

Cedar Lake Park

UPDATE

Autumn 2010

Confluence Edition

Volume 22, No. 2

Citizen Action: Part Three



BY NEIL TREMBLEY

Part One, published in the Fall 2009 CLPA Update (on line at the CLPA website) recounts the city's plan, in 2000, to re-align the last one-mile segment of the Cedar Lake Regional Trail to the Mississippi River and tells how the CLPA decided to gather support for returning to the off-road alignment.

Part Two (Spring 2010 Update) describes how CLPA executed its plan over the next three years. By the middle of 2003, the trail was back in the corridor. But much more work was needed..

The Cedar Lake Park Association (CLPA) had to keep the ball rolling. Once the trail alignment had been fixed, CLPA faced another hurdle: how much was this trail really going to cost? Well, to find that out, planners needed to know exactly who owned what down in the corridor.

A detailed design survey was needed. The price tag: over \$22,000. While CLPA debated footing the bill, to its relief Hennepin County stepped in and completed the survey. By the end of 2003, armed with data from the survey, project planners could begin cost estimates.

CLPA plunged ahead. It invited Congressman James Oberstar, a bicycle enthusiast, to come ride the Trail. An instant convert, Oberstar worked with his friend, Congressman Martin Sabo, to include the trail in the 2004 federal transportation bill.

Late one night, CLPA President Keith Prussing received a call from Sabo's chief-of-staff. "Does CLPA still want the money?" Louis Moore asked. "Of course!" Keith replied. We were in.



Construction continues even in the snow, with new retaining walls and pavement being installed. Looking west past Washington Avenue and beyond.

SW LRT News

Planning for the Southwest Transitway continues. The 2010 elections brought new fiscal realities to the state and federal officials, introducing some uncertainty to many transit projects, including LRT through greater Cedar Lake Park. Nonetheless, we must continue to act as if the project will happen, and be vigilant to get the best mitigation we can throughout the Kenilworth corridor.

To that end, we hosted, with support from the Bryn Mawr Neighborhood Association, a Design Charette in mid-November where a talented group of design professionals worked all day on possible visions for stations at Cedar Prairie (Penn Ave.) and Cedar Lake Park (W. 21st St.).

The Cedar Lake Parkway crossing drew forth design options, and the corridor in general was



Considering options at the Design Charette

discussed. There was a site walk in the snow. CIDNA, KIAA, BMNA, and Lowry Hill neighborhoods representatives were present, along with MPRB 4th District Commissioner Anita Tabb, MPRB staff, Hennepin County staff, and state Representative Marian Greene. It was a

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SW LRT...*continued on page 5*



On the Horizon

BY KEITH PRUSSING

The turn of the year is well underway, with each day a bit darker and the cold sinking deeper into the ground. It has been an eventful year for our Association. The trail to the river is almost done, and we have begun planning for a grand opening celebration to take place May 2011. The trail will be open; however, for meaningful use this year. We have walked the trail corridor, and the view of Minneapolis is unique and quite interesting.

We continue to need your help in the form of money and volunteer time. Your contributions, no matter how small, become part of a larger pool that has sustained our work for over 20 years. It is a grand vision we carry, built on the backs of hundreds of people. And, we have, and will continue with your help, accomplished great things. Please give as you can.

We are proposing the Confluence—a grade separated crossing of the Cedar Lake Regional Trail and the SW LRT. If we are successful, the trail will go under the rails, and will include space for a ski connection to the parklands on the east side.

MPRB has a new superintendent. We look forward to a strong relationship with her, as we continue to steward the park. Prior to her appointment, our friend superintendent emeritus David Fisher instituted a radical redesign of staff responsibilities, negotiating the departure of 16 senior staff across all departments. This was done because there are many less park workers to supervise, and there is an ongoing lack of funds. And, when a large cottonwood that had its top twisted off during the October "hurricane", it left an 18 foot standing snag perfect for wildlife. It received the orange paint letter marking it for removal. With a note to a senior forester, we were able to preserve this striking natural resource, located at the entrance to Hidden Beach. This is a good example of how we continue to partner successfully with MPRB.

I hope all is well in your world in these challenging times. Happy Holidays.



The spirals and henge of the memorial Cedar Grove



Contributors

Cedar Lake Park Association gratefully acknowledges contributions in the form of money, stocks, materials, volunteer time and in-kind services, memorials and gifts. Since the last Update, contributions have been received from:



Gerald Jorgenson and Mary Adair
Fay Atchison
Thomas F. Becker
Bob Berkwitz
Frank Braun
Susan Bunnell
Chris Carlson
Jeanette Colby
Nate Cormier
Bob Day
Terry Day
Dr. Aina G. Dravnieks
Harriet Dunlap
Steve Durrant



Charlie Elowson
Mark Wernick and Nancy Entwistle
Esther Ford
Joan and Dale Forde
Rob Forester
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Arlene M. Fried
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Arnold P. and Shirley Kaplan
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Richard and Angela Luther
Terry Saaro and Lee Lynch
Mr. Al Mayer
Stacy McMahon
Jim McPherson
Chet Meyer
Thomas Meyer
Meredith Montgomery
Mark Nammacher
Kelly and Andrew Nelson

Lisa and John Nicotra
Foundation of the Saint Paul Foundation
Cheryl Pangerl
Terryll A. Pearson
Constance Pepin
Corwin and Doris Peterson
David and Melisa Pollak
Robert Premer
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**GIVE ONLINE AT www.cedarlakepark.org.
All donations are tax-deductible.**

Visit Our Website

Go to www.cedarlakepark.org to see what CLPA is about. You'll find:

- Photos taken throughout the park and trail
- Historical and aerial photos
- People enjoying and nurturing nature
- History of the park and the Master Plan
- Volunteer opportunities
- Publications and maps
- Blog, links and contacts with others

If you would like to volunteer or contribute to your park, email us at info@cedarlakepark.org, call (612) 377-9522 or write to: Cedar Lake Park Association, 2000 Aldrich Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55405.

A Family's Experience

BY STACY McMAHON

There's a pileated woodpecker hammering overhead. Small bits of bark are flying in the air. The kids are nearby, balancing on a fallen poplar fighting off alligators with branches they've scavenged from the forest floor. I've been given a few minutes to catch my breath after racing up and down the Mound at breakneck speed. Several times a



Having a good day.

week my kids and I ride our bikes around Cedar Lake. This is one of our many stops.

My kids first rode their tricycles on the Cedar Lake Park trail: Red Radio Flyers with bells ringing traveling at such bone-rattling speed I was sure steel parts would be flying in all directions. They have graduated to two-wheelers now and Cedar Lake, with the easy access from surrounding bike trails, has become their own special place to explore, experience nature and find adventure.

At the northern point, a few years ago, a small dock was installed near the beach. It's perfect for lying on your belly, dipping your fingers in the water and watching small sunfish swim in the shallows, dropping a leaf to see it float away or tossing pebbles and counting the concentric ripples. If we are really lucky we might see a loon swimming across the small bay.

At the new Cedar Lake Park Bridge, the kids

love to scramble up the boulder and concrete base. This can be an interesting stop for grown-ups too, with a brief history of the lake engraved above the rocky wall on the underside of the bridge.

Heading east on the Cedar Lake Regional Trail, sometimes we race the train, kids reveling in the rumbling roar. But mostly it's quiet tall grass dotted with prairie flowers. The kids stop to blow on an Allium seed head sending their wishes with the seeds floating on the breeze. We might spot a shy blue bird in spring or hear a pheasant crowing in the fall.

At the confluence with the Kenilworth Trail, we head south. A stop at Hidden Beach for a snack yields a great view across the lake and a chance to meet some of our east-side neighbors.

At the rail bridge over the channel to Lake of the Isles, we sit on the stone wall of the channel and dangle our feet over the edge. Sometimes I can coax the kids onward to a tour of another of our great city lakes. In the alternative, we venture further south on the Kenilworth Trail, across Cedar Lake Parkway, to the playground at Park Siding Park.

Back to Cedar Lake Parkway, we follow the lake trail to South Beach. Last fall, a cold October day, we were on the South Beach by ourselves, kids exploring the shoreline, when one of them said "Mom, look at the cat." What I saw loping along the waterline towards us was a sleek-bodied mink. Although, quite common near water throughout Minnesota according to the DNR, it was an unexpected surprise in such an urban area. The curious creature continued to within 10 feet of us, stopped, stared and then slipped into the water, swimming away down the lake.

There's also the fishing dock, the boat launch and the duck pond between the Parkway and France Avenue. We are fortunate to have this incredible resource nearby and accessible. It's a few miles of great kid adventure filled with favorite trees, painted turtles napping on logs and green spotted frogs, mallards, wood ducks, great blue herons, snowy egrets, muskrats, red-winged blackbirds and their reedy songs, cattails, leaves, rocks and other treasures.

Volunteers



It has been an active year at the Burnham Woodlands restoration project. Yale Alumni volunteers returned to work in May. The site was featured on a KARE-TV segment, "Simply Science." The core group of volunteers continues to expand. Wildflower seeds have been collected and donated, then scattered throughout the site. This area, located just south of the Burnham Bridge, is progressing beautifully, and is well worth an exploring walk.

DRC volunteers planted in the prairie in the late spring. Happily, rain fell the next day, which makes the plants much more likely to succeed.

Elsewhere, buckthorn removal using hand tools has been done by our buckthorn brigades, particularly in the Big Woods I area along the lakeshore trail, and in the memorial Cedar Grove. Native tree plantings and seed scattering have been done.

Volunteers have been working on the W.21st/Thomas Ave S restoration on HCRRRA land. Prairie was planted a few years ago on the south end, and a wildlife trail is being laid out, with neighborhood help, closer to Thomas Ave, with an eye to preserving some of this wild land in the face of the potential Cedar Lake Park LRT station development.

Volunteer Opportunities in Cedar Lake Park

CLPA is a volunteer organization. We accomplish all that we do through the dedicated efforts of ordinary people like you who believe in our mission.

We need your help in a variety of areas, such as digging in the dirt in the park, database and website management, media production such as our newsletter, community outreach, fundraising and networking with the public/private sector.

Without you, we are not able to succeed. Please help us make a difference, and have fun along the way.

To volunteer or contribute to your park:

**Email info@cedarlakepark.org
Call 612-377-9522**

Projects in the Park

Remember the **osprey reintroduction project** at Cedar Lake in the early '90s? For a few years there were hacking boxes placed on scaffolding in the southeast part of the lake. Osprey chicks were placed in the hope that young birds would return and nest in succeeding years. Further, a tower was installed in the Cedar Meadows area below the Jones-Harrison Residence. Though no birds have nested at Cedar Lake, we continue to be hopeful. This Three Rivers Parks project has been very successful throughout Hennepin County, with a total of 67 nesting sites. Other wildlife enhancements we are supporting include the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery Project and chimney swift tower installations.

A **tragedy occurred** this fall when a runner mistakenly climbed over a wall after climbing the stairs of the Cedar Lake Pkwy bridge, and plummeted to his death, landing on the trail below. Our deep condolences to his family.

The **Hidden Beach** traditions of eclectic recreation, great swimming, and lovely sunsets continued for yet another year. The beach had lifeguards on some days, KIAA provided funds for increased police patrols, and generally all were safe.

We are thinking of bringing a crew from the **Minnesota Conservation Corps** into the park next year. They will selectively remove buckthorn and other exotics in preparation of planting native trees and shrubs, furthering our ongoing work in restoring native landscapes throughout the park, as described in the Concept Master Plan. Active statewide, these crews are approved by MPRB, will cost CLPA \$700–900/day. We are looking at a few days in the area of the Cedar Grove and east along Bum's Ridge. There have been safety issues in this area, and selective cutting of buckthorn will help.

According to the Met Council, in 2009 there were **300,000 users of the Cedar Lake Trail** west of the freight rail, and 600,000 users on the Kenilworth Trail. Remarkable. We are considering the possibility of locating a portable sanitation facility somewhere along the Cedar Lake Trail in the park. Possible locations include the area by Ewing Ave. S. west of the parkway bridge, or somewhere near I-394. There needs to be service truck access, and it needs to blend into the landscape. Estimated cost is \$1,200/year.

The **Nice Ride bicycle sharing program** has successfully ended its first year, and will expand its locations for next May. The distinctive green bikes have been seen regularly throughout the park and trails.

The **United Transportation Union** (UTU) proudly represents the active and retired railroad workers who served in the rail yards that existed for 100 years around Cedar Lake. They have produced a fine video salute with rich archival footage celebrating the dignity of Labor and Commerce in building the City of Minneapolis. Railroad workers have

been supportive of CLPA efforts to preserve the parklands since the earliest days.

There is a **freight rail controversy** under study. When the Hiawatha Bridge over Lake St was built, it severed a rail connection through the Midtown Greenway. MNDOT created an agreement with HCRRRA to temporarily run the few trains/day through the Kenilworth, connecting with the BN main line. At the same time, freight was temporarily removed from a line in St Louis Park, pending environmental cleanup and re-engineering an area called the Golden Triangle, so that the traffic now in the Kenilworth could return to St Louis Park. Though they signed off in the past, city officials want the trains, which pass near the high school, businesses, and many residences, to stay gone. Meanwhile, the rail authority wants to build the LRT transitway, and

preserve the Kenilworth Trail.

Since December 2009, we have met periodically with staff from the **Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority** (HCRRRA). These productive meetings have resulted in the development of new aerial maps that clearly show where not to mow the prairies along the trails. Sentence to Serve crews, without clear direction, had been cutting much more prairie than necessary to safety.

There are major improvements done and planned at **Brownie Lake**. Buckthorn has been cleared, drainage from the Target parking lot has been improved into the lake, and a canoe rack has been installed. Pending funding, a trail around the lake is under consideration, along with native plantings and a bridge connection over the railroad to Cedar Lake. Presently, the mature tamaracks on the north end are golden.



- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| A Cedar Lake Trail | G Big Woods I | M Mound | R Confluence |
| B Prairie | H Hidden Beach | N Burlington Northern RR | W Burnham Woodlands |
| C Parkway Bridge/Tunnel | I Cedar Point | O Memorial Daffodils | T Trail Access |
| D Memorial Cedar Grove | J Fishing Dock | P Jones-Harrison Residence | + Water Pump |
| E Big Woods II | K Cedar Meadows | Q Linda's Spiral | |
| F Kenilworth Trail | L South Beach | | |

Citizen Action

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Needing a state match, CLPA contacted Representative Margaret Anderson-Kelliher, whose political savvy smoothed the way to the Capitol. Earlier, the group had toured the trail with several state senators; now this paid off. With support from both houses, state funding appeared set. CLPA was on a roll—then everything ground to a halt. Due to political infighting, there would be no 2004 federal transportation bill.

Undaunted, the group continued to make connections. Early in 2005, Richard Thomas, a lobbyist for a huge construction conglomerate, volunteered his expertise. He worked tirelessly, sometimes even ruffling a few feathers, knowing that agitation often produces results.

Finally, in 2005 the long-delayed federal transportation bill became law; in it was a provision to extend the Cedar Lake Regional Trail to the Mississippi River. State funding followed.

All told, it will cost over \$8 million to construct this one-mile stretch: a high price to pay to complete the vision proposed 20 years earlier. Not surprisingly, some debunked the plan as costly and trivial. Well, acquiring land in the heart of a downtown metropolitan area is expensive, but it will pay off when thousands of people, including young children, enjoy this transit corridor without encountering one motor vehicle. Costly, yes, but hardly trivial.

**Thank You for
Your Support!**

Mowing the Prairie

In early September, as one of our stalwart prairie lovers was beginning her morning jaunt in Cedar Lake Park, she came across a sight that horrified her. From a distance she could see that the sides of the trails along the prairie had been mowed. But instead of the three-foot-wide mowing she was used to, she eyed a nine-foot-wide swath cut on either side of the three trails.

She quickly fired off a letter that reached the Minneapolis Park Board. The head of the park's environmental staff replied that she had given specific instructions and GPS coordinates for mowing the Cedar Lake Trails prior to going on vacation, but that a park keeper on the ground had told the mower to cut an extra wide swath to enhance visibility. I sent the following reply to the park board:

I read the email string about the mowing in Cedar Lake Park. I'm glad the additional mowing will have no adverse effect on the native-species plants now thriving in the park. I am aware of the benefits of mowing the areas alongside the trails: not only does it keep the trails from being narrowed by intrusive growth, but it gives people a sense that the area is being cared for, which is important, especially to newcomers. I'm also aware that mowing prairies can have a beneficial effect on the diversity of plant life. These reasons are why I reserved judgment on the issue until all the facts were known.

The area of Cedar Lake Park in question is designated as a savannah/prairie area and there are, as you know, signs up all along the trails attesting to that fact. The park keepers' concern about visibility is misguided. Perhaps the park keeper was new to the area and did not realize that the three-foot wide mowed area on either

side of the trail was sufficient to achieve that goal.

Of greatest concern to me was the strip mowing of the islands between the trails. Part of the beauty of the Cedar Lake Prairie is its natural look. Bicycling, walking, or skating through the area and feeling the solitude that the high prairie grasses give is a delightful experience. Having that critical edge between the trail and the prairie look like a raggedly-mowed lawn or cornfield after harvest is not only unsightly, but actually diminishes the park's visual space.

It also becomes a safety issue because the high grass between the trails serves as a physical buffer, a median if you will, that promotes safe movement through the area. Finally, those who love the park enjoy the unobtrusiveness of the trails, that sense of distance between the park and the "trails on the edge of the prairie." This dynamic is achieved by the design of the trail as a sinuous, undulating ribbon and by the prairie grasses and native-species wildflowers that have been tirelessly planted along and between the trails.

I hope that you can speak to the park keeper in question and educate this person on the history of the park and the unique place it has in the magnificent Minneapolis Park System. I also hope that you can set up a process where, even when you are on vacation, the guidelines that park staff have created can't be overturned by the whims of someone on the ground who perhaps does not have the sense of the larger scheme that you and your excellent staff have.

Regards, Neil Trembley



SW LRT News continued from page 1

great day for building relationships in support of the corridor community, whose boundaries, we say, run from the Lake St Station on the south to I-94 to the north.

We are entering a critical period with the transitway. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will be released any day, which then will trigger a 45–60 day comment period when all our concerns and ideas must be ready to become part of the record, and hopefully trigger meaningful mitigation to protect the park and the surrounding neighborhoods. Please check our website for information about this and everything else about this project. Each of us can comment on the DEIS. MPRB has convened an ongoing Citizens' Advisory Committee, where we are well and amply represented, to study all the relevant issues in order to respond thoroughly to all the real and potential effects on the Cedar Lake parklands. A clause in Federal law (4f) states

that any deleterious effects on parks and the users' experience must be mitigated, and MPRB, happily, is prepared to aggressively protect its interests.

The CIDNA neighborhood is advocating a cut-and-cover tunnel from the Lake Street Station to the Cedar-Isles canal. This is a constricted area, with many nearby homes and park facilities. It would allow for a grade-separated crossing at Cedar Lake Pkwy. Bryn Mawr would like a safe crossing of the railroad from the park facilities at Bryn Mawr Meadows.

Presently, people will cross the tracks at grade, even climbing under idling trains. The Harrison neighborhood wants to ensure there is station access for the near North community, so that residents can access jobs in the suburbs.

The Northstar Commuter rail needs a location to store trains when not in use. A study has been done, and Cedar Yards, below the

Kenwood bluff, or Linden Yards, east of I-394, are viewed as serious choices. Further, some time soon, as envisioned in the lower Bassett's Creek Valley master plan, the Van White railroad flyover will be constructed, and the city will vacate the 26 acres of the materials recycling center and impound lot. Mixed use development is proposed, including a light rail station.

The happy solution would be a stacked building layout, with train storage underground, light rail and trail next, then retail, office or residential above.

**For news, photos, updates,
maps and anything to do
with light rail through
the Cedar Lake parklands,
visit www.cedarlakepark.org**

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Cedar Lake Park Update is published seasonally by the Cedar Lake Park Association (CLPA).

Since 1989, CLPA has worked with individuals, neighborhoods, corporations, foundations, churches and schools, as well as with state, regional and federal agencies.

We have successful partnerships with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and other city, county, regional, state and federal agencies.

Editor: Jim McPherson
Photo editor: Meredith Montgomery
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Printed on recycled paper made of 50% recycled/10% post-consumer waste.

CLPA Update, Autumn 2010

If you want to be added to our mailing list, or would like earlier editions of this newsletter, please visit www.cedarlakepark.org/publications

Calendar

CLPA Steering Committee

Second Monday, 7 to 9 p.m. at the Kenwood Recreation Center. You're invited.

Design Charette

November 14, 2010, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Kenwood Rec. Center

Annual Fund Drive

NOW. Please contribute.

Cedar Lake Trail opening to the river.

Winter Solstice

December 21, 2010, 11:38 p.m. (UTC)

City of Lakes Loppet weekend

February 5-6, 2011

Spring Equinox

March 20, 11:21 p.m. (UTC)

Annual Meeting

Tuesday, April 5, 2011



The Linda Jadwin memorial, east side of Cedar Lake



This watchful mallard hen and other wildlife can be found in the park throughout the seasons.

Cedar Lake Park Association Mission

- 1. Create and nurture a park at Cedar Lake with a thriving nature preserve and connecting trails and greenways.**
- 2. Provide opportunities for people to learn to live in community with nature and one another.**
- 3. Continue to foster citizen leadership and private involvement in the development and management of the park and trails.**
- 4. Support similar efforts throughout the metro area and beyond.**