

St Vincent Park Working Group Six Month Evaluation October 2008

In March 2008, the Parish Council formed the Park Working Group (PWG) to develop a program plan for the park. The objective was to bring order and cleanliness to the park to ensure it is the safe haven we intend. To assist the volunteer PWG, a park manager position was developed and advertised. Candidates were interviewed, the job offered to Steve Bosse, and Archdiocesan clearance obtained.

The PWG Objective was to be implemented through the following strategies:

Strategy 1. Restrict the availability of currently uncontrolled food and clothing donations and enforce the existing prohibition against ramshackle shelters.

We dismantled shelters on May 3 and have prevented their rebuilding.

This has required constant attention to remove mattresses and tents throughout the summer. Upcoming cold will bring new challenges.

We spent 4 months trying to identify all the food and clothing donors in the park. We convened as many of these donors as we could to (1) produce a meal schedule that covers the entire month; and (2) develop a network to address ad hoc needs.

We identified 43 different individuals, churches, or groups. We had contact information for 29 of these; all of whom were invited to the 9/27/2008 Donor Meeting: 11 came. The food donors invariably come on the weekend and our hope to redirect them to weekday evenings has had some small success. Fortunately, the Salvation Army can make up the difference. Response to participating in the network has been limited. See Table 1. {Grade B}

We will post a sign to allow only authorized donations and recruit parishioners to provide phone coverage.

The sign has been posted on October 11. We solicited and received parishioner assistance for phone coverage (the sign has a phone contact number).

We have had St Vincent de Paul Society place a collection bin and provided distribution information to park residents.

The collection bin was placed the end of September and within two weeks the lock was broken and the contents rummaged. The society is willing to replace the lock and keep the bin there for now. The taped folder holding the distribution fliers was ripped off.

In an effort to contain belongings and eliminate mattresses, we provided storage bins and cots to the people who returned to the park after the dead trees were removed.

We have learned that, in order to enforce the bin limitation on belongings we must move to a monthly clearance of the park. Cots are mostly gone from the park, broken, sold or bartered away. {Grade: D} See #3.

The rat problem in the park has been horrendous. We contacted the city to trim the city-owned bushes along the Fallsway. The city did heavily poison the park in July and the rat population substantially diminished. The rats are returning and the city has been asked to re-poison. Rat control staff said there is no possibility of returning the park to green space given the established rat population and recommended paving the entire park. {Grade: C+}

The PWG cannot come to consensus on the more aggressive action of requesting the city to remove the bushes and pave over the rat holes. The recommendation to pave the entire park is neither affordable nor desirable.

→ We think that our efforts have been very good in the area of donation restriction and hope to see them bear fruit. We will re-group on the issue of hoarding and excessive accumulation of personal belongings. We continue to address the rodent infestation.

Strategy 2. St. Vincent will work with the Baltimore City Police Department to explore options to reduce the drug abuse problem.

Our previous relationship with Officer Talley has weakened as she has been unavailable to attend meetings or talk with us by phone or email. The major difficulty is our inability to achieve consensus on what we expect the police to do in the park. How to ensure safety in the park has been a significant challenge. The “open park policy” does not extend to people who do not comply with park rules or who are threatening/abusive to others. However, St. V's and the PWG have no capacity to police the park to enforce park rules. In July, the PWG provided the Southeastern District Police with contact information at St. Vincent's, and expressed our interest in keeping the park drug and alcohol-free. {Grade: F}

→ The PWG has judged this strategy to be of high importance to address and resolve. The PWG has consensus on park rules and linking permission to stay in the park to rule adherence but enforcement remains the biggest challenge. The PWG plans to invite the BCPD to additional meetings in order to discuss how best to maintain safety and adherence to the law in the park.

Strategy 3. Recruit park residents for regular park cleaning coordinated by the park manager.

Steve has never been able to recruit a stable cleaning corps. Cleaning was undertaken by several residents although they wanted to do this on their own time and not in a scheduled effort. Gift certificates did not make a difference. Since the two “cleaners” have left the park, the park environment has deteriorated. Some park residents maintain that the crowds drawn by

the Friday Night Meal Program are particularly disrespectful of the park environment and to blame for most of the trash in the park. Others disagree. {Grade: D}

➔ **The PWG has concluded the futility of the cleaning corps approach. We have recruited volunteers from St V and hope to form regular group. We will also solicit help from the groups who are active in the park. If St V can clean and *clear* the park monthly, other groups can clean on intervening weeks.**

Strategy 4. Establish a council for participatory self-governance in order to identify issues, weigh options, and craft good choices for the group.

We have discovered that there are few true “anchor” people in the park; most are in the park transiently and repeatedly. We have had four assemblies and have not had a single individual attend more than one. Consequently we have not been able to identify a functional core. Park residents appear fearful to identify problems in the group; some will speak privately, however their reports conflict on park safety. Further, the plan to provide skill-building within a group setting is now seen as overly optimistic given the psychosocial state of the park population. {Grade: D}

➔ **The PWG has also concluded the futility of this approach. We know that we need two-way communication and will explore other strategies.**

Baltimore Homeless Services:

We have met monthly with BHS since January and think it is important to continue this collaboration. The optimistic plans brought to the St. V Town Meeting in January have come up against city bureaucracy. While we have identified over 60 people staying in the park since early summer, only four have been housed and only two of these through the city’s Housing First Program. However, more are being processed although it is unlikely that the enough eligible candidates will be identified in the park for the promised 20 slots. {Grade: C}

➔ **The PWG will continue these MOU-stipulated meetings in effort to coordinate services to park residents and address park needs.**

Park Manager:

The role of the park manager was closely tied to the coordination of the cleaning corps and the park assembly and both efforts have been unsuccessful. {Grade: D+}



The PWG will redefine the job description for the park manager based on this evaluation.

Immediate Plans:

Two of the four volunteer members of the PWG have resigned and one must cut back. The park manager and Fr. Dick (ex officio) will continue. The PWG has spent focused time identifying the problems and needs of the park. It is time to enlist broader parish engagement to address the park. The PWG which has met during the day will move to evening meetings to open PWG participation in city/agency coordination, policy development, rule enforcement, and budget decisions. In addition, we will start soliciting for parishioners to assume responsibility for various tasks associated with the park.



The PWG will reorganize administratively to recruit and support an array of volunteer opportunities. {Grade on St V involvement to date compared to outside churches: Table 1. Status of Park Donors (10-10-08)}

Donor	Phone	Address	Email	9/27 invited	9/27 Meeting	Responded Form	Provide Meal	Network	Withdrew
1. Epic Church	yes		yes						
2. OLF Millersville	yes		yes						
3. Loyola College	yes	yes	yes	coming					
5. Sharon Edwards	yes	yes	yes						
6. Janice Bowman- Trinity	yes			coming					
7. Ralph Batykefer	yes			coming					
8. Rugged Cross MC	yes	yes	yes	coming					
9. D Furman- Bridgeway	yes	yes	yes	coming					
10. Irma D Miller	yes	yes		coming					
14. Janice Barnes	yes		yes						
16. Cedric George/ M Gilbert	yes			coming					
17. Jo and Robert Williams	yes	yes		coming					
18. Eric Brown	yes		yes	coming					
19 Tom Sanders- New Covenant	yes			coming					
21. Gretta Mill	yes								
24. Al and Yvette Jones	yes	yes		coming					
25. S Robertson- God's Plan	yes								
26. Leilani Jones	yes								
28. Alan Stokes Team Expo	yes	yes							
29. Dr. Leroy Fitts 1 st Baptist	yes								
31. Pastor Herbert Williamson	yes	yes							

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32. Christian Community Center	yes		yes						
33. CherryHill 7th Day Adventist	yes	yes		coming					
34. Second Presbyterian			yes	coming					
35. Irene Hines	yes		yes						
36. N Stackhouse; P Davis	yes								
40. Elizabeth Alford Mt Pleasant	yes								
41. Naomi Weiford, Int. Church	yes		yes						
42. Linda Zhou; JHU Careers	yes		yes	coming		To ODB			
43. Pastor Steve Bond			yes	coming					