

Bob Brogden

403 Waterside Drive

Carrboro, NC 27510

January 22, 2015

To the Mayor and Members of the Board of Aldermen:

I am writing to express concerns about the proposal to put a pump track in MLK park. Before I begin, a little background about me.

I have lived in Carrboro since 1974, in Spring Valley since 1989. Over the years I have watched Carrboro grow and develop, and most of that has been wonderful. I have ridden bicycles around town and long distances since the 1970s. I have also spent countless hours walking around town. I have long advocated for the use of bicycles and for the town to facilitate such use. The town has done an outstanding job with facilitating pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

I know many of the supporters of the pump track. They too have a long record of advocating for bicycle use and safety. It is with a somewhat heavy heart that I speak out against the placement of a pump track in MLK Park. Why?

The park is approximately ten acres. Some of it is wetlands, some of it open fields, and some of it a community garden. Both options presented at a recent Board meeting (for which I was in attendance) included a pump track. One option had the pump track taking up what is now an open field. The other option had the pump track situated in an area that is wet much of the time. About this consultant.

The consultant held a series of meetings. For various reasons I did not attend any of those meetings. In speaking with people that did, it seems the consultant followed procedures that allowed a small group to have an undue and disproportionate influence on what should be placed in the park. Then, a member of the group supporting the pump track, Heidi Perry, was allowed to speak out of turn at the recent Board meeting. It seems to me that this is not quite how a democracy, direct or representative, is supposed to work. But I digress.

The consultant presented two options to the Board, both of which included a pump track. How about an option that doesn't have a pump track? I have not been impressed with the work of this consultant, either in how he went about gathering information or about his lack of creativity in designs for the park. Who is paying him? How much is he being paid?

I would like to know more about the pump track: Who will use it? Who will maintain it? Who will insure that bicyclists are not riding all over the park? Will cyclo cross teams hold practices there? Will those teams hold competitions? I ask these questions because one day last fall the cyclo cross teams from Durham and Chapel Hill held an informal training session there. I know because I received a prior notice about it and walked over to the park to observe. What I found was a large vehicle with a large trailer attached. It had the name of the cyclo cross team from Durham on it. There were a number of other vehicles there, many with bike racks. A small NEIGHBORHOOD park is not the place for such activities. The above questions need to be addressed. One of the people pushing for the pump track is a sponsor of a Chapel Hill based

cyclo cross team. A pump track would physically and aesthetically have a negative, detrimental impact on this small, neighborhood park. I used to ride a mountain bike in the woods of Carolina North. But I stopped doing that 15 years ago because I saw firsthand the environmental and ecological degradation caused by such activity. I fear that allowing a pump track in a small neighborhood park will cause similar results.

A pump track is good and fine in its proper place. A small neighborhood park with limited parking is not such a place. It is obvious to me that people would come from other places to use the pump track, many of them having to drive cars to get there. A small neighborhood park should encourage people to walk and/or ride bikes to get there. I do not see how a pump track fits. A better location might be Anderson Park, which has the parking infrastructure and is located along a major road.

MLK Park should be developed with minimal environmental and ecological impact. A bicycle pump track does not fit such a scenario.

Sincerely,

Bob Brogden

bbrogden@bellsouth.net

The Hijacking of Carrboro's MLK, Jr. Park

Dale M. Rhodes

This is the story of how a single-interest lobby inserted its agenda into the development of a small neighborhood park in northern Carrboro. It's not a pretty story, nor is it yet over, but it could result in the destruction of the open spaces and natural beauty of what we have now.

A Fatally Flawed Planning Process

The town hired landscape architects Site Solutions in Charlotte, NC to work on the plans for MLK, Jr. park. The firm had produced the original Master Plan for the park in 2004.

The fatal flaw in the process is that no effort was made to conduct a scientifically valid and reliable survey of the needs and interests of the neighborhood or the community at large. The project has always been described as a "neighborhood park" beginning with the purchase of the property in 1994 and has held that description up to the present day.

Instead of a simple survey, Site Solutions used a series of three "public workshops" to determine the next phase of the park's development. The first meeting was held in the park itself and attracted about three or four dozen people. It was obvious that there was in attendance a self-selected pressure group consisting of perhaps four to six people lobbying for a "pump park." Later, I learned that:

Pump tracks first appeared in the United States in 2004 in California. They consist of a closed-loop dirt track interrupted by mounds of dirt. BMX bicycle riders are meant to traverse the track and the dirt mounds not using the bike peddles but by pulling up before reaching the dirt mounds and pushing down after coming down from the mounds causing a pumping motion and propelling the rider forward at up to speeds of 20 mph.

At this first meeting, to gauge the interests of the participants, paste-on stickers of green dots were handed out with each person getting four or five with which to choose among the long list of possible items to be included in the new plan. Not surprisingly, green dots fairly ran off the sheet as the BMX bike lobby used all their dots voting for the pump track. I watched as one of them picked up an unused sheet of dots and went off to apply them. The participants were encouraged to leave their email addresses on a sheet provided next to the green dots. Signing in was optional. I do not recall the people running the meeting ever asking for a show of hands as to who lived in the neighborhood or even in the town. There was certainly no effort made to determine the residence of those applying the green dots.

In summary, what we had was an uncontrolled, uncounted, unidentified population voting an unlimited number of times on options for the park. Objective research this was not.

It certainly is not a tool for making public policy. Unfortunately, this is exactly how several aldermen and the mayor treated it at their meeting on January 13, 2015 when they heard the report of the Site Solutions principal Derek Williams.

There were two other public meetings. The second, like the first, asked participants (again unknown) to list priorities for the park and even sketch out some design options. This meeting was held on a Saturday in the capacious auditorium on the second floor of the Century Center. Large round tables with chairs had been set up for the participants. I sat alone at my table as did several other attendees. At the urging of staff the tables were consolidated into just a few. I counted perhaps 16 or so people in attendance. Again, the bike lobby was present with three or four constituents. When the tables were consolidated they spread themselves among the tables thereby assuring that the pump track would remain high on the list of desirable outcomes for the park. With a single-interest lobby heavily influencing the process, the results are no surprise.

The final meeting was held in the same auditorium but this time it was more of a summing up by the consultant Derek Williams of the result of the first two meetings. There was no attempt made to evaluate the relative value, feasibility or appropriateness of the suggested improvements. It turned out to be a preview of what we would see in his January 13, 2015 presentation to the board of aldermen.

A Bad Process Produces A Bad Result

The consultant produced two options for the development of the Martin Luther King, Jr. park. The largest and most prominent feature of both options is the "Pump Track & Mountain Bike Skills" area. Indeed, if built, visitors to the park will have their eyes instantly drawn to these (presumably heavily fenced) dirt mounds, their connecting dirt tracks and surrounding dirt aprons. "Eyesore" would be the term I would use and in truth it will look like a permanent construction site in the middle (or occupying the largest part of the northern perimeter) of the park. Any appreciation of the natural aspect of what is left of the park will require super human selective perception on the visitor's part. These plans turn the MLK, Jr. park into essentially a single use park and an ugly one at that.

Off-road bike riders have already run amok on the other end of Tripp Farm Road where the Carolina North forest has been permanently defaced and eroded by years of enthusiastic riders. There is little need to build another facility catering to this off-road bike community especially as it will destroy the open field and natural beauty of what we have now.

What to Do Now?

The process has been so contaminated by a single-interest lobby, it is impossible to untangle that undue influence from the actual needs and interests of the neighborhood and the town at large. The two plans which flowed from this process are its poisoned fruit and must be discarded. The only responsible thing to do now is to do what should have been done in the first place: ask residents of the surrounding neighborhoods what they want in the development of their park. This is not very difficult and need not be costly. But before committing what may well exceed one million dollars in park development, it is the only responsible and prudent course for Carrboro's aldermen and mayor to follow. The voters are watching and waiting for a reasonable outcome based on valid and reliable community input. The park will remain for decades as a monument to the wisdom or folly of our elected leaders.

DMR

1/21/15

About the author: Dale M. Rhodes holds both a bachelor's (History) and master's (Communication) degree from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He was Director of Research for the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and Vice-President for Research and Planning at the National Association of Public Television Station. He has testified several times before the Copyright Tribunal of the United States as an expert witness on research. He lives in Carrboro not far from the MLK, Jr. park.

From: Isaac Dye [idye90@gmail.com]
Sent: Thursday, February 05, 2015 10:56 PM
To: boa
Subject: MLK jr. Bike park

My name is Isaac. I live in the chapel hill carrboro area and am very close to the MLK jr. Park. My friends and I love mountain biking and pump tracks we ride around the trails almost everyday and hav even built some of our own in our yards or other land. I love the idea of a bike park/ pump track being built here as this area has an enormous and verrryyyy active mountain biking community it still amazes me. And I think that it would b a great addition to hav this park made at MLK especially due to the fact that park has been an empty field now for years and I think it would b great to add a little something to it

From: R E Dow [robdow@gmail.com]
Sent: Monday, February 09, 2015 9:42 PM
To: boa
Subject: MLK park - bike park / pump track idea

Dear BOA members,

Hearing some chatter about the option of a bike park / pump track at the MLK park site. This would be a fun addition to the park, and a little different from our existing (very good & fun) parks in terms of a sport function. We live just down the road & have two small children that would love such an idea.

Thanks for your time & consideration!

Robert Dow

From: Kurt Rosenkrantz [kurt.rosenkrantz@gmail.com]

Sent: Monday, January 26, 2015 12:30 PM

To: boa

Cc: Noreen McDonald

Subject: MLK Park Plan

Hello,

My name is Kurt Rosenkrantz. I live at 2102 Pathway Drive, one block from MLK Park in Carrboro. I have two children, ages 8 and 11. Naturally, I am very excited about the plans for developing MLK Park. I attended the meeting at the park last summer and the recent Board of Aldermen meeting a few weeks ago. I wanted to give you my feedback on the proposed plans, as a parent and member of the neighborhood. Sorry for the length of my email, I've been doing a lot of thinking!

Developing this park is a wonderful opportunity to serve the needs of the Carrboro community. There are many great things in Carrboro -- Weaver Street, Farmer's Market, Carolina North Forest, and the great sports facilities at Hank Anderson Park -- but what is missing is a great place for children to play. All of our town park playgrounds are generic plastic and metal structures. MLK Park is a great site for a truly unique, creative, and natural playground that reflects the spirit and values of Carrboro.

At the meeting last summer, most of the discussion and votes were for various versions of a natural play area, possibly involving water play as well. In the past decade, playground designers all over the world have been creating innovative spaces where kids can alter the environment, build their own structures, and use their imaginations to play in natural and beautiful settings.

Looking at the plans presented at the meeting, like everyone else in the room I preferred plan A, the one without the connector road. But I saw 4 parts of this plan that could be improved.

1. There wasn't enough parking. There is no street parking in this area, so the parking lot needs to be adequate for the space.

2. The playground in plan A was tiny and in a bad location, right by the street and away from everything else. Instead of a centerpiece, this play area looked like an afterthought.

3. The pump track was enormous. I do support having a pump track, but it does not need to be so big, especially if we don't have any idea of the demand. Instead, let's start small and then expand it if it is very popular.

4. If we are going to name this park after Martin Luther King, we need to pay tribute in some way. The obvious places are in the main entrance to the park and in the proposed meditation garden. I'm no expert on King, but maybe we can do something with his 1960 visit to Chapel Hill or just a timeline of his life. For example, we could display a series of informative posters at various points around the perimeter trail of the park.

Attached is how I would lay out the park. This layout makes only a few changes from plan A. It splits the pump track area into a smaller pump track and large playground area. It expands the parking lot to about 50 spaces, and it leaves an area at the entrance to the park that could possibly be used for a tribute to King. The pump track has room to grow if necessary. Most importantly, it places the natural play area in an adequate space that will make it the centerpiece of the park.

Here are a few websites I found that illustrate what I mean by "natural play area."

<http://www.naturalplaygrounds.com/index.php>

<http://lifeandscience.org/support/climbing-higher/hideaway-woods/>

https://naturalplay.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/naturalplay_infopacket_small.pdf

<http://www.play-scapes.com/>

<http://www.play-scapes.com/category/play-design/natural-playgrounds/>

<http://www.play-scapes.com/play-design/natural-playgrounds/fairlop-waters-natural-playground-form-associates-redbridge-london-2010/>

<http://www.erectarchitecture.co.uk/projects/>

<http://www.erectarchitecture.co.uk/projects/play/140-p-clapton-common.html>

Thank you so much for considering my thoughts, and good luck planning the park!

Kurt Rosenkrantz

From: Ethan K [elsnar2@gmail.com]

Sent: Tuesday, January 20, 2015 3:07 PM

To: boa

Subject: MLK Park Pump Track

Hello!

My name is Ethan Kimberly and I attend Chapel Hill High School. I am 16 years old and I would LOVE to see a pump track built in MLK. It would be at a very convinient location for many members of the biking community, myself included. At Wilson park there is not enough room, and Anderson park is further away and I feel that it's much harder to access, given the amount of traffic on Old Fayetteville road. The younger members of the biking community would largely benefit from this project being set in motion. Once again, I would be delighted if this were built.

Thank you for your time.

From: Ben Thornburg [ben.penguin@gmail.com]

Sent: Monday, January 19, 2015 6:51 PM

To: boa

Subject: pump bike track, MLK Jr. park

hello,

My name is Ben Thornburg i am 15 years old and I go to chapel hill high school. my passion is mountain biking and having a pump track near my house would be a dream come true! I live in fair oaks area in cobblestone place and its maybe a block at the most away from MLK park. I have many other Friends who live close and would love a pump track there and I would love to see one built!

thank you for reading

-Ben