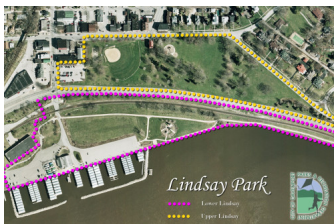


Park or Parking?: As the Lindsay Park Planning Process Gets Underway, Battle Lines Are Already Drawn

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Wednesday, 13 May 2009 06:00

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The meeting scheduled for Tuesday, May 12, has been described as the beginning of a master-planning process for Lindsay Park, with the potential impact to spill over into the Village of East Davenport. Darrin Nordahl, of the City of Davenport's Design Center, described the process as "very long and involved" and said he envisioned meetings to the end of the year.

But for many opponents of shifting the use of some park land - largely for parking for Village businesses - the process already appears well underway.

"It kind of looked like they were trying to sneak it under the radar," said Pat Stolley, a resident of the area who uses the park regularly.

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"What's already been hatched will be unveiled," said Karen Anderson, executive director of the Scott County Historic Preservation Society, "concocted in the back rooms with Village businesspeople. ... What a travesty that the process has been so closed."

Tuesday's meeting came after press time for the *River Cities' Reader* (the *Quad-City Times* coverage is

[here](#)

, and the

Argus

/

Dispatch

coverage is

[here](#)

), but interviews with city staff, park users and defenders, and business interests revealed that the process will likely be contentious. And parking will dominate the discussion.

A flyer alerting park supporters to Tuesday's meeting claimed that the park's basketball court and ball diamond are at risk. City officials said that's highly unlikely. "That's not even part of the equation," said Seve Ghose, the director of Davenport Parks & Recreation. "We are not going to give those up. They serve a community purpose."



But there is certainly support among some merchants for moving the restroom facility and basketball court for a parking area that could also be used to stage festivals. "It can fit in the area," said John Wisor, the owner of the 11th Street Precinct Bar & Grill, noting that the city could use brick pavers to improve the appearance. "All the businesses down here want it," Wisor said. "Parking is important to business. ... You don't lose anything. You gain."

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Wisor said that he collected 40 signatures from Village business owners supporting the concept, although he declined to name them.

One public-relations problem is that Wisor has a clear idea what he wants, such as an 11th Street entrance and approximately 40 parking spots. That gives the impression that before there was any public input, there was already a proposal on the table.

So there's a disconnect between what the city said about Tuesday's meetings and the issues that people are already arguing about.

Nordahl said that "this first meeting is really going to be bringing everyone up to speed" about issues; imminent improvements such as a new bike path; the next steps; and the scope of planning.

But the City of Davenport has done itself no favors in the way it approached this planning process.

Tuesday's meeting was held at the Davenport Parks & Recreation office (on the city's west side) rather than in the Village, and it was held on the same evening that the Davenport Historic Preservation Commission was considering the landmarking of a Village of East Davenport property.

Furthermore, beyond the parking/staging area favored by Wisor, there already seems to be an agenda for the park. The bike path is mostly built, and city staff members are talking about an Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant restroom facility and clearer signs for existing parking lots. All of that suggests that the planning process is not starting from scratch.

The Parking Problem

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Stolley said he was initially alarmed when he found out about the meeting, but on Friday he said, "I'm a lot less freaked out than I was a few days ago."

Still, on the issue of parking, Stolley said he doesn't think there's a need to add to what's already there.

"We have parking," he said. "People just don't know about it and don't use it."

"There's ample parking," Ghose said. "You just have to find it."

The city has three lots near Lindsay Park: near River Drive and Mound Street, adjacent to the convenience store/gas station on 12th Street, and south of River Drive.

"We know it's not signed the best," Nordahl said of free city parking. "We know we can improve signage."

Wisor scoffed at the idea that parking lots several blocks away are the answer for Village businesses. People don't want to walk that distance, he said, and for bar patrons, the lack of convenient lighted parking makes the area dangerous. "You want somebody to get raped?" he asked.

Nordahl said the lot south of River Drive is not appropriate for everyday use, but he said a parking plan for the area might be the next step.

"We've never done a parking plan for the Village," he said. "And everyone's clamoring for a parking plan. What we have heard ... is that the parking lots that we do have tend to be underutilized."

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He added that he doesn't believe that the lot envisioned by Wisor will put an end to the issue. "We're not so sure that even if you added a little bit of parking there, we're going to resolve the issue of parking in the Village as a whole," he said.

Nordahl also sounded less than enthusiastic about the prospect of a new lot: "I think people are looking at Lindsay Park as potential open space to expand parking, but honestly I don't think that's a long-term solution. I think what we're going to have to look at in the Village are the existing parking lots that line the alleys, many of which are completely underutilized, but because they are private property, the private-property owners will not allow the general public to park on there."

A 1977 study of the Village of East Davenport claimed that "parking can take place adjacent to the alleys as well as behind and between commercial structures These proposed plans increase the parking potential ... by 265 spaces."

"The Village is the same Village as when the study was done," Anderson said. "There's nothing out-of-date about this."

Another source of tension in the planning process could come from the different constituencies. The businesses of the Village want the park used to enhance their opportunities, while residents want it maintained as a neighborhood amenity. The city, meanwhile, is making some east-Davenport residents feel like their input isn't wanted by calling the park an amenity for the entire community - akin to Vander Veer Botanical Park.

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"It's really classified as a community park and a special-use park, because it is so large, because of its historical significance, and because it does cater to a variety of programs and uses not only for the citizens of Davenport but for visitors as well," Nordahl said. He added that the city plans to hold Lindsay Park meetings not only in the Village but also downtown and on the city's north and west sides. And he said the city is seeking a diverse group for the park steering committee, which would likely meet monthly through the end of the year.

While Nordahl sounds like he's with Stolley and Anderson on the parking issue, viewing the park as a community amenity suggests that he might favor a parking lot that could also be used to increase the number of festivals held at the park. The Davenport City Council, of course, would have final say on any changes to the park, and the Davenport Historic Preservation Commission has design review.

Anderson is adamant, however, that no park land should be eliminated for parking. "There's nothing that justifies taking out park land," she said.

And Stolley said, "I think the park's pretty cool the way it is. ... There's no need to really spend a lot of money."

But Wisor said he's baffled by the uproar over a multi-purpose lot that would only displace existing amenities: "I don't understand the big deal."