



Lardner/Klein Landscape Architects, P.C.

Strasburg Master Parks Plan

Kick off Meeting and Site Tour notes; August 15, 2019, 5-8 PM

Sign-in Sheet (attached)

Attendees:

Project Management Team (See sign-in sheet for attendees)

Project Engagement Team (See sign-in sheet for attendees)

City Staff (See sign-in sheet for attendees)

Michelle Bixler, Director of Community Development

Olivia Hilton, Marketing & Events Coordinator

Elisabeth Lardner, Lead Project Planner

Cara Smith, Project Planner

General Discussion

Organized sports facilities/athletic fields

- Current field supply in Town is limited for organized youth and adult sports.
- Interest and support stated for future development of 50-acre parcel in northern end of Town, as shown in 2018 Comprehensive Plan for active recreation.
- Question as to potential field space available for development behind Sandy Hook Elementary School (County school system is owner); understood that enough land was purchased to provide for both the school site and for a baseball field
- Extent of floodplain limits investment into existing fields at Town Park
- Who owns acreage near Hupp's Hill and Shenandoah Business Park; is any available for future park uses?

Trails, existing and as shown on 2018 Comprehensive Plan

- Is there any effort being made to tie this Parks Master Plan into other systems, such Shenandoah County, or connections from Fisher's Hill to Keister Tract? Cedar Creek? Strasburg is a middle point between two battle fields. There is someone from Shenandoah County Parks (agency has a 50-acre site down river) involved in the discussion/planning for this master plan.
- Build upon the developed trails plan and research completed to date—do not start over.
- Utility corridors could (and do in the 2018 Comprehensive Plan) serve as trail links.
- Fishers Hill Trail and Riverwalk, Keister and Cedar Creek are trails for walking/biking/horseback riding.
- Additional trail/trail links are desired in neighborhood east of Massanutten Street.

- Master Parks Plan is NOT a trails plan, but some attention in the Plan will be given to trail connections and opportunities to better connect parks and open space.
- Opportunity with Rails to Trails initiative- There is currently a Mt. Jackson to Strasburg exploratory committee. Norfolk Southern retains ownership of the rails, but they are not in use. (Rail is not yet officially abandoned.)
- Is there a trail link or easier way to get to Signal Knob from the heart of town without going out into the County?
- Consider ATV trails and places, perhaps a park, for ATV riding.
- The former quarry (shown on 2018 Comp Plan as future parkland) was once Half Moon Beach.
- At the 50-acres site identified in the Comp Plan for active recreational use, the area is steep, and the site potentially could be developed for mountain biking or rock-climbing activities.
- Consider exercise stations along trails as is done in Winchester.
- Riverwalk Trail and others are infested with invasive species.
- A clear and direct connection from downtown to Riverwalk Trail is needed.
- Look for opportunities to connect existing neighborhoods to the Riverwalk Trail. Review street termination and dead ends that might be converted to walking path connections to Riverwalk.
- There are [Civil War Trail](#) sites in Strasburg accessible by car and pedestrians. There also is a planning document that talks about connecting various battle sites through a Civil War Trail.
- Ensure that future developments include proffers for recreational trails.

Land acquisition and general land planning

- Parks Master Plan must be mindful of costs for any future land acquisition or improvements, private property rights, and strategic recommendations.
- What kind of housing is proposed to be located around existing and proposed park lands compared to housing proposed in town? (Question is related to ease of access to open space from all neighborhoods within Town.)
- Mid geographic area of Town is shy on Town controlled open space (open space in this area is owned by others).

Role in Economic Development and Tourism

- Trails and park lands have a role to play in attracting visitors and encouraging them to extend their stay and spend more dollars in town. Link features, such as trails to parks, for example.
- Is anyone from Tourism working on this plan (local or regional)?

Master Parks Plan Focus

- Appreciate big picture (links to other parks and adjacent jurisdictions), but need to focus on Town Park which needs reinvestment.
- The master plan can speak to planting and maintenance issues, but will not go into detail on actual construction.

Town Park and Pool

- Park improvements, upgrades, enhancements, and new equipment need to be ADA compliant.

- Need a master plan just for Town Park (It is part of this planning effort.)

Park Setting

- Vista beyond the park is what makes the park special and unique to this site.
- River access and the river's edge on park boundary is also special.
- View to the river is key.

Needed infrastructure and park upgrades

- Existing park amenities and facilities need to be upgraded—consider this before creating new parks and amenities.
- Street lights are needed, but require maintenance.
- Infrastructure upgrades are needed. There is not enough water/water pressure to adequately serve the community garden and dog park, and potable water in general.
- Electric hookups are needed.
- Fences are in inconvenient places—need to climb over them to get where you need to go. Are actual fences really needed, or can new landscape plantings serve that purpose in some locations?

Circulation

- No pedestrian paths at park entry. Pedestrians must walk on entrance road.
- Assessment of the location and quantity of existing parking is needed.

Activities

Skatepark

- The closest skate park is currently in Front Royal.
- Missing activities in Town Park/overall park system for tweens and teens
- This started out as a memorial effort—there are others who would like to memorialize with park features (pavilion, for example).
- \$40,000 raised, current goal is to raise around \$150,000 total
- Potential site in Town Park, to the left by the road at the park's entrance
- Some consider skate parks to be noisy—if by the road, may not an issue; eyes on the park also in place if located near the road
- Discussed idea of skate spots and means to link along trail/extend use to multiple park users

Court sports

- Tennis courts need resurfacing. Consider relining with pickleball and tennis lines.
- Volleyball court needs to be spruced up.

Pool

- Big wish list item - pool improvements and upgrades (list of needs/desires to be provided separately following site tour)

Playground

- Playground needs to be updated; last improved in 2007 - it does not have enough equipment, no shade, not enough parking adjacent to playground

- Second playground is located at the elementary school; limited hours due to school use
- Need to disperse playground locations
- Former playground was a wooden structure, similar to that still in Front Royal; can something similar be constructed today? Can wood be used in playgrounds? (earlier equipment removed due to concerns regarding splinters)
- Is there a better location for the playground?
- Along the lines of a playground, consider outdoor learning centers (especially for children with special needs) with recreational components (for example, the Faison Center in Richmond, Neal Beasley with the Timmons Group).
- Can features of an outdoor learning center be tied to SOL's and other curriculums (preschool; middle school; high school)?
- Is consideration being given to use of playground/park for preschool graduations?
- There are educational opportunities at the river.
- Can the play equipment be more innovative (Sherando Park tree house for example)?

Picnic Shelter

- Picnic shelter - long-term program, consider replacement shelter as several smaller shelters rather than single very large shelter; Consider adding lighting in picnic pavilions to extend their use.

Restrooms

- Existing restrooms need upgrading and maintenance; consider reconfiguring their layout - as entry doors are not highly visible from road or other heavily used park areas (may lead to inappropriate uses or vandalism)
- Minimal operating hours - often not open (challenge to staff/keep clean/and keep safely open)
- Johnny Blues (portable toilets) have been added to Town Park - hot summer days and quasi-permanent portable toilets can create overwhelming smells; portable facilities need additional and ongoing maintenance (emptying/cleaning)
- Consider coin-operated facilities (Winchester) or other industrial (Front Royal has all stainless-steel facility) or self-cleaning facilities to minimize vandalism and staff time.

Dog Park

- Needs to be revamped
- Provide potable water (such as people/dog water fountain), seating, lighting
- Replace existing wood with other material - so that the fence does not fall apart so quickly (users are emailing about the fence needing repairs)
- Desire to reinstate the annual doggie swim day at the pool

River Access

- Need for more boat launches (carry and trailer); current launch sites are at Riverbend, Deer Rapids, and former Lions Club lot
- Float between old Lions Club lot to Town Park almost is too short, although good for children and as an introduction trip.

- Can take 3- 8 hours to go from Deer Rapids to Town Park; faster in a kayak than a tube and dependent on river conditions and flow
- The dam, five miles downstream, can be a safety issue (though the adventurous consider it a “water feature”)
- The park is very close to downtown, but there is not a direct, walkable connection.

Visitor Center, off of Old Valley Pike

- Located on a +/-16-acre property
- Approximately 600 people per month visit, open daily
- Trails are not ADA accessible.
- Signal Knob can be visible from the location, although trees have grown up and currently block much of the view.
- Crystal Caverns at Hupps Hill, not far from the Visitor Center, underutilized and some consider it to be susceptible to flooding; potential that it could reopen; has been used in past as site for ghost tour; some think entire site could operate as a ghost tour site
- It is rumored that Patsy Cline played at the amphitheater near the Visitor Center—or at the former skating rink. Count Basie did play there.
- The quarry, former home to Half Moon Beach, is currently closed.
- Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation operates the museum portion of the site. Cedar Creek is pulling back to focus their efforts on Middletown; Town may stay at site and curate the Visitor Center, although there is also consideration of relocating Visitor Center to Strasburg Museum.
- The Visitor Center should be the first thing that you see when entering Strasburg.
- Potential for some Strasburg Museum displays/exhibits to move to the current Visitor Center?
- Hupps Hill LLC (Civil War Park) ownership is a subsidiary of the Bernstein Family Foundation.
- Could there be camping here?
- A future trail connection will link this site to downtown. The path will extend along the east side of Old Valley Pike from downtown to the Safeway.

Strasburg Museum

- A potential home to Visitor Center
- The building originally the potter factory, then train depot, and now museum.
- Exhibits include train, Strasburg history exhibits, and art.
- Strasburg pottery and information on the Great Train Raid of the Civil War are among the historical exhibits.

Hometown Park

- Established by Hometown Strasburg, half of the park is owned by Town and half is owned by the fire station; 2008 opening of the park at Mayfest - gazebo and musical programming (musical programming has since moved to the event center which is larger and more able to accommodate bigger crowds)
- There is a gazebo with 3 benches inside, 3 other benches outside, and 1 bench in the garden area; ornamental trees and a checkerboard surface area (pieces have been found!)

- The finished concrete area in park is too small for tables because of the space dedicated to checkers.
- CDAC created the original concept which grew out of Virginia Main Street project to develop green space in town. The original project proposed a 'twin' pocket park next to the post office (existing alley turned out to have been vacated to adjacent property owners).
- Fire department retains the rights to expand to a third bay on same site (would require removal of park; a concern)
- The recent introduction of the ice cream shop across the street brings more people into the park.
- People eat lunch in Hometown Park.
- Mayfest events
- The park could use more seating, although space is tight.
- It is difficult to see into the park—needs maintenance
- The area next to the private library is like a park; bench is nice
- When opened, the park successfully achieved everything as dreamed.

Public Art

- The Master Parks Plan will not go into detail regarding public art but may touch on potential types of public art features and general locations to house public art within the parks.
- Interest in public art downtown and along trails; potential ideas include utility box wraps, woodworker art, historic landmarks, plaques reflecting a theme such as the Vermont writers' trail, historic walking tours (is there a way to enhance historic storytelling with public art? Include in historic walking trail between museum and hotel, maybe shortening spaces between the current stops)
- Strasburg's history as a pottery town could be reflected in the art (i.e. planter pots at Town Hall)
- Train bridge needs to be fixed- idea of a mural and entrance to town/need for permission from railroad
- Other towns have "mascot" sculptures, such as the apples in Winchester or animals located around town (also painted rocks/scavenger hunts for social media opportunities)
- Bike racks could be sculptural

Strasburg Square

- Hosted the first event on stage November 2018
- Hosts Farmer's Market with about 10-12 vendors
- LOVE sculpture is going at the location of the rock garden and concrete tube/tunnel.
- There is a mini rock amphitheater on the banks of Town Run.
- Educational classes, yoga, and other events are held at Strasburg Square.
- Kids like to play in Town Run. It would be good to have alternative activities for kids to do beyond the Bouncy House.
- Outdoor lighting needed for evening events, often event ends after dark. Lights could go over Town Run—they are needed for path visibility at night (Town Run banks are high and steep in some areas). Could lighting be included in the actual seat?

- Patio seating could go by the pavilion—the Square needs more seating options (maybe stones?), moveable tables or more benches (issues of staffing and operations) particularly for older folks
- Bathrooms are open all day (closed 10 p.m. - 6 a.m.)
- They currently have benches that convert to picnic tables.
- Could vending machines be added? (How to avoid competing with local businesses?)
- Shenandoah Film Collaborative events draw 50-75 people; turnkey, Town provides space only.

What else is missing from the Town's parks?

Food/Concessions

- Outdoor food court or food truck roundup somewhere in town, not necessarily in Town Park (a past Town Council determined that greasy food smells from vendors could be a problem in Town Park and adversely affect the passive feel of the park; when a trial run was established with limited hours/days of operation, it was difficult to regulate vendors—some were arriving on days when they were not permitted); Town Council did allow soccer to experiment with a food vendor.
- Desire to increase business opportunities for local businesses- Is there a way to encourage them to provide food and beverages for sale?
- Need a basic building to rent out for concessions and fund raising (organized sports teams).

Athletic Field Needs

- Additional field space is needed. Existing fields have minimal improvements due to their location within the floodplain (very active floodplain).
- Field investments at Town Park are made by sports leagues, not the Town, and are at risk of flooding or games being washed out due to highwater levels.
- Soccer teams go to Mt. Jackson—a better facility is needed locally, as games can get washed out at Town Park (river flooding).
- Balls end up in the river embankment when playing on the fields at Town Park.
- Lacrosse and soccer need additional fields.
- The local baseball organization is looking at a permanent baseball complex away from Town Park; on site large enough to accommodate permanent facilities/parking/fields - ideal if room existed for rectangular sports to use outside of the two months that the college ball league season operates
- The Master Plan is a living document which will help to address the phasing needed for different future scenarios. For example, the plan will need to address the near-term use of Town Park for athletic field use with potential long-term purchase/development of field facility elsewhere.

Fishing

- Is there a need for fishing locations/amenities? It is difficult to fish at the boat landing—it is slippery and there is a steep/deep drop to the water. Fishing from a kayak is best, on the other side of the river, not the Strasburg side.

River Access

- Additional river access is needed.

Erosion Issues

- The Riverwalk and river's edge are suffering from erosion and 'goat trails.'
- Drainage ditches and utilities in Town Park currently shape flexibility for field use and grading opportunities. If not drained, they become source of mosquitos. Ditch line is deepening and more difficult to access to retrieve balls, etc.
- Erosion issues within Town Park could adversely affect buried utilities.

Other Items

- A bridge is needed to get to Town Park from the other bank of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River.
- Relationship with Sandy Hook side is good, they are part of the Strasburg community.
- Water draws people—need the greenway.
- The pavilion could host an artisan market place (similar business model as the knife sharpener at the pavilion).

PMT/PET members were asked to provide feedback on the draft public survey by 8/19 and to complete the questionnaire by 8/22.

Next steps include the existing conditions documentation field work (L/KLA) and the Project Management Team Meeting #2 - *Prioritize and Value Park System Improvements with Maintenance and Operations Staff*.

The public survey will go live as soon as the weekend of August 22nd.

Attendance Sheet

8/15/2019

Name			8/15/2019
Matthew Wolanski	Management	Steward of the Land	✓
Carla Wallen	Management	Community Leader	✓
Stephanie Noreen	Management	Community Member	
Lee Pambid	Management	Planning and Zoning	✓
Ben Stine	Management	Parks and Recreation	
Kevin Watson	Management	Recreation Business	✓
Tom Price	Management	Historic Perspective	✓
David V. Brotman	Management	Steward of the Water	✓
Sarah Mauck	Management	Community Leader	✓
Ray Heishman	Management	Superintendent of Public Works	✓
John Madera	Management	Regional Perspective	✓
Wyatt Pearson	Management	Town Perspective	✓
Michelle Bixler	Management	Project Manager	✓
Olivia Hilton	Management	Assistant Project Manager	✓
Amanda Scholtz	Management	Project Funder	✓
Kim Young	Management	Project Funder	✓
Engagement Team			
Adam Sharp	Engagement	Park User	X → erik
Paul Kosubinsky	Engagement	Park User	✓
Derek Copeland	Engagement	Park User	
Jennifer Williams	Engagement	Park User	✓ → Josie
Melissa Schleig	Engagement	Park User	✓
InaRae Crisman	Engagement	Park User	✓
Alison Sloop	Engagement	Steward of the Land and Water	
Michelle Warren	Engagement	Park User	✓
Donna Steffey	Engagement	Park User	✓
Jay Neal	Engagement	Park User	✓
SRPT Committee			
Ken Cherrix	Town Council		✓
John Massoud	Town Council		✓
Taralyn Nicholson	Town Council		
Emily Reynolds	Town Council		✓

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NV Daily

Josette Keelor