomes any role we can play in helping to build a stronger future for Lilydale Park.

Sincerely,

Whitney L. Clark
Executive Director