April 1, 2013

Members of Menasha Parks and Recreation Board

Friends,

I have been a frequent visitor to the Menasha Conservancy over the past few years, as a hiker, birdwatcher, and cross-country skier. I have come to love this small and unknown treasure of our City. While enjoying solitary walks, I often found myself noting s need for clearing some of the remaining evidence of the Conservancy's previous existence as a casual dump, and how I might help make that happen.

Last year, I mentioned it to fellow members of the Northeast Wisconsin Birding Club as a possible service project for members. Several immediately expressed interest in doing something for the Conservancy.

I discussed a project with Director Brian Tungate, who expressed interest. As I thought more about the Conservancy, I became increasingly aware of several issues:

1. The Conservancy is part of a larger wetland ecosystem stretching from Heckrodt Wetland Reserve through the Conservancy and along much of the North Shore area including privately and publicly owned properties, many "undevelopable" in conventional building terms – and some already developed, but incorporating ponds, wetlands and wooded areas.
2. The City has done some effective work to: remove substantial amounts of waste materials; cap some areas with clay; and create and maintain a system of trails in a portion of the property. The City has also provided a parking area, and during winter months groomed an excellent cross-country ski trail.
3. There are tentative plans for future construction of a portion of the Friendship Bike Trail across a portion of the wetland.
4. The presence of new residential developments to the east and north of the property demonstrate an interest in the land either as developable or simply as a value enhancer for the properties already developed.
5. The City has, to my knowledge, no published long-range plan or conceptual documentation for the Conservancy.

I began to widen the number of people and organizations who might be able to contribute expertise to resolve my questions. At this point, Joe Henry of the DNR, Tracey Koenig of Heckrodt, Steve Petznick of Mosquito Hill Nature Center (and President of the Northeast Wisconsin Birding Club), Denny Simon and Jim Klinkert of the Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust and several members of the NWBC have expressed interest in helping evaluate the site relative to flora and fauna – particularly bird life. Brian Tungate and Greg Keil have been kept informed and have contributed valuable information. We are considering widening the participation to other groups that might have an interest including the Winnebago County chapter of the National Audubon Society and the Wild Ones.

I am organizing a meeting and evaluative tour of the area for May 15. Our hope is that we can provide members of the Board with at least a rough preliminary evaluation of the property for flora and fauna preservation and enhancement. It is possible that there will be suggestions for further study.

It is my hope that any report and information from this effort will assist the Board in developing a mission statement and long range plans for our Conservancy. In the meanwhile, I am hoping that a small group of well-qualified avian experts will begin a survey of birdlife in the Conservancy. None of the above activities will incur any costs for the City. Besides providing information for the Board's own planning activities, any documentation generated could provide supporting evidence for future grant requests in support of potential habitat expansion or improvement projects which might be identified.

Thank you very much for your foresight in acquiring and caring for this valuable ecological resource. And thank you for any input and support you may provide.

Sincerely,

Jack E. Fry
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Menasha