



**Jess Greenwood, P.E.**  
Director/County Engineer  
Goodhue County Public Works  
2140 Pioneer Road  
Red Wing, MN 55066

TO: Goodhue County Parks, Trails, and Recreation Advisory Board

FROM: Jess Greenwood, Public Works Director

RE: 25 Mar 26 Park Board Meeting  
**Community Engagement**

Date: 24 Feb 26

#### Summary

It is requested that the Park Board evaluate potential models for fostering community engagement at Byllesby Park and/or Nielsen Memorial Preserve.

#### Background

With limited park staff and financial resources, neither Byllesby Park nor Nerstrand Memorial Preserve currently offer any interpretive programs, formal volunteer opportunities, or fundraising programs.

A few of the Byllesby Park neighbors are currently volunteering at the park in an informal capacity by picking up litter, removing invasive species, etc. Both the Cannon Falls and Kenyon areas have residents that are passionate about outdoor recreation, environmental education, and stewardship of our natural resources. There are several models that could assist with formalizing and recognizing those efforts:

#### Volunteer Program

Goodhue County could formalize a volunteer program where specific volunteer duties and events are outlined by County staff. Volunteers may sign up to assist with these duties and events. Tools, supplies, and supervision would be provided with County funds/staff. Examples: park clean-up days, tree planting, prairie ambassador program, etc.

#### Community Organizations

Goodhue County could partner with existing local community organizations (Lions Club, Rotary Club, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H, etc.) to raise funds and/or labor for maintenance and improvement projects at the parks. Tools, supplies, and supervision may be provided with County funds/staff or the group's funds and/or volunteers, depending upon the group and project.

Examples: fundraising, trail maintenance, nature playground development, geocaching development, scavenger hunts, etc.

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### **Programming**

Goodhue County could partner with organizations such as Community Education & Recreation and Master Naturalists to bring interpretive programming to the parks. This programming would be organized as a cooperative effort between County staff, potentially Dakota County staff, and organizations such as those listed above. Running these activities through organizations such as Community Ed could utilize systems already in place to facilitate program sign-up and fee collection.

Examples: plant walks, forest bathing, raptor center visits, history talks, watershed education, etc.

### **Friends Group**

A Friends Group is usually formed by a group of citizens that shares common interests in stewardship of a local park. Forming this type of group could be a significant time commitment for County staff, but the goal would be to develop a group of people that can help coordinate events, volunteers, fundraising, and/or programming at a park.

Examples of nearby Friends Group efforts:

- Planning: gathering input on improvement project designs
- Interpretive programs: ghost walk, watershed education, outdoor laboratory, flora and fauna presentations, fishing, making maple syrup, bird walks, nature hikes, candlelight hikes, falcons live, stargazing, wildflower ambassadors, art in the park, etc.
- Natural resource management: maintain pollinator garden, seed collecting, invasive species removal, bat counts, stream monitoring, tree planning, trash clean-up, etc.
- Lobbying
- Fundraising: selling merchandise, coordinating events

A general outline of steps for creating a Friends Group would be:

- Determine goals for a Friends Group to accomplish
- Recruit members
- Determine group name, mission, goals, and objectives
- Write by-laws
- Elect officers
- Develop MOU and Work Plan between the Friends Group and the County
- Set up bank accounts
- Develop committees
- Develop communications (logo, newsletter, website, social media, etc.)

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- Host regular meetings
- Build group leadership
- Start with small projects and grow to larger projects/events
- If fundraising ends up being a main goal, it may become important to incorporate and obtain a tax exempt status

It may be important to note that the approach to building community engagement and support is something that may evolve over time. What may start with formalized volunteer opportunities, partnering with community organizations, or programming may naturally evolve into a Friends Group over time.

Empowering citizens to help shape, invest in, and protect their local parks and trails can have a profound impact on our public spaces.

#### Alternatives

- Provide feedback to staff regarding goals for community engagement at Byllesby Park and/or Nielsen Memorial Preserve
- Do not develop further community engagement at this time

#### Recommendation

It is the recommendation of staff that the Park Board discuss the above models, and provide feedback on community engagement goals.

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