

Lithia Park Master Planning Moves Forward

A much-needed update of the Lithia Park Master Plan is in progress. Portland firm MIG has been contracted by the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission for the task, teaming with local professionals, including KenCairn Landscaping of Ashland, to update the existing 100-year-old master plan that includes outdated features such as donkey rides, car camping and a zoo. Reasons to undertake long-range Lithia Park planning are numerous and compelling. While much of Lithia Park is amazing just as it is, it is prudent to plan into the future to ensure that the park continues to be the beautiful place many have grown to love.

The new plan will emphasize maintaining the historic natural and human-made features of the park [MIG's project manager, Laurie Mathews, is a landscape architect who specializes in historic landscapes], improving accessibility within the park, improving safety of multi-modal traffic, preserving and enhancing Ashland Creek and its adjacent riparian area, preserving the overall natural environment, preserving and where necessary replacing the tree canopy and bringing the buildings and other designed elements up to 21st century standards. In some cases, this may involve removing non-historical structures that are in the riparian zone, such as the storage area across from the APRC Administration offices.

Many of the magnificent trees in the park are aging and stressed by a changing environment. The tree canopy on the east slope of the park has recently been altered by dieback, likely due to recent warmer and drier years, a trend that is predicted to continue. Many park trees are in decline for these and other reasons. A tree plan focusing on trees that can survive and thrive in a changing environment is essential.

Erosion on the eastern park slopes and along Ashland Creek has damaged the natural environment. Winburn Way has speeding cars and bicyclists competing with pedestrians and no sidewalk for refuge. Some restrooms are in out-of-the-way locations, encouraging vandalism and reducing their utility.

Year-round park usage continues to climb, placing pressure on all systems and increasing demands for more and better services and facilities, while APRC revenues have grown at a slower pace. An updated Lithia Park Master Plan can address more efficient use of limited resources that will be beneficial to park users and taxpayers alike.

Since the planning process began, hundreds of citizens have provided comments, concerns and suggestions. Suggestions have included: increased ADA access, more parking, ecological preservation, allowing dogs in the park increase in the number of areas available for events, a bicycle plan (including how to manage mountain bikes) and preservation of historic structures. A number of people took the time to attend meetings and urged those involved to not change what is loved about Lithia Park. Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission staff and Commissioners strongly support that sentiment.

Design Week took place from June 12-15 and focused on the vision and concept development for the master plan, with both formal and informal public input opportunities. If you would like to review the concepts and provide additional feedback, please visit bit.ly/LithiaParkConcepts. General info about the Lithia Park Master Plan can be found at ashland.or.us/LithiaParkMasterPlan. The Lithia Park Master Plan Subcommittee will meet on

August 9 at 2 p.m. at the Lithia Park Administrative Office; the public is welcome to attend and provide additional input.

The Ashland Parks Foundation recently received a \$1.3 million gift earmarked to create an authentic Japanese Garden in Lithia Park. Jeff Mangin and the Marechal family of Normandy, France, have donated the funds in remembrance of Mangin's wife, Beatrice Marechal. To design an authentic garden, the foundation hired Toru Tanaka. Toru was trained in Japan and has more than 35 years of Japanese Garden design experience. He served as the director of Portland's Japanese Garden from 1988-1991.

The planning process for the Japanese Garden was touched upon during Design Week and at other points during the master planning for Lithia Park. August will feature two community meeting opportunities to allow for public participation specifically related to the Japanese Garden: Wednesday, August 1—Ashland Senior Center, 1699 Homes Avenue, and Thursday, August 9—Ashland Community Center, 59 Winburn Way. Both meetings will be held from 6 to 8 p.m.

A Lithia Park feature that was little-mentioned during earlier public input sessions was the Butler-Perozzi Fountain, which has fallen into disrepair. Estimates for restoration are in the hundreds of thousands of dollars and this is not the first time expensive repairs are required. The Parks Commission welcomes additional public input about this park amenity as the Lithia Park Master Plan, upon completion, will include guidelines about whether this historic park feature should be preserved and/or maintained.

As former Parks Commissioner JoAnne Eggers noted during Design Week, Lithia Park cannot be all things for all people. She pointed out that all of the suggested new ideas might not fit while also retaining the magical essence of the park. The Lithia Park Master Plan can help ensure that critical park elements such as Ashland Creek, the large and magnificent trees and the moss-covered granite boulders will maintain their prominence and priority in the park, while considering the integration of new and changed park elements.

As the heart and soul of Ashland for many, we all have a stake in protecting and in some cases enhancing what we love about Lithia Park. We welcome and encourage your suggestions and ideas during this important planning period.

- *By Rick Landt and Matt Miller, Ashland Parks & Recreation Commissioners*