CUES TO CARE & MENDING FENCES

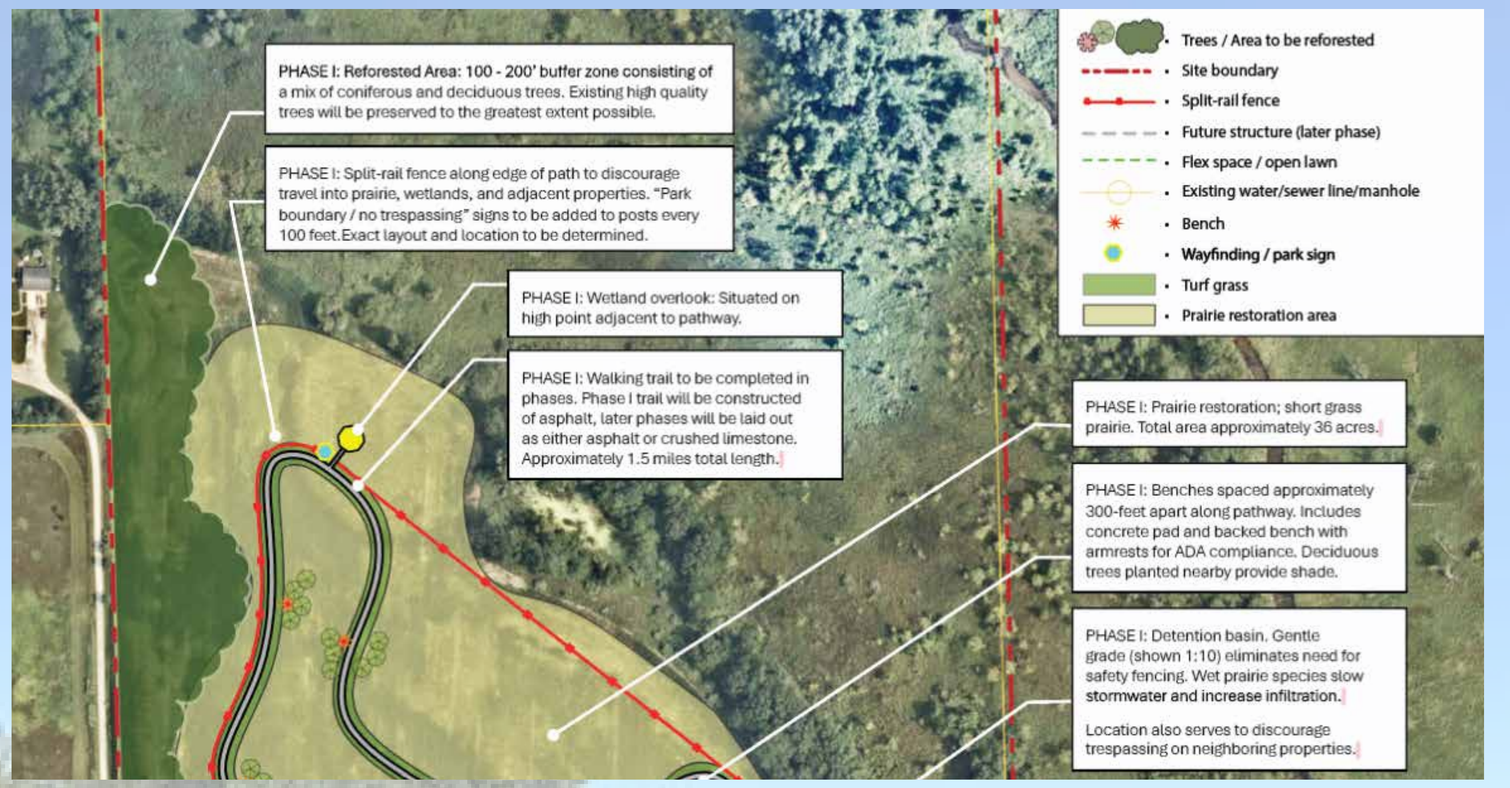
Howell Township, Mi

Chris Nordstrom MLA 2010 & Keely St. Andrew, MLA 2023

Carlisle/Wortman Associates

This example of a concept design for a park in a rural township demonstrates the flexibility and power of ‘cues to care’. The property is bordered by a contaminated floodplain on one side, and agricultural fields spanning most of the other side. At the north corner, however, were two homes with exceptionally long driveways which practically screamed, “DON’T BOTHER ME”. The park would have a walking path about 200 feet from these homes. As a part of the design process, Carlisle/Wortman had to convince the owners that we weren’t inviting trespassers onto their property.

The first action was to create a tree buffer between the house and the trail. The trees would provide a visual break but would take several years to fill in, and even when established the design team felt that some visitors would feel compelled to still hike through the forest. The second action involved a tall-grass prairie restoration between the tree line and the path. The prairie would provide all of the ecological benefits that come with native prairie, but more importantly from the homeowner’s perspective, it would discourage most people from trekking off the path.



The final feature is where “cues to care” comes into play. C/W proposed a simple split rail fence. Split-rail is a fence style that has never physically stopped anything or anyone from crossing a line, but psychologically represents a strong statement of “do not cross”. As the team presented the concept plan to the residents, Chris Nordstrom and Keely St. Andrew described Professor Nassauer’s concept, explaining that while there simply is no way to stop someone who is determined to trespass, by showing deliberate intent this simple, rustic fence can be as effective as an 8-foot-tall barrier. Using this example, the homeowner’s body language eased, his crossed arms relaxed, clenched jaw relaxed, and eye contact and communication between us improved. The next day the homeowner sent the design team examples of split rail he particularly liked.

The park project has been approved and construction is planned to commence within the next year. According to Nordstrom, “The elegant simplicity and applicability of “cues to care” has remained engrained in my mind since grad school. We see evidence of the concept almost daily…”.



