

Lake Harriet CAC Staff Telecon on Impacts 24 June 2009

Participants: CAC members Matt Perry, Bruce Manning, and Roann Cramer; staff members Don Siggelkow, Park Board General Manager; Shane Stenzel, Manager of Special Services; Heather Ocel, Special Services Facilities Coordinator ; Lt. Rob Goodsell, Park Police Lieutenant; Paul Hokeness, Lakes District Manager; Annie Olson, Manager of Support Services; and consultant Anne Carroll. Unable to attend: Bob Nielsen, Lakes District Foreman (who works for Paul Hokeness the Lakes District Manager).

Lake Harriet CAC chair Matt Perry quickly reviewed the CAC's charge for the staff members less familiar with our work. The group then launched into the Q&A, which is documented below as the conversation flowed. In most cases, bulleted responses were from multiple staff members who had information to contribute. Readers of this document with specific questions about this content should contact Lake Harriet CAC chair Matt Perry at mattp@pobox.com.

What overall impacts do each of your departments see – on a comparative basis – between the current concession operations at Lake Harriet, Lake Calhoun, and Minnehaha Falls?

- Customer Service gets questions from visitors about the food options at all of our parks, but there are no impacts, per se
- Maintenance sees more garbage and now encourages more recycling of paper and food products for Sea Salt and Tin Fish. They needed a different garbage container for those odorous foods. Bathrooms there get more traffic. Restaurants have more waste to deal with – plates, disposables, recyclables. Odor hasn't been a problem because of daily trash pickup. At Harriet, dumpsters are away from the buildings and the nature of the current food waste isn't as odorous. Tin Fish is talking with Linden Hills Power and Light (Energy Coop) about sending their food waste to their facility.
- Garbage pickup costs are a concession responsibility.
- Police doesn't see changes in police services as a result of either Tin Fish or Sea Salt. They don't know of any alcohol-related calls to either of those. Concessions have had some private parties and pay Police for the required security for those. Maintenance finds that people go to Tin Fish or Sea Salt to eat and may buy alcohol to drink with their food, rather than just going there to drink.

Looking backing over time, how did your departments change, if at all, as a result of the concessions at Lake Calhoun and Minnehaha Falls shifting from park-run to privately-run concessions some years ago?

- For Police, it actually helped, because our officers make all the deposits. Concessions used to all close at different times, meaning the squad had to respond to each of those locations independently and run the money downtown, taking two or more hours away from their being able to patrol the lakes for parking and other violations, or in the neighborhoods. With private concessions, however, they make their own deposits, so this duty has gone away for police.
- Tin Fish takes care of all its own maintenance, which relieved pressure on all our skilled trades; they do a pretty good job of maintaining the area and keeping it clean and sanitized. Sea Salt takes care of all their maintenance, also. In addition, we used to close and lock all the doors at Minnehaha, but we have found it more cost-effective to contract with them (Sea Salt) to do that. We still do have more garbage to deal with, though; they added the dumpster, but the volume increased and the nature of the waste changed to have more food (but concessions are responsible for garbage pickup costs).

- Customer Service department did not exist before these concession operations were in place, but it has been easy to link from our website to the Tin Fish and Sea Salt websites so park customers can get all the information they need directly – and they maintain those sites, not us.

Based on the information already received from staff, it sounds like the band shell area is well maintained and not causing significant problems. One possible impact of increased concessions might be more visitors, more traffic, more revenue. What is the current facility usage compared to capacity? What's the capacity of the space and what might be the impact of concession changes on that capacity? We understand staff will continue to do an excellent job, but what changes might be required to accommodate heavier use?

- It depends on the day and the events that day; nights with highly appealing concerts can attract up to 2000 people on a beautiful evening. Not at all sure that the site will be any busier if the food options change. One thing we have heard is that people really like things like ice cream and popcorn and don't want to lose those options.
- For Police services, probably in the last 15 years our need for police services has decreased at Lake Harriet. During certain events the space may be at capacity, but Police service demand has gone down over the years. We used to see a lot more teenagers from all over the metro area using all the lakes – they were the hot spots in the summer – but that's just not happening anymore. Years back, the Lake Harriet popcorn was famous and they stayed open later, so there were long lines for that. In the future, the proposed ideas would simply offer more options mostly for existing customers. Police services are much more tied to events than concessions. People don't seem to go to the lakes to drink. People also already bring coolers to all our parks with legal (3.2) or illegal strong beer/wine, but we don't around searching coolers and have very few problems over the years with things like public drunkenness.

Is there sufficient restroom and parking/roadway capacity at Lake Harriet for peak events?

- Last year we were able to schedule a restroom maintenance staff person 12-8 every day, but couldn't do that this year because of budget cuts. The concession operators are supposed to help with some of that, but at peak times when they're up to their elbows in ice cream and popcorn, they can't be cleaning the bathrooms. It wouldn't make any difference what kind of food is being served. There are bathroom lines at peak times, but we haven't done a very good job identifying other bathroom locations; we've talked about putting up signs, but people seem to routinely be willing to stand in line near where they're eating to use the bathroom. We hope to bring back this maintenance staff position next year.
- These areas are very busy at peak times, and currently we actively control/manage parking and traffic. We wouldn't anticipate significant increases in traffic or parking needs related to changes in food offerings.
- When the parking spaces are full, if people are going there just to eat, they will find someplace else to go; people won't park on the other side of the lake and then walk around just to go to a restaurant. Restaurants cater more to people who are already there, just offering them another option. If this becomes an issue Police staff will deal with it, but we already have staff in place in cars, bicycles, and on foot, and they are currently reallocated as necessary to deal with specific issues. We wouldn't anticipate a huge increase in vehicular traffic due to a concession change to a restaurant..

What about people who might want to sit down and eat? What kind of seating expansion might be needed, and what kind of challenges might be created for "people flow" in the area? We've heard that the biggest issue in the spring is dealing with bicycle-pedestrian conflicts, before everyone learns/re-learns how to move around in the same space.

- In the last two years we put the new little picnic shelter at Lake Harriet, and built the plaza behind the concession area with 10-12 new tables, improved the existing tables out front (to make them handicapped accessible), and added about 9 tables in the band shell area. People down there go find a shady spot wherever they can based on what they want to see or do. They also climb up the hill and sit on the grass to eat whatever they want. Maintenance wouldn't expect significant increases in demand for seating.
- Police commonly see complaints from people walking or biking on the wrong paths, especially in the spring, but these are not unique to Lake Harriet or to that concession area. We even have bicyclists collide with our huge mowers – people just aren't always paying attention. We also sometimes have pedestrians and bicyclists intentionally bumping people who are on the wrong paths. We wouldn't anticipate any changes to those systemwide issues with a concession change.

Do you see changes in use/people conflicts over the course of the season?

- It's just like drivers at the beginning of the winter; they're always worse at the beginning but then they learn
- A good example is the big fireworks display on the Stone Arch Bridge when there are thousands of people on the bridge and some bicyclist tries to ride across, gets tangled up in people, and the Police have to respond; there are always a few people like that, but we just deal with it in all our parks
- The *through* bike trail at Lake Harriet goes up and around the band shell area, so those bicyclists don't conflict with people in the concession area
- Typically by the middle or end of June most people have figured out how to respectfully do their own thing – bike, walk, dog-walk, skate, run, etc. – with others who are doing something different

If another building were placed, are there particularly problematic locations, especially with regard to people/path conflicts?

- Any service windows close to bike paths are a problem because any type of line would interfere with bike or rollerblading traffic; same with proximity to pedestrian paths – people don't like to have to cut through lines of people waiting to be served
- Bike path at Calhoun is somewhat near the Tin Fish and the bathrooms, but people keep an eye on each other and signage/pathway markings help