

Wilderness Park Stream Crossings Public Meeting

November 21.2019

Approximately 60 people attended a public open house to participate in a discussion about stream crossings in Wilderness Park. Staff gave a 30 minute presentation, sharing information on existing conditions in the park, past and upcoming planning efforts, considerations taken when making decisions about bridges, bridge guidelines and standards used by other public agencies, and a proposed framework for guidelines for Wilderness Park. After the presentation, the public was invited to ask questions. 23 individuals asked questions. The general question topics are listed below with responses from City staff.

The most common question topic was regarding **funding**. How can we increase funding? What are the sources of funding available? What is the breakdown of funding for the park? Could we partner with organizations that might help reduce costs?

Wilderness Park is, for the most part, owned by Lancaster County and maintained by the City of Lincoln. Lancaster County has, over the years, contributed money toward some major projects in the park, primarily bridges, but the bulk of expense falls on the City. There are Federal funds available through the Recreational Trails Program (Federal Highways dollars that are administered by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission). These are competitive grant funds with a 20% local, 80% federal cost share. Over the past 10 years there have been increasing numbers of applicants as many smaller communities have become interested in these funds. Other sources of funds have been the Great Plains Trails Network and the Run for the Bridges. These funds have typically been used to match federal grant dollars. Developing partnerships to help reduce costs is good advise. It could be possible to partner with the engineering college or other groups to do the plans for bridges, but it would always have to be under the supervision of a registered engineer willing to put his or her professional stamp on the final plans.

There were questions about **bridge loading and what users would be need to be accommodated**. Should the trails in Wilderness become multi-user, accommodations for hikers, bikes and horses would have to be made. This may mean that bridges will have to be built to accommodate all users, but it could mean that smaller bridges for bikes and pedestrians could be paired with an alternative route for horses.

As far as maintenance and emergency vehicle access, each crossing will have to be examined in the context of alternative routes for those vehicles. When the crossing could provide access for vehicles to a portion of the park that cannot be accessed any other way, it may be necessary to build crossings to accommodate vehicles. Response time should also be considered – although responders have commented that they will do whatever is necessary to provide response, well planned access could reduce response time, which is critical in emergency situations.

It was pointed out that although it seems the vehicles are what drive the size and strength of the bridge, bridges for pedestrians must be constructed to bear the live load – which is essentially the loading of the bridge with one pedestrian per square foot, all of whom could be jumping at the same moment- which may in many cases be a higher requirement than a vehicle crossing that structure. However, the width

and railing heights would vary according to whether horses and vehicles were to be served. Design standards for bridges do vary according to the type and size, but all bridges must be built to carry the maximum live load expected.

There were questions about **environmental impacts and protection of vulnerable species**. All federally funded projects are reviewed in light of the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, which requires review for wetland impacts, floodplain, threatened and endangered species, socioeconomic impacts, historic preservation, and other environmental factors. Locally funded projects are still reviewed for floodplain impacts and sent to the Army Corps of Engineers who review for any stream or wetland impacts. All projects follow the Migratory Bird and Bat Act which protects birds and bats from disturbance of nest and nursery habitat. Additionally, the Wilderness Park Master Plan identifies areas within the park where rare species have been identified. These areas are considered when making any decisions about trails or other disturbances.

There were some questions about **specific bridges and crossings in the park**. While many of these were addressed, people were reminded that a lot of what the Master Plan Update will do is look at existing crossings and future needs and make recommendations. There are three projects that will be moving forward this winter, however: the replacement of the Wilderness South Bridge ½ mile north of Saltillo Road; the repair of the Wooden bridge on the west side of Salt Creek just southeast of the intersection of Yankee Hill Road and Hwy 77; the repair of the low-water crossing just west of the 14th Street Trailhead.

There were some questions about **safety and emergency response**. It was pointed out that it is sometimes difficult to pinpoint what “safety” entails in Wilderness Park. The nature of the park means that there will always be some natural hazards. Need to consider whether structures are being “overbuilt” in response to safety concerns when there have not been major safety issues over the years. The City has a responsibility to ensure that any structures put in place will safely conduct whatever traffic they are designed for. This means maintaining and inspecting existing structures as well as properly designing and constructing new. While it is important for emergency responders to be able to reach all areas of the park, careful review can determine where those access routes will necessarily include bridge crossings and where access might be possible by an alternative. Emergency responders in the past, when asked about access in Wilderness Park, have responded that they will reach someone in need, no matter what.

There was some discussion of the **sustainability** of structures in the Park. It was pointed out that many of the issues seem to be connected to increased runoff and the erosion it causes in the park. Streams do widen, deepen and shift alignment over time. It is important for the stream stability to be considered when planning crossings. It is also important to continue to support efforts the City has made in upstream stormwater and floodplain control measures.

It was pointed out that the **constructability** of a crossing should also be taken into consideration. Getting materials and equipment to the project site can increase costs and impacts to the park.

The City was urged to consider how **volunteers** might be able to assist with some of the projects and to look at **creative solutions** to cut costs and impacts. They were also encouraged to consider long term **maintenance** of any structures put in place. Several mentioned that using the **Jamaica North** as a solution to access problems should be minimized as much as possible.