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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**TITLE:** Westwood Hills Nature Center Master Plan Update

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** The purpose of this report and study session discussion is to provide the City Council with an update on the Westwood Hills Nature Center master planning process.

**POLICY CONSIDERATION:** Does the Council wish to continue with the direction of the study that includes potentially changing the location of the interpretive center building?

**SUMMARY:** The city recently hired Miller Dunwiddie Architecture to create a comprehensive master plan to address the facility development and programming goals for the Westwood Hills Nature Center. The Westwood Hills Nature Center interpretive center is undersized and the building is in poor condition. The poor conditions of this facility and the success of the programs we offer at this site with limited program space, were the impetus behind a master planning process. The master plan will include topics such as a facility study and program evaluation including: schematic design and location of the interpretive center, assessment of classrooms with educational components, parking lot needs, etc. along with current and future program needs.

**PUBLIC PROCESS:** Program and facility survey for participants of the following events:

- October 16 & 17: Halloween Party (Westwood Hills Nature Center)
  - Approximately 200 participated in the survey
- October 23: Halloween Party (The Rec Center, 3700 Monterey Drive)
  - Information on public meetings distributed

Initial Public Input Meeting (Westwood Hills Nature Center): October 27, 6 - 8 p.m.

- 20 attendees at meeting

Second Public Input Meeting (Westwood Hills Nature Center): January 12, 2016, 6 - 8 p.m.

**BUILDING DESIGN:** Attached are two designs that Miller Dunwiddie created based on public input. These designs show options for where the interpretive center could be located. One of the designs shows the building in its current location and the other shows it closer to the parking lot. The designs will be discussed in great detail at the second public input meeting.

**FINANCIAL OR BUDGET CONSIDERATION:** The Master Plan Study is budgeted at \$50,000 and was approved in the 2015 CIP budget.

**VISION CONSIDERATION:** St. Louis Park is committed to being a connected and engaged community. St. Louis Park is committed to being a leader in environmental stewardship.

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:** Discussion  
Interpretive Center Location Design Options

**Prepared by:** Mark Oestreich, Manager of Westwood Hills Nature Center  
Jason T. West, Recreation Superintendent

**Reviewed by:** Cindy S. Walsh, Director of Operations and Recreation

**Approved by:** Tom Harmening, City Manager

## **DISCUSSION**

**BACKGROUND:** The Westwood Hills Nature Center interpretive center is undersized for the programs we offer. In addition, the building is in poor condition. When it rains, water seeps through the walls and the heating system is failing. The poor conditions of this facility and the success of the programs we offer at this site, with limited program space, were the impetus behind a master planning process. The master plan will include topics such as a facility study and program evaluation including, but not limited to, schematic design and location of the interpretive center, assessment of classrooms with educational components, parking lot needs, along with current and future program assessment needs.

Citizen input is playing a key role in shaping this plan. There have been several events planned where Miller Dunwiddie gathered input from the community in regards to developing the Master Plan. Over 200 participants completed surveys at the Westwood Hills Nature Center's Halloween Party on October 16 & 17, there were approximately 35 individuals who completed the online survey, and 20 participants attended the first public meeting on October 27. The second public meeting will be on January 12, 2016 at Westwood Hills Nature Center. This meeting will be publicized via postcards sent to residents, the city's website and social media, informing the School District, utilizing an email blast to past program users and promoting the meeting on Park TV. To gain additional input, Miller Dunwiddie met with parks maintenance staff, programming staff, and volunteers. This really helped the architects understand the first-hand issues with the facility.

**PRESENT CONSIDERATIONS:** The common themes that emerged from the public input were as follows:

- Building location closer to the parking lot for convenience and accessibility
- The need for more parking
- The size of the class/meeting rooms which would be kept intimate for 50 people but could open up big enough to accommodate 150 participants
- Preschool possibilities
- Net zero building from an environmental perspective

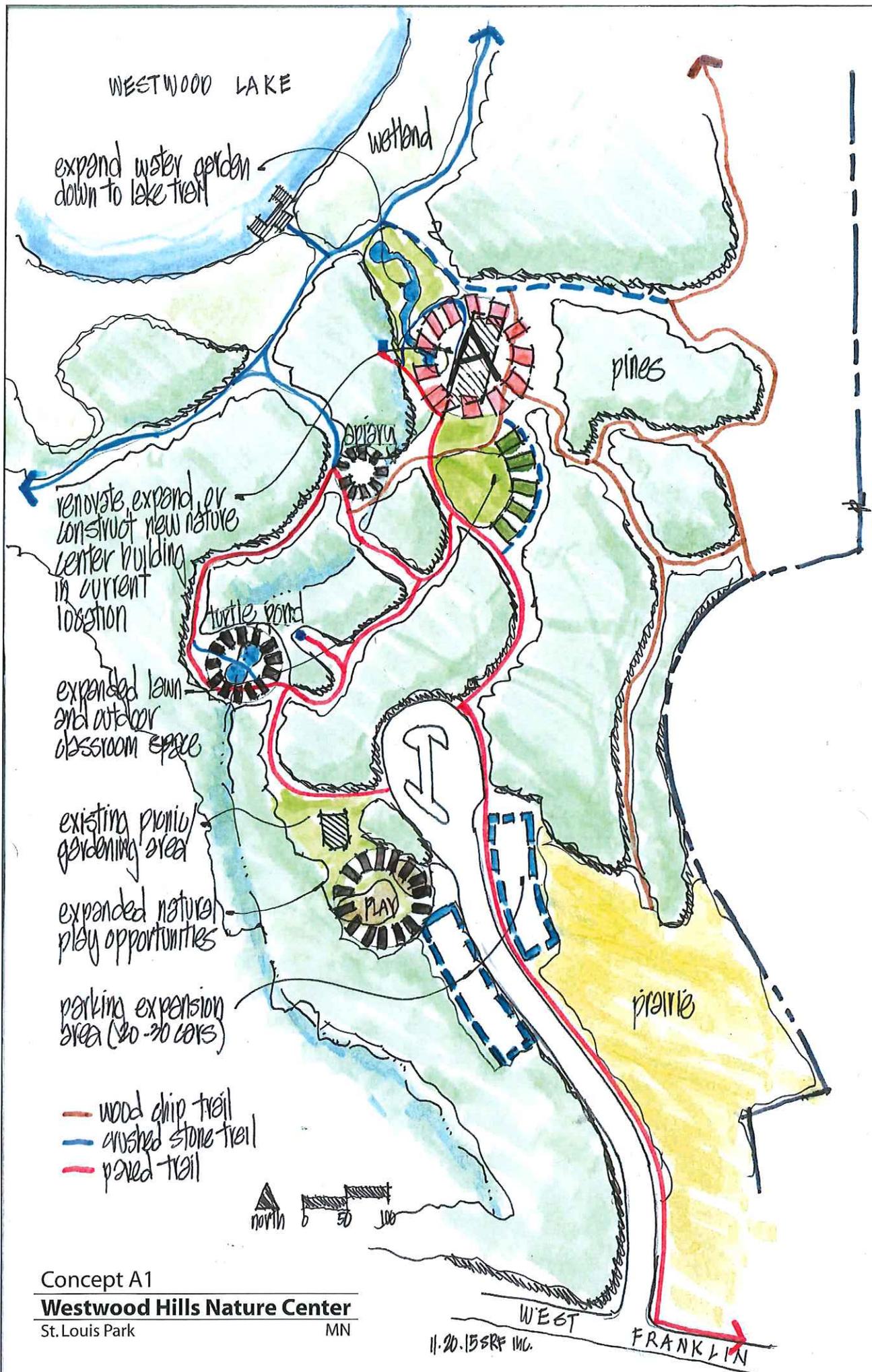
At this time the preliminary interpretive center layouts would have a gathering space when you enter the facility along with restrooms, animal displays, front counter space and staff offices. Towards the back of the facility would be three class/meeting rooms that could have an occupancy of 50 people per room. These rooms would open up to one larger rental room that would accommodate approximately 150 people where there would also be an option for a catering kitchen to accompany this space.

If the consensus would be to move the interpretive center to a location adjacent to the parking lot, the waterfall would stay on top of the hill with another amenity such as a pavilion or a small amphitheater for patrons to enjoy.

In either scenario, the parking lot would need to be expanded. Some of the prairie area located east of the driveway and land to the west of the driveway could be utilized for additional parking.

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Miller Dunwiddie will conduct focus group sessions.
- Public Meeting to be held Jan 12, 2016 from 6 pm–8 pm at the Westwood Hills Nature Center. At this meeting the community will be able to review the master plan concepts and provide detailed input.
- After the public meeting Miller Dunwiddie will take all the input and finalize a building footprint, location, layout, and programming needs to create a master plan.
- Miller Dunwiddie will present the final Westwood Hills Master Plan to the City Council in March.



expand water garden  
down to lake front

wetland

pines

renovate, expand, or  
construct new nature  
center building  
in current  
location

Turtle Pond

expanded lawn  
and outdoor  
classroom space

existing picnic/  
gardening area

expanded nature  
play opportunities

parking expansion  
area (20-30 cars)

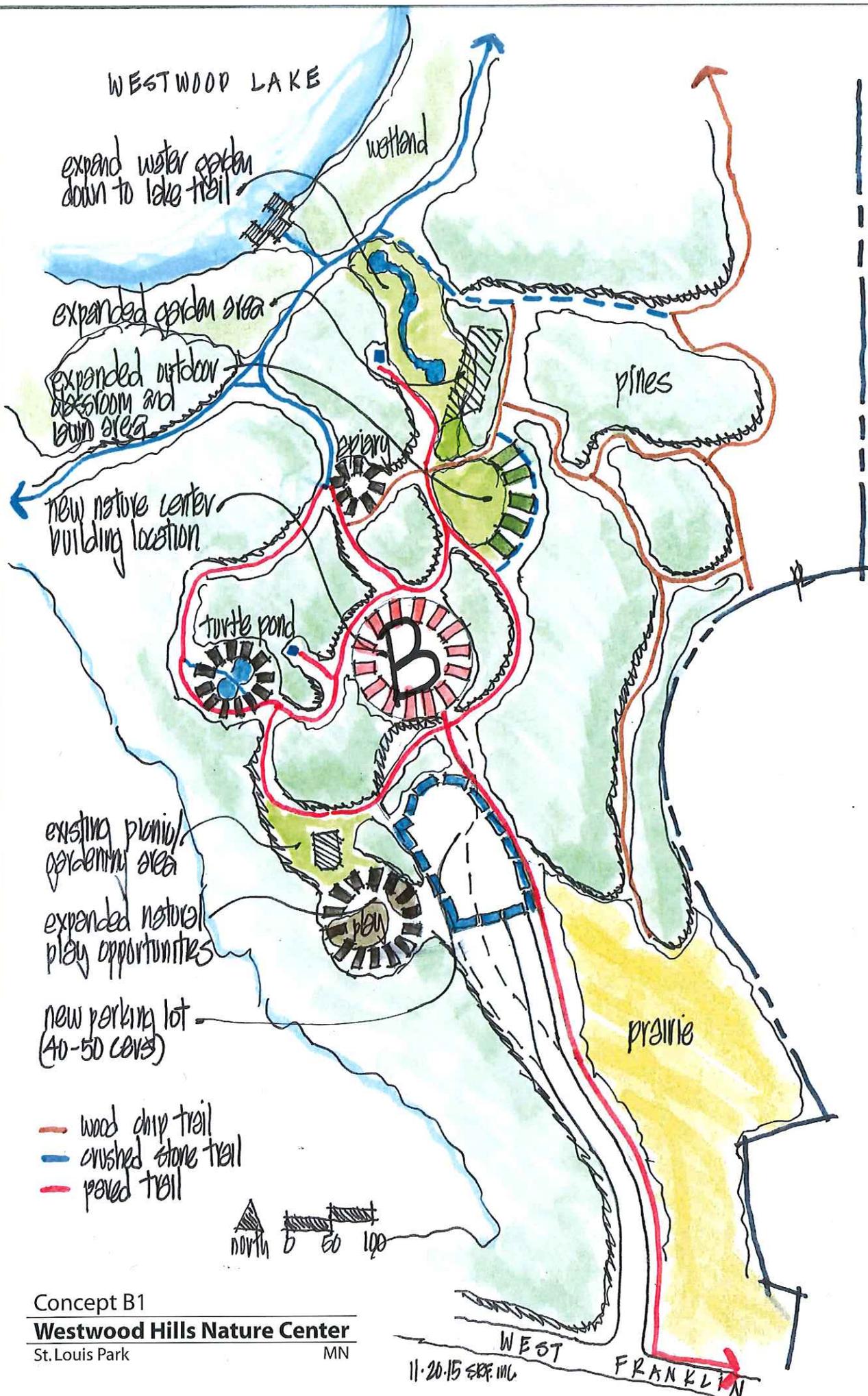
prairie

- wood chip trail
- crushed stone trail
- paved trail



Concept A1  
**Westwood Hills Nature Center**  
St. Louis Park MN

WEST  
FRANKLIN  
11.20.15 SRF INC.



Concept B1  
**Westwood Hills Nature Center**  
 St. Louis Park MN

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