

POP UPDATE

News from **PRESERVE OUR PARKS** Dec. 2011

Preserve Our Parks Inc. is a non-profit watchdog group for Milwaukee area parks and green spaces

Dear Friends,

This has been another trying year for our parks, and the 2010 budget includes cuts in funding and manpower along with unrealistic revenue predictions. The result will surely spur talk of disposing of parkland or leasing land to special interests. The recent proposal for a communications tower on the lakefront is a case in point (see below).

We at POP are committed to keeping our parks free and open to all. Your financial support, in any amount, helps us to do so. Thank you, and best wishes to you and your families in the coming year!

John Lunz, President, Preserve Our Parks

Invasive species: Cellphone tower proposed for lakefront

The Parks Department met resistance this summer when it proposed to let AT&T build a 60-foot cellphone transmission tower at the kite-flying area of Veterans Park. The area has a small, badly deteriorated restroom building. In a quid pro quo agreement, AT&T would contribute toward the cost of a new building, paying the County a total of \$500,000 over the course of a 25-year lease. The new building would be twice the size of the old one and hold AT&T's generator and equipment. The tower would be anchored to the building. AT&T promises the tower would eliminate cellphone dead spots on the lakefront.

At a County hearing in October, opponents expressed concern not only about birds, kites, high winds and noise pollution at the tower but about the insult of locating corporate interests on parkland and the blighting of a lake view. Some questioned the no-bid nature of the AT&T alliance. Others felt accepting the tower would encourage other cellphone networks – there are six at present – to seek park space for towers. Several at the hearing said they approved of the tower, or wanted it placed at another lakefront location.

An AT&T tower at Veterans Park would be illegal. The park is on filled land, which has the special protection of the Public Trust Doctrine. The Doctrine requires filled lands to be used only in aid of navigation and for public recreation, which includes the enjoyment of scenic beauty.

We need legislation *now* to allow the establishment of a secure, adequate funding source for the parks. The tower plan is receiving further study. This “invasive” should be nipped in the bud.

Budget numbers

Warning: This article contains material that may be disheartening to park enthusiasts.

The 2012 budget for Milwaukee County parks will be \$41,269,923. The sum reflects this year's budget cut of \$1.6 million. In real dollars, our parks now operate on a budget that is \$3,844,634 smaller than the 1986 budget. In 1986 the parks had 750 full-time employees. Today they have 210. Estimated deferred maintenance costs are \$280 million. Milwaukee has 150 parks and a total of 15,000 park acres.

Power line debate in Wauwatosa

The American Transmission Company (ATC) is planning to build two transmission lines through Wauwatosa to provide power to a new WE Energies substation on the Milwaukee County Grounds. One of the four proposed routes is through Underwood Parkway. Using this route would constitute a precedent-setting conversion of parkway land into a power line corridor. POP and the

County Parks Department oppose the use of the parkway. POP will write a letter expressing its opposition to the Public Service Commission, which is responsible for the decision.

Wisconsin legislation threatens public rights in waterfront lands

A Wisconsin bill aimed at streamlining DNR permitting procedures would make it easier for developers to build on waterfronts. It would loosen regulations on where buildings, bulkheads, boat launches, piers, etc. can be located. Former DNR officials and lawyers have testified that major portions of Assembly/Senate Bill 24 violate the Public Trust Doctrine, a constitutional law that protects the public's rights to the "use and enjoyment" of the state's public waters and adjacent filled lands. POP asks you to google "Wisconsin Bill 24" to find out more, then email Senator Alberta Darling and ask her to oppose the bill (Sen.Darling@legis.wisconsin.gov).

The splendor of Bender

If you're looking for beauty, you will find it at Bender Park on our southern shoreline within the shadow of the WE Energies Oak Creek Power Plant. Bender's 306 wild acres combine rustic paths through maple-beech woodlands, old orchards, and restored prairies. Birders revel in its diversity of species; the park excels at providing stopover and nesting habitat. Dog walkers and those seeking a peaceful escape frequent trails reachable through three points of entry. The long slope to the marina is often the halfway point for long-distance bikers, and with that in mind plans are in the works to connect the Oak Leaf Trail for bike access from Oak Creek. It appears the park's shoreline and marina were not affected by the historic WE Energies bluff collapse and coal-ash spill in October. The park also survived a development takeover attempt a few years ago, which POP vociferously argued against. The park is at 4503 E. Ryan Road in Oak Creek.

Further:

- **Vision** We now have the Long-Range Lakefront Planning Commission's roadmap for the lakefront site where I-94, O'Donnell Park, Art Museum, and the Hoan Bridge meet. Important, hopeful plan.
- **Award** Brian Russart, County Natural Lands Manager, won the UW Chancellor's 2011 award for Excellence in Community Engagement, an award for attracting private support for public programs.
- **Ship** January will mark 7 years since POP raised a coalition to stop the berthing of the mothballed 1948 Navy warship USS Des Moines on our lakefront as a tourist attraction. The ship was 2 football fields long, 6 stories high. Funding sources imaginary. The ship has received a proper sea burial.

Note to Readers: POP would be grateful to have your email address. Our email list is used only to alert supporters when parkland is under threat. We're at: info@preserveourparks.org. Thanks!

Preserve Our Parks Inc. was founded in 1999 to work for preservation of parks and green spaces. Our board: John Lunz; Betsy Abert, Laurie Albano, Randy Bryant, Diane Buck, Eddee Daniel, Barbara Elsner, Beth Heller, Jim Goulee, Bill Hibbard, Bob Kalupa, Charles Kamps, Mary Kamps, Kaye Kern, Bill Lynch, Betty Quadracci, Donna Schlieman, Ted Wiley

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