



General

This section provides the basic information about the park or trail and the organizations responsible for it.

Park/Trail ID # 15-020D	Funding Application 19-002F	Park/Trail Name Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo
Last Update April 24, 2019		
Project Name Nature Center Construction	District 6	Existing Acres or Miles 624

Project Description

Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo has been considered a gem in the Olmsted County Parks system for many years. Each year shows increasing numbers and interest in naturalist led programming and an overall increase in visitors to the Park. The current Nature Center was built in 1981 and has become too small for events, summer crowds and school visits. Our Master Plan identifies the expansion of the Nature Center as a key component of the Zoo and Park due to the increasing popularity of the Park. Ample consideration was given to expanding the current Nature Center vs building a new facility. The current roof-line made it difficult to add on and the layout is difficult to generate an overall user-friendly facility without tearing everything out and starting over. The additional building upgrades needed to meet standards for mechanical, utility and ADA requirements also continue to drive up the costs. Removal of the current Nature Center will prove to be more cost effective than trying to renovate to meet our current needs and will also provide space for an entrance plaza to the zoo. Constructing a new nature center to the north also allows for a separation between the Zoo and the nature center, spreading out pedestrian traffic and creating a more pronounced entrance plaza to the Zoo. The entire design for the nature center and enhanced zoo entrance plaza has been divided into two phases. Phase 1 consists of the installation of a new septic system and construction of the new nature center building. Phase 2 is the demolition of the current Nature Center, construction of the entrance plaza and outdoor landscaping (Phase 2 graphic attached). Phase 1 is the portion of the project designated for this grant application (Phase 1 graphic attached). Construction of a larger nature center facility will accommodate visitor growth and education needs at Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo. The design team traveled with staff to five other nature centers to look at layouts, space needs and listened to feedback from the staff at each site. The design elements put into the new nature center are intended to move Oxbow Park well into the future so expansion is not necessary 5-10 years after completion. However, we have also designed and placed the building in a location that will allow for expansion in the future, anticipating increased visitor populations and regional destination potential. Events and public programming have shown an increase of 25-30% each year and Naturalist led classes and zoo visits have increased as much as 20% per year over the last 10 years. Fundraising events such as ZooDazzle have seen crowds of up to 2,500 people in the zoo and nature center within a four-hour period. Visitor surveys and car counts are showing an increase in park visitors of nearly 25,000 more people per year which will bring an estimated 400,000 visitors per year by 2020. Oxbow Park serves more than 125 schools and youth groups from a radius of nearly 100 miles. During peak school visits in the spring there were over 900 students scheduled to be in the Zoo and Nature Center in a four-hour time-frame. The current Nature Center has four total restroom stalls, so an average of 225 students per hour

waiting to use them, which means there is nearly 4 flushes per minute over the course of four hours! This number does not consider the teachers, chaperones, unscheduled school groups, or general public visiting the Park. Now, envision the line for the restrooms placed in the same 4-foot corridor as the drinking fountain, doorway to the staff office/break room, doorway to the classroom, the front entrance, and the exit into the zoo. Pedestrian traffic flows both ways through the building and the doorways have single 3-foot doors which tends to cause blockages as patrons are trying to both enter and exit the single door simultaneously. (See picture "Busy NC" which was taken on a typical spring weekday and is attached for visual reference to the congestion issues). The concept of the new nature center was designed to address the needs of all aspects from staff space to programming and education. Total square footage of the new nature center will more than triple the size from 3,400 to 13,500. The building is arranged with 3 sections of the building catering to the different operational needs of programming, exhibit hall, and general support. Programming space needs were determined by current increase in educational classes as well as the desire to add more opportunity for events such as weddings, birthday parties and meetings to increase park user groups and overall park revenue. The programming space is 3,000 square feet and has options to be divided into 2 or 3 separate rooms allowing for multiple functions running concurrently or one large event space. Each programming space will have a door to the patio area facing the woods for quick and easy access to the outdoors for classes and events. A catering kitchen is adjacent to the programming space to accommodate meetings or events. A designated room was also placed next to the programming room and near the exterior of the building for rental equipment such as ski, snowshoes and nature backpacks. Olmsted County board has a strong understanding that an additional staff Naturalist will be needed to accommodate the increase in overall programming that is anticipated. Exhibit hall and visitor services is designed as one large open room to prevent crowding, allow designated space for traveling exhibits as well as tall exhibits such as prairie root systems. (See pictures for exhibit examples). Live animals such as reptiles and small raptors will continue to be displayed with adjacent animal support areas designed for ease of maintenance. A seating area at the far end will be slightly divided from the exhibit hall with large windows for wildlife viewing. A visitor services desk will be centrally located in the exhibit hall to prevent congestion in doorways or major traffic flow areas. The general support segment of the building provides designated office space for staff, conference room, break room, and locker rooms. The current Nature Center has all those functions plus some animal care facilities all in the same room. Five staff share four cubicles in a 9x12 area of the room next to the door leading to Nature Center exhibit area and drinking fountains, so noise and privacy become an issue for staff. The meeting/break room are at the other end of the room along with lockers and animal care facilities. Most morning staff meetings end up with standing room only and during the lunch hour several people must sit at their desk or find a place to eat elsewhere. Having animal care facilities within several feet of the break room can also be a health concern. (See attached pictures labeled "Office", "Staff meeting" and "Break room" to provide visual of this current common room). In the new nature center the staff office space is situated along the zoo perimeter to provide visual oversight of the zoo as well as quick and easy access into the zoo. Plenty of room was also provided for storage, mechanical, data and other utilities. Providing a much larger restroom was very important to accommodate the amount of traffic through the Nature Center during events and busy days. It was equally important that the restrooms are accessible to the public when the nature center is closed, and the greater park is still open. Therefore, larger restrooms and a family restroom were designed near the entrance plaza with a vestibule between the outdoors and the rest of the nature center to keep noise levels down in the exhibit hall. Doors between the vestibule and exhibit hall allow for noise control and the ability to lock the rest of the nature center but still allow access to the restrooms from outdoors. Oxbow Park has a history of floods which drives several of the projects listed in the master plan. Redirecting portions of the county road and moving the campground are among those changes to mitigate the flood issues. Design work for both the campground and the nature center have been completed in tandem to ensure the best overall design of utilities and infrastructure. The new septic system will also accommodate the future campground relocation. The new nature center has again been placed well out of the 500-year flood plain and is also in a location that allows this piece of the Master Plan to be completed as a separate piece of the puzzle that will not rely on other projects being completed in a certain order.

Project Area Maps

Location of park within region

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/All Parks Olmsted County_57158c.jpg

Oxbow Park Map

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/OxbowParkMap_996b7b.jpg

Nature Center Exterior Elevations

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Oxbow Park - Elevation Study 20190726_63b17e.pdf

Nature Center Floor Plans

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Oxbow Park - Plan Study 20190723_c0ed8d.pdf

Nature Center Placement map

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Nature Center placement map_c08a24.PNG

Phase 1 Implementation graphic

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Phase 1 graphic_3392b7.PNG

Phase 2

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Phase 2 graphic_f4c554.PNG

Building Exterior Visual Preferences

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Exterior Visual Preferences_104a07.docx

Organization

Olmsted County

Lead Contact

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Funding

Development Type

Development

Acres of Park Land to be Acquired

0

New Trail Miles to be Acquired

0

Types

New Trail Miles Developed

0

Miles of Trail Restored or Improved

0

Trail head facilities developed

1

Number of trail bridges/culverts to be developed/restored

0

Number of Connecting People to the Outdoors

Programs created/administered

132

Project Outcomes

Evaluation of Impact

An expanded nature center will benefit the entire region for expanded programming opportunities with better

availability to schools for classes as well as increased public program options. The community will be better served with an additional rental space for weddings, parties and meetings in a truly unique setting. It is our pride and mission to keep Zollman Zoo and the nature center admission free to provide a wonderful experience for all visitors.

Programming numbers are currently tracked on an annual basis for public programs, outreach programs, naturalist lead classes and zoo visits. Staff will continue to track those numbers to determine the trends in each of the programming areas. Revenue generated from new and existing events and programming opportunities will also be recorded and calculated to determine an increase in numbers as well as increases in revenue. Zollman Zoo and Nature Center are free of charge and strategically place donation boxes throughout the Nature Center and Zoo. Donations can be tracked on a yearly basis to determine if there is an increase in annual giving to the park.

Every 4-5 years the park staff conducts a visitor count to determine the number of users in various areas of the park. Since 2012 we have seen an increase of nearly 25,000 visitors per year on average. Visitor counts have been conducted by surveys and counting cars via road counters. Our evaluation plan would include a car count the year before construction as well as a follow up car count every other year after completion of construction. The car count numbers will assist in compilation of the overall visitor numbers to the Nature Center and Zoo.

Legacy Pillars:

- Connect People and the Outdoors
- Take Care of What We Have
- Coordinate Among Providers

Connection to Pillars

Connecting People and the Outdoors:

This project will focus on the pillar of Connecting People and the Outdoors by creating an all-inclusive center for nature recreation and education. While many parks and outdoor recreation activities are showing a decrease in numbers, Oxbow Park is showing an exponential increase in visitors each year.

The current Nature Center is easily congested with bottlenecks and blockage points, creating several pedestrian flow issues. The new nature center has a very open concept which will provide a welcoming spacious environment for visitors to explore nature related exhibits as well as several live animal exhibits representing the native MN zoo collection without feeling claustrophobic. Programming space will be significantly increased so multiple classes can occur at the same time or larger groups can be accommodated. The classroom space is 3,000 square feet and has options to be divided into 2 or 3 separate rooms. Providing a large event space for public events and fundraisers will open the door to increase programming opportunities as well as drawing potential new user groups to the parks. Many public programs are limited in attendance due to the available space in the classroom. Activities in the classroom get overcrowded and deter visitors from attending the programs because there is no room for them. A recent ice cream making program had many people that did not join the program and just walked by due to lack of space (as shown in picture Classroom Program).

Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo have been supported by an amazing group of volunteers through the 501c3 organization Friends of Oxbow (FOX). The board organizes fundraising events and memberships to support the animals, exhibit expansions, internship opportunities, and educational programming. The FOX events provide marketing and public outreach to the region creating additional promotion and visitation. The FOX board is very supportive of the larger nature center and the opportunity to have larger space and additional amenities for the fundraising events to create a larger draw and better experience for the visitors that attend. Providing more public event space will allow us to introduce new visitors to Oxbow Park and hope to

encourage more users, thus, increasing word of mouth about the wonderful park system available close to home.

Olmsted County Parks are continuing to explore more marketing opportunities and work with other county departments to maximize the outreach to the public. Utilizing technology and social media outlets has already created a steady stream of marketing and communication to public and park visitors. The construction of a new nature center and the fundraising efforts among the community will increase overall awareness and promotion of Oxbow Park.

Olmsted County Parks is in the process of coordinating with Olmsted County Public Health, Rochester City Parks, DNR and Mayo Clinic to expand the up and coming Parks Rx program. The Parks Rx program promotes doctors to write prescriptions to outdoor activities rather than drugs for various health problems and disease prevention. Oxbow Park will be one of the first regional parks to register as a destination park for doctors to write their nature prescriptions. The new nature center will provide a welcoming destination to put patients at ease for those that may not be avid outdoor patrons. Staff will be able to interact with patients to suggest nature activities that fit their comfort level and prescription.

Take care of what we have:

Continuing to upgrade and keep up with industry standards and public perceptions of a zoo is extremely important to maintaining professionalism and visitor support. The Nature Center at Oxbow Park not only provides environmental educational opportunities but is an extension of the zoo. Creating a welcoming environment that is accessible to all patrons is the direction Oxbow Park will continue to grow into the future in all aspects of the park and zoo.

Coordinate among providers:

Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo have an amazing volunteer advocacy group called Friends of Oxbow (FOX) that was founded in 1982. FOX promotes memberships and volunteer support for all aspects of the park and zoo. Volunteer help comes in the form of individuals, work groups, Sentence to Serve and Community Work Service. Oxbow Park consistently has more than 12,000 volunteer hours per year which is equivalent to almost 6 additional full-time staff.

Oxbow Park works with several non-profit organizations such as Audubon, Master Naturalists and Prairie Smoke to help with programming and cross promotion of each organization. The park also coordinates programming with organizations such as Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, Rochester Active Sports Club (RASC), DNR parks, MN Childrens Museum Rochester, the International Owl Center, and the National Eagle Center.

Zollman Zoo will be joining the membership reciprocity agreement with hundreds of other zoos in the region and around the country through the collaboration with the Mid-America Zoo Alliance. Oxbow Park staff have had several conversations with the MN Zoo and many zoos in neighboring states to develop a relationship and collaborate on the overall mission of environmental and animal conservation efforts. Oxbow Park is taking steps towards joining the MN Zoo and DNR as a member of the Minnesota Bison Conservation group.

Olmsted County Parks also have a strong connection with Mayo Clinic and the emerging Destination Medical Center (DMC) initiatives. Mayo Clinic has been a strong supporter in promoting Oxbow Park as a destination for patients to visit while they are staying at the clinic. Mayo Clinic marketing staff created videos to play on the TV screens in patient rooms and waiting rooms giving patients a preview of the park, nature center and zoo. The current Nature Center also has a map on the wall marking the location of visitors from all over the world, representing 6 continents and over 60 countries to date.

As mentioned previously, Olmsted County Parks is in the process of coordinating with Olmsted County Public Health, Rochester City Parks, DNR and Mayo Clinic to expand the up and coming Parks Rx program. Oxbow Park will be one of the first regional parks to register as a destination park for doctors to write nature

prescriptions. Olmsted County Parks will be working closely with Rochester City Parks to provide doctors and patients with a coordinated approach to offering parks and outdoor activities to fulfill prescriptions.

Connection to a Regionally Substantial Component of the Master Plan

Oxbow Park Master Plan was completed and adopted by the Olmsted County Board of Commissioners in 2016. Zollman Zoo and the Nature Center are the heart of the Oxbow valley and a significant part of the Master Plan. Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo is the only park of its kind in the state of MN, being a mid-sized natural features park with a special recreation facility of a MN native animal zoo nestled in the center. Visitors from a large radius in Southern MN, western Wisconsin, and northern Iowa frequent the park on a yearly basis. Rochester has been rated as the #1 Best Place to Live for mid-sized cities several times over the last 5 years.

Mayo Clinic promotes Oxbow Park as a place to visit for relaxation and entertainment while patients are staying at the clinic. The Nature Center has a guest book at the front entrance and denotes travelers from all over the world visiting Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo. We want to ensure that visitors from around the world can learn about and experience the unique natural features that Southeast MN provides. A state-of-the-art facility with exhibits and interactive programming geared towards many of those natural features unique to Southeast MN will give residents an increased sense of pride and world travelers a great experience in our state of Minnesota.

The Oxbow Park Master Plan placed the expansion of the Nature Center in the mid-term action plan placing it right in line with the top priorities within the next several years. Many of the short-term plans have been completed, including expansion of the nature center parking lot with an expanded bus drop off zone. Both the park commission and Olmsted County Board have stated the undeniable need for a much larger nature facility at the Park. Only three years after the adoption of the Master Plan there is already overwhelming feedback that a larger Nature Center is very high on the priority list for the Park and the Olmsted County Board sees it as the focus of funding in the park system in the near future.

Project Readiness

Project Lead

Project lead will be Karlin Ziegler, Olmsted County Park Superintendent, with the assistance of Lonnie Hebl, Oxbow Park Manager. The Parks Department has several staff with a long history of constructing many of the park buildings/structures in-house. Ziegler also has close connections and access to other departments within the county for assistance and expertise including Planning, Public Works, Facilities, and Finance just to name a few. HKGi was hired as the lead design consultant to complete the concept design shown in this grant application. HKGi created a well-rounded team of consultants by adding Alliance for building architecture and WHKS for civil engineering.

Implementation Timeline

An RFP for Final Design and construction documents will be executed immediately upon award in 2020. Olmsted County will provide funding for any necessary ineligible components as well as the final design and construction of a new septic system which will begin in 2020. Building construction on the new nature center will begin in 2021. Full completion of Phase 1 will be completed within the grant period and is estimated to take 2 1/2 years (30 months). Phase 2 consists of the re-design of the landscape and front entrance to the zoo. Phase 2 will begin 1-2 years after the completion of Phase 1.

Availability for Public Use

Zollman Zoo and the current Nature Center will continue to be open to the public during the construction of the new nature center. Oxbow Park is open to the public from 5am-10pm year-round. Zollman Zoo and the Nature Center will continue to be open to public from 10am-4pm daily. The new nature center will continue with the same hours and also be available for events and programs as needed on evenings and weekends.

Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo will continue to be free of charge. The newly expanded restroom facilities of the nature center will be open to the public during the greater Parks normal operating hours, when the nature center is closed.

Design Standards

A competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) was completed and HKGi was hired to complete the concept design of a new nature center. All design aspects of the building and entrance were designed with accessibility and traffic flow in mind. Final design elements will require the contractors to meet ADA requirements and address any other accessibility needs. Project lead will also work closely with the Olmsted County Planning Department and township planning to ensure all permits, standards, and current building codes in the jurisdictions are properly met. Research and consultation with other nature centers and exhibit design companies will be utilized to create the exhibit hall features.

Project Cost Breakdown

All costs listed below relate to the Phase 1 preparation and construction of the overall design. Project costs were produced by the design team led by HKGi and assisted by Alliance and WHKS. Total cost of Phase 1 completion is estimated at \$6,683,640.

- 1. New Septic Installation: \$85,000
- 2. Site Clearing and Preparation: \$25,000
- 3. Nature Center Constructions: \$4,075,500
- 4. Exhibit Fabrication: \$672,840
- 5. Plaza: \$44,650
- 6. Signage and Interpretation: \$20,000
- 7. Landscaping: \$15,500
- 8. Site Furnishings: \$12,500
- Total eligible costs: \$4,950,990

Soft Costs at 10% of the eligible cost: \$495,000

Non - eligible costs: \$1,237,650 consist of contingencies and soft costs that went over the allowable 10% threshold.

Total Project cost: \$5,445,990
GMRPTC grant request: \$2,135,000 (39%)
Local match: \$3,310,990 (61%)

Funding Request Breakdown

Grant Funding Request

\$2,135,000

Local Match #1	Funder #1
\$50,000	0
Local Match #2	Funder #2
\$3,260,990	0
Local Match #3	Funder #3
0	0
Local Match #4	Funder #4
0	0

Local Match #4

0

Funder #5

0

Non-Eligible Local Match

1237650

Non-Eligible Item Description

Consulting firm estimated 10% of the total construction cost in contingencies. An estimated 25% of the construction cost was also identified for soft costs, of which 15% are above and beyond the allowable guidelines for eligibility. Soft costs included fees, testing, surveys, geotech, permits, FFE and EAS and/or any other DNR requested requirements.

Total Funding

\$5,445,990

Percentage of local match

0.61

Completion Timeframe

30

Funder #1

Friends of Oxbow

Funder #1 Resolutions

Friends of Oxbow Resolution

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Letter of Intent FOX 7-18-2019_74d6ad.docx

Funder #2

Olmsted County Board of Commissioners

Funder #2 Resolutions

County Board Resolution

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Nature Center Resolution of Support_5c4e26.pdf

Funder #3

NA

Funder #4

NA

Funder #5

NA

Budget Worksheet

Budget Worksheet

[http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/project_budget_Nature_Center\(1\)_5f628a.xlsx](http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/project_budget_Nature_Center(1)_5f628a.xlsx)

Attachments

Doc Name	Description	Url
Project Area Map	Location of park within region	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/All Parks Olmsted County 57158c.jpg
Funder Resolution Two	County Board Resolution	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Nature Center Resolution of Support 5c4e26.pdf
Budget Worksheet	Budget Worksheet	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/project budget Nature Center (1) 5f628a.xlsx
Additional Attachment	Public Programs list	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/complete programs list b2aaa2.doc
Project Area Map	Oxbow Park Map	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/OxbowParkMap_996b7b.jpg
Project Area Map	Nature Center Exterior Elevations	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Oxbow Park - Elevation Study 20190726_63b17e.pdf
Additional Attachment	DMC Letter of Support	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/2019.07 Oxbow Grant Support Letter aacd27.pdf
Additional Attachment	Busy NC	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Busy NC_6046d1.JPG
Funder Resolution One	Friends of Oxbow Resolution	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Letter of Intent FOX 7-18-2019_74d6ad.docx
Additional Attachment	Break room	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Breakroom_dc91a3.JPG
Additional Attachment	Office	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Office_87e342.JPG
Project Area Map	Nature Center Floor Plans	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Oxbow Park - Plan Study 20190723_c0ed8d.pdf
Additional Attachment	Children's Museum Rochester Letter of Support	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Updated Oxbow letter of support with new

		clearer photo_690990.pdf
Project Area Map	Nature Center Placement map	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Nature Center placement map_c08a24.PNG
Project Area Map	Phase 1 Implementation graphic	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Phase 1 graphic_3392b7.PNG
Project Area Map	Phase 2	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Phase 2 graphic_f4c554.PNG
Additional Attachment	Example Exhibit - Karst	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Karst exhibit_b8bd67.jpg
Additional Attachment	Example Exhibit - Prairie Roots	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Roots exhibit_cc43f9.jpg
Additional Attachment	Classroom Program	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Classroom Program_8b494b.JPG
Project Area Map	Building Exterior Visual Preferences	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/Exterior Visual Preferences_104a07.docx
Additional Attachment	Staff meetings - standing room only	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/19-002F/standing room only_b330fb.jpg