

**ELLISON PARK AREA MASTER PLAN
(DRAFT)**

Presented on 2/26/09

**Public comments
(Community Groups/Municipal)**

2/26/09 – 3/16/09

- 1. ADK**
- 2. Town of Brighton**
- 3. G.R.O.C.**
- 4. ParksPreservation**
- 5. People For Parks**

The Genesee Valley Chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK-GVC) wishes to make the following comments concerning the latest draft of the master plans for the Ellison area County parks:

1. **Irondequoit Bay Park West.** In the input that ADK-GVC submitted last year with respect to the master plan updates, we referred to Irondequoit Bay Park West as one of the locations for the possible development of mountain biking trails. The other possible location that we mentioned was Tryon Park. It was our view that one of these locations would be suitable for off-road biking for a trial period, at the end of which consideration could be given to opening the other park to mountain biking as well, depending upon whether the initial trial was successful. We note, however, that the latest draft recommendations appear authorize mountain biking trails at *both* parks. There does not appear to be any trial period contemplated with respect to Bay Park West, or any planning stage. We feel this is unwise for a number of reasons:

- a. In our earlier input, we emphasized that mountain biking trails need to be properly designed and constructed. This takes planning, and is vital for Bay Park West. As the draft plan points out, Bay Park West contains some steep slopes, as well as considerable diversity in terms of forests and other vegetation (possibly including some rare or endangered plant species) and wildlife habitat. How will these features of the Park be impacted by off-road bicycle trails? Without proper planning, the county will not be able to answer this question or address any of the potential negative impacts.
- b. The draft master plan also acknowledges that there is limited access to Bay Park West at the present time. In view of this, how does the draft plan propose to deal with the increased demand for access that will result from opening the Park to mountain biking. How are the interests of residents in the vicinity of the Park going to be protected once the park becomes a popular destination for mountain bikers? The plan does not say.

Our recommendation: We propose that the County use the 18-month trial period that has been recommended with respect to off-road biking in Tryon Park to do the *initial planning* for a mountain biking trail system at Bay Park West, with no actual trail construction to begin at that park until the expiration of the 18 month trial period. During the 18 month trial period, those persons planning the Bay Park West trail system would design a trail that addresses the environmental issues referred to above to the fullest extent possible, and the County would use that period to address the park access issues. If the County determines at the conclusion of the 18 month Tryon Park trial period that that trial at Tryon was a success, then the County could take the next step of beginning work on the Bay Park West trail system. As our initial comments pointed out, off-road bicycle trails have to be properly designed. Due regard must be given to the nature of the terrain (e.g., potential erosion problems), biker safety, creation of an interesting

trail system for bicyclists, potential damage to valuable trees, etc. Such planning takes time.

2. **Tryon Park.** The draft master plan for Tryon Park states that “[t]he County should open natural surface trails in Tryon Park to off-road cycling.” This implies that the approach taken to Tryon will be to simply permit mountain biking on the existing foot trails. That almost guarantees that that Park will deteriorate. Look what has happened already. Persons unknown have gouged a large section of the land adjacent to one of the existing foot trails, and have built unauthorized bicycle jumps on the trail. Is this what we want to happen to the rest of the trail system in Tryon?

As we have pointed out above and in our earlier input, mountain biking trails need to be properly designed and built in order to address environmental and safety concerns. This means that certain parts of the existing trails in Tryon may need to be re-routed, widened, or stabilized. It may even be advisable to close certain segments of the existing trails and create others to replace them. As we understand the draft plan, a beginners mountain bike trail is going to be built somewhere in Tryon. We assume that proper trail construction standards will be followed for that trail. We think the master plan should require an equivalent level of design and construction for the other trails in Tryon that are going to be used for mountain biking.

Our recommendation: Re-write this portion of the recommendations to require that *any* trails that are opened in Tryon for off-road bicycling be properly designed and constructed, with due regard to legitimate environmental and safety concerns, and that they also be in compliance with accepted standards for mountain biking trails.

3. **Both parks.** Any mountain biking trails that are opened in Tryon Park or Bay Park West should be designed and developed *under the supervision of County officials*. (In addition, if some of the trails pass through property that lies within the Town of Brighton, development of such trails would require supervision by Brighton officials.) Under no circumstances should any off-road cycling club or other volunteers be permitted to design and build such trails on their own and without governmental supervision, regardless of such club’s’ or volunteer’s actual or purported level of expertise.

Let’s take our time and do the job right. Recently, a lack of governmental oversight in the Town of Penfield resulted in a group of volunteers (who apparently believed they had the Town’s permission) placing a trail at Sherwood Park in an area that infringed upon significant wildlife habitat. Moreover, it’s well known that several years ago, there was an unfortunate experience with a mountain biking experiment on the Crescent Trail in Fairport. It’s possible that rushing into the opening of mountain biking trails in Bay Park West and Tryon

could have severe negative impacts. Let's not take the chance of that happening in one of these County parks.

4. **The proposed bridge across the Irondequoit Creek narrows.** GVC-ADK commends EDR on moving the reference to a bridge across the Irondequoit Creek narrows from the master plan recommendations themselves to the part of the master plan Introduction describing various "parallel projects." We also commend EDR on its addition of language (a) referencing the Town of Brighton's legitimate role in determining the future of the bridge proposal, and (b) noting, along with the master plan goals that could be effectuated by such a bridge, that possible negative environmental impacts of a bridge may also have to be weighed at the appropriate time.

- c. **General recommendation.** ADK-GVC believes that the Parks Advisory Committee needs to take additional time to address the concerns that we have set forth above, as well as other concerns that may be raised by other members of the community. Accordingly, we recommend that the Committee *not* adopt the current version of the master plan updates at its March 2009 meeting, but that instead it should take one more month to allow sufficient time to deal with those concerns.

Respectfully submitted,

Genesee Valley Chapter, Adirondack Mountain Club

At a Town Board Meeting of the Town of Brighton, Monroe County, New York, held at the Brighton Town Hall, 2300 Elmwood Avenue, in said Town of Brighton on the 11th day of March 2009.

PRESENT:

SANDRA L. FRANKEL,
Supervisor

JAMES R. VOGEL
RAYMOND J. TIERNEY III
LOUISE NOVROS
SHEILA A. GADDIS

Councilpersons

RESOLVED, that correspondence dated February 27, 2009 from Lawrence A. Staub, Jr., Director, Monroe County Department of Parks, concerning the proposed Ellison Park Area Master Plan Update, be received and filed, together with draft comments to such proposed Master Plan; and be it further

RESOLVED, that Sherry S. Kraus is authorized to submit comments to Monroe County on behalf of the Town and the Town Board of the Town of Brighton, concerning the proposed Ellison Park Area Master Plan Update, in substantially the form attached to the above-referenced correspondence.

Dated: March 11, 2009

Sandra L. Frankel, Supervisor	Voting	_____
James R. Vogel, Councilman	Voting	_____
Raymond J. Tierney III, Councilman	Voting	_____
Louise Novros, Councilperson	Voting	_____
Sheila A. Gaddis, Councilperson	Voting	_____

The Town of Brighton makes the following comments concerning the latest draft of the Master Plans for the Ellison area County parks:

1. Impact on Town of Brighton by legalizing mountain biking in Tryon Park.

A. Mountain biking within the Town of Brighton. Under the Master Plan, mountain biking will become legal in Tryon Park if approved by the Monroe County Legislature. As part of that plan, mountain biking trails will be designed and developed. Since Brighton adjoins Tryon Park, such trails may abut, extend into or include county-owned lands that lie within the Town of Brighton. The Master Plan should expressly note that authorization of mountain biking through lands owned by the Town of Brighton will be subject to the future review and approval of the Town. Clearly, the county will have supervisory responsibility for any mountain biking trails that it builds, including any mountain biking trails built by the county on county land in county parks within the town of Brighton. The Master Plan should expressly state that the county will have such responsibility, including but not limited to public safety/emergency response calls by the Monroe County Sheriff's Department.

B. Landfill Operations. The Town of Brighton operates a landfill on its property adjoining Tryon Park. It is important that the planning and design of the mountain biking trails near the landfill be done to avoid and discourage bikers coming through the landfill, which poses a hazard to the biker and liability to the Town because of the type of work done and equipment used at the landfill. To minimize disturbance to Brighton's adjoining landfill operations and to reduce the potential for illegal/dangerous uses within its landfill, the Master Plan should expressly note that the Town of Brighton should be involved in the design and development of mountain biking trails that abut or fall within the Town of Brighton.

C. Proposed bridge across the Irondequoit Creek narrows. The reference to the building of a proposed bridge across the Irondequoit Creek narrows has been appropriately removed by EDR from the Master Plan recommendations to the part of the Master Plan

describing “parallel projects.” The Town of Brighton supports EDR’s addition of language (a) referencing the Town of Brighton’s legitimate role in determining the future of the bridge proposal, and (b) noting, along with the Master Plan goals that could be effectuated by such a bridge, that possible negative environmental impacts of a bridge may also have to be weighed at the appropriate time.

2. Situs of Dog Park.

The Town of Brighton, through its representative Sherry Kraus, participated in the study group that was formed in 2002 to implement the county legislation creating dog parks in the county park system. That study group was chaired by then County Parks Director Frank Allkofer and included legislator Ray Santirocco (the sponsor of the dog park legislation). The committee ranged in size from 15 to 21 members, most of whom were dog owners that used Ellison Park.

The Committee spent over 13 months reviewing sites at four county parks, including Ellison Park. Frank Allkofer and several members of the committee visited dog parks in other communities. All committee members participated in the evaluation process and a walk-through of the potential sites.

Because Ellison Park is the park most heavily used by dog owners, the situs of the dog park at that county park was studied with particular care and with an objective of “weaning” dog owners away from “doggy beach” (located at a bridge across Irondequoit Creek). At the end of the evaluation process, the 2002 study group recommended a site at Ellison Park known as the “Willow Grove” area located off of Blossom Road. The Town of Brighton supported the selection of this site.

The present draft Master Plan for Ellison Park situses the dog park in an area different from that recommended by the 2002 study group. The work underlying the 2002 Allkofer study group recommendation is not cited as a resource material reviewed by EDR in drafting the Master Plan. That study and its recommendations should be included as a reference in the Master Plan update document. At the recent request of Parks Advisory Group member, Sherry Kraus, materials from the 2002 study, along with the study group recommendation of the Willow Grove site, were provided to EDR with a request that EDR reconsider its suggested site.

The Town's concern is that the dog park site recommended in the draft Master Plan will not be used and thereby not accomplish the objective of encouraging people with dogs who wish to run freely to use the official dog park instead of the park at large. Here are comparisons of the two sites:

Use Attraction and Size:

The site now recommended in the draft Master Plan is much smaller (two acres) than the one at Willow Grove (5.9 acres) and is in greater proximity to other park visitors using the picnic and shelter areas. The greatest drawback is that it has no access to water, which means that park visitors with a dog that loves water (e.g., retrievers, spaniels and labs) will be less likely to use it and more likely to continue to violate leash laws, thereby continuing to put other park visitors at a safety risk. The question of whether the Willow Grove site posed environmental issues of degradation to Irondequoit Creek was raised in the 2002 study. Frank Allkofer asked Charles Knauf of the County Bureau of Environmental Quality to review the Willow Grove site for its environmental impact, particularly as to the potential for pollution of Irondequoit Creek downstream from runoff events that carry animal wastes from the park to the stream. Mr. Knauf responded as follows:

“If a dog park could be created in a way that encouraged and enforced feces cleanup, and with centralized waste collection to facilitate removal by parks staff, it could be better for water quality than current conditions at Ellison Park. Such an operation might provide a model that would be transferable to other parks in the County and to other municipalities. “

The 2002 study group, in recommending the Willow Grove site, expressly provided for the type of waste removal collections noted by Mr. Knauf to mitigate any issue of pollution to Irondequoit Creek.

Fencing:

Because the site proposed in the draft Master Plan must be fully enclosed, the cost of fencing will be substantially more than that projected for the Willow Grove site. The Willow Grove site is on an isolated peninsula of land with direct entry from a large parking lot. The presence of natural barriers, including the creek, minimize the amount of fencing needed to contain dogs within the dog park. The steepness of the opposite bank of the creek minimizes the risk that dogs playing in the water will cross to the other side and stray into other areas of the park. The 2002 study group recommended the placement of shorter, less expensive fencing and/or landscaping to discourage dogs from climbing the opposite side of the creek bank. Measures were also recommended by the 2002 study group to mitigate any erosion of the creek bank from dog use. To avoid a repeat of the costly restoration now needed for the embankment at the “doggy beach” site, the Willow Grove site should be designed with an appropriate water entrance that would avoid degradation of the embankment.

Aesthetic:

The site proposed in the draft Master Plan is a small beautiful natural area that will be lost to park users if developed into a dog park. The Willow Grove site is underused and conversion of the site to a dog park will not impact to any great extent on the aesthetics of the park.

Usability:

The Willow Grove site is wet in the central area during the wet seasons, but is usable during all seasons around the perimeter of the site. The 2002 study group noted these features and made recommendations for mitigation of this problem with fill materials. The site proposed in the draft Master Plan is less wet but is spongy during the wet seasons. Because the site is small, there is less surface area for users to avoid the spongy areas.

Constituency in support of Site:

The likelihood of usage of the new dog park is, in the Town’s view, the most important feature of the site. The Willow Grove site was chosen primarily for its access to water, its isolation from other park users and its direct entry from a large parking lot. Notwithstanding the fact that it could be wet in the central area during certain times of the

year, the 2002 study group members, most of whom used the park frequently with their dogs, were of the view that this site, above all others considered, had the greatest likelihood of attracting park visitors with dogs and, particularly, those users who had dogs that used “doggy beach”, a much overused area.

The dog park site proposed in the draft Master Plan has no similar constituency of Ellison Park users. It was one of seven sites (including the Willow Grove site) selected by EDR. To the extent there was any input from Ellison Park dog owners, such was minimal. The dog park committee that has carried on the efforts to create and fund the county dog parks in recent years has only three members. There is no member from the 2002 study group on this committee. Only one of the three members uses Ellison Park with any frequency. Since there is no demonstrated constituency of Ellison Park dog owners for the proposed site, the Town is concerned that the site recommended in the draft Master Plan will fail to attract dog users from the park at large as intended.

The Town recommends that the Master Plan be modified to situs the dog park at the Willow Grove area as recommended by the 2002 study group.

3. Continued closure of park road from North Landing Rd. entrance.

The Master Plan revisits the issue of whether to open up “Spruce Walk”, the interior park road descending from the North Landing Road entrance, passing by Fort Schuyler and extending to the bridge over Irondequoit Creek. This is one of the most popular and frequented pedestrian walkways in Ellison Park, particularly since it is one of the few areas that stays dry during all seasons of the year. The question of whether to open the road up to vehicular traffic was reviewed in depth and with great opposition in the 1985 master planning of the park. It was ultimately concluded that opening this road up to vehicular traffic (other than to park maintenance vehicles and for handicapped access) would severely detract from the enjoyment of the park for park users.

Prior to the placement of physical barriers at the North Landing Road entrance to this park road, there were occasions when vehicles would enter and be driven all the way to the bridge – scattering walkers, dogs, bikers and entire families with children in strollers in the process. In some instances, the vehicles would be driven at an unsafe speed down the road. There were also numerous occasions of mischief and park abuse with nighttime

drinking parties and bonfires along the road before the barriers made it difficult to have vehicular access.

This part of Ellison Park lies within the Town of Brighton. The Town does not favor opening the park road to vehicular traffic other than in the limited instances now allowed. Such a change would open up the park on the Brighton side to new and additional public safety issues, as well as possible increases in vandalism and destruction of park property.

4. Action by Parks Advisory Committee. At the last meeting, a stated goal was to have the Parks Advisory Committee come to a final vote and recommendation with respect to the Master Plan at its next meeting on March 19. In light of the long term importance of the Master Plan and the fact that this will be the first park Master Plan to receive legislative approval, we urge the Committee to err on the side of taking the additional time necessary to give due consideration to all of the comments received, including those from the Town of Brighton, even if such means that a final vote will not occur at its March 2009 meeting.



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GROC Executive Summary Regarding the Ellison Parks Master Plan:

After participating in the public input process regarding the Ellison Area Master Plan for over a year now, GROC wishes to formally thank the Monroe County Parks Department and Tom Robinson (EDR) for carefully considering the many issues and concerns brought up by park patrons and creating a draft plan that is thoughtful, fair, and inclusive. We as an organization wholeheartedly support the current version of the draft master plan and feel that it will meet the current and future needs of the public. To this end we respectfully request that you take into consideration the hundreds of emails recently sent in support of the current plan as well as a petition collected by Brighton High School Students with over 300 park users who strongly support the draft plan. These letters and signature come from real people who care enough to voice their opinions, not from a theoretical "silent majority".

We feel that the public input process that has occurred up until this time has allowed more than ample opportunities for all interested parties to give input, voice concerns, give suggestions, and participate in the formulation of this new draft. Since the current draft policy reflects the input already received from the public, GROC feels that any postponement of a vote on the draft plan at this time would be redundant and unnecessary. Enclosed with this executive summary please find our official position paper concerning off road cycling and shared-use trails in Monroe County Parks.

This document provides:

1. Information regarding our mission.
2. Accurate demographic data as it pertains to our active membership and our successful projects locally.
3. The FACTS about off road cycling and shared-use trails including:
 - o Safety (Data from the town of Victor pertaining to injuries in public parks with shared-use trails).
 - o Environmental impacts (Data from the National Parks Service and peer reviewed scientific literature).
 - o Health benefits (Data from the World Health Organization and Rochester Health Foundation).
 - o Growing popularity (Data from the Outdoor Industry Research Association).
 - o Successful models of co-existence with other trail users in local area parks.

All data provided in this document is supported by referenced documentation submitted for the public record during the public input process.

GROC is extremely excited about the prospect of shared-use trails in Monroe County parks and would consider it an honor and a privilege to become stewards of Tryon Park and Bay Park West.

Sincerely:

GROC Advocacy Committee

Louis Eichel, M.D.

Jonathan Brown, VP GROC

Rick Williams Chair GROC advocacy Committee



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**Genesee Regional Off-Road Cyclist
Position on Off-Road Cycling in Monroe County Parks**

GROC Board of Directors and Advocacy Committee October 29, 2008



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Over View

GROC is advocating an inclusive shared-use* policy in our parks that accommodates all human powered user groups. GROC believes that the current Monroe County law banning off-road cycling in all their parks, except for those that are deemed multi-use trail* does not accommodate the population of Monroe county user groups including off-road cycling.

- Cycling and Off-Road cycling is a diverse activity, from road, mountain biking, canal path, hybrid, club, families, kids, adults, elderly, racing, training and is also accessible to the general public.
- It spans all levels of abilities from the novice to the advanced and it is a good FUN experience that can be enjoyed at any stage in life and promotes a healthy lifestyle.

Healthy lifestyles = a better community

Off-Road/Mountain biking has become popular around the world, and most land managers and trail-user groups have come to acknowledge the legitimacy of responsible bicycling on public lands.

Acceptance of Off-Road/Mountain biking by ADK and Sierra Club in partnership with IMBA (International Mountain Biking Association) is well documented and both organizations have guidelines and material jointly created through this partnership. It is unfortunate that our local chapters of ADK and Sierra Club conservation chair and leadership are not mountain bike friendly or educated regarding this activity. The mountain bike community has been pushed out of our public lands based on the misconception of these local organizations. Because it has been illegal, criminalized and excluded from Monroe County Parks system these partnerships with the Off-Road cycling community have not been able to be established and flourish in our parks and community overall.

- Safety - Is one of the common issues raised to position mountain biking as an unsafe activity around other user groups. The examples of shared-user trails that are single track in nature are well documented around our country and locally. There are 130,000 miles of multi-use national forest trails that exist in the US, and locally the Finger Lakes Trail, Ontario County Park, Dryer Road, Whitney Road Conservatory are a few examples. To our knowledge NO documented cases of bike and hiker incidents on trails are on record.
- Environmental Impact – Our organization is extremely environmentally conscious and as an IMBA affiliated club we understand the importance of building and maintaining sustainable trail systems. We understand that not all trails can be built to sustain mountain biking and in some cases hiking. The scientific data that is available on this subject is very clear: bikes do not create any more damage than hiking based on proper trail design and the right geological conditions.
- Nature Experience – Mountain Bikers are looking for the natural experience as much as any other user group. The mountain bike allows a rider to enjoy larger areas and deeper into the



wilderness than can be done while hiking. Our love of these parklands and the ability to enjoy the natural surroundings is a very important part of the mountain biking experience.

- True Costs – Costs of creating single track trails for hiking and off-road cycling are minimal to the land managers and county. Dryer Road Parks trail system was developed solely by volunteers and required no capital expense by the town of Victor. This has been the case for Ontario County Park and many others, including trails maintained by other local organizations.

GROC understands that our parks need volunteers and future stewards of these resources in order to be maintained at a level we can be proud of. GROC understands that the moneys available to the parks department in today’s economy are shrinking. We believe that an inclusive parks policy will create a whole new group of volunteers and potential stewards of our parks.

Off-road cycling: The facts

Who are off-road cyclists?

Outdoor Industry Foundation (OIF) created The Next Generation of Outdoor Participants to gauge and understand the outdoor recreation participant in order to inspire and grow future generations of outdoor enthusiasts. This report looks at participation of users based on activities from 2005 to 2006.

- Cycling including all types is **78 million**
- Mountain biking is **50 Million**
- Hiking Population nationally is **76 Million** (Note: mountain biking crossover percentage to hiking is **58%**)

Demographics:

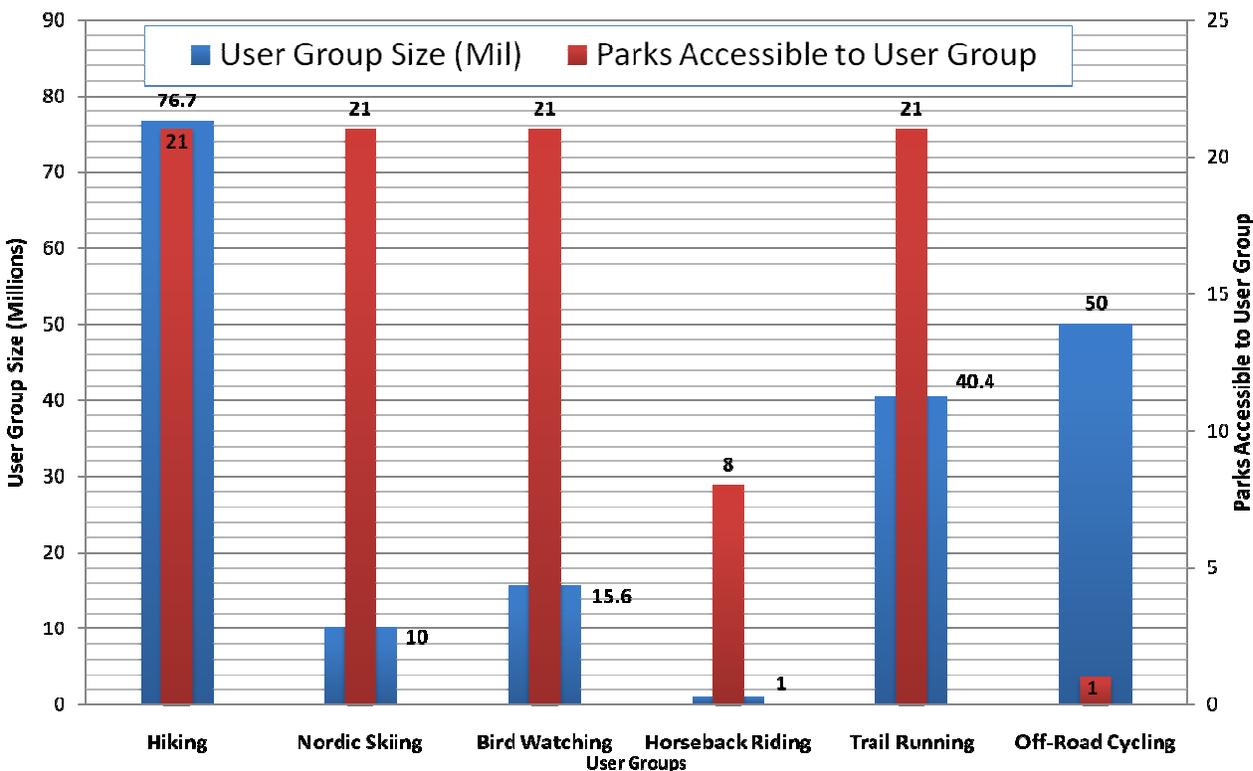
When we review who the users within our county are we need to look at our youth and the growing epidemic of childhood obesity. The ability for younger community members to participate in sports that are not team based activities is critical to this generation’s health. Our parks have the ability to provide all kinds of healthy outdoor activities from biking, hiking, paddling, and other lifelong activities. These activities are a key to solving this serious health issue. More importantly is the fact that Monroe County has 21 parks that are dispersed within the county including the more dense urban areas. This makes them easily accessible by large numbers of users within biking or hiking distance.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE TRENDS

Outdoor Industries 2005		GROC Survey 2008	
16 to 24	36%	17 an under	4%
25 to 34	21%	18-24	10%
35 to 44	21%	25-34	33%
45+	22%	35-44	34%
		45-54	15%
		50+	4%



Monroe County Park Access by User Group



Based on the size of the off-road cycling group nationally (50Mil) and the participation within GROC membership (700+) we believe that the current parks laws do not represent the Monroe Community.

There are more mountain bikers in the United States than golfers. In fact, there are 1 1/2 times more; 50 million bikers to 29 million golfers.

GROC Local Participation

GROC has been working with local area land managers to build and maintain trails that sustain shared-use. GROC had over 150 individual volunteers log over 1,500, hours in 2007 and 2000 hours in 2008.

Our Current projects include: **3,000 hours of volunteer trail work 2007-2008**

- **Dryer Road Park** – Victor, NY: 135 acres with 15 miles of trails open for the last 5 years
- **Sherwood Property** – Penfield, NY: 85 acre plot recently acquired by the town of Penfield designed for shared-use



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- **Ontario County Park** - South Bristol, NY: 100 acres? Currently building miles of new trails in coordination with OCP parks department.
- **Finger lakes Trail** -

These projects locally have shown that shared-use trails are a viable and that there is a large demand for increasing the number of parks available to the off-road cycling community.

Trail Management and Sustainability

GROC supports the science of sustainable trail management practices using the IMBA guidelines*. Although all the various local environmental groups differ on their opinion of trail damage caused by off-road cycling, GROC believes in the science and the examples in our local community and the United States.

Trail Damage is most often found when trails are not designed to work with the geologic and environmental conditions

- Poorly designed trails will cause erosion, and damage to surrounding environments
- Proper monitoring and maintenance of trail systems is a key to sustainable trail systems

“The existing body of research does not support the prohibition or restriction of mountain biking from a resource or environmental protection perspective. Existing impacts, which may be in evidence on many trails used by mountain bikers, are likely associated for the most part with poor trail designs or insufficient maintenance.” - *Environmental Impacts of Mountain Biking: Science Review and Best Practices* by Jeff Marion and Jeremy Wimpey

Shared-use trails can work

There are thousands of trail systems around this country that share use with many users groups

- Dryer Road Park is a phenomenally successful example in our area
- FLT (Finger Lakes Trails System) over 8 years of coexistence with many trail user groups
- 130,000 miles of multi-use national forest trails exist in the US

Off-Road Cycling Safety and Liability

The most common argument of the local trail groups are the liabilities and risks for hikers when user groups share trails. There are thousands of examples around the US demonstrating successful shared-use trails, several of these within our own local area.

Successful shared-use trail systems require:



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Trail Design that reflects the needs of the intended user groups.

1. **Blind Spots:** When you have multiple users on a trail system, blind spots around corners or on grades where a bike can have increased speed need to be addressed. Conflicts most often occur when users can not properly see what is in front of them.
2. **Controlling Speed:** Conflicts can also occur when riders gain speed on trails. Trail design needs to accommodate this increased speed or if not possible, to create a safe speed zone, create obstacles or features to decrease speed.
3. **Education:** Trail etiquette is the most important factor in creating a positive experience for all trail users. All riders need to know the rules on shared-use trails; bikers yield to hikers and should always make a hiker aware that they are approaching. The same rules for a multi-use paved path apply to single track trails. It also important for hikers to understand and accept other trail users.
4. **Trail Marking:** Mark trails clearly according to ODF Sign Design Manual. Trailhead signs alert visitors to technical challenges. Creating a safe experience for all levels of riders is an important part of a positive experience.

"Historically speaking, our records indicate that in the past four years since we opened Dryer Road Park to mountain biking, there are far more documented accident reports related to youth sports activities than those associated with mountain biking."

"As a parks and recreation professional with over twenty-five years of experience in the field, I can say with confidence that the sport of mountain biking is a legitimate recreational activity pursued by individuals who are often found to be the best stewards of our public lands."

"Mountain biking has brought not only honor and notoriety to the Town of Victor, but it has also benefited our local businesses by increasing the amount of tourist traffic to our retail shops, restaurants, and hotels."

Brian C. Emelson, CPRP
Director of Parks and Recreation

Conclusion

Off-Road cycling is a legitimate, safe, environmentally sound activity and the facts speak for themselves. There are 21 parks in Monroe County. GROC and the community should embrace shared –use trail policies within the parks. GROC as a member of IMBA (International Mountain Biking Organization) represents the off-road cyclist in our local community but we are not the only organization or group in the New York State area. Off-road cycling is a viable organized recreational sport and it is time that Monroe County park laws reflect all user groups and their needs.

GROC is very much in support of the proposed Ellison Park Master Plan as it stands as of 03/15/2009



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The proposal currently in draft has off-road cycling designated for two park areas: Tryon Park (83 acres) and West Bay out of the 1,139 acres encompassed in this plan. This plan also suggest a trial period of 18 months in order to determine the viability of off-road cycling as a part of the Parks allowed uses.

GROC and its members have participated in the public input process and are supportive of the current plan that was presented on 02/19/2009. GROC and its members are excited to work with the Monroe County Parks Department to bring off-road cycling into the Monroe County parks system as an accepted and encouraged activity.



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Resources

Shared-use*- The sharing of trails by many users groups including, Hiking, Biking, Snow Shoe, and XC Skiing, etc.

Multi-Use*- multi-use defined as paths that meet state and federal guidelines, 8 to 10 foot wide paths through wooded areas with some kind of surface treatment

IMBA guidelines*- International Mountain Bike Club provides GROC with international approved trail building guidelines and techniques. Information on these accepted trail management practices can be found at www.IMBA.com

- **Studies:**
 - [Environmental Impacts of Mountain biking: Science Review and Best Practices](#) (or [PDF version](#)) -- 2007. By Jeff Marion and Jeremy Wimpey. Originally published in the book [Managing Mountain biking](#), this article provides an extensive review of scientific studies and best practices.
 - [A Comparative Study of Impacts to Mountain Bike Trails in Five Common Ecological Regions of the Southwestern U.S.](#) (PDF file) -- 2006. D. White et. al., Journal of Park and Recreation Administration (Volume 24, Number 12)
 - [Natural Resource Impacts of Mountain biking](#) or ([PDF version](#)) -- 2004. By Gary Sprung. Originally published in the book [Trail Solutions](#), this article provides a summary of scientific studies that compare mountain biking to other forms of trail travel.
 - [Planning and Managing Environmentally Friendly Mountain Bike Trails](#) (7.5MB PDF file) -- 2006. A 60-page guidebook by Shimano, Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, U.S. Bureau of Land Management.
 - [The Economics and Benefits of Mountain biking](#) (2 MG PDF) --2008. Commissioned in 2008 by Shimano. A limited number of print copies are available; \$1 shipping fee for domestic orders, more for international orders.
- National Parks work with IMBA
 - <http://www.dirtragemag.com/print/article.php?ID=1186&category=departments>

March 13, 2009

Hon. Maggie Brooks, County Executive
Monroe County Office Building
39 West Main Street
Rochester, New York 14614

RE: Ellison Park Area Master Plan Update

Dear County Executive:

The thirteen undersigned organizations find the draft Master Plan for parkland around Irondequoit Bay to be unacceptable. The proposed Master Plan does not represent the interests of the residents and park users of Monroe County, but instead, the interests of a small, vocal user group. It does not meet its stated goals of conservation and sustainability. In short: mountain biking does not belong on existing, often narrow and winding, park trails.

Please consider:

- A ban on off-road bicycles was written into our park code for good reasons that remain valid today. It was based on concerns for the safety of the public, and the care of our environment. Political winds should not compromise proper park stewardship.
- Safety is a major concern. Trail walkers must not be placed in harm's way by cyclists traveling on the same narrow dirt trail. The experience of walkers is greatly diminished if they must be looking over their shoulders for oncoming cyclists. "Shared use" is a myth on existing, narrow park trails.
- Numerous public statements have been made, and letters written, both from individuals and prominent environmental organizations, that express serious concerns about opening our parks to cyclists. The draft Master Plan ignores these concerns.
- The Master Plan states, "public comment indicated that this [shared use trails in Tryon Park] is something that is highly desired by the community." This is a misrepresentation of the public comments. The comments of members of the undersigned organizations, representing some 6000 citizens, indicate a lack of support for shared use on existing park trails. A single, small special interest group of mountain bikers does not represent the community, or most park users.
- There were major, unacceptable changes introduced in the Master Plan presented to the Parks Advisory Committee (PAC) in February 2009, despite representations by the Parks Director and Consultant at the January 2009 PAC meeting that there would be no substantial change to the preliminary recommendations.
- These major changes included the use of existing trails in Tryon rather than carefully designed sustainable trails, the addition of a second park (Bay Park West) for mountain biking, and proposed shared use trail loops in the Ellison Wetlands.
- We are concerned about environmental impacts caused by cycling on steep, erodible trails. Simply allowing use on existing trails without considering impacts is not good stewardship.

- With the many miles of recently constructed multi-use trails (Genesee Riverway, Genesee Valley Greenway, Lehigh Valley, etc) there are ample bike paths in the county to help cyclists stay healthy. The county park trails are a unique domain without faster traffic where walkers can safely do the same. To claim that mountain biking on park trails is necessary to stem the epidemic of childhood obesity is to distort the facts.

All the above concerns cause us to ask: Is there an unstated agenda to open all trails for shared use in the Ellison Park Complex? Will Ellison Park Complex be the first falling domino in the county park system, as we open each park to off-road cycling? That is the stated goal of the mountain biking organization. This is a cause for alarm for all park users, for all of us who cherish our parks as one of our County's greatest resources, and pay for them with our taxes.

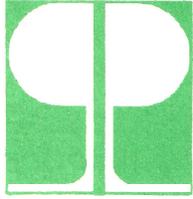
Finally, the master planning process has not been inclusive. We recommend that a citizen participation group comprised of diverse representative user group organizations work with the consultant and Parks officials in order to contribute ideas and review and discuss each successive draft in the process.

We urge our County Executive and our Legislators to continue to be proper park stewards and to resist the political pressures so that we, our children and grandchildren will be able to have access to safe, environmentally sound, park trails. We urge you to reject this draft Master Plan at this time – there are too many important issues that must first be addressed.

Respectfully submitted,

Burroughs Audubon Nature Club
Center for Sustainable Living
Federation of Monroe County Environmentalists
Genesee Valley Audubon Society
Genesee Valley Hiking Club
Living in Harmony
People for Parks
Rochester Area Mycological Association
Rochester Birding Association
Rochester Butterfly Club
Sierra Club, Rochester Regional Group
The League of Women Voters, Rochester Metropolitan Area
Wednesday Hikers

cc. Larry Staub, Director, Monroe County Parks Department
Tom Robinson, Consultant, EDR
Monroe County Legislators



MONROE COUNTY PEOPLE FOR PARKS, INC.

March 17, 2009

Hon. Maggie Brooks
Monroe County Office Building
39 West Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609

RE: Ellison Park Master Plan Update

Dear Ms. Brooks:

The Board of Directors of Monroe County People for Parks, Inc has reviewed the Ellison Park Master Plan Update draft document, which will be submitted to you upon recommendation of the Parks Advisory Committee. The following is a comprehensive critique of this document, which we feel is not ready for adoption by the County Legislature.

The proposed document, as with all master plans, contains a comprehensive inventory of the existing conditions of Ellison Park proper, Bay Park East, Bay Park West, the Wetlands, Devils Cove, and Tryon Park. With the exception of Ellison Park proper, which is extensively developed and used for active recreation, and group and family picnicking, the other areas are predominantly natural sloping woody terrains, which have never been considered appropriate for heavy use due to their fragile soil composition and their high value as remnants of old growth forests, ecological wetland resources, and supremely scenic overlooks to the bay. These qualities have traditionally set them aside for preservation, and only suitable for passive recreation such as hiking and as access areas to Irondequoit Creek and Bay for paddling opportunities.

The master plan consultant from EDR laid out seven key objectives that they, on behalf of the county, were requesting that the public center their comments around relative to plans for Ellison Park. Four of these – “Access and Community Connectivity, Green Infrastructure, Waterfront Use and Access, Sustainability” – address universal community goals and are relevant to all public parks, especially with waterfront acreage, and specifically to Ellison Park. However, three – “Healthy Living to Address Preventable Health Problems, Shared Use of Trails, and Dog Parks” – are reaching for a specific user group(s). Indeed, the healthy living and shared use issues appear contrived to solicit support for opening Monroe County parks to off road cyclists, something expressly ruled out in current park laws and policy up to this date.

Plan recommendations which we support include:

Paddler Access. The current master plan update, like the original master plan, recommends improvements in the various areas of the complex that create boat launches/landing areas for paddlers and give improved parking access. We agree that these improvements are needed and address the goals of

access and community connectivity, as well as waterfront use; and at the same time create the opportunity for the public to enjoy nature and engage in healthy exercise, while respecting the environment.

Sustainable Trail Practices. These have been recommended throughout the parks and are a supportable goal, provided quality signage is also installed. However, the signage recommendations in the plan document are somewhat vague. There should be signs that include instructions to users as to user group access or prohibition, proper trail conduct according to park law or weather conditions, and delineation of park boundaries and private property. The county must assist the public toward good conduct in the parks with instructive or educational signage that is well designed so as not to detract from the beauty of the natural elements of the park.

The facility maintenance and repair recommendations are also called for, and welcome additions to the plan. The perennial flooding in Ellison Park is hard on the infrastructure and many of the shelters have fallen into disrepair through the years.

Dog Parks. The development of dog parks in Monroe County parks has been on the public agenda since January 2002 when Ray Santirocco and Karla Boice put forth a referral to establish them in answer to the concerns of both dog owners who would like to be able to lawfully exercise their dogs off leash in open areas, as well as park users who have safety issues and who object to encounters with dogs running free. People for Parks had a representative on the original citizen committee that began meeting with Frank Allkofer in July 2002.

Ellison Park has long been considered the county's defacto dog park, as the area known as "dog beach" along the creek near the bridge near the sand hill has been a destination spot for dog walkers from everywhere in the county. The original committee was comprised of many of those same users, and had the objective of finding a suitable location that would have enough appeal to draw away the illicit use of the "dog beach" area. The dog beach area was never considered suitable as it was at an intersection frequented by many park users, which would be difficult and unaesthetic to fence off. The master plan concurs that any proposed area for a dog park "should not conflict or displace established park uses". Yet the area chosen out of seven potential recommendations is sited in a busy area and shares existing parking with, Hazelwood Lodge, Old Meadow Shelter, and a ball field. A dog park in this pleasant shady grassy two-acre area, where individual picnickers can be found in the summer months using the scattered picnic tables, will become an unaesthetic and unwelcome neighbor to the users of these facilities. Further, it will not achieve the desired affect of attracting the illegal off leash activity because it lacks the water access so desired by many of the dog park prospective users.

The original site (proposal #1 in the draft plan) identified by the dog park committee is isolated from all other areas of Ellison Park, borders on the creek, and has an existing large and unused parking lot adjacent to it on Blossom Road. The dogs and other park users would be totally segregated. We understand that the county is concerned that the creek as a natural barrier on three sides is not sufficient, and that the center of this area has standing water in spring. These are not insurmountable conditions. If erecting a fence around the area would cut off access to the creek, the area is large enough to create a water feature in the wet center for the dogs to enjoy. The extra cost of more fencing needed to enclose the larger acreage is something the county must accept if a successful dog park is the goal.

Recommendations that we feel do not address the public interest for reasons of safety, environmental stewardship, or esthetics include:

Opening the Road In Ellison Park Proper. The Landing Road entrance to Ellison Park has been closed to vehicular traffic since the 1960's, and the regular users of the park like it that way. There are no facilities, no shelters, playgrounds, picnic areas or benches on this side of the park that require automobiles to have access. The drainage system has been silted up and is non-existent. The flat areas along the creek are flooded in spring and remain water logged throughout the year. The former rose

garden was discontinued decades ago and a disk golf receptacle has further insulted the romantic stonework of its ruins. The walkers, cyclists, and families with strollers do not complain of this benign neglect because they enjoy the use of the park road without fear of on coming cars, and it is the only dry and paved ground available for these uses year round in Ellison Park. To open this road to cars would be to invite unwanted idler traffic that would introduce noise pollution, vandalism and criminal activity to this area that is so well loved by pedestrians and cyclists that are unable to hike or bike on dirt trails in wild areas, and prefer to use open, civilized park spaces. The area is wheel chair handicapped accessible, and the sheriffs, park guards and emergency vehicles have never had difficulty gaining access to this side of the park. What is needed in this area are park benches at appropriate locations, such as the grassy overlook area across the road from the former rose garden, and also, along the creek path.

Additionally, we are concerned that the county slipped this recommendation into the plan at the final hour, and left mention of this major change out of the overview that was given to the PAC and the public on February 26th. Where is the openness with the public so ardently proclaimed in the plan document?

Tryon Park Shared Trail Use. This organization, by letter dated September 25, 2008, acknowledged that there has been political pressure placed on the county to open dirt trails to off road cyclists and we recommended Tryon Park as a potential candidate for this use. Our understanding from the preliminary recommendations on the table for the Ellison Park Master Plan Update up to February 26th was that in all cases “sustainable” trails would be developed to mitigate the adverse environmental impacts known to be associated with wide, deep tread dirt bike tires. Also, all incarnations of the draft master plan contained the provision that mountain bikes would be allowed in Tryon Park on a 36-month trial basis during which time monitoring and evaluation would take place. At the February 26th PAC meeting presentation of the final draft it was announced that the trial period would be shortened to 18 months, and that existing foot paths would be opened for mountain bike and hiker sharing.

We, in unison with other hiking and environmental groups, feel the safety of pedestrians is severely compromised if mountain bikes traveling at greater speed on unpaved single lane trails are allowed to share the same trails. At the very least, their enjoyment at looking around the natural environment to identify birds, wild flowers, butterflies or trees will be greatly diminished if they must instead keep one eye peeled for on-coming bicycles; as will the cyclists’ fun and safety be compromised if they must worry about stopping for, or running into, slow moving walkers. Shared use, as a concept, has no long-term documented success, whereas multi-use trails have been accepted by planning professionals. However, multi-use trails have safety specifications for adequate width (8-10 feet) and are usually paved to ensure safety. Such trails exist for cyclists elsewhere in Monroe County. The old road bed in Tryon Park is the only surface suitable for multi-use. Pedestrian trails and bike trails that are single lane must be separated and designated.

We could support a shortened trial period providing it begins in spring of one year and ends in the fall of the following year, thus allowing monitoring over two seasons of use. The plan document is lacking in that it does not set out methods for monitoring impact or parameters for evaluation of data.

Opening Shared Use Trails in Bay Park West and Other Areas to Off Road Cyclists. We repeat that the concept of shared single lane dirt trails is untenable due to safety concerns. We continue to maintain that it is not environmentally responsible to cut any switch back trails for mountain bikes into the hillsides of highly erosive soils in Bay Park West, Bay Park East, Ellison Park, or the Wetlands/Riffle Range area. The level of mitigation that would be required to prevent the soil sliding that such a disturbance would unleash would be more costly than the county could afford. The loss of natural vegetation in these scenic areas would be a tragedy for future generations. We have been so fortunate to date so have a bay beautifully surrounded and protected by these wooded hillsides due to the current passive use of these set aside areas.

Another highly alarming and late-breaking addition to the list of recommendations in this master plan version, despite verbal assurances from Larry Staub to the contrary, is a reference to proposed shared use trail development in the Wetlands as stated on page 45, number “2. Browncroft Boulevard Access Parking”. At this point we must now question every mention of trails and trail work contained in this document with the suspicion that there is an agenda to open all trails for shared use in the Ellison Park Complex; and that this park, which is the first Monroe County park, will ironically be the first falling domino in the county park system for opening all trails in parks to mountain bikes.

Finally, we take exception to any implications that the solution to childhood obesity rests in providing off road cycling opportunities on narrow foot paths, or that such an activity is environmentally neutral. This discounts the multifaceted and aerobic benefits of walking and hiking which are considered the most healthful and safe form of exercise apart from swimming that any person of any age and economic standing can engage in, that does not require costly equipment.

The Ellison Park Complex is a valuable resource to the community that is often under appreciated. It provides many active and passive recreation opportunities, picnic facilities, and areas of scenic beauty. It also serves as an environmental preserve of the Irondequoit Creek Watershed and Irondequoit Bay, filtering out the non-point source pollutants from development and farmland runoff up stream. In short, it is our county’s work-horse park. We must refrain from over loading it with every special interest demand. We must sincerely adhere to the stated goal of maintaining environmental stewardship and a sustainable balance of recreational uses.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns.

Sincerely,

Cassandra Petsos, President
On Behalf of The Board of Directors of
Monroe County People for Parks.
175 Browncroft Boulevard
Rochester, New York 14609

c: Larry Staub, Parks Department
Tom Robinson, EDR
Mary Valerio, Recreation and Education Committee
Ken Zellar, Parks Advisory Committee