

Overton Park Alliance

Evergreen Historic, Midtown Action Coalition, VECA, Park Friends, Parkway House, Belleair Woods, Memphis Heritage, Stop Hurting Overton Park, Hein Park Neighborhood, Midtown Memphis Development Corp, Humans of Overton Park, Cooper–Young Community Association, Free Parking Brigade, Bellaire Woods, East End Neighborhood, Morningside Place, Central Gardens, Tucker Jefferson, Physicians for Urban Parks

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 1, 2016

RE: MAYOR STRICKLAND'S PROPOSAL TO REMOVE PARKING FROM THE OVERTON PARK GREENSWARD

Today, Mayor Strickland announced a proposed resolution to address the parking needs of the Memphis Zoo, while preserving the essential character of the central public space in the park referred to as the Greensward.

The Mayor's compromise plan requires the sacrifice of a portion of the Greensward adjacent to current Zoo parking in exchange for permanent protection of the vast majority of the Greensward land for public use. This compromise includes the creation of a visual and physical barrier to separate the natural park spaces from the Zoo's parking lot. We regret that any portion of the park's natural space must be sacrificed. However, we understand that the continued success of the Memphis Zoo, a key partner of the park and an institution cherished by generations of Memphians, requires that parking solutions be found. To accomplish this goal we support the proposed compromise and express our appreciation and gratitude to the Mayor for his leadership in resolving this issue.

As with all public projects, the "devil's in the details." Our support is based upon our understanding that the final document will address the following critical issues:

1. This solution, when fully implemented, will once and for all end Zoo use of the Greensward other than the portion to be incorporated into the Zoo lot. Legal protections must be established to permanently assure the enforceability of the plan.
2. Landscape design professionals will advise the City on the optimal line of demarcation at the edge of the swale area and create a low impact development plan in order to provide the most visually optimal solution so as to preserve and enhance the natural appearance of the land.
3. The current dispute over park management will be resolved with the Zoo being granted control over the portion of the Greensward to be devoted to Zoo parking, while the Overton Park Conservancy's management control of and responsibility for the natural portion of the Greensward will be affirmed. Upon its abandonment by the City, the General Services Lot will be transferred to the OPC, with Zoo visitors granted usage of the paved parking area for overflow parking along with park visitors.
4. To the extent possible the design professionals will be charged with preserving the old growth Magnolia and Oak trees to the south of the existing Zoo lot and incorporating them within protected areas in the extended Zoo lot.
5. The final plan will confirm and recognize the protection of the Old Forest area of the park from incursions by Zoo trams or other passenger vehicles.
6. The Mayor should establish a mechanism for public input with regard to the implementation plans for the agreements outlined in his proposal.

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The Overton Park Alliance will continue to remain vigilant to assure that the proposed plan is implemented to the benefit of the park and all of its users. We encourage all park supporters to express their appreciation to the Mayor for his leadership on this critical issue.

We encourage park users to continue to express their love for the park through robust regular use of the Greensward, but we ask that park supporters refrain from actions that would interfere with the Zoo's use of the area for necessary overflow parking until the plan is fully implemented in 2017. We ask the Zoo to reciprocate with a show of good faith by removing the metal barriers from the Greensward commencing immediately and only use the Greensward in this interim period when truly necessary.

The **Overton Park Alliance** is comprised of the neighborhood associations and park support organizations listed above and collectively represents tens of thousands of Memphis citizens with a deep love for our city and for Overton Park, a public space used weekly by thousands of Memphians and Mid-Southerners. We are committed to protecting the park for the use and enjoyment of all Memphians and for generations of Memphians to come.

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