

Health and Recreation Committee Meeting Minutes

*The meeting was held at 6:00 pm on May 14, 2018
in the St. Theresa Auditorium.*

Purpose:

To discuss plans for a new Pocket Park in the greenspace between East Street and Rowan Hill Drive near the intersection with Murray Avenue.

Attendance:

In attendance were Mariemont residents Rob Bartlett, Linda Bartlett, Melissa Schmit, Gretchen Griffith, Mandy Schulkers, Mandy Rohal, Tom Woodruff, Lisa Woodruff, Amy Kraynick, Kim Smith, Jaimie Robinson, Amanda Conners, and Alan Smith Peterson; Mayor Dan Policastro; Council Members Avia Graves, Kelly Rankin, and Maggie Palazzolo; Committee Member Mary Ann Schwartz; Committee Vice-Chairperson Eric Marsland; and Committee Chairperson Troy Hawkins.

Minutes:

Troy Hawkins opened the meeting and explained that the idea for a Pocket Park was proposed by representatives from the Mariemont Preschool Parents' Group (MPPG) and initially discussed in a meeting in January and then after some planning and groundwork was discussed in a meeting of the Health and Recreation Committee on March 20, 2018. The concept of pocket parks is one that is used by similar villages including Mariemont's Sister Village of Venice, Florida. The benefit of a pocket park is that it would provide residents a place to meet and socialize near their homes. The proposed location is further away from the other playgrounds in the Village and near the homes of many young children. As children get older, the pocket park would offer a place where they could meet their friends and play within a safe distance of their homes. The idea was also to select play equipment that offered different features than the other playgrounds at Dogwood Park and Ann Buntin Becker Park such as a mini climbing wall. Other proposed equipment included benches, a picnic table, swings, a slide, and a springy animal.

The MPPG had generously offered to put \$10,000 toward play equipment for the park and the proposal was that the Village would match that amount. The proposal was to locate the Pocket Park in the greenspace between East Street and Rowan Hill Drive near the intersection with Murray Avenue. The advantage of that location is that it is safe for children because it is separated from streets and it is nestled in with trees and bushes and somewhat secluded from view. At that time, it was thought that the immediate neighbors were comfortable with the proposed location for the park.

Troy Hawkins apologized that the immediate neighbors for the proposed location were not consulted sooner, and to Mandy Schulkers, Gretchen Griffith, Jaimie Robinson, and other MPPG volunteers for the time they put into planning for the proposed pocket park location prior to this meeting.

Mayor Dan Policastro added that since he had learned about the concerns of the neighbors, he had been considering alternatives. During his recent visit to Venice, Florida, he had been visiting some of their pocket parks, and saw a very nice pocket park with a gazebo in one of the greenspaces designed by John Nolan that provides an example for Mariemont. He had since discussed the idea of constructing a gazebo in the greenspace between Remboldt and Hiawatha with Lynn Long who had expressed interest and a willingness to follow up with neighbors. He suggested some unobtrusive play equipment could be placed near a gazebo so parents could sit in the gazebo while their children played.

Tom Woodruff presented a map of the area surrounding the proposed location for the pocket park and suggested there are better alternatives that would provide more space than the small area proposed. The proposed area could be crowded when people are walking along the path and potentially dangerous if toddlers are crossing the path in the way of bikers. One option would be the greenspace alongside the General Short's (Trolley Turnaround) Park. That location would offer more room for the play equipment and could be situated so as not to disrupt General Short's Park and to keep the children far enough away from the streets.

Linda Bartlett stated that if a pocket park were placed near General Short's Park, the Village should be very careful to protect the historic trolley platform and to maintain the existing park features. She also expressed that any plans for a pocket park should preserve the right-of-way for a potential multi-use path that could also run through that area.

Mayor Policastro expressed that Miami is a dangerous street and we would need to be careful to consider the safety of the children playing in the pocket park. A playground alongside General Short's Park would likely require a fence and might not be very attractive.

Gretchen Griffith stated that the proposal was for small equipment in keeping with the character of the space. We had considered natural tones that would blend with the surroundings.

Melissa Schmit expressed concern for the immediate neighbors who have the proposed location right in their front yard. She and Vanessa Chu had met with Troy Hawkins earlier since Vanessa had a conflict with the time of the Health and Recreation Committee Meeting and Vanessa had expressed concerns that the proposed park would not be as attractive as the current peaceful setting.

Alan Smith Peterson (another immediate neighbor) stated that the neighbors had worked with the Village to get proper drainage installed in that location to create the current peaceful greenspace. Previously it had been swampy, muddy, and full of cattails. He did not want to see the greenspace they had worked hard for taken away. Also, there is not sufficient parking in the area to accommodate visitors to the pocket park. His neighbor's house would be blocked if visitors park on East Street.

Lisa Woodruff stated that while she likes the idea of a pocket park, the proposed location is too small and she is concerned about the impact on the immediate neighbors.

Amy Kraynick stated that while the pocket park might be too much for the area, she wanted to emphasize that it does need attention from the Village. General Short's Park needs maintenance, such as leveling and general clean up.

Dan Policastro stated that there are plans to build additional sidewalk to connect the existing sidewalk to the crosswalk across Miami routing around the back of General Short's Park. He indicated the area could be leveled when that work is done.

Jaimie Robinson wanted to make sure it was clear that MPPG's plans for the pocket park were to provide playground equipment that would be suitable for children of all ages and that would provide a different experience from the equipment available in the other playgrounds in the Village such as a climbing wall.

The Health and Recreation Committee Members agreed that the plan for a pocket park is still of interest, but the Village needs to go back to the drawing board on the topic of a location.

The meeting adjourned at 6:45pm.