

PITTSFIELD

SPRINGSIDE PARK PLAN SUBMITTED



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The Pittsfield Park Commission is reviewing plans for long-term improvements to Springside House and Springside Park in Pittsfield. The house was formerly known as the Frank and William Davol House. The draft of a master plan urges a reversal of “years of reduced maintenance” at the park and house.

‘New vision’: Draft eyes collaboration, end to ‘reduced maintenance’
Other business: Request to rename Highland Park for Chris Porter

By Jim Therrien

jtherrien@berkshireeagle.com
@BE_therrien on Twitter

PITTSFIELD » The Park Commission has received a draft of a master plan for improvements to Springside Park, which members are expected to review for possible changes and discuss during the commission’s March meeting.

The commission also received a request this week to rename Highland Park to honor the late Christopher Porter, was briefed on a plan to install 10 “book houses” within city parks to promote the exchange of books and literacy, and tentatively approved a fundraising event with music and beer and wine sales in

July at The Common.

City Open Space and Natural Resource Manager James McGrath told commissioners that a first draft of a master plan for improving Springside Park has been completed. The draft was developed with help from Springside Park Conservancy members and others, he said, noting the role of current commission member Joseph Durwin in fostering a collaborative effort.

McGrath said the draft plan “is not heavy on data,” focusing instead on broader goals for park improvements over a multiyear period. It breaks the 238-acre park into nine sectors and identifies improvements

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The draft plan calls for increased collaboration with Springside’s stakeholder groups in order to reduce renovation and maintenance costs.

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Draft

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that would benefit each, he said.

The draft seeks to establish “a new vision” for collaborative efforts involving the numerous stakeholder groups directly involved with the park or holding events there, he said, and urges a reversal of “years of reduced maintenance” for Springside House and the park itself.

McGrath asked commissioners to review the draft and add their comments during the next meeting, with the goal of possible adoption in April or May. The draft eventually approved by the commission, he said, would then be submitted to the stakeholder groups and the public for comment.

As for funding sources, the city has set aside up to \$500,000 in the capital budget to provide matches to grants that might be obtained for restoration of the Springside House and other projects. One grant application expected to go out next month, McGrath said, would seek funding for roof, foundation and runoff control work.

However, the overriding emphasis will be on collaborative efforts to reduce the cost of improvements, he said.

Also this week, Richard Rivers asked the commission to change the name of Highland Park to honor Porter, who died in July 2015.

Commissioners, who last year approved changing the name of Pitt Park to honor the late Rev. Willard and Rosemary Durant, said they are in the process of developing a policy for



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Pittsfield has set aside \$500,000 to match and grants received for renovation of Springside House and other projects.

considering such requests and asked Rivers to wait for that process to be completed.

“Everyone I have run into had high praise for Chris,” Rivers said of support he found for renaming the park.

He asked commissioners whether he should submit a petition or take some other approach to have the change considered.

Simon Muil said the commission hasn’t finalized a policy for considering park name changes, and asked Rivers to hold off on his effort until that is completed, adding that honoring Porter is “definitely worth consideration.”

Jonah Sykes, development manager with Berkshire United Way, and Catherine Van Bramer, executive assistant to Mayor Linda M. Tyer, presented a proposal to install 10 Berkshire Book Houses in city parks, mounted on poles or otherwise set in place.

Sykes said United Way, as part of the countywide Berkshire Day of Giving program, is working with volunteers from Sabic to construct the houses, which will promote easy access to books for children and literacy. He said 10 would be located in city parks and two others at Pittsfield Housing Authority housing complexes — Dower Square and Wilson Park.

Caretaker groups and individuals would be responsible for keeping the book houses maintained and stocked, he said, and for monitoring the sites on a regular basis. Books could be taken out from the small “houses” and returned for others to read. The houses would be placed within different school districts in the city.

Vandalism was a concern raised by commissioners. Sykes said the placement of the book houses would be done with that possibility in mind, and if

vandalism does occur, organizers would consider changes.

“I can say the mayor definitely is supportive of this,” Van Bramer said of Tyer.

McGrath said each house placement would be considered and approved separately, with some on posts set in the ground and others mounted on a structure.

Jackie McHugh, of the Berkshire Humane Society, won tentative approval for a fundraiser on The Common on July 9, pending further information on the bands that would provide music, a specific site plan for the event and other details.

Commissioners said that, since the event would offer beer and wine sales, they want to ensure good precedents for reviewing requests involving alcohol sales are set since others are likely to follow for the park off First Street.

Contact Jim Therrien at 413-496-6247.