

LOCAL

PARK VIEWS

Lithia Park: Looking to the future

Master plan update will guide development and preservation

By Rick Landt and Matt Miller
for the Tidings

The Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission (APRC) has started the process of updating the master plan for Lithia Park. The most likely responses to that statement are probably "Why?" or "What is wrong with the park the way it is?"

Lithia Park is extraordinary right now, and it is a dynamic 100-year old park that will be changing regardless of whether or not we plan for it. Large trees will continue to grow old and die or become so hazardous that they will have to be removed. Threats of degradation due to erosion, overuse and invasive species will continue.

Visitors' desires for the park will change. The current master plan, developed almost 100 years ago, includes donkey rides and car camping. Currently, some upland natural areas are irrigated. If water is in high demand, do we want to continue to irrigate and make natural areas "unnatural?" These things and more need to be revisited, evaluated and updated.

The APRC goal for Lithia Park is to plan for the next 100 years, with a vision that will guide both park development and preservation.

Considerations for the new master plan will include reviewing pedestrian traffic patterns (for example, is a sidewalk needed along Granite Street?), a long-term tree replacement plan, restoration and protection of the riparian area along Ashland Creek (the blackberries, vinca and English ivy are invasive plants), park uses that should be initiated or

discontinued, and best locations for existing and potential uses.

The Lithia Park Master Plan Subcommittee met in early January to determine a list of preliminary goals. Specific goals that originated from that meeting include the following:

- Ensure all infrastructure, including structures, facilities, park areas, and systems are evaluated for current and best use, as well as safety and environmental impact.

- Ensure adequate public input throughout the process using innovative means to solicit public input on goals, priorities, processes and planning.

- Expand efforts to identify and preserve cultural and historic elements of Lithia Park while identifying opportunities for new aesthetic elements through creative landscape design and art.

- Through implementation of policies and procedures, ensure



Lithia Park's master plan will be reworked with an eye toward protecting the scenic treasure for the community, visitors and nature. [TIDINGS FILE PHOTO]

the park is protected as an urban park and public place for generations from over-development, overuse, misuse, wildlife and natural disaster.

The steps in the process of producing the Lithia Park Master Plan include developing a statement called a Request for Proposals (RFP), communicating the RFP to potential planners, selecting a firm or team to develop the updated master plan, gathering information and

data (including maps of existing conditions), providing the opportunity for extensive community involvement, developing multiple options, selecting the preferred option in conjunction with public input, and providing maps and written material that describe the updated master plan. Most of the above-listed steps will consist of multiple internal steps.

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The citizens of Ashland will be an integral part of the planning process. There will be multiple steps that will provide

opportunities for public involvement. Everyone in our city has a stake in Lithia Park. We at APRC will endeavor to keep you informed as the process evolves so that you can help us protect and enhance Lithia Park, the lifeblood of our city, while planning

for its future.

— Rick Landt and Matt Miller are Ashland Parks commissioners and members of the Lithia Park Master Plan Subcommittee. Park Views appears monthly.