

# Anderson Park District

## Phase I Plan Status of W. M. Johnson Hills Park

Initially established 4/2015; updated & reviewed 1/12/2016, 2/14/2017, 2/13/2018, 2/12/2019, 2/11/2020, & 2/9/2021.

The W. M. Johnson Hills Park plan was developed with community input, featuring an emphasis on active recreation in a passive setting. The Anderson Park District hired one of the most innovative, and well-respected firms in the Cincinnati area, Human Nature, to develop a plan to meet the recreational needs of the community, while incorporating a nature-based design. In conjunction with the neighbors of W. M. Johnson Hills Park and the community, this plan was established as a guide to improve the park. The initial plan was developed in 2001, and was subsequently revised in 2009 and again in 2015.

The W. M. Johnson Hills Park improvements will take many years to accomplish and like most other Anderson Park District parks, the improvements will be accomplished in phases. There is room for the plan to evolve pending available funding, community needs, use patterns, permit processes, etc. A priority for the Board of Park Commissioners is to make decisions that allow future Boards to meet the needs of the community. They intentionally refrain from making promises which tie the hands of future Boards regarding what they can or cannot do for the community.

The vision for W. M. Johnson Hills Park has always been of a different flavor than the other Anderson parks. It was purposefully acquired to round out the Anderson Park District's offerings to the community. The plan to include facilities and activities that complement the natural gifts of the property is a priority for park development. Athletic fields scheduled for sports leagues are not currently represented on the plan. The playground envisioned will have a nature theme with playscape features. While W. M. Johnson Hills Park is not intended to be a nature preserve, the trails and open space are represented as prominent components in the park design.

### **Time Line of W. M. Johnson Hills Park:**

- 1998** Mrs. Marian Barbour Johnson approached the Anderson Park District about creating a legacy in honor of her late husband, William McNeilan ("Mack") Johnson. The Anderson Park District and Great Parks of Hamilton County ("Great Parks") paid Mrs. Johnson \$1,125,000 (Anderson Parks \$625,000; Great Parks \$500,000). This purchase enabled Mrs. Johnson to live out her life on her property. One restriction on the property was included in the deed: *the property must remain a park in perpetuity*. Mrs. Johnson personally requested the following of the Anderson Park District: Include Mack's name in the name of the park; Recognize the headwaters of the Dry Run Creek.
- 1999** Mrs. Johnson passed away on August 12. Upon her death, Mrs. Johnson's estate conveyed 45 acres to Great Parks; 80.6 acres to the Anderson Park District; and her house and the surrounding 10.4 acres to the Anderson Park District (Daughters of the American Revolution had right of first refusal).
- 2000** The property officially became public park property in June. The existing private horse stable business continued, and a family continued to rent the house off Crooked Stick. The Anderson Park District began to gather community input and suggestions for park improvements.
- 2001** The first public planning process was conducted.

- 2007** W. M. Johnson Hills Park opened to the public with limited use, including no dogs, because of the private horse stable operation. The Anderson Park District dedicated a part-time Operations employee to the park.
- 2009-2010** A second public planning process was conducted. Several Open Houses were part of this well-publicized public input process.
- 2010** The private horse stable operation moved out, enabling the public to fully access the park, including the pastures. Unsafe structures were removed and areas of the park were cleaned up, including the removal of fencing and debris.
- 2013** A community-wide public input process began to determine future park improvements for all the Anderson Parks, including W. M. Johnson Hills Park.
- 2014** The last of Mrs. Johnson's tenants moved out in March.
- 2015** The plan for W. M. Johnson Hills Park was boiled down to a Phase I, ten year plan, to better explain the Board's intentions for the park improvements. The well-publicized public input process included an Open House.
- 2016** The Anderson Park District's survey to continue operations passed by the largest margin on record (61%) for an Anderson Park District operating levy.

Improvements have been made at W. M. Johnson Hills Park every year since the property became the responsibility of the Anderson Park District. An array of programs, camp outs, clean-up events, and rentals have been hosted at W. M. Johnson Hills Park since 2000.

### **Phase I Improvements:**

The Board of Park Commissioners has established the following priorities for W. M. Johnson Hills Park. Major improvements will require significant funding. Minor improvements will be accomplished as park visitation dictates and volunteer efforts and funding are available.

Additional features, programs, and grants deemed to be a good fit for W. M. Johnson Hills Park will be explored, which may not necessarily be specifically listed below. Staff will continue to research and develop activities and amenities for W. M. Johnson Hills Park, including applying for grants and seeking sponsorships which help accomplish parts or sections of the plan.

This informational piece is intended to serve as a guide to provide our residents with as much information as possible about the evolution of W. M. Johnson Hills Park. Phase I is anticipated to take approximately ten years to accomplish. It will be reviewed and updated annually by the Board of Park Commissioners.

### **Major Improvements ~ Phase I Plan, 2015-2025:**

*Many improvements have been accomplished since 2015 which are no longer listed on this document.*

### **Funding is secured in the 2021 budget cycle to complete the following major improvements:**

- Expand the parking area in the park core.

**Major Improvements to Complete:**

- Install flushable restrooms in the park core; install a septic system or hook up to sanitary sewers if/when available.
- Continue to maintain the Johnson house (MariMac Manor) for future use.
- Establish the park core features: paved looping trail; nature playscape playground; landscaping.

**Minor Improvements ~ 2021-2022:**

- Continue to promote the installation of sidewalks to connect the surrounding neighborhoods with the park.
- Install gravel beds for future paved trail connections.
- Continue to work with the disc golf volunteer group on the maintenance and logistics of the popular 18-hole disc golf course. (The first 9-hole portion has been in use since the fall of 2016; the back 9-hole portion opened in December of 2020.)
- Continue to build upon programming offered, including, but not limited to: camping, events, programs, and rental opportunities.
- Continue to make improvements as park use dictates including, but not limited to: park benches; picnic tables; family swings; nature playscape features; trail enhancements; signage; plantings; removal of debris and invasive species.
- Continue to explore methods to manage former farm ponds.

This list is intended to help the community understand the Anderson Park District's plans to improve W. M. Johnson Hills Park. The Phase I plan layer establishes a baseline of communication and understanding with the public. The Anderson Park District will continue to work towards including the standard amenities for this public property and to continue to build on programming efforts that encourage our community at large to discover and enjoy this special place in Anderson.

To learn more about W. M. Johnson Hills Park, visit <http://andersonparks.com/johnson-hills-park/> or contact the park office at 513.474.0003.