

At Public Meeting

Asylum Lake Use As Park Supported

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State land at Asylum Lake should become a public park, and remain mostly in its natural state.

That appeared to be the consensus of a public discussion Wednesday night at Kalamazoo City Hall on the Kalamazoo State Hospital property south of Stadium Drive.

About 50 persons attended.

They included the entire Kalamazoo area legislative delegation: Sen. John Welborn and Reps. Wayne Sackett and Howard Wolpe.

Welborn has introduced Senate bill 1483, with several other senators representing Southwestern Michigan, to authorize lease of the 267 acres of lake frontage and 1 1/2 acres of land to Kalamazoo County at \$1 a year for park, recreation and open space use only.

He and Wolpe said they'll try to push the bill through this legislative session, but added that it may have to wait for the next session.

Action to obtain the land for park use followed Kalamazoo State Hospital determination that the land, which includes all frontage on Asylum Lake and about half the frontage on Little Asylum Lake to the southwest, was "surplus" to its needs.

State hospital officials, neighbors and city officials have been unhappy about littering, nude swimming and destruction of vegetation by motorcycles since KSH phased out patient care in buildings near the lake.

Mrs. June Copeland of 1325 N. Church and Michael Doll of 613 W. Lovell, who moderated Wednesday's session at Kalamazoo City Hall, are among those who are spearheading support for Welborn's bill and a natural park treatment.

They're circulating petitions in support of the park, and are seeking persons willing to give a "continuing" effort, who are invited to call Mrs. Copeland, St 349-4595.

County Parks and Recreation Director Donald Kelley supported a natural treatment if the land becomes a county park.

His agency's philosophy, which includes retaining the natural resources of a tract of land; seeking 100 acres or more, to eliminate conflicts among users, and between users and abutting

private landowners; "controlled" access by a single park entrance; and emphasis on recreation which residents can enjoy at their leisure, rather than "structured" programs such as softball leagues.

Ralph Smith said he and Robert Vermeulen of 2231 S. 12th, who own most of the abutting land, find Welborn's bill "an excellent idea." Their principal concerns, he said, involve persons trespassing on their land, thinking it's state-owned.

County Com. Jack Hunt said he doesn't want a park on the lake to be an "amusement park," and prefers "passive" recreation.

County Board Chairman Robert Welborn, whose district includes the lake area, said: "We want to protect the land and make sure our children and grandchildren have some open space left."

Sen. Welborn, brother of the county board chairman, emphasized that "The fact that the bill has been introduced does not open this area up to public use. It's off limits, really."

Doll said that virtually all trails leading in to the lake cross private land. The 12th Street entrance gate is frequently locked by state hospital personnel to minimize vandalism.

Sen. Welborn said his bill proposes a lease of the land because that's the fastest way to create a local park.

Passage of a bill giving the land away would be extremely difficult, he said, and normally, the state would sell land for its appraised value.

Another change may well be the name of the lake.

The McMartin family, of which Smith and Vermeulen are members, once owned much of the land in that area, and the lake was McMartin Lake. Mrs. Copeland says that name still is on many maps.

Vermeulen took the name hunt back a step farther, suggesting that the Loren family owned the land before the McMartins, and the water was known even earlier as Loren Lake.

The name of the lake may well be what the public calls it, Sen. Welborn after many phone calls to state officials, he was unable to find how a lake's name can be officially changed.

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