

League of Women Voters of Lawrence-Douglas County

P.O. Box 1072, Lawrence, Kansas 66044

September 25, 2005

Dr. Terry Riordan, Chairman
Members
Lawrence-Douglas County Planning Commission
City Hall
Lawrence, Kansas 66044

RE: ITEM NO. 20: COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT; CHAPTER 9 – PARK, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACES

Dear Chairman Riordan and Planning Commissioners:

We very much appreciate the dedication and commitment of the committee responsible for writing the amendments to this chapter. Because the Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan is a separate document from this chapter, we hope that you will include your own concerns and considerations in the draft that is adopted in *Horizon 2020*.

There are changes in the current draft that we are glad to see. However, there are some concerns remaining which are listed below.

Mini-parks. We suggest that mini-parks be reinstated for higher than average density areas or where neighborhood parks are not centrally located.

The location of neighborhood parks. A location for a park in this plan would be acceptable if it is adjacent to a school. The problem is that even K–6 schools, which today are built large enough to accommodate several sections, are generally located at the periphery of neighborhoods. Once truly neighborhood schools, these now serve a much larger residential community. When the schools are not centrally located in a neighborhood, there should be some compensatory requirement for siting a neighborhood park that is closer to the center of the neighborhood that it serves. Most neighborhood parks are within “walking distance” of children because they are located adjacent to schools. However, it is important to consider how close each residential area is to its park when the whole neighborhood is considered.

A confusion in terminology. The term *natural areas*, as defined in the *Horizon 2020 Background Studies*, means *historically unaltered*, such as unplowed prairie. In addition to natural areas, there are other kinds of environmental lands that merit preservation as open space or parkland. These other kinds of areas are generally termed *environmentally sensitive lands*. Environmentally sensitive land features include forested areas, steep slopes, floodplains, wetlands, rock outcrops, prominent ridgelines, stream corridors and their riparian areas, and wildlife corridors. Some environmentally sensitive lands may not necessarily be historically unaltered, but are ecologically important. These should be treated differently when being incorporated into development, or when being used as transition areas. Some types allow human incursion, others do not. For instance, wildlife areas themselves should be buffered from human developments.

The need to distinguish land forms according to their need for preservation and potential for proper use. **Page 9-23, Goal 6** and policies is a start in this direction. However, because of the use of the term “natural areas” as a general term, **Page 9.22, Policy 5.2** could be misinterpreted to allow any type of land form to be used as a transitional area in a way that would be destructive rather than beneficial. Land forms that are suitable as transition areas between developed and undeveloped areas should be distinguished from those that would be damaged or destroyed by being used this way.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely yours,

Alan Black, Chairman
Land Use Committee

Caleb Morse
LWV L-DC Board of Directors