

## **A possible MCPAC recommendation regarding the sale of O'Donnell Park lands.**

Cheri Briscoe

The City of Milwaukee turned over Juneau Park in 1937 as part of a merger of City, Suburban, and County Parks to Milwaukee County to be managed only as a park.

Milwaukee County has a history of not selling park properties, except in rare instances where the land has no value to the public due to its small size or inaccessibility for public use, which qualifies it as "excess property." O'Donnell park is 6.1 acres and is accessible to the public. That disqualifies it as "excess property." Its poorly planned design is unfortunate.

In 1997 Northwestern Mutual did buy parkland (about 0.7 acres) on the southeastern corner of their property. (It was once part of Juneau Park.) The land had been maintained by NM for many years. It had bushes next to it that deterred the public from using it. It was determined to be "excess property." It is part of the new public open space plan that will be created when NM's new tower is completed. For more information see: [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1997-09-21/business/9709210059\\_1\\_land-war-memorial-center-shrubs](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1997-09-21/business/9709210059_1_land-war-memorial-center-shrubs)

The Long Range Lakefront Planning Committee presented a plan that was adopted by the County Board in 2011. On page 14 of its executive report, in Section 1.5 O'Donnell Park, the Committee recommends that "O'Donnell Park retain its current function in the short-term with openness for redevelopment if desired in connection with the Transit Center." Further, it states, "Redevelopment also needs to be in compliance with lakebed grant policies, as a small portion of the parking structure is located on lakebed. Future changes would also have to comply with the terms of a Waterfront Parks Aids grant program, which helped fund the construction of the terrace and pedestrian bridge." (The Parks Advisory Commission recognizes that newer, 1913, Landtrust Lakebed lines have recently been declared by the Wisconsin Legislature.)

On page 15 of the Section 1.5 of those recommendations, it states, "The redeveloped area should have at least as much parkland as what currently exists, and could be part of a comprehensive parks and public spaces plan for the area."

Milwaukee and other communities, such as New York City with its High Line Park, have enjoyed much success in leasing parks or sections of parks to nonprofit entities for management to decrease the tax burden of maintaining the properties. Millennium Park in Chicago is a publicly owned park which was built for \$475 million of which \$275 million came from the public and \$200 million came from private donors. Civic minded businesses and organizations have invested significant amounts of money to enhance public parks and or their leased properties in parks, creating valuable civic goodwill as well as value for them and the public.

Milwaukee County has an excellent track record of public private leasing programs within our parks. Examples include Bartolotta's Lake Park Bistro and North Point Custard, Friends of Hoyt Park and Pool, the Estabrook Beer Garden, and numerous others.

### **A recommendation for consideration by the Commission:**

The Milwaukee County Parks Advisory Commission recommends that Milwaukee County not sell O'Donnell Park. To insure that the O'Donnell parkland is preserved for the public, the Commission recommends that Milwaukee County Leaders and the Parks Department work with the business and philanthropic community in the area to create a Friends of O'Donnell Park organization to plan and solicit contributions for redevelopment of the parkland into a more welcoming and activated space for residents and businesses.