



DOUG COOMBS

Movie Screenings by Midtown Detroit Inc. are held in New Center Park.

Greater than the sum of the parks

Coalition brings neighborhood, downtown Detroit park groups together to collaborate

► **BY SHERRI WELCH** Can collaboration among Detroit park conservancies and “friends groups” bring new resources, joint programming and cost efficiencies?

Ten groups caring for neighborhood parks and downtown public spaces have banded together to find out.

Operating as the Detroit Parks Coalition and with a memorandum of understanding, the group is looking at opportunities to share costs, collaborate on programming and jointly fundraise, while also establishing a consolidated body to work with the city of Detroit on funding and improving the parks.

The effort began with five groups who came together in 2018-19: Chandler Park Conservancy as fiduciary, Belle Isle Conservancy, Clark Park Coalition, Friends of Rouge Park and People for Palmer Park.

In January, five more joined: Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, Downtown Detroit Partnership, Friends of Patton Park, Midtown Detroit and Sidewalk Detroit.



“IT’S NOT THIS CONSTANT NARRATIVE OF DOWNTOWN VS. THE NEIGHBORHOODS. THEY ARE SUPPORTING THE NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS.”

— Sigal Hemy, interim director, Detroit Parks Coalition

The expanded membership brings to the coalition both neighborhood groups and major downtown park conservancies with operational and fundraising expertise and ties to business leaders who’ve been supporting parks in the city and looking at best practices for sustaining them for years.

There’s huge value for both the prominent downtown park conservancies and the neighborhood parks in collaboration, said Sigal Hemy, a former program officer of the Erb foundation, hired by the coalition in August to serve as its interim, part-time director. It’s good for the big downtown park conservancies to be seen as sharing resources and knowledge, Hemy said.

“It’s not this constant narrative of downtown vs. the neighborhoods. They are supporting the neighborhood parks.”

Conversely, if some of the neigh-

borhood groups can springboard off of some of the knowledge and experience the large conservancies bring, “that’s a big win for them,” she said. The neighborhood groups also have their own knowledge to share about managing volunteers, for example, that downtown park conservancies can learn from.

In the planning phase since 2018-19 with a \$30,000 grant from the Erb foundation, the Detroit Parks Coalition is now at a nascent point.

It’s attracted more than \$2 million in planning and operating grants from the Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation and the Kresge Foundation.

It’s also gained the attention of business leaders at the regional CEO group who are engaged with its work through the DDP.

See **PARKS** on Page 12



Thank You,
STRICTLY
BUSINESS
 ad**VAN**tage **Sponsors!**

All of us at **JVS Human Services** are endlessly grateful for your support.

Proceeds from this year's campaign will be used to bolster our fleet of vans to better help the people we serve get to work, so they can remain self-sufficient and live their best lives.

There's still time to be a part of this year's **Strictly Business**. Find out how you can sponsor or donate at jvshumanservices.org/strictlybiz

WHITE DIAMOND



Insurance | Risk Management | Consulting

METALLIC SILVER



TUXEDO BLACK



Murray and Ina Pitt

RUBY RED

Brightwing*
 EHIM*
 Emily and Josh Eichenhorn*
 In fond memory of Marion Freedman
 Lisa and Brian Meer*
 Bea and Paul Schwarzbaum*
 Fran and George Stern*
 Taubman
 Lori and Alan Zekelman*

STEEL BLUE

BERLINE*
 Faye and Paul Blatt*
 Nancy and Jim Grosfeld

Stephanie and Jared Rosenbaum*
 Wayne Industries/Steel Pro

GREEN GEODE

Buck Baker
 Butzel Long*
 Carol Craine*
 Jennifer and Brian Hermelin
 Jill and Lee Hurwitz
 Jaffe Raitt Heuer & Weiss, PC*
 Lippincott Real Estate Advisors, LLC
 PCE Systems
 Star Trax Events*
 TPG, a Belfor Company
 Wolverine Packing Co.

CONTRIBUTING SPONSORS

Barron Family Foundation
 Broner Glove and Safety
 Andrea and John Kessler*
 Simmons & Clark Jewelers*
 Denise and Michael Tobin*
 Lori and Steven Weisberg*

SUPPORTING SPONSORS

Anita and Clifford DeVine
 Sarah and David DeVine
 Ronald Elkus
 Judy Greenwald*
 Law Offices of Kristen R. Gross, PC*
 Helene and Arthur Indianer
 Debbie Keith
 Aubrey Macfarlane*
 Alexandra and Ryan Mollen*

Earl M. Remer
 Law Offices of Jorin G. Rubin, PC*
 Dr. Mark Saffer
 Eva and Raymond Shapiro*
 Lynda and Douglas Thal
 Elysa and Michael Weil
 York Properties, Inc.
 Julie and Richard Zussman

*JVS Partners sponsor both Strictly Business and Trade Secrets, providing much-needed support for critical services for job seekers.

As of 10/8/21



ALWAYS ADVANCING To Better Serve Our Communities

At Beaumont, our health care heroes work together every day to ensure we are always moving forward, making a difference for our patients, our communities and our future. With the most nationally ranked hospitals in Michigan, we continue to invest in programs and facilities that provide better access to high-quality care, including:

- New, innovative outpatient campuses in Macomb and Wayne Counties.
- 28 urgent care facilities opened since 2019, making up the largest network in Michigan.
- An integrated approach to behavioral health services focused on access, education and removing the stigma of seeking mental health care.

Learn more at beaumont.org/advancing

Beaumont

FOCUS | NONPROFITS

PARKS

From Page 10

Three years ago, the CEO group convened stakeholders to look at development and maintenance of parks in Detroit, many supported by its members. The committee looked at best practices, efficiencies in services and how parks can be sustained. A 2019 study commissioned from the Washington, D.C.-based Urban Land Institute echoed earlier research, reinforcing the need for a citywide parks coalition.

Businesses and foundations have put a lot of money behind public spaces, including the Detroit riverfront, Campus Martius and Beacon Park, over the past 20 years since work on the riverfront began, said Jack Entertainment Chairman Matt Cullen, who is chairman of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy's board, a vice chairman of DDP and a member of the regional CEO group.

"The CEO group is very enthusiastic about the work that the parks coalition is doing," he said. "It's very much aligned with what we are hoping to happen and want to be supportive of."

Building the coalition

Though the CEO group is not a member of the coalition, it's very much at the table through the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy and DDP, Hemy said.

Libby Levy, who did the original strategic plan for the five initial parks, is an at-large member of its leadership team, as is Laura Trudeau, retired managing director of the Kresge Foundation's Detroit program.

Recently, the coalition secured its first joint allocation, a \$500,000 designation in the state's 2022 budget.

"That's a big win for us already ... instead of the state picking and choosing specific projects, they are allocating the (funds) to parks coalition and the 10 members will work out how it is (split)," Hemy said.

"It's the people who are using the parks every day making decisions about that funding."

The coalition has been approved for an \$180,000 grant from the Kresge Foundation to stand up the organization with paid staff, a business model and a governance committee to figure out if we should spin out to our own 501(c)3, Hemy said. It will fund a pilot for the coalition to cover "planning and doing," with efforts launching in January and running through June 2023, Hemy said.

Initial work will include allocating the state funding among the membership parks, developing collaborative programming, hiring a full-time coalition leader, exploring 501(c)3 status for the group and coordinating communication and marketing, leaders said.

"One of the things we're thinking about is having tours for the various parks (members) so they can get a sense of the different programming and amenities," like the new skate park at Chandler Park, Hemy said.

"That's best-practice sharing but also gives them a sense of who has what and where they can ask questions."

The coalition expects to hear on two other pending grant applications before the end of the year, one to support the group's pilot and the other to fund programming across its member parks.

While membership includes only major parks in the neighborhoods and downtown now, the goal is to grow to eventually serve conservancies, block clubs and neighborhood groups across



"AT THE END OF THE DAY, WE WANT PEOPLE TO HAVE REALLY GOOD EXPERIENCE IN OUR PARKS, TO MAKE GOOD MEMORIES. WHEN WE THINK ABOUT PARKS, WE HAVE TO THINK ABOUT A CITYWIDE SYSTEM."

— Alex Allen, executive director, Chandler Park Conservancy, and chairman, Detroit Parks Coalition



Visitors explore the Belle Isle Aquarium on Belle Isle in Detroit. | BELLE ISLE CONSERVANCY



Annual Butterfly and Prairie Walk at Rouge Park in Detroit. | FRIENDS OF ROUGE PARK

the city's parks, Hemy said. "We're starting with this tight group that has a lot in common, and our hope is we can find a way to expand and benefit everyone as we grow," she said. Already, the coalition is working with smaller organizations, sharing how members improve safety in parks and program them. The Detroit Pistons Foundation is making mini-grants to those groups to help them implement some of those practices, Hemy said. "At the end of the day, we want peo-

ple to have really good experience in our parks, to make good memories," said Alex Allen, executive director of the Chandler Park Conservancy and chairman of the Detroit Parks Coalition.

"When we think about parks, we have to think about a citywide system," he said. "We gain a lot of perspective from things happening in other parks ... as far as programs, fundraising, as far as our relationship with the city of Detroit."

The coalition gives members the ability to go to the city with one voice to address issues they all face, like trash, Allen said. It also brings opportunities to jointly pursue new revenue. Funders are getting requests from individual parks, he said. "From their vantage point, it's a lot easier and maybe more efficient to make a (grant) to one entity to support parks."

The coalition has something to offer for members big and small, downtown and in the neighborhoods, Hemy said.

Smaller organizations have a lot to learn about capacity and structure, she said. At the same time, "the larger organizations have a lot to learn from smaller organizations about how they mobilize volunteers."

"The Detroit Parks Coalition is a clear demonstration of what can happen when nonprofits and community stakeholders are working collaboratively and in partnership with one another," said Michele Hodges, president and CEO of the Belle Isle Conservancy.

"Already we have made strides with fundraising, in furthering a solid relationship with the city of Detroit, in coordinated programming, impactful marketing and communications, in establishing a vision for the long-term sustainability of our parks and, perhaps most significantly, equity and access to opportunity for all parks and their visitors."

Right now member parks are funded through a mix of city of Detroit parks and recreation resources, philanthropic support, endowments, business sponsorships and volunteer labor, Hemy said. The city owns the majority of park land and does ongoing maintenance like picking up trash and mow-



Larson



Trulik



Cullen



Trudeau

ing grass, though that doesn't always happen to the extent it's needed — especially during the pandemic when the city lost revenue while park use skyrocketed.

Philanthropy tends to help with a specific capital project or program, while endowments benefit larger organizations like the DDP and riverfront conservancy, as opposed to the smaller People for Palmer Park, for example. Some park groups also have membership fees, and rely on volunteer work.

Best practices

The collaborative model for park conservancies is new to Detroit but not other cities like New York, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, said Trudeau.

Trudeau benchmarked efforts in those cities during her time at Kresge and produced a report on models for long-term sustainability of parks and public spaces with Brookings Institution. "One of the observations was that collaboration and cooperation can lead to more resources and a lot of synergy in terms of knowledge-sharing and cost-sharing," Trudeau said.

A decade later, the DDP, on whose board Trudeau serves, and its CEO Eric Larson tapped her again to do research on the sustainability of public spaces.

By the spring of 2018, the DDP was testing the waters for an endowment campaign while also seeking to increase earned revenue and sponsor-

ships to create revenue for the ongoing upkeep of Campus Martius and other parks it oversees, including: Cadillac Square, Campus Martius, Capitol Park, Grand Circus Park and Beacon Park.

And by summer that year, the regional CEO group was looking at the issue, led by Cullen and a committee that included Trudeau, Larson and others.

"Cities can do a lot, but there are things the private sector — foundations, nonprofits, companies and individuals — can do to make the parks even better," by working to grow the pot of resources available to parks, building on the city's investments, Trudeau said.

The coalition "allows us to think about the entire network of parks as a whole and try to ensure equity," she said.

As with Campus Martius, there is always a lot of excitement and funding available for the creation of great ideas, Larson said. Raising the capital to build the park was not easy, but it was successful. But what often isn't looked at is the ongoing sustained funding.

"If we're going to continue to represent a network of parks that are best-in-class for public spaces ... the last thing you want to do is fall short on operating needs," he said. Funding requests that aren't coordinated are going to get harder and harder to justify for public-private partners, Larson said.

"There are investment opportunities that are out there, whether it's the dollars potential available through (the

American Rescue Plan Act), the new infrastructure spending bill or just a better way to approach a potential funder. Having a united and collective voice often is more compelling and can be a stronger voice as we advocate for ... sustainable operation of these public spaces."

The ability for neighborhood parks and downtown parks to work together on a unified basis is much more strategic and equitable, he said.

"I'm very excited about a more formal working relationship with the network of parks ... (and) hope the city would feel more comfortable that there is a collective voice," Larson said.

Right now, fundraising is done by individual parks, Cullen said. By definition, making one-off park investments isn't necessarily the best approach.

"You'd like to have a consistent funding mechanism with sufficient capacity. That's what we are aspiring to and continue to work on," Larson said.

The goal "is to make sure our community can support those types of spaces in a more consistent and broad-based way."

The Detroit Parks Coalition is a great example of organizations working together to share resources and scale services, said Paul Trulik, CEO of Apparatus Solutions and CFO of the DDP.

It's also a notable example of how long it takes to bring groups together, said Trulik, who is consulting with nonprofits to help them do scenario-planning through a program hosted and funded by Detroit-based Co.act Detroit.

"Perhaps the pandemic (and) current environment will expedite some of these conversations" among other nonprofits, Trulik said.

Crain's reporter Annalise Frank contributed to this story.

Contact: swelch@crain.com (313) 446-1694; @SherriWelch



CANCER DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE!

I FOUGHT WITH THE BEST.

In the fight against cancer, you want every advantage to beat the disease. There is no bigger advantage than having the experts at Karmanos Cancer Institute in your corner. Ask for the best.

Patricia C., Detroit, Michigan
Karmanos Colon Cancer Survivor

BARBARA ANN



Wayne State University

YOUR BEST CHANCE.

1-800-KARMANOS

PROUD TO BE A PART OF MCLAREN