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photo: FILE

Peter Jordan is a retired English professor who does contract writing and public relations work in the technology industry.

Harpeth Rambles - A walk in the park

By PETER JORDAN
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"I found a great new place to run," a young matron and former tri-athlete told me at a holiday gathering last weekend, her eyes still sparkling with endorphins.

Like dozens of other Franklin residents who enjoy the outdoors, she had just discovered that the former country club property on Lewisburg Avenue now morphing into a battlefield park is a terrific cure for NDD – "nature deficit disorder." She loves the silence, the rolling terrain, and the fact that she can run on grass, kinder on her legs than asphalt as she recovers from an Achilles' tendon injury.

Coincidentally, while she was doing laps around the Eastern Flank park, I was hiking up Roper's Knob, where the city Parks Department has been busy clearing and marking the trail. Parking is a bit dicey at the Arsenal Drive/Reveille Court trailhead, but otherwise Roper's Knob is a perfect place for a short but bracing winter hike. This time of year, the trail should be tick-free, and the leaves have thinned out enough to offer a dramatic (though alarming) view of how much former farmland has been bulldozed into Cool Springs.

Our "beautiful rolling countryside" – in the words of the Convention and Visitor Bureau – is one of the reasons Williamson County continues to attract so many new residents. Paradoxically, the countryside is committing suicide, killing itself because the appeal of the landscape attracts the newcomers who drive the development under which the landscape is disappearing.

But we're fortunate to have public and private leadership with the vision and courage to save at least some of the countryside we almost universally love.

Brentwood city commissioners, for example, deserve profuse thanks for their courage in approving the public park at the Cooper property, despite flak from a vocal minority a few of whom even argued that Brentwood doesn't need any more public open space because the one acre zoning leaves enough of the city green.

Luckily for Brentwood in particular and Williamson County in general, the commissioners took the long view, understanding that opportunities for passive parks are fast disappearing and that what they don't save today in many cases will never again be available.

Citizens for Brentwood Green Space (CBGS) helped lead the fight to save the park at the Cooper property. Their vision is compelling: "We commit to seek opportunities to preserve for future generations open space in the city of Brentwood. We recognize the value and desirability of preserving the unique character and beauty of farmland, forests, and historic properties. We seek to preserve and expand access to land for walking, bicycling and other similar use and enjoyment."

"I don't think there's anyone who doesn't like green space," says CBGS board member Gil Hutchinson. "I think everyone loves where we live, with our open space, hills and rivers. When I hear people say they're not for it, usually they're saying they don't want to pay for it."

But techniques such as land swaps and creative zoning can minimize the financial impact of green space acquisition, says Hutchinson, whose organization has identified some 7,000 acres of fast-disappearing Brentwood open space. Hutchinson hopes that perhaps a thousand acres of that green space might be saved for future generations,

The bitter dispute about the Cooper property in Brentwood and some of the heated political arguments in Franklin would seem to belie Hutchinson's belief that everyone loves green space.

But despite the heat, Franklin leadership has had the vision to acquire the magnificent expanse of Harlinsdale Farm, the Eastern Flank battlefield property, Roper's Knob, and the former boot factory property that will some day be a riverfront park. A variety of other parks are scattered around the city, including Winstead Hill, Fieldstone Farms, Jim Warren, Aspen Grove, and Liberty. Fully realizing the potential of all that open space will take years, but the important thing is that we have the land in hand, forever protected by easements allowing us to cure our NDD with a nearby walk in the park.

The battlefield park is open to the public, Roper's Knob is open, an enormous field at Harlinsdale is open – we've already got a wealth of opportunity to get out and enjoy the outdoors.

And we ain't seen nothing yet. Franklin Parks Director Lisa Clayton has an exciting agenda designed to get us outside. For starters, the city will open a new half-mile section of the Spencer Creek greenway to be opened in the next few weeks. The new stretch of greenway includes a 10-foot pedestrian bridge spanning the creek.

"This addition is a great step forward in the connectivity of the Cool Springs area and the Historic District of Franklin," says Clayton, pointing out that most of the work was done in house by the Parks and Streets departments.

She also hopes that at least part of the "Bicentennial Park" adjacent to the Harpeth on North Margin Street will finally be open to the public this summer.

Meanwhile, Williamson County has its own green space agenda, with the new park on the Natchez Trace and the County's recent acquisition – through a land swap with the City of Franklin – of the Franklin Springs property outside Leiper's Fork.

Gil Hutchinson may be looking through rose-colored (green-colored?) glasses when he can't imagine anyone opposing public open space, but our enthusiasm for public parks seems to be gaining momentum.

As I've said before in this space, all it takes to realize the importance of green space is to imagine Nashville without the legacy of Warner Parks. Eighty years ago, Luke and Percie Warner Lea gave us those 2,684 acres forever. We should thank our current leadership for saving islands of green in Williamson County that our children's children will enjoy decades from today.

I'd write more, but I'm off with the dog for a run around Fort Granger. . . .

Note "Nature Deficit Disorder, a term coined by Richard Louv in his 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods*, refers to the alleged

trend that children are spending less time outdoors.” –
Wikipedia.

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