

Blueprints for a lively, popular park

By LOUISE WREGE - HP Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, April 1, 2015 6:00 am

BENTON HARBOR - City officials are throwing out the dragnet to get opinions about the future of Dwight Pete Mitchell City Center Park.

Among the questions are what should the park look like in 20 years? What do residents love about the park now?

The city will host a visioning workshop at 6 p.m. April 14 at the Benton Harbor Public Library, 213 E. Wall St. Besides discussing their visions for the park, attendees will receive a light dinner. Child care will be available.

Anyone needing a ride to the workshop should call Deb Panozzo, mobility manager at the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, at 925-1137, Ext. 1519.

Registration and more information can be found online at Placemaking.mml.org/Square1 or by contacting Ebony Harris via email at eharris@cityofbentonharbormi.gov or by calling her at 927-8420.

"We want people who are going to live in this community, be in this community, work and recreate in this community, to come out and have their voices heard," said Benton Harbor Deputy City Manager Marja Winters.

A steering committee of almost 20 local people has been meeting with representatives from the Michigan Municipal League and Michigan State University to develop a park plan residents support.

"We want this to be a very inclusive community-building project," said Ryan Soucy of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission.

The project, dubbed Square 1, is being assisted by PlacePlans, an effort between MML and MSU to help cities attract and retain residents and businesses. The Benton Harbor City Commission approved spending \$8,000 to receive \$36,000 in services from PlacePlans, which chose seven cities statewide



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Ryan Soucy, left, of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission and Bryan Tutton, president of the Benton Harbor Downtown Development Authority, discuss plans Tuesday to receive community comment on how to update Dwight Pete Mitchell City Center Park in Benton Harbor while sitting on a bench in the park. The public is invited to a vision meeting at 6 p.m. April 14 at the Benton Harbor Public Library, 213 E. Wall St., which is next to the park.

to receive its services.

The city and the Benton Harbor Parks and Recreation Conservancy are sponsoring the project.

"After this meeting, the (MSU) team will use the information that is assembled as a result of the input from this meeting to come back with some preliminary recommendations, and then they will come back and present those recommendations to the community," Winters said. "It will be a community-wide event."

Bryan Tutton, president of the Benton Harbor Downtown Development Authority, said City Center Park is unique.

"It's right on the doorstep of City Hall," he said. "... It's right in the middle of a lot of stuff going on. It has a lot of strategic importance."

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