

News Release

Second Phase of Garden of the North Planning Scheduled

By Dan Svedarsky on Tuesday, August 23, 2005

In early May, Garden of the North planning consultants Jason Aune and Michael Fischer of LHB, Inc. revealed some of the big ideas and concepts which emerged from input sessions, community and campus tours, and analysis of numerous maps over 2 days. The planning focused primarily on the University campus but also took a broad look at the connectivity between the campus and the community.

They determined that a defining feature of the Crookston area is the prairie and the meandering Red Lake River. As planner Michael Fischer noted, "Crookston is really fortunate because it is the major northern hub on the U. S. route called Prairie Passage which runs all the way to Texas." The Prairie Passage route is on Highway 75 and passes by the University campus, then through Crookston, out Highway 2, then southeast on Highway 102. Identifying the Prairie Passage route as the "necklace," they further identified "pearls on the necklace." These included the campus and various plantings, the Red River Valley Natural History Area, the historic downtown area, the Red Lake River, Aunt Polly's Slough, Mount St. Benedict property, and the Historical Museum/Veteran's Memorial Walkway, to name the major ones. They also identified the entrances to the community/campus as key focal points; "Northgate," commencing at the junction of highways 75 and 2 by the campus and "Southgate" at the southeast entrance to Crookston on Highway 2..

One of the identified "pearls" is already getting more attention. The Sisters of St. Benedict are in the process of exploring options for the use of some of their land which lies south of their Mount Saint Benedict complex and along the Red Lake River. They convened a local Stewardship Committee last spring that has been meeting monthly to generate ideas leading to an eventual plan. Led by current Prioress Sister Lenore Paschke, past Prioress Kathi Merck, and Business Manager, Ted Stoa, the stewardship committee recommended that the planning team of Jason Aune and Michael Fischer do an intensive planning session focusing on the 200 or so acres owned by the Mount to help clarify use possibilities. "The Sisters are very interested in continuing the positive relationships they have had with the community of Crookston over the last 86 years," notes Ted Stoa. "And they are excited to participate in the planning process." Currently, cross-country skiing is accommodated on the property with trail maintenance coordinated by local skiing enthusiasts, Dale Knotek and Ardell Knudsvig, both members of the Stewardship Committee. Other members of the committee include, Dan Rust, Terry Wolfe, and Ross Hier of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and Dan Svedarsky of UMC and Garden of the North Project Coordinator. A planning grant was obtained from the Northwest Regional Partnership Board to assist in the planning of the Mount property along with support from the Mount. "A tract of land this size so close to Crookston with its unique natural qualities is really special," according to Terry Wolfe, local wildlife manager. "The overall educational and recreational values to the community are huge if an appropriate balance between use and protection can be worked out."

The planning session is scheduled for August 31 and September 1 in the North Conference room at the Mount. Interested members of the public are invited to attend evening sessions both nights at 7:00 p.m. A detailed schedule of events will follow..

Another part of the Garden of the North project was recently funded by a \$ 5,000 Crookston Development Authority (CDA) grant. This will support a detailed analysis of the "Northgate" entrance to the campus/community and look at appropriate landscaping, signage, and design that will make a distinct statement to travelers that they arriving at some place special. "I recently checked with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and they have a cooperative grants program that could assist with site preparation and cost of planting materials so I will be coordinating with City Administrator, Aaron Parish on that possibility," according to Svedarsky. The CDA grant will also support planning effort on a trail system..

A key feature identified in the initial broad scale drawings by Fischer and Aune was a trail system connecting the campus and community. According to Svedarsky, "Not only would a loop trail system functionally connect the campus and community, but it would symbolically wrap its arms around the two entities and express their connectedness. There could also be interconnections within the major loop system that could be quite functional." There is currently a sidewalk trail running by the high school to behind the Northland Inn that is just a short distance from the UMC athletic fields. If a crossing could be made over the railroad tracks and across the athletic fields, this would be very handy for UMC students living in apartments on the north end of town to bike or hike on a more aesthetic cross-country route to campus.

Another planning project underway is the Gateway Nature Center feasibility study supported by a number of entities including the CDA, Crookston Visitor's Bureau, Northwest Minnesota Foundation, and the Northwest Regional Sustainable Partnership. A proposed site for such a center is in the "Southgate" area of Crookston and C. J. Fernandez of the Center for Changing Landscapes of the University of Minnesota is currently studying that location..

For more information on the Garden of the North or the Gateway Nature Center projects, contact, Dan Svedarsky at 218-281-8129 or dsvedars@umn.edu.

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