



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 20-011F	Park/Trail Name Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo
Last Update June 26, 2020		
Project Name Nature Center Phase 2	District 6	Existing Acres or Miles 635

Project Description

Oxbow Park was awarded the Legacy grant for FY2021 for Phase 1, construction of a new nature center. Oxbow Park is now seeking additional funding for the Phase 2 portion of the project which develops the entrance plaza between the zoo and new nature center. Visitation and programming at Oxbow Park continue to increase and overwhelm the current available spaces. The new nature center will be placed to the north of the existing building which will open a large outdoor area between the nature center and zoo for gathering. This will improve the wayfinding and increased traffic flow. As a reminder, the Phase 1 nature center construction will increase the total indoor space by more than three times that of the current nature center built in 1981. Classroom and programming space will allow for large events or multiple smaller meetings or classes. The exhibit hall will have a large open concept with many interactive and highly interpretive exhibits focusing on SE Minnesota elements. By the time this application is submitted we will be moving into the construction document phase of the design development with anticipated construction bid proposal requests going out in November 2020. The nature center will now have a separate entrance from the zoo, which will maximize traffic flow and spread people out instead of having a majority of the visitors enter and exit the zoo through the nature center. The layout of the plaza will be key to successfully kicking off the visit experience at Zollman Zoo and the nature center. For this application the focused efforts of Phase 2 will be discussed in the following narrative. The first step will be to remove the current nature center. Olmsted County will hire a service to safely and quickly take down and dispose of the nature center. This first step will occur after the completion and opening of the new nature center with an intended start date of early summer 2022. A temporary entrance gate will be installed for safe and easy access to the zoo while the phase 2 construction is taking place. Grade work will be executed with strategically placed berms and pathways to maximize the traffic flow and provide a more natural setting. Pathways will be placed to easily move visitors from the parking area to the zoo, nature center and trails. Gathering areas will also be provided for large groups near the bus drop off zone. New pathways will extend into the zoo to better connect the new entrance with the existing animal exhibit pathways. A substantial entrance gate and archway to the zoo will be erected as a prominent entrance to the zoo. An antler archway will be part of the design above a sliding metal gate with natural artistic elements. The zoo perimeter fence line between the nature center and zoo gate will be a large-scale Swedish style fence made out of the red pine trees that will be removed from several areas around the developed area. Precedent photos will be added to the attachments to show examples of a Swedish fence (Attachment name "Swedish Fence"). Standard zoo perimeter fencing will be installed on the zoo interior side of the Swedish fence to follow USDA zoo fencing and prevent potential animal escape. Native vegetation

areas will be planted between the various pathways to provide texture, variation and color to the entrance. Key plant and tree species will have interpretive signage to educate visitors and provide a whimsical and passive learning experience. The native vegetation will also provide needed drainage for the hard surface areas. Storm water basins and rain garden areas will be constructed to account for the nature center and parking lot surface areas. These water management areas will have various elements to provide opportunities for public education. The north side of the nature center will have outdoor access from the programming area to a large patio facing the natural wooded area. The patio will provide an outdoor extension of the nature center which can be used for a variety of activities including outdoor classes, a large event social area, and a smaller scale relaxation opportunity by the outdoor fireplace. Staff have identified several elements of this patio area that will be constructed by staff, volunteers and service groups. Therefore, only small portions of this area shown on the design image will be included in this grant application budget request. Outdoor furnishings such as chairs, benches, waste/recycling bins, and tree grates have also been considered in the proposed budget needs. Seating will be a mix of natural stone, benches and chairs with many pieces being movable for snow removal and versatility. Lastly, we will add wayfinding signage and lighting in key areas to promote safety and increased traffic flow. All pathways and other elements will have ADA standards in mind during the design and construction process. Our goal is to have visitors of all ages and abilities enter the heart of the park with a feeling of ease and comfort while developing a sense of curiosity for the unique ecology of SE Minnesota.

Project Area Maps

Park boundary and site location

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/OxbowParkMap_6d4516.jpg

Nature Center and Plaza placement map

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/Nature_Center_placement_map_577132.PNG

All County Parks map

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/County_map_with_all_parks_highlighted_SW_69d8c7.jpg

Organization

Olmsted County Parks

Lead Contact

Full Name

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Funding

Development Type

Both

Acres of Park Land to be Acquired

0

Funding Category:

- Park

Anticipated number of participants/users in Connecting People to the Outdoors project

300000

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 vault toilets built**Number of Shower/restrooms****Number of campsites built****Acres of prairie restored****Acres of invasive species removed****Number of Connecting People to the Outdoors****Programs created/administered**

132

Project Outcomes**Evaluation of Impact**

The outdoor plaza connecting the new nature center and zoo entrance will be an important first impression area that will also provide educational elements. The impact of this area will be accounted for with the new nature center construction (Phase 1 grant) as a strengthened resource for the region. An expanded nature center and zoo entrance plaza 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 have strategically placed donation boxes throughout. 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 includes a car count in 2020 as well as a follow up car count every other year after completion of construction. The Nature Center has been closed for the majority of the 2020 season due to COVID-19, however, we have seen impressive numbers visiting the park. If the nature center is able to open for the 2021 summer season, then we will do another car count to help balance out the surveys. 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

Again, we are looking at the overall project with Phase 1 and Phase 2 combined for an overall expansion of what we can offer to the public.

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.

Olmsted County Parks have a strong involvement in the Greater MN Parks and Trails board which provides many collaboration options with other parks from all areas of the state.

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 has joined a 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 has now joined the MN Zoo and DNR as a member of the Minnesota Bison Conservation group.

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. More information on this endeavor is discussed in the Connecting People and the Outdoors narrative.

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.

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 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 outdoor entrance plaza will allow plenty of room for many different groups to gather and organize before venturing on to the nature center or zoo. Passive educational elements will be provided to offer learning experiences as visitors arrive.

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 park.

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 large fundraising events and membership opportunities 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 (prescription) 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. Olmsted County Parks developed the first Parks Rx Pass to the Parks booklet with outdoor activity suggestions that will be used by providers as a prescription method. The new nature center will provide a welcoming destination for patients prescribed with park time and activities and help put them at ease if they may not typically be avid outdoor patrons. Staff will be able to interact with patients to suggest nature activities that fit their comfort level and prescription.

Connection to a Regionally Substantial Component of the Master Plan

The 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 plays a significant role 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 entrance plaza will also provide native elements and interpretive signage to provide information and education even when the zoo and nature center are not open.

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 four 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 and landscaping 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. Hoisington Koegler Group Inc. (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

Demolition of the current nature center and the development of the zoo entrance plaza can begin once the Phase 1 construction of the new nature center is complete. Nature Center construction is set to begin in the spring of 2021 with a 10-month construction period. Phase 2 work will likely start mid-summer of 2022 with a completion by the end of 2022.

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. Upon completion of the new nature center, a temporary zoo entrance will be while Phase 2 work is being complete. 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 admission. When the new nature center is close to completion, the newly expanded restroom facilities on the exterior of the nature center will be open to the public during the greater parks normal operating hours of 5am-10pm.

Design Standards

A competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) was completed and HKGi was hired to complete the concept design of a new nature center. HKGi has been the lead consultant on the nature center building as well as the phase 2 components of the exterior traffic flow, landscape and zoo entrance plaza. Final design elements will require the contractors to meet ADA requirements and address any other accessibility needs. Paths and entrance points will be designed for easy flow and ADA compliance. Project lead will also work closely with the Olmsted County Planning Department and township planning to ensure all permits, standards, and current building demo codes in the jurisdictions are properly met. Outdoor grade work, plantings and other landscape will be developed with proper drainage and storm water management areas. Native plantings will create natural settings and create ease and longevity in maintenance.

Project Cost Breakdown

All costs listed below relate to the completion of Phase 2 for the Oxbow Nature Center Project. Phase 2 consists of the outdoor landscaping and development of a new zoo entrance plaza. Total cost of Phase 2 is estimated at \$300,840.

- 1.Pathways: \$51,000
- 2.Landscaping: \$10,000
- 3.Site Furnishing: \$42,000
- 4.Fencing and Gates: \$30,000
- 5.Utilities: \$40,000
- 6.Signage: \$15,000
- 7.Site Demo and Grading: \$48,000
- 8.Design and Engineering: \$21,240

Total Grant Request: \$192,000 (75%)

Total Match: \$65,240 (25%)

Ineligible Costs: \$43,600

Total Project Cost: \$300,840

Funding Request Breakdown

Grant Funding Request

Doc Name	Description	Url
Project Area Map	Park boundary and site location	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/OxbowParkMap_6d4516.jpg
Budget Worksheet	Phase 2 budget breakdown	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/project_budget_Phase_2_e9a485.xlsx
Project Area Map	Nature Center and Plaza placement map	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/NatureCenter_placement_map_577132.PNG
Budget Worksheet	Full budget breakdown worksheet	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/Phase_2_grant_budget_breakdown_a1cd49.xlsx
Additional Attachment	Antler archway to mimic at new entrance	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/Arch_north_472f75.JPG
Additional Attachment	Current Nature Center entrance	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/NatureCenter_Circle_andGazebo_62a315.JPG
Additional Attachment	Phase 2 area graphic	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/Phase_2_graphic_fe4524.PNG
Project Area Map	All County Parks map	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/County_map_with_all_parks_highlighted_SW_69d8c7.jpg
Additional Attachment	MOU	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/MOU_signature_9528f0.pdf
Additional Attachment	Phase 2 site plan	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/2020_OXBOW_DD_LANDSCAPE_PH2-SiteLayout_047409.pdf
Additional Attachment	Updated Nature Center Design Plan	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/Oxbow-DD-Plan_7e5743.pdf
Additional Attachment	Plaza rendering view from the Nature Center	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/Plaza_from_the_Nature_Center_Entrance_84ca30.jpg
Additional Attachment	Plaza rendering view from the bus drop off area	http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/funding/20-011F/Zoo_Plaza_Entry_from_Bus_Dropoff_d73f55.jpg