

Phase I Plan Status of W. M. Johnson Hills Park

Initially established 4/2015; updated & reviewed 1/12/2016; updated & reviewed 2/14/2017

The W. M. Johnson Hills Park (“JHP”) plan was developed with community input, featuring an emphasis on active recreation in a passive setting. The Anderson Township Park District (“ATPD”) hired one of the most innovative, and well-respected firms in the Cincinnati area, Human Nature, to develop a plan to meet the recreational needs of the community, while incorporating a nature-based design. In conjunction with the neighbors of JHP and the community, this plan was established as a guide to improve the park. The initial plan was developed in 2001, and was subsequently revised in 2009 and again in 2015.

The JHP improvements will take many years to accomplish and like most other ATPD parks, it will be accomplished in phases. There is room for the plan to evolve pending available funding, community needs, use patterns, permit processes, etc. A priority for the Board of Park Commissioners is to make decisions that allow future Boards to meet the needs of the community. Their intent is to refrain from making promises which tie the hands of future Boards regarding what they can or cannot do for the community.

The vision for JHP has always been of a different flavor than the other ATPD parks. It was purposefully acquired to round out the ATPD’s offerings to the community. The plan to include facilities and activities that complement the natural gifts of the property is a priority for park development. Athletic fields scheduled for sports leagues are not currently represented on the plan. The playground that will eventually be constructed will have a nature-based theme or tie into the history of the property. While JHP is not intended to be a nature preserve, the trails and open space are features the ATPD envisions as priorities for the park.

Time Line of W. M. Johnson Hills Park:

1998 Mrs. Marian Barbour Johnson approached the ATPD about creating a legacy in honor of her late husband, William McNeilan Johnson (“Mac”). The ATPD and the Hamilton County Park District (“HCPD”) paid Mrs. Johnson \$1,125,000 (ATPD \$625,000; HCPD \$500,000). This purchase enabled Mrs. Johnson to live out her life on her property.

One restriction on the property was included in the deed: the property must remain a park in perpetuity. Mrs. Johnson personally requested the following of the ATPD:

- Include Mac’s name in the name of the park.
- Recognize the headwaters of the Dry Run Creek.

1999 August 12th, Marian Johnson passed away. Upon her death, Mrs. Johnson’s estate conveyed 45 acres to the HCPD; 80.599 acres to the ATPD; and her house and the surrounding 10.376 acres to the ATPD (the Daughters of the American Revolution had the right of first refusal).

2000 The property officially became public park property in June. The existing private horse stable business continued, and a family continued to rent the house off Crooked Stick. The ATPD began to gather community input and suggestions for park improvements.

2001 The first public planning process was conducted.

- 2007** W. M. Johnson Hills Park opened to the public with limited use, including no dogs, because of the private horse stable operation. The ATPD dedicated a part-time Operations staff member to the park.
- 2009** A second public planning process was conducted. While most of the interest came from surrounding neighbors and people associated with the private horse stable operation, people with varying interests participated in the process.
- 2010** The private horse stable operation moved out, enabling the public to fully access the park, including the pastures. Unsafe structures were removed and areas of the park were cleaned up, including the removal of fencing and debris.
- 2014** The last of Mrs. Johnson's tenants moved out in March.
- 2015** The 2010 JHP Plan was boiled down to a Phase I plan, to better explain the Board's intentions for the JHP improvements and process.

Every year since the property became the responsibility of the ATPD, improvements have been made, including the construction of an extensive network of trails and the purchase of an adjacent property. The most significant changes occurred as of 2010, once the private horse stable operation vacated the property. The ATPD has hosted an array of programs, clean-up events, and rentals at JHP every year since 2000. From 2000-2006, the house served as the offices for the ATPD Ranger Department and Planning Director.

Phase I Improvements:

The Board of Park Commissioners has established the following priorities for JHP. Major improvements will require significant funding. Minor improvements will be accomplished as park visitation dictates and volunteer efforts and funding are available.

The ATPD will continue to explore additional features, programs, and grants deemed to be a good fit for JHP, which may not necessarily be specifically listed below. ATPD staff will continue to research and develop activities and amenities for JHP, including applying for grants which help accomplish parts or sections of the plan.

This informational piece is intended to serve as a guide to provide our residents with as much information as possible about the evolution of JHP. Phase I is anticipated to take approximately ten years to accomplish. It will be reviewed and updated annually by the Board of Park Commissioners.

Major Improvements ~ Phase I Plan, 2015-2025:

Funding is secured in the 2017 budget cycle for the following Major Improvements:

- Infrastructure improvements include:
 - Create a new vehicular access/entrance and driveway to the park on Bridle Road to meet line of sight and safety recommendations by engineers (Hamilton County,

etc.). (The existing gravel road will continue to serve the two private residences, per an easement agreement.)

- Develop an ADA accessible main parking area in the park core, with paved trails and sidewalks.

Funding is not secured for the following Major Improvements:

- Infrastructure improvements include:
 - Electric service upgrade
 - Water service upgrade
 - Install flushable restrooms in the park core: Install a septic system or hook up to sanitary sewers if/when they become available.
 - Establish the park core features: paved looping trail; shelter; amphitheater; playground; landscaping.
- Determine if the Moorman House is historic. If so, establish a parking area off Crooked Stick. If not, install a gate at the entrance to the park from Crooked Stick.

Minor Improvements ~ 2017-2018:

- Continue to promote the installation of sidewalks to connect the surrounding neighborhoods with the park.
- Abandon the trail by the homes along Crooked Stick and re-establish the trail further into the park.
- Install gravel beds for future paved trail connections.
- Continue to work with donors for the installation of an off-leash dog field area.
- Continue to work with the disc golf volunteer group on the design, installation, maintenance, and logistics of an 18-hole disc golf course. The first 9-hole portion was installed in 2016 with a soft opening; a grand opening will take place in 2017. The second 9-hole portion is on hold as some of the Major Improvements will be considered in the eventual course design.
- Continue to build upon programming offered, including, but not limited to: camping, events, programs, and rental opportunities.
- Continue to make improvements as park use dictates including, but not limited to: park benches; picnic tables; family swings; playscape features; trail enhancements; signage; plantings; restoration of the existing pond; removal of structures, debris, and invasive species.

This list is intended to help the community understand how the ATPD plans to improve JHP. The Phase I plan layer establishes a baseline of communication and understanding with the public. The ATPD will continue to work towards including the standard amenities for this public property and to continue to build on programming efforts at JHP that encourage our community at large to discover and enjoy this special place in Anderson.

To learn more about W. M. Johnson Hills Park, visit <http://andersonparks.com/johnson-hills-park/> or contact the park office at 513.474.0003.