

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY - NORRIS PLAYGROUND REDEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL
Update to DPW Grant for USDA Forest Service Green Schools Initiative
November 2009

The USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry *Green Schools* initiative aims to improve the network of green infrastructure in Milwaukee through a targeted increase in tree canopy on MPS playgrounds by planting of trees and turf on school playgrounds, thereby reducing stormwater runoff and helping to create neighborhood “pocket parks” if they are properly planted and well maintained. The *Green Schools* funds cover the cost of trees, field run turf and asphalt removal.

The Near West Side Comprehensive Plan, adopted by the Milwaukee Common Council in March of 2004, recommended as a catalytic project the conversion of Norris Playground to community green space. Specifically, the project “proposes to remove the unattractive existing surface and rehabilitate the parcel into appealing green space. By doing so, the project will optimize the use of this land by converting an underutilized and virtually vacant plot into the highly utilized multi-purpose asset to the community.”

The Near West Side Comprehensive Plan and the conversion of Norris Playground to green space is supported by the Avenues West Association, as well as neighborhood stakeholders who will be the primary users of the green space, particularly Marquette University. Other institutions in the area such as the Milwaukee Rescue Mission’s school and the Milwaukee Center for Independence will also benefit from this effort. All of these institutions serve children, students, young adults, and others who will activate the green space for recreational and educational use.

The *Green Schools* funding provided the City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works (DPW) with the opportunity to remove the asphalt and demonstrate the feasibility of having grass grow and thrive in that area. DPW also made much needed repairs to the existing field-house and installed a drain for stormwater runoff. The site is now cleared for further green development because of the federal funding from USDA. Because of the prior condition of the site, institutional stakeholders were reluctant to invest in improvements to the site until DPW could assure stakeholders of the site’s readiness and development potential.

Due to recent challenges in the local economy, private funding through the Friends of Norris Park for the original design became difficult to secure. The City of Milwaukee sought to bring the institutional stakeholders together to collaborate on the redevelopment of Norris Playground that would fully meet the intent of the *Green Schools* program guidelines as well as the goals of the Near West Side Comprehensive Plan.

In that spirit, as one of the largest stakeholders, Marquette University has agreed to pursue a multi-year lease arrangement with the City of Milwaukee that would further develop

Norris Playground to create a highly utilized “pocket park” to provide much needed recreational fields and green space. In addition to the recreational green space, Marquette University will work with the City of Milwaukee to plant and maintain additional trees at Norris Playground. The Norris Playground tree planting program will be linked to the university’s tree planting program, which recently incorporated a Wisconsin native tree focus. The native tree project is a joint educational and biodiversity effort between the Biological Sciences Department, the Office of the University Architect, and the Students for an Environmentally Active Campus (SEAC).

Marquette University proposes to invest in the following:

- update the existing site with all natural grass turf, including the removal of remaining concrete, with playing fields to accommodate recreational sports such as field hockey, lacrosse, softball, soccer, and other sports;
- maintain the existing field house and restrooms to support patrons (university students, university staff, other children and school-age students, community members);
- ensure the stormwater runoff priority is maintained and/or enhanced with any updates to the site;
- implement a safety program through 1) the installation of lights to maximize use of the site for both daytime and evening activities, 2) the reinforcement of existing fencing, especially to better protect young and school-age children, in addition to college students, who will be regular users of the fields, 3) the installation of security cameras linked to the university’s surveillance program, and 4) the addition of Norris Playground in the university’s security patrol protocol;
- promote the opportunity for the community to readily access and utilize the site through the university’s established procedure for “use of university facilities” by 1) clearly posting the policy and procedures on-site at Norris Playground as well as on the university’s website and related resources, and 2) directly conducting outreach to neighborhood stakeholders, MPS, and other potential users of the site regarding the opportunity to access the site for community use.

The cost to Marquette University is approximately \$400,000 for the capital improvements. In addition, the university will fund the annual operating costs associated with properly staffing and maintaining the site, as well as ensuring that the site is well-programmed and well-protected for use by the neighborhood stakeholders.

The effort to further develop Norris Playground into recreational green space according to the proposed plan by Marquette University for playing fields has the support of the following neighborhood and institutional stakeholders:

- Avenues West Association
 - Avenues West Association is a not-for-profit neighborhood association that advocates for development, revitalization, and safety throughout its 94 square block area. With its partner, Business Improvement District #10, the association leads the way in promoting community stability, land balance and economic development.
- Milwaukee Center for Independence (MCFI)
 - MCFI's School for Early Development and Achievement (SEDA) currently educates children 3 to 6 years old. Its half day K3 program serves only children with a diagnosed disability. SEDA welcomes students with and without special needs, in a full inclusion environment with small class sizes. SEDA offers an individualized educational plan for every child that is tailored to each child's unique needs. Its certified staff includes teachers, therapists and aides. The school offers families support and resources from the day their child is enrolled in the SEDA program, giving them the tools they need to help their child succeed at the highest level possible.
 - MCFI's Adult Day Services includes a comprehensive program entitled, L.I.F.E. (Leisure, Inclusion, Fun & Experience) for adults with physical and cognitive disabilities. L.I.F.E. programs, through a menu of more than 200 different activities, promote personal choice, self-sufficiency, friendships, recreational opportunities and provide a support system for individuals as they move through life's challenges.
- Milwaukee Rescue Mission (MRM)
 - MRM provides shelter, food, education, and training to help the homeless. One of its programs is a shelter for women and children known as Joy House.
 - MRM also operates the CrossTrainers Academy. It offers pre-kindergarten through 5th grade classes, and also serves some of the children who are staying in Joy House.
- Marquette University Child Care Center
 - The Marquette University Child Care Center is a non-profit, employer sponsored facility owned and operated by Marquette University since 1989. The center is open to children of students, staff and alumni of Marquette University, ages 6 weeks through 11 years of age. The center serves 100+ children year round and runs summer programs for school age children.
- Local law enforcement including Milwaukee Police Department's Avenues West Police Substation and the Milwaukee County District Attorney's Community Prosecution Unit.

Marquette University believes that its proposed enhancements and programs are consistent with the goals set forth in the original cooperative agreement between the City of Milwaukee and the USDA Forest Service for *Green Schools* “to increase tree canopy and reduce impervious surfaces on Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) playgrounds.” In fact, the university’s proposal removes 100% of the asphalt compared with the original proposal to remove 90%. The original proposal aimed to have an additional investment of up to \$390,000, whereas the university’s proposal will leverage at least \$400,000 in capital improvements plus annual funds to support the annual operation and maintenance of Norris Playground.

Marquette University is pleased to make at least a 25-year commitment to properly enhance, operate, maintain, patrol, and promote new recreational green space coupled with a tree planting and education program at Norris Playground through a multi-year lease with the City of Milwaukee. Through this proposed partnership between Marquette University and the City of Milwaukee, Norris Playground will serve the community as a “pocket park” that provides a desirable place to play, gather, and spend time, consistent with the intent and scope of the *Green Schools* initiative.