

Parks at Peak Performance

Oldham Era

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By John Foster

Picture this: 13 new parks sprinkled throughout Oldham County on 600 acres, enough to nearly double park space in the county. Include a horse park, a new aquatics center, an indoor aquatics center and a new gym. Then sprinkle around several basketball and tennis courts plus football, softball and soccer fields, including an indoor soccer facility.

That's what the committee behind the Oldham County Parks and Recreation Master Plan has already been picturing, detailing them in a 313-page plan that will soon undergo planning commission and fiscal court scrutiny.

If it sounds ambitious, it's intended to be, according to the document, which quotes an urban planner, "Make no little plans," it reads, "They have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized."

Oldham County Parks and Recreation Director Tim Curtis agrees it's ambitious.

"It doesn't mean we're planning on getting it all done in the next couple years," he said. But without a plan, he said, nothing will be accomplished in the future. It's important to have a long-term blueprint, something to shoot for, he said.

As for anything in the near future, he said a picnic shelter should go up soon at Morgan Conservation Park as well as a picnic shelter at the 54-acre sports park behind the Oldham County High School football and baseball fields. At that site new trees are being planted and a new playground will go in soon. New fields for the Oldham County Youth Soccer Association are in the works at the previously bare site.

Crews recently laid about 1.75 miles of crushed stone trails at Wendell Moore Park with more to come.

He'd also like to see an indoor recreation center with a pool in the coming years near the Ky. 329 exit off Interstate 71 — at a site accessible to Goshen and Crestwood alike.

Current parks in use

The parks in Oldham County get put to plenty of use. The one possible exception is the conservation park in the northern rural reaches of the county.

For example, Curtis said the picnic shelter at Wendell Moore Park is reserved almost every weekend for family reunions or company picnics.

In 2007, people visited the aquatics center about 50,000 times.

How about a different part of the county? Well, in Centerfield, little leaguers' families can be found most June nights filling the parking lot at Peggy Baker Park out to the highway.

When the seasons change to fall youth football players fill every inch of open green space they can get their size 5 cleats on, their movements illumined by headlights.

According to a survey by the planning consultants, 81 percent of respondents used an Oldham County park in the last year. Wendell Moore and the aquatic/community center was the most popular, followed by Peggy Baker Park.

La Grange's parks get used as well. Those visiting the community center go beyond basketball to Lamaze and Canasta as well as a homeschoolers' PE class among others. About 2,400 people visit the center each month according to tallies kept by the center.

A need for more

The committee and Curtis believe Oldham County residents deserve more parks. He said he often hears from newcomers to the county who are surprised the county doesn't have a more extensive parks system.

"I don't think you should have to go into Louisville to experience a good parks system," he said. "I want the residents of Oldham County to get what they need right here."

He said it's no secret that Americans don't exercise enough. They also can benefit from the connection to nature parks provide. The report points to increased property values near parks as well.

There are currently 689 acres of public parks belonging to Oldham County and La Grange at 15 sites. Another 181 acres is open to the public at Creasey Mahan Nature Preserve and the North Oldham Lions Club park.

Oldham County has fewer residents per park acre — 109 — than most of the state and nation, with medians of 184 and 132 residents respectively. In other words, they have more parkland per capita than most places. But the 227-acre Morgan Conservation Park helps that number. When only developed parkland is considered, Oldham County is near the national median.

But based on standards by the National Recreation and Park Association, in comparison to other communities and the consultant's experience, Oldham County residents have fewer playgrounds than needed for the population, as well as picnic shelters, trails and baseball/softball fields. If the county continues to grow, those needs will too.

The only items consultants state are plentiful enough are tennis courts and community centers.

There are areas of the county without access to a park for several miles — most notably the Ballardsville, Skylight and Norton Commons areas. There's only one public pool, one public gym and one outdoor volleyball court in the county.

Residents surveyed said they most want walking and biking trails, an indoor swimming pool and small neighborhood parks. For existing facilities, they said they most wanted upgrades to the restrooms. Residents stated they'd also like more adult fitness classes and water fitness classes.

Plans for the future

There are several suggestions for new parks throughout the county. Some of them include a long park along the river between Westport and Goshen; a park in Skylight; and an equestrian park between Ky. 1694 and Ky. 393 with multiple riding rings.

They also have ideas for a park just west of North Oldham High School; a waterfront park near Jefferson County and a park between Goshen Elementary and Moser Farms.

The ideas don't end there. In the works is also a park in Brownsboro; the Crestwood city park planned for the intersection of Ky. 146 and Ky. 22; a park south of Ballardsville and a baseball/softball complex in the Goshen area.

And that's an incomplete list of only new parks. The plan also calls for a gym at the John Black Community Center; two tennis courts, a soccer/lacrosse field and trails at Briar Hill; a disk golf course and fishing dock at Wendell Moore Park and a nature center at the conservation park. Friends of Westport, a community organization in that town, have a plan for expanding Westport Park. The city of Pewee Valley also is working to develop one acre of parkland behind city hall.

For the 54-acre sports park, four lit soccer fields, an indoor soccer facility, a multi-use field, four picnic shelters, two playgrounds and two sand volleyball courts are in the plans.

Paying for the dream

The suggested improvements and expansions total about \$72 million in estimated cost plus about \$700,000 per year to maintain.

Curtis said he has no plans to ask Oldham County tax payers for \$72 million anytime soon. For one thing, it's a long-term plan. For another, there are many other ways to get the money — from land donations to private foundations to grants.

The report also raises the possibility of new taxes, asking residents if they would support a recreation tax. 51 percent said they would, but the people who responded to the survey are the ones with the most interest in parks, it should be noted.

Curtis said that sort of tax isn't a possibility at this time, especially considering the state of the economy.

The planning commission will see a presentation on the plan at their meeting 9 a.m. July 28. A public hearing is planned Aug. 25.

A copy of the plan is available at OldhamCounty.net.

Park Facts

689 = acres of park land exist in Oldham County, including incorporated cities

109 = average number of residents per park acre in Oldham County

184 = average number of residents per park acre in the state of Kentucky

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