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Cost considerations downscale pesticide-free park effort in Lawrence, KS

23 Jun, 2005
LM Week in Review

LAWRENCE, KS — On June 7, in response to pressure from environmental activists, the city commissioners of Lawrence, KS, voted unanimously to designate **Watson Park** as "pesticide-free." The seven-acre park adjacent to the downtown was part of the original town of Lawrence.

Watson Park will be a test case so that the community can see the results of a pesticide-free maintenance program. Fred DeVictor, director of Parks and Recreation, said his department would also use the park to find out how much pesticide-free management will actually cost the city.

Although the parks and recreation department showed it spends less than \$10,000 a year for pesticides, activists had lobbied the city's commissioners to convert all of the city's 52 parks to pesticide-free maintenance by 2009. However, a cost analysis by the Parks and Recreation staff estimated that the city would have to spend \$213,000 for equipment; \$116,000, annually for staff; and \$95,000, annually for materials to achieve that goal.

In a **May 11 memo to the City Manager** giving details of the budget requirements for a proposed pesticide-free maintenance program, Mark Hecker, Park & Maintenance Superintendent wrote:

"Most of our professional staff, and most of the horticultural industry, do not believe this is the most cost effective way to manage a park system. If requested, we could provide testimony from industry experts, articles and quotes from trade publications and research done by universities and professional organizations that would detail the proper and safe use of pesticides as a management tool. We have concerns that our inability to use pesticides may reduce the quality of our parks and could threaten the long-term health of the City's parks, trees, shrubs and flowers."

At its May 17 meeting ([transcript](#)), the city commissioners listened to testimony from Parks and Recreation employees, citizens and representatives of the GCSAA and USGA. After discussion, it was decided to designate a "signature" pesticide-free park and eventually compare the results to the city's other parks.

Related stories:

- "Watson Park set to be pesticide free," *Lawrence Journal-World*, June 7, 2005.
- "City Commission to consider plan to rid parks of pesticides," *Lawrence Journal-World*, May 29, 2005.
- "Study: Pesticide-free parks would heap on costs for city," *Lawrence Journal-World*, May 17, 2005.

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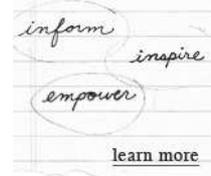


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