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Manhattan Parks and Recreation staff led this master plan study. This plan would not be possible without input from hundreds of Manhattan residents who participated in this planning process. Thank you for engaging with us online, at Warner Memorial Park, and around the community.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Warner Memorial Park is an 89-acre natural area park in the southwest quadrant of the City. The parkland is owned by the City of Manhattan. 80 acres was acquired through land donations and purchase in 1957. The park was dedicated and opened in 1959. The park is largely undeveloped and in a natural state. Existing park amenities include mowed pathways and natural surface trails, including the historic Military Trail, and two park shelters. A 9-hole disc golf course was constructed in 2010.

Since the City acquired Warner Memorial Park, several master plans (1966, 1978, 1987, 1992, 2002) have recommended changes or additional amenities be added to the Park. The most recent 10-year master plan was prepared by City of Manhattan staff in 2002. This planning process involved community input and multiple work sessions with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. The Plan recommended that Warner Memorial Park be managed to allow only minimal development to maintain the open character of the Park and recommended a new vehicular access point from Shuss Road, addition of two restrooms, parking and picnic shelter improvements, management of invasive red cedars, and improved signage. Significant recommendations from this plan that have not been accomplished include construction of permanent restrooms and relocation of the west parking lot.

In 2015, a cursory review of the Park was completed as part of the Parks and Recreation Strategic Facility Improvement Plan (SFIP). The SFIP concurred with the 2002 master plan that the Park should remain primarily a natural area and recommended an updated Park master plan be prepared to further investigate passive recreation opportunities.
Warner Memorial Park

Situated in the southwestern part of Manhattan, Warner Memorial Park is surrounded by residential and commercial development, yet offers one of the largest expanses of undeveloped open space in the community. Naturalized wooded areas, open space, and select native prairie grass areas are the primary attributes of this Park. With the exception of two covered shelters and some road improvements, this Park has been left mostly undeveloped. Existing features include open prairie, hiking trails, a cross-country course used by the school district, and a 9-hole disc golf course. The gravel parking lots and shelters do not have lighting. This was intentional to deter use of the Park after dusk. A stormwater retention pond is located on the northwest corner of Warner Memorial Park.

Vehicular access to the Park is limited through the main gate off of Warner Park Road and the disc golf parking lot off Shuss Road. The gravel parking lot off of Warner Park Road can accommodate 15-20 vehicles, while the gravel parking lot off of Shuss Road can fit approximately 10-12 vehicles. In certain circumstances, special arrangements are made for larger groups through the Manhattan Parks and Recreation Department. Walk-in access is also possible from three neighborhood trails: Cherry Hills, EJ Frick, and Miller Ranch.

In August of 2016, during the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) discussions for 2017, City Staff recommended professional services to develop a Warner Memorial Park Master Plan. The City Commission approved the CIP project to be funded with surplus Economic Development Funds totaling $45,000. An additional $15,000 was allocated from EcoDevo for implementation of the plan’s priority improvements. Periodically, through 2016 and 2017, Manhattan residents approached the City Commission in the Public Comments portion of the meetings to express their interest in expanding the disc golf course at Warner Memorial Park.

On October 18, 2016, the City Commission tabled a consent agenda item to advertise a Request for Qualifications for Professional Services to develop a Warner Memorial Park Master Plan. Commissioners cited the cost to hire a consultant and expressed concerns about using Economic Development funds, as proposed in the 2017 Capital Improvement Program. At this time, a majority of Commissioners expressed their support to expand the disc golf course. The City Commission directed staff to reach out to Kansas State University for possible joint ventures in preparing a Warner Memorial Park Master Plan.

Why Update the Warner Memorial Park Master Plan?

The last master plan for Warner Memorial Park was adopted in 2002. At that time, a Ten-Year Plan was developed which detailed a maintenance strategy for the Park. The Parks and Recreation Strategic Facility Improvement Plan (SFIP 2015) recommended updating the master plan for the Park. Soon after, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) recommended City Staff update the master plan for Warner Memorial Park. City Commission goals identified the development and implementation of a Warner Memorial Park Master Plan as a priority in 2018/2019.

From 2009 through 2016, PRAB meeting minutes record Warner Memorial Park as a topic 18 times. Of those 18 occasions, 11 mention disc golf. On September 14, 2009, PRAB approved the 9-hole course. According to DGcourserewiew.com, the current disc golf course is ranked 13th in the Nation as a 9-hole course. In December 2012, the PRAB was in favor of adding another 9-holes to the exiting course. They saw the expansion of the disc golf as an asset to Warner Memorial Park. The Director of Parks & Rec at the time, Curt Loupe, stated that Warner Memorial Park needed a master plan before moving forward on the expansion.

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CHAPTER 2: HISTORY

This chapter provides a brief history of Warner Memorial Park. This information is sourced from City Commission minutes, Park Board minutes, newspaper articles from The Manhattan Mercury and The Manhattan Republic, letters, previous park master plans, and other related documents.
Warner Memorial Park Master Plan: 1957-1959

The City of Manhattan acquired 80 acres of land in 1957, which was dedicated as Warner Memorial Park. The parkland was acquired through a combination donation/purchase from Kern and Bessie Warner. In May of 1957, the City Commission accepted "approximately forty acres of ground as a gift to the City for park purposes" from Kern and Bessie Warner. Warner also offered a second tract of 40 acres for sale if the community could raise funds in 65 days. A public campaign to raise funds began at the end of May. The public contributed funds for the City to purchase the land and surpassed the amount needed by July.

The Park Board announced that Warner intended to donate 10 acres of the 40 up for sale in memory of Meda Warner, his first wife, and that Mr. and Mrs. C. N. Shuss would donate 3 acres for new entrances to the Park. By September, the public fundraising was completed and the City Commission approved Warner Memorial Park as the official park name. The land contract stipulated that if a total of $1,500 per year for three years was spent by the City on park development, improvement and maintenance of Warner Memorial Park, the Warners agreed to contribute another $1,000 in cash for further improvement and maintenance of the Park.

Planning the new park began immediately. At a Park Board meeting in October of 1957, City Manager Wesche reported that the plan was for the area to be a natural park for unorganized play - as natural and rustic as possible - and that the plan was to keep roads to a minimum. Mr. Wesche suggested historical markers for the Leavenworth-Fort Riley trail, which goes through the Park.

In November of 1957, L. R. Quinlan, Professor of Landscape Architecture at K-State had 14 students assist him in planning for the new Park. The students' work was presented in January of 1958 and a Park Board subcommittee was created to find "one basic plan." More than 100 people attended a meeting in February of 1958 held to discuss park and recreation developments in the area, including an opportunity to view Warner Memorial Park plan concepts prepared by Quinlan's students. In May of 1958, 1.35 acres were donated from Warner and 0.9 acres from Miller to be put towards a road leading to the Park from the south.

In August of 1959, a dedication ceremony was held for Warner Memorial Park. The City Manager reported that the master plan for the development of Warner Memorial Park provided the following: 2 shelter houses, 11 concrete tables, 11 fireplaces, 11 waste receptacles, 4 restrooms – 2 each site, 2 wells, and 2 lookouts – observation points. The archery range was sanctioned by the National Field Archery Association in August as well.

In September, Manhattan garden clubs (Women's Club) started working on a proposal to further develop Warner Memorial Park. The Women's Club presented their proposal at the November Park Board meeting and suggested putting funds towards completing roads, sinking two wells, landscaping, building shelters, restrooms, replaces, a bridge, an observation tower, playground and a baseball diamond. Throughout 1959, a new shelter house, eight new concrete picnic tables, and two new restrooms in the Scout Area were constructed. Part of the road system along with three parking areas were constructed. Part of the road system along with three parking areas were constructed. Part of the road system along with three parking areas were constructed. Part of the road system along with three parking areas were constructed. Part of the road system along with three parking areas were constructed. Part of the road system along with three parking areas were constructed.

Throughout the 1960s, Warner Memorial Park was used extensively as a picnic ground. Articles appeared routinely in the Manhattan Mercury throughout the year documenting various clubs, families, or groups who held a picnic at the park. In January of 1960, a motion by the Park Board was carried to officially designate a 'picnic ball diamond.' In June, City Manager Wesche reported that the contract to spend $1,500 annually on Park improvements for three years had been fulfilled. A total of $7,856 was spent the first two years and $3,700 in 1960. The Sertoma Club had matched the City's $1,500 annually for the three years, just as they had done at Sunset Park.
Parks and Recreation hosted numerous public meetings and discussions with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and the City Commission. Kern Warner's grandson, Bill Warner, and Don Parrish, a friend of Kern's, advocated for what they believed what Kern Warner would have wanted for the Park: to be used by the greater Manhattan community. A group of neighborhood residents, concerned about a history of parties and illegal activity in the Park, wanted to limit access to prevent those kind of activities from occurring again. In the summer of 1996, Jason Meier, Park Planner Intern, prepared "Warner Memorial Park Master Plan" concept drawings. In September of 1996, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board discussed short and long range goals for the Park. Long range goals included improving the shelters, controlling erosion on the roadways and parking lots, reclaiming the Park boundaries, and developing a plan for Park uses for the community. Short term goals included removing damaged concrete picnic tables, fire pits, old posts, and trees. In December 1996, 5.03 acres were annexed into the Park during development of Miller Ranch subdivision. During construction, a retention pond was created to handle stormwater runoff.

**Park Development and Use: 2000-Present**

The 2000s saw continued interest in Warner Memorial Park with preparation of a new 10-Year Plan, development of the Old Military Trail, and addition of a 9-hole disc golf course. The City also worked with adjacent land owners to remove a variety of private structures and other property from the Park. Interest in expanding the disc golf course to 18-holes started in 2012. In the spring of 2018, Landscape Architecture students from the LAR320 studio at Kansas State University created master plan concepts for the Park and presented their visions for the park at the Flint Hills Discovery Center in April.

In 1963, the Mercury printed a series of articles about hosting a good picnic, and advertisements extolled the virtues of Warner Memorial Park as a fine picnic area. The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts frequented the Park often as well. In May of 1963, a proposal to blacktop the roads in the Park was deemed too big of an undertaking for the Sertoma Club. Construction of new homes began along the south and north sides of the park. The Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan made in June of 1966 included a Capital Improvement Plan for the Park that planned to install water mains, construct 3 toilet facilities, additional picnic facilities, surface parking lots and roads with asphaltic concrete overlay for a total of $51,000 to be spent on Park improvements. By the late-1960s, public attention was turned toward CICO Park and development of new athletic facilities there.

**Park Development and Use: 1970-1979**

During the 1970s, Warner Memorial Park was viewed with renewed interest as a site for recreation including cross country. Numerous proposals were made for additional recreation amenities to serve a growing population as new home construction continued in areas around Warner Memorial Park. The Girl Scouts continued to use the Park for activities throughout the decade. Public notices for picnics were less frequent during this period than in previous years.

**Park Development and Use: 1980-1989**

In the early 1980s, news clippings about Warner Memorial Park focused on cross country events, homes for sale around the Park, and development of Cherry Hills Estates. In 1987, a Landscape Architecture student prepared a master plan. She conducted a survey with Park neighbors and suggested construction of a nature center, nature trail, restrooms, playground, cross country trails, and Boy Scout camp area. The old restrooms were demolished and left in the ravine. Later in the decade, growing concerns about crime in the Park led to changes.

**Park Development and Use: 1990-1999**

The 1990s saw the Park closed to vehicular traffic and a significant community discussion about access and use of the parkland ensued. Parks and Recreation hosted numerous public meetings and discussions with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and the City Commission. Kern Warner's grandson, Bill Warner, and Don Parrish, a friend of Kern's, advocated for what they believed what Kern Warner would have wanted for the Park: to be used by the greater Manhattan community.

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This chapter of the master plan provides a brief overview of the existing features, conditions, and current uses of Warner Memorial Park. Understanding these three items at the Park was an important step in developing design concepts. The Park is used by the community for hiking, walking, and trail running; wildlife and bird watching; disc golf; and other passive recreation opportunities.
Existing Features and Conditions

Warner Memorial Park contains a similar aesthetic seen throughout the Flint Hills of Kansas. A majority of the Park is vegetated with a mixture of native open prairie, which is typically hayed annually in July or August, and surrounded at the periphery with wooded areas. Specific areas of the Park are regularly mowed prairie to accommodate trails, cross country, and disc golf.

Features include:

- Two gravel parking lots which can accommodate 20-25 total vehicles. The gravel lots appear to weather well and do not require maintenance very often.
- Vehicular access is restricted by a gate at the southwest parking lot. The community can check-out a key at the Parks & Rec office to open the gate and enter the Park.
- Two existing shelters can be found in the Park, one in the center of the Park and another near the 9-hole disc golf course. According to reservation records, the shelters have not been reserved in the last three years. The shell of a third shelter can be found on the northern part of the Park.
- Numerous trails can be found within Warner Memorial Park, both rogue and official trails. Erosion can be an issue, particularly on steep slopes and areas adjacent to the roadway.

An aerial image from the 1950s was analyzed and the tree coverage was digitally extracted to scale (light green below). Visual inspection of the 1950s image appears to show mostly hardwood vegetation in the ravines. The extracted layer was imposed on an aerial image from 2018 for comparison. The 2018 image was taken during the winter, when the hardwoods lose their leaves. This image clearly shows where the invasive eastern red cedar has taken over in the Park. If left unchecked, the red cedar population could expand in the prairie areas of Warner Memorial Park. Park crews currently mitigate the overgrowth of red cedars through haying practices and plan to continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Figure 12: Remnants of an old shelter on the north side of the Park.

Figure 13: Southwest entrance of Warner Memorial Park.

Figure 14: Shelters and benches on the east side of the Park.

Figure 15: Existing trail erosion.

Figure 16: 1950’s and 2018 invasive tree coverage comparison.
Trails
Numerous trails currently exist inside Warner Memorial Park, in various capacities. Official trails include the "8 Weeks Trail", "Scouts Trail", and the "Old Military Trail". During the warmer months, the cross country route is mowed once a month. Rogue trails have been developed by many individuals over the years, including many "fall line" trails. These trails are susceptible to erosion. There are also a number of well-worn natural foot paths on the east side of the Park as a result of the existing 9-hole disc golf course. Park maintenance crews have implemented a fall herbicide treatment to combat the invasive honeysuckle to keep desired pathways cleared.

Warner Park Usage Study
In September of 2017, the Flint Hills Metropolitan Planning Organization (FHMPO) and the City conducted trail counts in key locations throughout Warner Memorial Park. The counters were able to track how many people traveled through the Park and recorded day-to-day usage patterns. The data collected is conveyed in the image below, showing the average users per day during the two week study.
Disc Golf

In September of 2009, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) recommended the construction of a 9-hole disc golf course in the eastern meadow of Warner Memorial Park. The local disc golf club worked with Parks & Rec to raise funds and install baskets and tee pads. The 9-hole disc golf course is the only disc golf course within Manhattan city limits. The Little Apple Disc Golf Club holds weekly league play and various events from March through November at the Park. Park maintenance crews mow the eastern meadow every three to four weeks during the warmer months. The current footprint of the disc golf course is approximately 10 acres. According to dgcoursereview.com, the 9-hole disc golf course at Warner Memorial Park is ranked 13th in the nation.

Cross Country Course

In the early 1970’s, the K-State and Manhattan High Cross Country teams began using Warner Memorial Park as a practice site. In September of 1975, Manhattan High Cross Country hosted their first high school invitational at the Park. The high school and middle school host 3 events a year. Practice occurs once or twice a week between June and October. Park maintenance crews mow the course once a month during the warmer months. The footprint of the course is approximately 34 acres on the west side of the Park and is 3.1 miles long. The course is also usable by the public as mowed walking paths.
The master plan process engaged Manhattan residents throughout the community to assess their needs and desired improvements for the Park. Staff utilized a community survey, a neighborhood focus group, a Kansas State University Landscape Architecture Studio, neighborhood meetings, advisory boards, and the City Commission to solicit ideas and feedback.

Using the information collected through the public engagement process and considering existing conditions/uses, multiple conceptual layouts for the Park were developed. The following chapter explores the concepts developed during the design phase.
In February 2017, Parks and Recreation Staff released a survey inquiring about the uses of Warner Memorial Park and what the community wants to see in the Park. Overall, the results showed that the Park is a place people go to experience nature. Eighty percent of those who responded stated that it was important or very important to maintain as native prairie. Trails and restrooms rated highest when asked about priority improvements. Playgrounds, Dog Park, and expanded Disc Golf were supported by those users, but were not a priority for most others. When the results were published, the disc golf community felt the survey was not properly distributed to encompass the greater community such as K-State and Ft. Riley, therefore, results were low in regards to prioritizing the disc golf expansion.

Little Apple Disc Golf

In November 2017, City Staff held a meeting with representatives from the Little Apple Disc Golf Club (LADGC). The LADGC presented their concerns about communication and prioritization of disc golf by the Parks & Rec Department. The meeting discussed the possibility of a commitment to disc golf in the Park master plan and to help grow the sport in the community. As an existing Park use, disc golf would be given consideration in the planning process. A public process would ultimately determine the appropriate mix of uses and areas where different activities could occur. The LADGC presented their support for hiring a professional disc golf designer to create more buzz for the expansion of the course and ensure a safe, quality course layout.

LAR 320 Studio

In October 2016, the City Commission requested City Administration collaborate with Kansas State University in an effort to generate design concepts for Warner Memorial Park. On December 1, 2017, the City entered into an agreement with Kansas State University for development of Warner Memorial Park master plan concepts. The agreement indicated that students in LAR320, a 2nd-year landscape architecture studio, would prepare up to nine conceptual designs for the Park. To introduce the students to the project, City Staff facilitated a site visit to the Park on February 19, 2018. A stakeholder meeting was held at City Hall on February 21, 2018, with representatives from surrounding neighborhoods, high school and K-State Cross Country, the local disc golf club, and the Convention and Visitor’s Bureau. Students presented their final conceptual design proposals at an open house public meeting on April 14, 2018 at the Flint Hills Discovery Center.
With completion of the student’s concepts, City Staff developed two master plan concepts, “Aromatic Sumac” and “Blue Sage,” based on student ideas and public feedback. The process included opportunities for public input through City Advisory Board meetings and multiple public engagements. The first neighborhood meeting was at Warner Memorial Park on July 12, 2018 and the second was at the Flint Hills Discovery Center on July 19, 2018. City Staff mailed postcards to residents within 500 feet of the park, emailed various neighborhood groups/stakeholders, and advertised on social media. Around 43 citizens attended the first meeting and 29 on the second, consisting of neighbors of the park and disc golf supporters.

The Aromatic Sumac Concept proposed improved trail connections, restrooms, nature education activities, expansion of the disc golf course across the ravine, and improved parking that is considerate of the native prairie. The proposed visitors center and nature play area are located next to the south parking lot for easy access. Restrooms would be located inside the visitors center. The proposed nature play area would allow children to experience nature in a controlled environment. The proposed overlook could provide views to the surrounding area and doubles as a shelter. Activities such as bird watching and star gazing could occur there. Cross country and disc golf events could use the overlook and amphitheater as a check in station during events. The proposed amphitheater could be used as an outdoor classroom, yoga terrace, outdoor concert venue, grass seating, and a gathering space. The overlook and amphitheater provides the opportunity to cut down invasive red cedar trees in the Park. The education pond proposes a dock with signs to teach visitors about aquatic ecosystems. A proposed dog park located in a shaded area could give owners a place to take their dogs.
BLUE SAGE
course across the ravine, and increased ADA accessibility. The proposed
nature education activities, increased parking, expansion of the disc golf
Warner Memorial Park.
A crosswalk on Shuss Rd and a trail down to Seth Child Commons is
the other side of the ravine and could be incorporated into trail loops.
The proposed gardens would also allow Park users easier access up and
down the ravine. Two bridges are proposed to cross the ravine and join the
the ravine would serve as an erosion control measure while allowing
cut down some invasive red cedar trees in the Park. A single bridge is
an effort to ensure the community would have a world-class disc golf
course that would be safe and appropriate for Warner Memorial Park.
Houck Design

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disc golf course across the ravine, and increased ADA accessibility. The proposed
to perform the work requested.
City staff worked with Houck Design to redefine their initial scope and
two phases, preliminary design and final design/implementation.
During Phase 1, the designer, John Houck, was on site for 12 days for
course. City Staff advertised a Request for Proposals for a professional disc
course layout, meeting(s) with stakeholders/community members; and
City Staff intended to initiate the second phase with Houck Design only if
warmer climate. Once the disc golf course was complete, Houck Design had proposed
to host and market a grand opening tournament to promote the new
course.

On August 9 and 15, 2018, City Staff notified the community

Before August 9 and 15, 2018, City Staff notified the community
about a neighborhood meeting for expansion of the disc golf course at
Warner Memorial Park. On August 20, 12 people attended the meeting
with an even mix of local residents and disc golf supporters. Houck Design
gave a presentation on what disc golf is, how it can benefit the
greater community, and how John Houck designs courses to work with
the natural elements found on site. Neighbors of the Park voiced
concerns about expanding the disc golf course to 18-holes. Concerned
residents felt that the expansion would ruin the natural aesthetic of
the Park.

As part of the effort to further engage the community in the master
plan process, City Staff organized an on-site walk with Houck Design.
On August 27, 16 people attended the event, with most of those
present being disc golf supporters; however, a handful of neighbors
were present as well. The neighbors voiced similar concerns from the
previous meeting about the aesthetic footprint the expanded disc golf

City Staff advertised a Request for Proposals for a professional disc
golf design on June 1, 2018. Part of the reason to hire a professional
designer was to create buzz for the master plan process, but it was more
an effort to ensure the community would have a world-class disc golf
course that would be safe and appropriate for Warner Memorial Park.
On July 9, 2018, a selection committee, comprised of Parks Staff and
Stakeholders, met to review the submissions. The selection committee
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the public process dictated moving forward with the project and once
sufficient funding was in place to complete the installation.
Phase 2 would have consisted of internal development of disc golf
golf courses. The designer would have been on site for approximately 15-
22 days to mark fairways for clearing in phases on multiple trips. The
consultant’s fee for the second phase would have been $5,000 as well.
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present being disc golf supporters; however, a handful of neighbors
were present as well. The neighbors voiced similar concerns from the
previous meeting about the aesthetic footprint the expanded disc golf
golf courses. The designer would have been on site for approximately 15-
22 days to mark fairways for clearing in phases on multiple trips. The
consultant’s fee for the second phase would have been $5,000 as well.
After the disc golf course was complete, City Staff intended to initiate the second phase
with Houck Design only if the public process dictated moving forward with the project and once
sufficient funding was in place to complete the installation.
course would have on Warner Memorial Park. Houck Design mentioned that a majority of the tee pads and baskets would be in wooded areas, out of visual range. John Houck mentioned that an effort would be made to keep deciduous trees. The fairways would consist of removing invasive species such as honeysuckle and eastern red cedar.

Cross Country and Proposed Disc Golf Course

In August 2018, Alfonso Leyva, Park Planner, and Casey Smithson, Park Superintendent, met with the Manhattan High School (MHS) athletic director and cross country coach to discuss the potential expansion of the disc golf course and how it would affect the cross country route. Initially, Houck Design inquired about making minor changes to the course in order to create enough of a safety buffer between both activities. After City Staff talked with MHS, it was clear that the cross country route be maintained in its current position and the potential disc golf course expansion should respect the route and not cross it with fairways. At that time, MHS was fine with the expansion of the disc golf course as long as it would not interfere with the cross country route. City Staff conveyed that information to Houck Design and they agreed to design around the existing cross country route.

"Coralberry"

In August and September 2018, City Staff combined the two concepts into a single concept, "Coralberry" based on community input and advisory board suggestions. When "Coralberry" was available for public viewing in mid-September, Houck Design had finished Phase 1 of their contract, which involved site analysis and routing of the proposed expansion. The proposed layout was incorporated in the Coralberry Concept. When "Coralberry" was available for public viewing in mid-September, Houck Design had finished Phase 1 of their contract, which involved site analysis and routing of the proposed expansion. The proposed layout was incorporated in the Coralberry Concept. Houck Design mentioned that a majority of the tee pads and baskets would be in wooded areas, out of visual range. John Houck mentioned that an effort would be made to keep deciduous trees. The fairways would consist of removing invasive species such as honeysuckle and eastern red cedar.

Coralberry Concept developed in September 2018.

City Staff set a key parameter for the designer and that was to create a disc golf course layout without using a bridge to cross the ravine. This parameter was set so the disc golf course wouldn’t depend on the bridge, an expensive item, to be constructed. The elevation of the Park is lowest on the northern section and that is why the course was proposed close to the northern property line. Two other parameters involved keeping the proposed course on the eastern half of the Park and to not cross or change the existing cross country course.

On September 19, 2018, City Staff held a meeting at Warner Memorial Park to discuss the Coralberry Concept. Approximately 70 citizens attended and the biggest topic was the expansion of the disc golf course. Many disc golf supporters showed up but the majority were neighbors of the Park. A handful of neighbors were in favor of the expansion. However, the majority were in opposition to expanding the disc golf course to 18-holes as it was laid out in the Coralberry Concept. John Houck was present at the meeting, and interacted with multiple citizens concerned with the expansion. One of the concerns was how close the fairways appear to show up on the plan near the northern property line. John mentioned that a 30-40 foot buffer would exist between the course and the property line of the Park. These areas would be buffered by vegetation left untouched in the process of sculpting fairways.

A nature playground was another amenity that received positive feedback. Residents were receptive about the playgrounds being close to the entrance but still out of sight, tucked within the wooded area. This playground would allow children to experience nature in a controlled environment. The playground would include a variety of play types for both preschool and elementary aged children. A key aspect of this concept explores the possibility of connecting the two portions of the Park through a pedestrian bridge. The bridge would also help complete the trail loop around Warner Memorial Park.

An amenity that has been sought after at the Park since 2012, is the expansion of the disc golf course to 18-holes. The local disc golf community is interested in a third official 18-hole course that would allow Manhattan the opportunity to host Disc Golf tournaments. The disc golf club has engaged previous Park Boards and City Commissions to support the expansion. This master plan has been tasked to explore the expansion and gauge community feedback. As proposed, the 18-hole disc golf course design is recommending the re-routing of the existing 9 holes for playability and flow of the course.
The City Commission requested further information before making a decision on the Warner Memorial Park Master Plan. The Commission asked staff to further research claims of Native American burials in the Park, explore alternative layouts for an 18-hole disc golf course in the Park and at other locations in the community; and explore options to re-open Warner Park Road to allow more access to the interior of the Park.

City Commission Summer 2019 Work Session

Following the City Commission Work Session, City Staff began evaluating potential sites for suitability to develop an 18-hole disc golf course. Staff reviewed existing parklands and City-owned lands within the Manhattan Urban Area Comprehensive Plan boundary. Ten sites were evaluated based on the following factors: topography, vegetation, land area, adjacency to residential lots, ownership, existing uses, and parking. A matrix was created depicting these properties and scoring methodology. Based on this analysis of ten properties, Warner Memorial Park was rated the most suitable site for an 18-hole disc golf course. Therefore, based on the findings of the site analysis and feedback received from the public, PRAB, and City Commission, staff prepared two alternative design layouts for Warner Memorial Park. Coralberry Concepts A and B were presented to the City Commission on August 27, 2019.

Concepts A and B showed modifications to the disc golf course layout proposed by Houck Design in the Coralberry Concept. Concept A moved holes 4, 5, and 6 from the Coralberry Concept to the east of the existing park road and cross country route. For some residents, the overlap of the two activities was unacceptable. The buffer from the property line of the course layout was also increased to 50'.

Concept B re-routed the Boy Scout trail to the north, closer to the property line. The existing trail route would be repurposed for disc golf fairways. Some residents were concerned about the proximity of the course to their property. This alternative would create extra buffer between the course and private property. John Houck, disc golf course designer, reviewed the modified course designs and felt that either concept could be developed into a playable, championship level course. Representatives from the Little Apple Disc Golf Club were also supportive of either design.

Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

On October 1, 2018, City Staff presented the Coralberry Concept to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB). Approximately 70 people attended the meeting. Twenty residents shared comments and concerns about the proposed Coralberry Concept. Eleven spoke in opposition to expanding the existing disc golf to an 18-hole course; five spoke in favor of expanding disc golf; and four people had general comments about the Coralberry Concept. The PRAB recommended the Coralberry Concept for the Warner Memorial Park Master Plan with removal of the disc golf expansion, dog park, and nature playground.

PRAB members stated that the Park was not a suitable location for an 18-hole disc golf course; however, the board agreed that the existing 9-hole course should remain. The Board had concerns about access to the proposed dog park and nature play space. Members were not necessarily opposed to the activities, but were concerned that the existing park access would not allow for sufficient use of those amenities at the proposed locations.

Throughout the master plan process, two visions for Warner Memorial Park emerged. One vision, presented by the local disc golf club, was to expand the existing 9-hole disc golf course to an 18-hole championship course. Another vision, desired by residents surrounding the Park, was to keep the Park in its existing state with minimal development. A third vision was presented at the PRAB meeting for the first time during the master plan process. A descendant of Kern Warner spoke of the Park’s intent when it was dedicated in 1959. Mr. Warner’s descendant would like to see the road in the Park re-opened for public access, something that surrounding residents have opposed for over 20 years, and programmed with more nature-based activities.

City Commission Fall 2018 Work Session

On November 27, 2018, staff updated the City Commission on the Warner Memorial Park Master Plan. City staff presented the Coralberry Concept and a modified version of “Coralberry” recommended by the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, which removed expansion of the disc golf course, nature play space, and dog park. Public comment from disc golf advocates indicated support for expanded use in the Park. Comments from other residents echoed many of the same concerns raised at the PRAB meeting regarding safety, parking, access and appropriateness of disc golf use in the Park.

The City Commission reviewed the current master plan and decided to continue with the changes made by the PRAB. The City Commission approved the Coralberry Concept with modifications and a re-routing of the Boy Scout trail. City Staff presented the Coralberry Concept to the Board of Education and the Board of Education approved the layout. The City Commission also approved the layout for the disc golf course and the disc golf course is currently under construction.
Concepts A and B also explored options to re-open Warner Park Road through the Park. Currently, the road extends 175 feet into the Park and can accommodate parking for 10-15 vehicles. A locked gate restricts further vehicular access on the existing half-mile roadway. Concepts A and B showed two roadway options to extend vehicle access further into the Park to create better access to an existing picnic shelter. This shelter was proposed to receive improvements that would make it more usable. A new restroom could be placed near the shelter to accommodate trail and shelter users as well. The cost of the restroom would be dependent on the style (vault or connected to City utilities). Extension of the road increases the possibility of off-road access into prairie areas of the Park. Unauthorized access could be addressed through strategic placement of limestone boulders (similar to the current outline of the southwest parking area) or a metal railing. Longtime residents continued to voice concerns of vandalism in the park when the road was opened. In previous conversations with RCPD, patrolling of the Park could potentially increase with opening of the road.

During the August 2019 Work Session with the City Commission, City Staff requested direction on development of an 18-hole disc golf course and options to re-open Warner Park Road to vehicular traffic. Following public comment from over a dozen residents, a majority of the City Commissioners agreed with the recommendation for Warner Memorial Park set forth by the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and also agreed that the road should not be opened for public access. In short, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board recommended the Coralberry Concept for the Warner Memorial Park Master Plan with removal of the disc golf expansion, dog park, and nature playground.
In response to community feedback through the master plan process, a final Park proposal was prepared. This chapter highlights the proposed elements recommended for Warner Memorial Park. The focal point of this master plan is to maintain a space that is natural and rustic, with minimal development.
2019 Warner Memorial Park Master Plan

The Warner Memorial Park Master Plan recommends improved trail connections and signage, a bridge, pollinator meadows, rockery gardens, enhancements to existing features, a new restroom/shelter and expanded parking on the northeast corner of the Park. Warner Park Road would open but only extend to the Enhanced Shelter with enough parking for five vehicles.

Trails and Signage

The 2017 survey of Park users found that trails were the feature most often used in Warner Memorial Park, and a trail loop was the most highly desired new amenity. Numerous trails currently exist in the Park, including Scout Trail, the 8-weeks Trail, and the historical Old Military Trail developed by Don Combs. Rogue trails, particularly those on steep slopes, should be blocked and covered over to prevent erosion. Park crews plan to consolidate trails where they overlap with the cross country course, in an effort to reduce maintenance of redundant trails.

The trails are to be maintained and constructed per recommendations from the Warner Memorial Park Trail Evaluation conducted by the Native Trail Solutions study (appendix c). Park crews will continue to clear brush where needed to make existing trails usable. Trailhead signage, including a Park Map, should be added to the main entrance to the Park. Additional wayfinding or interpretive signage should also be located at selected locations along the trail system.

The Park’s rich history and native landscape offers possibilities for interpretation and education. Interpretive signage focused on the history and environmental qualities of the Park would create a sense of place for Warner Memorial Park.

The varying elevation throughout the Park deters an on-grade trail in some locations. In order to accomplish a trail loop, a bridge would need to be constructed on the southern edge of the Park. To save on cost, the bridge would not span the whole ravine, rather, it could be a similar design as the Boy Scout bridge along Scout Trail. A combination of smaller bridges and stairs could be used to cross the ravine.
Native Landscape Management

Maintaining a native prairie at Warner Memorial Park was a top priority for respondents to the online survey and was a common theme heard from residents throughout the planning process. In order to preserve the open space and maintain views and trail corridors through the woods, existing vegetation must be managed. The native prairie and woodland landscapes in the Park should be sustainably managed similar to other natural area parklands such as Roger Schultz Community Park.

Eastern red cedars and honeysuckle should be removed on the border surrounding the Park where necessary to develop a firebreak. In other areas of the Park, the cedars need to be thinned out over time unless necessary for erosion control or barriers. Park crews should continue spraying in the fall to combat invasive honeysuckle vegetation which tends to block existing trails throughout Warner Memorial Park.

Proposed pollinator meadows on the western half of the Park are necessary for erosion control or barriers. Park crews should continue spraying in the fall to combat invasive honeysuckle vegetation which tends to block existing trails throughout Warner Memorial Park.

Stormwater Management

Warner Memorial Park plays a small role in stormwater management for the residential neighborhoods surrounding the Park. The undeveloped nature of the Park generally results in slower rates of run-off compared to other natural area parklands such as Roger Schultz Community Park. Continued collaboration with the University will be necessary to address runoff from the Park. Strategically placed gardens would be located in areas that tend to erode more quickly. Rockery gardens would be developed in areas that need to be addressed. Localized flooding will occur at the existing 9-hole disc golf course.

Disc Golf

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and City Commission did not recommend the expansion of the disc golf course to 18-holes, but they did state that the existing 9-hole course should remain at its current size. Park crews should continue to work with local players to maintain the course as fairways.

The City Commission continued to express support for an 18-hole disc golf course somewhere in the community. A championship course requires a minimum of 30-40 acres. An ideal site would feature a large parking area, a maintenance area, and a water feature for the community to enjoy.

Stormwater Management

Warner Memorial Park projects a small role in stormwater management for the residential neighborhoods surrounding the Park. The undeveloped nature of the Park generally results in slower rates of run-off compared to other natural area parklands such as Roger Schultz Community Park. Continued collaboration with the University will be necessary to address runoff from the Park.

Picnic Areas

Existing structures, such as the two shelters, picnic tables, and benches, should be evaluated by Park staff to determine if these features should be repaired, replaced, or removed entirely. This master plan recommends the two existing shelters remain and should be maintained as required to ensure their continued usefulness to Park visitors. The old shelter frame and concrete slab on the north end of the Park should be removed, and the surrounding area restored with native vegetation.

Shuss Road Trailhead

The trailhead and disc golf parking at Shuss Road should be further enhanced. New restrooms and a shelter should be developed to serve disc golfers and trail users. The restroom could be connected to City infrastructure, as the proposed location is not far from existing water and sewer lines. The possibility of temporary restrooms could be accomplished with porta-pots and a concrete base for stability. The shelter should be similar to shelters at other parks and be made of durable materials that require limited maintenance.

The parking is recommended to be expanded and further organized to maximize vehicular capacity. The footprint of the proposed parking lot would extend further north and south of the existing lot, with the proposed restroom and shelter extending immediately to the north and south of the pond. These recommended features would directly benefit the greater community by providing a “staging” point to explore Warner Memorial Park through its trail system and further support the events which occur at the existing 9-hole disc golf course.
Recreation Programs

Manhattan Parks and Recreation should continue to encourage passive use of Warner Memorial Park by residents and visitors. Picnicking, hiking, wildlife viewing (including birds, animals, and insects), and star gazing are all activities that can be enjoyed by individuals or small groups. Partnerships with Sunset Zoo, the Flint Hills Discover Center, the Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, the Kansas Native Plant Society, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and other outdoor/environmental groups and clubs are encouraged. These partnerships could lead to new activities or special events that bring new users to the Park and foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the landscape.

Disc golf is encouraged to continue on the existing course. Manhattan Parks and Recreation should continue to work with the local disc golf group and players to support play at Warner Memorial Park and grow disc golf in the sport throughout the community. This could occur through partnerships at special events, collaboration with Riley County or Tuttle Creek State Park, or other shared programming opportunities.

Cross country and trail running is also encouraged to continue in the Park. Manhattan Parks and Recreation should continue working with the Manhattan High Cross Country team, and other local running clubs to encourage safe and appropriate use of the trail system.

Warner Park Road

The Final Draft Master Plan document for Warner Memorial Park was made available on the City’s website for public comment on October 16, 2019, along with the date and time of the next PRAB meeting concerning Warner Memorial Park. Advertisement for the draft document was also released through social media and radio. Following the November 4, 2019 PRAB meeting, City Staff met internally to develop formal comments to the current outline of the southwest parking area), bollards or railing, addressed through strategic placement of limestone boulders (similar to cut logs, could be repurposed or cut logs placed periodically along the side of the road. Boulders or railing would be the greatest expense. Cut logs, could be repurposed from City Forestry operations, but would need to be replaced on a more frequent basis.

City Staff presented the two options to the City Commission on November 19, 2019. After much discussion, the City Commission chose the second option detailed on the previous page, which opens Warner Park Road to the extent of the existing shelter.

Budget Estimates

The following information includes budget estimates for improvements shown on the master plan for Warner Memorial Park for 2019. A high and low estimate for each project or phase of improvements is provided. A high and low estimate is given to account for uncertainties in the project cost. The estimated cost for each project is based on 2019 dollars, and represents construction costs only. A 20% contingency has been added to account for aspects of each project that are not known at this time.

Some aspects of these projects could be completed by City Staff or possibly in partnership with local organizations or volunteer groups. These strategies could help reduce the estimated costs. As projects are further developed and more refined budgets are prepared, consideration should be given to engineering and architectural design fees, permitting fees, additional contingencies, and other costs necessary to complete each phase. Project budgets should also account for inflation and other market conditions based on the anticipated construction dates.

Funding for these improvements could come from a variety of City sources. Operational funding from the Parks Division would be used for basic maintenance of the park landscape and trails. Partnerships with neighborhood groups or community service groups, such as Hands-on K-State or the Roy Scots, could be important for trail clean-up and other small-scale Park improvements. The Economic Development Fund, Transient Guest Tax, or Stormwater Fund. The City could also pursue grants or private donations to further pursue priority enhancements. In order to maintain and enhance the Park, as desired by the participants in this planning process, City Administration and the City Commission will need to prioritize funding for Warner Memorial Park in the Parks and Recreation budget and the CIP.

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Sub-total: $219,000.00
20% contingency: $43,800.00
Total: $262,800.00

Figure 88: Warner Memorial Park Master Plan cost estimate.
CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

It has been close to 20 years since the last master plan has been developed for Warner Memorial Park. The latest master plan process started in 2017 with a neighborhood survey. Since that time, there has been nine public interactions, six advisory board meetings, and three City Commission Work Sessions concerning the Park. It was clear throughout the master plan process that there were differing opinions on the future of Warner Memorial Park. Manhattan residents showed great interest in the process and this level of public engagement helps City Administration, Advisory boards, and the City Commission make informed decisions on the future of our community open spaces.

Warner Memorial Park will continue to be a gem in the City’s parks system. 89 acres of undeveloped public open space in the middle of a city is a precious resource that the community has a vested interest in protecting. Preservation of open space must be balanced against the needs and rights of the public to access and enjoy the parkland. Based on these recommendations, Manhattan Parks and Recreation will continue to sustainably manage the native park landscape and promote appropriate public uses of the Park so residents and visitors can enjoy Kern Warner’s legacy park for years to come.