



Project Memorandum

June 3, 2020

To: Rob Romanek, Parks Planner, City of Salem
Ben Johnson, GreenWorks

From: Kimi Sloop, Managing Associate, Barney & Worth, Inc.

Re: Geer Park Stakeholder Feedback

As part of the design development process, we sought input from a variety of park stakeholders including city of Salem staff, park user groups, and agency park neighbors. The summary below are the highlights from the conversations. The list of stakeholders is at the end of the summary.

Best things about Geer Park

“People love this park. People use it during the day. Lots of ages and abilities can use the park. Every hour someone is out there using the park. Newest park, but it was designed in a way that people are building parks now.”

- **Multi-use:** baseball, soccer, cross country, biking, walking, picnicking, etc.
- **Accessibility:** parking and access to I-5.
- **Potential for growth:** regional draw and tournaments. central to Eugene/Portland
- **Frequently used:** ability to schedule multiple games at one time; constant use during all hours the park is open (day and evening) by a wide variety of users
- **Amenities:** restrooms (location, permanency and size), parking and picnic area (shelter)
- **Ease of maintenance:** development makes maintenance easy, walkways and trails wide enough to get equipment around, maintenance building is a plus, interest in future staffing/housing potential

Existing Park Uses

- **Walkers** use trails/paths during the day. Some people from the neighborhood and nearby employees. Increasing interest for walking and running events at the park.
- **Picnics and celebrations.** Groups picnic at the shelter area between the restrooms. Families bring 10x10 pop up tents and tables to have birthday parties by the pump track.
- **Baseball fields** used by area high schools, JBO, adult groups too. Practices, games, and tournaments. Groups use multiple fields at the same time.
- **Soccer fields** used by high schools and all ages – 3-year-old through adults. As many as 5-6 teams on one soccer field. Soccer fields in high use in fall and spring. Soccer tournaments.

- **Biking** on trails. Users range in age. Families with kids on bikes, riding the cement trails.
- **Bike pump track.** All ages for bike track. Great big dirt jumps with potential for wooden lips.
- **Cross country meets** – high schools and middle schools have cross country meeting in opportunity areas 1,2 and 3, and developed trails.
- **Physical fitness training** by the National Guard. Sit up and push-ups in ball fields, then running portion on the path.
- **Open field space.** Highly valued with lots of people using it at the same time. Rare/occasional use for military training
- **Food truck/tent sales** are arranged by park users. Food truck is set up between the two fields.

Existing Park Limitations

- Ball fields
 - Slopes – makes it hard to see people.
 - Size, depth to backstop, and permanent mound are issues for expanded softball use.
 - Not enough baseball or softball fields. Most tournaments want 4 fields, not two. Fields need to be all 90' or two 70' and two 90'.
- Soccer fields
 - Would get more use if there wasn't a crown in the middle of each field. However, the crown is appreciated when it is muddy and sloppy.
 - Soccer fields are rough.
 - Ultimate frisbee and boomerang groups could use the soccer field if they were flat.
- Natural turf and no lighting
 - Only so much play can be had without synthetic turf and lighting during shorter, wetter days
- Bike track
 - Asphalt pump track is settling and cracking, getting worse for the skateboarders.
 - Bike track is not delineated so people randomly walk across the jump lines.
 - Resources and terrain are limited.
 - Lower asphalt track has limited utility except when it is busy. Riders develop skill sets quickly and move on.
 - Upper track is seeing degradation with boarders and striders.
 - Pump track may need to be removed and rebuilt.
 - Not good separation for progression: second start hill.
 - Lacks amenities.
- Parking
 - Current parking is insufficient, especially when there's a baseball game and SKEF soccer on a Saturday morning
- Geese – mass quantity of geese and what they leave behind.

Vision for Geer Park

Note: This is a high-level summary of most frequent comments.

- Artificial turf fields.
- Safe place to gather.

- Play all year round/expanded use of facility.
- Tournament type facility - good location, good revenue opportunity.
- Positive, clean environment for kids and families to do activities
- Continued and improved existing park uses – keep what is there, but make it better.
- Accessible by all.
- Multi-use fields to be used by baseball, soccer, lacrosse, football, bocce ball, etc.

Specific Improvements, Additions to Create the Vision

- Ball fields
 - Warm up facility between the fields.
 - Synthetic turf.
 - Good lighting.
 - Larger dugouts.
 - Shade preferred.
 - Additional fields. New fields could be both baseball and softball.
 - The bigger you make the two new fields, the better (can accommodate soccer, too)
 - 80-90 foot play now. 70 foot been requested.
 - Prioritize baseball needs. There are other softball fields in Salem/Keizer, but not baseball fields.
 - 200' field would be youth fields. 300' field for adults. 10' minimum fence.
 - Prefer new fields to be fit for younger teams rather than retrofit current fields.
 - Sizes - 90' good for high school and older. Can be used for 14-year olds as well. 5th and 6th graders us 70' field with 50' mound distance. Younger than 5th grade, 50' field with 40-45' mound distance. Intermediate group uses 80' field.
 - Modify fields so they can work for softball. No permanent mounds. Softball requirements - dirt infill. No natural grass. Baseball mound. Flat. 14 U softball. Home plate to pitchers mount 43 feet. Bases are 60 feet apart. 8'10" home to second.
 - Multi-use fields (ball fields with soccer in the outfield).
 - Natural grass soccer fields could be changed to a warm-up area.
- Soccer
 - Either flatten out existing natural fields or improve with synthetic turf.
 - Crowns seem too big – could be lowered and still get good drainage. Plenty of areas to drain water into. Fields are not sand based.
- Additional restrooms
 - Northern part of the park, near bike park.
- Additional walking paths.
 - More accessible paths for wheelchairs and less able bodied.
 - More trails for running.
 - Expand the path to create a bigger loop around the whole park. Expanding it up and around the pump track would increase traffic and surveillance in that part of the park.
- Playground
 - ADA requirements, plus playground equipment that is more accessible for those less able bodied.
 - Large playground area for ease of movement.

- Central area, easily accessible, keep people entertained and trigger the different sense.
- Skate park
 - Size – 25,000 sq. ft. minimum. At least the size of Keizer Skate Park.
 - A mix of real street features – curbs, ledges, steps. Small bowl or two.
 - More features on the smaller beginner to intermediate size. There are other places in the region to get the really big/advanced end stuff.
 - Stay away from show piece features. Looks cool and may sell the project, but money could have been spent on something more useful.
 - If the bike park and skate park in different areas, think about how they would be connected – a trail between with a couple of features.
 - Put thought into the crash factor/roller derby factor. Sometimes there are only 2 or 3 useable lines and everyone gets in each other's way. With the design, keep people from crashing up and keeping people separate. Usability is more important than the look.
 - Prefer larger park with fewer features than smaller park with more features.
- Basketball court
- Bocce ball court
 - Turf, about ½ a football field size. Could be the soccer field.
- Bike Park
 - Focus on a pump plaza, bowl design, more interesting for beginner and intermediate users. Works better with location and focus on providing amenities for neighbors, beginner, intermediate, and family users.
 - Pump track accommodates long boarding.
 - RC cars out there. Occasional uses. Drive around soccer fields. Community for RC cars in town. Could be priority for bikes, then skateboarders then RC cars.
 - Strong desire for singletrack trails.
 - More and bigger/better tech, jump, pump track.
 - Larger jumps (for mountain bikers and BMXers, and these require different jumps). Want expert-level lines but these are different.
 - More progression of tracks.
 - Integrate jump lines with pump tracks.
 - Safety improvements - barrier around track. Even just a visual barrier to keep foot traffic from conflicting with bikes.
 - Add practice gate and couple turns and a table.
 - Add parking, closer access, visibility, signs directing to park, split-rail fence delineating area.
 - Paved path that goes to bike park.
 - Add family friendly amenities – drinking fountain, benches, picnic shelter, shade and seating near the bike park.
 - A small storage building for the tools and things that the volunteers use to maintain the track.
- Safety
 - Clear lines of sight.
 - Encourage natural surveillance.
 - Clear out underbrush.
 - Limit dark corners/places to hide.
 - Security patrol.
 - Keep the pump track immediately visible from the parking lot, and if possible, from the road.

- Access
 - Push Geer Drive out to Hawthorne.
 - Keep Park Avenue open – escape route in event of flooding.
 - Barriers to keep vehicles from entering off Hawthorne and driving across the grass.
- Parking if adding capacity to fields (either new fields or synthetic turf)
 - School bus parking/access needed to support cross country meets.
 - Northern part of the park, near bike park.
 - Substantial additional parking needed for baseball/softball tournaments
- Concession stand and/or food cart hook ups.
 - Needs to be in a location that is accessible by all. There may be a big draw for food carts – lots of park use year-round not just tournaments. Revenue draw. Challenge – how to manage how the trucks. Power? Preference to avoid generator use (noise) Change of zoning? (zoning change not needed as per Rob’s comment regarding community park code)
- Track/area with lane markers.
 - Formal area with lane markers to allow the military to do sprints. 40 meters square. 10 lanes. In order to use Geer Park for an official physical training qualification facility, there needs to be a place for sprints and a 2-mile run (recruits have 5 minutes after their sprints to start the run). (Note – Kris Mitchell can send specific requirements)
- Geese problem from October to spring. What they leave behind is an issue. Take care of that some way.

Opportunity Areas/Location of New Amenities

- Concerns about area 1 being used as a community garden. Increase in rodents and insects near lots of kids on the bike track.
- Area 1 could be a picnic area. Opportunity for neighborhood.
- Area 1 used for cross country, east side of the trees.
- Area 4 for skate park. Good visual. Good addition to the park. Away from the housing so noise not as irritating.
- Skate park west of the bike park. Additional parking on the side by bike park. Could cause issues to ride skateboards along trails through fields. If opposite ends of the ball fields, a lot of people going between them. Stay away from ball fields between parking and skatepark. Cutting between spectators to the skate park.
- Preference to have the north area (near Marion County Juvenile Department garden) active uses or open field. Foliage and brush backing up to the garden property is a challenge because the homeless hide and camp in the area. Compatible uses with the Marion County Juvenile Department garden are ball fields, sports courts, or bike trails.
- If ball field complex is built on the back half of the park, fence it off and add a gate for security.

Other Insights/Questions

- \$110K in CIP for FY 2023 for Geer Park irrigation rehab.
- Multiple concerns expressed about homeless in the park. There has been vandalism and theft – especially to Marion County Juvenile Department garden and baseball shed.

- Concerns expressed about personal safety in the park. Vulnerable populations are encouraged not to walk/bike to the park.
- Bike track gets more culturally diverse users than other park amenities. Close-to-home urban facilities. Falls in line generally with population. Predominately Latinx community.
- Examples noted
 - Hoodview in North Clackamas PRD. Four softball fields that can convert to soccer fields in the outfield. Tournaments all year long.
 - Longview. Bond for 80-acre park – 9-10 baseball/softball fields, with soccer inlays imprinted on the turf for different ages.
- Revenue/programming opportunities for both the fields and the bike track.
- Part of the biking culture is doing your part to maintain the track – the City should do what we can to foster that.
- What other uses does the community want?
- What is the timing of developing Hazel Green Park with this park?
- Community garden in area 1? Concerns around additional pests.

Cherry City Baseball Club specific comments

- For people coming from out of town, proximity to the prison carries a stigma (directions often given that include the prison location).
- Salem lacks city run baseball fields. Many in town are under the school district ownership and not well maintained. Softball enough fields in town. Baseball is thriving in this region. West Coast Premier Tournaments – partner with them – to expand their reach of tournaments in the Willamette Valley especially in Salem/Keizer.
- Cherry City Baseball Club has a use agreement with the City for upkeep and maintenance of the ballfields. They would be interested in an opportunity for being a third-party investor for some control of the park scheduling.
- Number of ball fields/parks available in Salem limits ability to host tournaments. Cherry City Baseball Club runs tournaments and uses Geer Park, the complex in Keizer and two in Albany. Silverton and Dallas ball fields are back-ups if the tournament grows in size. For tournaments, they run 10 teams at Geer Park for 7th and 8th graders. 80-120 teams total to the tournament at all sites. 20-30 teams to Albany. 60 teams going to Keizer. If lights and turf, could add 4 more teams to Geer Park. More revenue possibility for Salem.
- Consider third party investor for control of some part of the park – like scheduling (Cherry City Baseball Club may have opportunity).

Salem Area Trail Alliance specific comments

- Three general user groups of the bike track:
 1. Local neighborhood kids without supervision, no helmets and safety gear, lower priced bikes, just their local park and using it as such. Drawn towards asphalt and beginner dirt, don't have tech skills to use larger jumps.
 2. Local Salem users: kids on striders and adults on MTBs, driving to the park for access, driving up to 30 minutes. Lots of kids on pump track, adults on dirt. Mostly bike-oriented families.

3. Enthusiasts drive to the park, from Portland and surrounding areas. Some of the best dirt jumps with public access. Longboarder skaters come to use pump track. This is the group with higher skill levels, want bigger jumps, larger and faster pump track.
- Mountain bike group is underserved (they need a facility that caters to MTB skills tracks). Geer may not be the place: not enough gravity.
 - A bit of a disconnect between the volunteers and park operations over maintenance. BMXers not used to working in a public park.
 - Focus on stakeholders that are the actual users, not the dream, pie-in-the-sky user groups. Need to sync with volunteers that will actually do the maintenance work. For example, The volunteers are dirt jumpers. If the dirt jumps are removed, volunteers will evaporate. Volunteers only want to maintain what they ride.
 - SATA can be a partner but can't carry everything. City also has to provide maintenance and development.
 - Geer Park is not the ideal location for a comprehensive bike park that includes a progressive jumpline and cross-country skill features because of the lack of varied terrain. Geer Park best for beginning/intermediate level and an asphalt pumptrack application with integrated jump features (i.e., rollable doubles). Pumptrack should be designed with bikers and skaters in mind. Focus advanced amenities (e.g., cross country skill features and progressive jumpline) elsewhere (i.e, park with mixed levels of topography and gravity potential).

Stakeholders Interviewed

- External
 - Sue Hill, Special Olympics Oregon – Marion County
 - Colin VanDerHyd, Salem Area Trail Alliance
 - Jeff McNamee, Salem Area Trail Alliance
 - Derek St. Clair, Salem-Keizer Stars
 - Jesse Decker, Skatepark user
 - Troy Greeg, Marion County Juvenile Department
 - Todd Sheldon, Marion County Juvenile Department
 - Justin Sparrow, Marion County Juvenile Department
 - Dan Hughes, Cherry City Baseball Club
 - Ryan Matthews, Marion County Health
 - Kris Mitchell, Oregon Military Department
- Internal City of Salem
 - Melinda Mokalla, Recreation Coordinator
 - Billy Powers, Recreation Softball Coordinator
 - Zachariah Close, Parks Project Coordinator
 - Noe Marquez, Parks Operations Supervisor
 - Jennifer Kellar, Parks Operations and Recreation Services Manager
 - Becky George, Recreation Supervisor