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Shade, trails top parks wish list

By Lisa Wakeland

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Shaded areas near athletic fields and playgrounds, like here at Juilfs Park, were the number one request for future improvements in the Anderson Township Park District system.

On a warm day at the end of August, Nancy Theuring was sitting under a large umbrella watching her husband and dozens of other men play softball.

There are few shady spots near the ball fields at Riverside Park on Round Bottom Road, and that's one thing Theuring, of Indian Hill, said the parks could use.

"I think shade and more water fountains would be nice," she said.

Though she doesn't come to the Anderson Township parks very often, Theuring was spot-on with the No. 1 improvement park users wanted – shaded areas near playgrounds and athletic fields.

More than 63 percent of people who responded to the Anderson Township [Park District's survey](#) on future park improvements identified shaded areas as the most important amenity.

It was followed by more restrooms and paved trail extensions as what respondents rated most important.

Among the least important additions for the Anderson Township parks were public art and synthetic ball fields.

PHOTOS: See what survey respondents rated as the top eight highest and lowest priorities.

Anderson Township Park District Executive Director Ken Kushner said the surveys, which were collected for several months, helped provide some direction, and they're planning to get even more feedback from the community.

Many people who responded indicated a desire to be part of a parks improvement committee, which will likely start meeting later this fall.

Judy Hershey, a nanny for an Anderson Township family, said she often brings the children to the parks.

"I'm happy with the improvements they've made so far," she said. Like many people who responded to the survey, Hershey said more shaded areas near playgrounds or benches along walking trails would be nice.

Joe Seither, who lives in Amelia and grew up coming to Juilfs Park, also agreed that shade was important, but so were covered areas to escape from the occasional rain storm.

Even though he doesn't have a dog, Seither said an off-leash area outside of the Kellogg Dog Park would be a good addition. It doesn't have to be big, he said, but could give dog owners another option to play with their pets.

Cindy Hughes, who lives near Juilfs Park, comes to the park several times a week to walk around the trails and said paved extensions would be great, as would an indoor walking area for colder months or bad weather.

"I think (the trail extensions) would be a good thing because it's more interesting when the scenery changes," she said.

"I would love an indoor walking trail because during the winter you're stuck on a treadmill."

While many of the responses were similar to what Park District staff expected, there were some interesting dichotomies.

For example, Kushner said, shade was one of the highest priorities, but [surveys indicated](#) covered dugouts at ball fields – which provide shade – were one of the least important amenities.

Similarly, an indoor walking trail and more indoor space were on both the high and low priority lists.

"We know what we've been offering in the parks, and this is looking five, 10 or 20 years down the road," he said.

"People want recreation (opportunities) all year and we're trying to figure out how to bring the best of what we do outside, inside."

Space, which can be very limited around Anderson Township, is part of the challenge as the Park District investigates possible improvements. How to pay for what the community wants also is an issue.

"There is only so much we can get done within our budget now," Kushner said. "None of our parks are finished, and every year we try to add something to one of the parks and put in what we can."

The Park District typically funds improvements through its operating budget, private fundraising and grants. One idea is to have a separate capital improvement levy, and Kushner said all funding options would be discussed during committee meetings.

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Community Experts



Eric Spangler (Editor) - (513) 576-8251 espanqler@communitypress.com



Lisa Wakeland (Reporter) - (513) 248-7139 lwakeland@communitypress.com



Forrest Sellers (Reporter) - (513) 248-7680 fsellers@communitypress.com



Melanie Laughman (Sports Editor) - (513) 248-7573 mlaughter@communitypress.com



Nick Dudukovich (Sports Reporter) - (513) 248-7570 ndudukovich@communitypress.com

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