Minneapolis
Park & Recreation Board

Resolution 2019-368

Resolution Approving the Concept Plan for Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden Operations and Visitor Comfort Improvements at Theodore Wirth Regional Park

Whereas, The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) is the steward of Minneapolis parks and lakes;

Whereas, The MPRB owns and operates Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary (Eloise Butler) located within Theodore Wirth Regional Park;

Whereas, MPRB staff have proposed allocation of 2020 CIP funds for operations and visitor comfort improvements for Eloise Butler;

Whereas, The Board of Commissioners approved the Theodore Wirth Regional Park Master Plan (Master Plan) in 2015 which included the improvements for Eloise Butler;

Whereas, The community engagement plan developed for this project was followed to solicit input from the community for the development of the concept design, including input gained through stakeholder meetings, on-site engagement, and an online survey;

Whereas, Engagement of the community has resulted in a concept design for improvements at Eloise Butler aligned with the Master Plan; and

Whereas, This resolution is supported by the MPRB 2007-2020 Comprehensive Plan, which envisions “dynamic parks that shape city character and meet diverse community needs” and “a safe place to play, celebrate, contemplate, and recreate;”

RESOLVED, That the Board of Commissioners approves the concept plan for Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden operations and visitor comfort improvements at Theodore Wirth Regional Park; and

RESOLVED, That the President of the Board and Secretary to the Board are authorized to take all necessary administrative actions to implement this resolution.

Minneapolis
Park & Recreation Board

TO: Planning Committee

FROM: Michael Schroeder,

DATE: November 20, 2019

SUBJECT: Resolution Approving the Concept Plan for Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden Operations and Visitor Comfort Improvements at Theodore Wirth Regional Park

BACKGROUND

This resolution approves the concept design of operations and visitor comfort improvements for Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary (Garden). The idea of such improvements was envisioned in the Theodore Wirth Regional Park Master Plan, but no details were provided. Currently, the existing buildings do not meet federal and state standards for accessibility and safety.

As outlined in the 2010 Eloise Butler Management Plan, Garden staff intentionally worked to grow the Garden's audience numbers. Now, an estimated 60,000 people visit the Garden annually. It is known for its seasonal displays of native wildflowers in woodland, wetland, and prairie areas.

The concept design resulted from community engagement that took place between June and September 2019 with several different audiences (see *Attachment B – Community Engagement Plan*). The majority of the engagement was with Garden users, people who visited the Garden this summer, whether it was their first visit or one-hundredth visit. Other audiences MPRB staff focused engagement with included:

- Staff and volunteers of the Garden
- Friends of the Wild Flower Garden
- Wirth Park users
- Residents of adjacent neighborhoods

We also had direct communication with the Loppet Foundation, Bryn Mawr Neighborhood Association, and Harrison Neighborhood Association to discuss engagement opportunities with their constituents and/or to inform them about the upcoming concept design.

Though the majority of engagement was with folks who already visit the Garden, Garden and planning staff agreed that it would be beneficial to expand engagement to folks who live and play near the Garden to use this both as an educational opportunity for people to learn about

Minneapolis
Park & Recreation Board

the Garden and as an opportunity to learn what design elements may draw in new people who aren't current visitors.

Engagement included holding several stakeholder conversations, distributing an online survey, and engaging residents through in-person activities within the garden and neighboring sites. During the engagement period, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) staff communicated that improvements would likely include:

- The addition of an all-gendered, family-friendly, ADA-compliant bathroom
- Demolition of the existing tool shed which currently doubles as both a tool shed and staff office space
- A new tool shed that will be built outside of the garden's borders and fence
- An addition to the visitor center to house existing staff
- A new front entrance

More than 700 people gave their input over the course of the summer, either through in-person engagement or by taking the online survey, with ages ranging from seven to eighty years plus. Section 5 of the community engagement plan has been updated as required at this project milestone.

While the average person who shared their demographics information in the survey self-identified as female, white, and over 50, we found that the in-person engagement activites in the visitor center, at neighboring community sites, and at Wirth Park was effective at broadening the range of voices in the process. Though we didn't ask people to share their demographics during in-person activities, qualitatively, we were able to bring in more youth and non-white voices into the process this way.

Broad and overlying themes MPRB heard from the responses included:

- To preserve and maintain the feel of the Garden
- Interest in increased accessibility within and around the Garden
- Issues around transportation and access to the Garden
- Value in existing programs and activities
- Ideas about how to use space outside of the Garden fence

DESIGN CONCEPT

The design concept recommendations include (see *Attachment A*):

Visitor center

- Add on an addition to the visitor center behind the existing building. The addition will include needed elements for staff such as: a break room, shared working space, stairs to upper level storage, office space, and program storage

Minneapolis
Park & Recreation Board

- Screen in the existing porch to allow for additional programming space, especially in inclement weather

Bathroom/tool shed

- Demolish the existing tool shed inside the garden fence; allow for this part of the Garden to be restored to habitat
- Build a new toolshed outside of the existing Garden fence
- Add an ADA accessible, family-friendly, all-gender bathroom next to the existing bathroom inside the Garden

Front entrance additions between the garden gate and parking lot

- Hard-surface, accessible paths to lookout points of Maple Bowl and possibly to the gate of EBWG
- Gathering/outdoor classroom space
- Small natural play area
- Nature-inspired artwork
- Intentionally design for adaptability to allow for further expansion if needed
- Native plantings

Garden Boundary

- Propose to change the Garden boundary to enhance visitor experience and provide additional habitat preservation

FUNDING/COST SUMMARY

Sources	$450-550,000
2020 Regional Parks and Trails CIP (pending Board approval)	$300,000
Other grants and donations to be resourced	$150-250,000

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approving the concept plan for Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden operations and visitor comfort improvements at Theodore Wirth Regional Park.

This action is supported by the following vision themes outlined in the 2007-2020 MPRB Comprehensive Plan:

Vision Theme 3: Dynamic parks that shape city character and meet diverse community needs

Vision Theme 4: A safe place to play, celebrate, contemplate, and recreate;

Minneapolis
Park & Recreation Board

Furthermore, this action is supported by the Theodore Wirth Regional Park Master Plan, which states that:

> Improvements to the garden will increase access, protect or enhance the garden's plants and infrastructure, provide an enhanced self-directed experience, and support potential expansions in programming. Recommended improvements include main entry access improvements (though grades throughout the garden prohibit full ADA access at this site), as well as path, bridge/boardwalk improvements and other enhancements to building and facilities (as identified in the management plan of 2010).

HISTORY:

11/06/19 **Planning Committee** **ADOPTED**

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment A - Eloise Butler Concept Plan Approval (PDF)
- Attachment B - Community Engagement Plan Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden (PDF)

Prepared By: Emma Pachuta,, Strategic Planning
Review:
Cindy Anderson Completed 10/24/2019 2:37 PM
Adam Arvidson Completed 10/25/2019 2:35 PM
Michael Schroeder Completed 10/26/2019 11:25 AM
Jennifer Ringold Completed 10/29/2019 8:23 AM
Al Bangoura Completed 10/30/2019 8:09 AM
Planning Committee Completed 11/06/2019 5:20 PM
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board Pending 11/20/2019 5:00 PM