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27 May 2010

By E-mail

Gary Drewes, Chair, Economic Development Subcommittee
Scott Amos, Chair, Municipal Infrastructure Subcommittee
Gladys Storm, Chair, Civic Improvements Subcommittee

Dear Subcommittee Chairpersons:

Thank you for the time and service you are providing to oversee the Vision 2012 Phase Four process and hearings. We appreciate this opportunity to offer comments on behalf of Friends of Rapid City Parks (FRCP). Friends of Rapid City Parks was founded in 2003 to:

- Ensure that Rapid City area Parks are managed in a way that preserves this legacy for future generations.
- Protect Park resources and green space when issues relating to Park development arise.
- Encourage organizations located on park land to maintain and improve their facilities in a way that complements their surroundings.
- Support or sponsor events that bring attention to Rapid City parks, their preservation and enhancement.
- Encourage the Rapid City Council, or other jurisdictions, to expand the Park system and adequately fund Park maintenance.

FRCP acknowledges the value of the 2012 process and the enhancements this fund has made possible in Rapid City. We have reviewed proposals for the seven projects in Vision 2012 Phase Four related to the parks and request your consideration of the following comments.

1. Regrettably, the proposal to construct the Roosevelt Park Field House begs the proposition that we can continue to erect buildings in the floodway. Friends of Rapid City Parks has opposed, and will continue to oppose this notion. While we agree that the purposes for which the field house is designed are laudable and in the civic interest, we cannot condone continued encroachment on what our members consider to be sacred ground. The greenway is a memorial to the lives lost in the 1972 flood, and should be a reminder that

“floodway” means just that—this is an area that can and will flood. The statute and ordinances under which this land was designated have been stretched and squeezed to allow paving and building of more than 60 structures in the 38 years since the greenway was set aside. We urge the subcommittees to adhere to the vision of decision-makers at the time and preserve this open space as green space, as floodway, as permeable natural land that provides invaluable ecosystem services, as sacred ground.


2. We oppose funding the Mary Hall Park Parking Lot. This project duplicates what is being developed at the Outdoor Campus by the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks. The construction of the park has in large part diminished what wildlife and natural features existed prior to removal of habitat such as shrubs, trees and ground cover. Addition of more paved surface for street and parking will contribute untreated storm-water runoff to Lime Creek and will impair the ecosystem function of what natural cover remains. Friends of Rapid City Parks opposed the approach to this development when it was first proposed, and we do not support continued expenditure of public funds for additional paving over of natural wetlands.
3. We support completion of the West Memorial Park Design in the section of the Greenway Tract (Omaha Street Corridor Enhancement Project) from Interstate I90 to Eighth Street, south of Central HS. This proposal will contribute to necessary storm water treatment, will buffer Rapid Creek, and will remove the bike/pedestrian path out of the floodway. Additionally, when FRCP relinquished its opposition to the Central High School expansion into the park, part of our compromise was based on removal of the tennis courts and parking at the “turn around” on Eighth Street. This project would restore vegetation to what had been paved area and will contribute to the diversity and ecosystem function of this wetland area.
4. We can neither support nor oppose the Whitewater Park proposal by Black Hills Paddlers. We find the proposal lacking in specifics related to how it would operate or be maintained, how it would generate income, or how liability would be handled. The proposal cites examples from other areas, but those parks are associated with rivers, not creeks, so it is difficult to analyze the extrapolated assertions related to economic impact.
5. We support the request from Black Hills Runners and Black Hills Mountain Bikers to implement the trail plan developed for the Skyline Wilderness. The trail design was accomplished by an expert trail design firm for the Parks & Recreation Department. Implementation of a trail system will not only make the use of the Skyline Wilderness more accessible for residents and visitors, it will protect the off-trail area from damage. We

especially commend the designers and proponents for their selection of natural materials for trail surface.

6. While Friends of Rapid City Parks recognizes the need for additional acquisition of park land and for the expansion of neighborhood parks in under-served areas of the city, we cannot support the Southwest Area request for a small neighborhood park at this time. Because of the difficulty the city has had finding sufficient resources to maintain existing parks, we do not believe this neighborhood park should be a priority at this time.
7. The Sundial Pedestrian Bridge over Omaha Street presents a significant opportunity to discuss how Rapid City might reknit its two halves that have been severed by the barrier created with the widening of Omaha Street. While we may not support this specific proposal, we do support creating some process for discussion of a means to carry pedestrians and cyclists from downtown to Memorial Park and access the bike path, the greenway, and other amenities provided in the green ribbon that is our city's most valuable natural asset. The difficulty of crossing Omaha Street has been raised in transportation studies, in the current bicycle and pedestrian pathway study, by cyclists and civic activists on innumerable occasions. We applaud the proponents of the bridge, and urge the subcommittees to make a recommendation to the City for further study of options for crossing Omaha Street.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these views on the project proposals before you. We appreciate that it is a difficult task to balance the interests of many worthy civic groups with the need to keep spending under the "pay as you go" limitations of the 2012 Vision Fund, and to choose projects that will accomplish the most for economic development, needed infrastructure and civic improvement.

Wishing you every success in your deliberations,



Steve McCarthy

President, Friends of Rapid City Parks