

July 31, 2014

Members of the Common Council
West Allis City Hall
West Allis, Wisconsin

Dear Members of the Common Council:

Open public spaces such as neighborhood parks and public gathering spaces are important to the vitality of our City and the quality of life for our residents. As the City continues on the path of success, a renewed focus on public spaces is needed to ensure walkable and bikeable connections and making sure that as a City, we continue to meet the recreational and social needs of residents while attracting new people to the community.

A recent completed CVMIC Playground Safety Inspection Report, hereby attached, suggests opportunities to improve the access and quality of the City's playground apparatuses. The report highlights several areas of deficiencies and unsafe situations for children which may open the City up to liabilities. The Department of Public Works quickly acted upon major deficiencies but additional items requiring budgeting and planning remain to be addressed. The parks identified Rogers's playground, Liberty Height playground, Veterans Park playground and Reservoir Park playground. The historic challenge has been the cost to improve the amenities, meet today's recreation needs, and the continued maintenance of the parks.

The City of West Allis Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan was prepared in 1996 to ensure quality neighborhood parks and recreational facilities that meet the needs of our children and families. About 30% of the study's recommendations have been funded and completed throughout the City. An update to the plan is needed with the goals to build on efforts of providing safe, attractive, and functional recreational spaces and opportunities and offer amenities that meet the current and anticipated demand for City's residents of all ages and physical capabilities.

These projects are great efforts, but we should continue to look at other areas to grow Park and Playground opportunities in the City, including some sections of the City that are underserved, some underutilized parks, and potential vacant lots that will be donated to the City in the coming years. We should also consider how we meet the needs of the four legged residents of the City through a Dog Park. The Parks and Playgrounds bring numerous benefits to the City including opportunities for exercise, promote social interaction amongst neighbors, increased marketability of homes and enhanced appeal to young families that move into our community. Furthermore, once playgrounds are installed, they require minimal maintenance and additional work.

Therefore, I am proposing the following recommendations to the Council:

- The City and various departments take the necessary steps to assess the outdoor recreational facilities and open spaces throughout the City.
- Support efforts to update a study while developing a comprehensive plan that addresses existing neighborhood parks and the vision to approach future open and public space considerations.
- Continue to use CDBG fund to update eligible parks such as Liberty Heights Park, Veterans Park, and additional areas based upon meeting CDBG requirements.
- With the prospect of the City providing financing to a development project, the loan has the potential to yield an estimated \$180,000 to \$200,000 in interest per year, for 7 to 8 years. Therefore, I propose we take 50% of that interest and create a Parks and Playground Improvement Program (PPIP). The goal of this program is to enhance parks in an effort to promote the superior quality of life within our family neighborhoods, and to address the items in the CVMIC report. These additional funds will allow us to develop new recreational opportunities in the City such as a fully handicap accessible playground, a small splash pad, a tot lot, or additional pocket parks.
- This will generate an estimated \$630,000 ($180,000/50\%=90,000 *7$ years). We will also have the ability to leverage CDBG dollars towards projects where applicable.

Community parks are a living thing and often reflect the vibrancy and energy of a neighborhood. The study and the recommendation I provided above are the steps necessary in developing a comprehensive plan that will meet the demands for outdoor recreational opportunities.

Thank you for your consideration and assistance in taking steps to improve our neighborhoods and community. Please call me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Dan Devine
Mayor