
FORT WAYNE STRATEGY MEMO

TO: INTEREST GROUPS AND COMMISSIONERS
FROM: BYRON WILSON, FORT WAYNE PARK ADVOCATE
SUBJECT: LOBBYING FOR FORT WAYNE
DATE: 01/11/04
CC: JOHANNA HARTWIG, BULBUL GUPTA

Historic Fort Wayne is a better choice than the other parks for a Detroit Metropark. Fort Wayne has the potential to attract a diverse demographic to the area because the surrounding areas of the park hosts the sole Native American burial site in Southwest Michigan. Also, The Tuskegee Airmen Museum, located within the Fort can attract those who are interested in military history as well as those who are interested in the contributions made by African-Americans to the country in general and World War II in particular. In addition, Mexican town has now become home to a fast growing Hispanic population in the region. The park also has the potential to be used for open air concerts during the summer or the river front area could be used for recreational activities. These diverse activities would bring diverse visitors and revenue to the area.

While Fort Wayne plays host to the advantages I have mentioned above, it is fair to say that interest groups like the tourism/entertainment, youth/education, social services/non-profit housing, business development, environmental groups, and health medical/senior have expressed concerns that range from the price to maintain the park to the negative image associated with the park.

In an effort to address all the concerns raised by the interest groups and allay as many fears as possible without straying too far from what the commissioners might also be concerned about, we recommend that the interest groups pay close attention to the following:

1. **Joint Jurisdiction** may calm some of the concerns that the youth/education and business groups expressed i.e. political feasibility of the park. We understand that there are many barriers that stand in the way of park revitalization efforts and that oftentimes it is difficult to convince people to invest in a park that they see no direct benefit from. Fort Wayne is uniquely located and shares its jurisdiction with a diverse set of communities. It is then important to find out who the leaders of these diverse communities are and bring them to the negotiating table so that they can then go back and sell the ideas they walk away with to their constituents. This joint jurisdiction also brings joint revenues to park. To supplement our offering we feel that the youth/education group might benefit from the educational and athletic activities the Fort would offer.

2. **Entertainment diversification** would address the concerns raised by the social/non profit housing tourism groups i.e. the number of people visiting would dwindle, as history has shown and it would be too expensive to maintain, respectively. First, other park proposals would be using up budgets similar in size to ours and the Fort would learn from its past closure by diversifying the type of entertainment it offers over time so that repeat visitors would be more likely and this would in turn increase the likelihood of increased revenues.

3. **A name change for the park** might be in order to address the negative image associated with its name. Airlines have often changed their names after a crash in an effort to erase the negative stigma associated with them. It is also very important to realize that this as a revitalization effort and that with revitalization comes that challenge to revitalize many attributes associated with an area, in this case the negative stigma. Furthermore, we feel that the negativity associated with the park is overblown because the park only makes the headlines when something bad happens, but the park now has an opportunity to make news when concerts are being hosted there or when other major events are occurring.

4. **Economic development** could also be spurred in light of a revamped Fort Wayne. The Social services group has questioned the viability of a park, but studies have shown that parks increase property values, attracting business to the area and in turn creating a community with a diverse income bracket. Greenery and open space would be something that the environmental/agricultural groups might find appealing.

It is important to note that this strategy was not created in a vacuum, but that it was indirectly created by the input of the interest groups. It is their vision of the Fort Wayne that we are presenting and we have tried to accommodate all the concerns that these interest groups have expressed. We understand that although we have presented a vision of Fort Wayne with the help of the interest groups, the commissioners would be concerned not only with what the residents want, but the overall feasibility of the plan. Fort Wayne's multi-jurisdiction would generate revenue and cooperation from various quarters of the community.

Fort Wayne complements multi-jurisdiction with historical, cultural and educational attributes and this is why we believe that Fort Wayne is a better candidate for a Detroit Metropark than the other parks.