



AUGUST MEETING NOTICE

The Merrill Parks & Recreation Commission will have a meeting on Wednesday, August 5th, 2020 at 4:15 p.m., at the Merrill City Hall.

Voting members of the Commission: Jean Ravn, Brian Artac, Dan Novitch, Kyle Gulke, Joan Tabor, John Van Lieshout, Amanda Groth

The following items will be included on the agenda:

1. Approve minutes from the previous meeting.
2. Approve claims.
3. Public comment.
4. Continued discussion on 2021 Capital Budget Requests.
5. COVID-19 discussion continued:
 - a. Labor Day Parade
 - b. Flag Football, Colorama Bike Ride, any other potential Fall Recreation
 - c. Smith Center Ice
6. Review/Approve potential resolution of support to apply for 2021 WDNR Urban Forestry Grant.
7. Monthly Reports.
8. Set date and time for next meeting.
9. Public Comment.
10. Adjournment.

Submitted by,

Dan Novitch, Chairperson
Parks & Recreation Commission

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PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

July 1, 2020

The Merrill Parks and Recreation Commission met on Wednesday, July 1, 2020 at 4:15 p.m. at the Merrill City Hall.

Members Present: Kyle Gulke, Jean Ravn, Joan Tabor, Brian Artac, Amanda Groth and John Van Lieshout.

Members Excused Absent: Dan Novitch

Department Staff Present: Dan Wendorf and Dawn Smith

Visitors: City Administrator Dave Johnson, Christine Vorpapel

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

***Carried unanimously.

***Motion by Vanlieshout, seconded by Tabor, to approve the claims from June.

***Carried unanimously.

Public Comment: Dan Wendorf extended a welcome to our new Park and Recreation Commission member Amanda Groth.

The next item on the agenda was to COVID-19 updates. Wendorf stated that we are slowly seeing some progress in shelter reservations. Bathrooms will remain closed to the public and will only be opened when there is a shelter reservation by the reserving party. Soccer league will not be able to run this year. Some smaller activities are starting back up. The Park and Recreation Department have some smaller programs and baseball is starting to play some games with health guidelines. Lion's Car Show and the Dog Show are both cancelled for this year. Wendorf stated that he has still been working with the health department on everything.

The next item on the agenda was the 2021 Capital Budget discussion. Wendorf asked if anyone had any questions. Gulke questioned how long crack sealing lasted. Wendorf stated maybe 3 years. Wendorf stated that he would like to keep this agenda item on for the next couple months to discuss.

The next item on the agenda was monthly reports. Wendorf asked if anyone had any questions. Wendorf stated that the department is working with only 3 seasonal staff this year. Wendorf stated that the department will be running some small programs in July and parks are available for rental, with some rules and regulations to follow.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 5, 2020 at 4:15 p.m. at the Merrill City Hall.

Public Comment: Christine Vorpapel, N2227 Oak Ridge Ave. Merrill, WI. Christine stated that Recreation is more than just COVID-19. Christine stated that she is with great exception against canceling Gazebo Nights. She stated that there is a whole city block to sit. Christine stated that we need to think of the physical, mental and emotional stress that COVID-19 is causing. Christine also stated that she thought it was wrong how Gazebo Nights was cancelled, no one

personally called but sent an email. Christine stated tourism is at a dead stand still, small businesses are hurting, Easter Egg Hunts cancelled, and questioned if we were going to cancel Santa Claus next? Christine stated that people should have the choice if they want to attend, not be told they can't.

Dave Johnson, 1010 Johnson Street, Merrill WI. Dave Johnson stated that the City Council will continue to follow the guidelines set by the Lincoln County Health Department. Johnson also stated that the Merrill Park and Recreation did not refuse to rent them the park but stated that if could not keep the event under 50 people than they would be unable to rent them the park. Johnson stated that we should be happy having few cases here in Lincoln County, it means that what we are doing is working.

***Motion by Gulke, seconded by Ravn to adjourn at 5:00 p.m.

***Carried unanimously.

Dawn Smith
Recording Secretary

JULY

ACE HARDWARE	LED BULBS	7/10/2020	19274228124	\$319.80	55200-08-91000
ACE HARDWARE	PAINT SUPPLIES	7/22/2020	197940	\$78.96	55200-08-91000
ACE HARDWARE	CLEANING SUPPLIES	7/22/2020	197971	\$23.96	55200-03-40000
ACE HARDWARE	ROOFING BRUSH	7/28/2020	198101	\$4.79	55400-03-40000
ACE HARDWARE	LED BULB	7/27/2020	1978080	\$79.95	55400-03-40000
ACE HARDWARE	PAINT BRUSH	7/30/2020	198184	\$15.16	55400-03-40000
AMERICAN WELDING	CYLINDER RENTAL	6/30/2020	7198156	\$68.95	55300-03-41500
AMERICAN WELDING	CYLINDER RENTAL	6/30/2020	7194654	\$51.25	55200-02-15000
AMERICAN WELDING	ACETYLENE	7/24/2020	87231063	\$78.84	55200-02-15000
ATCO INTERNATIONAL	POP UP SWIPES	7/9/2020	10558261	\$250.10	55400-03-40000
BAJA	SHIRTS	6/24/2020	17919	\$300.00	55300-03-41500
BARB LAATSCH	SUCURITY DEPOSIT	7/17/2020	VOUCHER	\$100.00	10-21-7200
BETH SCHLUETER	SECURITY DEPOSIT	7/30/2020	VOUCHER	\$100.00	10-21-7200
BRIAN HENKELMAN	PARK REFUND	7/20/2020	VOUCHER	\$75.00	10-45200-46722
BRIAN HENKELMAN	SECURITY DEPOSIT	7/20/2020	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
CHER THOMAS	SECURITY DEPOSIT	7/24/2020	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
CINTAS	MOPS/MATS	7/2/2020	4054824849	\$189.90	55400-02-23250
CINTAS	UNIFORMS JIM/JOE	6/25/2020	4054132862	\$71.18	55200-03-46000
CINTAS	UNIFORMS JIM/JOE	7/2/2020	4054824950	\$71.18	55200-03-46000
CINTAS	MOPS/MATS	7/30/2020	405736079	\$189.90	55400-02-23250
CRYSTAL SANDERS	SECURITY DEPOSIT	7/30/2020	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
DAN SCHNEIDER	SECURITY DEPOSIT	7/24/2020	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
DAVES'S HOUSE OF MUSIC	BAKING SODA FOR PARKS	7/8/2020		\$14.43	55200-03-40000
DAWN RANDELL	BUS TRIP	7/1/2020	VOUCHER	\$76.00	
DEBBIE WEIX	SECURITY DEPOSIT	7/24/2020	VOUCHER	\$100.00	10-21-7200
DIANE GOETSCH	SECURITY DEPOSIT	7/30/2020	VOUCHER	\$100.00	10-21-7200
EMMA CHARTIER	CANCEL POOL PASS	7/1/2020	VOUCHER	\$85.00	
FEGRUSON	PARTS FOR EQUIPMENT	6/15/2020	5608832	\$261.83	55200-03-50000
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH	CANCEL SHELTER RESERVATION	7/1/2020	VOUCHER	\$55.00	45200-46722
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH	CANCEL SECURITY DEPOSIT	7/1/2020	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
FOTO NEWS	ADVERTISING	7/1/2020		\$139.00	55300-03-41500
GREEN LAWN	SPRING START UP/	7/5/2020	20-08209	\$217.05	55200-02-15000
HSU	NATURAL KILN-DRIED WOOD MULCH	7/17/2020	45434	\$642.50	55200-08-91000

JACKIE SCHNEIDER	SECURITY DEPOSIT	7/30/2020	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
JAMELY TREVINO	BUS REFUND	7/24/2020	VOUCHER	\$128.00	
JILL HANSON	SECURITY DEPOSIT	7/24/2020	VOUCHER	\$100.00	10-21-7200
KEN ZASTROW	PARK REFUND	7/20/2020	VOUCHER	\$65.00	10-45200-46722
KEN ZASTROW	SECURITY DEPOSIT	7/20/2020	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
KEVIN KEFFEE	SECURITY DEPOSIT	7/30/2020	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
LINCOLN COUNTY HEALTH DEPART.	RENEWAL APPLICATION	6/30/2020	138	\$105.00	55420-03-40500
LINCOLN COUNTY HEALTH DEPART.	COVID SUPPLIES	7/10/2020		\$203.67	55200-08-91000
LINCOLN COUNTY HEALTH DEPART.	RENEWAL APPLICATION	7/20/2020		\$192.00	55420-03-40500
LINCOLN COUNTY HEALTH DEPART.	RENEWAL APPLICATION/WATERSLIDE	7/20/2020		\$425.00	55420-03-40500
LINCOLN COUNTY HEALTH DEPART.	RENEWAL APPLICATION	7/20/2020		\$275.00	55420-03-40500
LINCOLN COUNTY HEALTH DEPART.	RENEWAL APPLICATION	7/20/2020		\$165.00	55420-03-40500
LINDA VANGROLL	SECURITY DEPOSIT	7/17/2020	VOUCHER	\$50.00	10-21-7200
MARLENE THOMASCHEFSKY	BUS REFUND	7/24/2020	VOUCHER	\$128.00	
MENARDS	BALLVALVE SWEAT WITH DRAIN	6/22/2020	3220	\$16.99	55200-03-50000
MENARDS	BALLVALVE SWEAT WITH DRAIN	6/22/2020	30160496	\$16.99	55200-03-40000
MENARDS	INSERT	6/22/2020	59331	\$9.55	55200-03-40000
MERRILL ACE HARDWARE	PAINT FOR DUGOUTS	6/25/2020	1927150	\$131.96	55200-08-91000
MERRILL ACE HARDWARE	APRON WAIST	6/29/2020	19274228124	\$9.95	55300-03-41500
MERRILL ACE HARDWARE	APRON WAIST	6/30/2020	19274228124	\$14.94	55300-03-41500
MERRILL ACE HARDWARE	PAINT	6/29/2020	1972271	\$98.94	55200-03-43000
MERRILL ACE HARDWARE	APRON WAIST	7/3/2020	197351	\$9.96	55300-03-41500
MERRILL ACE HARDWARE	PAINT BRUSH/NAILS	7/10/2020	19274228124	\$58.76	55200-03-43000
MERRILL ACE HARDWARE	SUPPLIES FOR FLOWER BED	6/15/2020	19677271	\$91.95	55200-08-91000
MERRILL DISTRIBUTING	ADVANTAGE URINAL BLBCS	7/27/2020	1536244	\$47.50	55200-03-40000
MERRILL STREET DEPARTMENT	P-6	6/15/2020	16655	\$31.41	55200-03-50000
MERRILL STREET DEPARTMENT	P-25	6/15/2020	16653	\$47.28	55200-03-50000
MERRILL STREET DEPARTMENT	P-24	6/10/2020	16652	\$81.63	55200-03-50000
MERRILL STREET DEPARTMENT	P-18	6/2/2020	16642	\$307.09	55200-03-50000
MERRILL STREET DEPARTMENT	P-0	6/16/2020	16660	\$771.38	55200-03-50000
MERRILL STREET DEPARTMENT	P-0	6/8/2020	16648	\$146.44	55200-03-50000
MERRILL STREET DEPARTMENT	PARTS FOR SHOP	6/22/2020	1970118	\$63.87	55200-03-40000
NORTHWOODS NURSERY, LLC	TREES	7/15/2020	77043	\$1,700.00	55200-08-91000
NORTHWOODS NURSERY, LLC	TREES	7/15/2020	77043	\$1,727.55	55200-08-92000

10 Year Capital Plan - Merrill Parks & Recreation Department

GREEN=FUNDED/RED=NOT FUNDED/PURPLE=OTHER FUNDING SOURCE(S)/Blue=added after 7/1/20 meeting

Park/Project	Priority	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Zero turn mower replace	1	\$25,000									
Replace infield drag ** (engine only)	2	\$2,000									
Smith Center Flooring & office improvements	1	\$15,000									
Replace dock at Ott's	2	\$15,000									
Tree Planting	2	\$10,000									
Smith Center interior LED lights (non arena)	1	\$15,000									
Solar panel installation - Smith Center	2	\$141,000									
Park 1-ton dump truck replacement	2	\$50,000									
Replace large field mower	2	\$100,000									
Re-pave Lion's Park Parking lot *crack seal only	2	\$60,000									
Re-pave Kitchenette Park Parking lot *crack seal	2	\$60,000									
Solar panel installation - Smith Center	1		\$141,000?								
Construct trail from Prairie Trails to RBT	2		\$100,000								
City Forest main road & parking lot reconstruct	2		\$75,000								
Replace Ott's Dock and repair landing	1		\$25,000								
Replace water supply line to Kitchenette Restrooms	2		\$20,000?								
Concrete aprons around Park Shelters	2		\$20,000								
Zero Turn mower	2		\$20,000								
Pit Toilets at City Forest	1		\$25,000								
Construct open air shelter at City Forest	2		\$45,000								
Granite for topdressing existing trails	2		\$10,000								
Dormers over Smith Center entrances	2		\$30,000								
				2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Pit Toilets at Prairie Trails	1			\$25,000							
Replace large field mower	1			\$115,000							
5 year Outdoor Recreation Plan	1			\$10,000							
Re-do basketball courts at Streeter Square	2			\$35,000							
Lights on MARC varsity softball field	3			\$175,000							
Park 1-ton dump truck replacement	2			\$50,000							

OPINION: IN A PANDEMIC, WE NEED GREEN SPACES MORE THAN EVER

Here's why some neighborhoods don't have them — and what we can do about it.



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WRITER
Cate Mingoya
@GroundworkUSA

Director of Capacity
Building,
Groundwork USA

REPUBLISH

March 31, 2020 — As we settle into our new normal — two parents working from home with an active 2-year-old — my family is in a constant search for age-appropriate, socially distant entertainment. The few playgrounds near us are padlocked shut to keep kids off the slides and swings, and each day is a new hunt for opportunities to burn off energy. When my husband and daughter left the house today to get some fresh air, I asked them to bring home sticks for a crafting project. But even after a lengthy walk — at least by 2-year old standards — they came home empty handed. There simply weren't any sticks to be found.

Our neighborhood stick shortage is connected to a much larger national problem. My beloved hometown of Somerville, Massachusetts, is one of the [densest cities in New England](#) with [little green space](#) compared with other cities in the state. The sparse tree canopies and extensive pavement in my city have little to do with neighborhood preference and everything to do with a long history of federally backed housing segregation.

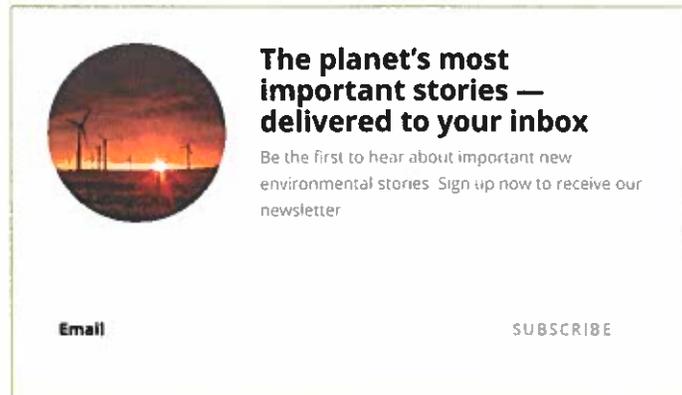
In the 1930s, the Home Owner's Loan Corporation created a series of "residential security maps" — redlining maps — designating black and brown communities as too risky for investment and ineligible for newly available federally backed mortgages. Even though redlining was outlawed by the Fair Housing Act in 1968, we are still prying loose its grip today.

Redlining locked in patterns of poverty and disinvestment. It denied mortgages to black families, cementing a racial gap in homeownership and wealth that has [persisted into the 21st century](#). Formerly redlined neighborhoods still have relatively low homeownership rates, home values and credit scores. Our neighborhoods receive fewer services and investments: We get the bus depots and sewage treatment plants; others get the parks and street trees.

Today, our communities are likely to be disproportionately harmed by the health, economic and social costs of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result, my neighbors are more vulnerable to climate change. Lacking substantial tree cover and green space, [new research](#) shows that formerly redlined neighborhoods are about 2.6 °C (4.7 °F) hotter, on average, than comparable communities. Low-income communities of color are literal hot spots for the urban heat island effect — a [deadly impact](#) of climate change. Impermeable surfaces and a lack of green space also make our neighborhoods more [vulnerable to flooding](#), and many of my neighbors may be unable to absorb the costs of these crises.

Today, our communities are likely to be disproportionately harmed by the health, economic and social costs of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pollution sources clustered in our neighborhoods mean poor air quality and [soaring rates](#) of asthma and other respiratory diseases, underlying health conditions that increase the severity of COVID-19. And sparse green space will make it harder for us to stay healthy and sane while limited in our activities.



But there is hope. Across the country, community members, activists and organizers are fighting back. They're drawing attention to the legacies of redlining and pushing policymakers to address the harm caused by these racist policies. In five cities — [Denver, Colorado](#); [Elizabeth, New Jersey](#); [Richmond, California](#); [Metro Providence, Rhode Island](#); and, [Richmond, Virginia](#) — residents of formerly redlined neighborhoods are working to make their communities greener, safer and more equitable. Partnering with five local trusts, my organization, [Groundwork USA](#), launched the [Climate Safe Neighborhoods Partnership](#) to use data-driven community organizing to make our formerly redlined communities safer from the impacts of extreme heat and flooding — and now coronavirus.

The Climate Safe Neighborhoods Partnership helps educate communities about the relationship between historical redlining practices and current climate risks. We then work with residents to prioritize changes they'd like to see in their communities and build the capacity of community leaders to intervene in municipal budgeting, planning and decision-making.

In New Jersey, for example, seasonal flooding leads to frequent overflows of wastewater from sewers directly into the Elizabeth River, exposing residents to untreated wastewater. [Groundwork Elizabeth's](#) Climate Safe Task Force is working to bring community voices to the county's plan to design the sewer system. In Colorado, [Groundwork Denver](#) is empowering residents to organize and advocate for green-space funding to combat the disproportionately high temperatures and flooding experienced in their neighborhoods. In Virginia, [Groundwork RVA](#) is doing door-to-door community education and capacity building so that impacted residents can advocate for green community infrastructure in the city's Master Planning process.

I want my daughter to grow up with green space to run in and clean air to breathe, under the cooling shade of trees.

The projects are different, but the goals are the same: to empower disinvested neighborhoods to become more resilient to disasters of all kinds, and to make sure that people who live in these neighborhoods are driving that change.

For me, this is personal. I want my daughter to grow up with green space to run in and clean air to breathe, under the cooling shade of trees. I want her to be safe from the heat waves, floods and pandemics of the future. I want her to know that fighting for justice and the safety of others is just as important as fighting for herself.

I know that my neighborhood isn't barren of sticks by accident, and it isn't going to get better by accident. As writer James Baldwin once observed, "history is not the past. It is the present." Racist history makes low-income communities of color more vulnerable to crises — from climate change to COVID-19. Understanding that, we can we address the root causes of the problem and, most importantly, solve it.

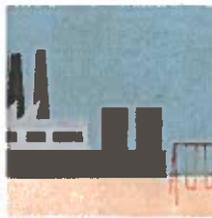
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More Time Out in Nature Is an Unexpected Benefit of the COVID-19 Sheltering Rules

Exploring the natural world can be restorative to mental health

By Laurence C. Smith on April 26, 2020



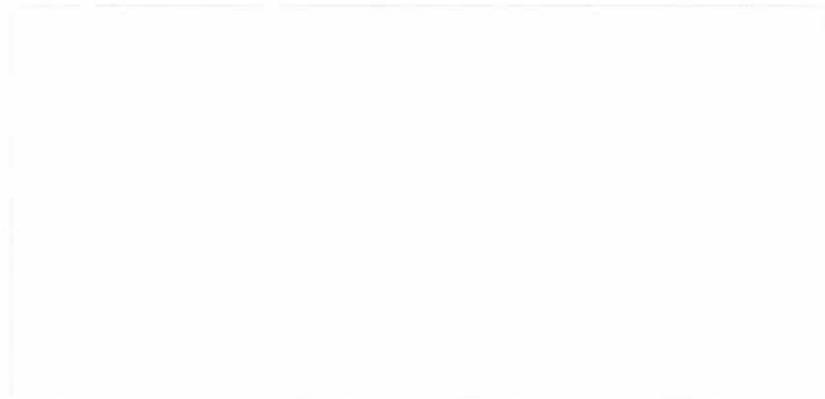
Credit: Tegra Stone Nuess Getty Images

As the COVID-19 pandemic rages around the world, shattering our familiar realms of work, education and play, many of us in lockdown face a binary choice: We can hunker down at home, or—when we can't stand it anymore—take a walk outside. After the crisis began, I witnessed a tenfold surge in the number of people strolling through a waterfront park near my home. Until my state shut down its beaches and parks at the

beginning of April—the last of our nonessential public spaces to close—it offered a coveted refuge where people could emerge and move safely about.

In this way, the novel coronavirus has forced us to reevaluate the value of natural outdoor settings, a rare pause to a decades-old trend. All over the world, the amount of time that people spend outdoors has been declining. From studies of park visitations, fishing license sales, campground attendance and other historical records, we find that humanity's interest in outdoor recreation peaked in the 1980s and early 1990s, and has been steadily dropping ever since. Put simply, a massive retreat of *Homo sapiens* from the natural world is underway, even as our growing global demand for land and natural resources is straining the Earth's climate and environment.

The underlying reasons for this trend are debated, and likely still evolving. Numerous studies point to our growing preoccupation with indoor entertainment, beginning first with television and videos, then progressing to internet browsing, social media and online gaming. These technologies of course offer countless benefits for entertainment, education and social interaction, but they come at a cost to our personal well-being.



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More than a decade ago, the bestselling book *Last Child in the Woods*, by Richard Louv chronicled a growing body of scientific evidence that spending time outdoors is critically important to the developmental health of children. Citing many scientific studies, Louv traced declining outdoor activities to a dizzying array of psychiatric disorders, obesity and other maladies, and coined the term "nature deficit disorder" to collectively describe them. His follow-up book, *The Nature Principle*, found that nature-deficit disorder also affects adults.

A dip into this science is quite interesting. One University of Michigan study that sent adult study subjects for a 50-minute walk through an Ann Arbor park found that it measurably restored their cognitive skills, whereas a walk through the city's busy downtown degraded it. These improvements in brain function were observed regardless of a person's mood, weather conditions or other external factors. Importantly, peacefulness alone (such as sitting in a quiet room) could not reproduce the observed cognition benefit. There is something about the kind of moderately interesting stimuli found in nature—even those in a simple city park—that is restorative for our brains.

Hamburg, the Nile in Cairo, the long-maligned Los Angeles River in Southern California, and many others.

Done right, reimagined urban riverfronts offer a rare opportunity to create vibrant, appealing neighborhoods with public access to calm outdoor settings and a curated form of nature. Already, millions of city people are enjoying new waterfront parks, where they can stroll, exercise or simply pass a few calm minutes outside. One doesn't have to hike the Appalachian Trail to reap the cognitive and health benefits of being outside. Waterfront spaces will help many of us endure the current crisis and make access to the outdoors a daily possibility for millions—yes, billions—of people in our rapidly urbanizing world.



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For those of us lucky enough to be safely holed up in our homes, this pandemic offers a chance for reflection. I view with new appreciation the public park near my house, and how much harder this lockdown became after it was shut down. Spending time outdoors, even in urban settings, even six feet away from the next closest person, offers a refuge of normality during these extraordinary times.

If you can get outside, value it. If you cannot, then think about which nearby natural setting you might visit soon, when the restrictions are lifted. Chances are high that a river runs through it.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

Laurence C. Smith

Laurence C. Smith is the John Atwater and Diana Nelson University Professor of Environment and Society and Professor of Earth, Environmental and Planetary Sciences at Brown University. Previously, he was Professor and Chair of Geography at UCLA. His most recent book is *Rivers of Power: How a Natural Force Raised Kingdoms, Destroyed Civilizations, and Shapes Our World*.

Small wonder that during times of acute stress like we're in now, a walk outdoors feels more important than ever. Access to natural settings is especially critical for cities, where green space is at a premium, and where more than half of all people live. By 2050, that number will rise to nearly 70 percent. Fortunately, a remarkable renaissance is underway in most urban cores that will help with this problem, both during (where allowed) and long after this pandemic.

Over 90 percent of the world's largest cities—and most smaller ones too—were built along rivers. Since the industrial revolution, these urban waterways have typically been lined with heavy industry, making them inaccessible and heavily polluted. In recent decades, the flight of manufacturing and shipbuilding, together with pollution-control laws, caused these large waterfront properties to shutter and decay. Owners and city planners struggled for years to repurpose these sites, with mixed results. But now, urban planners and designers are eyeing them in a new light. The derelict riverfronts have become ripe targets for redevelopment.

Industrial properties are typically huge compared to other available land parcels. Their large size attracts ambitious redevelopment projects incorporating mixed-used residential and commercial space, affordable housing programs, environmentally sustainable materials, and—very importantly—opportunities for lots of public outdoor green space.



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Modern urban planning is all about public commons and green space, and reimaged riverfront properties offer rare opportunities to create them. This is a consequence of long-standing legal norms protecting public access to rivers (an idea dating to Roman times), and of physical threats posed by rivers themselves. By definition, floodplains are naturally prone to flooding and erosion, making them risky locations for buildings. In coastal areas, rising sea level adds another long-term existential threat to waterfront structures. As a result, riverbanks have become uniquely appealing for repurposing into elongated, floodable urban parks. Such projects are now proliferating in cities all over the world.

In New York City alone, waterfront redevelopment plans for dozens of former industrial sites are planned or underway, virtually all of which create new public parklands in a crowded city that desperately needs them. Other major projects are in progress along the Thames River in London, the Huangpu in Shanghai, the Elbe in



August 2020 Parks & Recreation Director's Report

Parks: July was a good month. It was nice to be able to see a few things begin to happen in and around our parks that we are more used to. Shelter reservations begin on July 1st and to date have been working out pretty good. For the most part, everyone has been following the recommendations that we have provided for them and asked them to follow. There has been the occasional party that has had more than 50 people, which we would rather not have, but a majority of people have been cooperative. The restroom key to the renting party has also been working out as well, which has helped keep our high touch points down throughout the parks and hopefully that continues. The shelters and restrooms have been kept pretty clean as well by the renting parties so we feel confident in moving forward into August with reservations. The County Health recommendations remain unchanged so they are still not recommending mass gatherings any larger than 50 yet. Hopefully this changes in the coming months and virus numbers begin to come down. Another month has passed and our humidity and rainfall continues to remain well above average. That means our grass cutting has now slowed down one bit. We have been able to keep up, but it has dominated quite a few work days/weeks to date. Not much we can do about it, but things really look beautiful lush and green in our parks so no complaints here. We have been able to re-allocate some staff to help with other tasks and projects, such as painting, shelter and restroom cleaning, and other various tasks so we can keep up with mowing. After COVID shut down the vast majority of our programs and operations, we only hired 3 seasonal employees to keep our budget expenses down while still being able to keep up with essential functions within our department. For the most part we have and by using different staff in some different areas, we have been able to do a few additional projects. We have also been able to finish up some memorial benches at River Bend Trail; we are working on some planting beds at Banker's Square, Festival Grounds, and Stange Park. We will be replanting several areas that had tree mortality that were recently planted. We have been diligently cleaning inside and out of our park facilities to try and go above and beyond to limit virus exposure for us and the public. We purchased a mixer that fits onto a regular hose that allows spraying large volumes of sanitizing agent over a large area (playgrounds, shelters, restrooms, dugouts, bleachers, etc.). Baseball has returned to some of our fields and facilities and has been going good as well. There will be no tournaments this year but single games and practices have been occurring regularly and have been following recommendations. Merrill Girls Fastpitch is starting up and is planning to host a fall league in mid-August into September. It will fit the health recommendations and will be single game structure. The River Rat sculpture should be going up within the next few weeks. We are waiting on Agra to finish the structure that will enclose the sculpture and Lincoln Windows is providing us with glass to fit in the structure to showcase the River Rat. It has taken quite a while but we are very thankful for Harry Wallace's amazing contribution for carving the sculpture, Agra for the structure, and Lincoln Windows for the glass! We also had a young lady (who I believe is Harry's granddaughter) donate her time and talents to paint a beautiful Barn Quilt of the former "Normal School" that was installed on the east facing façade at Normal Park.

Forestry: Tree inspection calls have slowed down, which is good because I am a bit behind on some of the early/mid-summer calls from having to spend a little more time in the office than usual because of some of our staffing. With our consistently above average rainfall, our tree health overall continues to be good. This is especially true for most of our young trees, which have been growing and developing very nicely. As previously mentioned with summer planting, it is nice to be able to plant a few dozen summer trees this year. It has been a while since we have had time to do that and it will allow us to plant “forward” this fall in areas that need to be restocked. I am going to be working on our WDNR Urban Forestry Grant over the next few weeks in hopes of receiving additional tree planting funds.

Recreation: Nerf Wars have been very popular, and those who participated have thoroughly enjoyed their experience! It was a great way to safely recreate and give people a little positive for their day/week/month. The other programs that we tried to organize with smaller numbers didn't receive enough participation to host the classes. That is understandable as people have different levels of comfort related to interaction with others during this pandemic and we completely respect that. At least we tried and we will continue to try and find ways to safely offer smaller recreation opportunities. I was a bit disappointed that none of the MHS coaches took me up on my YouTube video opportunities to showcase their sports during this strange summer. I do understand that it wasn't necessary and everyone has things to do in the summer, but thought it would be a great way thing. So I will shoot a few videos in August that showcase our parks, get people active and informed and hopefully people find it useful. We do have some decisions to make regarding some fall recreation, specifically youth Flag Football and Colorama Bike Ride. Flag football is going to be difficult to safely run, due to the close contact between participants and I am not sure we could mitigate the risk. Colorama Bike Ride has a little less direct exposure, but we wouldn't be able to do many of the things that people have grown accustomed to (breakfast before they begin their ride, rest stops with water/fruit, and a meal afterwards). The other factor in Colorama is that we average 60%+ of our participants come from well outside of our community. So we have to consider the simple fact that if we cannot offer Colorama in a similar fashion, is it worth our effort and adjustment costs to try it in a completely altered format for one year.

Smith Center: We have successfully hosted a number of Nerf Wars over the past month and as previously mentioned it was great! By using the entire arena, and staggering start times to allow people to leave and sanitize, we were able to do it safely (in small groups) to also ensure physical distancing. We have been getting a tremendous amount of small projects done in the arena as well. We have finished the office carpet and re-organized the office, re-did the entire skate rental room, re-did the Zamboni pit, have been fixing lights, extension cords, painted doors and locker rooms, deep cleaned all areas, had the boards and glass cleaned, to name a few. This is the most we have been able to accomplish in years, so it has been really nice to be able to accomplish some tasks during this time and the arena looks great. On August 11th we will be hosting 4 polling districts for the elections. This will be the first time we have ever hosted 4, but we will spread them out between the community room and the arena. We are in conversations with Youth Hockey and Ice Reflections Figure Skating Club to plan for safety when we install the ice this year. As of right now, I believe we can install the ice and host a majority of what we normally do under the right conditions. There will have to be some adjustments, like everything else, for safety precautions but we can do it. We will have to monitor how many people are inside the arena, to begin we will most likely keep locker rooms closed, and we will remain diligent on sanitizing everything daily (and have our associations help us as well).

Respectfully Submitted,
Dan Wendorf – Parks & Recreation Director