



West Haymarket

SITE 'RECREATIONAL' DEVELOPMENT



In progress

West Haymarket Recreation

Summary

Recreation opportunities are a critically component in the quality of life for persons of all ages. As a community, Lincoln must ensure ever local resident has access to recreation opportunities appropriate for them. To support this objective the West Haymarket endeavor seeks to provide recreational activities which serve multiple outcomes:

- Enlarge Lincoln's economic base by fostering tourism, entrepreneurship, and investment opportunities
- Promote community health , wellness, and environmental education
- Increase opportunities for post college-age students and our children to become long-term Lincoln residents
- Expand entertainment opportunities
- Assist the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in leveraging its education and student athletic mission
- Encourage private charitable giving and business investing to create public-private partnerships to advance strategic community projects.

In addition, the creation of recreation opportunities in the West Haymarket meets the Project's goals by facilitating an expanded Haymarket Park and the surrounding area into a multi-purpose recreation complex. This in turn complements formation of the "Nebraska Sports Triangle" – the strategic triad tying together Memorial Stadium, Haymarket Park and the proposed West Haymarket Civic Arena.

Through dialogue with recreation providers in Lincoln, extensive research on successful recreation programs, and engagement of local stakeholders, the need for several recreation facilities has been identified. The most significant near term need found through this community input and research is for baseball and softball facilities—specifically, for practice, local league play, and hosting of tournaments.

Another priority need is a community ice center available for use by local hockey leagues, the University of Nebraska club hockey teams, figure skaters, and the general public. Other needs are multi-purpose fields for practice, University intramural activities, and multi-use activities. Finally, the West Haymarket area is the focal point for connectivity for the city's trail system. Any recreation uses in the area will be greatly enhanced by expanding and providing connections to the existing trail system.



Background

Over the past two years an extensive effort has been made to develop a solid understanding of the recreation needs in Lincoln with a focus on how these needs may be accommodated in the West Haymarket area. The impetus of this effort was the 2015 Vision Group's desire to expand Haymarket Park and to create the "Nebraska Sports Triangle."



This task began with the completion of extensive interviews with Lincoln area recreation providers, including meetings with the following groups:

- Lincoln Parks and Recreation
- University of Nebraska Campus Recreation
- Youth baseball club team and league representatives
- American Legion Baseball
- Adult baseball leagues
- Youth softball club team and league representatives
- Doris Bair Softball Complex representatives
- Abbott Sports Complex
- Capital Soccer Association
- Nebraska Soccer Association
- Lincoln Public Schools
- YMCA
- Nebraska Sports Council
- Great Plains Trails Network
- Lincoln Optimists Club
- Lincoln Saltdogs
- Nebraska State Activities Association

This resulted in a comprehensive understanding of the recreation needs for youth and adults, and for public and private providers in Lincoln. The participants in the interviews were asked about their goals for promoting community recreation in Lincoln, existing conditions regarding participation, facilities and expectations for the future. Every recreation provider confirmed the importance of recreation — not just for the sport or group they represented—as a component in the quality of life in Lincoln. Furthermore, the providers indicated participation in recreation activities across areas was increasing. Naturally, some activities are increasing faster than others.

The findings of the interviews revealed the greatest need for additional baseball and softball facilities for practice, local league games and the ability to host tournaments. Another priority need is a community ice arena available for use by local hockey leagues, the University of Ne-

braska club hockey teams, figure skaters and the general public. The need and desire for an ice arena is being addressed in the West Haymarket area. Through a generous private donation, an ice arena is being designed and will potentially locate in the area adjacent to the proposed West Haymarket arena.

Multi-purpose fields for practice areas, University intramural activities, and multi-use activities such as programming and seating for community 4th of July activities also form a critical part of recreation in West Haymarket. The West Haymarket area is the focal point for connectivity for the city's trail system. Recreational uses in the area will be greatly enhanced by expanding and providing connections to the existing trail system. Finally, the West Haymarket area is laced with valued saline wetlands. Combining trails and recreation areas with this critical habitat provides environmental education opportunities for Lincoln residents and visitors alike.

A second component in determining how the West Haymarket area may accommodate recreation needs in Lincoln included research into the following topics:

- Inventory of existing programs and facilities
- Study of business models
 - Sports councils
 - Private, non-profit operation
 - Private, for profit operation
 - City operation
- Economic development opportunities
- Promoting community health and recreation

Based on the identified need for baseball and softball facilities, Lincoln Mayor Chris Beutler appointed an ad-hoc task force to develop recommendations for how baseball and softball facility needs may be met within the West Haymarket area. The purpose of this group was:

- Determine the current and anticipated need for baseball and softball facilities in Lincoln, including facilities that may be used to host tournament events
- Create a program statement for a new baseball/softball complex including fields and support facilities (parking, concessions, maintenance, playground, picnic, and day use)
- Discuss potential locations where a baseball/softball complex may be developed with a focus on West Haymarket
- Review cost estimates for a baseball/softball complex and develop funding strategies
- Review a business plan for operations and maintenance of a baseball/softball complex, including a fee structure to offset operational costs

The task force identified the existence of over sixty club teams in Lincoln with the teams playing over 4,000 games per season, but only three-quarters of the games were played in Lincoln. If additional facilities were constructed, over 1,000 games could be played in Lincoln versus at tournament events in other cities. Also, there is a significant need for additional facilities to provide for adequate practice time. And, the greatest need is for ball fields appropriately sized for youth baseball and softball.

Research and consultation with the Lincoln Convention and Visitors Bureau indicated developing a youth ball field complex in Lincoln could provide a lucrative economic development component for the city. The optimal size for the facility is eight to twelve fields. The task force concluded

that the West Haymarket area – with its central location in Lincoln and easy access to downtown and the University of Nebraska – is an ideal location for such a complex.

Recommendations

The recreation needs of Lincoln are many, with the corresponding space needs even exceeding the area available in West Haymarket. As a result, it is recommended a complex be built to meet the pressing needs for youth baseball and softball in Lincoln in the West Haymarket area – while retaining and expanding as possible opportunities within the overall area for neighborhood recreation and facilities meeting community recreation needs, such as 4th of July events, trail connections, dog run, and environmental education related to Lincoln's unique saline wetlands. In addition, the opportunity for future expansion of the recreational use of the Oak Lake area should be studied to determine its feasibility.

A conceptual plan for West Haymarket recreational enhancements should consider the following facilities as part of the overall programming process:

- Youth baseball/softball fields
- Regulation size baseball field(s)
- Concession, restroom and storage building(s)
- Playground
- Radio-control model race track
- Internal trail/pedestrian system with linkage to the city wide trail network
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- Parking facilities