

THE CASE FOR SHELBY FARMS PARK

CREATING A GREAT AMERICAN PARK

THE SHELBY FARMS PARK ALLIANCE
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE
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THE CASE FOR SHELBY FARMS PARK:

CREATING A GREAT AMERICAN PARK

To: The Citizens of Shelby County, Tennessee

From: The Shelby Farms Park Alliance

Shelby Farms Park lies in the heart of Shelby County, Tennessee, and offers 4,500 acres of open green space for the recreational pleasure of the citizens of Shelby County. It is a community treasure, unrivaled in size and public potential anywhere else in the United States.

Yet the future of Shelby Farms Park is at a crossroads. Do we want this vital acreage to continue without unified governance, without a compelling vision and under constant threats of development? Or do we want this vital acreage to achieve its full potential as a great American Park, achieving the thoughtful vision of master plan, governed by representatives from the public and private sectors and guided by a vision of creating a Park to enhance the quality of life for everyone in Shelby County?

The Shelby Farms Park Alliance is a diverse group of community-minded citizens who are committed to the vision of a great urban park. This informally structured group was formed out of a dedicated belief in the civic importance that Shelby Farms Park holds for all the people of this community. In that spirit, the Alliance commissioned the following Case-Making Report to make sure that the people of Shelby County fully understand the positive impact that the Park will have when its full potential is achieved.

The Report contains detailed information about the history and geography of the Park. It lays out a clear vision how the Park, if developed to its greatest potential, can contribute to the economic vitality of our community and to the physical and spiritual health of all citizens. And it establishes a compelling reason why a comprehensive Master Plan can serve as the blueprint for a great park, governed by a public-private partnership and unified by the desire to create a great park for the people of Shelby County and for future generations.

The Shelby Farms Alliance is prepared to help lead and participate in a process that will turn this vision into reality.

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THE TRUST *for* PUBLIC LAND

C O N S E R V I N G L A N D F O R P E O P L E

FOREWORD BY PETER HARNIK

In traveling tens of thousands of miles to meet with hundreds of leaders and visit scores of city parks, I have learned many basic lessons about urban greenspace. Three of these lessons undergird them all.

First, there is nothing more important than a vision. If basic statistics provide a picture of what a city *has*, visioning allows it to imagine what *can be*.

Second, moving from vision to success requires a plan. The plan allows park advocates to gain a constituency, develop a power base, and move toward reality. With a plan, the agency becomes an active player. Without one, it's merely a pawn in other players' games. Having a plan enables agency staff and private park advocates to reach consensus on goals and objectives. It then allows the combined park community to claim a seat at the table with the other shapers of the city — developers, highway builders, port officials, housing advocates, retail promoters — and negotiate the plan's implementation.

Lesson number three is that nothing happens without leadership. The leader can come from the public sector or the private sector, can be elected, appointed or self-appointed, but he or she must be dynamic enough to take the vision and the plan and make things happen.

What we are seeing unfold now in Memphis with Shelby Farms Park is a validation of these three lessons. A committed group of leaders is taking a vision up to the next stage of a true plan. Watching this process unfold gives me great hope and enthusiasm for the ultimate design and success of this great space.

The document you hold in your hands can be the blueprint for the creation of an urban park of truly national significance in Shelby County, Tennessee. I hope you will join me in assuring the success of this effort.

Peter Harnik
Director
Center for City Park Excellence
May 10, 2005

THE CASE FOR SHELBY FARMS PARK

CREATING A GREAT AMERICAN PARK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When the citizens of Shelby County rose up and spoke in one voice to preserve and protect Shelby Farms Park in 1973, it delivered a mandate that still echoes through the decades. It is a resounding message about a park that holds a special place in the lives of the citizens of Shelby County. It speaks to the special sense of ownership that exists between the people and their park.

While Shelby Farms Park is cherished for its aesthetics and natural beauty, there is much more potential that remains to be tapped. With a compelling vision expressed in a credible, inspirational master plan, Shelby Farms Park can catapult from a beloved local park to a great urban and regional park with national significance.

Research and experience in recent years show the deeper role that the park can play in shaping the character of Shelby County, in serving its citizens, and in realizing their future. This new understanding of parks as more than locations for recreation and relaxation underscores the importance of the 4,500 acres in the heart of Shelby County, and the wisdom of the public mandate to protect it.

Today, there is a new mandate. It is a mandate for open spaces and recreation. But more than that, it is a mandate for public health, for economic vitality, for increased property values and stable neighborhoods, for youth development, and for reducing crime. It is the mandate for a great Shelby Farms Park. It is a mandate that springs from a new understanding of the full impact that Shelby Farms Park can have. In this framework, it is not just an outdoor amenity and a unique natural asset. More to the point, it is an absolute necessity, with its 4,500 acres offering so many benefits for the region and its people.

It begins with a master plan that articulates a vision for the park to achieve its potential, that captures the aspirations of the public, that attracts new partners and new funding to the park, and that defines the kind of organizational structure that is needed to accomplish greatness for Shelby Farms Park.

It is common in Shelby County to look for “best practices” and benchmarks in other parts of the U.S. as we work on projects and set priorities. But with a great Shelby Farms Park, we have the chance to be the benchmark for the rest of the nation as communities seek to duplicate the best models of park development.

With a master plan that establishes Shelby Farms Park as a benchmark for the nation, the citizens of Shelby County are in fact doing the following:

- creating a safer community
- encouraging healthy lifestyles
- attracting new business investment

- increasing property values and taxes
- protecting air and water quality
- improving the quality of life for families
- attracting new residents, especially young knowledge workers for the new economy
- conserving parkland and diverse ecosystems
- offering a place for psychological and spiritual recharge
- providing the “living room” where spirit of community is formed
- protecting the home of wildlife and migratory birds in the urban core
- teaching self-esteem, social skills, and teamwork to youths
- improving Shelby County’s national image
- embedding a community conservation ethos

But to achieve these benefits, Shelby County has a clear charge. It was summed up by Garrett Eckbo in his 1975 report written in the wake of the public defense of the park: “It is possible to look at (Shelby Farms Park) as a potential landscape to be enjoyed for its own sake (and) the special quality that will make it competitive with any and all of the great parks of the world.”

That is the mandate before us – to create a great American park.

Our decisions will determine how we use the park, but more importantly, they will determine how Shelby Farms Park will be used centuries from now. It is in our role as stewards for future generations that *The Case For Shelby Farms Park: Creating a Great American Park* is written to inform the best decisions possible.

In the end, decisions about Shelby Farms Park do more than capitalize on one of Shelby County’s most important natural resources, arguably second only to the Mississippi River. Today’s decisions also begin a journey to that tells what kind of community we are, about our values, and about our confidence in our own future. In truth, the journey to a great Shelby Farms Park is also a journey to becoming a great community.

INTRODUCTION

“The future of Shelby Farms Park is also the future of Shelby County.”

The words of Dr. Richard Florida, author of the groundbreaking books, *The Rise of the Creative Class: How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, and *The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent*, and collaborator in the *Memphis Talent Magnet Report* and the *Memphis Manifesto Summit* remind of us of the importance of Shelby Farms Park.



The timeless landscape of Shelby Farms Park tells the story of eons. Glaciers cut their paths through the land as they receded northwardly, Indian hunters lived off the bounties of its forests, European trappers traded along its stage coach route, a utopian dreamer founded a history-making anti-slavery plantation, and the Progressive Era in Memphis politics led to the purchase of the land for public use in the early 1900's.

Today, there is the rustle of small animals in the underbrush, egrets wintering in the fields, the almost silent movement of Wolf River toward its encounter with the Mississippi River, and a mosaic of foliage – wildflowers, trees, ferns, and lichens.

It is tempting to describe Shelby Farms Park in these kinds of evocative terms, but the wealth of Shelby Farms Park is measured in terms other than the ethereal. Its wealth is also in the unrealized, vital contributions that it can make to the health, economic vitality, air and water quality, crime prevention, and community-building of Shelby County.

Yet, today, despite this wealth, the park continues to be threatened by schemes for commercial development on its eastern border, by engineering designs that consume hundreds of acres by massive highway interchanges on its northern border, and by a proposal to double the width of Walnut Grove Road through the center of the park. Charles Landry, Europe's leading cultural expert, said in Memphis: “People who make decisions about buildings must understand that they are making 100-year decisions, and if they make the wrong one, all of those generations afterwards must suffer the consequences.” The same can be said of Shelby Farms Park.

Key decisions about the parkland face our community, and keeping in mind that these are 100-year decisions, they must be approached with thoughtfulness, research, and vision. In the end, the seminal question is whether 100 years in the future, the people of Shelby County will congratulate this generation for consuming land for asphalt and concrete, or whether our greatest legacy is in the protection of this refuge in the heart of Shelby County and the development of a great American park.

A PLACE OF HISTORY

The special sense of pride that the people of Shelby County have for Shelby Farms Park is a sentiment born from connections to the land's history as an anti-slavery plantation and later, when the land was used to set national standards for prison reform. Both times captured national attention and positioned our community as forward-thinking and progressive-minded.

To begin at the beginning, the earliest settlers linked to the land of Shelby Farms Park were undoubtedly Paleo-Indian people living in small bands of extended families. The first evidence of their presence at the park dates to the Archaic Period (8000 to 6000 BCE). Artifacts from these people – such as Dalton and Kirk points for knives, spears or knives – have been found in the fields (north of Walnut Grove Road, west of Farm Road, south of the Shelby County Correction Center and east of the Lucius Burch Natural Area.)

By the late pre-Columbia era, Shelby Farms appears to have continued as a hunting area for nearby settlements, which were members of a complex hunting and agricultural group that built a number of mounds throughout the region for ceremonial rituals. Later, a major Indian trail followed Wolf River, connecting the Mississippi River bluffs and settlements in Pontotoc, Mississippi. After the Revolutionary War, the land was part of the State of North Carolina and partly owned by the University of North Carolina.

Much of the Mid-South's land was operated as cotton plantations using slave labor, a fact made even more ironic by the land's association with Frances Wright and her utopian community, Neshoba, a 1,940-acre farm where she paid slaves to work so they could buy their freedom. It lasted only a decade and ended in 1830 when its founder became ill. Most of Neshoba was south of the Wolf River just west of Germantown Road, but part of it was located north of the river on present parkland. By 1886, according to Memphis Heritage, there were at least 25 owners of the land that is now Shelby Farms Park.

Shortly after the beginning of the 20th century, Memphis was a leader in the “Good Government” and “City Beautiful” movements, adding more than 1,750 acres of new parkland (including Lea's Woods (renamed Overton Park) and Wilderberger Farm (named Riverside Park)). It was in this milieu of enlightened politics that the Shelby County Penal Farm was conceived as a new workhouse. In 1928, initial land acquisition began near the Mullins Station railroad stop, and the Penal Farm opened October 19-21, 1929, quickly becoming nationally important as a model for fair treatment and hard work based on agriculture, and for cattle that repeatedly won national competitions. At the time, *The Commercial Appeal* reported that the Penal Farm was one of the most visited prison farms in the world, as people came to see the success in rehabilitation and soil conservation that was taking place.

By 1964, Shelby County Government concluded that there were better uses for the property and asked government planners to recommend the best use of the expansive site. The crimes committed by prisoners were becoming more serious, management challenges more difficult, and farm operations less profitable. The eventual recommendation in 1975 was for development of a new town called Shelby Farms.

Response to the announcement was swift. Few issues in the history of Shelby County Government provoked such widespread, visceral opposition, and a broad-based coalition of citizens (who have evolved to become Friends of Shelby Farms Park) banded together to preserve the land for public use. County government yielded to the public outcry and endorsed a proposal for the land to be used as a park.

By 1975, the “Shelby Farms Public Use Program,” more commonly known as the “Eckbo Plan” was adopted by county government. Written by a team headed by nationally known landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, the report is the Bible for the parkland, and all discussions inevitably refer to the report, which was officially endorsed by Shelby County Government. Plough Park, seeded financially by legendary Memphis entrepreneur Abe Plough, was created north of Walnut Grove in the wake of the Eckbo Report and remains the heart of the park. In

1982, about 1,000 acres south of Walnut Grove were turned over to the Agricenter for the purpose of creating a center for cutting edge research, advanced technology, major seminars, and demonstrations. Unintentionally, it drew a dividing line through the parkland and through hopes for a unified vision.

Land was also set aside for an equestrian center east of Agricenter. In 1988, the Tennessee Legislature created the Lucius Burch Natural Area – named for a prominent, influential leader for park preservation -- in the heavily wooded river bottomland that wraps around the south and west boundaries of Shelby Farms Park. In 1991, Agricenter and Shelby County Government gave land to Ducks Unlimited on which it built its international headquarters.

If there were lingering doubts about the public’s special feelings for Shelby Farms Park, they were dispelled in 1991 when citizens of Shelby County loudly opposed Kimbilio, a proposed wildlife preserve, golf course, and conference center north of Walnut Grove Road. The uses were seen as incompatible with the park’s mission for public use. The proposal was abandoned in short order.

In response to the public’s demand for more independent decisions about the park, the Shelby Farms Board was created in 1994 to manage the land outside of Agricenter and Area 10 (the land used for county governmental buildings on Mullins Station Road). The Board was only given advisory powers, but exercises considerable political influence over the park’s direction as the public’s voice.

Public outcries have been common when the most dominant and enduring issue facing Shelby Farms Park during the past three decades comes up -- plans for a major highway through the park. Various alignments and designs in the 1980s and 1990s promised devastating impact on the park, but with the dawning of a new century came a new cooperative attitude toward designing a “context sensitive” road that would serve both transportation needs of the county and access and circulation needs of the park.

Memphis Heritage’s 1994 historical survey concluded: “...the property has historic significance for the people of Memphis and Shelby County...the Farm is intimately associated with events which have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of local history. The Farm played a central role in the Good Government movement in Shelby County...(and) additionally, made a significant local and national contribution to both penology and agricultural conservation of the time...(and) because it has yielded, or is likely to yield, archaeological information important to a better understanding of local history and pre-history. The historic nature of the farm, and its role in the development of county government and the county agricultural industry of 50 years ago are not widely known or appreciated...A single management entity for all compatible uses would facilitate this.”

PHYSICAL FRAMEWORK

GEOGRAPHY, GEOLOGY AND HYDROLOGY

Shelby Farms Park is part of the northern half of the Wolf River valley. Shelby Farms Park, like most of the region, is characterized by loess soil deposited by powerful winds that raked the land during the Pleistocene Age as the glaciers of the last Ice Age withdrew.

Deposits of loess generally formed when large volumes of meltwater flowed from the edges of glaciers during the summer. During the winter, when the glacier was not melting, the area where the water flowed was dry, and winter winds would pick up the fine silt from these dry areas, carrying it long distances in huge dust storms. Loess is typically found in meandering river valleys separated by gently rolling upland areas.

The park's northern boundary is close to the ridge line of the drainage channel and the southern boundary is the river. About half of the width is floodplain. Above the floodplain is a strip of level river plain ranging in width from 800 feet at the east to 3,500 feet at the northwest. This plain rises about 20 feet from the riverbank to the toe of the upland slopes that make up the northern portion of the park. The upland areas average about 70 feet above the river plain, offering impressive vistas of the land and river to the south. Within the western half of the uplands are lakes and connecting canals. The parkland offers a number of distinctive landscapes – the grove of trees in the northeastern corner of the park, the pine forest, the river plains, the hardwood forest hugging Wolf River, and the meadows.

High turbidity in most of the lakes in Shelby Farms Park and Wolf River result from fine-grained soils and watershed erosion. Shelby County has taken some action over the years to mitigate the problem. Much of the parkland south of Walnut Grove Road lies within the 100-year flood line and has been addressed by several levees with canals. Additional impervious surfaces in this area are problematic, because of the potential for aggravating nagging flooding problems.

LOCATION

Shelby Farms Park is three parks in one. It is a neighborhood park for families within a half-mile radius, it is an urban park for families living within three to five miles, and it is a regional park for the metropolitan area. A 20-minute travel time by car makes the park easily accessible for roughly one million people.

Under way are two projects that will make Shelby Farms Park the focal point for outdoor recreation in Shelby County. The abandoned CSX line is being converted into a trail (and possibly, light rail) on the northern boundary of the park, connecting Cordova to downtown Memphis. On the southern border, the Wolf River Greenway will connect the park directly with Collierville and midtown Memphis. As a result, Shelby Farms Park will be the hub for both, offering new opportunities for visitors to connect directly by biking, hiking, and boating.

These plans capitalize on Shelby Farms Park's near perfect geographic location at the center of Shelby County. In addition, demographic trends in Shelby County place Shelby Farms Park more and more at the population center for the community. The park is 12 miles from the northern border, 13 miles from the western boundary, and nine miles from the southern edge. It is bounded roughly by the Wolf River on the west and south, Mullins Station/Raleigh LaGrange Roads on the north, and Germantown Parkway on the east. A small sliver of land extends to Summer Avenue at the northwest corner of the property.

Shelby Farms Park is located at 35°09' latitude, 89°51' longitude and sits at the heart of a metro area of 1.2 million people. The land is owned by Shelby County and lies totally within the city limits of Memphis after being annexed in 1973. The beginnings of the park were laid in 1929 with the opening of the county-operated Shelby County Penal Farm, and by the 1940's, the land had reached its maximum size of 5,019 acres. Subsequently, land was given for the state and federal prisons and for the former State Technical Institute in the early 1970s, and the area settled to its present size of 4,500 acres.

PARK PROFILE

PARK USAGE

Shelby Farms Park staff sets park usage at 750,000 visitors a year, making it one of the most popular public spaces in Shelby County. Every weekend, park land and park pavilions north of Walnut Grove Road are jammed with corporate activities, family reunions, and gatherings. It also hosts numerous organized races, and special community events, including Friends of Shelby Farms Park's "You Gotta Have Park" festival. When attendance at Agricenter and Showplace Arena is included, it is clear that the 4,500 acres are a powerful regional magnet.

Reflecting its role as a regional park, few places boast of more diversity – race, economic, and age. On a recent weekend in the park, makeup of the park crowd was typical – about one-third African-American, one-third Hispanic, and one-third Caucasian.

Without question, Shelby Farms Park is an important recreational center for the area, but it can be much more with imaginative programming and a broader vision. Achieving its outdoor recreational potential is critical to our community, which ranks near the bottom of regions in total parkland, parkland as percent of total area, and spending on parks. The need for parks in the unincorporated areas or previously unincorporated area is especially serious, because development of parks in this urbanizing area has been sporadic and has never kept pace with population shifts.

If the north and south sides of Walnut Grove Road can be stitched back together into a seamless experience, Shelby County can create a majestic park. As the Eckbo Plan stated in 1975, "The basic design problem is to integrate or tie together the upper and more urban park potential and the lower more natural qualities of the floodway. It is this combination which creates the potential for one of the great natural/cultural parks of the world."

It begins with a master plan that develops a vision for more varied uses, activities, and purposes. And with the convergence of the CSX trail and the Wolf River Greenway at Shelby Farms Park, the park becomes the nexus for heightened usage and uses, giving our community a historic opportunity to set national standards for outdoor recreation. Shelby Farms Park today is only a hint of what it can become with expanded uses, amplified programming, and a visionary plan for the future.

PRESENT USES

Shelby Farms Park is like few urban parks in the United States. Twice as large as New York City's Central Park and San Francisco's Golden Gate Park combined, Shelby Farms Park is one of the United States' largest concentrated parks in the heart of an urbanized county. The park teems with activity: walkers and joggers on forest paths or the paved surface around Patriot Lake; bikers headed for hidden trails; seniors tending to gardens; horse lovers putting their horses through their paces; Frisbees and kites dancing in the wind; athletes training for marathons; cloud watchers reclining on blankets, and families enjoying picnics. It is a special place, dramatic in its diversity, and that is why the Shelby Farms Advisory Committee strongly recommended that a conservation easement, land trust, or similar covenant should be placed on the land to conserve and protect it for future generations.

Key elements of the park include:

- Lucius Burch Natural Area – The almost 800 acres of bottomland hardwood forest and its six miles of hiking trails allow hikers to step back in time when pioneers and native Americans hunted game in the area. It offers a timeless setting, and it is easy to forget that busy streets lie only a few hundred yards away. The area is designated as a state natural area, and it is the site of boat launching on Wolf River. Shelby County has received a State of Tennessee grant to build kiosks, restrooms and picnic areas as a gateway to the Natural Area. The Forest is designated a Class I Natural Area, which restricts its development to hiking trails, bridges, overlooks, primitive campgrounds, and small picnic areas. Persistent problems of erosion, trail damage, and privet nag at the forest, and must be addressed in the immediate future before further damage is done to the area.
- Shelby Farms Park Visitors' Center – Overlooking Patriot Lake from a prominent knoll, the visitors' center is the hub of activity for visitors, park rangers, and people gathering in its meeting rooms where the view is no extra charge.
- Plough Park – Located north of Walnut Grove Road, the park is the centerpiece of Shelby Farms Park and includes several popular fishing lakes, a pasture of American bison, Patriot Lake, a multi-use “dog park,” a riding stable and horseback riding, picnic areas, and trails for hiking and biking. On most weekends, the park is crowded with a mosaic of the Shelby County population, and it is so popular that there have been times when access has been shut down because of overcrowded park conditions. Most facilities are tired, the playground has safety issues, and bathrooms are few and primitive, and yet, thousands of people pour into the area north of Walnut Grover Park each week.
- Fishing Lakes – The park has a number of popular fishing spots, including Beaver Lake, southwest of the horse stables; Patriot Lake's popular 60 acres; Pine Lake in the center of the park; and Chickasaw Lake between Farm Road and the amphitheater. Agricenter operates a “pay to fish” lake south of Walnut Grove.
- Agricenter International – 1,000 acres are used by the nonprofit organization that was formed to become an agribusiness and bio-agricultural center by advancing research, showcasing cutting-edge technology, and sponsoring conferences on agribusinesses. A building with 150,000 square feet is used for a multitude of events, including bridal shows and home shows. Agricenter has subleased some of this land to companies associated, some loosely, with agriculture, and manages and receives revenues from the “Catch ‘Em” lake which can be seen from Walnut Grove, the RV park which can be seen from Germantown Rd, and a seasonal corn maze. In recent months, Agricenter has added an educational coordinator to expand its outreach to provide programs for students. Early in 2005, Agricenter took over operations of Showplace Arena from Shelby County Government, which was paying its deficit each year. Much of the acreage west of the scattering of buildings is used for demonstration and cash crops. There is a popular paved running trail on the property. There has been discussion in the Shelby Farms Park Advisory Committee about whether the flat south of Walnut Grove Road, particularly the land used for cash crops, would be better used for athletic fields, but that question rests with the master plan.
- Ducks Unlimited – The international conservation organization with a focus on wetlands and waterfowl habitats built its headquarters on land west of the Agricenter in 1991. The

presence of DU has not been leveraged for the benefit of Shelby Farms Park, particularly with the organization's members around the world. In addition, some of the expertise found in the headquarters could be helpful in conservation plans for the area.

- Show Place Arena – Management of the \$7.5 million arena was transferred from Shelby County Government to Agricenter in 2005. Connected to the arena is the The Butcher Shop restaurant. Typical events are rodeos, barrel racing, bull riding, and hunter/jumper events. The arena has been key to Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau's efforts to recruit horse-related events to Shelby County. Show Place Arena has intriguing possibilities, but it is in dire need of air conditioning, better seating, and refurbished restrooms for it to become a more successful multi-purpose arena. With little imagination, it is easy to see the arena used for sporting events and concerts as well as horse events.
- Farmer's Market – Located east of Agricenter and operated by it. Built with a grant from State of Tennessee, the farmer's market is a mecca for consumers seeking the vegetables from the region. There are also flowers and herbs, crafts and some baked goods.
- RV Park – Located south of the Farmer's Market is a spartan 296-space RV park with hook-ups. It was built by hotel-motel taxes as a temporary facility by the Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau in the late 1980s to recruit a national square dancers convention to Memphis. However, it remained open, and today, its revenues go to Agricenter.
- BMX Motocross Track – Located south of Walnut Grove Road and west of Agricenter is the BMX track leased to Memphis Motocross Association.
- Soccer fields – Several soccer fields are adjacent to the Motocross Track, and two are leased to Shelby Youth Sports Golden Saints. The future of the fields is grim, because it sits on top of a large capped landfill. There are better sites for athletic fields east of its present location and at the northwest corner of Walnut Grove and Farm Road.
- Shelby County Gun Range – Located near the Motocross Track and soccer fields is the gun range, which is used for target practice and skeet shooting. For several years, the county has considered closing the facility because of low revenues that frequently do not cover its costs, but such a decision is problematic, because federal law would require Shelby County to remove the lead from the site at a considerable cost.
- Area 10 -- Most of Shelby County Government's buildings are congregated west of the intersection of Mullins Station and Farm Roads in the northwest quadrant of the parkland. The area has historically been dominated by prison facilities, but it now includes public works and construction codes enforcement operations. Some people have argued that this designated area for governmental use extends all the way to Walnut Grove Road on the south; however, the Eckbo Plan of 1975 shows Area 10 as the existing footprint for county buildings. In 1989, Shelby County Mayor William N. Morris Jr. said there was no basis for the argument that Area 10 extends all the way southwardly to Walnut Grove Road. With the chance to tie into a parklike setting, the buildings could become an appealing "campus" for county government.

ZONING

Although the Eckbo Plan of 1975 strongly recommended that the zoning for Shelby Farms Park be changed to conform to its use as a park, it still remains largely zoned for industrial use, particularly in the eastern and northern sections. Much of the flood plain is zoned agricultural and the center of the park is zoned residential. The incoherent zoning reflects the lack of attention that comes from the absence of a master plan to guide the future of the park and its uses.

In 1975, the Eckbo Plan sounded the warning about the attention needed for sensitive zoning to encourage investment in mixed use development that takes full advantage of the park frontage north of the park. It is a challenge that remains today, and incredibly, some of this prime real estate is zoned heavy industrial.

Shelby Farms Park's importance as an anchor for the area's property values and as a magnet for quality development is to be exploited.

There have been proposals for commercial development along Shelby Farms Park's Germantown Road frontage. No recommendation for this kind of development was made by the Eckbo Report or in any subsequent internal reviews by Shelby County Government. The question of development – whether it will be allowed, and if so, what type – is a key question for a master plan to answer. Best practices in other communities show that similar proposals to sell or lease parkland earmark revenues to park operations. The emphasis is on complementary, upscale uses, rather than strip shopping centers, to make the best use of the irreplaceable parkland.

GOVERNANCE

The blurred and complicated lines of responsibility and authority at Shelby Farms Park often produce needless confusion and bureaucracy, and for that reason, governance is a central issue that must be considered by the master plan. For three decades, there have been repeated recommendations for an independent public, nonprofit organization. It began with the Eckbo report itself, which said in 1975: “properties are to be maintained as a geographical unit in the county's ownership, with the Authority as its agent...the purpose of single ownership is to be able to develop and carry out a comprehensive, long-term plan for the Shelby Farms property.”

Previous Shelby County Mayors William N. Morris, Jr., and Jim Rout called for an independent authority to manage the parkland, and in his 2002 campaign, Mayor AC Wharton suggested that the park “be unified into a single functioning whole” managed by an autonomous board, and his Five-Year Financial and Management Plan released in October, 2004, recommends “fully transfer(ring) responsibility for Shelby Farms to (a) dedicated not-for profit” and cites numerous examples of successful public/private partnerships for parks in other communities.

The April, 2005, report by the Shelby Farms Advisory Committee, appointed by the Shelby County Board of Commissioners, urged creation of a single management board to oversee all lands north and south of Walnut Grove Road. It said: “The development of Shelby Farms should be carried out under a single master plan and a unified organizational structure that achieves a marriage of public and private resource.”

Committee Chair Gene Pearson, director of the graduate program in city and regional planning at University of Memphis, said: “Today, Shelby Farms is fragmented, and there has not been a master plan for 30 years...The recommendations...can help stop the fragmented,

disjointed decision-making and involve every one in a unified planning and development process.” The report was accepted unanimously by the Shelby County Board of Commissioners.

Now, the nine-member Shelby Farms Board manages 1,300 acres of park and recreational areas. Eight members are appointed to three-year terms by the Shelby County mayor and confirmed by the Shelby County Board of Commissioners. The ninth member, who is a voting, ex-officio member, is the mayor himself. The board has limited authority to make decisions about park uses, but it exerts considerable political power. Final decisions on finances rest with the mayor and commissioners. Meanwhile, the 12-member staff of Shelby Farms Park answers to the Director of the Division of Public Works.

The largest single public investment made on the north side of Walnut Grove Road is the Visitors’ Center, built in 1999 with a \$1 million grant from the State of Tennessee and approximately \$250,000 from Shelby County Government. The land south of Walnut Grove managed by Agricenter has received the lion’s share of public money spent anywhere on the 4,500 acres – an amount approaching \$20 million in operating subsidies, construction costs, capital expenses, and unpaid rental payments.

The county mayor also appoints and the board of commissioners confirms the five members of the Agricenter Commission for five-year terms. In addition, the mayor and the chairman of the board of commissioners, or their designated representatives, are members of the commission, which has entered into a lease with Agricenter for use of 1,000 acres of land. The Agricenter is a nonprofit corporation with its own 31-member board and 13 employees. Agricenter’s building was built in the mid-1980’s with a \$4.5 million grant from State of Tennessee and \$2 million from Shelby County Government. Agricenter became financially self-sufficient with its 2004 operating budget. Agricenter recently took over management of Showplace Arena from Shelby County Government in a three-year contract.

A review of best practices in other large urban and regional parks shows an assortment of management structures and organizational models. Trends, however, are moving toward public/private partnerships, with greater private involvement because of the importance of setting a strong vision and providing the funding to achieve it. The recommendation of a governance structure that is tailored to our community’s needs is a priority of the master plan, and it is clear that if there is the political will and business and foundation leadership, Shelby Farms Park can become the benchmark for the U.S.

WILDLIFE AND VEGETATION

The terrain at Shelby Farms Park is home to an array of wildlife, with the forest, meadows, and pine woods attracting more than 200 species of birds, including Redtail hawks, peregrine falcons, herons, ducks, Canada geese, Indigo bunting, Cooper’s Hawks, bluebirds, turkey vultures, and more. Several species winter in the park, roosting in places where they return year after year. State and regional ornithological organizations meet in Memphis simply to take advantage of the opportunities for spotting so many diverse birds in one location. The prevalence of birding reports on the World Wide Web attest to the special pleasures of Shelby Farms Park.

There is also impressive wildlife in the area. Bobcats, families of deer, reptiles, rabbits, minks, muskrats, beavers, squirrels, and foxes are found in the heart of the urbanized center of Shelby County at the park. In the lakes and Wolf River are bluegill, carp, largemouth bass, bowfin, and catfish.

Shelby Farms Park has a significant pine forest in Plough Park, and there are large numbers of red oak, cypress, maple, ash, elm, sweet gum, sycamore, tupelo gum, white oak, hackberry and birch. The last estimate of the trees was made more than three decades ago, but the estimate of more than 22,000 trees seems a reasonable estimate because there has been no harvesting of trees by county government.

BENEFITS OF SHELBY FARMS PARK

Looking at the vistas of Shelby Farms Park or relishing the solitude of its trails, it is easy to appreciate the value of its physical space and aesthetic qualities. But these are but obvious indicators of the broader contributions that the 4,500 acres can make.

In the New Economy of the 21st century, communities that succeed will leverage all of their assets to compete. Parks that succeed will leverage all of their assets to promote healthy lifestyles and contribute to public policy objectives. Shelby Farms Park is not now such a place. It doesn't have this kind of leverage. But it can. Great parks always do. As a great park, Shelby Farms Park has the power to define the community as healthy, confident, imaginative, and bold.

Dramatic park investments in other regions are already being made, because public policymakers now recognize that parks are more than places for recreation and fun, as important as they are. In truth, parks are civic anchors that make important contributions to larger public objectives, including economic growth, water protection, public health, crime prevention, place-making, and community-building.

It is because of the new understanding of parks' contributions that cities and counties across the U.S. are making record investments in "greenprints," ambitious plans to purchase, expand, and capitalize on parkland. No community can point to a park as physically, socially, or emotionally important as Shelby Farms Park. While others are buying parkland, we have 4,500 acres waiting to be leveraged to fulfill its rich possibilities.

It begins with a master plan for Shelby Farms Park and ends with creation of a great American park that becomes the benchmark for communities across the U.S. There are few investments that we can make and no message that we can send that can pay such rich dividends.

A PLACE FOR STRONGER PROPERTY VALUES

The symbiotic relationship between parks and adjacent neighborhoods is well-documented.

Shelby Countians need look no further than Overton and Audubon Parks to see the positive power of parks; there, stable, quality neighborhoods adjacent to the parks testify to their gravitational pull. At Shelby Farms Park, residential and commercial development south of the parkland attest to its allure. The remaining vacant land north of the park offers exciting opportunities for quality development, emphasizing a mixed-use, mixed-income, diverse, walkable, and sustainable community founded on the principles of New Urbanism. Such a vision for the area north of the park would help to anchor these neighborhoods in the heart of Shelby County and help stabilize property values while generating new tax revenues for local government.

In a 2000 report, Texas A & M professor John L. Crompton reviewed 25 studies about whether parks did truly contribute to increased property values, and he found that they did 80 percent of the time. Repeated studies confirm the findings. The value of property near

Philadelphia's Pennypack Park is 11 times greater than land about one-half mile away. Boulder, Colorado, determined that the price of residential property decreased by \$4.20 every foot away from its greenbelt, and the increases associated with the park added \$500,000 in additional property tax a year. In Dayton, Ohio, proximity to the park and arboretum accounted for five percent of the residential selling price, and in Columbus, Ohio, the park and river accounted for 7.35 percent of the sales price. The fact that about 20 percent of Community Development Corporations – previously focused on housing and commercial development – now invest in open space speaks volumes about the impact of parks on neighborhood quality, and therefore, tax revenues.

In a 2001 Public Opinion Strategies' survey conducted for National Association of Realtors, 50 percent of the public said they were willing to pay 10 percent more for a house located near a park or other protected open space. In the same survey, 57 percent of respondents said that if they were in the market to buy a new home, they would be more likely to select one neighborhood over another if it was close to parks and open space. The same is true for commercial properties. A study that analyzed 36 parks concluded that rents, sale prices, and assessments for buildings near parks increased more than twice as fast as other sub-markets.

In this way, Shelby Farms Park is an anchor for the heart of Shelby County. As Jeff Speck, director of design for the National Endowment for the Arts, says: "If mayors understood the correlation between tree cover and real estate value, our cities would look like forests."

A PLACE FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

According to the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Shelby Farms Park is an outdoor living classroom. More precisely, it is a classroom that every student would welcome.

In parks around the country, new youth programs are being developed along with work programs for at-risk youth seeking to move from welfare to self-sufficiency. As far back as 1967, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders spotlighted the link between urban violence and lack of park and recreational opportunities. In 1992, the Carnegie Corporation reported that at-risk youth listed safe parks and recreation centers and chances to go camping and participate in sports as their top choices for "what they wanted most (to do) in their non-school hours." It is in the civic interest that they are channeled to active recreational programs in physical fitness and good health that last a lifetime.

The social consequences are profound. Physically fit youth make better grades. Recreation programs build character, pride, self-esteem, social skills, teamwork, leadership, focus, and healthier bodies. A national survey of more than 14,000 teenagers found that those who took part in such activities are less likely to have unhealthy eating habits, smoke, join gangs, have premarital sex, use drugs, or carry weapons.

Shelby Farms Park has much to offer youth in recreational opportunities and enriching program options. Ground can be broken for this community with new, innovative programs for children that are in keeping with policy objectives that recognize that the lives of youth can be transformed by park-based activities where youth develop a sense of security and personal identity, values, morals, and skills needed for healthy adulthood.

Shelby Farms Park offers an expansive palette for youth programs, but a limited budget and vision prevent its ability to respond to this gripping need for Shelby County. Juvenile statistics

are stark and well-known. Shelby Farms Park can become the place where youth are taught lessons for life in healthy, productive living. There would be no stronger measurement of the park's greatness than in its ability to serve the interests of Shelby County youth.

A PLACE FOR GOOD HEALTH

Shelby Farms Park is not only in the heart of Shelby County, but it is good for the hearts of Shelby Countians. As a great park, it will inspire healthy lifestyles, reduce medical costs, and increase personal happiness.

Although significant sums have been spent measuring the economic impact of parks, there is always the problem of putting a price on the priceless. There is no measurement that can accurately calculate the social value of individual happiness or the value of strong families, but the park contributes to these in important ways. While studies show that different ethnic groups use parkland in distinct ways, there is a common thread that runs through all – family togetherness and personal happiness. While some groups prefer to center their activities around food and others around active recreation, all see parks as sources of family bonding. At an individual level, Shelby Farms Park contributes to the physical and mental health of each park user.

This is especially important for youth. If current trends in obesity and inactivity continue, today's youth will be the first generation in the nation's history to face a shorter life expectancy than their parents. Adult onset diabetes now strikes children at younger and younger ages, and while all segments of the youth population are suffering from obesity and inactivity, low-income communities suffer first and worst.

The Surgeon General estimates that the U.S.'s cost of overweight and obese people is more than \$117 billion, and certainly, Shelby County pays more than its share. The rate of obesity in the eight-county Memphis Metro Area is higher than both the CDC's state and national rates – 27.5 percent compared to 24.5 for Tennessee and 22.2 percent nationally. Not surprisingly, the diabetes rate of 9.1 percent in both Shelby County and the metro area is higher than the state's 8.5 percent and U.S. rate of 6.7 percent. Trends show that the percentage of obese adults in Shelby County has climbed from about 12 percent in 1990 to 27.5 percent now. Diabetes has climbed from 5.4 percent in 1994 to more than 9 percent today.

Only three years ago, both *Men's Health* and *Self* ranked Memphis as the nation's unhealthiest city. In its most recent ranking, *Men's Health* ranked Memphis as the fifth unhealthiest city for men in its ranking of 101 cities and only five points from the bottom. Memphis received a grade of D in fitness, F in environment, and F in health. Meanwhile, *Self* moved Memphis up 32 spots, but in a ranking of the healthiest 200 cities, it is 168th. The region remains in the bottom percentile in exercise.

Men's Fitness, in its 2005 rankings, said Memphis is the fourth fattest city in the U.S., and it gave the region a grade of D for parks and recreation, citing the region as the fourth worst in the ratio of parks to residents. And *Medical News Today* wrote that Memphis is in the bottom 10 cities for utilitarian walking or biking and in the bottom 10 cities for parkland as a percentage of city acreage.

Shelby Farms Park can be the platform for reengineering the community's health ethos. It should be home to highly successful programs which directly attack health risks, like the National Institutes of Health's "Hearts n' Parks" program to fight heart disease. Adopting heart healthy

behaviors improves individual health. Even modest amounts of weight loss, approximately 10 percent, can reduce high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol levels, and high blood glucose levels in overweight people. Reducing these risks helps prevent cardiovascular disease and reduces its severity in people with existing disease.

With a “Hearts n’ Parks” program, Shelby Farms Park can be the site where science-based information about lifestyle choices is communicated and skills for incorporating heart healthy behaviors are embedded into people’s lives. Taught by trained park staff members, “Hearts n’ Parks” will leverage Shelby Farms Park’s potential to help people improve and maintain their weight.

In addition to contributing to physical health, these programs contribute to improved mental health. In a 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey of Memphis City Schools, 27.4 percent of students reported feelings of sadness and hopelessness, insufficient levels of exercise were reported by 41 per cent, and 65.5 percent said they watch more than three hours of television on an average school day. Inactive people are twice as likely to experience symptoms of depression as active people. One prescription is frequently given by mental health professionals – more exercise. And research shows that children with attention deficit disorder benefit from contact with nature and the outdoors.

The U.S. Surgeon General says “Americans can improve their health and quality of life by including moderate amounts of physical activity” that reduce the risk of premature death; reduce risk of coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer, and non-insulin-dependent diabetes; improve maintenance of muscle strength, joint structure, and joint function; weight loss and favorable redistribution of body fat; improve physical functioning in persons suffering from poor health; and build healthier cardiovascular, respiratory, and endocrine systems.

Shelby Farms Park is a much-needed antidote for Shelby County’s health problems. The results of “Healthy Communities” programs demonstrate the positive impact that the park can have on the knowledge of healthy behaviors, the principles of health-healthy living, and the impact of physical activity.

A PLACE FOR AIR AND WATER QUALITY

Air and water quality is a growing regional concern for Shelby County. In a recent survey of the 50 cities with the most polluted air, Memphis ranked 21st. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said that of the 30 cities that recorded an increase in the number of days with unhealthy levels of air pollution, the Memphis Metro was 8th. The U.S. Public Interest Research Group says in a ranking of metro areas with the most air pollution from vehicles per capita, Memphis was 17th. The local EPA Watershed Rating (a comprehensive measure of drinking water systems, wetlands, fish consumption advisories, biological integrity, ground and surface water pollutants, and 12 other environmental indicators of water quality) is poor.

Shelby Farms Park is an important weapon in protecting the purity of our drinking water, a unique competitive advantage for the region, and in helping fight air pollution.

Its flood plains and parkland are natural filters that cleanse polluted water before it reaches the aquifer where the region’s drinking water originates. Research indicates that at Shelby Farms Park, there is a downward migration of water from the shallow water-table aquifer through a window in the underlying upper Claiborne confining unit to the Memphis aquifer, the primary source of water for Shelby County. Historically, the Memphis aquifer was thought of as an ideal

aquifer overlain by a thick, impermeable clay layer that serves as a confining unit and protects the aquifer from contamination; however, studies now indicate that the confining unit may be thin and contain sand “windows” that provide “pathways” for contaminants to reach the Memphis aquifer.

In places like Mecklenberg County, N.C., counties are adding open space as protection for the area’s water sources. Other communities are working to protect both water quality and water quantity by guaranteeing that rainwater recharges underground aquifers. Pervasive development and its impervious surfaces divert runoff away from drinking water aquifers and into culverts and streams. In many parts of the U.S., cities are finding that there is simply not enough undeveloped open space to absorb rainfall.

Open parkland gives nature the room to take actions that would be extremely expensive if undertaken by technology, such as:

- filtering pollutants from soil and water
- buffering air pollutants
- conserving soil and water
- preserving genetic diversity
- pollinating food crops and plants

Shelby Farms Park’s forests control erosion, clean the air of pollutants, mitigate global warming, and cool the air. American Forests estimate that trees in the nation’s metro areas contribute \$400 billion in stormwater retention alone – by eliminating the need for expensive retention facilities.

The U.S. Forest Service calculates that one tree generates \$31,250 worth of oxygen over its 50-year lifetime; provides \$62,000 worth of air pollution control; recycles \$37,500 worth of water; and controls \$31,250 worth of soil erosion. In other words, Shelby Farms Park’s approximately 23,000 trees generate \$719 billion worth of oxygen; provide \$1.5 trillion worth of air pollution control; recycle \$900 billion worth of water; and control \$719 billion in soil erosion prevention.

Shelby County has been cited for nonattainment for poor air quality several times in the past, and the federal government has threatened sanctions to reduce pollution levels. Trees can remove from the air as much as 15 percent of the ozone, 14 percent of the sulfur dioxide, 3 percent of the particulate matter, eight percent of the nitrogen dioxide, and 0.05 percent of the carbon dioxide. In a project sponsored by NASA, meteorologists determined that clearing trees made temperatures in Atlanta five to eight degrees higher than outlying areas, creating an urban “heat island” that generates increasingly violent thunderstorms and contributes to flooding.

Trees also act as natural filters for water pollution. Their leaves, trunks, roots, and associated soil remove polluted particulate matter from the water before it reaches storm sewers. Trees also absorb nutrients created by human activity, such as nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium, which otherwise would pollute rivers and lakes. According to the American Forests Urban Resource Center, incorporating trees into a city’s infrastructure allows for smaller, less expensive

stormwater management systems, because trees intercept rainfall, and impervious surfaces like parking lots and roads prevent water from soaking into the ground.

A PLACE FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

Memphis and Shelby County was the first place where Richard Florida's groundbreaking research on the "creative class," the workforce fueling the Knowledge Economy, was applied. Conducted in conjunction with Dr. Florida, who visited Memphis several times, the *Memphis Talent Magnet Report* written by Coletta & Company was a wake-up call for the pivotal role that quality of life will play in our ability to compete in the global economy:

"Cities must be talent magnets to succeed in today's knowledge economy. To succeed, they must attract young mobile professionals who make up the knowledge workforce. In today's economy, the cities that win will be the cities that are places rich in ideas and talent...as a result, attracting and retaining educated young people who make up the most mobile core of the talent pool are the keys to a healthy, dynamic economy."

The stakes could not be greater. To succeed, Shelby County must be a magnet for knowledge workers while retaining the best and brightest of our own young people. Shelby County is no longer competing with other counties in the United States, but with regions in Mexico, India, and China. It competes in a world where globalization and technology are reshaping the world as we know it and how we fit in it.

The forces unleashed by the connectivity of technology are shifting the economy from the manufacture of goods to the conception, design, and marketing of goods, services and ideas. The workers needed to respond to these forces place a high premium on education, a high quality physical environment, and a community with a reputation for innovation and tolerance. As Bruce Katz of Brookings Institute says success comes with the creation of a quality of place, including "nearby active outdoor recreation."

National research by Carol Coletta of Memphis and Portland economist Joe Cortright in *The Young and the Restless* punctuated this importance for Memphis:

- Memphis is below average in college attainment, ranking 38th in the percent of 25 to 34 year-olds with college-educated (25.7 percent), but its college-educated population grew no faster than the average for U.S. metropolitan areas in the 1990s
- Memphis has 13,000 fewer 25 to 34 year-olds than in 1990, a decline of 7.5 percent,
- Memphis is experiencing net domestic in-migration among 25 to 34 year-olds, gaining a net of 5,700 people in this category from the rest of the U.S. in the past five years. Additionally, Memphis attracted about 5,600 international migrants in this age group. Memphis has a relatively high rate of out-migration compared to in-migration; for every six 25 to 34 year-olds who moved into the region, five left.

The Milken Institute's Tech-Pole, which measures metro areas based on their output of high tech industries and the concentration of high tech industries, ranks Memphis 134th of the 200 largest cities (November 2004). In the Metropolitan New Economy Index (April, 2001), which ranks cities according to 16 New Economy measures, the Memphis region ranked 47th of 50 cities, behind Nashville (#32), St. Louis (#27), and Charlotte (#30). Finally, Dr. Florida's Creativity Index ranks the Memphis region as 49th out of the 50 largest metro areas.

In its recommendations, the *Memphis Talent Magnet Report* said this key group of knowledge workers are seeking “peak experiences” that are the best found anywhere in the nation, and outdoor recreation is an important factor for them. Specifically, the report cites Shelby Farms Park for its potential to create a “peak” recreational experience.

That is why Dr. Florida said: “Shelby Farms Park is more than incomparable parkland. More to the point, it is unique competitive advantage for Memphis and Shelby County that cannot be matched in the global competition for talented workers. There is no question that creative workers in the knowledge-based economy place high value on outdoor assets and on a distinct sense of place. In this way, the future of Shelby Farms Park is also the future of the region.”

Business executives concur. They report that quality of life assets such as parks, outdoor recreation, and open space have become as important as location costs in attracting and retaining companies. Boeing, in 2001, when announcing the selection of Chicago for its corporate headquarters, cited recreational opportunities and quality of life as major factors. In the wake of the announcement, Dallas, one of the three finalists for the headquarters, appointed a task force to identify ways the city could be more competitive. Among top recommendations: more greenspace and parks.

Shelby Farms Park can be a peak experience and a “hook” in marketing to these workers. In addition, outdoor recreation is one of the fastest growing areas of the U.S. economy, including hiking, camping, biking, birding, fishing, and boating. Recognizing the connection between open space and tourism, some communities have begun taxing tourists to raise funds for park and open spaces, levying sales taxes on tourist-related goods and services. As the travel and tourism sector expands to become the nation’s leading industry in the next few years, counties from coast to coast will see their parks in a new light, because they will increasingly be seen as economic engines. Shelby County must get there first and stake out its unique claim with a great park as a competitive edge.

A PLACE FOR BIODIVERSITY

It is not the sheer size of Shelby Farms Park that sets it apart. More to the point, it is the diverse eco-systems found within its borders. There is the river and floodplain ecology, forest ecology, meadow ecology, and farmland ecology. In this way, the park conserves the biological diversity of plants and animals that inhabit each habitat and can bind the park together into an interlocking whole.

For about 12,000 years, the Wolf River has flowed near Shelby Farms Park. The river is teeming with life, and its vitality increases as the degraded urban section recovers from years of damage. The Natural Area is a remnant of a historic river meander, bald cypress-water tupelo swamps, bottomland hardwood forests, and open river channel habitat.

Unfortunately, the State of Tennessee says the ecosystem was significantly altered as a result of a change in hydrology by the Corps of Engineers and the invasion of privet, but the Natural Area remains a refuge for forest dwelling birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians in an urban environment.

Each Shelby Farms Park ecology has its own unique wildlife and its own unique character. To have these habitats in the midst of an urban environment is a staggering gift that the people of Shelby County have given to themselves.

A PLACE FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY

Shelby Farms Park is a community center without a roof. It is common space that is welcoming for all citizens. A study by the University of Illinois and the University of Chicago found that green common spaces are predictors of strong social ties. Evidence of community-building at Shelby Farms Park support the conclusions that interactions between diverse groups of people build social ties and community pride.

The power of green space was the reason that the Puritans built communities around common greens. Situated at the center of a region of 1.2 million people, Shelby Farms Park fulfills the role of the civic living room where working people mingle with international businesspeople, Latino families spread picnic blankets next to rural teenagers, multi-pierced youth talk with prep school students. It is the egalitarian nature of Shelby Farms Park that helps construct the society of Shelby County itself.

The users of the park symbolize the diversity of Shelby County, as do the surrounding neighborhoods. Neighborhoods adjacent to the park include people with the highest average income in the county, but also, some of the lowest; people with the highest percentage of college education, but also, some of the lowest; some of the highest median house prices, but also, some of the lowest; some with high percentages of seniors, but also, some with the highest percentage of children; and neighborhoods that are racially diverse. It is no wonder that Shelby Farms Park is the mixing pot for the community.

It is an irony of the 21st century that roads receive more funding and are set as higher priorities than parks, when parks are necessities of the same magnitude. They are a core function of government, but this does not mean that government alone should be responsible for them. Some of the most successful models of park development and management in the U.S. flow from the public and private sectors joining hands in innovative partnerships.

For example, the 20-year-old Central Park Conservancy gave \$20 million to Central Park and transformed it from a near dust bowl to arguably the queen of all American parks. The Piedmont Park Conservancy raised about \$20 million to turn Atlanta's largest park from a run-down, unsafe space into the premier landscape in the city. In inspiring these relationships, this, too, is a way in which Shelby Farms Park can be a positive force in building a stronger community. The public agrees. According to research conducted by American Lives Inc. for the real estate industry, 78 percent of all homebuyers and shoppers rated natural open space as either essential or very important.

In drawing people to the park, this special space contributes to understanding between races and ethnic groups and builds community pride. That's why a livable community cares more about parks than parking lots. In building on the strengths found at Shelby Farms Park, Shelby County develops its own uniqueness, because it is at the park that people are held together long enough for them to discover the power of citizenship that comes from inhabiting a shared space.

As the acclaimed mayor of Bogota, Enrique Penalosa, who created 1,300 parks in this city, said: "We cannot prove mathematically that...more and better parks make people happier; however, if we reflect, most things in life that are important in life cannot be measured either: friendship, beauty, love, and loyalty are examples. Parks are essential to a city's happiness."

A PLACE FOR CRIME PREVENTION

Programming Shelby Farms Park costs less than building new jail cells.

Research links the presence of public parks to reductions in crime, particularly juvenile crime. Parks with active programming keep at-risk youth off the streets in the four hours after school when most delinquency occurs. In fact, when researchers asked youth what they wanted most during non-school hours, they said safe parks and recreational programs.

According to a study by the U.S. Department of Justice, half of the men in the urban core will be arrested by the age of 17, and the cost of keeping one teenager in detention for a year approaches \$30,000. But more prisons and the threat of tougher sentences do not necessarily deter young offenders. While California was spending \$4 billion for new prisons, gangs in Los Angeles doubled in size.

U.S. Congressman Bruce Vento speaks for a growing number of legislators who insist that parks and open space are underused weapons in fighting crime: “Urban recreation and sports programs are a proven, common sense, and cost-effective means of preventing crime and delinquency. I wonder if our urban youth crime rate would be different if these programs had not been neglected in the past.”

Healing America's Cities documents success stories in cities that have recorded drops in crime when adequate parks and recreational activities are made available. Cities have documented 25 percent drops in juvenile arrests after beginning recreational programs, and they have also seen improved school grades. That is why Newark Mayor James Sharpe says his city could hire three recreational leaders for the cost of one new police officer, and the recreational leaders would have a much greater impact on keeping youth out of trouble.

Clearly, crime-fighting does not rest solely with law enforcement. It also rests in maximizing opportunities that can be created in Shelby Farms Park, through organized recreational programs and activities to teach positive life skills

A PLACE FOR SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

All major religious and spiritual traditions recognize the special role that nature can play in individual spiritual health. A variety of people cite this as a chief benefit of Shelby Farms Park – a place to recharge, renew, and center religious beliefs and spirituality.

Evangelicals have coined the term, “creation care,” to express their view of the Biblical mandate for environmental stewardship. As Rev. Ted Haggard, president of National Association of Evangelicals, says: “The environment is a values issue, and there are significant and compelling theological reasons why it should be a banner issue.” His organization adopted its first environmental stewardship mandate, saying: “We affirm that God-given dominion is a sacred responsibility to steward the earth and not a license to abuse the creation of which we are a part. Because clear air, pure water, and adequate resources are crucial to public health and civic order, government has an obligation to protect its citizen...”

The United States Catholic Conference says Catholics are compelled to show their respect for the Creator through stewardship and care for the earth as a requirement of their faith. Pope John Paul II called for an “ecological conversion” in which humanity becomes more sensitive and respectful of the Creation, because the emphasis on environmental stewardship makes the “garden of creation...available to all and not just to the privileged few.” Every mainstream Christian denomination agrees.

One of the basic laws of Buddhism set out by the Buddha 25 centuries ago was the importance of protecting the living environment. He taught that those who follow his path must protect animals and vegetation, and humanity misuses its power when it destroys forests and natural resources.

The Qur'an is full of references to the precious resources of the earth. The prophet Muhammad expressed concern for their protection and their equitable access by all people. Islam offers a strong basis for ecological understanding and stewardship, and often connects these issues with an overall call for social justice.

Judaism's commitment to the environment begins with Genesis, and if all its teachings about respect and protection for God's Creation were compiled, the definitive book on conservation would have been created centuries ago. Rabbi Micah Greenstein of Temple Israel says: "According to Jewish tradition, after God had created the first man, God led him on a path through the trees in the Garden of Eden. God said to the man, 'Look what I have done, see how beautiful and worth of appreciation they are. Everything I have done has been for your sake. Take care of this legacy, because if you destroy it, there will be no one to fix it after you'"

His words, and the teachings of the world's major religions, are powerful admonitions to protect Shelby Farms Park and create a great park for future generations. They are also reminders of opportunities at the park to address the spiritual renewal that it brings to so many people.

THREATS TO SHELBY FARMS PARK

LACK OF FUNDING

The potential of Shelby Farms Park in the years since the Eckbo Plan is largely unrealized. It is a highly popular local park, but it does not approach the greatness that Mr. Eckbo first imagined. The primary reason is lack of funding.

Since the early 1980s, operations of the park have been tied directly to Shelby County funding, and as county government deals with its financial crisis, less money is available to parks and other quality of life amenities. The county's investments in the park peaked as the 21st century dawned. For example, the 1990 budget included county funding of \$182,540, and 10 years ago, it had climbed to \$545,422. The overall budget for the park peaked in 2001 at \$779,184, with \$252,358 in revenues and \$526,826 in county funding. This is a small amount when compared to comparable regional parks, but funding levels have been declining since then. In the most recent Shelby County budget, it dropped by about 40 percent to \$316,007.

The Five-Year Financial and Management Plan commissioned by the Wharton Administration calls for an end to public funding and the transfer of responsibility for park management to an independent, nonprofit organization under a long-term lease. It quotes Brian O'Neill, superintendent of the Golden Gate National Recreational Area: "A non-profit can engage the community in ways that is difficult for the government to do...(people) are able to translate their passion and commitment to a cause with a non-profit in a way that's very difficult for them to do with a government agency." In particular, the report says, some donors are unlikely to give directly to county government, and it is difficult for the county to use public money to pay a fundraising staff.

The impact of the low funding levels for the 1,300 acres under control of the Shelby Farms Board can be seen in broken playground equipment, land and trail erosion, overgrown natural areas, and staff reductions. In a grant application submitted in 2000, county government cited broken swings, inadequate insulation around the ladder of the playhouse, safety hazards on gym equipment, exposed concrete in “tot lot,” broken, old, and outdated equipment on “handicapped trail,” trash, the deteriorating amphitheater, lack of signage, public safety concerns, and more. Most of these problems remain.

At the center of Plough Park stands a children’s playground that is symbolic testament to the consequences of inadequate funding, but it also demonstrates the love of Shelby Farms Park itself. It is antiquated and served by a bathroom on a septic tank. The playground itself is puny, out-of-date, and in some respects, unsafe. There is no money or vision for anything better, and yet, it was voted as the best playground in Memphis in the annual survey in *Memphis* magazine. It does not take a visionary to imagine the impact that a modern, expanded playground could have, and yet, it is unlikely to happen without a master plan.

Meanwhile, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation says privet is a serious problem, because the Asian plant is displacing native species. The invasion of privet was encouraged when drier site conditions were created and the native landscape was changed by the channelization of Wolf River. Because of the severe financial crisis in Shelby County Government, there is little funding to tackle such projects.

In light of budget pressures, some members of county government have suggested entrance fees for the park, and other people have suggested selling or leasing the frontage on Germantown Road for commercial development. Both suggestions are extreme measures by national best practices.

Drastic budget cuts for Shelby Farms Park run counter to trends in peer cities where bold new programs are being created and public funding increased for parks and open space. American voters continue to support conservation financing that preserves natural area, creates parks, and protects farmland. A recent report by The Trust for Public Land said that voters in 23 states approved three-fourths of the ballot measures for parks, creating about \$1.8 billion in funds. In fact, since 1995, more than \$25 billion in new funding for state and local conservation projects have been approved by voters.

In the Southeast U.S., Carroll County, Georgia, voters approved \$19 million; Raleigh \$47.25 million; Rogers, Arkansas, \$2 million; Olviedo, Florida, \$4.5 million; Hilton Head, N.C., \$15 million; and Cary, N.C., \$15 million. Raleigh and Wake County, N.C. have a long tradition of parkland, which it credits as a major factor in the creation of its status as a high tech center. Since 1970, the percent of city space devoted to parkland grew by 17 percent in San Francisco, 46 percent in Dallas, and 300 percent in San Diego.

Meanwhile, numerous city and county government leaders are funding major programs to create parks. Louisville, for example, unveiled in February, 2005, a \$20 million plan to upgrade its park system and create thousands of acres of new parks. About the same time, New Orleans announced a \$115 million restoration of the 1,300-acre City Park to the standard set by great public spaces in Chicago, New York, and St Louis. Meanwhile, Nashville has embarked on a \$151 million park program, and Atlanta has begun a \$151 million linear park that will stretch 22 miles.

Funding responds to a compelling vision, and state government, foundations, and the business sector have a tradition of supporting such dramatic visions. Such visionary programs attract the support of philanthropy and business. Indianapolis received \$10 million in the most recent report on private donations; \$6 million in Austin; \$16 million in Kansas City; and \$50 million in New York City. In addition, such a vision could spark special public funding such as a “Pennies for the Park” initiative to dedicate two cents of the county tax rate to parks, raising about \$3 million a year.

LACK OF STAFFING

The lack of county funding logically plays out in the small size of the Shelby Farms Park staff. Its dozen staff members labor to keep the park clean and safe, but there is not enough staff to do little else. More than half of the staff – eight – are rangers or firing range officers. The work of the staff is supplemented by other county departments, inmates from the Shelby County Correction Center, and volunteers. Friends of Shelby Farms Park is the principal advocacy group for the park, and its volunteers sponsor an annual festival, “You’ve Gotta Have Park,” and seek opportunities to help the staff with special projects and day-to-day needs.

There is no question that the staff of the Shelby Farms Park is committed to it. In fact, their devotion to the parkland is the overriding attitude displayed in a visit to the park; however, with such a small staff, Shelby Farms Park is a shadow of what it should be. There is no opportunity now for programming or organized activities that encourage good health, youth development, and economic development.

Parks much smaller than Shelby Farms Park in other parts of the U.S. have staffs that are five to 10 times larger. And while no one argues for staff for staff’s sake, the appropriate sized staff comes from a vision adopted as part of a master planning process. Once there is a clear plan, there can be a staffing plan for accomplishing it. Then and only then can the public/private partnerships be created for funding and managing a staff that is sized appropriately for its mission.

LACK OF MARKETING

Marketing for Shelby Farms Park is limited at its best and nonexistent at its worst. With limited park budgets and a small staff, it comes as no surprise that there is little time or money for developing and executing marketing plans. Few governmental agencies are adept in marketing, and Shelby County Government is no exception. Materials about Shelby Farms Park are basic and website information is unexciting.

In fact, most marketing of the park comes from outside organizations like Friends of Shelby Farms Park and Wolf River Conservancy. The most up-to-date brochure about the park is produced by Friends of Shelby Farms Park. Information about the park is deep within the Shelby County Government website and only gives basic information about hours of operation, events, and rules and regulations. There is no map of the park on the county website, and maps of the park found online at other websites are difficult to read and often incomplete.

Marketing of the Shelby Farms Park is mostly word of mouth, but a Google search hints at the momentum that can be built with a serious marketing effort. With more than 6,000 “hits,” it is a striking indication of the special regard in which the park is held. With a comprehensive, well-planned marketing plan, Shelby Farms Park can claim its rightful place of national prominence.

ROADS AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

If current growth and land consumption rates continue, the United States will urbanize its land at a rate seven times faster than population growth. Already, land consumption in Shelby County outstrips population growth. That is why the imperative for engaging in open space conservation becomes more and more critical. But as highly prized sites in Shelby County dwindle, the pressure on parkland grows.

Current road plans aim 30 to 33 new lanes of traffic at Shelby Farms Park, and will consume hundreds of acres of parkland, as reflected in the Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Long-Range Transportation:

- five new lanes from Sycamore View
- six or seven new lanes from Whitten Road
- six or seven new lanes from Appling Road
- five new lanes widening Mullins Station Road into the northern perimeter of the park
- six new lanes widening Walnut Grove Bridge over the Wolf River
- two or three new lanes widening Walnut Grove Road

The many road plans are puzzling in light of the report by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group that Memphis is ranked 6th in the U.S. in the number of the lanes of highways per capita, which contributes to its ranking as 17th worst city for most air pollution from vehicles. Not coincidentally, Memphis and Shelby County were recently cited by the Federal Highway Administration for lack of safe alternative forms of transportation such as bike and pedestrian lanes and light rail.

As for the 30-year controversy about Kirby-Whitten Parkway, progress is being made and it has the potential to set the standard for the entire state. Tennessee Department of Transportation, Shelby County Government, and Friends of Shelby Farms Park have led development of a "context sensitive design" process to build a road with a park-sensitive design that balances the needs of the park and transportation. Access to Shelby Farms Park has been problematic for years, and there are ways that this road can ease nagging access and congestion problems.

Suggestions have been made that the Germantown Road frontage should be sold or leased for commercial development to generate revenues to pay down Shelby County's \$1.7 billion debt. There are no best practices for this, either for parks or local government. There is no benchmark for including a shopping center within a park, and in most communities, when parkland is used for development, it is a limited, high quality, complementary use, and the revenues are earmarked to the park budget. Best practices in other communities also show an unwillingness to sell irreplaceable assets in exchange for short-term financial rewards. A master plan would evaluate the use of this acreage, and if development is to be considered, what type should be allowed. The Shelby County Advisory Committee on Shelby Farms recommended to the Shelby County Board of Commissioners that no decision on development be made except as part of a master planning process. The recommendation was passed unanimously by the board of commissioners.

A key part of the report was for restrictions to be placed on the entire Shelby Farms Park property through a conservation easement, land trust, land banking or other appropriate means to limit the use of the land to pedestrian, skating, and equestrian trails and paths, paved and unpaved; nature trails; gardens; recreational sports; pavilions, picnic areas, and playgrounds; agronomy and horticulture; dog exercise and training; boating activities; fishing; wildlife habitat; forests, fields, vistas, and open spaces; wetlands mitigation bank; (and) existing uses unless moved or destroyed under provisions of a master plan.”

LACK OF VISION

Shelby Farms Park enjoys an embarrassment of riches, but lacks a vision of what they can become.

The Wolf River Greenway, like Shelby Farms Park, is an idea that took decades to move toward fruition. For about 40 years, there has been a dream of creating a greenway along Wolf River. It is now becoming a reality, and Shelby Farms Park will be the buckle on a greenbelt that runs from Collierville to downtown Memphis. When completed, Shelby Farms Park will be midpoint of a linear park, making it even more accessible by hiking, biking, or boating.

Meanwhile, the abandoned CSX railroad tracks north of the park are becoming a “Rails to Trails” project for which Shelby Farms Park will be the hub, opening up exciting new access with a hiking and biking trail, and possibly light rail, from Midtown Memphis and Cordova.

With the shifting of Kirby-Whitten Road to the most westwardly point in the park, land preserved at the northwest corner of Walnut Grove and Farm Roads (and flatland south of Walnut Grove Road) could be a possible location for a baseball complex, an idea to be studied in a master planning process. A study by the Memphis Park Commission identified a need for four baseball complexes and 20 soccer fields to respond to city needs. This does not include the needs of residents who live in unincorporated areas where few recreational facilities have been built.

Shelby Farms Park is the ideal location for a “Healthy Communities” program, offering every one from youth to seniors opportunities for exercise and good health. Youth in after school and weekend programs learn more about nature and themselves. Then, there are summer camps, nature walks, and ecology talks.

In other words, there is no lack of exciting ideas for programs and activities, but they are only ideas until they are given substance and form in a master plan. Most of all, they need the public-private partnership that can get them done. Public-private partnerships come in all shapes and sizes, and the only common thread is the marriage of public leadership and private vision and funding. There is no predetermined template for these partnerships: there are some that manage parks and their staffs, there are others that have a voice in decision-making and raise funds, and there are some that are simply the fund-raising arms for the park. In each case, the emphasis is on attracting the funding that is needed for parks to improve and expand. More and more, in light of budget pressures and complex policy issues, governments are looking to private partners to take broader roles in park operations. More and more, private and philanthropic funders are less likely to give over money without a voice in decision-making. What partnership is best for Shelby Farms Park is a critical issue to be addressed by the master plan.

Public Parks, Private Partners says master plans lead to understanding current conditions of the park, generate and build community interest and participation, create a new and common vision for the park’s future, and develop a clear and solid set of recommendations and

implementation strategies. And the master plan recommends the public-private partnership that is tailored to the needs of Shelby Farms Park and is best equipped to fulfill the vision of a unified park.

Most of all, the master plan challenges expectations of what the park can be, provides a rationale to raise funds for park needs, and guides decision-making about park improvements. The plan is only as good as the credibility of its master planner. That is why the selection of an experienced firm with national credentials (with the help from local partners) is so crucial to the future of the park.

CLOSING

Shelby Farms Park has a special place in the life of the Memphis/Shelby County region despite being strapped for revenue and lacking a clear vision for the future. It is a special place, a popular local park, but it can be more. With a bolder vision, it can improve quality of life, clean the air, give cooling shade, provide recreation and fun, offer contemplative opportunities, improve personal health, reduce crime, inspire youth, and more. .

The *New York Times* could have been speaking for the citizens of Shelby County when it editorialized: “The parks are not, as many politicians believe, a frill. They are the city’s lungs, essential components of its health and quality of life – cleaning the air, breaking the heat, breathing life into (the community). They can provide recreation and a crime-free environment for school children and their families, an avocation for gardeners caught in their boxy apartments. Safe and improved parks can also improve city revenues.”

It is in doing all of these things that a great Shelby Farms Park will be a powerful competitive advantage. To compete in the global economy, each segment of Shelby County – from the housing market to arts and culture, from the weather to the job market – is part of the equation people use to decide where to live and companies use to decide where to locate and expand. Every community is in competition with every other one, and every civic asset must be leveraged for a community to succeed.

A great Shelby Farms Park can tip the balance. With research and practical evidence pointing to the value of parks in the life of a community, parks across the country are looking for ways to increase their ties to the many constituencies that they can serve. This has led to a wave of major bond issues for parks and improved opportunities for their people. But none has an asset that rivals Shelby Farms Park, but we must move quickly to build the great park that it can be.

By broadening its vision, the Louisville Olmstead Parks Conservancy worked as a partner with the City of Louisville to plan and fund for park improvements that address the park’s true potential. The Austin Parks Foundation played a similar role in the Texas capital. In New York City, the Central Park Conservancy manages the world’s most famous park, and the Trust for Public Land worked with the Enterprise Foundation and the Council on the Environment of New York City in South Bronx, Central Brooklyn, and Upper Manhattan to create community gardens and parks. In Atlanta, the Piedmont Park Conservancy raised nearly \$20 million to reclaim the city’s largest park, which was rundown and unsafe. The City Parks Alliance, composed of leading park leaders from across the U.S., is working to maximize the critical role that parks play in the revitalization of the city.

In Chicago, Mayor Richard Daley, in his 2003 inaugural speech, referred to his city's work to make neighborhoods places where people want to live and work, make streets safer, give children educational opportunities, and attract new business and housing. In conclusion, he linked these achievements to decisions to upgrade the park system and expand its programs.

The fulfillment of the dream of Shelby County citizens that began in 1973 can be realized. It is not prevented by lack of money. It is prevented by a lack of vision. With a vision drawn from the master plan for a great park, a broader operating philosophy, expanded programs, and the appropriate management structure to attract new funding partners energized by the promise of a great Shelby Farms Park that will be a benchmark for the nation.

But it will take concerted, concentrated work by a partnership between the public and private sectors. And if it is successful, this "green strategy" can transform Shelby County, as it once helped give birth to the Progressive Era in Memphis. The Tennessee Historical Society says "the Memphis Park and Parkway System resulted from the vision of the new civic capitalists who emerged in the wake of the yellow fever epidemics of the 1870s (and)... established the Greater Memphis Movement (GMM), a loose organization devoted to the promotion of a civic agenda that included... construction of a system of parks and connecting boulevards to unite the new city with the old." Just as parkland helped catapult Memphis onto the national stage a century ago, Shelby Farms Park can do it again today.

The overriding question for us now is not what kind of park we want, but what kind of community we seek. It is not what we wish to do on the parkland, but what we want the land to do for our community. It is not about making decisions about what we want, but what Shelby Countians 100 years from now would wish we had done. It is in the name of these future generations for whom we are stewards that we create a great Shelby Farms Park. In this real way, the park becomes the bridge that connects our present aspirations to our future realities.

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