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First Report of the Bernadette Watkins Park Feedback Project: Community Feedback



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Table of Contents

Summary 4

Project Background..... 5

Methods: Details about the Survey 5

Participants: Who Responded to the Survey?..... 5

Feedback on the Plan for Bernadette Watkins Park..... 7

Feedback on the Bioswale 8

Conclusion 10

Appendix: Survey Questions 11

Summary

446 Newport residents gave feedback on the park concept plan that emerged from Phase 1 of the Strategic Depaving Project via an online survey. The responses are not randomized (not statistically representative of Newport residents), and Latinos are likely overrepresented in the sample. Rather, the responses indicate feedback from residents of Newport who are invested in the parks.

Response to the concept plan was overwhelmingly positive. Respondents generally agreed that the proposed trees would both beautify the park and add safety for children who play there. They also responded that they would enjoy spending time in the park pictured in the plan. Moreover, they believe that the proposed bioswale will help address issues with rainwater and are in favor of eco-friendly or “green” additions to parks. They also would be interested in an educational element that would teach about the bioswale and ground water.

These data support the findings of Phase 1 of the Strategic Depaving Project. The park concept plan that emerged from that research was generally received positively by those who took this online survey.

Project Background

This project builds upon Phase 1 of the Strategic Depaving Project, led by Dr. Kirsten Schwarz as part of NKU's Ecological Stewardship Institute. Dr. Schwarz and her students worked closely with residents of the westside of Newport, Kentucky in their project. Through open-ended surveys and design charettes in the community, they found that access to greenspace and water quality were concerns in this area. They also learned what residents wanted for Bernadette Watkins Park in particular. Chris Manning of Human Nature, LLC consulted on the project and produced a concept plan for improvements to Bernadette Watkins Park that incorporated community goals for the space, including green space and water quality concerns.

This project, The Bernadette Watkins Park Feedback Project, can be understood as the next phase of the Strategic Depaving Project. I led this research project and included students in my Spring 2021 Applied Anthropology class at Northern Kentucky University in the research process. This project took the map that emerged from Phase 1 back to the residents of Newport for feedback. Additionally, we sought to learn how residents of Newport would like to use the city's parks and what equipment they wanted to see in the parks. We partnered with some of the same community groups as the first phase of the project: ReNewport and Westside Citizens Coalition.

This is the first of two reports. This report summarizes community feedback on the concept plan for Bernadette Watkins Park. The second report will detail general feedback on how residents of Newport, KY would like to utilize parks and what improvements they would like to see at Bernadette Watkins Park and parks in Newport, KY generally.

Methods: Details about the Survey

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we relied on an electronic survey to gather feedback from the community. The survey was a mix of closed and open-ended questions. There was also an option for residents to enter a drawing for a \$25 gift card as a thank you for participating in the project.

We advertised the survey in three ways. We sent a postcard advertising the survey to all residents of Newport, KY, posted an ad to a Facebook discussion group for residents of Newport, KY, and encouraged those in our community partner groups to share the link with friends in the area. A little more than one-third of the respondents (37%) were recruited through the postcard, almost half (48%) were recruited through to the Facebook community post, and 15% were recruited by word-of-mouth.

Participants: Who Responded to the Survey?

There were 446 usable responses¹ to the survey that came from residents all over Newport, Kentucky. About one-third (33%) of the respondents live in West Newport, 41% in East Newport, and a little more than one-quarter (26%) in South Newport.

¹ I deleted responses that were duplicates, that did not complete at least one major section of the survey, and those who did not spend at least 3 minutes on the survey (indicating that they did not read it through).

Education and Income

95% of respondents indicated that they held a high school degree (or equivalent) or higher, while 16% held at least a bachelor's degree. Almost all of the respondents reported an estimated household income within the range of \$20,000 to \$99,000. 61% of respondents placed themselves in the middle two categories, ranging from \$35,000 and \$74,999.

Language

Most respondents grew up in an English-speaking household (75%), with Spanish (9%) and German (11%) as the next largest groups. Similarly, 83% of respondents primarily speak English in their current homes, with Spanish (9%) and German (6%) as the next largest groups. Since this survey was written in English, it likely does not represent the linguistic diversity in Newport, but it does indicate that it may be helpful to include Spanish translations in further research or as part of materials that may be distributed.

Race and Ethnicity

Interestingly, 45% of respondents self-reported as of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.² The 2019 US Census³ lists Newport, Kentucky as 5% Latino, so responses in this project over-represent Latinos by quite a bit. Because this number is so much larger than found in the Census, it is possible that there is issue with this data point that I have been unable to identify.

Almost half (48%) of those who identified themselves as Hispanic were recruited via postcard, while the post on Facebook was the most effective recruitment method for those who reported that they were not Latino (60%). This suggests that if the City of Newport wants to reach Latino residents, a mailing might be an effective way to do so.

There was also a higher-than-expected response for several other categories of identification: American Indian (11% compared to .1% on the Census), Asian (5% compared to .2%), Native Hawaiian (4% compared to 0%).⁴

Age

Most of the respondents (75%) were between 25 and 44 years old, though the total reported age range was 18-74 years old. Just over half of respondents (53%) live in a household with children, while 47% do not. The households with children were most likely to have children or preteens.

Summary

There is no "average" respondent to the survey, but the majority of respondents speak English at home, identify themselves as White, have completed a high school degree or higher, and/or are

² 46% reported that they are not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. 9% selected "prefer not to answer."

³ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/newportcitykentucky>

⁴ Choices were White, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Black or African American, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and "prefer not to answer"

between 25 and 44 years of age. There are fairly even splits in response rates among parts of Newport, those who have children or do not, and those who are Latino or not.

Feedback on the Plan for Bernadette Watkins Park

The key findings for this report come from survey responses that ask respondents to consider a map or infographic relating to the park and then rate their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements (Appendix).

Diagram of Proposed Park Changes Presented in Survey

A primary challenge in use of surveys is that every item must be self-explanatory; a researcher is not present with the respondent to clarify or to answer questions. With this in mind, students created a diagram that showed the components of the concept plan put together by Human Nature, LLC that we asked about in the survey in a format that could be easily read. Our goal was a map that was approachable and a clear written description (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Drawing and Description of Proposed Changes to Bernadette Watkins Park Used in the Survey



“Based on community feedback the Strategic Depaving Project has developed a layout for a potential addition to the current Bernadette Watkins Park in the city of Newport, Kentucky, represented in the map above. The park is located on 6th and Patterson Street and currently consists of a small playground along 6th Street joined by a small collection of trees.”

Responses to the Park Diagram

Participants responded overwhelmingly positively to this park diagram. Since Bernadette Watkins Park currently functions as a neighborhood park in West Newport, I also looked at how those in the westside responded to these questions. Responses from all Newport residents taken together and from those in West Newport were very similar. I have noted response numbers from West Newport residents in footnotes.

Overall, respondents were satisfied with the proposed park concept. Respondents indicated that they would like to spend time in the park in the diagram (83% “agreed” or “strongly agreed”).⁵ They were also satisfied with the amount of trees and plants in the diagram (89% “agreed” or “strongly agreed”).⁶ They agreed that the park should have “open, grassy areas” (90% chose “agree” or “strongly agree”), which are included in the park concept.⁷ Moreover, in a space provided for people to write in what equipment the plan might be missing, about 9% of responses (33 out of 377) indicated that nothing else was needed or that the plan was complete.

We also asked specifically about the tree barrier, since that is an important design feature in this proposal. Overall, respondents feel that the proposed tree barrier would be a good addition to the park. 87% of respondents agree that it will make the park more beautiful, and 86% believe it will make the park a safer place for children to play.⁸

Feedback on the Bioswale

The bioswale is an important feature of the concept plan for Bernadette Watkins Park, as it is meant to help manage rainwater collection and to naturally filter rainwater.

Bioswale Information as Presented in the Survey

We assumed that much of the community would likely be unfamiliar with bioswales, since it is a specialized concept. Accordingly, we wanted to present the concept of a bioswale to the community in an approachable way. Students put together an infographic and description to communicate this idea (Figure 2).

⁵ 84% of respondents in West Newport chose “agree” or “strongly agree”

⁶ 83% of respondents in West Newport chose “agree” or “strongly agree”

⁷ 87% of respondents in West Newport chose “agree” or “strongly agree”

⁸ 84% and 82%, respectively, of respondents in West Newport chose “agree” or “strongly agree”

Figure 2: Infographic and Description of Bioswale



Image modified from [NACTO](#) under a Creative Commons License

“The tree barrier on the map is planned to be a ‘[bioswale](#),’ formed by the construction of a ditch and small hill that is then covered with native plants and four season trees. The construction of the ditch will help in the management of stormwater collection, filtering the water naturally through the soil before being deposited in a sewer drain near the edge of the park. Also included is a planned water feature at the center of this ditch which will help recirculate water to various other outlets in the area.”

Responses to the Bioswale

As in the earlier set of responses to the park diagram, responses to the bioswale should be considered both in terms of Newport residents as a whole and in terms of responses from West Newport residents. As in the earlier set of responses, residents of West Newport gave similar responses, and the rates are noted in footnotes.

We asked respondents to consider the brief, initial description of a bioswale (Figure 2). We wanted to know if respondents believed that a bioswale would work, and 85% agreed that this feature would help to manage rainwater.⁹ Respondents also were in favor of eco-friendly or “green” additions to parks, overall (91% agree or strongly agree).¹⁰

Since earlier research indicated interest in an educational water feature associated with the bioswale, we also wanted a question to gauge interest in this general theme. So, we asked respondents their opinion on the statement “If I saw this feature [bioswale] in a park, I would

⁹ 81% of respondents in West Newport chose “agree” or “strongly agree”

¹⁰ 87% of respondents in West Newport chose “agree” or “strongly agree”

want to learn more about it.” 76% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.¹¹ This indicates that community members would likely appreciate an educational water feature illustrating how a bioswale works and its goals.

Conclusion

This report indicates that survey respondents generally approve of the proposed park improvements that emerged from the first phase of the Strategic Depaving Project. While the survey was not randomized, it does provide feedback from a group of residents who care about the park and want to have their voice heard on the issue. This group responded favorably to the proposed additions to the park, indicated that they like eco-friendly components in parks, and agreed that a bioswale will improve the issues with rainwater in the community.

¹¹ 73% of respondents in West Newport chose “agree” or “strongly agree”

Appendix: Survey Questions Used in this Report

Under the diagram of the plan for Bernadette Watkins Park improvements:

- Is there anything else missing in this park? Please list what you would like to see added to the park (equipment, features, etc.) in the space below.
- For each of the following statements, please pick the choice that most closely matches your opinion. Options given: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
 - This plan features enough trees and plants
 - It is important to have open, grassy areas in this park.
 - The tree barrier between the park and Lowell Street/KY-9 will make the park a safer place for children to play.
 - I would like to spend time in this park.

Under the infographic and description of bioswales:

- For each of the following statements, please pick the choice that most closely matches your opinion. Options given: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
 - The bioswale will help manage rainwater
 - If I saw this feature in a park, I would want to learn more about it.
 - I like eco-friend/green additions to parks.
 - How did you hear about this survey?
 - A postcard in the mail
 - A post on Facebook
 - Word of Mouth
 - What part of Newport do you live in?*
 - *This is the only required question on the survey
 - West Newport
 - East Newport
 - South Newport
 - I do not live in Newport
- What is your highest level of education?
 - Some high school
 - High school degree or equivalent (for example: GED)
 - Some college
 - Associates degree
 - Bachelors degree
 - Graduate degree (for example: Masters, PhD, MD, JD)

- What language(s) did you speak in your household growing up? (Check all that apply)
 - English
 - Spanish
 - German
 - Hindi
 - Arabic
 - Other (space to enter language)
- What language(s) do you speak most often at home now? (Check all that apply)
 - English
 - Spanish
 - German
 - Hindi
 - Arabic
 - Other (space to enter language)
- Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to answer
- How would you describe yourself? (select all that apply)*
 - *Due to an error in settings, participants were unfortunately only able to select one.
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Black or African American
 - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - White
 - Prefer not to answer
- What would you estimate as your annual household income?
 - Less than \$20,000
 - \$20,000 to \$34,999
 - \$35,000 to \$49,999
 - \$50,000 to \$74,999
 - \$75,000 to \$99,999
 - \$100,000 to \$149,000
 - \$150,000 or more
 - Prefer not to say

- What is your age? (please select range below that best fits)
 - 18-24 years old
 - 25-34 years old
 - 35-44 years old
 - 45-54 years old
 - 55-64 years old
 - 65-74 years old
 - 75 or older
 - Prefer not to say
- Do any children (under 18 years old) live in your household?
 - Yes
 - No
- If “yes” is selected: What age group(s) are in your household? (check all that apply)
 - Baby or toddler (0-3 years old)
 - Child (4-8 years old)
 - Preteen (10-13 years old)
 - Teen (14-17 years old)