



Levi Carter Park Place Game Report

Carter Lake Preservation Society

Parkway Church of God

April 28, 2007

Introduction

The Carter Lake Preservation Society wants to make Levi Carter Park a better place to play. The 519.5-acre park – one of Omaha’s six regional parks - features two baseball fields, two football fields and two basketball courts. Other amenities include paths, picnic areas, shelters, restrooms, a pavilion, fishing dock areas, a boat ramp and open space.

Levi Carter Park is also home to Carter Lake, an old oxbow lake formed when the Missouri River changed course in 1877. Today, this urban body of water is shared by two cities, two counties and two states. The City of Carter Lake, Iowa, lies completely within the concave portion of the lake, and the City of Omaha and Levi Carter Park surround the lake on its convex side. It provides opportunities for water-skiing, fishing and boating.

Society members teamed up with Omaha by Design to hold a Place Game workshop April 28. Local residents, park patrons and members of the Carter Lake Preservation Society were invited to participate. Twelve people attended.

Segments Evaluated

Due to the size of Levi Carter Park and the number of workshop participants, two segments were selected for evaluation: the WPA buildings area and the adjacent play area.

Evaluation Tools

Workshop participants were asked to evaluate their segment of Levi Carter Park according to the four criteria outlined below.

Comfort and image

- Attractive
- Feels safe
- Clean/well maintained
- Comfortable places to sit

Access and linkage

- Identifiable from a distance
- Walkable
- Accessible by transit

- Clean information/signage

Uses and activities

- Good mix of activities
- Frequent community events
- Busy area
- Economic vitality

Sociability

- People in groups
- Evidence of volunteerism
- Sense of pride and ownership
- Children and seniors present

Workshop participants were also instructed to ask persons who were in the “place” being evaluated what they liked about it and what they would do to improve it.

General Observations

Levi Carter Park is a beautiful expanse of green space that may well be one of the metro area’s best-kept secrets. Workshop participants value its mature trees and plants, its open spaces, the architecture of its historic Works Progress Administration buildings, and its view of the lake and the Omaha skyline. Perhaps most importantly, they value its potential.

In terms of the four criteria outlined above, workshop participants ranked the park’s access and linkage as its best asset, followed by its comfort and image, its sociability, and its uses and activities.

Several concerns were raised, ranging from security issues related to too much access to the park (27 entrances were cited) to the condition of the fencing, roads, structures and play equipment to its lack of use/promotion. Additional concerns identified included litter, illegal dumping and the metro area’s general perception of the park.

Short-term suggestions posed by workshop participants focused on improving public knowledge of what the park has to offer and undertaking a “clean-up, spruce up” strategy that could help address the perception problem cited above.

Long-term solutions focused on two fronts: restoring the park to its historic origins, including refurbishing the existing WPA structures and recreating the original white sand beach; and creating a variety of “use-specific” areas, such as a bike and walk trail that connects to the existing trail system, exercise stations, and camping and dog-walking areas that could help attract new users.

Next Steps

The next stage in the placemaking process is holding a Place Definition workshop. In this workshop, a small group of stakeholders takes the ideas generated from the Place Game process and begins to develop a plan that will help transform them into reality.

For more information about the Place Definition process or to schedule a workshop, contact Teresa Gleason at 402.342.3458 or teresa@omahabydesign.org.

Short-Term Improvements

- Reduce the number of park entrances. (9)
- Add new playground equipment. (8)
- Enforce illegal dumping regulations. (6)
- Add portable toilets. (4)
- Bring "Earth Day" and other events to the park to encourage use. (3)
- Improve bus service to both the park and airport. (2)
- Reduce the speed limit and employ traffic calming devices. (2)
- Remove graffiti. (2)
- Add trash containers. (1)
- Repair all fences. (1)
- Create a 4-wheeler area.
- Improve signage and include positive messaging.
- Kill weeds.
- Mend fences.
- Make repairs to the road/sidewalk/lot where required.
- Trim trees and remove dying trees.

Long-Term Improvements

- Build a trail system through the park that connects to the east trail system. (10)
- Rebuild (as needed) all buildings, including roofs, bathrooms and bath houses. (7)
- Close selected streets to limit access. (6)
- Add historic lighting to entire area. (3)
- Restore original beach area with white sand and docks. (3)
- Add water feature as part of beach area. (2)
- Increase park security. (2)
- Add a flagpole. (1)
- Add low maintenance landscaping (flowers, shrubs, trees) above the wall. (1)
- Add concessions or a restaurant. (1)
- Create a grand entrance. (1)
- Create a patio.
- Create a pavilion connection to the play area.
- Create a variety of usage areas (dog exercise area, exercise stations, nature/education area and a camping area).
- Provide opportunities for boat rental.
- Rebuild paths with original stone.

WPA Buildings Area

What do you like best about this place?

- Architecture
- Historic quality of materials in the structures (fireplaces, beamed ceilings)
- Trees
- Lake view
- Open feeling
- Huge gathering space

What is the biggest problem with this place?

- Burned out building
- Worn out bathrooms
- Underused main pavilion
- Trash/litter
- Weeds
- Handicapped access
- No restrooms

List three things that you would do to improve this place that could be done right away and that wouldn't cost a lot.

- Enforce illegal dumping regulations
- Bring "Earth Day" event/activities here
- Trim trees/remove dying trees
- Kill weeds
- Remove graffiti
- Repair all fences
- Encourage more park use with additional events
- Improve bus service to both park and airport
- Add portable toilets
- Reduce number of park entrances
- Add trash containers

What three changes would you make in the long term that would have the biggest impact?

- Restore original beach area with white sand and docks
- Rebuild (as needed) all buildings, including roofs, bathrooms and bath houses
- Rebuild paths with original stone
- Build trail system through the park, connecting to east trail system (bike and walk)
- Add historic lighting to entire area
- Add a flagpole
- Increase park security
- Add landscaping (flowers, shrubs, trees) above the wall
- Close selected streets to limit access

Comments from users of the place.

- Not available (park supervisor provided history of WPA structures)

What local partnerships or local talent can you identify that could help implement some of your proposed activities? Please be as specific as possible.

- City of Omaha Department of Parks, Recreation and Public Property
- Carter Lake Preservation Society
- Peter Kiewit Foundation
- Papio-Missouri River NRD
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Iowa West Foundation
- Iowa and Nebraska Game and Parks Commissions
- Douglas County Historical Society
- Landmarks Inc.
- National Park Service
- Union Pacific
- Todd & Tyler/Z-92 (Journal Broadcast Corp.)

Play Area Adjacent to WPA Buildings

What do you like best about this place?

- Lake
- Trees and established plants
- Downtown view/proximity
- Historical aspects
- Space
- Pleasure Pier
- Wildlife habitat
- Birds
- Potential

What is the biggest problem with this place?

- Too much access (27 entrances)
- Security/lighting/patrolling/speed
- Old equipment
- Lack of promotion
- Lack of signage
- Fence/road condition
- Trash/dumping
- Little replanting
- Lack of variety of uses
- Perception

List three things that you would do to improve this place that could be done right away and that wouldn't cost a lot.

- Limit number of entrances
- Improve signage (positive messaging)
- Play equipment
- Mend fences
- Road/sidewalk/lot patches
- Reduce speed limit
- Traffic calming
- 4-wheeler area

What three changes would you make in the long term that would have the biggest impact?

- Trails – bike and walk
- Period lighting
- Water feature
- Beach
- Pavilion connection to the play area
- Concessions/restaurant
- Boat rental
- Patio
- More variety of usage areas (dog exercise area, exercise stations, nature/education area, camping area)
- Grand entrance

Comments from users of the place.

- Not available

What local partnerships or local talent can you identify that could help implement some of your proposed activities? Please be as specific as possible.

- City of Omaha Department of Parks, Recreation and Public Property
- Peter Kiewit Foundation
- NoDo businesses
- Neighborhood alliance/Neighborhood Center for Greater Omaha
- Papio-Missouri River NRD
- Nebraska Department of Natural Resources
- Iowa West Foundation
- Omaha Community Foundation
- Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce
- Omaha Airport Authority
- Creighton University

ObD 05/17/07