

Mary Jo's Heye-lights

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Issue 8

Mary Jo Heye

City Council Ward 2 Position 1

501-960-0622

maryjohey@gmail.com

1800 Kristen Ct., 72120



Sherwood Mayor & City Council Contact Information

Kevin Lilly
Ward 2, Position 2
501-835-5945
klilly@cityofsherwood.net

April Broderick
Ward 1, Position 1
501-920-0072
abroderick@cityofsherwood.net

Charlie Harmon
Ward 1, Position 2
501-920-1914
charmon@cityofsherwood.net

Beverly Williams
Ward 3, Position 1
501-554-4275
bwilliams@cityofsherwood.net

Marina Brooks
Ward 3, Position 2
501-835-8572
mbrooks1616@gmail.com

Tim McMinn
Ward 4, Position 1
501-772-4766
timmcminn@cityofsherwood.net

Mike Sanders
Ward 4, Position 2
501-590-2537
msanders@cityofsherwood.net

Mayor Virginia Young
501-835-6620
vyoung@cityofsherwood.net

THE PEOPLE SPEAK PARKS

What makes a great park?

I recently posed this question on social media. I think it is important that government reflect the desires of the citizens/community. I knew how I felt about the state of our Parks system but was pleased with the outpouring of opinions. The takeaway from this post was that the community feels that it is important to maintain our current parks in good condition. However, it was also clear as far as parks go, Sherwood citizens think there is a lack of imagination, inclusivity, community involvement, and investment in our growth areas in the past decade.

Parks build community. They are gathering places and provide not only recreational activity but also places for people to meet one another. Parks bring a neighborhood together and create a sense of community by giving citizens that common public place in which to interact. It is important to get neighborhood input and involvement in our parks because these are the people that will be using and treasuring it. Community involvement brings about a pride of ownership.

Towards a Better Park System

We should not be approving large new subdivision developments without green spaces for parks and trails. Why must we always scramble to fix things afterwards - the most expensive way? It is less controversial to have these things identified in the original plans. Some people do not want to live next to a park or trail while others do. Save the fight by planning ahead. The shocking thing is that one of our major local developers has stated that he tried to work with the city to donate land by Millers Glenn years ago and was told the city was not interested. Now, the city has changed its mind. Luckily, the developer is still willing. But what if this had not been the case? Where was the strategic thinking? This requirement reserves the land even if the city does not have the money to develop it. At least the space has been saved and the city can then build the park development into the budget.

By being creative and thinking outside the box, you can make your dollars do more. Disc golf for example, is not expensive and yet provides a fun family activity. How about sand volleyball? Volleyball has become a huge sport and we do not have anything for it in Sherwood. Provide open spaces to fly kites, play soccer & kickball, throw a football, have a picnic, train dogs, etc. (See PARKS, Page 3)

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Land To be Purchased for New Fire Station

The Sherwood Fire Commission put in an offer to purchase land for a new station on Rapid Water Drive and the offer was accepted. Closing will be any day now. Rapid Water Drive is the new street that intersects with Brockington just south of the Hwy. 107 intersection.

This new station location will plug a major gap in the Sherwood Fire District's coverage area in the upper Brockington Road area. For Millers Crossing, Gap Creek, Austin Lakes, Glenn Hills, Stone Hill, and other neighborhoods, this is huge and a long time coming. This will improve response times for these areas. It is important to remember that the Fire District handles much more than fires. They are also medical first responders when there is a stroke or heart attack. Every second is critical when it involves a medical event like these. We have several retirement communities in the Brockington Road area, so this is especially important. *Congratulations and thanks to the Sherwood Fire Commission for this great step. MJHT*

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maryjoheye@gmail.org

Good News! Sales Tax Revenue continue to be up despite COVID!

Sherwood's sales tax revenue is up due to a combination of reasons. More people are shopping online and, due to new state laws, Sherwood is now receiving the sales tax revenue from these sales. Secondly, there is a little-known manufacturer called Southern Coating & Nameplate that has been creative during this crisis and has come up plastic screens being used by schools to prevent the spread of Covid. Third, necessities did not take a hit during this crisis. In other words, retailers like Walmart have not suffered during this crisis unlike small retail chains or those like Dillards. And finally, the crowds at the store on Keihl Avenue that is hard to not notice, Natural Relief Dispensary, is doing incredible business. I know that this was not a business that everyone was happy about. However, the boost in our tax revenue is appreciated.

While this is good news, I encourage people to shop local whenever possible. I do not want a world where I can not go to a store and see and feel the merchandise.

NOTICE

Harmon Center Information

- **Harmon Center remains closed on Sundays.**
- **No basketball courts are available.**
- **The pool heater is still broken, *wet suits are advised.***
- **And Generalissimo Francisco Franco is still dead**



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(PARKS, continued from Page 1)

Parks should be inclusive. There should be equipment for kids of different sizes and ages and handicap accessible. At a very low cost, you can include braille signage, for example. There should be ample benches for parents, grandparents, and others. Picnic benches that are wheelchair accessible. There are wonderful mother/toddler swings available, also.

Parks can be educational. You can plant indigenous plants and have them labelled. Label the trees in the park. Create butterfly gardens. Involve our local talented gardeners - we have so many master gardeners in the area. If we put in a sidewalk or walk path, stamp impressions of leaves of trees and animal prints on the path, adding labels or other signage identifying them. Imagine scavenger hunts in the park. Create spaces that stimulate the imagination.

Benchmarking is so important in park development! Look around at the other city's parks and evaluate what is good and how they did it. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. Any time Tab and I go somewhere, we check out their infrastructure and parks. There are some amazing beautiful parks out there and ideas are free for the taking.

Sherwood Needs to Emphasize Parks Again

One thing was interesting when looking at the history of Sherwood parks and what our park system looks like currently, you can clearly see administrations where it was a priority and when it was not. Under Mayor Evans and Mayor Harmon, we had tremendous parks growth. This is evident by the abundance of a variety of parks in the southern part of the city. Then it stops. Under the current administration, the city has continued to grow and some work has been done in a few major recreational areas (soccer & tennis) but neighborhood parks did not grow with it. This also seems to coincide with the take over and prioritization of the golf course.

The bond issue for the splashpad, soccer, and tennis complex was envisioned (**top of next column**)

(PARKS, continued from previous column)

and pushed through by Sonny Jenson, the former Parks Director. He did this by bonding A & P monies which was approved by the voters. These were one-time monies however, and they have all been spent as referenced in a previous Mary Jo's Heye-Lights issue. This did not address the need for neighborhood parks in block after block, subdivision after subdivision of new home development under this administration. The Ten-Minute Walk rule for neighborhood parks has been forgotten – if it is even known.

Parks spending is a community investment that pays dividends. They make our community more marketable to new home buyers. They keep our property values up. They increase our quality of life by increasing our quality of place!

What needs to be done in the future? We need strategic parks planning. We need budgetary commitment for parks. We need an administration that understands what a modern park is and is committed to making those parks happen. **MJHT**



Let's take a closer look at this City Facebook Post

The City of Sherwood made a Facebook post on August 4th touting the work done on city parks “over the last few months.” (The full text of the post is included below.) What does a “few months” mean to you? Two months? Three months? Six? Would two years ago mean a few months to you? Let's go through this list. (**See FACEBOOK, Top of Page 4**)

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(FACEBOOK, from bottom of page 3)

• Pickthorne Park on Marlar Drive received parking lot updates and a new pavilion to replace an older one. ***This Pavilion was replaced in 2018. Why the disinformation?***



• Delmont Park on Sherwood Avenue received a new sign regarding its historical significance, parking updates, sidewalks connecting features (including the grill) and a new swing set. ***The picture of the swing set pictured was replaced in 2018, more disinformation. Why? To be fair, the sign is new.***

• Sherwood has many great facilities, including 20+ neighborhood parks, and upkeep is an ongoing process. ***According to the city's map there are 16 parks. Now if you include two POA neighborhood parks, Gap Creek and Hidden Lake that would bring the number to 18. However, the city does not maintain these parks, so this would not make sense with this statement. Why the overstatement? Can the City not look at its own city parks map to see how many parks there are? Clearly this is once again a subtle way to mislead the public.***

• In exciting news, Indianhead Park will receive a NEW playground in 2020 in place of a dilapidated tennis court. ***Great! This happened, but I had to fight hard for this overdue improvement. I offered to help with this project to make it unique. My offer was ignored. Instead, we got more cookie cutter equipment. At least it was something. However, the city also tore out the tennis court. Yes, this tennis court needed to (Top of next column)***

(FACEBOOK, continued from previous column)
be repaired, but it was completely removed and the new playground was placed there. That space and that facility is gone. This action is a diminishment of the park. Further, a city asset was destroyed without even a whisper to the Parks & Recreation Committee or to the City Council. Neither the Committee or the Council approved of the action. I asked about this and was told that this decision went up the lines to the Mayor. Let's get this straight - city assets should not be destroyed without Council approval. And why destroy it? There was an old playground set with a bigger fall zone already in place. Replace the old playground equipment with the new equipment in the existing fall zone. The tennis court could have then been fixed with the extra revenue that the city has been receiving from sales tax. Any talk of replacing it with anything ...No!

• Construction is ongoing for the new soccer fields and tennis courts at the Sherwood Sports Complex. ***This is true. But why is it "ongoing?" This complex was originally supposed to be opened in January 2020 and then no later than Memorial Day. And still we wait. Why? These projects are riddled with ongoing problems. This has been frustrating and disappointing for the tennis and soccer communities. This is not something to brag about.***

Overall, I expect my city government to put out the truth. I do not want my city government to say they are doing more than they actually are. How are we to know when they are telling the truth? A resident put in a Freedom of Information Act to get to the truth and passed it along to me. Why is this necessary to get the truth?

This city has an ongoing problem with transparency! The new communication director can serve a useful purpose, but she should not put out disinformation. I do not blame this new employee. She is doing what she is told. The city actually needs to doing things to be proud of and then no disinformation is needed. The entire text of the City's August 4th Facebook Post is on the next page. MJHT

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August 4th Facebook Post City of Sherwood Arkansas - Government

August 4 ·

Just a quick Parks Department update:

Over the last few months, we've seen some needed improvements to our parks throughout the city. As you may know, Sherwood has many great facilities, including 20+ neighborhood parks, and upkeep is an ongoing process. A couple of the parks that have been partially renovated in recent months are:

- Delmont Park on Sherwood Avenue received a new sign regarding its historical significance, parking updates, sidewalks connecting features (including the grill) and a new swing set
- Pickthorne Park on Marlar Drive received parking lot updates and a new pavilion to replace an older one
- Barnhardt park next to City Hall had some invasive trees and overgrown shrubs removed
- Henson trail had some work done for a trail detour around a drop-off caused by erosion

Other parks will receive attention as time and budget allow. All facilities are being assessed and a plan is being developed to update parks systemwide.

In exciting news, Indianhead Park will receive a NEW playground in 2020 in place of a dilapidated tennis court.

Construction is ongoing for the new soccer fields and tennis courts at the Sherwood Sports Complex.

Indianhead Subdivision is getting Sidewalks.



Indianhead is finally getting some sidewalks after many decades of waiting patiently. Sidewalk construction has started on Mohave (see picture). This will **start** the effort to build sidewalk access to the neighborhood park for many people in the Indianhead neighborhood.

On the other hand, the sidewalk for Deerfield will be delayed because the administration decided to apply for a grant which still has not been announced, pushing construction into next year. City money had already been allocated for this project in 2020. It could be being built right now along with Mohave.

City Council member Kevin Lilly and I expressed our exasperation at the Street Committee meeting at this administration decision. The city should have picked another project that was not already funded in this year's budget. There were other streets already on the sidewalk list for **next** year that needed the extensive engineering. These are federal grants and all require professional engineering. Perfect, right? Deerfield did not require professional engineering. Indianhead and Shoshoni are arguably the best projects for such grants. They have the high traffic counts and open ditches. Even non-Sherwood traffic uses these streets. These projects have both a great need for sidewalks and a need for engineering.

As it stands, there is no guarantee that Deerfield will get grant money. Regardless, it will be on hold until the grant awards are announced later this year. Hopefully, this type of decision making will not happen again and the administration will think more strategically in the future. Oh and also, if Deerfield doesn't get a grant, it doesn't start over. It was a funded project. The Deerfield project shouldn't be unfunded because of this administration's decision.

MJHT