

A forum for readers in Dallas County

Compromise lights the way

White Rock groups show how to build a consensus, says **Eric Van Steenburg**

I had a sinking feeling that I was going to be left in the dark. And if the opponents of lighting at White Rock Lake had their way, so would the rest of Dallas.

But in a spirit of compromise that is, sadly, seldom seen these days, the members of the White Rock Lake Lighting Task Force came up with a lighting plan for East Dallas' signature park that seems to meet everyone's needs. For now.

In case you weren't aware, Dallas has five parks that are designated "signature parks" by the Park Department. They are Fair Park, the Arboretum, Turtle Creek/Katy Trail, the future Woodall Rodgers Park and White Rock Lake Park.

Consider for a minute the number of people in North Texas who have an interest in White Rock Lake. There are sailors and fishermen, runners and walkers, nature lovers and residents — all of whom see the lake and its park from their own perspective.

I'm a cyclist and skater who lives on the west side of the lake. Do you think for a minute I have any clue what the interests and desires are of a bird watcher who lives on the east side of the lake? Not really.

Yet, give City Council member Sheffie Kadane credit. He knows there are dozens of parties interested in this city park, and, last summer, after a bit of controversy erupted over new lights at some parking lots, he summoned as many as would respond to be part of the White Rock Lake Lighting Task Force. I was one of them. The task force was to work with the city's hired landscape architects and lighting consultants and be the voice of the people.

Or should I say "voices" of the people? Cyclists may view the roads around the lake as just about the only place in Dallas to get a serious workout on their bikes. Runners know the lake for its fertile training ground and the annual White Rock Lake Marathon. Meanwhile, residents who live near the lake sometimes see it as their personal space, forgetting that it was built for all 1 million citizens who live in our great city.

There are people who want to protect the natural beauty and tranquility of the space. While others are quick to point out it was built by man to control and provide water.

Because of these disparate views, there were some members of the Lighting Task Force who would have preferred to see the lake lit up like a Target parking lot for use anytime. And there were others who wanted it in total darkness.

Somehow, under the guidance, expertise and patience of The Lighting Practice consulting firm, the Task Force came up with a plan. Here's a secret — it's not perfect.

But here's another secret — it takes a giant step toward fulfilling the interests and desires of all the various constituents of this signature park. And it was done through compromise.

In an era when most people feel compelled to defend their point of view at all costs, often to the detriment of the whole, the recently unveiled White Rock Lake lighting master plan struck a balance that everyone could live with.

The plan calls for lighting the parking lots, but turning off the lights exactly when the park closes at midnight. It calls for lighting at locations where trails and roads intersect, but keeping the light dim enough that it won't become intrusive to nearby residents. And it establishes specific "natural zones" where limited or no lighting is allowed.

Perhaps the best thing about the master plan, which was adopted by the Park Board this month, is it allows for revisions and updates.

Should the need for changes happen, and my guess is that it will, a standard has been established for compromise. Wouldn't it be nice if other politically charged issues had the same goal?



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