

# County parks panel considers projects

By Lydia Statz, Union staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, July 8, 2014 8:57 am

JEFFERSON — The Jefferson County Parks Department covered a lot of ground Monday at its monthly county Parks Committee meeting, giving updates on ongoing projects and proposals for upcoming ways to serve the county.

One prospect Parks Department Director Joe Nehmer brought forth for consideration would downsize slightly the county's total land holdings, as he proposed the idea of transferring control of Altpeter Park to the Town of Sumner.

Altpeter Park, a four-acre parcel on the shores of Lake Koshkonong off Lamp Road, is a small grassy area that features play equipment, picnic tables and a grill. The area floods frequently, and mostly serves as a neighborhood park for residents in the immediate area.

Because of its use mostly as a neighborhood draw rather than a county-wide attraction, the county would like to explore the idea of offering control of Altpeter Park to the Town of Sumner.

“We would like to see it managed by the municipality that makes sense, that it most appropriately serves,” Nehmer said. “It really is a neighborhood park ... We think from a park management standpoint it makes sense.”

There is some precedent for this type of transition. Endl-Gruennert Park in the City of Jefferson, Dehnert Park in the Town of Concord and McCoy Park in the City of Fort Atkinson all used to be county parks before ultimately being transferred to their local municipalities. Nehmer said in the past no exchange of funds has accompanied the transitions.

The Town of Sumner has not yet been contacted about the idea. Walt Christensen, the county board supervisor whose district encompasses the Town of Sumner, will bring the idea forward to the town board at a future meeting, and, if accepted, the transfer will require several levels of approval at the town and county level before becoming final.

New to the docket this month was a consideration of specialized county park facilities for residents with autism or dementia.

County Human Services Director Kathi Cauley was on hand to speak to the committee regarding the specialized needs of these individuals, which she said are numerous. The issue that has been raised most often by the public is the possibility of these individuals running or wandering away from caregivers.

To combat that and cater to the needs of the increasing number of aging individuals in the county, the parks committee discussed the possibility of including a special enclosed area in one of the parks where people can roam without fear of crossing into traffic or wandering too far from caregivers.

Though some areas exist in municipal parks or at other county facilities, such as the Jefferson County Dog Park, the parks committee agreed it would be beneficial to meet with members of an autism or dementia caregivers

group to receive their input before proceeding.

The idea will be on future agendas for consideration as the Parks Department researches how best to include special facilities in the county parks.

Also much discussed in the future will be the best use of the new Crawfish River Park, located along State Highway 18, just to the west of the City of Jefferson. The park was opened earlier this year on land purchased from the State Department of Transportation after county residents raised \$56,000 to match the state's asking price.

The 16-acre parcel borders the Crawfish River and Glacial River Bike Trail, and provides valuable access to a natural wetland environment, but a major problem plaguing the park always has been how to access it.

No parking lot exists on or near the park, and recently the county highway department, prodded by the Department of Transportation, posted "no parking" signs along Highway 18 to prevent residents from stopping along the shoulder to access the area.

Currently, residents must bike into the park via the bike path, or park on a nearby city street and walk dangerously along the highway to reach the park.

The county will be undergoing a master planning process to identify the best design for the park to encourage access, and develop the area into a leading resource for county residents and the School District of Jefferson.

One option that has been identified would be to purchase a vacant five-acre parcel located directly across the river to expand the park. Parking could be located there, with a recreational bridge to the main park, greatly expanding access.

However, the purchase of any new land likely would have to be made through fundraising, similar to the original park land.

The master planning stage likely is to last quite some time, and include much community and county input to come to an amenable solution.

Meanwhile, in other business Monday, the parks committee:

- Discussed a possible increase in the Jefferson County Dog Park annual registration fees. If approved with the new annual county budget, an annual dog park registration for a county resident would increase from \$20 to \$25, while non-county residents would increase from \$25 to \$30.

Daily passes are proposed to remain at \$5.

- Announced the closure of Rock River Park, located on County Highway B west of Johnson Creek, and Kanow Park, located on State Highway 16 east of Ixonia, due to high water. Both are on the banks of the Rock River.

Parks Operations Supervisor noted that Altpeter Park on Lake Koshkonong, and Burnt Village Park, on the banks of the Bark River — two parks that also are prone to seasonal flooding — have not yet been closed but are being monitored daily.