

OPINION



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EDITORIAL

Developing neighborhoods

Land bank used for park space, which bolsters quality of life

The Hutchinson Land Bank was created as part of a comprehensive housing improvement strategy, but it is being used in one case to improve a park. Thinking of housing more broadly as neighborhood quality of life, this use of the land bank makes perfect sense.

The board for the land bank voted Tuesday to donate land at 300 W. Sherman St. to the city park department to expand the adjoining Ashmeade Park. The park is a small one, hidden behind a large commercial center but serving the Avenue A School neighborhood.

Ashmeade Park offers little more than a small stretch of Cow Creek and a couple of picnic tables shaded by trees. Hutchinson Housing Program Manager Amy Denker said residents of the neighborhood had expressed interest in expanded parks. And Parks Director Justin Combs told Denker the extra space could be used for playground equipment.

The land bank was created to acquire on a transitional basis vacant, abandoned and foreclosed properties until they could be improved or redeveloped. The idea is to restore blighted properties in residential neighborhoods to productive use, and most of the time that's new or renovated housing.

"The property may be offered for infill development, community gardens or held until adjacent property can be acquired for larger redevelopment

projects," City Manager John Dearthoff explained.

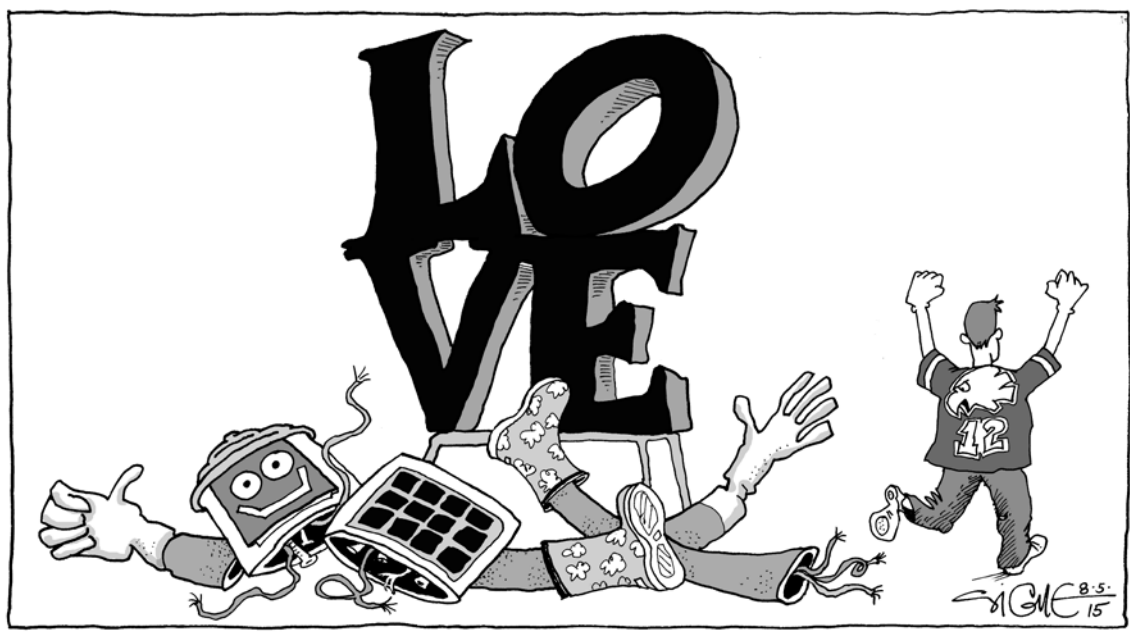
The land bank is one of several housing strategies that's part of a city focus under the leadership of Dearthoff and Planning Director Jana McCarron.

In the meantime, under the leadership of Combs, the city parks department is making strides in improving and expanding the parks system.

That in-turn fits with something called neighborhood development, a new initiative of the Hutchinson Recreation Commission. Under the leadership of director Tony Finlay, Hutch Rec this year took over responsibility for a position that started in the former Reno County Growth Coalition then evolved into community development coordinator at the Hutchinson/Reno County Chamber of Commerce.

Neighborhood development is community development but, as the name implies, with an even more grassroots approach. So Neighborhood Development Director Elizabeth Grilliot is identifying ways to improve the livability of residential neighborhoods – parks being one way to do so.

The Avenue A neighborhood will be improved by the expansion of Ashmeade Park. It's an example of how the land bank can be a valuable tool not only for individual housing development but overall neighborhood development. Moreover, it's good to see the synergy with other efforts to improve quality of life in Hutchinson.



COLUMNISTS

Lessons from Oxford



Jason Probst

I have a new batch of friends, every one of whom is a drug addict or an alcoholic.

They've all lied and most likely stolen. They've spent much of their lives high or drunk or figuring out ways to get that way. They generally don't have much money, and many have some sort of criminal conviction. They have hurt their communities, their families, their friends and people they love, and they know it.

A few weekends ago the men of Oxford House Niam (pronounced knee-um) let me stay at their home on 1500 N. Main. (Oxford Houses typically are named for the street it's on – in this case Niam is simply Main spelled backwards).

I wanted to know more about Oxford House, the people who live there and what makes them successful models for recovery.

Yes, this home is filled with addicts, but there's a lot more to these men than their addictions. Every man who lives at Niam showed me kindness and warmth, generosity and openness, understanding and acceptance. And they made me feel like part of their family.

Lance Whitney let me invade his space and crash in his bedroom. Zach Cochran talked with me about his comics collection. It turns out we both own the first-ever appearance of the villain Carnage in Spider-Man comic books. I got to see Tim McQueen's furniture that he'll take with him when he moves out, and Mason Loving showed me his "vaping" equipment.

They also talked to me about the mistakes they had made, and the things that had affected their lives in ways they hadn't always understood. They talked about their addictions, and the horrible side of themselves that takes control with the help of drugs and alcohol.

As we talked around the patio table, or at the dining table grabbing grilled chicken, hot dogs and hamburgers, I realized there wasn't much difference between these men and me. My guess is that there's not much difference between them and you, either. I can't believe there's one single

– and we spend more each year. For decades we have fought a drug war that we're not winning. We're not ever going to win so long as our approach is to tell a group of people they have failed as humans because their weakness is different than our weakness, and then reinforce that idea by declaring a war on them.

What will work is something like the Oxford House model – which has an 87 percent success rate for those who remain in the homes for 18 months or more.

And after spending a weekend with Zach Cochran, Johnny Pope, Gebadia BanOsdol, Matt Griffin, Lance Whitney, Tim McQueen, Mason Loving, Donnie Baringer, Jason Hoffman and another man who asked not to be named, I know why it works.

It is a family, filled with the sort of love that can fill the dark emptiness of pain and addiction. Here, these men find support. They find accountability. They learn that to set goals and accomplish them, and they learn that the more they do, the more they can do. They learn to believe in God, and that He sees worthiness in them, even if they can't find it in themselves. And they see, maybe for the first time in their lives, that someone cares about them.

Zach Cochran gave me such an example. He was between work, short on money and wasn't sure how he'd pay his share to stay in Oxford House. He reached out to his brothers, and they reached back: When he walked into his room one day, money was sitting on his bed. That's just one example, but I heard 100 more. And I saw, firsthand, the authenticity of a group of people who have found little support in society, so they created it for themselves.

We can pretend we're solving our country, or city's, drug problems with laws, guns and condemnation. Or we can try what works so demonstratively well at Oxford House – love, support, faith and compassion.

Jason Probst is news editor at The Hutchinson News. Email: jprobst@hutchnews.com.

ANOTHER VIEW

Debate winners

FROM THE HAYS DAILY NEWS

While it seems a bit early to pay close attention to the 2016 presidential contest, the season is upon us nonetheless.

There is a need for the lengthy nomination process, given the plethora of candidates vying for the Republican Party nomination.

Thursday night in Cleveland, 17 declared candidates for the party's ticket squared off. Separated into two tiers, with seven debating in the "happy hour" event and the current top 10 enjoying the prime-time telecast, viewers who did tune in were able to watch two distinct factions attempting to take control.

The divisions are in play throughout the nation, and it will be interesting to see if ultraconservatives or more moderate individuals produce the nominee.

Either way, we don't believe the GOP ticket will include the name Donald Trump. Center stage for the main event, the billionaire unapologetically displayed his contempt for women, people of Mexican descent, the president, fellow candidates and former business associates who lost billions of dollars each time he took his company into bankruptcy.

Dr. Ben Carson's name won't be there either. His diminutive presence will provide the opportunity for the only female candidate, Carly Fiorina, to be promoted to the upper tier. By most accounts, the former Hewlett Packard CEO dominated the afternoon session.

Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida and Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker gave it their best attempts, but suddenly appear long shots to grab the party mantle. Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee will continue to attract the most socially conservative voters, but not enough mainstream party members to sustain his bid.

Making strong moves were

Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, whose libertarian bent has broader appeal than many pundits admit. Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush attempted to distance himself from the family name, but it's still strong enough to make him viable. New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's promise to more effectively battle terrorists served him well. Texas Sen. Ted Cruz won't be admired by establishment party members, but likely scored points with tea party activists for his criticism of those in power.

Gov. John Kasich from Ohio, who squeaked into the evening debate, displayed his thoughtful approach to each topic thrown his way. We believe Kasich is the sleeper candidate with the best chance to end the Democrats' hold on the White House.

Former Texas Gov. Rick Perry could regain top-tier status as long as he's not convicted of the abuse of power indictments he faces. None of the other afternoon debaters distinguished themselves enough to move up; if they do it will be because of something on the campaign trail.

The real winner of the Fox News debates? Fox News itself. While the moderators struggled to keep the candidates on point with the questions posed, their queries were on the mark. The three news anchors, Bret Baier, Megyn Kelly and Chris Wallace, rose above their network's usual anything-but-fair-and-balanced approach. They were well-versed on the topics and the candidates' past and current stances, they were not afraid to make any of the candidates uncomfortable, they challenged all the aspirants to reveal their true selves.

We have unabashedly criticized Fox in the past for any number of misdeeds. On Thursday night the network behaved as a news-gathering organization should. We give credit where due.

JOIN THE DISCUSSION

The News encourages readers to share their opinions on this page and offers a number of ways to do so:

(1) Write a letter to the Western Front on any topic. Send it to The News at 300 W. Second Ave., Hutchinson, KS, 67504-0190; fax to (620) 662-4186 or email to westernfront@hutchnews.com.

Letters should be limited to 500 words. Poems, consumer complaints, business testimonials and group-written letters will not be accepted. Letters written in support of candidates and issues during election seasons should be limited to 150 words. Please sign your name and provide your address and a phone number so we may call to verify the letter. We strive to publish letters within one week of verification. There is a 30-day waiting period between submissions.

Western Front letters are subject to editing for space considerations and libel concerns. Letters that cite statistics or assert facts without providing information sources will not be published.

(2) Respond directly to a newspaper editorial by joining our online opinions blog. Go to www.hutchnews.com/editorialblogs.

Obama's ad man works to defeat Iran deal

WASHINGTON – Obama ad man Mark Putnam has a dexterous sense of loyalty.

He is proud of his work on the president's 2008 and 2012 campaigns. His website boasts that he wrote and produced Obama's 30-minute infomercial in 2008, "the most-watched and highest-profile political ad in American history." The site also notes that he "continued his work on the Obama Media Team" in 2012, "creating many nationally aired television ads." There's also a blurb from David Plouffe, former Obama campaign manager, calling Putnam "one of the best producers in our party."

And now Putnam is repaying President Obama for the faith he placed in him, by working to defeat the signature foreign-policy achievement of his presidency.

Putnam was hired by Citizens for a Nuclear Free Iran, a front group created by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee for the purpose of undermining the Iran nuclear agreement. The Washington Post reported the group is expected to spend \$40 million, and Politico reports that the entity has already spent more than \$11 million. Putnam's spot, a classic attack ad, features ominous music, dark and scary shots of ayatollahs and the warning: "Congress should reject a bad deal."

"I am more grateful to President Obama than I can ever express for being able to help him in two presidential campaigns," Putnam told me via email. "I have strongly supported every other initiative he has undertaken. On this issue, however, I, like other Democrats,



Dana Milbank

have a heartfelt position against the agreement."

For Obama, it probably brings to mind the old adage: If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog. He is learning that truth anew as he tries to sell the Iran deal.

Republicans, naturally, have been in lockstep in opposing the Iran agreement, as they have against most everything Obama has done. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, inserting himself ever deeper into American politics, lobbied American Jews against the deal on Tuesday, saying that "more people will die" because of it.

The White House has confidence that it will have enough votes, at least in the House, to sustain a veto, and AIPAC's millions have failed so far to beat a sufficient number of Democrats into submission. But Obama, wisely, has decided not to let opponents' TV ads go unanswered while lawmakers are home for their August recess. He countered critics of the deal in harsh terms in a speech on Wednesday.

He said critics of the deal are of the same "mindset" responsible for the Iraq war: "It's easy to play on people's fears," he said, "to magnify threats, to compare any attempt at diplomacy to Munich, but none of these arguments hold up. They didn't back in 2002, in 2003 – they

shouldn't now." He said Iran went from zero to several thousand centrifuges on the George W. Bush administration's watch, and he mocked critics' claims that a "better deal" was achievable: "Walk away from this agreement, and you will get a better deal – for Iran."

Obama offered a sharp response to Netanyahu: "I believe he is wrong. ... As president of the United States it would be an abrogation of my constitutional duty to act against my best judgment simply because it causes temporary friction with a dear friend and ally."

Obama claimed Iran's death-to-America hard-liners are "making common cause with the Republican caucus," and he argued: "Between now and the congressional vote in September, you're going to hear a lot of arguments against this deal, backed by tens of millions of dollars in advertising. And if the rhetoric in these ads and the accompanying commentary sounds familiar, it should, for many of the same people who argued for the war in Iraq are now making the case against the Iran nuclear deal."

Hard-liners, Republicans – and Obama's own ad guy. The sunny, 30-minute infomercial Putnam made in 2008 had this Obama promise: "I'll renew the tough, direct diplomacy that can prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons."

Now Obama says he has done that, and he calls this "the most consequential foreign-policy debate that our country has had since the invasion of Iraq." But his ad man has a new client.

Follow Dana Milbank on Twitter: @Milbank.