



MERRILL
WISCONSIN
City Of Parks

CITY OF MERRILL

Parks & Recreation Dept. - Smith Center

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SEPTEMBER MEETING NOTICE

The Merrill Parks and Recreation Commission will have a meeting on **Wednesday, September 6, 2017 at 4:15 p.m.**, at the **Smith Center**.

Voting members of Commission: John Burgener, Jean Ravn, Brian Artac, Melissa Schroeder, Dave Sukow and Michael Willman.

The following items will be included on the agenda:

1. Approve minutes from previous meeting.
2. Approve claims.
3. Public Comment
4. Continued discussion and review Outdoor Recreation Draft Plan
5. Begin discussion on 2018 Capital and Operational Budget.
6. Monthly reports.
7. Set date for next meeting.
8. Public comment
9. Adjournment

Submitted by

Mike Willman

Mike Willman, Chairperson

Parks and Recreation Commission

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PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

August 2, 2017

The Merrill Parks and Recreation Commission met on Wednesday, August 2, 2017 at 4:15 p.m. at the Smith Center.

Members Present: Brian Artac, Melissa Schroeder, Dave Sukow, Jean Ravn

Members Excused Absent: John Burgener, Ben Debroux and Mike Willman

Department Staff Present: Dan Wendorf and Dawn Smith

Visitors: City Administrator Dave Johnson, Erik Pfantz, Kandy Peterson, Derek Woellner and Mary Ball

***Motion by Sukow, seconded by Ravn to approve the minutes from the June meeting.

***Carried unanimously.

***Motion by Schroeder, seconded by Ravn, to approve the claims from June and July

***Carried Unanimously.

The first item on the agenda was the Outdoor Recreation Plan discussion continued. Wendorf went through some of the questions from the survey. No action was taken at this time.

The next item on the agenda was to discuss the refund policy for Summer Playground. Wendorf stated that there has been a couple parents that would like a refund from the summer playground program. The policy states that no refunds will be given once a program is started including our summer playground program. After some discussion it was decided that the policy will not be changed – no refunds will be given.

The next item on the agenda was the Normal Park Restroom project update.

Wendorf stated that we are a little behind, due to June weather and County Concrete's block maker being out of commission for a stretch of time, but things are going good and if everything stays on track it should be done by the end of August.

The next item on the agenda was the River Bend Trail project updates. Wendorf informed the Commission of the WDNR letter stating that work on the east trail extension would not be allowed to begin until after September 19th due to Wood Turtles. Evidence was discovered by the WDNR that the endangered Wood Turtles were in the area of the proposed extension, causing the pause in the construction schedule. Wendorf stated that everything will be ready to go for the work to begin at that time and hopefully the weather will cooperate this fall for start and completion. Wendorf also informed the Commission that work on the Agra Pavilion is progressing. The concrete aprons were finished a few weeks ago, work on the windows and garage doors have begun and it is starting to take shape. Wendorf thanked everyone who has been involved with this project and shared his excitement for the potential that it brings for the entire community. Wendorf also stated that his crew will be installing the trail marker posts within the next week or so along the trail to help people as well as EMS/Police identify key points in the event there is an emergency.

The next item on the agenda was monthly board reports. Wendorf informed the Commission that summer has been going good up to this point and that after a rough month of June, the crew has finally been able to make progress on some projects. Wendorf stated they are hustling through what they can get done before the seasonal staff has to start going back to school. Wendorf stated that the Bierman Family Aquatic Center numbers will be a little down in June due to the consistently poor weather conditions for the entire month and into early July.

***Motion by Schroeder, seconded by Ravn to approve the monthly board report given by Wendorf.

***Carried unanimously.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 6th, 2017 at 4:15 p.m. at the Smith Center.

Public comment:

Erik Pfantz commented that he thought the Commission referenced the wrong parks during the Outdoor Recreation Survey discussion.

Aldersperson Ball said she hears a lot of nice comments about our beautiful parks in town and wanted to thank all of the staff members of the Parks & Recreation Department for the great job that they do.

***Motion by Ravn, seconded by Schroeder to adjourn at 5:33p.m.

***Carried unanimously.

Dawn Smith, Recording Secretary

★ 2018 add Outdoor Rec Plan \$5,000

10 Year Capital Plan - Merrill Parks & Recreation Department

Park/Project	Priority	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Smith Center HVAC	1		\$60,000	\$70,000							
MARC Ballfield Improvements	3		\$15,000	\$15,000							
Stange Park Improvements	1	See below									
Athletic Park Parking Lot	1	\$50,000									
Athletic Park Field Lights	1	\$200,000									
Park Dump Truck Replacement	2		\$40,000								
Stange Park Lagoon Bridges	1	\$50,000									
Large Field Mower Replacement	2		\$85,000								
Otts Park Field Lights	3			\$100,000							
Park Pickup truck replacement	3				\$30,000						
Prairie Trails Pit Toilet	3		\$25,000								
Athletic Park Wall Restoration	2			\$20,000							
Lions Park eliminate stairs and construct pedestrian p	3				\$25,000						
Lions Park Parking lot replace	2			\$35,000							
Kitchenette re-surface playground	3				\$15,000						
Kitchenette parking lot replace	2			\$35,000							
City Forest Pit Toilets	2		\$25,000								
City Forest Shelter	3				\$30,000						
Otts Park re-fence ball field	2			\$20,000							
Otts Park new bleachers	2			\$25,000							
Stange Park resurface/border playground	2					\$15,000					
Stange Park Restrooms/shelter	1	\$150,000									
Stange Park Parking Lot	1	\$35,000									
Stange Park basketball court upgrade	1	\$30,000									
Stange Park lighting	1	\$20,000									
Stange Park tennis court remove and hillside fix	1	\$15,000									
Streeter Square re-do basketball courts	3					\$20,000					
Riverside Park parking lot	2				\$40,000						
Riverside Park resurface playground	2				\$15,000						
Replace infield dragger	3			\$20,000							
City Forest Main Road re-construction	3							\$75,000			

AUGUST

2017 AMERICAN LEGION	ADVERTISEMENT	8/1/2017		\$150.00	BARLEYFEST
ACE HARDWARE	LED FEIT	8/4/2017		\$21.99	55200-03-40000
ACE HARDWARE	BATTERY	7/31/2017		\$9.58	55200-03-40000
ACE HARDWARE	PIPE/COUPLE/EL.BOW	8/4/2017		\$1.59	55200-03-40000
ACE HARDWARE	ANTIFREEZE	7/25/2017		\$20.50	55200-03-40000
ACE HARDWARE	WASHERS/THREADLOCKER	8/9/2017		\$14.97	55200-03-40000
ACE HARDWARE	PIPE INSULATING	8/14/2017		\$7.95	55200-08-91000
ACE HARDWARE	CLAW HAMMER/ SPECIALTY TOOL	8/17/2017		\$24.94	55200-03-40000
ACE HARDWARE	SPECIALTY TOOL/METAL HANDLE	8/16/2017		\$17.46	55200-03-40000
ACE HARDWARE	CLEANER	8/16/2017		\$18.27	55200-03-40000
ACE HARDWARE	BROOMS	8/16/2017		\$11.99	55200-03-40000
ACE HARDWARE	JOINT KNIFE, ROLLER KIT	8/21/2017		\$27.45	55400-03-40000
ACE HARDWARE	DUSTER/SANDING BLOCK	8/22/2017		\$34.47	55400-03-50000
AMAZON.COM	ASPIRE KEY NUMBERED TAGS	8/2/2017		\$54.89	55420-03-40000
AMERICAN WELDING	AQUATIC CENTER	7/21/2017	4937472	\$223.00	55420-03-40000
AMERICAN WELDING	AQUATIC CENTER	7/27/2017	4945371	\$137.76	55420-03-40000
AMERICAN WELDING	CYLINDER TANKS	7/31/2017	4904077	\$82.68	55200-02-15000
AMERICAN WELDING	AQUATIC CENTER	7/31/2017	53403	\$1,070.68	55420-03-40000
AMERICAN WELDING	CYLINDER TANKS	7/31/2017	929	\$112.57	55300-03-41500
AMERICAN WELDING	CARBON DIOXIDE	8/4/2017	4979934	\$148.75	55420-03-40000
AMERICAN WELDING	CARBON DIOXIDE	8/10/2017	4987256	\$119.05	55420-03-40000
AMERICAN WELDING	CARBON DIOXIDE	8/17/2017	4995939	\$171.03	55420-03-50000
ASCENSION CHURCH	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/23/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
ATCO INTERNATIONAL	CENTURION CLEANER	7/24/2017	132383	\$266.00	55420-03-40000
ATCO INTERNATIONAL	POP UP SWIPES	8/8/2017	132383	\$245.00	55420-03-50000
ATCO INTERNATIONAL	CENTURION CLEANER	8/15/2017	132383	\$399.00	55200-03-4000
BARLEYFEST	ADVERTISING BARLEYFEST	8/1/2017		\$400.00	BARLEYFEST
BAUMGART WASTE	WASTE HAULING	7/25/2017	16896	\$262.45	55400-02-23600
BOB OTT	G.B.P FOOTBALL CAMP	8/12/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	
CAR QUEST	PARTS FOR SHOP	8/2/2017	50717	\$10.02	55200-03-50000
CAROL FINANGER	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/8/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
CARQUEST	SUPPLIES	8/21/2017	50717	\$51.54	55400-03-40000
CHARLIE JOHNSON	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/23/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
CHASTENA DESCHAREND	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/15/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
CHRIS CIRUDINSKEY	G.B.P FOOTBALL CAMP	8/12/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	
CITY DIRECTORY	ADVERTISEMENT	8/21/2017	183060	\$392.00	55400-03-41000
CORY RAMPART	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/8/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
COUNTY MATERIALS	MASON SAND	7/25/2017	2938595	\$37.00	55200-08-91000
COUNTY MATERIALS	MASON SAND	8/4/2017	2947272	\$148.00	55200-08-91000

COUNTY MATERIALS	MASON SAND	8/4/2017	2946716	\$74.00	55200-08-91000
COUNTY MATERIALS	MASON SAND	8/4/2017	2946+249	\$296.00	55200-08-91000
COUNTY MATERIALS	MASON SAND	8/8/2017	2949081-00	\$37.00	55200-08-91000
DAVE'S COUNTY MARKET	WATER	7/28/2017		\$11.94	55300-03-41500
DAVE'S COUNTY MARKET	ICE PACKS	7/31/2017		\$15.65	55300-03-41500
DAVE'S COUNTY MARKET	AQUATIC CENTER	8/1/2017		\$4.47	55300-03-41500
DAVE'S COUNTY MARKET	AQUATIC CENTER	7/20/2017		\$8.38	55300-03-41500
DAVE'S COUNTY MARKET	SUMMER PLAYGROUND	8/4/2017		\$25.42	55300-03-41500
DAVE'S COUNTY MARKET	NAPKINS, KETCHUP	8/14/2017		\$8.87	55300-03-41500
DAVE'S COUNTY MARKET	PAPER PLATES	8/15/2017		\$7.56	55300-03-41500
DAVE'S COUNTY MARKET	SUPPLIES FOR CRAFTS	8/16/2017		\$30.71	55300-03-41500
DAVE'S COUNTY MARKET	KETCHUP/CHEESE SAUSE	8/20/2017		\$16.98	55300-03-41500
DAVE'S COUNTY MARKET	PAPER PLATES	8/21/2017		\$44.60	55300-03-41500
DAVE'S COUNTY MARKET	ICE CREAM SANDWICHES	8/22/2017		\$13.77	55300-03-41500
DICK DUGINSKI	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/8/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
ERIC GEISS	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/8/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
FASTENAL	SUPPLIES FOR SHOP	8/11/2017	97058	\$176.85	55200-03-40000
FOTO NEWS COURIER	ADVERTISING	8/1/2017		\$517.50	55300-03-41500
FOTO NEWS COURIER	ADVERTISING LABOR DAY	8/1/2017		\$592.20	LABOR DAY
G & K SERVICES	MATS/MOPS	8/3/2017	6016584586	\$180.41	55400-03-23250
G & K SERVICES	UNIFORMS	7/27/2017	6016578864	\$64.43	55200-03-46000
G & K SERVICES	UNIFORMS	8/3/2017	6016581594	\$64.43	55200-03-46000
G & K SERVICES	UNIFORMS	8/10/2017	6016584359	\$64.43	55200-03-46000
G & K SERVICES	UNIFORMS	8/17/2017	6016587098	\$64.43	55200-03-46000
GREBE'S	CHAINSAW REPLACEMENT	8/3/2017	275748	\$999.95	55200-08-91000
HEARTLAND COOPERATIVE	TOMAHAWK 4 GTLYPHOS	9/30/2017	294764	\$94.76	55200-08-1000
HILLSIDE FELLOWSHIP	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/15/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
J & j LEE CONSTRUCTION	NORMAL PARK RESTROOMS	8/19/2017		\$90,792.00	NORMAL PARK RESTROOMS
JANET THOMPSON	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/8/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
JOHN HANSON	G.B.P FOOTBALL CAMP	8/12/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	
JOSH FORD	G.B.P FOOTBALL CAMP	8/12/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	
KRUEGER PLUMBING	SOCCER FIELDS	7/25/2017	26787	\$230.90	55200-02-15000
LAMERS BUS LINES	MILWAUKEE ZOO	8/1/2017	516228	\$1,375.00	55300-03-41500
LAURA DUGINSKI	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/8/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
LEE RECREATION	DOG BAGS	8/3/2017	11253-17	\$91.50	55200-03-40000
LES n JIMS	BOWLING	7/13/2017	12153	\$378.00	55300-03-41500
LES n JIMS	BOWLING	7/13/2017	12156	\$155.00	55300-03-41500
LINCOLN WOOD	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/8/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
MERRILL BIBLE CHURCH	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/16/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
MERRILL DISTRIBUTING	AQUATIC CENTER	7/28/2017	1309362	\$470.10	55420-03-40100

MERRILL DISTRIBUTING	SMITH CENTER PAPER PRODUCTS	7/28/2017	1389402	\$117.90	55420-03-40100
MERRILL DISTRIBUTING	AQUATIC CENTER	8/1/2017	1389754	\$309.85	55420-03-40100
MERRILL DISTRIBUTING	URINAL BLOCKS	8/1/2017	1389751	\$21.80	55200-03-40000
MERRILL DISTRIBUTING	TISSUE	8/9/2017	1391094	\$60.00	55420-03-50000
MERRILL DISTRIBUTING	LATEX GLOVES, TOUCHLESS TOWELS	8/21/2017	1392576	\$252.00	55420-03-40000
MERRILL DISTRIBUTING	CAN LINERS	8/21/2017	1392676	\$42.90	55400-03-44000
MERRILL STREET DEPARTMENT	P-4	7/18/2017	9566	\$278.62	55200-03-50000
MERRILL STREET DEPARTMENT	P-24	7/20/2017	9570	\$41.79	55200-03-50000
MERRILL STREET DEPARTMENT	P-18	7/13/2017	9561	\$3,512.17	55200-03-50000
MERRILL STREET DEPARTMENT	P-18	7/31/2017	9577	\$132.27	55200-03-50000
MERRILL STREET DEPARTMENT	P-18	7/25/2017	9572	\$1,501.25	55200-03-50000
MERRILL WATER UTILITY	ATHLETIC PARK	9/10/2017	222-26940-13	\$1,702.28	55200-02-21000
MERRILL WATER UTILITY	ATHLETIC PARK CONCESSIONS	9/10/2017	222-27040-00	\$71.42	55200-02-21000
MICHELE EVANS	G.B.P FOOTBALL CAMP	8/12/2017	VOUCHER	\$100.00	
MICHELE GROVOGEL	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/15/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
MID WISCONSIN BEVERAGE	AQUATIC CENTER	7/31/2017	439443	\$200.00	55420-03-40100
MID WISCONSIN BEVERAGE	AQUATIC CENTER	7/31/2017	439444	\$290.84	55420-03-40100
MID WISCONSIN BEVERAGE	AQUATIC CENTER	8/7/2017	441833	\$271.84	55420-03-40100
NASSCO	TOWELS	8/23/2017	2224070	\$203.73	55200-03-40000
NEVCO	SCOREBOARDS	5/23/2017	165375	\$5,700.00	LIONS PARK BIERMAN GRANT
NORTHWOODS CHILDREN'S MUSEUM	SUMMER PLAYGROUND	7/31/2017		\$324.00	55300-03-41500
PETERSON BROS SAND AND GRAVEL	TOPSOIL	8/1/2017	11892	\$107.50	55200-08-91000
PHYLLIS FREDERICK	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/8/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
PREMIER MANUFACTURING	BLACK BRASS PLATE	8/17/2017	4115	\$23.00	RIVER BEND BENCH FUND
RENEE SMITH	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/15/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
RJESTERER & SCHNELL	PARTS FOR SHOP	8/1/2017		\$29.36	55200-03-50000
RJESTERER & SCHNELL	DEL WITH TODD	5/18/2017	1181453	\$28.78	55200-03-50000
ROSS HELLER	G.B.P FOOTBALL CAMP	8/12/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	
RTL ELECTRIC	WIRING FOR SCOREBOARDS	8/9/2017	61818	\$6,089.13	LIONS PARK BIERMAN GRANT
RTL ELECTRIC	WORK AT ATHLETIC PARK	8/9/2017	61819	\$320.64	55200-08-91000
SANDY RASMUSSEN	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/8/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
SARAH GRUNENWALD	G.B.P FOOTBALL CAMP	8/12/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	
SHANNON HARDT	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/8/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
SHARON SCHMELTZER	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/23/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
STEVE WEIX	G.B.P FOOTBALL CAMP	8/12/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	
SUNRISE BROADCASTING	ADVERTISING	8/1/2017		\$249.00	55400-03-41000
SUSAN KENNEDY DJ SERVICES	HAWAIIAN LUAU AT AQUATIC CENTER	8/21/2017	1	\$300.00	55420-03-40000
SUSAN WIELAND	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/15/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
SYSCO	AQUATIC CENTER	8/3/2017	118312764	\$526.67	55420-03-40100
TAMMY WOLLER	G.B.P FOOTBALL CAMP	8/12/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	

THE COSMO	SUMMER PLAYGROUND	7/18/2017		\$432.00	55300-03-41500
THE COSMO	SUMMER PLAYGROUND	7/18/2017		\$408.00	55300-03-41500
THERESA GRUND	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/8/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
THOMAS BALL	G.B.F FOOTBALL CAMP	8/12/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	
TONYA HANRAJAM	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/8/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
TRINITY CHURCH	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/23/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
TRINITY LUTHERAN SCHOOL	SECURITY DEPOSIT	8/8/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
TRISHA KUBICHEK	G.B.F FOOTBALL CAMP	8/12/2017	VOUCHER	\$50.00	
TWEET GAROT	HOT H2O HEATER	7/20/2017	49732	\$2,189.00	26-31-5390
WALMART	AQUATIC CENTER	7/26/2017		\$32.13	55300-03-41500
WALMART	AQUATIC CENTER	7/25/2017		\$44.10	55300-03-41500
WALMART	AQUATIC CENTER	7/27/2017		\$63.21	55300-03-41500
WALMART	AQUATIC CENTER	8/1/2017		\$54.95	55300-03-41500
WALMART	SUMMER PLAYGROUND	8/3/2017		\$33.08	55300-03-41500
WALMART	SUPPLIES FOR POOL	8/15/2017		\$7.78	55300-03-41500
WALMART	SUPPLIES FOR CRAFTS	8/16/2017		\$14.31	55300-03-41500
WALMART	END OF YEAR PICNIC SUMMER PLAY	8/25/2017		\$98.72	55300-03-41500
WAUSAU CHEMICALS	SUFURIC ACID	7/27/2017	275385	\$625.50	55420-03-50000
WAUSAU CHEMICALS	HYPD CHLOR	8/3/2017	275748	\$1,305.85	55420-03-40000
WAUSAU CHEMICALS	SODIUM BICARBONATE	8/18/2017	276270	\$232.50	55420-03-40000
WAUSAU CHEMICALS	CALCIUM CHLORIDE	8/2/2017	276310	\$381.65	55420-03-40000
WJJQ	ADVERTISING AQUATIC CENTER	8/1/2017		\$150.00	55400-03-41000
WPS	CONCESSION STAND AT MARC	8/31/2017	4050611701-00011	\$167.47	55200-02-22000
WPS	CONCESSION STAND AT MARC	8/31/2017	405061701-00018	\$93.33	55200-02-22000
WPS	SMITH CENTER	8/31/2017	405061701-00003	\$1,431.47	55400-02-22000
WPS	CONCESSION STAND AT MARC	8/31/2017	405061701-00002	\$33.49	55200-02-22000



The Atlantic

The Nature Cure

Why some doctors are writing prescriptions for time outdoors



Selman Design

JAMES HAMBLIN

OCTOBER 2015 ISSUE | HEALTH

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SIGN UP

THE FIRST TIME J. Phoenix Smith told me that soil has healing properties that can help thwart depression, I just nodded slowly.

Smith is an ecotherapist, a practitioner of nature-based exercises intended to address both mental and physical health. Which means she recommends certain therapies that trigger in me, as a medical doctor, more skepticism than serenity: Listen to birdsong, in your headphones if necessary. Start a garden, and think of the seeds' growth as a metaphor for life transitions. Find a spot in a park and sit there for 20 minutes every week, without checking your phone, noting week-to-week and seasonal changes in a journal.

Ecotherapy is a fledgling profession, still unrestrained by such things as "standards of practice" and "licensing requirements." It can mean regular outdoor sessions with a therapist or simple exercises undertaken on one's own, and can be part of a general approach to well-being or a supplement to treatment for a medical condition. (It is not intended as a replacement for standard evidence-based treatments.)

Smith almost lost me at the part about not checking your phone. But I couldn't dismiss her out of hand. Her certainty that she is doing something great for people was disarming. Plus, she has a background in public health: She worked in HIV prevention for 20 years, until she was laid off in 2010.

After Smith lost her job, aimlessness led to stress, which led to depression. But she found solace on long hikes in the Northern California hills, and was inspired to volunteer at a garden in East Oakland. "I remember walking into the garden, and I immediately felt better," she told me. "I just saw wealth and abundance. There was food growing, and flowers. It really helped to shift my thinking."

Smith became so convinced of nature's healing powers that she decided to start a consulting company, EcoSoul, predicated on the idea that "bringing forth your medicine is a way of honoring your ancestors, your highest self, and the earth." The next year, she was part of the first class to graduate from the ecotherapy certificate program at John F. Kennedy University in Pleasant Hill, California.

Ecotherapy training programs are springing up around the country, but the one Smith attended was launched by a pioneer of the movement: Craig Chalquist, the chair of the East-West Psychology Department at the California Institute of Integral Studies. When I tracked him down, he shared some familiar advice: "If you hold moist soil for 20 minutes," he told me, "the soil bacteria begin elevating your mood. You have all the antidepressant you need in the ground."

As Richard Louv puts it, when we don't spend enough time outdoors, we develop "nature-deficit disorder."

What was it with these guys and dirt? It turned out that Smith and Chalquist were referring to a study published in *Neuroscience*, a prestigious journal, that had found that soil bacteria called *Mycobacterium vaccae* increase serotonin in the brains of mice, much like Prozac and similar medications. It's a stretch to apply this preliminary finding to humans—ask your doctor before replacing your psychoactive medications with dirt.

But other research, conducted with actual humans, does support the idea that spending time in nature makes people healthier. Children with ADHD who regularly play in parks have been found to have milder

symptoms than those who spend more time indoors, for example, and therapeutic-camping programs have been found to decrease relapse rates in substance addicts. Such findings generally have more to do with mood and behavior than basic biology—but mood and behavior are intimately tied to physical well-being. Social connection, for instance, is one of the most important factors in human health. And communal green spaces foster that.

The idea that nature exposure is important to human health goes way back, predating fears about iPad addiction by a few generations. In an 1862 issue of *The Atlantic*, Henry David Thoreau praised the vigor-inducing virtues of walking in nature: “Think of a man’s swinging dumbbells for his health, when those springs are bubbling up in far-off pastures unsought by him!” Also in this magazine, the next year, when tuberculosis was believed to account for one-third of all deaths in “the civilized world,” a physician wrote, “No doubt the lives of thousands would be saved by destroying their houses, and compelling them to sleep in the open air.”

I was disappointed that none of the ecotherapists I interviewed encouraged me to destroy houses. But some of the simple principles behind ecotherapy are gaining acceptance even in mainstream medicine. And when nature therapy is recommended by a doctor, it tends to carry more weight.

AT HIS OFFICE in Washington, D.C., Robert Zarr, a pediatrician, writes prescriptions for parks. He pulls out a prescription pad and scribbles instructions—which park his obese or diabetic or anxious or depressed patient should visit, on which days, and for how long—just as though he were prescribing medication.

Zarr says it's important to give concrete advice instead of repeating the vague admonitions (Exercise more! Get outside!) that people are used to hearing. "If you came in to me with bacterial pneumonia," he told me, "I wouldn't say, 'You just go to any pharmacy, pick up any antibiotic you'd like, take it for as many days as you'd like, with or without food, and I'll see you in a month, buddy.'" He doesn't necessarily tell patients what to do at the park, however—just to go.

Zarr is part of a small but growing group of health-care professionals who are essentially medicalizing nature. He relies on a compendium of 382 local parks—the product of meticulous mapping and rating of green spaces, based on accessibility, safety, and amenities—that he helped create for DC Park Rx, a community-health initiative. The Washington program was one of the first in the United States; there are now at least 150 others.

Park prescriptions are a low-risk, low-cost intervention that, in Zarr's experience, people are quick to accept. And sure, people are more likely to move around in a park than they are when watching TV, but there may be more to it than that. Researchers in the United Kingdom found that when people did physical activities in natural settings instead of "synthetic environments," they experienced less anger, fatigue, and sadness. A 2015 study in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* reported that walking in a park reduced blood flow to a part of the brain that the researchers claimed was typically associated with brooding. And in one of the most famous studies on the topic, patients recovering from gallbladder surgery healed faster and with fewer complications when their room looked out on trees rather than a wall.

Why would natural venues be more therapeutic than built environments? "That gap, we don't fully understand," Richard Louv told me. Louv is a

journalist whose 2005 book, *Last Child in the Woods*, is widely credited as the impetus behind the modern American nature-exposure movement. He points to research that says people are attracted to and feel restored by looking at images of nature, particularly savannas. Also restorative, according to an influential essay on health-care-facility design, are slow-moving water, foliage, and “birds or other unthreatening wildlife.”

Roger S. Ulrich, who co-authored that essay and led the study on hospital-room views, explains the effect in evolutionary terms: Natural environments trigger positive emotional reactions because observing nature was once important for humans’ survival. According to E. O. Wilson’s not-dissimilar biophilia hypothesis, we’re genetically hardwired to “affiliate with other forms of life,” and when we don’t, we suffer. Or, as Louv put it in his book, we develop “nature-deficit disorder.” (Because everything seems to be a disorder now, the term has proved divisive. Some believe it trivializes psychiatric diagnoses. But Louv was describing a social condition, not a psychiatric ailment.)

The answer may also have to do with nature’s capacity to instill awe. At a conference in February at UC Berkeley, scientists gathered to discuss the latest research on the health benefits of awe, including reductions in levels of cortisol, a stress hormone. The awe explanation particularly speaks to J. Phoenix Smith. In my conversations with her and Chalquist, both were careful to stick to evidence-based arguments. But beneath those arguments is something more than an interesting but unconvincing mouse study about soil bacteria. Something spiritual.

What makes ecotherapy different from an attempt to “mine nature for its beneficial effects,” Chalquist explained—perhaps sensing that I was eager to begin mining nature for its beneficial effects—“is that we have to give something back.” He tells students that if they want to experience the full

value of ecotherapy, they can't just go touch a tree; they need to come to care about that tree and help preserve it for future generations.

Actually, I found this to be one of the more persuasive arguments for ecotherapy. If the practice leads people to volunteer in an urban garden (as Smith did) or to start a bird-watching club or to fall in love while chained to a redwood, it could legitimately improve their health by giving them a sense of purpose and fostering social connections. The same could be said of so many unconventional therapies (equine, acroyoga, glassblowing) that seem to be beneficial despite the lack of a clear biological mechanism. And even if you don't "give back," it's tough to argue against doctors' prescribing time in a park, crazy as it may seem that they need to do so. Soil-holding remains optional.

Related Video

The Health Benefits of Going Outside

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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September 2017 Parks & Recreation Director's Report

Parks: Hard to believe the summer staffers have come and gone already for the season. Spring and fall are always a difficult time for us with the shortage of help, we always find a way to get things done but that doesn't mean it is easy. We were able to finish a good number of our projects before the summer staff left and do have some projects remaining that we would like to get done. Like everything out of doors, it is weather dependent. We were able to resurface the skate park ramps, install the trail mile marker posts on the River Bend Trail, aerate and top dress athletic fields, and finish some of the memorial benches/trees to name a few before they left. The damp summer really never allowed us to slow down on the mowing throughout the parks, which doesn't allow for as much time for projects, but has ancillary benefits for our water table and trees. Work that we had scheduled for Lions Park, as part of a Bierman Foundation Grant a few years ago, is almost complete. We recently finished with the install of two new scoreboards on diamonds 2 & 5, and paved all the way from the upper parking lot down into the area between all of the fields and are going to include a dusk to dawn light in the middle. The light is going to be for safety and to deter vandals. Progress at Normal Park has really increased over the past few weeks and that project should be finished within the next week or so. We are waiting on interior fixtures and some electrical items, but should be done very soon. We will be able to utilize the new facility over the winter season for the ice rink, and I look forward to increasing gazebo usage because of this new amenity. . . it has been a very long time in the making. I have started working on a design for a new facility at Stange Park that we need very badly, as well as working with the Street Department to get that area cleaned up from the demolition. I have been assured that they will be working down there possibly as early as next week. City Engineer and I met with an architect last week to get started on a design for a new bathroom/shelter/kitchen area to be located where the old pool was. Once we have a nice design I will share it with you and we can see what your thoughts are, now is a great time to revitalize that beautiful park. The River Rat Statue progress is coming along very nicely and hopefully our generous volunteer carver will have it finished in the near future. We closed the Aquatic Center for the season on August 25th. With the exception of the un-summerlike weather this season, things did go pretty well. Obviously our attendance numbers and revenue is going to be down (like every outdoor pool in the entire State), but things ran much smoother there this summer. Like everything we do, we are already in the process of evaluating what went right, what went wrong, and how do we evolve to become even better next year. We did have some electrical issues this summer out there and are going to have Badger Pool, Miron, Current Technologies, and Clark Dietz come at the same time in mid-September to trouble shoot some of our breakers and in pool lights. We are going to be cleaning everything up and getting ready to winterize the aquatic center as well. The River Bend Trail east extension can begin after September 19th (Wood Turtle issue), so we will hopefully be able to get going on that project right away after that date. Park facilities are set to close on October 1st, which is always nice to free up some time for our crew on a daily basis to get other things done.

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Forestry: It has been surprisingly busy on the forestry front lately, with a lot of tree related phone calls and inspection requests. Quite a few calls related to the Japanese Beetles but more from an informational stand point. We had an Urban Foresters Networking Meeting in Rib Mountain on August 23rd and I was a speaker. I was asked to share my experience from the Tornado and how we handled the forestry end of things. The City Forester from Stevens Point also spoke about his recent experience from their June 2017 destructive storms. It was meant to help other communities be better prepared for catastrophic weather incidents. I am excited to be working with our local Rotary Club on the Rotary International initiative to plant 1.2 million trees by Earth Day of 2018. Our local chapter is going to work with us to help plant trees for every member. I am excited to work with Rotary to plant 52 more trees on our streets and in our parks.

Recreation: Summer programs have wrapped up for the season. We had another great recreation season once again and I cannot thank our staff members and participants enough. It takes a lot of work to do what we do day in and day out, starting long before the programs begin and continues all the way through the end of the season. Our programs went very well with very good participation numbers and no major issues, which means everything ran smoothly. We are already gearing up for our fall and winter recreation program line up and should have those available for public consumption very shortly. We also have our 35th Annual Colorama Fall Bike Ride on September 23rd at Kitchenette Park. So if you are looking for a fantastic reason to exercise and take in the beautiful fall colors of Lincoln County (and a meal included) join us for the event!

Smith Center: We have had a number of reservations and events over the past month inside the Smith Center and they all went very well. Some of those include a wedding, company celebration, and safety day camp. We have a very busy few months remaining before we get ready to put the ice back in for another season. Barleyfest, 5th Quarter, Tots Need Toys are a few of the events we have still remaining. We have been working very hard to market the Smith Center, with some already booked for next year and hopefully more. We always market the building and are always looking for ways to increase dry floor and ice usage and that effort will never stop. We have a number of promising opportunities next year and beyond and will continue to provide more unique events and opportunities within the Smith Center each and every year. We lost one of our Arena Specialists to another job so we will be posting that position right away to hopefully fill that vacancy and get that person up to speed quickly.

Respectfully Submitted,



Dan Wendorf *DMS*
Parks & Recreation Director
City of Merrill