

Responses to a Questionnaire
(from the *Save Red Bank Central Park* Citizens' Group)
by the 2022 Candidates for the Red Bank, TN, Commission
September 2022

Lawrence Miller (for District 3)



1. Compared with other priorities for the City, how important do you think parks and recreation lands, and related amenities are to the Red Bank community, economy, and culture? Why?

Parks, recreational facilities and greenspaces are essential as tangible assets to benefit our community. They bring benefits to individuals in terms of health and wellness. There is ample scientific research that shows that urban parks promote active living and opportunities to avoid chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease and respiratory problems. In addition, people gain mental health benefits from opportunities provided by park and recreational facilities, including socializing with friends and family, spending time in nature, and exercising.

Red Bank as a whole is missing economic benefits from a more robust presence of parks and recreation. The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) has documented the significant gains that come from infrastructure improvements in parks. These include - direct and indirect employment, increased property values, transactional opportunities on and near parks, and integration into city-wide management issues such as stormwater runoff and air pollution.

NRPA research has determined that 94% adults agree on “the importance of their local government investing in infrastructure improvements that promote economic activity in their community.”

I attended the Red Bank Commission’s strategic planning retreat last spring as an observer. I was heartened by the fact that the issue of parks and recreation surfaced as one on the Commission’s top five priorities. I fully support the Commission on this effort which was focused on the “10-minute Walk to a Park Initiative.

2. What do you think the City of Red Bank should do with the publicly owned 12-acre former middle school property at 3715 Dayton Boulevard? Please explain in detail.

Over a year ago, I began looking closely at the 12-acre site that once housed Red Bank High School and later Red Bank Middle School. After 70 years as a school campus in the heart of our City, the land has been vacant for over a decade. I joined Don McKenzie in an effort to catalog plant and animal life on the site. We discovered a surprising number of life forms there, primarily along the



[Miller, continued]

woodland areas on the west and south of the parcel. Undoubtedly the most surprising find was a massive Virginia Pine. Don submitted this tree for consideration as a Champion Tree and a team from UT Knoxville took measurements that are under analysis. It is likely that this will be the Champion Virginia Pine for the United States.

This is an epic tree, and it deserves an epic park.

I support the ideas of using all of this property as a publicly accessible park. I created a conceptual map with some suggested areas for native plant gardens with nature trails, an amphitheater, a pavilion, and a sculpture garden. <https://flic.kr/p/2nJNgCA>

However, the actual purpose of a park is something that can be developed within the community planning process that will be directed by our City Manager with the aid of the City's new staff person responsible for parks and recreation. My concept map is only a suggestion and is by no means definitive. In a recent community forum hosted by Commissioner LeCompte and his citizen committee, I heard several great ideas that could be incorporated into our epic park.

Using all twelve acres as a park will create a much-needed focal point for our community. In a sense, it would be honoring the heritage that was earned as a school campus. I think it would be highly appropriate to honor this legacy of the schools that were at the core of the Red Bank community well before it was an incorporated municipality.

I have made some further points in an opinion I wrote for a local online publication (Why We Need An Epic Park In The Heart Of Red Bank <https://bit.ly/3oZ64ed>.) Research has shown that a park setting is connected to increased economic benefits. These include enhanced property values and an increase in businesses that want to locate near an attraction. An epic park would also attract new homebuyers to Red Bank. In addition to younger families, parks have proved to be attractions favored to capture the retirement migration that the Chattanooga area is experiencing. Look to North Chattanooga where two municipal parks have fueled the economic boom north of the river.

3. What is your opinion about the merits of the City's current "10-minute Walk to a Park Initiative" compared with other Red Bank parks and recreation needs?

I am an enthusiastic supporter of the initiative as an aspirational goal for Red Bank. There are two questions that we will need to answer to make a sincere effort to launch this initiative in Red Bank:

- 1) How many people have access to a park within a 10-minute walk of home and how many do not?
- 2) How many new parks do we need to close that gap?

Given the fact that the City of Red Bank has a total area of 6.56 square miles (4,122 acres) and only thirty-six acres of parks and recreational facilities, it is obvious that we have a long way to go.



[Miller, continued]

We will not get there through the City of Red Bank alone. To move incrementally towards a better number, we must be creative and opportunistic. Also, we will only make progress if we align ourselves with other government agencies, not-for-profit-organizations (including Red Bank churches), businesses, and property developers. The community must work to convince these stakeholders of the benefits that will come from more parks with more access.

There will be some opportunities for low-hanging fruit. But there are some significant obstacles. For one, Red Bank does not have an infrastructure that is conducive to walking. Our busiest thoroughfare, Dayton Boulevard, does not have enough sidewalks in spite of efforts by the City. More daunting is the near-complete lack of sidewalks in neighborhoods. Walking needs to be safe and some neighborhoods with minimal traffic at slow speeds may not need sidewalks to get to a nearby park.

We need to look for opportunities to create small “pocket parks” within neighborhoods. Opportunities will be there, but we must be ready to use all of the tools in our community tool belt.

Our community-wide planning process will encompass parks and the 10-minute Walk to a Park Initiative in a rational manner that has multiple opportunities for citizen input. I encourage all folks in Red Bank to become familiar with this process and weigh in with their ideas and energy.

4. How do you propose to resolve Red Bank’s out-of-compliance status with the National Park Service regarding the 2011 land swap agreement?

In a letter dated May 22, 2020, The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation stated that the National Parks Service found the City of Red Bank to be in non-compliance and rejected a proposal for three non-adjacent properties for consideration, citing their lack of public access and the failure of the City to develop these properties for park use. The original land swap was approved by NPS in 2010, with a 3-year deadline for Red Bank to complete acquisition and development of the replacement parks. The City has missed opportunities to resolve this issue. I am not an attorney, but to me it seems that to be compliant, Red Bank needs to submit a new proposal that meets the requirements first established in 2010. That original proposal included three acres of the school property at 3715 Dayton Boulevard and two parcels on Stringer’s Ridge.

I suggest that the best approach to resolve the land-swap issue is to designate the former school property as the replacement property. There is a two acre difference from the school property and the original 14.6 acres that the Park Service deeded to Red Bank. Perhaps if the City’s plan were very well developed with specific commitments to a timeline that would complete the development of a publicly accessible park with recreational opportunities. It is conceivable that an additional 2 - 3 acres could be purchased from adjacent property at 3645 Dayton Boulevard.

Remember that the City of Red Bank currently owns the former middle school property. Conversion of the land to a park would have some costs. Obtaining additional space (behind the existing buildings at Plaza North) would also be a cost. I believe that Red Bank could work with non-profit organizations such as The Trust for Public Land to obtain the bulk of the necessary funding for completing a park and achieving compliance



[Miller, continued]

5. Do you think resolution of Red Bank's out-of-compliance status with the National Park Service matters? Why or why not?

Yes, it matters. It matters because this is what the City of Red Bank said would be done to complete the land swap. The City's integrity is on the line here.

There is also concern that elements of the Federal Government will not entertain grant funding requests from the City of Red Bank due to non-compliance on the land-swap. As we move forward with a community-based planning process for Red Bank, it is likely that we will find opportunities to apply for Federal grants to pay for projects. We need to be in compliance to take advantage of such opportunities.