

# Wilderness Park plans spawn heated debate

By JOSH FUNK  
Senior staff writer

In the last of a series of meetings, community leaders vented concerns last night about development projects encroaching on Wilderness Park.

The city contracted the Lincoln/Lancaster County Mediation Center to identify concerns about and propose solutions for the future of Wilderness Park.

"Our job is to ensure that people have a voice in this process," said Betsy Kosier, one of the mediators.

About 20 people attended Monday night's meeting ready to discuss issues of development and preservation of the park that serves as one of the city's main flood plains in addition to preserving natural beauty.

Monday's meeting was the last of about 80 the mediation center has sponsored in the last month to identify issues.

The next step is the creation of a working study group of community leaders, city officials and developers to consider the issues and find solutions over the next nine months. The group's first meeting is Nov. 16.

The study group will consider results of several city-contracted environmental studies to be completed over the next six to eight months examining park ecosystems, storm water drainage and the impact of transportation.

But while the city is considering issues, the future of the park as the Densmore Park initiative on today's ballot, could still go forward.

"It seems like the cart is outrunning the horse here," South Salt Creek neighborhood representative P. C. Meza said.

Early in the meeting, community leaders had a chance to question city planning and parks departments representatives.

"I don't know" was a common answer to many concerns that seem to need further clarification.

"There were a lot of questions raised (in earlier meetings) we didn't have the answer to," said Mike DeKalb, city planning representative.

Many people questioned the effectiveness of the mediation, saying it should be coordinated with other studies the city has already conducted.

"The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing," said Mike Hutchinson, state vice president of Pheasants Forever. "We are developing while we are studying."

DeKalb said that this process is designed "to look at what the park is, what it was and what it could be."

City officials also reminded people that expansion of the park, along with development bordering it, is another issue for the study group.

Community leaders voiced concern about the procedures for developing land bordering the park.

Several people felt as though community support had been overruled by developers and their money in the past.

Wilderness Park's role as a city floodway was also questioned by many people, especially those living in flood plain neighborhoods.

They said they wanted to know where the water will go when non-per-

## Election to determine future of land

By SARA HOSSAINI  
Staff writer

The controversy that erupted last year over the developing of land near Wilderness Park is once again stirring debate as voters cast their ballots today on part of the land's future.

Two proposals on today's ballot would fund the city's efforts to build a community park and a library at Col. Densmore Park near Wilderness Park.

The Parks and Recreation Bond would fund six lighted baseball fields along with recreational facilities equipped with parking and rest rooms for a total cost of more than \$4 million.

Another proposed bond would use taxpayer funds to build a branch of the Lincoln Public Library.

Also being built on the land near Wilderness Park is a privately funded YMCA.

The development of the area near 14th Street and Mockingbird Lane, known as Col. Densmore Park, is

drawing criticism from residents nearby, who argue that the need for more sports fields has been met and that the location is less than desirable for everyone.

"We are fighting this for a number of reasons," said Terri Jo Dahlquist, a resident of the area. "The Lincoln Optimist Club is taking care of the need (for recreational facilities) with 12 ball diamonds being built a couple of miles from here. This would be a big mistake for the wildlife of Wilderness Park."

Dahlquist said certain animals would be negatively affected by the bright lights of the baseball diamonds.

The Optimist Club is building the 12 baseball diamonds north of Highway 77 and south of Old Cheney Road.

Lynn Johnson, Lincoln Parks and Recreation spokeswoman, said the new Col. Densmore Park would be neighbor-friendly.

"We understand the neighbors' concerns, and we will try to work with them," she said.

"We are definitely going to look at landscaping in the future to help with the light and act as a buffer to Wilderness (Park)."

Both sides agree the land in question is not the most ideal choice for development because of the hilly grassland and the more than 100-year-old flood plain that covers the area.

But Lincoln city officials said grading the area would cost less than purchasing land elsewhere.

Parks and Recreation officials also said they were working with engineers to ensure proper water drainage.

But some neighbors are still uneasy.

"They want to flatten the land, which will increase the flooding problem that already exists," Dahlquist said. "Parks and Rec says it will handle it, but they give us no exact numbers, no real solutions at all."

Whether Lincoln voters approve the construction bonds or not, Johnson said the privately funded YMCA still plans to grade its portion of the land.

meable development moves in.

Two large areas in the flood plain bordering the southeast side of the park have been zoned as future residential areas and developers are already planning.

Further north, Lincoln Public Schools will build a high school, and stores at the new shopping center at 27th

Street and Pine Lake Road are starting to open.

It is unclear how these projects will affect the environment, but it is now up to the people to determine the future of the park, Kosier said.

And community leaders are ready to commit to this long mediation process.

"At first in the process there is anger and a fear of dark powers at work," South Corridor neighborhood representative Jim Bishop said. "It's hard to find a consensus in such a divisive issue, but once you get past the fear and anger you can get your voice heard...."

"The park is beautiful, and it is up to the citizens to save it."

# Freshmen adjust to college life through involvement

By SANDI ALSWAGER  
Staff writer

Going away to college, some freshmen love it, some struggle, and others may just miss home.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln tries to make its freshmen feel at home, particularly through activities and programs in the residence halls, where nearly all freshmen live, some students said.

"We always have people who have trouble adjusting to this environment," said Delmer Esters, residence director for Abel South Residence Hall.

Student assistants - the residents' guides on each hall floor - concentrate on making the transition easier.

Some students rely on assistants' help, while others do fine on their own.

Overall, freshmen this year are adjusting well, Esters said.

"The staff does an excellent job being in tune to their needs," Esters said.

The stories of three UNL freshmen show the range of adjustments hundreds typically face:

**Long way from home**  
For Lori Henderson, adjusting to college life meant accumulating a

huge phone bill. Henderson said when it was time to move here from Vermilion, S.D., her mother, who is a college professor, had already started teaching and could not help her.

Henderson had to move on her own.

"Usually people's parents help them out, but I had to do everything by myself," she said.

Henderson said she made frequent calls home during the first couple of days just to ask simple questions such as how to set up her television and her loft.

And calls home still are a solace when classes get rough or she just needs someone to talk to.

"My mom understands what I am going through because she is a college professor. If I got a bad grade, she would reassure me," she said.

Although Henderson did have her student assistant available for help, she decided she would rather consult her mom.

Although a tad homesick initially, Henderson said she is beginning to get used to her new life and thinks joining university activities helped a lot.

"I got involved," she said. "You have to make it a point to go and meet people."

Henderson has joined the Abel Residence Association, which is the hall's government, and Campus Red Cross. She helped organize the Abel Olympics and homecoming activities, she said.

Such activities are what housing administrators have in place to help students like Henderson adjust.

Abel Hall Student Assistant Jon Trombino said the first five weeks of the semester are a crucial time for freshmen to adjust and often determine whether or not a student will drop out of college.

"The thing that keeps them here is whether they get involved," he said.

### Town-sized dorm

Coming from a small Nebraska town, Casey Tyler, a pre-law major, was excited to dive into college culture headfirst.

Tyler, who is from Emerson, which has a population of 860, said he adjusted and met new people right away.

Tyler said he enjoys the social life



Tyler is twice the population of my town," he said.

Tyler participates in intramural sports to meet new people, he said.

Residence director Esters said not all students from small towns make the adjustment as easily as Tyler did, considering they come from communities of 200-500 people, with Abel being a building of 1,000.

"The staff is available to talk with them and point them in the right direction," Esters said. "I've talked with students at 3 or 4 a.m. because they are having problems."

### Out-of-state of flux

Though David Nwangwu is from out of state, he did not hesitate to go out and meet people.

Nwangwu, a freshman pre-medicine major from Texas, said his circle

of UNL the most.

"There are so many things to do here," he said. "When you come from a small town, you realize there are a lot more opportunities here."

"Abel has twice the population of my town,"

of acquaintances grew just by meeting friends of other people he met.

Despite all the activities set up by residence halls, Esters said students must take an initiative to meet students themselves, as Nwangwu has done.

Nwangwu said students should take advantage of the opportunities the university offers.

"I made myself be open to people and wasn't shy at all," he said.

Nwangwu said he wanted to venture out into the world and be on his own. He originally is from Sugarland, Texas, a Houston suburb.

Although Nwangwu hasn't joined any activities, he is concentrating on joining the football team as a walk-on player in the spring.

Nwangwu said there were not any out-of-state programs aimed specifically for him. He came to UNL to visit, he said, and the Big Red Welcome helped him to meet a lot of people.

"You can't be shy going into a new place," he said.



Henderson



Nwangwu

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