

Focus

Survival skills

An Alaskan pilot is rescued after he was stranded six days on the Kenai Peninsula.

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Conceptual drawings produced by Alaback Design Associates show just a few of the many activities that could come to Mohawk Park, if suggestions made by the park's new master plan come to fruition.

Remaking Mohawk Park

Soccer fields, disc golf and a place for dogs suggested

By ROBERT EVATT
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Greg Warren knows that Mohawk Park, Tulsa's largest park and one of the biggest municipal parks in the nation, contains exactly 2,806 acres.

Yet he's not sure what's in all of those acres, even though he's the data resource manager for the Tulsa Park Department.

"There's parts of the park that are unknown to the city of Tulsa," Warren said.

Though the Tulsa Zoo, Mohawk Golf Course and Oxley Nature Center are usually bustling with people, large portions of the park are unclaimed wilderness that attract only wild animals. Warren said the entire section of the park east of Memorial Drive is usually overgrown and fenced off to the public.

"We only use 70 percent of the park," Warren said. "We want people to use all of it."

Not just Tulsa people. Warren and others involved with the park believe that, with the right attractions and trimmings, Mohawk Park could draw people — and their wallets — from outside the city.

"We want to make Mohawk Park a destination," said Mary Collins, executive director of Tulsa Zoo Friends.

Rather than simply dream of the prospects, city officials have assembled a new, nearly finished master plan for the park. With money from the county's Vision 2025 sales tax and city tax funding, the plan could lead to new trails, add new attractions and, hopefully, draw new visitors, Warren said.

The new plan, created by Alaback Design Associates and based on concepts developed by the city, will receive minor adjustments based on input from an open meeting this week. Warren wants to break ground on the first new additions in summer of next year.

Park planning: Warren said the plan is the first sweeping update to Mohawk's master plan since it was originally developed in the 1930s.

"The idea for the update has been percolating for a long time," Warren said. "This needs to be a regional park."

City officials drew up some preliminary plans for the park in the 1980s and '90s, though the project started receiving serious attention 18 months ago, after the proposal and passage of Vision 2025.

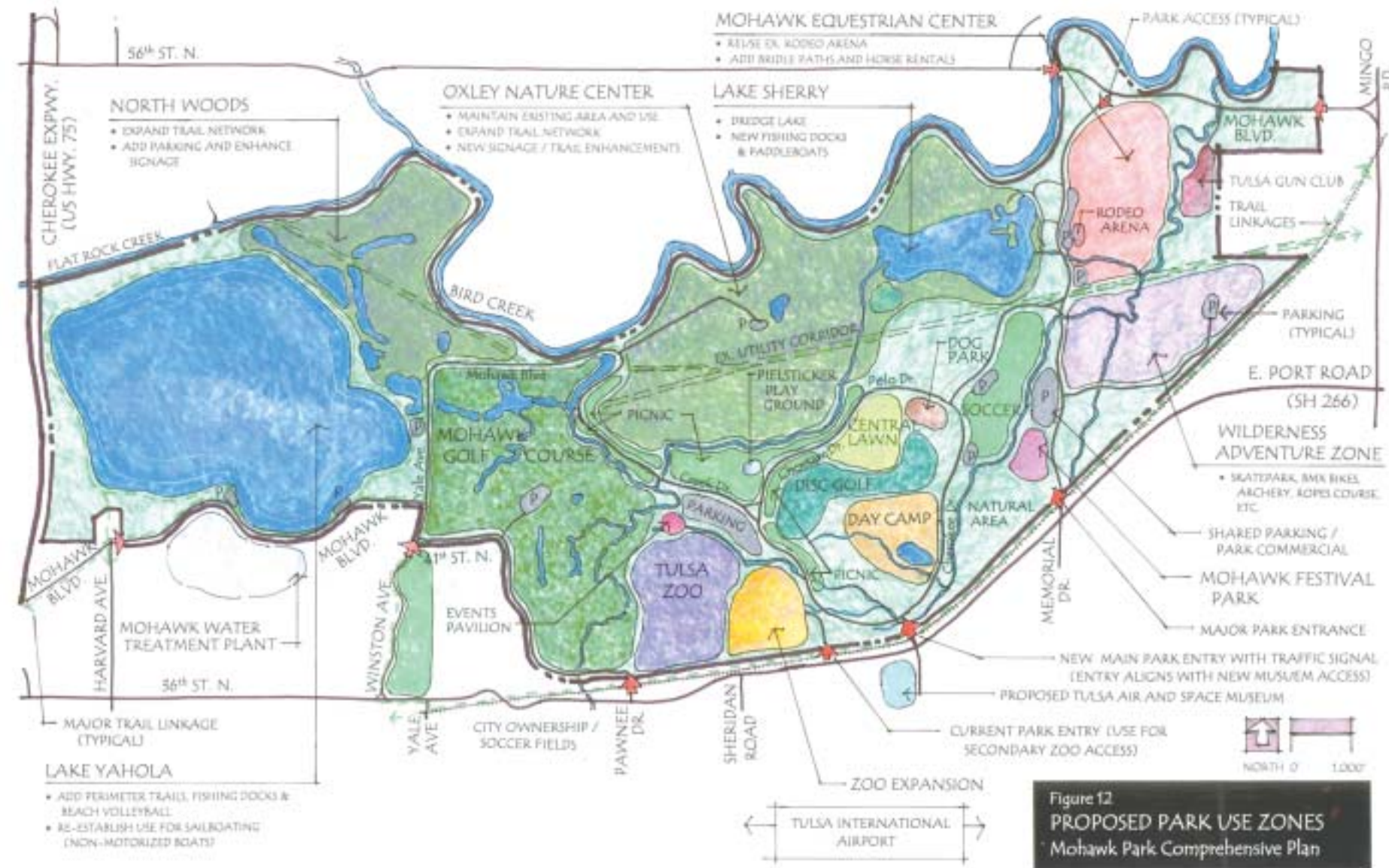
The park's share of the Vision 2050 money is about \$6 million, Warren said. Another \$1 million is available from a 2001 sales tax.

Warren said he hopes the city will provide more funding after the plan is completed.

The items in the plan, which was assembled by city officials with the input of 20 users of the park and the general public, total about \$30 million. Warren said items in the plan will be implemented over the years, though the city will take on some projects immediately.

"Once the plan's done, we'll prioritize the items, go to the top of the list, and start spending what money they give us until it's gone," Warren said.

Success through soccer: Warren's



pick for a top project, after improving the roads, installing more lights and creating three new entrances, is the addition of 16 new soccer fields, mostly in an area just west of Memorial Drive.

He's not just being a sports fan. Warren believes a first-rate soccer area could draw thousands of people from several states.

"It's one of the things that will attract national attention," Warren said.

Warren said the soccer idea came largely through Gordon Wilson, a long-time soccer enthusiast and chairman of the executive board of the Oklahoma Soccer Association.

"There's never been a facility large enough and nice enough to host tournaments in the city of Tulsa," Wilson said.

But Oklahoma City has such a facility in the South OKC Soccer Complex, Wilson said. Even though it was just finished in recent months, it already landed the 2007 Southern Regional Finals of the U.S. Youth Soccer Association.

The eight-day tournament will bring \$6 million to \$8 million into Oklahoma City, Wilson said.

"Soccer tournaments are major moneymakers," Wilson said.

Warren said he wants Tulsa to have a similar attraction, so he asked soccer experts like Wilson what the city needs.

"They said we need 16 fields for a tournament, so we'll give them 16," Warren said.

The large parking lot planned for the soccer area would be shared by space set aside for concerts and festivals, Warren said.

Something for everyone: Soccer isn't the only sport Tulsa residents want to see at the park. During his requests for information, Warren was surprised at the number of people who want to use Mohawk for disc golf.

"These guys are rabid," Warren said. "I didn't know how much energy they had until you tell them it's a possibility, then they'll design it for you."

Thanks to their energy, the plan proposes an 18-hole disc golf course northwest of the zoo.

Even more sports may find a home in "Wilderness Adventure Zone" in the eastern portion of the park.

The zone could accommodate a skate park, a BMX bike track, a ropes course, and other activities.

"We want all sorts of cool stuff there," Warren said.

An area just east of the main entrance could be used as a day camp, according to the plan. Groups such as the YMCA, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts would have access to campsites, a large pavilion and a pond with a fishing dock.

The open area in the center of the

heavily wooded park would become a central lawn for casual family use. A large, limestone pavilion is proposed for the southeast corner.

Four-legged fun: The plans aren't just tailored for humans. Even before planning for Mohawk shifted into high gear, Warren said, he frequently heard from animal lovers.

"I get a call every week telling me Tulsa needs a dog park," Warren said.

So a "bark park" went into the plan. The six-acre, fenced-in area would allow dog lovers to unleash their pets and let them romp.

Warren hopes to screen visiting dogs for vaccination and social readiness, but he said the activity has been surprisingly safe nationwide.

"I wouldn't think it would work, but letting a dog off their leash makes them less aggressive," Warren said.

For those who would rather be astride animals than beside them, plans call for an equestrian center in the northwest corner. These 100 acres would incorporate trails and stables into the existing and under-used rodeo arena, Warren said.

"I don't know if it's lack of publicity or what, but the rodeo arena isn't used much," he said.

Though the plans wouldn't cause changes at the Tulsa Zoo itself, a nearby, 10,000-square-foot events pavilion would allow the zoo and other elements of the park to sponsor more corporate events.

"It would be fantastic if more companies and families used the area,

since it would benefit Mohawk Park and zoo attendance," Collins said.

The zoo will also receive expanded parking and 37 acres for future expansion.

Water works: Finally, the plan calls for more development of the park's two lakes.

Lake Yahola already has a path around it, but Warren said the plan calls for paving it and adding benches to make it more useable.

The plan also suggests a sand volleyball court, a fishing dock and access for sailboats, though Warren said current regulations at the lake, which doubles as a water reservoir, prohibit watercraft.

Warren feels the smaller Lake Sherry, east of the Oxley Nature Center, needs more work.

"It's about 18 inches deep and has water lilies all over," he said. "It's terrible."

The plan calls for dredging the lake and repairing its dam to better control the water flow of Bird Creek. Fishing docks and paddle boats are also possibilities.

Though the plan calls for a great deal of development, Warren said it takes into account the existing trees and builds attractions around them.

"Mohawk Park is one of the crown jewels of Tulsa. It's 2,806 acres of untouched, virgin forest," Warren said. "We don't want to lose many trees."

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