

Every month since February 1987 the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation has produced one-hour TV programs on issues related to peace, social justice, economics, the environment, and nonviolence.

The Olympia FOR's program airs several times every week for the entire month on Thurston Community Television (TCTV), channel 22 for Thurston County's cable TV subscribers. You can see TCTV's schedule at www.tctv.net.

You can also watch the program described below (and more than 100 of our previous interview programs and special programs) at the Olympia FOR's website, www.olympiafor.org. Simply click the "TV Programs" link to reach www.olympiafor.org/tv_programs.htm, scroll down, and click the program you want to watch.

Many of our website's TV program listings also include a document (in Word and/or .pdf format) describing the program.

APRIL 2015

"LBA Woods and Other Parks for Our Community"

by Glen Anderson, producer and host of this TV series

This month explores the need for local parks. We focus on a timely opportunity to devote a large amount of additional land to become a park that would serve the greater Thurston County area.

A community group formed a few years ago and has generated wide support throughout our community for a 150-acre "LBA Woods Park" next to the current "LBA Park" in SE Olympia, within the city limits. This non-profit organization, the LBA Woods Park Coalition (www.lbawoodspark.org), has been urging the City of Olympia to buy the available land now so it can become a park.

Three guests help us explore this topic:

- Bonnie Jacobs is a longtime Olympia organizer for many efforts to improve our local quality of life.
- Brian Faller is an attorney with special expertise regarding recreation areas.
- Kris Norelius is an elementary school counselor who appreciates young people gaining access to experience the natural world.

Everybody wants to live in a local community that provides for a high quality of life. One important factor is having enough parks for the public to enjoy. The greater Olympia and Thurston County areas are expected to add about 20,000 more residents during the next 20 years. Houses for them will consume much open space, and it will increase the need for parks for the public to enjoy.

Economic justice is a factor, because people who are rich can fly to Hawaii or Europe or elsewhere for vacations, and people who have houses have back yards, but people who live in apartments do not. Everyone regardless of income level needs to be able to enjoy free outdoor spaces in our local communities.

More than a decade ago – in 2004 – 57% of Olympia's voters voted to increase their utility tax to provide money for acquiring park land, based on the City's 2002 parks plan. But since then the City of Olympia has actually acquired far less land than the 2002 Olympia parks plan had called for, and has spent some of the Voted Utility Tax for purposes other than park land acquisition, which is what the 2004 election required.

Later in this TV program we discuss a few other parks in the greater Olympia area, but we devote much of this program to exploring the possibility of adding a large amount of land in SE Olympia next to the existing LBA Park in SE Olympia, near the intersection of Boulevard Road and Morse-Merryman Road. This land has many trees, so the proposed new park is called "**LBA Woods Park.**"

Our guests show and explain an impressive and informative series of photos, maps and images to help the viewers understand the two large parcels of land – totaling about 150 acres – that would become "LBA Woods

Park” if the City of Olympia would act on this proposal. These are the only two remaining large forested parcels within Olympia’s city limits.

The LBA Woods Park Coalition has an informative website, www.lbawoodspark.org, which shows maps, photos, and much other information. We showed some of this during the TV program.

Both of these large parcels of land are owned by real estate developers who are intending to cut down the trees and build houses and streets throughout these 150 acres of natural land, which now has many trees, native plants, wildlife, and 58 species of birds. People have been using it informally as a park, even though it is privately owned, and over the past decade people’s feet have made clear trails throughout these beautiful, natural 150 acres of woodland.

This land is very walkable, without any steep climbs. In contrast, both of the two large wooded parks in Olympia – Priest Point Park and Watershed Park – are located around ravines that make them difficult for many people to walk through. The proposed “LBA Woods Park” would provide recreational opportunities that current parks do not offer. Also, this would preserve natural ecosystems and habitats.

People of all ages and all physical abilities feel nourished by spending time in beautiful natural settings such as this. This opportunity has value far beyond the merely financial.

If the city were to acquire these lands now, a participatory public process could allow the community to decide what additional uses a park could serve. Suggestions already include a dog park, off-road bicycle trails, community gardens, birdwatching opportunities, and so forth.

Supporters of LBA Woods Park have been urging the City of Olympia to buy both parcels now to stop their “development” into houses and streets. The current owners would sell at reasonable prices before they get farther into the “development” process. The City has money from the Voted Utility Tax and can raise money from other sources.

The LBA Woods Coalition (www.lbawoodspark.org) has gathered more than 5,200 signatures from all over Thurston County and beyond to support this proposal. The Coalition continues to build community support from people of all ages to persuade the City. People from all over have been enjoying this natural area, so this is something that serve our larger region, not just Olympia.

Our local community has a great history of individuals and small numbers of people stepping forward to save special places for public use. **Examples:**

- **Sylvester Park:** In the 1950s, many downtown businesses and city leaders wanted to turn **Sylvester Park** (Olympia’s town square at Legion & Capitol Way) into a parking garage. But some thoughtful local people organized to save it as a park.
- **Watershed Park**, a natural area in SE Olympia near Henderson Blvd, was saved from being logged and turned into a housing development. Some of the local people who saved Sylvester Park were also leaders in creating Watershed Park.
- **West Central Park** is a new spot for calm community gathering at the SE corner of Harrison and Division: Over the years, some local people organized and prevented a gas station and then a convenience store from being built there. Finally, a generous local person – Alicia Elliott – bought the land to prevent it from being abused in other ways and to instead convert it into a small park to serve the whole community. The West Central Park’s website is www.aparkforus.org
- **Isthmus – “Capitol Olympic Vista Park”** For several years a growing number of local people have been urging the government to acquire the little strip of land between downtown Olympia and the West Side, removing the buildings, and turning it into a park. See www.capitolvistapark.org (The Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation produced a TV program about this. See the September 2011 link on the “TV Programs” page at www.olympiafor.org)

- **West Olympia Heronry:** Herons nest in West Olympia downhill from Dickinson Avenue, down toward West Bay Drive. Some people are protecting this from a housing development. Info: www.olyecosystems.org and the January 2015 issue of *Works in Progress*, www.olywip.org

The community-based effort to create LBA Woods Park next to the current LBA Park would be another in this great tradition of local people organizing to protect natural ecosystems and serve the local quality of life.

Everybody wants to live in a community that feels pleasant. We in the Pacific Northwest especially value having natural areas nearby that we can walk through and see the trees and hear the birds. People of all ages like that. Older folks seem to find this a way to revive memories of our childhoods when we had more natural areas nearby.

Natural areas are disappearing quickly – being paved over and built upon. We need to preserve the few that remain so all of us – and future generations – can enjoy them and enjoy being part of the natural world.

It makes sense for the City of Olympia to buy the two large parcels we have been discussing and create the LBA Woods Park. I invite you to work with the LBA Woods Park Coalition and visit their attractive, informative website, www.lbawoodspark.org You can connect with their Facebook page there too.

I also invite you to connect with other local groups working for grassroots-based parks efforts, such as:

- Capitol Olympic Vista Park on Olympia's Isthmus – www.capitolvistapark.org
- West Central Park – www.aparkforus.org
- West Olympia Heronry www.olyecosystems.org