

An Update on the Lithia Park Master Plan Process

In the March 2017 Park Views column we announced that the process of updating the Master Plan for Lithia Park had begun, with the goal of planning for the next 100 years with a vision that will guide both park development and preservation. Since that time, the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission has selected a Portland-based firm, MIG Inc., as the lead team of landscape architects to develop the Lithia Park Master Plan. Additional team members include the local groups of landscape architect KenCairn Associates and sole-proprietor Environmental Consultants.

MIG project Manager Laurie Matthews, a specialist in historic public parks, noted, “Lithia Park’s spirit of place is palpable and evident to anyone who walks through or sits under its canopy of trees alongside the banks of Ashland Creek. Our team is honored to be helping the community envision what the next 100 years will look like. To that end, we are not focused on proposing major new changes but enhancing what resonates and only changing things that will benefit the character and health of the park.”

In October, Matthews and MIG Principal Lauren Schmitt met with the APRC Lithia Park Master Plan Subcommittee to plan the next steps. At that meeting, stakeholders were identified and a site visit was scheduled so that team members could see the park in person and meet with individual stakeholders in their respective areas of expertise.

On Dec. 6, the MIG assembled team met with APRC staff and the Lithia Park MP Subcommittee in the Parks Admin office in Lithia Park. The group was divided into two sub-groups and APRC staff led the two teams on a guided tour in Lithia Park. This site visit for the MIG team was very successful and allowed all of the team members to walk through the park with knowledgeable APRC staff guides to answer any questions and point out items, projects, and areas that may need to be addressed in the Lithia Park master plan. An open house for the public with MIG team members was well attended.

On Dec. 7, MIG team members met with community stakeholders that had been identified during the October meeting and also spent more time investigating Lithia Park in more detail based on each person's area of expertise. For example, MIG team members met with members of the Forest Lands Commission to discuss forestry management strategies within Lithia Park, MIG's structural and civil engineer looked at bridges and buildings, and other team members reviewed historic plans, photos and documents, in addition to interviews with citizens.

The entire Master Plan process is currently estimated to be completed in April 2019. Throughout the planning process, there will be opportunities for the public to engage in the process, giving input and being heard about how they would like to see Lithia Park remain the jewel that it has been for Ashland for the last 100 years. Currently, MIG is compiling information and data collected in December, launching an online survey in February to garner additional community feedback, working on the "Foundation Report (site analysis) and Presentation" to be delivered in March and developing a preliminary program to help frame Design Week discussions scheduled for June 11-15.

The cost of the Plan is \$230,000 which, over 100 years, works out to approximately \$2,300 per year, or about 10 cents per year per citizen of Ashland. I think most people would agree that is a very small price to pay to ensure the longevity and vitality of such an integral part of our city.

—Matt Miller is an Ashland Parks & Recreation Commissioner. Park Views appears monthly.