

**A Message from the Director**  
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### **W.M. Johnson Hills Park Update**

Recently, the Anderson Township Park District has been criticized for the decision not to renew a lease for a private business owner, Bridle Run Stables, at W.M. Johnson Hills Park. This column serves to provide the ATPD volunteer Board of Park Commissioner's perspective on this matter, and to provide the community with facts about Anderson's newest park.

W.M. Johnson Hills Park (accessible via Bridle Rd) became part of the ATPD in 2000. This property acquisition was made possible by a variety of means: a generous donation from Marian Johnson (the previous owner of the property), a partnership with the Hamilton County Park District, and the sale of bonds by the ATPD to secure the remaining funding. The intent for the property donated and purchased was to be converted into a community park.

The park opened to the public in 2007 in a limited capacity because the ATPD allowed a private horse operation (Bridle Run Stables) to continue to operate on the property on a temporary, leased basis. The private horse operation as it currently exists is a dominant feature that requires exclusive use of approximately 65 of the 136 acres of the property. The property cannot be developed (giving residents access to the property at large) with the horse operation residing in the prime space of the property.

The owner of the horse operation has been well-aware of the temporary terms of the year to year lease. It has been clear that Johnson Hills Park was not going to be available permanently for their private operation and that when the ATPD was ready to move forward with the next development phase, their operation would need to move on. The ATPD decided in the fall of 2008 to move forward with the next phase of development. Accordingly, we gave formal notice to Bridle Run Stables as required by the terms of the lease agreement.

Once the private horse operation vacates the property this summer, we will immediately secure the existing structures and give the residents of Anderson access to the property at large, including allowing park visitors to begin recreating with their dogs. Engineering plans are underway for an access road, a 30-car parking lot, and infrastructure enhancements including electric and sewers. Right now, trails on the portion not currently open to the public are being marked and mapped by GPS.

Regarding the management of the property, Mrs. Johnson made one formal restriction: the property must remain a public park in perpetuity. She also made her preferred intentions clear, which we will honor: incorporate Mack's name in the formal name of the park; preserve as much of the remaining pastures as open space as possible; and highlight for users the feature of her property that is the head waters of the Little Dry Run Creek.

We have compiled information from residents via community input sessions. Some residents want nothing to happen to the property, and some want more than what the property can support. As always, we strive to balance the resident's demands for recreational opportunities within the framework of our budget. There will be more opportunity for community input during the amenity planning stages, which will capture input on various functions, amenities and style choices. We do not want to make promises that impede future Boards as we believe the park must be able to grow and adapt with the community. That being said, we envision the near future phases to minimally include: picnic shelters, restrooms, trails, additional complimenting recreational opportunities, open space, etc.

We understand change can be hard to accept. The ATPD Board is obligated to weigh all factors and make the best decision for the community at large. Some may remember years ago when we were in the process of developing Juilfs Park; the public protests were significant, and many of the neighbors were vehemently opposed to the development. Now, Juilfs Park is one of this community's crown jewels and most of us could not imagine Anderson without it.

The Park District has invested in, and will continue to invest in W. M. Johnson Hills Park, so that our community members can enjoy the Johnson's land legacy in perpetuity. The plan of the ATPD has been and continues to be to develop the property into a park, accessible to the community at large. Like all of our properties we have developed, a transition of use is necessary to convert what was once private property into a public park.

We have monthly regular meetings of the volunteer Board of Park Commissioners, at which the public is always welcome. The meeting schedule is posted on our website, as are all of our approved meeting minutes: [www.AndersonParks.com](http://www.AndersonParks.com) Contact Ken Kushner, Executive Director for more information: 513.388.2492; [kkushner@AndersonParks.com](mailto:kkushner@AndersonParks.com)