**The Indiana Tech Sports Facility Offer**

**A Perspective from the Board of Friends of the Parks**

4/19/17

Indiana Tech has recently announced that it has arranged a “public-private partnership” with City top administrators to invest over $6 million of Indiana Tech resources in Memorial Park, on Fort Wayne’s east side. Indiana Tech proposes to:

* Rebuild an existing baseball field to women’s league softball standards, outfield surfaced in artificial grass and the whole field encircled with a security fence.
* Construct a 10,000 square foot, one story new sports administration building in the heart of the park, on what is presently a rolling knoll.
* Expand existing parking areas in the heart of the park
* Remove the memorial grove, relocate two site-specific monuments, flatten out one of the few rolling hills in the neighborhood, and construct a new football field-sized running track, complete with bleachers and field sports throwing facilities, comprising an area of at least 350 feet by 750 feet, encircled with a security fence.

Park Department Executive Director Al Moll has recommended to the Board of Park Commissioners that this project be moved ahead, even while Park Board members have expressed concern about the technical and legal arrangements about ownership and control of facilities, access by the community, timelines, and the loss of important designed and mature historic park infrastructure.

Friends of the Parks wants to ensure that this deal adds to and does not detract from community park experiences.

In the early 2000s, the Fort Wayne Zoo attempted to greatly expand their parking lot further into Franke Park, taking away valuable green landscape experiences in the process. To help avoid future misunderstandings in the use of community park lands, Cultural Landscape Reports (CLR) were commissioned by concerned citizens who founded Friends of the Parks. These Reports were thorough in their documentation of the history and evolution of our oldest and most significant parks, including Memorial Park. They were also thorough in their intake of community thoughts, through extensive outreach efforts, not just with adjacent neighborhoods, but with the entire Fort Wayne community. These reports are a valuable tool to guide Park Board, Staff and the whole community in making wise choices in the use of its community treasures, held in trust for today and for future citizens.

The CLR for Memorial Park noted the significance of:

* The existing ball field, where the Fort Wayne Daisies (pioneering women’s’ league) played is notable for the Daisies having played there and for being in its original location.
* The entire park design, by Park Superintendent Adolph Jaenicke, as commissioned by the Park Board, including the park drive layout (opened in 1928), creating the “canyons” adjacent to some of the drives to have a “western feel”, creating the memorial grove on the park’s east side, with one tree to represent each fallen soldier in WWI, accentuating the unusual (for Fort Wayne) rolling topography.
* The 1928 Art Smith (Bird Boy of Fort Wayne) memorial, set purposefully on the highest point of the park, in the memorial grove, designed as a tall column with a winged man on the top, all of it reaching for the sky, just like Mr. Smith. Jaenicke had intended a similar tall memorial obelisk at this same site in his 1918 master plan for the park as a centerpiece, to be seen from long views through the park.
* The more than 1500 trees planted by Jaenicke, a substantial number of which included the now-mature evergreen trees planted on his “canyons” along the west entry drive and the elliptical drive surrounding the memorial grove.

The CLR has recommendations for the park’s future as well, including:

* Restore metal and masonry park monuments, enhancing their settings to their original character.
* Replace intrusive central parking areas with reinforced turf for occasional parking.
* Restore the patterns of the original park drive layout.
* Restore the memorial grove
* Restore the details of Jaenicke’s drive “canyons”.
* Invest in the ball diamond to bring it to good function.

Friends of the Parks has been directly involved and facilitated the replanting of trees along park drives and in the memorial grove, using funds and labor donated by dozens of individuals.

These park features and the beautiful landscape experiences they create for ALL members of the community are threatened with destruction by aspects of the deal being struck between City administrators and Indiana Tech. Although the ball field work could be done in a manner sensitive to the site, the artificial turf is an anomaly to an historic park. A sports building might be possibly designed to snuggle into the topography and diminish its intrusiveness. Perhaps parking can be redesigned to be less intrusive. The track cannot be made less intrusive and destructive as proposed. It requires scraping away dozens of century-old trees and removing the signature memorial hill to flatten it out as a track.

Indiana Tech has publicly announced what a good deal this is for the community. They have stated how these facilities will create opportunities for mentoring and developing young athletes, and how they will oversee activities, facility maintenance and facility management, including times when it will not be available to the public, when Indiana Tech needs them for their sports teams. Indiana Tech is not currently offering such largess to the community with their present sports facilities. Is this current largess the result of an ulterior motive?

To look at this another way:

Indiana Tech wants to build sports facilities to support their teams. They claim to have been looking for nearby areas to build these facilities. Parcels of the sizes needed for these facilities can be assembled within the vicinity of their campus, *but they must be purchased from willing sellers.* This is not an easy task.

They have turned instead to requesting the Park Board give them free land to build and operate their facilities, just like they would do on their own land, and in return, give the community limited use of the facilities on the community’s land.

These same areas of Memorial Park are currently fully available to anyone during normal park operating hours. The beautiful landscape has, for nearly 100 years, provided an escape from daily stress, including for Indiana Tech students, providing a place to engage with nature in a safe place. One does not need to be a member of a sports team to walk through the park or participate in a pick-up game of baseball or softball. Indiana Tech’s proposal changes that equation significantly. The new facilities do not provide the contemplative and nature-oriented experience the park was designed by Jaenicke to provide. Even community sports teams will have to get in line behind Indiana Tech’s teams, who would receive preferential treatment in facility scheduling.

This proposal has been paraded and promoted by Indiana Tech as a done deal. They reported their outreach to two adjacent neighborhood associations. We hear reports that not all nearby residents support this taking of their park facilities. A public meeting to allow presentation of this project has been scheduled for May 4. Friends would hope that at least two public hearings, held at times convenient to the community, would be held to allow all sides to present their perspectives on this issue, as it flies in the face of established Park policy, the Cultural Landscape Report for Memorial Park and destroys memories treasured by the community.

These are the details not being mentioned by Indiana Tech in their efforts to sell this amazing offer of sports fields to the community. There will be significant loss of a beautiful, mature, historic park facility so that a privileged few will have the opportunity to play sports for Indiana Tech. Sorry, but that $6 million gift of sports facilities does not come without a hidden price to us all. Let’s not lose 100 years of park history.

Attend the Park Board meetings. Attend and speak at any public hearings. Write to the media and express your concerns. It is important that we let the Board of Park Commissioners and Indiana Tech officials know how valuable these park facilities and their legacy are to us. Friends of the Parks is here to support our parks and their stewardship. Be part of our mission.

Friends of the Parks

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