Work Session Agenda
BOARD OF ALDERMEN
CITY OF PARKVILLE, MISSOURI
March 4, 2014 – 6:00 pm
City Hall Boardroom

1. CALL TO ORDER and ROLL CALL

2. GENERAL AGENDA

A. Proposal to Form a Non-profit Corporation and a Community Nature Center in the Parkville Nature Sanctuary

3. ADJOURN

ITEM 2A
For 03-04-14
Work Session - Board of Aldermen

CITY OF PARKVILLE
Policy Report

Date: February 23, 2014

Prepared By:
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City Administrator

Reviewed By:
Bob Fluchel
Nature Sanctuary Director

ISSUE:
A proposal for forming a non-profit corporation and a community nature center in the Parkville Nature Sanctuary

BACKGROUND:
Advocates of the Parkville Nature Sanctuary have developed a proposal (see attached) to create a non-profit "friends" group to supplement fundraising for future programming, maintenance and development of Nature Sanctuary properties. The proposal raises four important questions for the Board of Aldermen that will be the focus of the scheduled work session:

1. Does the Board of Aldermen support the creation of a private, non-profit corporation to supplement fundraising efforts for the Parkville Nature Sanctuary?
2. If so, what is the desired relationship between the non-profit and the City?
3. Will the Board of Aldermen assist with recruiting one or more champions to provide leadership for the establishment of the non-profit?
4. What does the Board of Aldermen envision for the long-term future of the Nature Sanctuary?

Below is additional background information related to each question.

Does the Board of Aldermen support the creation of a private, non-profit corporation to supplement fundraising efforts for the Parkville Nature Sanctuary?

The main goal of establishing a non-profit corporation is to increase funding for the Nature Sanctuary by finding new sources of revenue to supplement existing government support. A non-profit corporation will be able to compete for grants that are not accessible to government entities. Although the City can accept tax-deductible donations for public purposes, sometimes donors are more comfortable making a donation through a qualified non-profit rather than a government entity. A non-profit is not subject to the Missouri Sunshine Law and has more flexibility to pursue major gifts with discretion.

The Board of Aldermen should understand that one purpose of a non-profit is to provide donors with an avenue to exert more influence over the way gifts are expended. Currently donations are receipted to the City through the Nature Sanctuary Donations special revenue fund. While gifts are restricted for Nature Sanctuary uses, the Board of Aldermen has great discretion in how and when it expends the funds. Donations raised by the non-profit will be controlled and released to the City by the non-profit board of directors. It is the intent that the City and the non-profit maintain a cooperative relationship to mutually define fundraising priorities, but the City will lose some control. The benefit of this sacrifice is that the non-profit may have more fundraising success than the City due to its focus and its ability to appeal to new donors and grant sources that cannot be accessed directly by the City.

If so, what is the desired relationship between the non-profit and the City?

The non-profit corporation will be a private entity that exists solely to support a public cause. Because the non-profit will raise funds on the City's behalf but have no direct governmental oversight, the relationship will create ethical and legal complexities that must be handled carefully. The City and non-profit will have to establish protocols for how funds are solicited, collected, and expended so that the non-profit can raise funds confident that the City will follow through on the commitments that are represented to donors.

It is common for a government entity to enter into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with a foundation or "friends" group to define and protect the interests of both parties. For example, a MOU could establish that the non-profit is authorized to raise funds on behalf of the City (Nature Sanctuary) and that the non-profit board of directors and Board of Aldermen will work in good faith to mutually establish funding needs and priorities. The City may agree to maintain a base level of operating support for the Nature Sanctuary to ensure donors that the non-profit is raising new, not replacement, funds. The MOU could set rules for donation sources. For example, existing donations (such as those from the on-site donation box and special programming) may continue flow directly to the City, while the non-profit will be limited to accessing new donation opportunities. The MOU could define the limited role of city staff to provide information and guidance to aid with fundraising, but will make clear that the non-profit is a separate legal entity with its own governance, finances, etc.

Will the Board of Aldermen assist with recruiting one or more champions to provide leadership for the establishment of the non-profit?

If the Board supports the establishment of a non-profit, staff seeks assistance to identify and recruit leaders to work on this effort. Considerable work will be involved in creating the entity (articles of incorporation, bylaws, filling a board of directors, setting up governance and financial protocols, etc.) in addition to work associated with the primary objective of fundraising. This is not work that can be assumed by the Nature Sanctuary Director. Mr. Fluchel can work closely with the non-profit and provide guidance and assistance throughout this process, but he cannot undertake the work of creating and leading the non-profit. To do so would represent a conflict of interest between his public position and the new private entity.

What does the Board of Aldermen envision for the long-term future of the Nature Sanctuary?

The Nature Sanctuary has an impressive history of offering a remarkable, but simple, nature retreat. It is amazing how much has been accomplished on the property with tremendous private support and minimal direct resources from the City. However, this history is not sustainable. The strong volunteer base is aging, and the City will have to be creative to replace that long-standing support without investing significant new financial or personnel capacity. The proposal describes a long-term objective to construct an interpretative center in the form of a three-season shelter at the entrance of the Parkville Nature Sanctuary. The vision is that this facility would create opportunities for more and enhanced nature-based educational programming and would allow the Nature Sanctuary to evolve and become more relevant as a conservation attraction. The shelter would require additional capital and maintenance investment initially, but it could pay off over time by generating new advocates and donors for the Nature Sanctuary. The Board should discuss whether or not added facilities and programming are consistent with the current or desired mission of the Parkville Nature Sanctuary.

BUDGET IMPACT:
There is no direct budget impact associated with this work session. However, many elements of the discussion, such as enhanced fundraising and desired capital improvements, may have implications for future city budget cycles.

ALTERNATIVES:
1. Provide direction regarding the proposal to form a non-profit corporation and develop a community nature center in Parkville Nature Sanctuary.
2. Postpone the discussion.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:
Staff supports the concept of forming a non-profit corporation to promote advocacy, fundraising, and volunteerism for the Nature Sanctuary. City staff can provide guidance and assistance during this process, but community volunteers must be identified to lead the effort. Staff recommends crafting a MOU between the City and non-profit that clarifies roles and expectations before private fundraising commences. Staff does not have a recommendation at this time on the long-term future of the Nature Sanctuary, particularly the interpretative center. This concept requires more public input and analysis to understand the resources necessary for success. Staff recommends concentrating efforts at this time on establishing the non-profit. Future priorities, including the interpretative center, could be vetted with the non-profit board of directors to determine if there is private fundraising support to achieve this vision.

POLICY:
The Parkville Nature Sanctuary and Sullivan Nature Sanctuary are public lands that are subject to regulation by the Board of Aldermen as parks/open space. The White Alloe Creek Conservation Area portion of the Nature Sanctuary is owned by the Missouri Conservation Commission and managed by the City through a lease agreement (approved by Ordinance No. C/A 275 on December 2, 2008).

SUGGESTED MOTION:
As this is a work session, no motion is necessary.

ATTACHMENT:
1. A Proposal for Forming a Non-Profit Corporation with Long-Range Planning Considerations Including Developing a Community Nature Center in Parkville Nature Sanctuary

A Proposal for Forming a Non-profit Corporation

With Long Range Planning Considerations Including

Developing a Community Nature Center in Parkville Nature Sanctuary

Parkville Nature Sanctuary: an Overview

Kept in its natural state, Parkville Nature Sanctuary (PNS) is a special place that serves a life-enriching role in our community. For families: the Sanctuary provides a place to hike, explore and discover nature. Families not only have fun together, they also pass on a century old American tradition of caring for the land and its natural resources---the tradition of conservation.

For many adults the Sanctuary serves as a forest retreat, in which to escape the hustle and bustle of modern urban life and find solitude. For nature lovers, it is a place and to marvel at the wonders of wildlife. For volunteers, the Sanctuary is a place to share the joy of working together for the cause of conservation, by serving as stewards of a cherished natural woodland. For Scouts, it is a place to earn merit badges and do service projects by building benches, trails and bridges.

The Nature Sanctuary can be even more than the above. For the very young children, the Sanctuary can provide a place to play and "imprint" on nature. For school age children, PNS is capable of serving as a fantastic field trip site to enable them to acquire first-hand knowledge of ecology and forest wildlife. For high school and college students, it can be an outdoor science laboratory. For college students, PNS is a place to learn how to take care of and interpret natural resources, so they will be there in the future.

With adequate thought and planning, this educational potential can be realized without compromising the natural integrity or disturbing the treasured solitude of the Nature Sanctuary.

Being that Special Place: Instilling Conservation in the Next Generations

Research done by the National Audubon Society shows that the one thing that all those who call themselves conservationists have in common is that they learned to love a special piece of land somewhere. It may have been a forest where they hiked, a lake where they fished, a wooded "back-forty" where they played as children on the farm, or a field trip site they visited in school.

In any case, they returned to their special natural place, season after season, year after year and grew to know and love that special piece of land. They felt protective of it, they cared about it. They worked on its behalf to make sure it would not be ruined. In short they became conservationists at heart---and the protective feeling for their special place, generalized to a broader viewpoint that defines conservation: the caring for and wise use of natural resources.

For many, the Parkville Nature Sanctuary has been, is, and will be that special place. Although Sanctuary volunteers have always taught conservation, there is a great potential to accomplish more in our community. This is why we want to incrementally improve our facilities and gradually expand our ability to provide natural history and conservation education programs to the families and schools of our community. And to assure that everyone who wants the "naturalness" of the Nature Sanctuary to be left undisturbed, it is important to understand that the proposed physical improvements need use less than one half of 1% of the land in our stewardship. And, the physical improvements that are proposed would not require the removal of existing trees.

A Brief History of Parkville Nature Sanctuary

The Parkville Nature Sanctuary (PNS) originated in 1989 as a result of a gift of forty-six acres of land and $25,000 to the City of Parkville from the developers of the original Riss Lake Development Co. By 1992, far-sighted individuals, led by Alderman Jack Friedman and Jim Reed envisioned a use for the land that was different than that of a conventional city park. Friedman and Reed had a dream of a woodland nature sanctuary with hiking trails. It promised to be a special place, kept in its natural state, where people of all ages could enjoy nature. It was to be called Parkville Nature Sanctuary.

As a result of that dream and twenty-two more years of effort by the City and a truly dedicated group of volunteers, that dream has become a solid reality. The people of Parkville often tell us they are pleased with the continual progress that has been made in building a nature sanctuary in which we can all take some pride. Although we still consider protecting the natural resources on our land as our highest priority, we want to see improvements in our ability to serve and educate the nature loving public

In addition to its main site, Parkville Nature Sanctuary also manages a smaller nature preserve site known as Sullivan Nature Sanctuary. It is a beautiful stretch of floodplain forest just west of Main Street and English Landing Park and north of the new Platte Landing Park. The floodplain forest is a different habitat type than the main Nature Sanctuary and offers unique learning opportunities. Sullivan Nature Sanctuary comprises just a few acres, but those acres being adjacent to the other two large parks and being comprised of lowland forest habitat, make the Sullivan Tract unique and valuable.

The main Nature Sanctuary and the Sullivan Tract fit and contribute to the long-held community vision of Parkville, as a place graced with natural beauty and historical context, and this is a vision that Parkville community leaders steadfastly try to preserve and promote. Without its natural beauty, Parkville would not be the lovely community that we all love. That natural beauty must continue to be valued and cared for by well informed and well educated generations of conservationists to come. Parkville Nature Sanctuary should have a role in educating those future generations.

Partners and Stakeholders

Parkville Nature Sanctuary has become a model of community involvement and cooperation. Many partners and stakeholders have played and continue to play important roles. Any effort to improve the Nature Sanctuary should include consideration of the needs of these stakeholders:

The City of Parkville: Parkville leaders and officials initiated the Parkville Nature Sanctuary. The City owns and/or leases all the land and employs a part-time director to coordinate volunteer and City staff activities on the site. The City provides a basic operating budget as well as support from other City Departments when necessary. Alderman Diane Driver serves as Nature Sanctuary Liaison to insure continuing communication with and assistance by the City. The Street Department Staff and Parks Department Staff help out with road maintenance and with some grounds maintenance projects which the Nature Sanctuary staff is not equipped to do, for example mowing and grading.

Riss Lake: The original Riss Lake Development Co. created the opportunity for Parkville to start the Nature Sanctuary when it donated forty-six acres of land and $25,000 in funds. We believe this occurred before 1992, but we don't know the exact year. These gifts made Parkville Nature Sanctuary possible. Currently, many Riss Lake residents hike and volunteer at the Nature Sanctuary. Some members of our Nature Sanctuary Board reside in Riss Lake, as do many of our Scout volunteers. Children from Riss Lake among many others, from other parts of our community attend our annual Nature Day Camp.

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) is owner and lessor of an additional sixty-nine acres of woodland which serves as extension of the Nature Sanctuary. The additional parcel is called the White Alloe Creek Conservation Area (WACCA). Its rules and regulations are coordinated with and kept compatible with those made by the City. MDC staff also helps with technical management advice and occasionally sends a work crew over to trim dangerous limbs that hang over the trails of WACCA.

This additional upland forest land (WACCA) was purchased, with substantial taxpayer dollars, in 1995 by MDC from Park University at the request of the City of Parkville. Alderman Jack Friedman and Jim Reed made the request. In my working capacity with MDC at the time, I initiated MDC's involvement with the land acquisition. The influence of Kansas City leader Anita B. Gorman, who served on the Missouri Conservation Commission at that time, made the acquisition possible.

Subsequently, the MDC land has been made available to Parkville as lessee. The term of the renewable lease is ten years and the financial cost to the City is only its commitment to manage and use the land in partnership for the benefit of wildlife and the public. It remains the intention of both parties to renew the lease indefinitely. MDC has been a supportive and helpful partner to the Nature Sanctuary, lending expertise and help from the forestry and wildlife divisions of MDC when needed.

Park University, which once owned all of the 115 acres of land that now comprise the Nature Sanctuary holdings, sold the sixty-nine acres which was to become WACCA to MDC, at its appraised value.

Park University Maintenance Staff maintains the restrooms at the entry to the Nature Sanctuary. The restrooms were built by the City of Parkville under a cooperative agreement whereby Parkville agreed to build it for joint use for visitors to the University athletic fields and the Nature Sanctuary, and Park University agreed to maintain them. PNS has a good relationship with the staff at Park University.

Currently, Park University encourages Honors Students to complete their volunteer service at the Nature Sanctuary. They also use the trails for their cross country team practice.

Park Hill School District provides trail and program volunteers from high school honor societies, executive committees and senior community service projects and science classes. Several teachers bring their classes on field trips to PNS each school year.

About ten years ago, there was a preliminary attempt to work with Parkville Nature Sanctuary to make a plan for an educational interpretive center for the School District at PNS. Several meetings were held led by Bob Engledge, Park Hill School Board Member. Those plans were suspended due to concerns about operating costs. Neither the City nor the School District felt they could supply operating costs.

Kansas City Youth Volunteer Corps supplies PNS with more than eight-hundred hours of youth volunteer work each year to help wood chip trails, do other trail work and help with special events.

Regional Boy Scouts and Girl Scout Troops from local Churches organize service projects and volunteer work days to help the Nature Sanctuary. Eagle Scout Troops construct many of the Nature Sanctuary bridges and trails with youth and other volunteer labor. Scout contributions to maintaining the Sanctuary have been invaluable. More than a hundred Eagle Scout Projects have built and rebuilt most of the bridges and trail infrastructure at PNS. More than one-thousand hours of volunteer labor is donated by scout groups each year.

Area Businesses, provide many goods and services to help us with special events and maintenance needs: Farmland Industries, Grass Pad, L&R Farms of the Farmers Market, Urban Tree Specialists, Asplundh Tree Service, Sugar & Spice Catering, Parkville Coffee House, Caribou Coffee, ADH Rentals, PCR Rental, Beverly Lumber, and KCP&L.

Parkville Nature Sanctuary Board Finally and most importantly, we have a dedicated band of volunteers, which was led originally by Alderman Jack Friedman and former Director Jim Reed, and more recently both by Bob Fluchel and former Asst. Director Lewis Jonas. The late Alderman Dave McCoy was also a key member of the group. Former Alderman Scott McGruer also served as Liaison recently. Since 2011, Alderman Diane Driver serves Liaison currently on the Board of Aldermen. A list of current PNS Board members is included in the appendix.

Our Nature Sanctuary Board members conduct three special events each year: Ghost Stories, Nature Day Camp, and Trek with Santa. Ghost Stories and Nature Day Camp generate several thousand dollars in revenue. These activities, plus donations by individuals, by Turkey Run and other runs and memorials generate on the average $5,000 to $6,000 per year which is added to our Parkville Nature Sanctuary Fund. This donation fund, which we earmark for equipment, capital Improvements, and special needs, is occasionally tapped for purchases unanticipated in the City budget or that the City has been unable to afford to place in our annual budget.

It has been tradition that the Parkville Nature Sanctuary Volunteer Board makes decisions on how to spend the money in that fund. The current balance in that fund is roughly $45,000 dollars. It has been the practice of the PNS Board and the City over the years to keep $25,000 minimum in that fund should an emergency arise at the Nature Sanctuary that requires maintenance or capital expenditures, or in the event a major project or equipment need should arise unexpectedly.

We believe a volunteer PNS group has been and is the best resource to help the City to improve the Nature Sanctuary. Time has proven the effectiveness of this course. Parkville Nature Sanctuary's trails are recognized by many area hiking groups as among the best in the region, which is a tribute to volunteer effort and to all who have helped. We feel the community's enthusiasm for PNS every day.

A Crisis Presents Opportunities for Transition to the Future

It is often said that "meaningful change takes place in times of crisis." Last summer, the Parkville Nature Sanctuary reached a critical junction in its development. Director Jim Reed and Asst. Director Lewis Jonas needed to seriously scale back their commitment due to family and health concerns, and resigned their part-time positions. Longtime volunteer, Pat Harris, filled the Director role briefly, but found that the time-commitment was more than she anticipated and she chose not to continue. Many of us felt we had reached a crisis for PNS.

At that point, out of concern for the Nature Sanctuary's future, I offered my service as director once again, and resumed the part-time director position which I had held in 2010 and 2011. I wanted to do this and I hope and intend to provide leadership. I am also asking others to help me to recruit leaders to provide PNS leadership for the upcoming years. This is a challenging task.

Although our core group of volunteers remains active. However, our stalwart members are aging and we are much aware of the need to involve a younger people. We hope that we can find strong new leaders who will be future stewards of the Nature Sanctuary. We trust that we can encourage our successors to be as vested in this enterprise as is the older generation.

Our older leaders will be open to the new ideas that new leadership brings and will support the efforts of a new generation as they develop. I believe our PNS Board can do this, because we have faith in future generations and we recognize the limitations of what our older members are able to do. We are willing to change because our organization, does not want to slip backward.

We want to move forward with the goal of gradual, continued improvement. We want to accomplish this by continuing and expanding the tradition of strong volunteer and community involvement. We whole-heartedly believe this volunteer involvement brings enthusiasm to our cause as well as great returns on the City's financial investments. Volunteers help the City operate on a fraction of the operating budget that would be required without substantial volunteer involvement.

The Community's Need: Addressing a Growing Problem in the Lives of Children

The best-selling book entitled "Last Child in the Woods" by Richard Louv, details "the staggering divide" that now exists between children and the outdoors. Louv attributes the lack of outdoor exposure to nature in the lives of today's kids to some disturbing childhood trends, such as obesity, attention disorders, and depression. Louv has started a national movement which he calls "No Child Left Inside," to address the problem he has named "nature deficit disorder." He has started a national movement called: "No Child Left Indoors." We are doing something similar at PNS by getting kids outdoors.

There is no question that the majority of kids in our community are suffering from "nature deficit disorder." Can children be healthy without spending a couple of hours outdoors each day? With additional financial support for the Nature Sanctuary, from Friends of Parkville Nature Sanctuary, we hope to take more steps to address this problem.

Assuring a Conservation Consciousness in the Future

We might think of exposure to nature as the first essential step in teaching the young to practice conservation. Yet, there is another essential step in developing a conservation consciousness and that step depends on one person sharing values with others. Nature enthusiasts inspire an emotional bond with nature in others. This can be said about the staff and volunteers at the Nature Sanctuary. But in order to have a broader impact, we must reach many others and in a more organized way. We need to reach educators and youth leaders more effectively. Together, we can all instill and nurture a belief in conservation in our community.

Establishing a New Partner in a Public-Private Partnership: Forming a non-profit Corporation: Friends of Parkville Nature Sanctuary.

Although Parkville has an official population base of only 5,554 people, recreational users for its parks and nature sanctuary are disproportionately large, because they also come from many other neighboring communities on both sides of the Missouri River and beyond!

This can certainly be seen as a good thing in that it brings many visitors to Parkville and many of them frequent local shops and businesses. But it is a bad thing in that the tax base and financial resources available to manage its parks and nature sanctuary are disproportionately small compared to the number of visitors.

Although many improvements are being made in Parkville, tax funding for worthy projects such as the Nature Sanctuary has not been expanding. The City of Parkville has many urgent and important priorities. Although the City can provide a bare bones operating budget for the Nature Sanctuary, experience shows that it cannot adequately fund the staffing, equipment, capital improvement and educational program development that we would like to have in order to better serve our visitors.

We want to improve our facilities and programs significantly over the next several years. Our total budget needs to be more than what is now. It will take some time to accomplish this and there will be challenges ahead. But we would like to see continual improvement and it can be accomplished.

We propose supplementing, not replacing the budget that the City provides. City officials created the Parkville Nature Sanctuary. It is wholly owned or leased by the City. The City has a responsibility to it, and it has a responsibility to the City. Although the nature sanctuary is a relatively small operation that requires only a tiny percentage of the City's budget, PNS is as much a City facility, as are its roads, parks and administrative facilities. However, the Nature Sanctuary is different in that it has had the bonus of a dedicated volunteer support organization.

In the light of the City's financial situation, and its ongoing priorities, it seems likely that the City's financial support of the Nature Sanctuary will not expand significantly in the coming years. However, the PNS Board asks that the level of city funding and support for basic operating costs be considered favorably, and reasonably increased from year to year when budgets allow.

The proposed non-profit, Friends of Parkville Nature Sanctuary will raise additional funds for equipment, capital improvements and educational program needs. This will enable the additional projects that we would all like to see happen at the Nature Sanctuary----some of which are outlined below.

It is our belief that such a public-private partnership will strengthen Parkville Nature Sanctuary. In order to be as effective as it can be, that partnership necessitates the formation of a board of directors and non-profit corporation with 501(c)(3) tax exemption status.

A non-profit Board of Directors could also provide strong, vested and focused volunteer leadership for the future. It would engender formation of a friends-type membership structure, allow fund-raising events and encourage grant applications which have potential to yield more financial support. The board of Directors should be comprised of a diversity of people: civic leaders, people with expertise, and volunteers. It would be charged with putting the Nature Sanctuary on better financial footings.

I propose that the corporation be entitled Friends of Parkville Nature Sanctuary, and it be comprised of no more six to eight members to begin with and ultimately no more than than twenty-four members. By laws and incorporation papers would be drafted and submitted to the IRS by summer of 2014. Officers will be elected and an official Board of Directors could be in place by fall of 2014.

Is a non-profit Corporation necessary to support the Nature Sanctuary? Yes. It is possible that the Nature Sanctuary might continue to seek donations with the City as the recipient as in the past. But many donors do not like giving to governments, as they rightfully feel they have already given at the office, i.e. paid their taxes. Donors want to give to non-profits where the tax deduction is of clear benefit to them, and where they know their donations will not get side-tracked to what might be higher legislative priorities at any given time.

Asking for Help from True Believers in Conservation

There are many true believers in conservation of natural areas. Our Friends of Parkville Nature Sanctuary would like to actively solicit their help and contributions. We believe that conservation minded people will give money to us--- people who might not otherwise donate to parks. If we have the humility to ask for their help, and if we have a good plan for how we will use the money to improve the Nature Sanctuary. We believe we can have a successful non-profit corporation.

Friends of Parkville Nature Sanctuary could provide an active conduit to enlist the support of interested individuals, foundations, and government agencies. An on-going annual membership subscription base could provide more annual operating dollars to sustain a better operation. We share our vision of what a better operation would look like in the plan below.

A Plan for the Future

The following goals and objectives comprise the beginning of a five to ten year plan for PNS. It is important to receive input from as many stakeholders as possible before proceeding further with plans, but this preliminary outline for a plan serves as a springboard for further discussion. It also makes apparent the need for private funding in order to accomplish the many goals below*. Note: The goals are not listed in chronological order but are instead, listed with larger projects first:*

Goal 1. To improve the educational opportunities at the Nature Sanctuary

Objective A: Construct an Interpretive Center in the form of a three-season shelter at the entrance of Parkville Nature Sanctuary.

Historically, authorities in the conservation field have defined a "community nature center" as an institution comprised of three components:

1) A natural area with hiking trails

2) A staff comprised of professionals and volunteers from the community

3) An interpretive center with displays and exhibits.

We want to have a community nature center for Parkville. We already have the first two components in place. The next logical step to make our Nature Sanctuary more complete is to build the third: an interpretive center, with programs orientated toward families, scouts and other youth groups and school groups.

Keeping it simple and not over-building: We envision an innovative but somewhat modest structure that would in effect serve as a staging area or portal to the Nature Sanctuary. We picture a rustic-style, wood, three-season design with a large fireplace that would accommodate a group as large as fifty people. It would provide: an attractive focal point for the entrance: a gathering place to get in out of the rain and wind when necessary; a place to conduct orientation sessions; limited space for interpretive exhibits and displays; a facility to include secure, locked, storage cabinets for teaching aids and interpretive props.

The worst mistake that a nature center can make is to over-build its interpretive center---making it too big and expensive to operate and maintain. An overbuilt nature center also becomes so comfortable and accommodating that people soon become "building-bound"---something we do not want.

The interpretive visitor center we envision would not be any larger than it needs to be. We do not want what one might call a "museum in the woods" kind of nature center. It would be a different kind of interpretive center---rustic and simply constructed and using green design to the extent possible.

The proposed interpretive center would be an invitation to go outdoors and would open outward both physically and spiritually. It would, in effect be a three-season semi-enclosed shelter in a rustic and aesthetically pleasing design. It would be more than just a place to get in out of the rain and wind.

The interpretive visitor center serve as a staging area for families and school groups, emphasizing hands-on interaction with nature. The center would have implement-based family activity centers where families would check-out basic kits of equipment, e.g. Binoculars, bird and tree guides, insect nets, etc. It would be staffed mostly by volunteers.

It would be designed to accommodate a group of no more than fifty people (e.g. one school bus full and some additional volunteers, parents and teachers. It would have all-season restrooms. This would provide winter visitors with a much requested restroom, which is not now available at the Sanctuary in the winter time.

The proposed structure might be located at the main PNS entrance just north of the picnic tables and just northeast of the parking lot, it would back up to the unimproved 13th Street and front to the south where It would be integrated with the adjacent existing wooded picnic area. The potential building site is mowed lawn currently. No trees would need to be removed and no natural area disturbed.

The photographs that follow are Illustrations of existing facilities at regional sites which suggest certain features of the structures that we imagine for PNS. Although the structures may be different in scale from what might be appropriate for PNS, they may be helpful.

An example of a wood, three season, rustic interpretive center at Deanna Rose Children's Farm.

Imagine a similar structure at the entry of PNS with informative exhibits and displays of authentic natural objects and nature study tools to check-out.

Objective B: Expand and train a group of volunteer teacher-naturalists

We now have a group of general purpose volunteers who do many things. We need to recruit and train about a dozen volunteers to specialize in conducting guided hikes, educational programs and day camp activities. It may be advantageous to start a joint program with Park University to train students who want to learn interpretive skills. They could serve as interns at PNS, helping with programs.

Volunteer Dianne Kixmiller leads a group of Nature Day Campers.

Goal 2. To construct a "Children in the Woods" play area for young children.

The Center Shelter would open to the outdoors and extend activities into a woodland play and activity in area called "Children in the Woods." Here, kids would do what kids in by-gone eras once did in the woods: scramble through hollow logs, clamber over fallen trees, scramble on boulders, climb up into a tree house, hop build forts, cross a suspension bridge, and slide down slopes, run, jump and just play in the dirt without admonition. This area would be limited to about ½ acre or approximately 20.000 square feet. It would be located just across the gravel road east of the interpretive shelter.

A safe but fun wood suspension bridge would lead kids down from the road and into the wooded play The Children in the Woods Play Area would be carefully constructed among the trees. The target population will be pre-school and elementary school kids. This woodland play area would meet a critical need to get youngsters outdoors into a natural environment, not just to let them play, but also to give them a chance to imprint on nature. "Children in the Woods" play area is desirable because children five years old and younger are at a critical, formative learning period where being exposed to woods in an informal and fun way is very important.

We don't want the children of Parkville to be like the children described in the popular book "Last Child in the Woods." We want them to grow up from a very young age, learning through osmosis and loving to be outdoors enjoying nature. An interpretive center and woodland play area would spark curiosity and encourage interaction with nature in a generation of children that are missing out.

Examples of features that might be included “Children in the Woods” play area

Something as simple as a hollow log to crawl through, invites kids to pretend to be a fox, a bear cub, or a raccoon.

A suspended foot-bridge would descend from the road to the Children in the Woods play area.

Ours would be shorter and simpler than the one in this illustration.

Tree Stumps entice hop on and to count the rings to find trees ages like these at Burr Oak Woods Nature Center outdoor play area for preschoolers.

A tree house, but smaller and less elaborate than this one at the Missouri Botanical Gardens in St. Louis, would give kids a bird's eye view of the woods.

Goal 3. To improve interpretive aids and signage throughout the Sanctuary

Objective A. Update our trail map and add topographical features.

Objective B. Construct new entry signs on Highway 9 and new entry Kiosk(s).

Objective C. Install trail signs and wayside exhibits to interpret the natural and historical features at key locations.

> For example: Girl Scout Cabin, Park College Farm, waterfalls, Riss Lake, White Alloe Creek, Old Kate Trail, Woodard Hall Dormitory Ruins, etc.

Goal 4. To install basic utilities and permanent, secure storage to maintenance yard at Nature Sanctuary

Objective A . Make electricity and city water available to the site.

Objective B. Replace temporary wood storage sheds with permanent, secure maintenance building by having a PNS bay in proposed Parks Department building on 13th Street

Goal 5. Catch up on deferred maintenance of existing facilities

Objective A. Repair the Girl Scout Cabin Shelter---Improve drainage and resurface floor

Objective B. Repair the low-water bridge on the existing road through the Nature Sanctuary

Goal 6. Create links in the trail/road system at PNS that would enable seasonal guided hayrides and better handicapped access to the Sanctuary.

Objective A. Apply rock base and crushed limestone overlay to dirt road from Bluebird Trail (at Reagan's Bench) to Old Kate Trail at the West side of the base of Riss Lake Dam

Objective B. Improve grade at Northeast corner of Old Kate Trail

Objective C. Contract with a hayride wagon operator to provide tours

Objective D. Provide hayrides that interpret both history and natural history

Appendix 1. Mission Statements

Proposed Mission Statement Addition: Friends of Parkville Nature Sanctuary

To plan, raise funds for, and aid the City in implement improvements to Parkville Nature Sanctuary's facilities and educational programs.

Parkville Nature Sanctuary Volunteer Board

March 23, 2010

The existing mission of the Parkville Nature Sanctuary Volunteer Board is to:

1. Preserve the properties it manages in their natural state, including;

- Original Parkville Nature Sanctuary consisting of forty-six acres tract donated by the developers of Riss Lake subdivision.
- White Alloe Creek Conservation Area (WACCA) consisting of sixty-nine acres leased at no cost since1997 from the Mo. Dept. of Conservation.
- Sullivan Nature Sanctuary donated in 2009 in memory of Edgar and Ruth Sullivan and their twin daughters, Kathryn and Virginia.

2. Maintain its trail systems and other improvements, including the Jeanette Robbins "Girl Scout Cabin" pavilion.

3. Offer seasonal, family oriented, guided hikes for the recreational and educational benefit of the community.

4. Organize and present special events to familiarize the public with the Sanctuary and to raise funds to help cover the cost of maintenance and improvements.

5. Publicize its activities via free media outlets and web site.

Appendix 2 Active PNS Board Members

Angela Baker

Jeremy Barnes

Lee Burgess

Cody Croan

Diane Driver

Bruce Duffin

Trevor Eiken

Barbara Jaekel

Dean Jernigan

Pat Harris

Lewis Jonas

Don Kixmiller and Dianne Kixmiller

Amy Lang

Josh McGlaughlin

Jeanne Pyland

Jim Reed and Diane Reed

Marc Siebert and Ann Siebert

Donald Smith

Carolyn Tragasz

Colleen Cernich

Appendix 3

The Challenge of Managing a Nature Sanctuary in Modern Times

Managing a nature sanctuary has always involved building and maintaining hiking trails and bridges, erosion control, coordinating volunteers, caring for grounds equipment, enforcing rules, preventing illegal hunting and working with neighboring property owners. But in former days, with respect to managing natural resources, you could simply "let nature take its course."

Today, however, extensive and active resource management is required to maintain a nature sanctuary in good condition. Resource management is required to off-set the disruptive impact of modern human activities as well as to meet the higher expectations of the public. If you elect to let things "take their course" in a sanctuary today, the result would be a nature sanctuary of little value---run down trails, and a forest lacking diversity of wildlife and devoid of much of its natural beauty.

The biggest change has been caused by an invasion of aggressive exotic species of plants, animals, and pathogens brought about by humans moving everything from place to place about the planet. We need to do a more thorough job of keeping the invaders at bay. To do less, would allow natural forests, prairies, wetlands and streams to degenerate into tangles of brushy undergrowth, mounds of consuming vines and fields choked with weeds that have little or no value to our native wildlife.

This invasion of exotic species is happening in each of the natural ecosystems:

In forests: Aggressive vines, such as vine honeysuckle, euonymus winter-creeper, trumpet creeper, and others, climb up, mound over and kill trees; bush honeysuckle and multi-flora rose are taking over the understory. These create a dense-impenetrable brush that you cannot even see through. Garlic mustard, a super invasive ground cover, is crowding out our native woodland wildflowers. The emerald ash borer is wiping out all of our ash trees. In prairies, Johnson grass and *Serecia lespedeza*, a tough, rapidly spreading legume takes over and kills off native prairie grasses. In streams: If streams are not monitored and protected from pollution, toxic chemicals from the watershed can easily pollute the stream, making it uninhabitable by fish and other wildlife.

Moreover, knowledgeable professional, biologically oriented, resource managers, with training and experience, are needed to protect and to manage a nature sanctuary. We have done a reasonably good job of this at PNS because we have the experience, network of expertise and commitment to deal with the above problems. It is our hope that Parkville will continue to have an experienced natural resource manager as director in the future. Professional Park and Recreation managers have a different training and expertise than do conservation professionals, although it is equally important, it is a different field.