

**I ENDORSE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT AND URGE THE ROGERS CITY COUNCIL AND CITY ADMINISTRATION TO ENDORSE IT AS WELL.**

NAME:

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**The City of Rogers has made a major commitment to the future development of downtown Rogers by partnering with Gateway Planning. The development of Lake Atalanta Park should be an essential component of that process. Please consider the importance of including Gateway Planning BEFORE making further decisions related to Lake Atalanta.**

### **LAKE ATALANTA PARK - A NATURAL TREASURE FOR ROGERS**

**1. A PLACE FOR ALL:** Lake Atlanta Park should remain a true multi-use community park. It is a place for family picnics, quiet walks in the woods, and leisurely strolls by the lake. It is a place to see wildlife and wildflowers,

It is a place to see springs bubbling from the ground and to contemplate why our ancestors settled here and what these springs must have meant to them. It is a place to hear the haunting call of a barred owl or to take in the annual display of ruby-throated hummingbirds descending on the jewelweed in Frisco Springs Hollow.

It is also a place to take children to a playground where they can wade in a clear, clean, spring-fed creek. The lake itself offers a place to fish and to see what waterfowl has flown in that day or what turtles have gathered. It is also a favorite place for runners, like the War Eagle and Mountaineer cross-country teams, for walkers, for bicyclists, for photographers, for birders, and for artists. It has traditionally also been a park that has provided quiet places for those who seek solitude, away from the noise and pressures of a fast-paced world.

As new developments are planned and their effects are considered, the first question to always ask is, "*What is it that the park is already providing for us that we don't want to lose*"? The answer to this question should guide our planning decisions.

**2. ADVISORY GROUP:** Establish an advisory group of at least 12 area people to help with the planning process in order to provide expertise and more representation for Rogers' residents and the greater Northwest Arkansas community.

- By having this advisory group, there will be a wider range of experts from which to draw information and ideas.
- In addition, Rogers' residents will be much more likely to approve of the planning process and to feel a sense of ownership in the final product.

- The advisory group should be invited to all planning sessions conducted by the current committee and be encouraged to provide information and add their perspective to the planning committee, the city administration, and the city council.

**3. TRAILS:** The difficult geology of the system forming Lake Atlanta and the complex natural communities associated with this geology place limitations on what kinds of trails can be built within the park. The current system of trails provides variety with minimal impacts on the park's most sensitive environments. The park's terrain, with its system of steep hillsides and spring hollows, places some limits on development if protecting natural features like springs, sinkholes, highly-erosive hillsides, native plants, and bird communities is indeed a goal of the city plan.

A major change in the trail system in the park will be unworkable if it increases potential for environmental damage such as erosion and is focused mainly on a relatively specialized groups of cyclists. Even with recent land acquisition, the ecological carrying capacity of Lake Atalanta and its associated spring hollows cannot accommodate a 12-mile trail system.

The Rogers public will be best served by a system of walking and bicycle trails for people of all ages and abilities. This requires focus on provisioning different types of trails for different user groups including those who ride mountain bikes.

- Some trails should be suitable for wheelchair use and for baby strollers.
- Some should be for bicycles only, and these could certainly accommodate off-road cyclists.
- Some trails, especially those in ecologically sensitive areas, should be for foot travel only. Some trails may be places in areas suitable for multi-use by any users.

Trails are important to the park, and with additions to the land base, more miles of trails are possible. However, considering the geological and hydrological characteristics of the park, the trails should be built in ways that protect the spring system and sensitive areas identified in the Natural Heritage study commissioned by the city.

- Finally, the design of new trails should respect the privacy and security of private lands and homes that surround the park by keeping the trails well away from the park boundaries and from private homes.

**4. FISHERIES:** Confine the focus of fishing in the park to Lake Atalanta itself, where it has traditionally been, rather than in the spring-fed creeks upstream from the lake.

Emphasize a sustainable, native fishery that maintains the ecological integrity of the lake.

- The spring creek that feeds Lake Atalanta should not be made to support a population of trout. First, trout of any kind are not native to Arkansas. Second, food sources in that stream (small crustaceans and juvenile insects) are simply insufficient to sustain a trout population of any size for very long. Trout would likely have to be fed. The natural consequence of such feeding would be degradation of water quality with so many fish in a small, confined environment and would require ongoing maintenance costs. This degraded water would then flow right through the portion of the spring creek near the current playground that is most used by children for wading and playing in the water.

**5. NATURAL AREAS and KARST ECOLOGY/SPRINGS:** The botanical report submitted by The Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission provides a suitable blueprint or starting place for demarcation of special natural areas in the park. Protection of these areas is of first concern.

These places are non-replaceable parts of the natural heritage of Rogers. If saved, they will benefit both present and future generations. And being so close to downtown, many citizens will over time take joy in visiting and knowing about them.

- Educational signage can be placed to explain their special qualities. This will allow local education institutions to better use the park as an outdoor classroom.
- These designated and managed natural areas can accommodate trails in places, especially foot trails like the one up Frisco Spring Hollow. These could be valuable points of interest wherever foot trails or bike trails intersect with these protected natural areas.
- These natural areas also protect wildlife species, including plants and animals that benefit from being shielded from heavy disturbances.
- Natural springs and their spring runs should not be impounded in any way. Ponding these runs will damage native species that depend on this habitat.
- The existing well-designed trail up Frisco Spring Hollow permits easy views of Diamond and Frisco Springs. This trail has been damaged by flooding and needs to be repaired, including potential addition of cross pipes to allow flows that exist above the trail to reach the spring runs without damaging the trail.
- A carefully designed effort should be made to reduce the extensive impact of non-native plant species in the hollow and along the runs. Removal of aggressive exotic plants like privet would permit the native plants growing room.
- The city should consider funding for a scientific inventory of the extent and nature of karst geology that underlies the entire park.

**6. CULTURAL AND HISTORIC SITES/EDUCATION:** Protection of springs that form Prairie Creek and Lake Atalanta should be the city's top priority in redeveloping the park. There is a long history of how human beings have used springs and spring runs in the Ozarks.

- Humans used these springs thousands of years ago. Years ago, Rogers recognized their importance by placing interpretative signs showing how the community's early days depended entirely on the functionality and quality of these springs. It is time to build on this interpretation in the redevelopment of the park.
- Springs small and large occur all over the park and throughout our region. Many towns have formed around them, e.g., Rogers, Springdale, Eureka Springs, Cave Springs, and Siloam Springs.
- One of the biggest challenges to population and industrial growth for Rogers and Northwest Arkansas is water quality. Protecting and understanding the nuts and bolts of water quality is essential to both protecting the integrity of Lake Atalanta's springs and helping the public understand how the long term well-being of everyone in Northwest Arkansas is directly tied to protecting and enhancing water quality. In Rogers, it starts with these springs that are major tributaries to Beaver Lake. Interpretative signs explaining early settlement and water uses help people grasp the importance of these springs.

The park lends itself well to nature education. The springs and spring creeks are a valuable example of an Ozark spring system. The natural areas in the park can also be used for the study of native plant and animal communities.

- These places are not only enjoyed by casual visitors to the park but also are used for educational purposes by Rogers Public Schools, Northwest Arkansas Community College, the University of Arkansas, and other academic institutions.
- The Elders property (Shelton property) is a recent 20-acre addition to the park that has good potential as a nature center. It encompasses the old Elders family house place, a nearby spring and walnut grove, surrounding woods, and a “losing stream,” typical of karst topography. The house should be kept and evaluated for renovation.
- The scout hutch should also be kept and evaluated for various uses, which might add to the natural, cultural, or historical education of visitors.

**7. LAKE MANAGEMENT:** Man-made lakes are the same as any other man-made thing such as a road or a building – they require maintenance and upkeep.

- Lake Atalanta needs maintenance and an updated management plan. It needs periodic drawdowns and sediment removal. Habitat for fish and other aquatic life should be a prime consideration with any lake alterations.
- The sediment that is removed should be disposed of according to all applicable laws and taken off site so as to not pollute or degrade any of the springs, springs creeks, the lake, or any of the other lands in the park or placed in sediment bags and used to protect the existing shorelines.

**8. PLANNING PROCESS:** Provide a period of time of at least 30 days after the December 10, 2013, public meetings for residents to continue to make comments that will be considered by the committee, the advisory group, the city administration, and the council. Many people are out of town for the Christmas and New Years holidays and will not have a chance to digest the information presented on December 10, 2013, until after the first of the year. There has been no formal way for the public to contribute to this current planning process, and a reasonable comment period at this point would be welcomed by many Rogers residents who have been waiting to submit comments and to meet with the city or with their aldermen.

No work in the park related to this plan should begin until the committee and the advisory group have completed the public participation phase, finished the final plan, and gained the approval by the Rogers City Council.

It appears that a looming grant deadline in the fall of 2014 may be causing committee members to rush through work before all necessary considerations, both ecological and recreational, have been properly studied. The city administration and the city council should request that this deadline be extended or removed so that the residents of Rogers can receive an open, careful, and thorough planning process for this valuable city park. The residents of Rogers should not be short-changed by a rushed planning process or a rushed implementation period.

**ADDITIONAL PERSONAL COMMENTS:**