

## **A Vision for Theodore Wirth Park**

Submitted to the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board by the City of Lakes Nordic Ski Foundation

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### **I. Introduction**

The Park Board is poised to start a new citizen's advisory committee process for Theodore Wirth Park, with the charge of improving the winter recreation facilities, adding active sports facilities, consolidating operations facilities and improving trails. The City of Lakes Nordic Ski Foundation has partnered with the Park Board to improve and promote use of the park for the past eight years. (*See appendix*). This document provides the Nordic Ski Foundation's vision for Wirth Park – a vision that we believe is in line with the Park Board's charge to the advisory committee. The Foundation hopes that the Park Board formally adopts this vision as its overall framework in shaping the park through the advisory committee process.

### **II. Executive Summary**

While the strengths of Theodore Wirth Park are trails and silent contemplation this document focuses on trails. Hiking trails, walking trails, trails leading to quiet spaces, ski trails, mountain bike trails and asphalt bike trails – Wirth Park is built on trails. Wirth Park's strength is also its weakness. In general, the trails are not signed or marked, they run through brambles of buckthorn, they are often in a dilapidated state and there is no infrastructure – like coordinated and adequate maintenance facilities and a public building with related concessions – to support the trail network. In fact, dilapidated is the common theme of the entire park. Rather than spend precious resources analyzing a dartboard full of disparate ideas, the Park Board should, to coin a new phrase, un-dilapidate the park and invest in making trail experiences better for all.

Investing in trails makes sense for several reasons. Over the past 30 years, with little planning and almost no investment trails use in Wirth Park has skyrocketed:

- Cross country skiers now make approximately 55,000 trips to the park, logging more than 500,000 kilometers – or 310,000 miles - over little more than a 60 day season
- Conservatively, mountain bikers make some 50,000 trips to the park, logging some 250,000 miles.
- Everyday bikers make more than 250,000 trips through the park, logging more than one million miles each year.
- Runners: 25,000 trips and more than 100,000 miles
- Walkers and hikers, including birder and nature watchers, make more than 75,000 trips and log more than 150,000 miles

- In-line skaters, roller-skiers and other like users make some 10,000 trips, logging more than 40,000 miles.

Trail use by young people in particular has increased dramatically. (*See Appendix*). From a societal perspective, Wirth Park's trails are more important than ever. Sedentary lifestyles and obesity are at epidemic proportions. This is particularly true in North Minneapolis, where low-income and minority populations have the greatest health problems in the city. Because Wirth Park is North Minneapolis' largest park, Wirth should be a place that helps inspire an active lifestyle throughout the year. Despite years of neglect Wirth Park's trails have been doing that. With a little investment and un-dilapidating, Wirth Park's trail infrastructure can inspire more and more people to stay active throughout the year.

### **III. Vision**

The Minneapolis parks system has lakes and riverfronts with asphalt walking and biking trails. It has dramatic features like Minnehaha Falls. It has pocket parks within reach of most citizens. It has soccer parks and baseball fields, and hockey rinks and ice arenas. What it does not have is a park devoted to lifetime activities – also known as active or silent sports. The northern portion of Theodore Wirth should be that park.

The idea is to create a central location for silent sports like cross country skiing, mountain biking, trail running, disc golf, cyclo-cross, hiking and perhaps BMX bike riding. The central location would act as a hub for these activities, with a central building, parking lot, and facilities catering to the silent sports community. For instance, the building would contain a great room for meetings, a bike and ski shop (a North Minneapolis version of the Midtown Bike Station), office space for organizations devoted to increasing all, but especially youth participation in these activities, and a restaurant or coffee shop.

The trailheads for the various activities would all emanate from this central location. Over time, this central location would help solidify this community and help young people develop a passion for lifetime sports. Non-profit organizations would run programming designed to encourage activity in North Minneapolis residents. This has already been happening to some degree – with organizations like the Nordic Ski Foundation (see appendix), V3 (a North Minneapolis based triathlon training club) and Trips for Kids all working with youth in Wirth Park on a regular basis. Other organizations, like Bolder Options and Big Brothers/Big Sisters, have expressed interest in further development at Wirth Park as well.

There is significant momentum for this idea. Cross country skiing, trail running and mountain biking have blossomed over the past several years. The golf operation recently added a disc golf course, cyclo-cross is a growing sport with a presence in Wirth, and there are strong proponents of adding a BMX course to the park system generally. Other cities, like Portland, Oregon and Boulder, Colorado, have added silent sports centers already.

While ski, bike and running trails pass through the entire park, the most intense use and the center of activity would be better placed on the northern side of the park, with the current Par-3 building being the most likely location for the silent sports center. This site attracts users from south Minneapolis and the suburbs, but is actually closer to North Minneapolis – making it well-suited to creating a mix of user groups.

While building on Wirth Park's strengths, this would be a new signature park in the Park Board system. The park would feature world class cross country ski trails, a feature that only a northern city like Minneapolis could boast. With Wirth Park's woods and hills, it could also provide world class mountain biking and trail running experiences. This is what the Park Board should strive for: a world class park that can be used by all and that will be particularly effective at introducing and retaining young people to lifetime sports.

#### **IV. Specific Plan**

To make this vision a reality, there are four primary areas to address: the golf courses/winter recreation area, trails, maintenance and management.

##### **A. Create World-Class Ski Trails**

Prompted by the 1922 National Ski Tournament and 1924 U.S. Winter Olympic Ski Team trials, both held in Glenwood Park (now Theodore Wirth Park), then-Park Superintendent Theodore Wirth wrote in the Board's 1924 Annual Report:

*"The prospects are that the Olympic winter sports games will be held in Minneapolis in 1928 or 1932."*

The Olympic Games have not arrived in Minneapolis yet, but the Junior Olympics are coming this March and, pending park improvements, a Paralympics World Cup is poised to come to Wirth Park in 2012.

For cross country skiing there are two distinct sections of trail: the snowmaking/competition area (those trails on the north or west side of Wirth Parkway) and the recreational trails, which run through the remainder of the park. There are six elements to our plan to make the snowmaking/competition area into a premiere local, regional, national and international destination for both everyday skiing and major competitions: 1. Move the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways, 2. Upgrade the snowmaking facilities, 3. Upgrade the lighting, 4. Create a permanent staging area that is handicapped accessible and visible to the public, 5. Widen and grade a short section of the "Back-40" section of trails, and 6. Build a dedicated year-round welcome center for silent sports.

###### **1. Move the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways**

For better or worse the golf course and the winter recreation area are inextricably linked. It is impossible to have an intelligent discussion of one without discussing the impact on the other. The challenge is figuring out how the two can co-exist with the best chance for both to succeed. After years of working on these problems, the Nordic Ski Foundation and the golf staff have a solution: move the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways of the 18-hole golf course.

The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways are problematic for several reasons. First, neither are great golf holes. Among other problems, it is difficult to grow grass on the 17<sup>th</sup> fairway because it runs through a ravine-like area. The 18<sup>th</sup> is even worse. It is, apparently, not a good thing to end a course with a par-3 hole. But that is exactly what the 18<sup>th</sup> is. Moreover, the 18<sup>th</sup> green is overly challenging – with an uneven camber that causes balls to run back off of the green. This may be okay for championship golf, but it is frustrating – and a terrible way to end – for a municipal golf course.

Second, it is impossible to run the winter recreation area without significantly impacting the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways. The snowboard hill runs right into the middle of the fairway – with the tow rope actually crossing the fairway itself. In fact, the last tow rope pole has to be removed each spring and replaced again each fall in order to allow for golf to happen in the summer. The cross country ski trails also crisscross the fairways – creating sub-optimal conditions for both the skiing and the golf.

Third, the winter recreation area is in desperate need of a pond for cold water. Currently the water comes directly from the golf well – with water at around 55 degrees. Optimal snowmaking happens with near-freezing temperature water; in other words, water from a pond where it can cool before use. But building a pond with the current golf alignment is problematic. Moving the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways will allow for the construction of a pond in a location near the snowmaking system.

Finally, while the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways take up relatively little space, they “hem in” a large swath of land that could or should otherwise be home to the cross country skiing and endurance sports communities in the summer months.

The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways should be moved in order to disentangle golf and winter recreation while making both better. (See Appendix for proposed plans for new 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways). The estimated cost to move the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways is \$350,000.

## **2. Upgrade the Snowmaking Facilities**

With minimal public investment, the Winter Recreation Area has become a premiere destination for cross country skiing. Through private donations the Nordic Ski Foundation has been able to work together with the Park Board on several infrastructure projects:

- upgraded the electrical transformer, replaced the old electrical panel and ran three-phase 480 volt power to stations throughout the 2.5 kilometer Hap Lutter Snowmaking Loop;

- ran 6" water lines 7' under the surface throughout the Hap Loop and added hydrants at periodic intervals to facilitate snowmaking operations;
- purchased snow guns and booster pumps; and
- designed, created and widened this portion of the trail system to accommodate U.S. Ski Association and international standards for both ordinary and adaptive cross country skiing.

But the demands on this system have quickly outstripped its ability to produce. With warm water from a well, the current system can only produce snow at extremely cold temperatures. The current pumphouse cannot provide water for more guns. The system is labor-intensive, requiring the dragging of heavy hoses and electric cords all around the course. Necessary improvements include:

- Run electric lines and add power stations at more locations in order to avoid running high-voltage extension cords;
- Run water lines and add hydrants in more locations to avoid running long lengths of fire hose;
- Add a holding pond to ensure that water used to make snow is cold;
- Add a new pumphouse that can accommodate more snow-guns;
- Add submersible booster pumps at hydrant and electrical locations;
- Add permanent "stick" snow guns at select locations;
- Acquire new snow guns; and
- Acquire a new snowcat-style grooming machine for pushing snow.

The estimated cost for upgrading the snowmaking facilities is \$1.5 to \$2 million.

### **3. Upgrade the Lighting System**

Lights are an essential element for a successful cross country ski area. During the heart of ski season the days are short. Lights are the only way to extend the hours of operation – significantly increasing the number of people who can use the park on a daily basis.

The current lighting system dates from around 1980 – when a series of street lights were erected on a now obsolete ski trail. There are a number of different chains of lights – like strings on a Christmas tree. And like strings on a Christmas tree, it seems that one chain or another is always blinking off.

The wires for the lights are strung from pole to pole or from tree to tree. Some of the lights themselves are also mounted in trees. Many of the trees have actually grown around the lights over the years. The big problem here is the overhanging wires. During the snowmaking process, ice builds up on the wires until the weight finally breaks the wires.

Modern lighting systems for cross country skiing have buried wire, and the lights are directional (the lights shine along the trail so as not to blind the skiers), lower to the ground, more efficient and more reliable.

Modern lights should be installed on the Hap & Judy Trails at Wirth Park. The estimated cost for modern lights is between \$150,000 and \$200,000.

#### **4. Create a Permanent Staging Area**

Over the past few years the Nordic Ski Foundation added a staging area on the top of the hill near the snowboard area. This staging area is minimally sufficient for the upcoming Junior Olympics, but has several problems.

- It is too small and cannot feasibly get bigger.
- It is at the top of some 120+ stairs. This has two impacts.
  - First, it is very difficult for small children to access and use as a learning area (one of the primary uses of a staging area for cross country skiing).
  - Second, the stairs and the surrounding hilly terrain make the staging area almost completely inadequate for paralympics/adaptive uses.
- It is invisible from the road. And
- It does not meet most national and international standards.

On top of all that, the new 18<sup>th</sup> fairway would bisect the staging area, rendering it useless for its intended purpose.

There is a fairly simple and obvious solution. A new staging area should be built in the area around the first fairway of the Par-3 golf course. This area has several features to recommend it. It is already almost completely flat (a precondition of a cross country staging area). It is immediately adjacent to the existing parking lot and Par-3 building site and, thus, it is easily accessible to both children and handicapped athletes. It is easy to connect to the existing snowmaking loop, but is also immediately adjacent to easier terrain that is more appropriate for sit-skiers and children. It is visible from the road. And, whether the Par-3 continues as a golf course or is re-purposed, the new staging area can work in conjunction with summer uses of the area.

The cross country staging area should move to the Par-3. There are three distinct parts to this move: 1. grading and site work, 2. lights, and 3. snowmaking ability. The grading work should be minimal, with a price tag of less than \$25,000. The lights and snowmaking projects are potentially more significant. However, if done as part of broader lights and snowmaking projects (see above), would add little to the overall cost.

Wirth Park has the opportunity to host a Paralympics World Cup in 2012. To host an international event designed for people with various handicaps it will be necessary to have an adequate staging facility in an area that can work for the athletes. The Par-3 staging area would work whereas the existing staging area presents significant problems. The Nordic Ski Foundation would like to see the staging area moved to the Par-3 location in the summer of 2011.

#### **5. Widen and Grade the “Back-40” section of trails**

The current “competition loop” consists almost entirely of challenging terrain with numerous up- and down-hills. The loop is good for national competitions like the Junior Olympics, Senior Nationals and even the World Cup, but it is lacking in easier terrain necessary to host events like the State High School League’s cross country ski meet, the Paralympics World Cup and the National and World Masters competitions.

The solution lies in widening and grading a few hundred meters of trails through the Back-40 section of the park (near Twin Lake). This would create a 7.5 kilometer competition loop that could accommodate a number of skill levels and events. (Note that this work could be compatible with a plan to better access Twin Lake in the summer).

The cost to widen and grade these trails would be \$10,000 - \$20,000.

#### **6. Build a Dedicated Welcome Center for Silent Sports and Winter Recreation**

Theodore Wirth Park spans 743 acres. There are 25 kilometers (15 miles) of ski trails. Well over thirteen miles of hiking and running trails. Four miles of mountain bike trails. Five miles of asphalt bike paths. There are swimming beaches and wildflower and vegetable gardens. There is a tubing hill and snowboard area. And yet, outside of dedicated golf buildings, there are essentially no public buildings in the entire park.

But even without any facilities various organizations have begun to use the park extensively to introduce young people to a variety of outdoor activities, including biking and mountain biking, orienteering, paddling, roller-skiing, capture-the-flag, triathlon training, gardening and nature hiking. A few of the organizations that use the park to work with young people include the Nordic Ski Foundation (Adventure Camps, Bryn Mawr Skis, Anwatin Ski Team, Farview Park Ski Team, Trips for Kids mountain bike program), the V3 Triathlon Program (teaching North Minneapolis kids the basics of triathlon training), Bolder Options, Go!Training (a high-level cross country ski program), the Minnesota Youth Ski League and the JD Rivers Garden Project.

For nine months of each year there is no indoor facility, no interpretative staff, and no place that can act as a base of operations for these various groups. The park is such a good place for these

activities that these groups meet here anyway. But with a public building the use of the park would increase dramatically.

A public building/welcome center should be built on the location of the current Par-3 building. With the new cross country staging area right there, this building would act as the hub of activities for cross country skiing in the winter and mountain biking, disc golf, hiking and running in the summer months. Ideally, the building would house a bike shop, a restaurant and/or coffee shop, and a great room and office space that would be used by various non-profit partner organizations (organizations like the Nordic Ski Foundation, Bolder Options and V3) that have a specific mission to engage North Minneapolis youth.

With the proposed change in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways, the current parking lot could be expanded to the north – where the 17<sup>th</sup> green and fairway are now.

The estimated cost of a new Welcome Center building is \$2.5 - \$3 million.

## **B. Improve Trails Throughout the Park**

Trails are the backbone of Theodore Wirth Park. But, like the entire park, the trails have been largely neglected for years. The trails and infrastructure surrounding the trails need to be re-built. Improvements are needed in the ski trails, mountain bike trails, hiking trails and asphalt trails.

### **1. Finish the Improvements of the Ski Trails**

The ski trail system itself is in relatively good condition. However, the Park Board needs to address signage, bridges, and miscellaneous grading and soil stabilization in order to create a top-quality ski trail network:

#### **a. Add Signage**

Probably the largest impediment to greater use of the park's ski trail network is signage. Current signage consists of Nordic Ski Foundation-produced map boards and scattered "carsonite" arrows. There is no consistent signage, trail junctions are often unmarked and skiers are left to guess at the level of difficulty of the various trails.

Because of the challenge of knowing the trails and the difficulty of the trails, there are no Park Board staff members who could complete this project independently. Instead, the Nordic Ski Foundation recommends that the Park Board employ the Foundation to lead the signage project. The estimated cost for this project is \$10,000.

#### **b. Add or Improve Necessary Bridges**

To accommodate modern ski trail grooming equipment, the trail system needs five new or upgraded bridges.

The estimated total cost for the four bridges is in the neighborhood of \$500,000. However, there is a Minnesota Department of Natural Resources administered federal matching grant available for projects like these. That matching grant would effectively cut the cost of these projects in half. The application for these grant funds is due in March. To ensure that this opportunity is not wasted, the Nordic Ski Foundation recommends that the Park Board employ the Nordic Ski Foundation to apply for these grants on behalf of the Park Board.

The specific bridge projects include:

- i. A bridge over the one-lane maintenance/access road leading to the rear side of the Chalet.
- ii. A second bridge over Wirth Parkway in the vicinity of the current par-3 building.
- iii. A concrete bridge from the golf course to the asphalt trail running through the east side of the park needs to be updated or replaced.
- iv. A wooden bridge running over Bassett Creek just south of Highway 55 needs to be augmented with a new biking and skiing bridge that can accommodate a snowcat grooming machine.
- v. A new bridge needs to be erected over Wirth Parkway near the Quaking Bog parking lot. By connecting two large swaths of the park, this bridge would benefit both cross country skiing in the winter and hiking in the summer.

#### **c. Grading and Soil Stabilization**

There are a number of small grading and soil stabilization projects that should be addressed throughout the park. In general, the work will not be difficult; grade and/or bring in some soil, disperse some seed, and, in a few cases, place erosion control mats while the seed comes in. The total cost of all of this work is probably \$10,000 - \$20,000. However, it is not worth allocating resources to these projects without a shift in park maintenance practices.

Currently, Park Board employees routinely drive a variety of vehicles on the trails. Some of this driving is necessary. Most is not. And driving on the trails while they are wet is almost never necessary, but is, unfortunately, also common. Before spending more resources on erosion issues, the Park Board needs to address the practices that cause the majority of the erosion. (Note that by bringing the

mowers, the garbage collectors and the forestry crew together in one place, a new Wirth Park maintenance facility may help with this problem.)

## **2. Mountain Bike Trail Improvements**

The Nordic Ski Foundation cares about the mountain bike trails in Wirth Park for a number of reasons. First, many if not most of the Foundation's members are mountain bikers in the summer months. Second, the Foundation runs the City of Lakes chapter of Trips for Kids – an organization that takes inner-city youth on mountain bike rides in Wirth Park. Third, the Foundation runs Adventure Camps designed to teach the basics of lifetime sports, and mountain biking is a main staple of the camp activities. Finally, a major component of the Foundation's mission is to engage inner-city youth, and mountain biking is one of the best ways to do this.

A good mountain bike system needs a variety of trails: technically and aerobically easy trails for beginners, trails with challenging obstacles for more advanced riders, and longer trails with significant climbs and descents for the more fit rider. The current trail system could easily be augmented by adding trails for beginning riders as well as more physically challenging trails, in order to attract riders who currently travel long distances to ride at Lebanon Hills or Murphy Hanrehan in the south suburbs.

The Park Board should add technically easier trails for beginning level riders as well as more physically challenging trails for riders who want more of an aerobic challenge. With the re-alignment of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways of the 18-hole golf course, there is an opportunity to add these trails without infringing on the golf operations.

The estimated cost to add five to seven miles of mountain bike trails is \$50,000 - \$60,000.

## **3. Hiking Trails**

Hiking, Nordic walking and trail running are increasingly popular activities. With its wilderness feel and plethora of trails, Wirth Park lends itself to these activities. All told, there is more than 13 miles of inter-connected hiking trail in the park. There are narrow intimate-feeling trails and wider, more open trails. Both have their place. The problem is that very few people can follow the trails without feeling lost, disoriented or, as a result, unsafe.

The Park Board should add unobtrusive signage to guide people through the park. The Park Board could either hire an "expert" in this area or contract with the Nordic Ski Foundation to mark the trails in an unobtrusive fashion. Because the Nordic Ski Foundation already knows the trails and routes through the park, the Park Board should contract with the Nordic Ski Foundation to coordinate the signage through the park. Note that in the process of looking at the trail network, the Park Board should retain both narrow, more intimate trails and wider trails in the park.

#### **4. Asphalt Trails**

There are a variety of asphalt trails in the park. With the exception of the main north-south bike trail and the newer Luce Line segments, most of the trails need to be repaired or replaced. Specific trails include:

- a. **East side trail running under Highway 55.** This trail is in terrible condition and needs to be replaced. Unfortunately, because the trail is in the Bassett Creek flood plain, wood chips will not work. This section of park must have been a dump at one time as there is old concrete and asphalt scattered throughout the area. During the re-paving process, the old concrete and asphalt should be removed.
- b. **Various trails through the “Eloise Butler” quadrant** (that portion of the park that lies between Glenwood on the north, Interstate 394 on the south, the Bryn Mawr neighborhood on the east and Wirth Parkway on the west). There are a number of very old asphalt trails through this section of the park. These trails should be converted to woodchips.
- c. **North-south trail connecting Cedar Lake and Wirth Parkway.** This short section of trail is narrow and dangerous with older asphalt. This is the only piece between Webber Park and Cedar Lake that has not been re-paved in the recent past. It should be re-paved.

#### **C. Maintenance facilities.**

The maintenance facility for the golf course/winter recreation area at Wirth Park is in an abysmal condition. The cart barn is old and rickety with gaping holes in the walls. The “office”/garage space is too small, it is infested with mice, it is depressing, and much of the modern equipment used at the facility does not even fit through the vintage garage doors. The road and parking area are in atrocious condition and eroding asphalt and gravel regularly wash into the storm water system. Equipment sits out in the elements – reducing its useful life and also costing the Park Board in repair time and replacement costs when it is stolen or vandalized.

Any new maintenance facility should be a system-wide facility rather than a golf-and-winter-recreation-only facility. Wirth Park is too big to have disparate crews acting without any coordination. Currently, the forestry crew comes from one place, the lawn mowing in South Wirth from another, the electricians form another and the golf maintenance from yet another. This results in an annual game of “Who’s on First?” There is no coordination in when activities occur, resulting in waste and mismanagement. The solution: create one maintenance facility in Wirth Park that can act as a base for all of the crews. With a single, re-done base the various maintenance crews can communicate, plan, and coordinate their activities through one central facility.

The estimated cost to re-build the maintenance facility is between \$1 and \$1.5 million.

#### **D. Additional Thoughts Regarding Silent Sports Center**

Ideally, the new Silent Sports Center would include activities like disc golf and BMX, would include areas of the park that are now in use as the Par-3 golf course, and would be run by a non-profit organization with a mission of youth involvement and a vested interest in the success of the silent sports center idea.

**a. Include additional activities**

The idea behind the silent sports center is to provide a myriad of silent sports activities so that both adults and children are attracted to the area throughout the year. Ideally, the silent sports center would include activities like BMX, disc golf (the Park Board added disc golf this fall, but because it overlaps with the par-3 golf course its chance of success is minimal) and, perhaps, a skate park. The Park Board should consider adding these activities along with the mountain biking and skiing referenced above.

**b. Re-purpose the par-3 golf course.**

As referenced with regard to skiing, the success of these activities will hinge to some extent on the curb appeal. Can people see the activities from the road or bike path? Currently, the par-3 golf course occupies the curb appeal location. The par-3 also sits squarely between the current mountain bike trails and the area currently used for the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways.

The par-3 golf course was added in the 1970s – when golf was on the upswing. Since then numerous golf courses have come on-line throughout the area. However, in recent years, the popularity of golf has declined, and hence both the 18-hole and par-3 courses at Wirth Park have significant excess golf capacity. (*Request spreadsheet on golf play and revenues from golf staff*).

At the same time, obesity has grown to epidemic proportions, particularly among poor and minority groups. We believe it is time for the Park Board to consider bold action to help combat these problems. The area currently used for the par-3 golf course should be re-purposed. This does not mean losing the par-3 course entirely. Instead, with forward tees a par-3 could be built into the Front-9 of the 18-hole course. Because there is excess capacity in that course, the addition of a new par-3 on the Front-9 would help the Park Board retain more revenues at a lower cost. In the alternative, the Park Board could replace a portion of the existing par-3 with a smaller 6-hole practice course for children, or with a driving range.

By re-purposing the par-3, the Park Board can create one system of mountain bike trails, and activities like BMX, a skate park and independent disc golf will have the space and the visibility to succeed. The Park Board should consider re-purposing the par-3 area.

**c. Non-profit management**

In order to be successful, the silent sports center must be run by an organization equipped to market to and recruit a variety of users. Moreover, with shrinking finances the Park Board cannot afford to take on additional ongoing costs. By contracting with an organization like the Nordic Ski Foundation, the Park Board can provide better services and, at the same, avoid additional expenses.

The Park Board should build the silent sports center and surrounding facilities with the idea of non-profit management in mind. The non-profit would run the new building, lease space to a restaurant or coffee shop and to a bike and/or ski shop, and run the concessions like disc golf, BMX, and cross country skiing. Ideally, the Nordic Ski Foundation would be a partner in the planning and development process.

#### **V. This plan maintains the natural character of the park**

Silent sports enthusiasts go to the park because they enjoy woods and trees and wildlife. The intent of this plan is to leave the natural character of the park intact and to leave places for silent contemplation. In fact, by re-purposing golf facilities and concentrating the majority of the more significant uses in the golf course section of the park, the plan is designed to actually decrease the impact on the natural areas of Wirth Park.

The plans for the southern reaches of the park are modest:

- Add discrete signage for hiking and skiing;
- Remove and/or replace corroding asphalt trails;
- Grade and stabilize soil to prevent erosion in a few select locations;
- Add a bridge over Bassett Creek and another over Wirth Parkway near the Quaking Bog parking lot.

There are no plans for more or wider trails in this section of the park. Instead, the idea is to leave the area to the south of Highway 55 largely intact – except to un-dilapidate. Indeed, this plan serves to move at least two more intensive elements that had been proposed for the southern portion of the park to the golf course section instead:

- Consolidates the golf maintenance facility with the general use maintenance facility that had been proposed at Glenwood and Xerxes;
- Moves proposed concessions from Wirth Beach area to Welcome Center in northern portion of the park;

The hope is to capitalize on the natural character of Theodore Wirth Park. That is what attracts all of us to the park.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Wirth Park has been largely neglected for years. The Park Board has an opportunity to re-shape the park in a truly inspiring fashion. With this investment the park can go from dilapidated feeling to world class, with an innovative silent sports center that can serve both North and South Minneapolis, creating a truly unique regional park.

The Park Board should act boldly and with vision. Only by coming into the Advisory Committee process with a cohesive vision can the Park Board hope to achieve a park that is more than a potpourri of disparate ideas. This vision is in line with the Park Board's direction to address recreation and active sports facilities, operations facility consolidation, and trail upgrades. The planning staff should go into the process with this broad vision and use the advisory committee to shape the details of the plan.

## **Appendix:**

### **Nordic Ski Foundation has been a Park Board partner for eight years.**

- Direct Investments:
  - Invested over \$400,000 in cash improvements in the park
  - Invested over \$200,000 in in-kind improvements, including donation of snowmobile and groomer
  - Invested roughly 14,000 of hours of volunteer time in the park
    - Trails days – 100 people/year \* 4 hours \* 8 years = 3200 hours
    - Loppet shoveling of trails – 9 years \* 200 people in average year \* 3 hours/person = 5400 hours
    - high school shoveling under bridges – 9 years \* 50 kids \* 2 hours/kid = 900 hours
    - other general work on trails – 9 years \* 10 people \* 50 people = 4500 hours
- Managed various projects in the park, including:
  - snowmaking,
  - trail development,
  - new staircases,
  - cross country skiing staging area
- Raised profile of park throughout the community
- Brought thousands of new visitors to the park
- Helped Winter Program increase revenues over 500%
- In absence of planning attention, designed and purchased signage for cross country ski trails

- Advised Park Board on website for winter recreation programming
- Brought national events like the Junior Olympics and – hopefully next year – a Paralympic World Cup to the park
- Serve hundreds of kids in North Minneapolis every year:
  - Teach lifetime activities to 500+ elementary students each year (some programs take place directly in Wirth Park, others take Foundation-financed field trips to Wirth Park):
    - Bryn Mawr Elementary
    - Nellie Stone Johnson Elementary
    - Cityview
    - Hall
    - Loring
  - Inspire middle school students to a more active lifestyle (using Wirth Park as a base of activities):
    - Anwatin Middle School
    - Farview Park
    - North Commons
    - Harrison
  - Run ski camps and adventure camps in Wirth Park in conjunction with Park Board
    - Scholarships for underprivileged kids
  - Runs Trips for Kids mountain bike program in Wirth Park
    - Work almost exclusively with North Minneapolis parks
- Foundation is volunteer-driven
- Includes
  - 400+ members
  - 1,000+ annual volunteers
  - 9,000+ event participants
  - Hundreds of individual donors that have helped pay for improvements throughout the park

**Trail use by young people in particular has increased dramatically:**

- High school skiers swarm the park on most weekday afternoons in the winter.
  - On an average winter day the park hosts six high school teams with 50 skiers per team.
  - There are two to three days of racing per week – oftentimes with two races happening simultaneously. On these days, upwards of 500 students use the park in a single afternoon.
- The Minnesota Youth Ski League has clubs across the state. The biggest club in the state meets at Wirth Park – with 200 children coming every Sunday through the winter.

- Students from Anwatin Middle School, Bryn Mawr Elementary and Farview Park ski in Theodore Wirth Park every week throughout the winter.
- The Mayor's Challenge and the Midwest Junior Championships are now annual events bringing nearly 1,000 skiers from across the Midwest
- The Junior Olympics will bring the best young skiers from across the country to Wirth Park this year.
- The City of Lakes chapter of Trips for Kids brings groups of kids mountain biking each week throughout the summer and fall.
- Children mountain bike with their parents on a regular basis
- North Minneapolis' V-3 Triathlon program uses Wirth Park as a base for training.
- In conjunction with the Park Board, the City of Lakes Nordic Ski Foundation runs Adventure Camps that bring kids to the trails of the park (mountain biking, roller-skiing, orienteering, etc.) all summer.
- Local schools like Anwatin and Bryn Mawr Elementary use the park for adventure learning throughout the year.

**Assumptions on trail use by user groups:**

- Cross country ski trips per year:
  - (2000 passes x 15 + 2000 loppet day + 600 Mayors Challenge + 10\*250 (high school) + 500\*15 (high school passes + 5000 (day passes) + 10,000 (uses by non-pass holders)+ 200\*8 (MYS) + 8\*100 (Bryn Mawr) + 20\*30 (Anwatin)+12\*100 (adult groups)+40\*20 (Go!Training) = more than 55,000 uses)
- Mountain bikers
  - 180 days \* 200 trips
- Everyday bikers
  - 250 days \* 1,000 trips/day
  - Average four miles per trip
- Runners
  - 250 days \* 100 runners
  - Average 4+ miles per trip
- Walkers and hikers
  - 300 days \* 250/day
  - Average two miles per trip
- In-line skaters, roller-skiers and other like users
  - 200 days \* 50 trips/day
  - Average four miles per trip



# Theodore Wirth Golf Club

Minneapolis, Minnesota

## CONCEPT PLAN A

| SCORECARD     |           |              |           |              |              |              |
|---------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| HOLE          | PAR       | EXISTING     | CONCEPT A | PAR          | BLUE         | WHITE        |
| 1             | 4         | 376          | 4         | 376          | 368          | 313          |
| 2             | 5         | 489          | 5         | 489          | 471          | 441          |
| 3             | 4         | 333          | 4         | 333          | 311          | 270          |
| 4             | 3         | 224          | 3         | 224          | 195          | 178          |
| 5             | 4         | 446          | 4         | 446          | 410          | 361          |
| 6             | 5         | 492          | 5         | 492          | 471          | 446          |
| 7             | 4         | 397          | 4         | 397          | 361          | 350          |
| 8             | 3         | 160          | 3         | 160          | 140          | 120          |
| 9             | 4         | 391          | 4         | 391          | 374          | 308          |
| <b>CUT</b>    | <b>36</b> | <b>3,310</b> | <b>36</b> | <b>3,310</b> | <b>3,310</b> | <b>3,310</b> |
| 10            | 4         | 380          | 4         | 380          | 370          | 303          |
| 11            | 4         | 358          | 4         | 400          |              |              |
| 12            | 5         | 518          | 3         | 160          |              |              |
| 13            | 4         | 422          | 5         | 518          | 503          | 461          |
| 14            | 4         | 372          | 4         | 422          | 410          | 342          |
| 15            | 5         | 491          | 4         | 372          | 367          | 356          |
| 16            | 3         | 180          | 5         | 491          | 485          | 436          |
| 17            | 4         | 407          | 3         | 180          | 175          | 156          |
| 18            | 3         | 146          | 4         | 410          |              |              |
| <b>In</b>     | <b>36</b> | <b>3,274</b> | <b>36</b> | <b>3,333</b> |              |              |
| <b>TOTALS</b> | <b>72</b> | <b>6,584</b> | <b>72</b> | <b>6,673</b> |              |              |



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Minneapolis, MN 55411-2227

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October 12, 2010

Revisions:  
10-19-10: Render proposed holes.

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0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 1,000

SHEET

1

**Improvements - Quick Reference Guide with Proposed Phasing:**

|                      |   | Estimated Cost        | Timeline for completion  | Notes  |
|----------------------|---|-----------------------|--|--|
| <b>2011 Projects</b> |   |                       |  |  |
|                      | <b>Hiking trail signage</b>   | \$10,000              | Spring 2011  |  |
|                      | <b>Move 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways</b>                                  | \$350,000             | Break ground in 2011 for spring 2012 completion                    |  |
|                      | <b>Create a permanent staging area</b>  | \$25,000              | Complete work in fall 2011, in time for 2012 Paralympics World Cup |  |
|                      | <b>First phase of snowmaking upgrades – add snowmaking capability to new staging area</b> | \$150,000             | Complete work in fall 2011, in time for 2012 Paralympics World Cup |  |
|                      | <b>Add ski trail signage</b>  | \$10,000              | Fall 2011  |  |
|                      | <b>Replace/repair maintenance facilities</b>  | \$1 - \$1.5 million   | Summer and fall 2011   |  |
|                      | <b>Upgrade the Lighting on the Snowmaking Loop</b>  | \$150,000 - \$200,000 | Summer 2011 – in time for Paralympics World Cup                    |  |
|                      | <b>Re-grade the Back-40 section of trails</b>   | \$10,000 - \$20,000   | Complete work in fall 2011, in time                                | Foundation to raise private funds for this project |

|                          |   |                                  |                                      |   |
|--------------------------|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
|                          |   |                                  | for 2012<br>Paralympics<br>World Cup |   |
|                          | <b>Grading and soil<br/>stabilization</b>               | \$10,000 -<br>\$20,000           | Summer 2011                          | Foundation to raise private<br>funds for this project, but would<br>require change in Park Board<br>policies or practices |
|                          | <b>Re-purpose par-3<br/>golf course</b>                 | \$10,000                         | Fall 2011                            | Remove signage and<br>miscellaneous   |
|                          |   |                                  |                                      |   |
|                          | <b>2011 Subtotal</b>                                    | <b>\$1.7 – \$2.3<br/>million</b> |                                      |   |
|                          |   |                                  |                                      |   |
| <b>2012<br/>Projects</b> |   |                                  |                                      |   |
|                          | <b>Second phase of<br/>snowmaking<br/>upgrades</b>      | \$500,000                        |                                      | Add pond and new pump house   |
|                          | <b>Add bridges</b>                                      | \$500,000                        | 2011-2013                            | Federal matching grants<br>available. Start applying for<br>matching grants in March 2011?                                |
|                          | <b>Add mountain bike<br/>trails</b>                     | \$50,000 -<br>\$60,000           | Spring 2012                          | Would happen after 17 <sup>th</sup> and<br>18 <sup>th</sup> fairways are moved  |
|                          | <b>Remove and/or<br/>reconstruct asphalt<br/>trails</b> | \$500,000                        | 2012-2013                            |   |
|                          | <b>Add BMX facility</b>                                 | \$50,000 -<br>\$60,000           | 2012                                 | Possibility of grant funding from<br>Bikes Belong   |
|                          |   |                                  |                                      |   |
|                          | <b>Subtotal - 2012</b>                                  | <b>\$1.6 million</b>             |                                      |   |

|                        |  |                              |           |   |
|------------------------|--|------------------------------|-----------|---|
|                        |  |                              |           |   |
| <b>2013 and beyond</b> |  |                              |           |   |
|                        | <b>Build a Welcome Center</b>                        | \$2.5 - \$3 million          | 2012-2013 | Possible bonding project?   |
|                        | <b>Complete upgrade of the snowmaking facilities</b> | \$.8 - \$1.3 million         | 2012-2013 | Add water and electric infrastructure, permanent submersible booster pumps, additional snow guns and snow cat |
|                        |  |                              |           |   |
|                        | <b>Subtotal – 2013 and beyond</b>                    | <b>\$3.3 - \$4.3 million</b> |           |   |
|                        |  |                              |           |   |
|                        | <b>Total</b>   | <b>\$6.6 - \$8.2 million</b> |           |   |