

**APRC Park Views Column – April 25, 2019**  
**Lithia Park Master Plan**  
**By Michael A. Black, AICP; APRC Director**

It was more than 100 years ago now since renowned park designer John McLaren (1846-1943) produced the original plan for Lithia Park. McLaren, “...saw a city park as a place where people and nature meet and mingle, where trees and meadows, shrubs and flowers, streams and pathways come together to encourage city dwellers to escape the bounds of their busy urban lives.”<sup>1</sup> On arriving in Ashland at the request of several residents and promoters of a park, McLaren commented that, “...few places in America were as naturally suited for a park as Ashland.”<sup>2</sup> Prompted primarily by the desire to expand the existing park and build the “Lithia Springs Resort,” McLaren was hired to produce the master plan for what would become Lithia Park.

Many of the amenities that were envisioned by early Ashlanders and promoters of the Lithia Springs Resort were included in the original plan, but never executed. A casino (not for gambling, but intended for dining and dancing) and sanitorium are two of those that were envisioned, but never realized. Many of the plan’s elements, like the Butler-Perozzi Fountain, a zoo and the bandshell were built, as well as most of the trails, landscaping and gathering places that are present in the Park today.

Move forward in time to 2019 and another master plan for Lithia Park is now being completed. For two years, Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission (APRC), with the technical expertise of the design firm MIG, Inc., have worked together with the public to create a new master plan to “*preserve the historical characteristics [of Lithia Park] and provide recreational activities for generations to come*”<sup>3</sup>

To ensure the vision of the master plan is carried through to the end of the process, the Commissioners of Ashland Parks and Recreation adopted the following goals early in the process:

- *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 broad public input throughout the process using innovative means to solicit public input on goals, priorities, processes and planning.*
- *Plan for comprehensive park circulation through the creation of a plan within and through Lithia Park to ensure adequate access for all appropriate modes of transportation that guarantees that all points, areas and facilities are accessible by pedestrians.*
- *Ensure appropriate public interface of the natural and built areas of the park through plans that address natural resource planning, water conservation, stormwater management and natural resource protection.*
- *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 the evaluation and implementation of policies and procedures, ensure the park is protected as an urban park and a public place for generations from overdevelopment, overuse, misuse, wildlife and natural disaster.*

*Ensure the attraction of Lithia Park as a great public space remains strong through planning for activity and usage trends, increased events and services offered by APRC and third parties.* Throughout the planning process, several public meetings have been held, including a “Design Week” in June, 2018,

where all our consultants were on-hand in Ashland for a week of discussions, planning, sharing and learning about the desires for the future of Lithia Park from the many public participants. Several public meetings have been held to discuss the project with the public.

Now, in early 2019, MIG, Inc. is ready to present their draft of a master plan for Lithia Park for the next 100 years. On April 25, 2019, at the Senior Center (1699 Homes Ave), 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., APCR staff and consultants from MIG, Inc. will review the draft master plan for Lithia Park. Recommendations in the draft plan range from strategies for rehabilitation of existing features to addressing the three modes of travel in the Park: – walking, biking and driving.

The draft being delivered is a comprehensive evaluation of 99 of the most beloved acres in Ashland. Lithia Park has been that place for “...*city dwellers to escape the bounds of their busy urban lives.*”<sup>4</sup> John McLaren envisioned 100 years ago.

The purpose in pursuing a new master plan is to ensure that for the next 100+ years the park will continue to provide the respite from daily life for millions of visitors. We are asking the public to join us in reviewing the draft master plan from MIG, Inc. and to give input on the proposed plan. More than anything, APCR is aiming to ensure that Lithia Park will remain as relevant, accessible and enjoyable as it is now for many generations to come. For more information, please visit [ashland.or.us/LithiaParkMasterPlan](http://ashland.or.us/LithiaParkMasterPlan).

1. John Enders, *Lithia Park: The Heart & Soul of Ashland*, 35
2. John Enders, *Lithia Park: The Heart & Soul of Ashland*, 35
3. Request for Proposal for the Lithia Park Master Plan
4. John Enders, *Lithia Park: The Heart & Soul of Ashland*, 35